



THE BI-MONTHLY REGIONAL
MAGAZINE FROM LST CAMRA

FREE

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

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This issue ...



London Calling



Brussels Classics



Hello Horseshoes

CAMRA membership in March: 122.072

The CAMRA newsletter for
Lichfield, Atherstone, Sutton & Tamworth,
including
Chasetown, Shenstone, Rugeley, Whittington, Curdworth,
Coleshill, Kingsbury and Polesworth

A Heritage Day Out

I think it is fair to say that in our larger towns and cities, the proportion of pubs in one area is far from slightly underestimated. Do you quest and find new places to drink, or stick with what you know? I have in the past tried the former and had some pretty appalling pints.

On Saturday 5th March armed with my £7.50 each way pre-booked train ticket, I headed for London. I caught the 07.19 arriving at Euston at 08.27. Having breakfasted at the Pinner cafe on Charlton Street, I met up with a fellow conspirator from Derby. He had travelled down via East Midlands trains on one of their Red Dot Day promotions, where a £15 ticket will give you unlimited travel on East Midland trains. We met in the **Betjeman Arms** on St Pancras station, a gastro style pub that at 10.20 in the morning was proving quite popular. Two of the three pump clips were turned round, so we had a not bad pint of Greene King *IPA*.

My pal had bought his *London Heritage Pubs* book with him, and as it was still early, we decided to walk to the **Southampton Arms** at 139 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, pictured right. This, to say the least, is a real pub. The walls are brick with old white tiles behind the bar. The seats are what can only be described as old church benches. 14 handpumps serve 7 ciders and 7 beers. We started with Dark Star *Hophead*. Very refreshing after our walk and previous pint of Greene King. Next was *Zenith* from the Summer Wine brewery. This tasted soapy (no reflection on the pub) and I was disappointed with it. We finished off in there with a pint of Dark Star *Stout*. This again was as good as the *Hophead*.



Next up was the **Lord Southampton**. This had two pumps displaying *Courage Best*, but none was available. We had better luck at the **Bull & Gate** on Highgate Road. Like the Lord Southampton, it's an Irish pub and listed in the Heritage book. They were serving *Camden Bitter* from the local Camden town brewery down the road.



A short walk over the road took us into the **Assembly House**, pictured left, a large open plan old pub. For the second time that day we had Greene King *IPA*. *Abbot Ale* was the other option.

We then got the tube south to St Pancras. What would have cost £4 was only £1.90 with my Oyster card (see web site for details). The **Skinner's Arms** on Judd Street was our next port. Although independently owned, Greene King products can predominate – the pub was once owned by GK. Our tipples were *Sover-*

A Heritage Day Out cont.



eign Blonde from Tunbridge Wells. *Sovereign Bitter* was also available along with GK *IPA* and *Abbot*.

With only time for two more before my train, we went into the **Euston Tap**, pictured left, just in front of the station. The building is on two levels and resembles a large stone mausoleum. They serve around eight real ales and various bottled beers from around the world. They also have foreign keg on tap. Bristol Beer Factory *Milk Stout* was my option before getting the 18.33 back to Tamworth.

So there you have it, a real mixed bag. Apart from the Euston Tap and the Southampton Arms, there weren't many rare guest ales, but beer quality was good throughout. The Betjeman Arms is a busy pub selling a lot of beer, so there's no reason why there should be an issue. The *London Heritage* pub guide is as the title states a guide to heritage pubs, so you don't expect miracles as far as what's on offer. The Euston Tap is proving very popular and will no doubt get into the *Good Beer Guide*, along with the Southampton Arms. The Skinner's was everything you would expect from a pub that's been in the *GBG* for the last five years. Other than finding *Camden Bitter* in the Bull & Gate, we got out of the day exactly what we expected from the places visited.

David Parkes

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Mr Backhouse's Home Improvement Top Tips

Tip number 1: *What to do with that awkward space under the stairs*

What indeed does one do with that awkward, angled space under the stairs? A friend of mine, Howard Smith from Blacko in Lancashire has the ideal solution! A fully equipped mini real ale bar with ample room for two nines of cask ale!

Even the landlord of the nearby GBG pub the Rising Sun (Moorhouse's) pops in on occasions after closing time! Below is a photograph with long term CAMRA member Michael Benyon adding a bit of glamour!

What for next issue Dave? We reckon converting the bathroom into a brewery should feature!



Wye Valley Back On The Menu

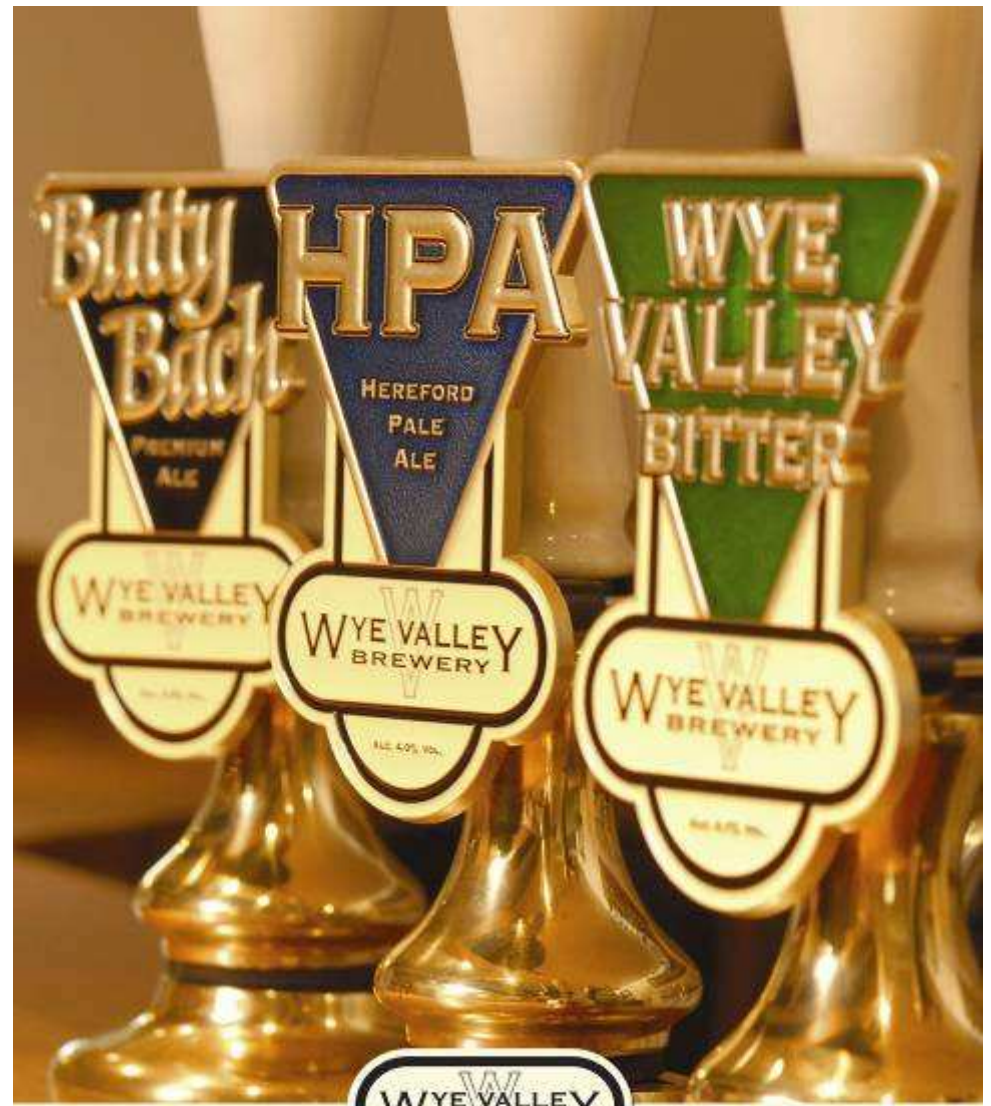
Wye Valley Brewery are frequent prize winners, both locally in our West Midlands Beer of the Year competitions, and nationally with prestigious gongs such as last year's BBC Food and Farming Awards, where they took Best Drinks Producer. So it's a bit strange that parts of our branch fell outside their delivery area! The good news is they've now redrawn their boundaries, and will be delivering further north, including Lichfield and Rugeley.

The brewery are producing a series of monthly cask specials, with March's offering celebrating CAMRA's 40th birthday. *Campaign Ale* was a 5.0% IPA created in association with Herefordshire CAMRA branch. The Herefordshire crew chose a generously hopped recipe with a characterful bitter flavour and Bramling Cross and Celeia in the hopback for a pronounced floral hop aroma. A new twist was the addition of further Celeia hops into the fermentation vessel to diffuse even more essential hop oils.



April will see *Dorothy Goodbody's Natural Blonde Lager*, the brewery's first go at a craft lager. It will be 4.8%, and in genuine lager style will be matured for 60 days.

For May it's back to supporting CAMRA, with a mild to coincide with our Milds in May focus. *Dorothy Goodbody's May Queen* will be a 3.5% classic mild, dark and full bodied with gentle hopping.



**BBC FOOD AND FARMING AWARDS
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Granite City

Last issue's report of a visit to Aberdeen was motivated by the necessity of visiting BrewDog's keg palace there. But there are plenty of real ale boozers there – as well as some superb whisky haunts – so let's see what the Granite City has to offer.

Strangely enough, we thought our hotel for the visit – the **Brentwood** – would be a sure-fire winner, as its ten hand-pull bar gets a good write up in the *Good Beer Guide*. We were maybe unlucky, as eight of the lines had very mainstream southern beers, and the two local brews – an Orkney and a Belhaven – were fairly common elsewhere. But we did find the hotel itself pretty good, and very friendly.

We quickly found solace close by, in the **Grill** on Aberdeen's main thoroughfare, Union Street. This also provoked a momentary loss of faith in the *Guide*, which promised an 'exquisite' interior. This did not seem to accord at all with the exterior, pictured right, which quite frankly looked like an awful dump, complete with the dreaded Tennants sign. But we persevered, and indeed the inside was fabulous: a fine plaster ceiling and a wonderful wooden bar, complete with glass cabinets awash with a stunning variety of fine whiskies. Naturally the real ales took our first fancy (local Deeside *Talorcan* plus Harviestoun *Bitter & Twisted*) but somehow we got irresistibly sucked into the whirlpool of whisky! The whisky list is a volume in its own right, needing a pint just to give you time to leaf through the overwhelming choices. We managed to visit this classic four times during the course of a long weekend, so draw what conclusions you wish from that!



Head in the direction of the quayside, and you'll come across a variety of salty-looking bars, but one of the more polished is **Aitchies Ale House**. The sole cask offering is Orkney *Dark Island*, with the novelty of table service. Close to the various transport hubs for rail, road and water, the early traveller can get a drink here from 8am onwards.

Further along and nestling right by the quayside is the **Moorings**. The name makes it sound like the sort of place where you might park your yacht and head inside for a Pimms, but the skull-and-crossbones on the windows should warn you otherwise. There's a definite heavy-metal feel to the place, but we did find it quite friendly, and the five Scottish cask ales got the thumbs up. There's also a great view of the high-tech oil industry service boats moored up right outside. Thankfully, we never got to find out whether the neon sign – "Live Nude Bands" – was a wind-up or ghastly reality.

Back up to the bright lights of Union Street, two more Guide pubs lie just off the main drag. **Ma Camerons** seemed a little overrated – it's down as one of the oldest pubs in the city, with a listed snug. No matter how authentic it might be, the snug was just a bare little room. And the beer choice was equally drab, two dull offerings from the Belhaven/Greene King stable. It's worth being aware that Belhaven is one of Greene King's northern acquisitions, though uncharacteristically for GK, they've allowed the Belhaven brewery to live on – for the time being at least. The downside is that GK now has its foot in

Granite City cont.

the door over large swathes of Scotland, so that Scots can savour the delights of *Abbot* and 'IPA.'

A far better bet is the **Prince of Wales**, pictured right, tucked down a little side street just off the main drag. This place also merited a number of visits, with a good choice of cask ales which changed over the course of our long weekend. We were also taken in by the good-value food menu, though we inadvisedly tried the local side dish of *skirlie*. Described as "delicious oatmeal and fried onion," it was rather more akin to buttered, gritty sawdust. Try the excellent haggis fritters instead!



We were blessed with nice weather during our trip, and in these conditions, Aberdeen is a pleasant city for walking. Many of the old buildings carry impressive decorative granite-work, well worth looking up for. The splendid *Provost Skene* house is well worth a visit; give your liver at least an hour's break to see this ancient former residence of the mayor (provost) of Aberdeen. This is also close to the impressive *Marischal College*, though our top tip would be to take in the view of the college from the leather sofas in the nearby **BrewDog Aberdeen** bar, as covered in the last issue!



One notable feature of Aberdeen that we've not seen anywhere else is the number of former churches which are now pubs or bars! Without trying we spotted four, so the full tally could be much higher. One of the pub-churches sported the sign to left, suggesting a theme of re-using such old buildings. We did pop into this 'bar' (the **Slains Castle** on Belmont Street); not surprisingly it was just keg fizz, but if you'd like to drink in a place resembling an *Addams Family* set, then this is for you!

Last word can go to the cracking JD Wetherspoon pub, the **Archibald Simpson**. Archie was the local architect responsible for many of Aberdeen's elegant buildings, and this splendid former bank is one of his creations. With a richly decorated interior (right), including elaborate ceiling mouldings, gilded frieze-work and mosaic tiling, it's a reminder that banks-of-old were as good at disposing of your cash as modern ones! The place is worth a visit in its own right, but the excellent ale choice and the unusually friendly staff make it a must.



Sutton Pubs & surroundings, update & news

John W and Mike D give us a Sutton perspective!

There have been a few small changes to the Sutton area pubs over recent weeks, so a few pointers as to what has and what might happen.

The **Half Way House**, corner Lichfield Road and Jordan Road, an Ember Inns pub near Four Oaks Station. Five hand pulls, but usually only two or three different real ales available, on the last visit this included Fullers *London Pride*. Saturday nights have been a bit less frantic and noisy than in the months before Christmas, with not so many drunken teenagers, so a slight improvement!

The **Crown**, Walsall Road/Four Oaks Common Road. Another Ember Inns pub, has had some refurbishment of the rear lounge area, with a designated area for diners, and an extended food menu with daily specials not available at other Ember Inns. At least three real ales on, very often Timothy Taylor *Golden Best*. All at sensible prices, in common with the other local Ember Inns pubs, usually under £2.60 a pint with no VAT increase. The wine list has also been changed, throwing out (thank goodness) Californian Blossom Hill rubbish!

Barleys, Mere Green. This pub now appears to be closed, no sign of life since mid January. Rumours say it might be converted into a Chinese restaurant.

Apres. Still very expensive, and noisy in the evenings. Ok if you have a fat wallet and want the young 'scene.' Headache guaranteed from the pretend foreign lager that comes from a chemical factory in south Wales.

Old Speckled Hen, Mere Green. Appears food oriented and quiet most nights.

The **White Lion**, Hill Village Road/Butlers Lane. Thwaites beers only, shame no guest ales. Comfortable lounge and restaurant area now also has a lunchtime carvery option.

Flints Bar, Mere Green, Belwell Lane. A wine and lager bar, still closed. There was a rumour that Wetherspoons was interested in having it, but it turned out – thankfully or sadly, depending on your point of view – to be false.

Fox and Dogs, Mere Green Road (opposite junction with Little Sutton Lane). Lagers and usually one real ale on, Young's *Bitter*. Good value weekdays lunchtime carvery. Medium sized bar area, and small lounge, with outdoor seating area for fine weather and smokers. Never that busy any evening.

Plough & Harrow, Slade Rd, Roughly (next but last stop on 905 bus route). Banks's and Marstons beers only, with a restaurant area which is popular and considered good value.

Lichfield Arts Council Beer Festival was held as usual in the marvellous Guildhall on 3rd -5th February. Around 30 real ales on, plus ciders, a really pleasant lunchtime session – nothing outstanding, but a very enjoyable few hours. We also took the opportunity to check out some of the Lichfield pubs.

In our view, the **Acorn** Wetherspoons is one of the better ones of the chain. At least five real ales on, decent service and beer in good condition at fair prices, once you have

Sutton & surroundings cont.

avoided the lunchtime rush of screaming kids and pushchairs.



The **Malt** opposite the Garrick Theatre on Wade St is a relatively new bar/restaurant, and has five hand pulls with varying real ales – worth exploring if in the area, though atmosphere more for diners than drinkers.

The **Horse and Jockey** on Sandford St was seen to have Holden's *Golden Glow* on handpull as we peered through the window, so we went in. A very welcoming bar lady and good beer made for a pleasant half-hour stay. It's an old pub, recently refurbished inside with a mix of leather chairs, benches and tables, and an outside rear drinking area. It seems sports oriented with two TVs showing Sky Sports, which meant it was fairly busy with a Rugby match being shown, but worth checking out.

By the time you read this, we will have been to the Derby Winter Ales Festival (held in the new winter venue of the Roundhouse adjacent to Derby Station), the marvellous Leicester beer festival, and Burton beer festival. We'll consider Walsall beer festival (April 14-16th), also at a new venue of the Walsall College. So, plenty to look forward to in the coming months.

Concluding thought: music too loud in your pub? Ask the staff to turn it down! If you say nothing, then nothing will be done about it! We want to be able to hold a decent conversation, and not be forced to shout!

Sir Robert Peel

Local  Overall Pub of the Year 2007 & 2009		Mon-Thu 2-11 Fri 12-11 Sat 12-12 Sun 12-11.30
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Whisky Galore

On a recent trip to the granite city of Aberdeen, one of the many pubs that we visited was **The Grill** on Union Street. If not for the Tennants T on the sign outside you could easily mistake it for a run-down greasy spoon cafe given its drab exterior, pictured right. Plucking up the courage to venture inside we were taken aback by its contrasting grand interior (pictured below). It has an ornate plaster ceiling, wooden panelling and a wonderful bar back, and is on the CAMRA inventory of historic pub interiors. Housed on sagging shelves and in cabinets behind the bar is an extensive selection of over five hundred malt whiskies. No wonder that it was the UK Whisky Bar of the Year 2009. Whilst the majority of the whiskies are from Scotland, sixty are from around the world including ones from Ireland, Japan and the USA. The oldest whisky available is appropriately a Scottish one, a Macallans from 1938.

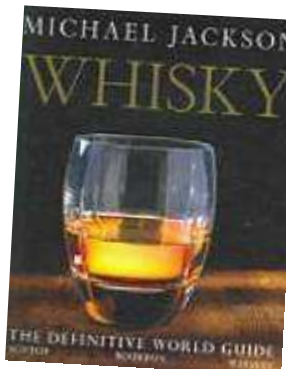


Starting off first with a couple of beers, we had Harviestoun *Bitter & Twisted* with its grapefruit aroma and tart hoppiness. This was contrasted by a rich, coffee and chocolate flavoured porter, *Talorcan* from the Deeside brewery. Not being tempted by the other mainstream beers that were on offer we asked for the bulky whisky menu. This listed all of the whiskies available with accompanying tasting notes; some whiskies being quite old or rare with prices to match. After counting the pennies in our sporrans we opted for the normal priced ones – around the £3 mark – which still gave us an ample choice of drams. Drinking beer beforehand primes your palate and softens the spirit harshness of whisky allowing your palate to better appreciate its qualities. Flavours range from honey and heather through to meaty and peaty offerings.

Amongst our favourites were the superbly smoky *Smokehead*, the *Mortlach* 16 year old with its nutty, slightly treacly edge, and the *Clynelish* 14 year old with honey and spice tones.

Whisky has a fascinating and interesting history regarding its origins. This is portrayed in an excellent book with superb illustrations, "*Whisky: The Definitive World Guide*", co-written by the late, great Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson was well known as a beer hunter, but was also a highly respected whisky guru. I would thoroughly recommend its purchase along with several drams in The Grill if you are a whisky enthusiast and in the area.

Eric Randall



Happy Birthday To Us

CAMRA has just celebrated its 40th birthday! CAMRA was formed on 16th March 1971 by four founding members – Michael Hardman, Graham Lees, Jim Makin and Bill Mellor whilst visiting a pub on holiday in Ireland. The quartet had become deeply disillusioned with the domination of the market by a handful of national brewing companies, determined to push lower quality of keg beer brands into the market, displacing smaller, local breweries and ales from the bars of pubs across the land.

It turned out they weren't alone in their anger at the rapidly reducing choice and quality available to drinkers across the UK – hundreds and then thousands joined the cause.

40 years later and CAMRA now has more than 120,000 members who like you, love a good pint of beer in a great pub.

CAMRA has achieved many successes over this period. Saving pubs and breweries under threat from closure, the introduction of Small Brewers Relief, LocAle and Licensing Hours Reform and the promotion of endangered beer styles are just a few of the successes CAMRA is proud of over the last 40 years. These and many other achievements have played a major role in there now being more than 3,000 different real ales being brewed in the UK by over 750 real ale breweries.



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The Horseshoes Reborn

We reported a couple of issues ago that the **Tunnel Brewery** of Ansley were to acquire their first pub, and now we can report that it will be opening very shortly, on the 14th of April! The thorough refurbishment of the former Lancet has been going ahead at a cracking pace, so expect a completely transformed, cosy pub with an Edwardian style dark wood interior. The pub will take back its former name of the **Horseshoes**.

It is situated at the beginning of Heath End Road in Nuneaton (CV10 7JQ), near the George Eliot hospital. Loads of buses from Nuneaton centre drop off nearby; the best bet is probably the hourly 17 service which has a last return of just after midnight.

The pub will offer around five Tunnel cask ales, plus Everards *Tiger* and free-of-tie guests. The premium lager will be their own kegged *Munich Style Lager*, plus *Leffe Blonde*. Two real ciders will be offered, plus a range of premium bottled beers. Plenty to go at! There are also plans for a couple of beer festivals a year.



Car parking is available, and there's a small beer garden. Opening hours will be 12-11, and food will also be available, from 12-4 initially but this may change. Mike the brewer is a professional chef by trade and has planned a simple but classy menu; local cheese planks will also feature. Occasional themed nights for food are in the pipeline, and there'll also be a Thursday night beer connoisseur's class running at certain times of the year.

The refurbishment of the pub is a credit to Everards Brewery, who are leasing the pub to Tunnel as part of their Project William scheme. The scheme gives small brewers better access to the market, with the only ale condition being that they must sell one Everards beer. Other brewers to have benefitted include Titanic, Slaughterhouse and Amber Ales. The gain for Everards is that they can acquire real estate, and lease them out to tenants who will be more than usually committed to making a success of the business!

It's been a very busy time for Bob and Mike of Tunnel, right, as they have also recently moved the brewery! They left their former site at the end of March, moving to the picturesque Red House Farm between Ansley Common and Over Whitacre (CV10 0QU). They now have office, brewery and bottling unit in one location. The brewing kit is unchanged at present, but they now have scope for an increase in capacity, particularly for fermentation. The new location will also have a hospitality/function suite, and much better storage space. Exciting times ahead!



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Consumers Corner

It's always nice to get feedback from beer drinkers. Campaigning for CAMRA is a largely unsung activity, so it's comforting to get those letters of praise which make it all worthwhile. The following fragment of a thoughtful email was received from a **Richard Arnold**, so thanks for the praise Richard!

"I always suspected CAMRA was a bogus organisation which makes money out of suckers, now I know its true. If the <Name deleted> is your pub of the year because of its beer, you tossers know as much about beer as I know about nuclear physics. How much did the <Name deleted> bung somebody to get nominated as pub of the year?"

"Well Richard old boy, where to start? Here at CAMRA, we're so used to making money from big kickbacks from pubs that we're drinking more champagne than the bankers. All we do is feather our own nests by drawing gullible punters – like yourself – into crap pubs with rubbish beer. We do it for a living!"

The truth is of course quite different. CAMRA has a small professional HQ at St Albans, but the rest of us are unpaid volunteers. We have a genuine passion for promoting good pubs and good beer. We get no monetary reward for our efforts, and indeed, expect none. Constructive criticism is fine, but petulant and childish abuse is plain silly. In this particular case, the complainant thought it easier to rant facelessly to a third party rather than talk directly to the pub staff. If you get sub-standard beer anywhere, by all means let us know, but do take it up first with the people who have served it to you!

Up In Smoke Again

London on a sunny Thursday afternoon; a great way to ease one's self into a new weekend! For only £10 we bought return tickets from the local station to London Euston but we were aware that if we travelled between 15.40 and 19.00 a £5 supplement was charged. We arrived on time, at the first pub and drank a midday pint. The **Euston Tap** is a hophead's paradise with beers from the British brewers who excel in hoppy, and US brewers who just use hops by the shed-load. I drank my all-time favourite, Thornbridge *Kipling*, an exquisite mix of grapefruit, passion fruit and ecstasy.

But we could not linger so off to the next pub, the **Bree Louise**, right, which indulged us with Dark Star *Meltdown* at 5%, Dark Star *Six Hop* at 6.5% and Otley *Porter* at 6.6% with a mixer of people eating, drinking, chatting and playing games; a genteel feel.

Not able to linger too long we headed for the **Harp**, below left, which is CAMRA pub of the year 2010, meaning it has a reputation to uphold.

From the exterior it looks a well maintained but small building, with lots of flowers, which means somebody cares a lot for this place. Inside it was packed with drinkers and looking at the beer list we saw why. I chose the Dark Star *Hophead Citra*, all citrus hops with lemon and elderflower and a hint of brie, sparkling and only 3.8%. Fabulous, fabulous beer!, and what a window, below right!



I could have stayed for the rest of the day wallowing in such a perfect pint but I was levered away in pursuit of equal delights. Next stop was the **Porterhouse** in Covent Garden. The beers are brewed in Dublin; I chose the *Turners Sticklebract Bitter* at 3.7% which was warm, slightly sweetish with honey elements, a sort of John Smiths with attitude. Perhaps I was spoilt from the previous excellence but I tasted my companions' stout and lager and they were tasty enough. Perhaps the dark lighting tamed my tastebuds. Let's go! We left the Porterhouse but had to admire the interior which was a bright mix of paint and metal resting under the dim lighting, wow for a spotlight or two.

Onwards and upwards to our next port of call, The **Ship & Shovell**, pictured next page.

Up In Smoke Again cont.

Shovell from Sir Cloudesley Shovell made Admiral of the Fleet in 1705. Here I found *Hopping Hare* from Hall and Woodhouse, a best bitter at 4.5%. It was hoppy and tasty and the bitterness developed after a sweet and syrupy start. Refreshing, clean, bright and sparkling.

After a brief walk we encountered the **Cittie of Yorke**, a pub since 1430. A wood panelled interior and side booth seating gave an olde worlde feel that did not prepare me for the Gents, with a make-over of which any DIY TV guru would be proud. Bright lights, gold and stainless steel. Perfect.

The beer was not as polished and we agreed that there was an element that a salad could wear comfortably. We left our beer and headed to our last resort. The **Seven Stars** was to be our final venue and we found Dark Star *Hophead*. So refreshing after the previous beer, and much welcome, but our expectations were greater than the result. Not a final wow but a "That's your lot", a gentle lowering of the palate presence. A thought of food and glass of water. A fitting end to a thirsty Thursday and another 568 ml to carry back home.

Geoff Cross



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League of Shame

We've seen in previous issues that the guideline limits for alcohol consumption in the UK – between 21 and 28 units per week – were pretty much plucked out of the air. But how much do we actually drink as a nation?

One useful study was published by the World Health Organisation. Their data from 2003 showed the per-capita consumption of alcohol. The methodology used by the WHO counted use by persons 15 years of age or older. Quite why they chose 15 is unsure, but presumably it recognises that underage drinking occurs, and should not be excluded from the figures.

Overall consumption, units per week

1:	28.0:	Luxembourg
2:	27.2:	Ireland
3:	26.1:	Hungary
4:	25.3:	Moldova
5:	24.9:	Czech Republic
6:	23.6:	Croatia
7:	23.0:	United Kingdom
8:	22.8:	Germany
9:	22.4:	Denmark
10:	22.2:	Spain
11:	22.1:	Portugal
12:	22.1:	Cyprus
13:	21.9:	France
14:	21.7:	Russia
15:	21.3:	Austria
16:	20.7:	Switzerland
17:	20.5:	Slovakia
18:	20.3:	Nigeria
19:	20.3:	Netherlands
20:	20.3:	Belgium

The numbers are mildly surprising, as they do seem to confirm that we are drinking quite a bit! The league table, left, shows the top twenty boozing nations, with the average units-per-week consumption. This is consumption of all forms of alcohol, not just beer

Naughty old Luxembourg tops the table – must be those champagne swilling bankers – with a figure at the top end of UK recommendations. Bear in mind that these are average figures, for drinkers and non-drinkers alike, so that figures would be even higher if teetotalers and occasional drinkers were excluded. So with the UK sitting at 23 units per week, we are clearly not paying any notice at all to the Government advice! Still, at least we're beating the Germans.

The figures do contain some surprises. Where for example are those allegedly famous boozers, the Australians? Languishing down in 32nd place, that's where, with a

paltry 17 units per week. The Poles and Finns, known for their vodka, also fail to reach the top 20. And note the Russians, allegedly poisoning themselves into an early grave, placed 14th below France. Plucky Nigeria has Africa's sole top twenty entry – maybe due to drinking the famous Guinness *Foreign Extra Stout*, locally brewed to 7.5%.

Some iconic wine drinking nations seem to fare relatively poorly (or well, depending on your outlook). Italy, Chile, South Africa and Bulgaria are all below 15 units per week.

No surprises where the really dry spots are, those where religious practice forbids it, and where there are punishments to match. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan are among the twelve nations declaring zero consumption of alcohol.

If we move on to look at the consumption of beer alone rather than alcohol in any form, then the champion's league table shifts quite significantly. Strangely enough, the re-

League cont.

search for the table below came from Kirin, the Japanese brewer, in 2004.

Note how the picture changes! The Czechs roar out into the lead by a major margin, with Ireland and Germany also leaving the competition way behind. Australia jumps back into the frame too; they might make world class wine, but prefer golden fizz!

The figures in the two tables (units and litres) are not directly comparable as you'd need to know the beer strength to work out the units. But if we err on the high side and assume that the average UK pint is 5%, then the figures suggest that of the 23 units per week that we average in the UK (leftmost table), only 10 of them come from beer.

If we are drinking too much in the UK, then it ain't from beer!

Beer consumption, litres per year

1:	156.9:	Czech Republic
2:	131.1:	Ireland
3:	115.8:	Germany
4:	109.9:	Australia
5:	108.3:	Austria
6:	99.0:	UK
7:	93.0:	Belgium
8:	89.9:	Denmark
9:	85.0:	Finland
10:	84.4:	Luxembourg
11:	84.1:	Slovakia
12:	83.8:	Spain
13:	81.6:	US
14:	81.2:	Croatia
15:	79.0:	Netherlands
16:	77.0:	New Zealand
17:	75.3:	Hungary
18:	69.1:	Poland
19:	68.3:	Canada
20:	59.6:	Portugal

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Beer Snippets

This may be the April issue, but sadly this is no April Fool. The **Yard** in Cardiff, a Brain's pub, is getting an overhaul which will include some redecoration of the toilets. Customers are being asked for photos of their bare botties to create ceiling wallpaper to give you something to look at while draining your bladder. A load of bums in Cardiff? Or just bare-faced cheek? Clearly the Welsh pub trade is no longer just about bums on seats.

We commented last issue about the Government's pathetic stance on preventing the sale of alcohol below cost. Setting the minimum price at just duty plus VAT was a major kick in the teeth for pubs which simply cannot compete with the loss-leading supermarkets. Full marks to SIBA's Julian Grocock for his biting assessment: "the notion that top quality British grown ingredients and the skilled labour of the thousands of people employed in brewing have no actual value absolutely appals me."

Fewer marks go to Home Secretary Theresa May, who tried to make the illogical sound logical by saying that "we are banning below-cost sales of alcohol, and we are setting that at VAT plus duty." Will this lead to even cheaper deals than are currently available? It will mean business as usual for the supermarkets, who are no doubt pleased that their lobbying has an effect. But this didn't stop May claiming that this box-ticking measure would mean "7,000 fewer alcohol related incidents and 1,000 fewer hospital admissions a year." Don't hold your breath for evidence to back this up.

The Alcohol Concern agency deserves full credit for its attempts to make us aware of the very real risks of consuming too much happy juice. But they are sometimes too willing to bend statistics to fit their agenda. Chief Exec Don Shenker seized on the 2009 drop in alcohol-related deaths – a year of recession – to say that when people have less money in their pockets, fewer people die from booze-related causes, and therefore beer should be more expensive. It's an abuse of statistics – alcohol abuse is a long term process, and deaths from it will not magically vanish in a year of high prices.

Also doing their bit to prevent anyone drinking anything at all is the Scottish Government, who think that the current Challenge 21 policy is under-powered. From the 1st October, Challenge 25 will come into force, so that many more legit drinkers will have to carry documentation to prove that their pimple-squeezing days are far behind them. Not surprisingly, the licensed trade feel that the measure is yet another burden on both pubs and drinkers, and can only further damage the pub trade.



At best our taxmen are viewed as a necessary evil, but now HMRC have proved that they're a bunch of miserable sods by their bill to a Cornish brewer. Foodswild's *Cornish Stinger* is a nettle beer, and the taxman has retrospectively decided that the drink is not a beer but should be classified as a wine – leading to a £9,000 demand for extra tax! The kerfuffle has arisen because the beer doesn't contain any malt, making it suitable for those with grain protein intolerances, but also showing that the taxman is on the ball. A bit of common sense by HMRC wouldn't go amiss though!

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NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

The **Dog Inn** at Nether Whitacre (B46 2DU) will be offering £2.50 pints to CAMRA members on Wednesday nights. There are six real ales to choose from. Please have your membership card to hand. Landlord Gary Webb tells us this is for a trial period, so use it or lose it!

At Baxterley, the **Rose Inn** will be holding its third beer festival from the 22nd to the 25th of April, over what this year will be both the St George's and Easter weekend. There'll be 23 ales to go at plus ciders. Evening music is still being lined up.

The **Dog & Doublet** at Bodymoor Heath has started having a changing guest beer. Last spotted was Titanic *Lifeboat*, apt given the canalside location. The D&D is also known for good food; one of the unusual old classics you can enjoy there occasionally is oxtail.

Just up from the Dog, the **Gate Inn** at Nether Whitacre has also added a changing guest, from the Marstons portfolio. Mark and Jean are gearing up for their May beer festival, which just keeps getting bigger and better. 50-plus diverse ales are being lined up, so you may want to take advantage of the on-site camping!

A pleasant surprise in Mancetter's **Blue Boar** was Fullers's *ESB*, a splendidly rich winter beer. The Boar usually has Tetley's *Bitter* plus a guest.

The **Bull Inn** over at Witherley featured Adnams *Southwold Bitter* recently. It's easy to forget how good this well-balanced 3.7% ale is.

The home-brewed beers at the **Griffin** at Shustoke continue to excel, and brewer Oliver is clearly getting more confident and polished in his use of hops. *Rambler's Ruin* is very light but assertive, an ideal summer beer, while the *Griffin Pale Ale* could easily be mistaken for the iconic Thornbridge *Jaipur*, both in terms of alcohol kick and lovely hop punch.

Amongst the recent guests at Atherstone's **Hat & Beaver** was a fabulously hoppy *Hop Bomb* from Sadlers. If you think Sadlers beers are not that hoppy, look out for this one!

Church End's first pub, the **George & Dragon** at Stoke Golding, is expected to open in the second week of May. This may change, check before travelling!

Outside our branch area, North Warwickshire has got a 'new' brewery. The Wood Farm Brewery held a formal opening of its new brewery tap on Friday 11th March. Situated on Coal Pit Lane (CV23 0SL) on the way to Willey, it's actually the old Rugby Brewery under new ownership. They'll retain some of the old Rugby brands (such as *Webb Ellis* and *1823 Mild*) but will also do new brews under the Wood Farm label. The tap will offer around five beers plus food, from 12-10 daily, 12-8 on Sundays.

STAFFORDSHIRE

Readers of CAMRA's national *Beer* magazine will have seen that local **Blythe Ridware Pale** (4.3%) was featured in the Spring 2011 edition. The article in question is aptly called 'Genius in a Bottle'. Author Des de Moor described this balanced and very refreshing beer as one of the best he had tried in the new breed of bitterish golden ales, so Rob and Jennie Greenway of the brewery are naturally very pleased! Our branch chair-

man selflessly tried several of the Blythe Brewery range of bottled ales over Christmas and was reported to be more than impressed with each one.

Sadly, we have to report that the Quartz Brewery **Heart of the Country** outlet at Swinfen has closed, as of February. We haven't been informed of the reasons why, but we believe that Quartz Brewery will continue to operate from the main Kings Bromley Brewery site.

The **Talbot** in Brereton now closes on Mondays.

The **Red Lion** over the road serves food at reasonable prices, with Sunday lunch at £6.75 or the three course set menu at £11.75. Food available is available 12 til 9 Mon-Sat and 12 til 6 Sundays.

A new pub-restaurant has recently opened on the outskirts of Rugeley. The **Colliers** (next to the Premier Inn on Tower Business Park) is owned by the Table Table Group. Wychwood *Hobgoblin* has been spotted as a guest.

The **Swan** in Armitage is undergoing major renovation, and will be closed for a number of months.

The annual Lichfield Arts Association **Winter Beer and Wine Festival** held on Fri 4th to Sat 5th February at Lichfield Guildhall was a huge success, with the excellent choice of ales rapidly running out towards the end of the Saturday session. Many thanks to the organisers and dedicated volunteers! It must however be mentioned that it would be even better if the casks benefitted from a cooling system, especially with the high temperatures reached in the crowded Guildhall.

In Lichfield's **Duke of York**, the Joule's Pale has now been joined by Joule's Slumbering Monk (4.5%) as regular beers. The brewery is also reported to be working on a new blonde ale, probably available for summer, so expect to see it in the Duke. After last year's resounding success, the Duke is holding its 2nd Beer Festival from 28th April to 1 May. As before a stillage will be erected in the old store room and around 25 ales plus 4 ciders/perries will be served straight from the cask, along with the usual hand pulled choices available in the bar and lounge.

Our apologies to any readers who tried to visit the **Duke of Wellington** in Lichfield, since the article in the last edition advising that it was due to re-open. The doors remain well and truly locked! The optimistic article was based on a suggestion that Enterprise Inns were going to come up with a 'less impossible' financial demand for the dedicated licensees who have maintained it as a highly popular community pub since taking the helm. Only a couple of months before it closed it had deservedly gained our branch award for Staffordshire Pub of the Year 2010 award, for the second year running.

The closure of the Welly and the reduction in choice at the Queens Head (currently under the supervision of a relief manager) has caused a huge increase in ale drinkers crossing the threshold of the **Horse and Jockey** on Sandford Street! Not really a surprise, as over the past year it has gained a reputation for serving an excellent choice of 3 regular ales plus at least 3 guests (frequently from micros). To go one better, being a true Free House, it is able to sell at prices that are very competitive for the City!

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Beer Break

What started off as a pleasant afternoon's walk ended up with me dancing on ice and breaking a leg in early December. Is that what they call break dancing? Until my mobility improves I am now drinking the majority of my beer intake at home. Back in the 1950s beer at home meant **Davenports**; these days however we are spoilt for choice for beer buying possibilities for home consumption. Fortunately I have a good selection of bottled beers to dip into at my leisure. *Taras Boulba* is a Belgian offering from the **Senne** brewery. This is a hophead's beer with citrus aromas and flavours, ending with an astute bitter finish. Talking of hopheads beers I have several from the ever-impressive Scottish brewery of **BrewDog**. These are not for the faint hearted! Their new version of *Punk IPA* at 5.6% is fruity, floral and hoppy with a bitterness that lingers on the palate. *Sam Saint* has intense pine and citrus hop notes which are superbly balanced by grain flavours. This would be one of my desert island beers. *Chaos Theory* is a strong IPA with malt and juicy hop flavours. Last of the BrewDog beers is *Riptide Stout* which has sadly been discontinued. At 8% this is an ideal beer for a nightcap and ensures that you sleep soundly and have sweet dreams. It has rich, roasted grain and chocolate flavours with moderate hoppiness and a warming bitter finish.



With their distinctive old fashioned green flask type bottles, **St. Peter's** beers are always going to stand out, as they do in their different styles and flavours. Their *Fruit Beer* has grapefruit essence added to provide the grapefruit flavour and tartness of this pale ale; the same is possible with the use of certain types of hops, Chinook or Pioneer for example. In contrast the *Cream Stout* is dark, roasty and rich with liquorice flavours and a smooth, silky finish.

A more local offering is **Holden's Special** which is a cracking beer on draught and pretty good in bottles too. It is smooth with juicy sweet maltiness and a pleasant bitter finish. *Columb-O* which is not just a beer for Peter Falk fans, is an offering from the Welsh brewery of **Otley**. It is a very pale, golden ale packed with American Columbus hops. It has intense floral aromas and hop flavours with a satisfying herbal finish.



Having started off with a foreign beer it seems fitting to finish with imbibing one in honour of our patron saint, St George. This beer is ironically a German offering, *Keller Bier* from the **St Georgen** brewery of Bittenheim. The bottle has a colourful label showing St George with his red and white flag. It is similar in style to an English top fermented ale and does not disappoint. It is an unfiltered amber coloured beer which is dry, fruity and hoppy, and a fitting finale.



Eric Randall

Tunnel Tour Via The Tunnel

Early March saw another Tunnel Brewery Belgian trip, this time courtesy of Peter Thompson. Peter arranged some exceptionally cheap Eurostar tickets, and a bargain hotel close to the centre of Brussels. But most importantly, he thoroughly planned an excellent five day tour of around 40 outstanding beer cafes in and around Brussels.

Brussels city is home to a wide range of cracking bars, ranging from richly gilded palaces and modern trendsetters to smoky neighbourhood staples or fin-de-siècle classics. But hop on a bus or tram and you can also find some marvellous cafes in beautifully rustic countryside. Let's highlight a few!



In the city centre, the **Moeder Lambic Fontainas**, left, opened just over a year ago. Situated on the Place Fontainas, the Moeder is rapidly shaping up as one of the best cafes in town, and is firmly biased towards the adventurous beer drinker. We certainly found some gorgeous beers which caught us totally off guard. The local *Taras Boulba* from De La Senne was predictably first class, but the gorgeously hoppy Contreras *Valeir Extra* was a revelation. And the Toccalmatto *Zona Cesarini* –

from Italy of all places – was just stunning, a lovely pale ale with a marvellously complex hop profile. Beer aside, maybe the best feature of the place is the boisterously enthusiastic staff – very beer-knowledgeable and keen to spread the gospel, with many young faces amongst them. The future of quality beer feels in safe hands if this place is anything to go by.

Move less than 10 miles into the countryside – on a bus service through some idyllic countryside – and you'll find a completely different place which is also a champion for quality beer. Set in the sleepy village of Eizeringen, the **Verzekering tegen de Grote Dorst** should probably get into the Guinness Book of Records for the shortness of its serving hours – just 3½ hours per week, from 10am to 1.30pm on Sundays. Given that the name translates as “Insurance against the Great Thirst”, locals are certain to be gagging by the time it opens.



But don't let the opening hours put you off, it's a welcoming, timeless classic, interior pictured above. It was rescued from closure by two brothers, Yves and Kurt, who provide friendly service during the all-too-short-opening. They offer a fabulously extensive range of the local speciality – lambic and gueuze beers, those spontaneously fermented beasts whose trademark is their varying degrees of sourness. I am definitely a wuss as far as proper lambics go, so I earned extra street cred by forcing down an ultra-acidic Hanssens

Tunnel Tour Via The Tunnel cont.



Kriek, pictured left as evidence. This could have powered Belgium for eternity if poured into a lead-acid battery. Meanwhile, Peter & Mike shared a crusty classic from the cellar, a 23 year-old bottle of brick-dusty *Faro* from the Eylenbosch brewery, right. This brewery closed in 1991, a fact sadly pressed home by passing the carcass of the building on our bus journey.



Back in the city, a new bar lies just off the Grand Place. Admire the gold-leaf

grandeur of the Place, and then hit the **Little Delirium** on Kaasmarkt (Marche aux Fromages). This is the kid-brother of the established **Delirium** bar. While the main Delirium bar features a genuine but ludicrous 2,000+ different beers, the Little Delirium features just 30 on tap, but they're a very worthy 30, changing slowly over time. They're mostly Belgian brews, but a “happy hop weekend” while we were there included offerings from Southern Tier in New York state and BrewDog. The Southern Tier *Pale Ale* was superbly hoppy and assertive, but the gorgeous BrewDog *Hardcore IPA* comprehensively kicked its ass and sent it off to the substitutes bench. If you think it's daft to go to Brussels to drink Anglo-Saxon beer, then you can also enjoy excellent locals from breweries such as De Rulles, Struise or Jandrain-Jandrenouille.

The Little Delirium shares the same décor as its big brother – old brewery enamels all around, and the trademark upside-down keg fonts (pictured right) which dispense all the lovely beers. Prices are very reasonable given the proximity to the Grand Place, plus the staff are very friendly and fluent in English. And if you're mental enough, the bar also stocks a good choice of brain shrivelling Absinthe, most ranging from 70% to 90% ABV. Unsurprising advice – stick to the beer!



Many other places impressed us, far too many to cover in detail here. Amongst them were **Heeren van Liederkercke** with its outstanding beer range, the famously opulent **Metropole**, the rustic **Volkscafe De Cam**, and the splendidly old-fashioned **Becasse**. So many fabulous cafes that a return visit is simply compulsory!

If we've sparked your enthusiasm to enjoy your own sampling trip, the book *Around Brussels in 80 Beers*, available from the CAMRA website, is highly recommended; also *LambicLand* from www.booksaboutbeer.com.

Many thanks to Peter Thompson for organising a splendidly memorable trip!

Favorite Favourites

Politicians must get fed up of kissing babies and such. Even Gordon Brown got fed up of insulting old-age pensioners. One of our local MPs has gone the altogether more enjoyable route of pressing the flesh in pubs, according to a press release which popped up at the end of February.

Christopher Pincher, MP for Elford, Clifton Campville and Tamworth, is also a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group. He announced the “constituency’s favorite pubs, as part of the British Pub celebrations of 2010. The celebration of British pubs ran at the end of 2010 and constituents were asked to nominate their favorite pubs.” It sounds like a good idea, though it would also be advisable to invest in a UK-English spell checker for the PC.



The winners of the competition are shown in the table at the bottom; good luck to them all, and to all the other excellent pubs in our area. Mr Pincher can be seen in the picture to the left, delivering the Green Man’s award.

Mr. Pincher said that “the local pub is important for many people; it functions much more than just a place to drink or eat in a supervised and secure environment. It is a pillar of the community providing a venue for local people to meet and hold events. I believe pubs are vital in promoting community spirit. I would like to congratulate the winning pubs and thank all constituents who nominated their favorite pub.”

Fine words recognising the value and importance of pubs, and an excellent point to conclude. But he then spoilt it all by continuing: “I support the Chancellor’s decision ... not to increase the large alcohol duty bequeathed by Labour ... and I am pleased by the plans to introduce a high alcohol tax that will support the pub trade, by preventing below cost retail sale of alcohol.”

I thought weasel words were generally supposed to be a bit more cunning? No political skill needed to translate the two key points:

1. *Blame Labour for the hike in alcohol duty, but it’s here to stay pal, we won’t reduce it*

2. *In fact we’ll increase it, because we don’t have a meaningful below-cost scheme.*

If the rest of the Parliamentary Beer Group thinks the same, then – we’re stuffed!

1. **Sir Robert Peel – Tamworth**
2. **Plough & Harrow – Fazeley**
3. **White Lion - Harlaston**
4. **Crown Inn - Elford**
5. **Green Man – Clifton Campville**
6. **The Gate - Amington**
7. **Red Lion - Hopwas**
8. **Royal Oak - Stonnall**
9. **The Black Horse – Edingale**
10. **Fox & Hounds – Shenstone**

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Bottled Beer Review

Thwaites *Very Nutty Black* is the 'export strength' (3.9%) of their *Nutty Black* (3.3%). A treacle like pour, dark but not black. A wisp of smoke aroma and chocolate making its presence known. A taste and a memory of D & B. No nothing illegal just Dandelion and Burdock. Sweet start and yes a hint of hazelnut from this beer I had squirreled away before Christmas. Very bubbly, a mound blowing experience, loosen the belt against government advice. Easy going, palatable; no dominant flavours like the smoke from a stout dragon. No tasty words from Johnson, denied a portly pew to relax with, no stout Gaelic to fight. A little warming without fire and a slow creeping feeling of Oliver: can I have some more, I need to find that taste in the bottle. Neither shaken nor stirred, a confident release and an Old Faithful Yellowstone gush. Mopped and wiped I suppose it serves me right for being complacent when operating heavy bottles. More life, more taste? Same aroma, that After Eight moment. A hop, a hop, my kingdom for a hop, thanks Richard. I fear I am an addict to alpha acid and those beers that lack this mouth-watering necessity are, in my opinion, a shadow of what beer should be. I detect no bitterness, no slavering drool, no matter it's the taking part that counts! Having won the cup with other beers this team effort looks a likely candidate for relegation to division pop.

Geoff Cross



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Backyard Bonus

Congratulations are due to local brewer Austen Morgan, of Backyard Brewery in Brownhills. He has won a national award with his beer called *The Hoard* (featured at last year's Tamworth Beer Festival). The competition was the SIBA National Beer Competition, split into nine different categories, and Austen snaffled top spot in the 'Bitters and Pale Ales' category, covering beers up to 4.0%.

Austen is pictured below (left) receiving the award; also pictured is Mike Bates (right) of Burton Wood Turnery who sponsored the category.

Austen was suitably chuffed, given that around 1,400 beers entered the initial stages of the competition. He said "We work hard to make our beers the best they can be and it's fantastic to receive this public recognition. We are grateful to everyone, to the pubs and shops who sell our beers and to our many loyal drinkers locally, for helping us to win this award. We promise to go on producing our great beers for as long as there's demand for them."



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 27.

23rd March-10th April Wetherspoons Beer Festival
Up to 50 beers over the three weeks, JDWs across the country

7-9th April, Beer & Banger Festival
Burton Bridge Inn, 24 Bridge Street, Burton, DE14 1SY, 20+ ales

8-9th April, Coventry Beer Festival
Coventry Rugby Football Ground, Butts Road, Coventry, CV1 3GE
95+ ales, plus ciders and perries. Fri & Sat 12-4, 6-11.

14-16th April, 30th Walsall Beer Festival
Walsall College, Littleton Street West, WS2 8ES
150+ ales, ciders & foreign bottled beers. Thu 5-11, Fri & Sat 11-3, 5.30-11

18-25th April, Merchants Beer Festival
Merchants Inn, Little Church Street, Rugby, CV21 3AW
See www.merchantsinn.co.uk for details/beers

22-25th April, 3rd St Georges & Easter Beer Festival
Rose Inn, Baxterley, CV9 2LE. Around 23 ales plus real ciders.
Music nightly, food throughout. Fri/Sat/Sun 12-11, Mon 12-4, 7-11.

22-25th April, Market Tavern Beer Festival
Market Tavern, Atherstone, CV9 1ET.
8 fest ales, 2 farmhouse ciders. Fri 6-11, /Sat 11-12, Sun/Mon 12-12. BBQ Sat.

28th April-1 May, 2nd Duke of York Beer Festival
Duke of York, Greenhill, Lichfield, WS13 6DY
Around 25 ales, 4 ciders/perries.

29-30th April, Digby Beer Festival
The Digby, Coleshill Road, Water Orton, B46 1SH
15 ales, 3 ciders, food and entertainment. 12-11 both days.

20-22nd May, 2nd Coton & Hopwas Social Club Beer Festival
School Lane, Hopwas, Nr Tamworth, B78 3AD. Food and entertainment.
16 ales plus ciders. Fri 7-11, Sat & Sun 12-11. More details on (01827) 62684.

27-30th May, 3rd Gate Beer Festival
Gate Inn, Nether Whitacre, B46 2DS, (01675) 481292. Bar meals, BBQ, Jacket Spuds.
50+ real ales plus ciders. Fri 5-11, Sat/Sun/Mon 12-11. Live music.

3-5th June, Crown Summer 2011 Beer Festival
The Crown Inn, 10 Bond Street, Nuneaton, CV11 4BX

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

One of the joys of having such a large and diverse branch area is that it allows members from one town to try pubs in a town they may not normally drink in, if they turn up to branch meetings which rotate between Tamworth, Lichfield, Sutton and the North Warwickshire villages.

This was how I discovered the New Dolphin in Atherstone, the venue for our March meeting. I must confess I had to ask directions before I found this gem of a pub – a Mecca for lovers of local real ale at decent prices.

For the branch meeting, three handpulls were in action offering the 6% Sarah Hughes *Ruby Mild* and a couple of Beowulf gems including the 4.5% *Wuffa*. Having the luxury of a chauffeur that evening, I dived straight in to the Sarah Hughes and that and the subsequent *Wuffa* were both on top form.

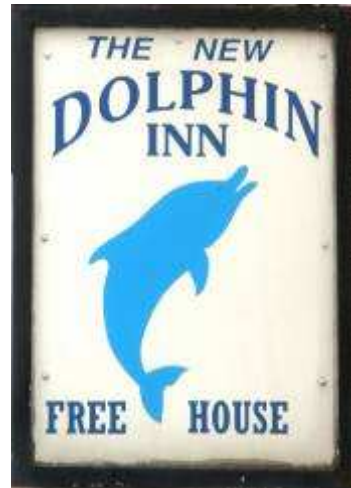
And here's the thing about this pub. Because they buy almost exclusively from local breweries and landlord Ron collects all the beers from source rather than having them delivered, prices can be kept almost absurdly low. The *Wuffa* was £2.40, almost 50p cheaper than almost all good real ale in Tamworth and Lichfield.

Another thing that really impressed me was that at 9.30pm on a chilly Monday night in early-March, this pub was packed. Although our branch meeting took up most of one end of the spacious bar area, the rest of the room was buzzing with darts and pool matches or just locals propping up the bar – at a time of the week when too many landlords just sit back and wait for the custom to come in or, if it's not there, close the doors.

I went back on a Wednesday lunchtime two days later to confirm first impressions. I got a friendly welcome from the knowledgeable barman Sam, the beer was just as good – and I'll definitely be going back.

Martin Warrillow

- 162 Long Street, CV9 1AE



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