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

Contact us at

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L.A.S.T. Orders Edition 40 Feb / Mar 2012



This issue ...



Czech It Out



Cheshire Cheers



Festival Winners

The bi-monthly CAMRA newsletter for
Lichfield, Atherstone, Sutton & Tamworth,
including

Chasetown, Shenstone, Rugeley, Whittington, Curdworth,
Coleshill, Kingsbury and Polesworth

CAMRA membership in January: 132,967

Bread, Ale and Whisky

We get a similar feeling every year at the end of Tamworth Beer Festival – pack up the kit, reflect on successes and occasional failures, and look forward to a break before it all begins again the following year. But one pleasurable duty remains before we take our eye off the ball – delivering our prizes for beers of the festival!

These days out never fail to please – we usually get to go somewhere new or interesting, we are invariably treated with generous hospitality, and best of all we get to meet friendly, interesting folk at the breweries. Our critics have been known to say that the award trips are just flimsy excuses for piss-ups, but this is demonstrably false – whenever have we needed an excuse?

We were particularly pleased with 2011's crop of winners, reflecting the interesting, high quality beers being turned out by micros across the land.

BRIGHTSIDE
BREWING COMPANY BURY



Typifying this was our Gold prize winner, the *IPA* (also known as *Maverick*) from **Brightside Brewing** of Bury. The big brewers often turn out 'IPA' which is simply insipid pale ale, but turn to Brightside's for

an example of the real thing – fragrant and juicily hoppy. This went down so well at the festival that we fretted that pesky customers would drink it all before the staff had a chance!

Pictured are Martin Watts (right) presenting the certificate to owner Neil Friedrich (centre) and brewer son Lance (left). The brewery involves the whole family, with daughter Carley looking after sales, and wife Maxine "holding it all together," to quote Neil's words!

The compact 10-firkin brewery is tucked away at the back of the family bakery business. They've been running the bakery since 1985, and despite its success they've decided to move on to a new challenge – brewing! Having satisfied themselves that they can make top quality beer – amply demonstrated by our award – the future will see them move to a different location, quadrupling the size of the brewing kit at the same time. The future may also see the production of a German style lager – as you may have guessed from the name, Neil has a German heritage, and apparently his father's uncle was a brewmaster back home!

Having presented the award, it was time to adjourn for some sampling. We moved on to the excellent **Trackside**, the railway-buffet-bar adjoining the heritage East Lancashire Railway in the centre of Bury. Amongst the beers on offer were the fabulous *Stout* and *Solstice* from Brightside. We thoroughly enjoyed our time chatting with the family, and wish them all the very best in their endeavours; we expect to be hearing more of their success in the future!



Bread, Ale and Whisky cont.

For the Silver award, it was off to the other end of the country. **West Country Brewery** started up in 2010, re-using much of the equipment from a previous brewery. Located some miles west of Salisbury – our route took us past Stonehenge – the brewery sits in an industrial unit, out in the countryside near Dinton. The set-up is very spacious; even the cold storage room is bigger than the total size of most of our local micros! The operation



is headed up by brewer Rod Macdonald, with Mark Jacobs as assistant brewer. Mark (centre) and Rod (right) are pictured receiving the award from editor Adam Randall.

This was an excellent opportunity to re-sample the *English Ale*, a beautifully gutsy copper-brown ale with a great balance of clean malt and fruity hoppiness. Rod thinks it still needs a bit of tweaking to enhance it further; the ABV will be tweaked up a little from the existing 3.9% to 4.1%. This will also distinguish it from the other ale in their main portfolio, *Somer*, which will stay at 3.9%. Rod has a long CV in brewing, from helping to set up Exmoor Ales, as well as spells at Hall & Woodhouse,



Cotleigh, and the Theakstons State Brewery in Carlisle.

Rod joined us later in the evening on our little crawl of Salisbury. The city has some excellent *Good Beer Guide* pubs, but Rod was also able to point us at two great pubs which must be strong contenders for next year's *GBG*: the **Wilton** (SP2 7ED), a cosy wood-fire heated local featuring three micro ales (including the *English Ale*!), and the nearby **Duke of York** (SP2 7AS) with four interesting ales (such as *Dark Star Hophead*) and a couple of real ciders. We would also have missed the lovely old **Haunch of Venison**, which dates from 1320, and offers Hopback beers in good nick. So ta for the tips Rod!

Church End picked up the Bronze award for their lovely *Meaty Peaty Mild*, a cracking mix of *Gravediggers Ale* and Laphroaig whisky. We thought it appropriate that our secretary George (left) should present the award to Karl (right) from the brewery. George just cannot get enough Laphroaig, and similarly Karl cannot wait until Tamworth Beer Festival comes around, so that he can get going on all the fruity beers that we ask him to make. So much more interesting than beer-flavoured beers!



Book Review

June brings an exciting new development if you're a fan of German beer. On the 3rd of June, Lufthansa are introducing a new daily service from Birmingham to Berlin. And it will go to the brand new airport in Berlin, with a new short-hop train to the centre of town. How timely then that there's a new book out – *Around Berlin In 80 Beers*.

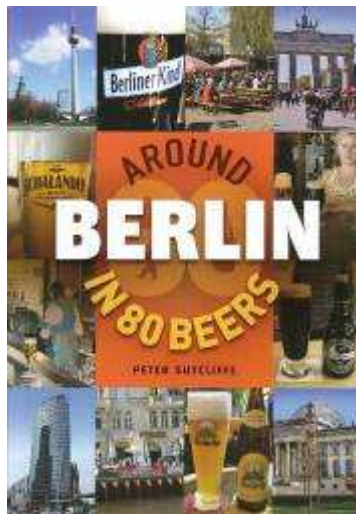
It's the fifth in a series of *80 Beers* books, with the others covering Amsterdam, Bruges, Brussels and London. The author of *Berlin* is lumbered with an unfortunate moniker – Peter Sutcliffe – but clearly his expertise does not concern the top security facilities at Broadmoor. Instead he brings to the table an extensive knowledge of the Berlin pub scene, from the many brewpubs to a wealth of central and suburban boozers.

Just like the other volumes in the series, the book is easy & pleasant to use. The basic premise is highlighting 80 bars across the city where you can try a different beer in each – no mean feat! Each pub has a dedicated page, with plenty of photographs to break up the prose. Page headers give all the key detail in a simple format – hours, food offerings, train or tram stops and so on. I thought I knew Berlin pretty well, but this guide has killed my complacency!

Bars aside, the book has the expected sections on beer styles, how to get there and so on. The Berlin history section is interesting and easily digestible, and there's a useful tour route which takes in a number of the recommended pubs while steering you past many of the historical – often Hitler-storical – bits of the city.

If you got in quickly enough, return flights from Brum were an absolute bargain at £78 all-in – extremely good for an airline where things like baggage, drinks and using the dunny are not viewed as chargeable extras. I'll be on that maiden flight on the 3rd, so expect to hear more about Berlin in a future edition of *Last Orders*!

- £9.99, but see special offers at www.booksaboutbeer.com



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Cheshire Cheers

This latest beer and bicycling odyssey was in pursuit of some Cheshire cheers in this northern county. Alighting at the train station at Stafford I mounted my trusty steed to cycle in sunny conditions towards Nantwich, my destination for that day. Outside of the town centre is the **Globe**, pictured right, home of the Woodlands brewery. Their *Globe* and *Oak Beauty* bitters sampled were similar in colour and taste, having caramel and nutty flavours with a gentle hoppiness.



I checked into the charming town centre **Crown Hotel**, pictured below, whose uneven floors add to its character. A walking tour was in order to take in the fine historic buildings of this small and pleasant town. Kicking off drinking in the town took place in the 350 year-old black-and-white timbered **Boot & Shoe**, which had attracted a large footfall for early on a Saturday evening. Black Hole *Titan* was a pale beer with an astringent hoppiness. The next hostelry visited was the **Black Lion** with its old fashioned and characterful interior, this was another pub that was doing a roaring trade. Weetwood *Best Bitter* had a mix of malt, grain and hop flavours in contrast to Phoenix *White Tornado* which was pale, floral and hoppy with citrus notes.



The day's imbibing ended in the Crown Hotel with two different beers, Salopian *Icon*, a pale beer with an intense blackcurrant taste and bold hoppiness. *Winter Melt-down*, an amber coloured ale from Dark Star was an ideal nightcap with its mixed spice flavours and warming finish.

The following morning was grey and overcast with a light drizzle, not very appealing conditions for cycling onwards to Chester. Thankfully, shortly after setting off conditions improved with sunny spells being the

norm for the rest of the day. Chester is a wonderful walled city with some varied and interesting pubs being one of its many attractions. A two night stay was in order to allow enough time to take it all in. A walk around the intact town walls was enjoyed interspersed with occasional diversions for some liquid refreshment. The first of these was undertaken at the **Mill Hotel** which has around twelve real ales to choose from. Coach House *Gunpowder Mild* was dark and rich with roasted grain flavours. A pleasant walk along the Shropshire Union Canal was needed to get to **Telford's Warehouse**, which is large and airy with views of the canal basin. Here a purr-fect beer, the pale, citrusy and hoppy *Cheshire Cat* from Weetwood was sampled.

Cheshire Cheers cont.

There are two Wetherspoons in Chester which were partaking in the chain's most recent real ale and cider festival. £3 plus per pint is the norm in most of the city's pubs whereas it was only £1.99 for their festival beers. In the JDW **Square Bottle**, the *Proper Black* from St Austell is a black IPA, the flavours of the dark roasted malts being perfectly balanced by the intense bitter hoppiness. In the other JDW, the **Forest House**, Stone *San Diego Session IPA* had massive hop presence and flavour, and a dry finish. The day's drinking was concluded at the **Old Harkers Arms**, a former canalside warehouse with wooden floors and panelling, a short walk from my B&B. *Titanic Stout* had tobacco and liquorice flavours with a burnt bitterness which was opposed by Mauldons *Black Adder* with its toffee and chocolate flavours and velvety smoothness.

A good night's kip and hearty breakfast was a good foundation for the enjoyable canal-side walk to get to the **Bridge Inn**, pictured right, where the pale and zesty *Shropshire Gold* from Salopian hit the mark. A repeat visit to Telford's Warehouse was called for to try Sheffield Beer Works (aka Abbeydale) *Galaxy 55*. The *Galaxy* hop variety (grown in Tasmania) is the new kid on the block and does not disappoint on the palate.



This beer was out of this world with its powerful blackcurrant aroma and flavours, and awesome hop finish. A more down to earth beer in price (£1.60 a pint) and flavour was Samuel Smith *Old Brewery Bitter* with its woody maltiness and light bitterness which was sampled in one of the city's oldest pubs, the **Boot Inn**.

The **Brewery Tap** is the tap for the local Spitting Feathers brewery and is situated in an impressive Jacobean hall, with high ceilings and tapestries. Spitting Feathers *Thirst Quencher* did just that with its fruity citrus hop flavour and was followed by Cambrinus *Lamp Oil Porter* which had a pleasant, smoky bitterness. The nearby **Bear & Billet**, pictured left, features low beams and a log fireplace. Here the golden, hoppy *Priory Gold* from Burscough brewery was savoured. Back at the Forest House *Kett's Rebellion* from Woodforde was a fruity and hoppy offering. A visit to Chester would not be complete without a visit to the **Albion** with its old fashioned interior and war time memorabilia. Adnams *Bitter* with its hop and bitter notes and hints of dark fruit was available and the final beer sampled on this enjoyable trip



before cycling homewards the following morning.

Eric Randall

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Beer Snippets

Fans of **White Dwarf** from Oakham Ales have had an unwelcome New Year's present – the beer has been axed. This wheat beer was an Oakham favourite, but was reportedly dogged with technical problems when the production moved away from Peterborough town centre. Most Oakham drinkers will have been so dazzled by the arrival of *Citra* that they may not have noticed *White Dwarf*'s absence. The replacement in the regular portfolio will be *Scarlet Macaw*, a 4.4% golden ale. Isn't it a bit strange that they've decided to name it after an endangered species? Try it before it squawks!



Whilst waiting for your food in a JD Wetherspoon, it's always good to have something to read while you wait for the hard-pressed microwave to do its work. *Wetherspoon News* seems to have turned all political of late; never an issue goes by without JDW boss Tim Martin sticking the boot into the Euro (and reminding you each time that he was right all along). Lying, mendacious politicians get the treatment, and the January issue even featured an article on rising sea levels and climate change; not the sort of stuff you expect in a booze mag!

Anyway, we've got a question for Mr Martin. We reckon he should stop worrying about the trivial issue of the Euro, and focus on a much more pressing issue: the great black pudding conspiracy! High street JDWs offer a budget brekkie with the option of black pudding. Go to an airport JDW and the price more than doubles – understandable in a way – but the option of black pudding disappears! Answers Mr Martin please!

It's taken 'em a year to introduce it, but come April we will finally have the Government's marvellous new policy of banning 'below cost' sales of alcohol. In the usual unhinged manner of Whitehall, cost is taken to be zero, but only after the taxman's taken his cut of duty-plus-VAT. The policy is useless and already past its sell-by date, but this didn't stop minister James Brokenshire from trumpeting it as an "important first step which will prevent 7,000 crimes a year." We reckon Broken-Britain-Shire should launch it on April 1st rather than the 6th as intended.

Meanwhile, an unprecedented number of MPs have got behind the bar to work a shift at the local pub. The initiative, launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group, attempts to get MPs more aware of the issues facing community pubs. We hope that something comes out of it, but politicians of all shades have been notoriously poor at supporting the well-managed end of the alcohol trade. Will they just use these opportunities to press-the-flesh and then quietly retire again to the passive backbenches?

This sentiment is echoed by Ted Tuppen, chief exec of pub chain Enterprise Inns, who asked "why have successive governments discriminated against pubs instead of supporting them?" Which is well-said, though in turn we'd like to ask why greedy pub chains have in turn done so little to support their tenants? High rents and high beer prices are amongst the key problems. It is ironic that powerful pub chains look for help from above, after a sustained record of screwing the people below.

Birmingham's Contemporary Classics

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:

Post Office Vaults

pleasantly surprised. The bar is downstairs, down a staircase decorated with brewery enamels, a theme which continues in the single main room. The décor is pleasantly basic – a simple brown and white colour scheme, bare wooden floor, and a selection of black-and-white photographs of old Birmingham.

The bar, pictured below, is not that long, but certainly packs a lot in. Eight hand pulls feature a good selection of ales – nothing mainstream, and a permanent mild, Hobson's 3.2% prize winner. Real ciders feature strongly too, with six or seven generally on the go. A few upmarket keg products are offered, including Freedom Stout. And all this is topped off by an eclectic and growing bottled beer list, which includes top-flight lambics, Flemish brown ales, US micros and German classics. The Vaults is almost struggling to keep up with itself –



while the sandwich board outside boasted 50 bottled beers, a quick flick through the freshly-printed menu showed 76!

The venue has 'always' been a pub; in the era when M&B dominated Birmingham it was the M&B **Royal Mail**, but since then it has been a succession of nondescript, failing yoof-bars. So this new venture is a welcome rescue of a bar with great potential. Over a short time (it

opened Dec 2011) it has developed a great atmosphere – no TV, no music, just good beer and conversation. No food is served but you can bring your own, plates and cutlery will be provided for you.

If like most you're train bound, the final great feature of the Vaults is that if you leave by the slightly grander Pinfold Street entrance (pictured right), you've just a two minute walk to New Street Station!

What are Birmingham's most well-known landmarks? Sadly, most would probably name either the Dalek-spotted Selfridges store, or the floozy in the jacuzzi at Victoria Square! Queen Victoria is above all this – her statue gazes serenely at Birmingham's newest pub.

The **Post Office Vaults** has one of the least imposing pub entrances in Brum. The plain doorway on New Street (below) sits modestly between a Greggs bakery and a booze'n'fags news-agents. But step over the threshold and you'll be



opened Dec 2011) it has developed a great atmosphere – no TV, no music, just good beer and conversation. No food is served but you can bring your own, plates and cutlery will be provided for you.

If like most you're train bound, the final great feature of the Vaults is that if you leave by the slightly grander Pinfold Street entrance (pictured right), you've just a two minute walk to New Street Station!



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Czech It Out

Having last visited Prague twenty years ago, when the Velvet Revolution had yet to smooth off the rough communist edges, it seemed high time for a return visit to see how the place had mellowed. Additional motivation came in the form of Evan Rail's excellent *Good Beer Guide Prague & The Czech Republic*, recommending no fewer than 70 bars in Prague alone!

The city is very beautiful, picture-perfect in parts, but the casual visitor could be forgiven for thinking that the beer scene is just *Pilsner Urquell*, *Budweiser Budvar* and *Staropramen*. These do dominate, but dig deeper and there is a wealth of interesting smaller brews to be found. It's also worth noting that Prague is home to a number of bars where *Pilsner Urquell* is available in unpasteurised form. *Budvar* and *Urquell* are very respectable beers in their own right, but the fresher form of *Urquell* is a revelation, allowing the hoppiness and malty richness to shine all the brighter.

Prague is a sprawling place, but like any Brit going to a foreign city, you marvel at the excellent transport system – an integrated metro, tram and bus system, where a 24-hour ticket costs less than £4, and includes getting to and from the airport. Transport could be like this across the UK if transport was – duh! – about transporting people rather than making money for the operators.

So with your day-pass and a metro map, where to go? I can only say that I scratched the surface of Prague, but a three-pronged attack seems good: visit some of the brewpubs, seek out unpasteurised *Urquell*, and try the promising new development in Prague – beer bars offering a range of microbrews.

The **Richter Brewery** (sign pictured right) was highly recommended, and rightly so. It's a nice traditional boozery, a single large wood-panelled room, with a pair of polished brewing vessels in the corner. The standard *Ležák* or lager is outstanding – a rich, unfiltered golden brew with a lovely assertive bitterness to start, melting into a lasting bittersweet finish. The three other beers available on the day were equally noteworthy, and as you can see from the beer board below, keenly priced. 32 Kč for half



a litre worked out at £1.10, a bargain for such cracking beer.

Such prices were about the norm in Prague, with excellent beer rarely coming in above 40 Kč (£1.40) as long as you avoided the obvious tourist haunts. At the **Klášteří pivnice** – a smoky if cheerful dump – top-nick *Kláster* was going for 21 Kč (75p). And at the **Klášteří pivovar Strahov**, an 'expensive' brewpub right in the tourist heart near the castle, a first class *American IPA* at 6.3% was 64 Kč (£2.20). I think I can cope with that sort of expensive!

Another must-do brewpub in the centre of town is **U Medvídků**, essentially a *Budvar* beer hall, but with a brewpub hidden away upstairs. The

intimate vaulted brewpub serves *Oldgott Barrique*, a nice amber lager-cum-ale, and the *X-Beer 33°*, a scary 12.8% brew. The food here is hefty; a half roast duck was superbly cooked with lovely crispy glazed skin, but it looked more like half a goose. You also



Czech It Out cont.

need to be aware that the Czech Republic is a nation practising vegetable apartheid – dumplings are the standard accompaniment; healthy veggies get to ride at the back of the bus. But served up next to a goulash with a rich sauce, dumplings can be just the thing.



If nettle beer is up your street, then don't miss **Pivovarský dům**. Along with excellent non-silly light and dark beers, this brewpub also offers a range of addition-beers: coffee, cherry, banana and nettle. Strangely enough, the nettle or *Kopřivové*, pictured left, was the best of the weird bunch – a lemony herbal flavour with a good hoppy-herbal finish. The sister venture of **Pivovarský Klub** also deserves favourable mention; only a tiny brewplant here, the distinguishing feature being six artisanal brews on tap. The novelty of the brews made it mildly confusing; struggling to find them in the Czech *GBG*, it was basically a matter of ordering by numbers and hoping for the best!

The Klub is an example of Prague's emerging phenomenon – bars serving a range of micro beers. In the past it was apparently very much the case of one-bar-one-beer, with the beer usually being one of the big three, but now specialist beer bars are slowly popping up. An excellent example is **Zlý čas**, a spacious cellar bar which soon fills despite its size. *Zlý čas* translates as 'wicked times' but we were on best behaviour when sampling the 20+ draughts, a few of which were superbly priced imports such as Schlenkerla's *Urbock* (55 Kč/£1.90). The beer descriptions appear above the bar, around the pub clock (pictured right). A particularly striking new-wave brew was Kocour's *Sumeček* or *Catfish*, a deliciously fragrant and fruity American Pale style.



Another compulsory speciality bar is the **Prague Beer Museum**. This has 30 draught beers, less exotic in scope than that of *Zlý čas*, but still with many surprises. *Opat Chocolate* did exactly what it said on the tin – rather too much so in fact – while *Samurai* from Kocour was another New-World-hop masterpiece. The place has rather too much loud-music-for-youngsters, but it's good to see youngsters enjoying such beers.

Prague's many traditional bars shouldn't be forgotten. **U černého vola** serves up *Kozel* light and dark, and feels like a throwback to the communist era – dirt-cheap beer with professionally grumpy staff. Don't take it personally – enjoy watching locals get the same surly treatment! And if you're of a sensitive disposition, don't observe the glass-washing routine too closely; surely beer is reasonably antiseptic?

For cheery service – mostly the norm despite what the guidebooks say – the basement **Kolíbka** bar is good and also offers a rare-ish chance to try Bernard beers in unfiltered form. The *Světlý Ležák*, served in a classy handled glass, is an intriguing brew – richly malty with a smoky edge, polished off with a don't-put-this-down-for-long hoppiness.

My previous trip to Prague in the 90's didn't leave me with any great intentions of going back. Looking back on this trip – good food, excellent beer, and the ease of getting about amongst other things – I know that it won't be long before I'm there again!

West Midlands Beer Of The Year

On Tuesday 27 December 2011, many of our regional branch members attended the annual West Midlands Beer of the Year awards, hosted this year by the **Drop Forge** in the Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham. Six of us from Lichfield were picked up en-route by the Burton branch of CAMRA in their hired bus! Great to have door to door service and many thanks to Burton's May Arthur for making the arrangements.

The Drop Forge, right, is an attractive, open plan conversion of an old Victorian factory. A staircase leads up to a gallery that nests above the main bar/dining area, and the whole pub benefits from natural light from the large glazed areas. In addition to the four hand pulls on the main bar, half a dozen casks were set up on a stillage for the event, with a choice of local micros served on gravity for the competitive price of £2.50 a pint.



The breweries closest to us picked up prizes almost exclusively for dark beers. Church End took second place in the Stout category with *Stout Coffin*. For porters, Beowulf took third with *Finns Hall Porter*, while Blythe scooped gold with *Johnson's Porter*. Beowulf's excellent *Dragon Smoke Stout* and *Dark Raven* took third places in the dark bottled and strong mild categories respectively. Rob of Blythe (left) and Phil of Beowulf (right) are pictured below, to the right of each pic.

The overall Beer of the Year winner was Hobsons *Mild* followed in second place by Salopian *Hop Twister* and in third Salopian *Golden Thread*. There was also a special award to the Birmingham branch of CAMRA, recognising amongst other things all the hard work they put in to their recent guide to the city centre pubs of Brum.

Soon after all of the awards had been presented, most of the audience decided to visit the local real ale outlets in the Jewellery Quarter. Our party took the short walk to the **Lord Clifden** and had time for a couple of pints (Wye Valley HPA in my case) before returning to the bus at the agreed departure time of 4pm. After being dropped off at Lichfield bus station it was time to find a comfort stop? What better than the **Duke of York** Greenhill where I had a pint of Joules *Blonde* before finally heading home.

Dave Backhouse

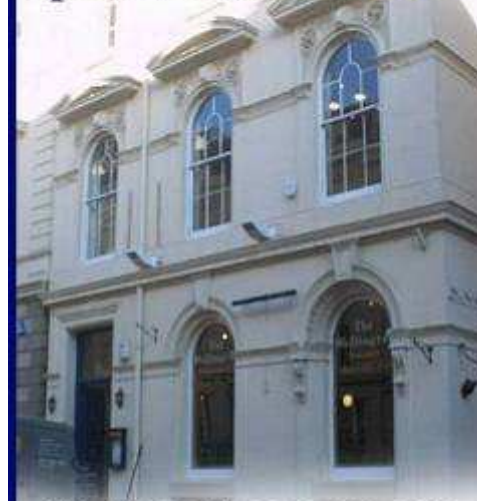


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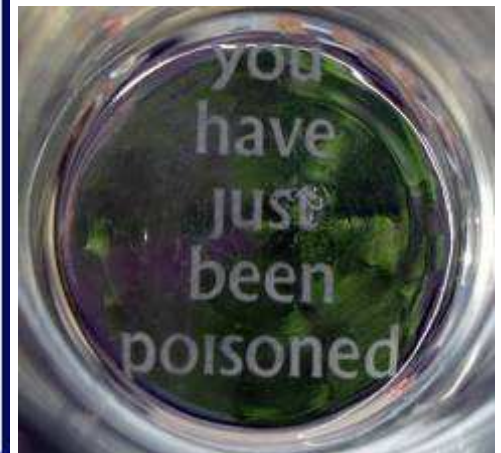
Still Thirsty?



The latest glass for creamflow? Or is it better suited to the icy yellow fizz that passes for lager in this country?

Fans of the cult TV series *The Prisoner* from the 1960s will recognise it as a prop from *The Girl Who Was Death* – though hardcore fans will know that the version below is the correct font and word alignment!

Both can be bought from www.etsy.com, but they are pricey, and of course the gag relies heavily on your victim holding the glass correctly!



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Four cask ales always available. Good Beer Guide 2012

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Tipple Tattle

STAFFORDSHIRE

The JDW **Plaza** in Rugeley continues its theme of Staffordshire beers; Limestone *Foundation Stone* was on special offer at £1.45 a pint recently.

Meanwhile in Brereton you could have had a *Soggy Bottom* (from Jennings) in the **Red Lion**. The pub is doing a Valentine's Day food special, 6 courses for £25 per person.

Sadly, the **New Talbot** in Brereton has closed. The so-called 'white knight' who stepped in to 'save' it is in talks with planners to turn the pub into housing.

The **Crown** at Handsacre has reinstated food, with two-for-£10 Tues-Sat, from noon until 7pm. Cask ales are *Pedigree* and *Bass*. The **Olde Peculiar** down the road had Backyard's *Kris Kringle* over the festive season.

At Longdon, the **Swan With Two Necks** has new opening times of 12-11.30pm, with food served 12-2, 6-9 every day. Take away fish & chips are back, as well as Bathams *Bitter* on Fridays! The regular beer line-up is now Sharps *Doom Bar*, Timothy Taylor *Landlord*, *Pedigree* and Caledonian *Deuchars IPA*. The good news is that the Deuchars replaces Greene King 'IPA'. The insipid GK wasn't selling very well apparently – drinkers voting with their palates!

The **Gatehouse** in Lichfield has recently undergone a smart interior, refurbishment and at the same time was re-badged from a Lloyds to a JD Wetherspoon house.

To accompany the six ales from the Marstons list, the **Queens Head** in Lichfield is hosting theme nights and activities to cater for all tastes. Regular events include a curry and chilli night every Thursday (£6.50 with a free drink), pub quiz usually on the last Tuesday of each month, and Lichfield Folk session on the last Sunday of every month.

The **Horse & Jockey** is now the only true free house in Lichfield. The eight hand pulls offer a mixture of three regular national beers plus a selection of guests, usually micros.

The wood fires in both the bar and lounge of the **Duke of York** in Lichfield make this busy Joules pub a highly popular retreat during the winter months. Three Joules ales are accompanied by one or two ever-changing guests, mainly from micros. Dark beers feature regularly in the guest slot.

Over the last few months **Ye Olde Windmill** at Gentleshaw (WS15 4NF) has had some great cask ales on tap including Sarah Hughes *Ruby Mild* and *Sedgley Surprise*, Castle Rock *Harvest Pale*, Dancing Duck *Ay Up* and Salopian *Shropshire Gold*, to name but a few! The pub will be hosting a beer festival to coincide with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee on 2-3rd June. This will be a family day to include entertainment and some fine cask ales. More details in the next issue.

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

Few pubs now have 18 gallon casks in the cellar – 9 gallons is the norm, and it's a good size to make sure that ale sells in the ideal time – three days for freshness. So we were impressed to hear of the volumes at the **Rose Inn** at Baxterley. It's not unusual for landlord Tim to go through four 18s of *Bass* and six 9s of guests in a week! Compared to a mere three 11s of Carling in a week, it's a pretty impressive ratio: 126 gallons of cask

Tipple Tattle cont.

versus 33 of lager. Any other pubs in our area doing a better ratio?

In days gone by, the most northerly pub in our Warwickshire branch area was the wonderful Four Counties, so named because – prior to boundary changes – it was alleged to have a foot in each of Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. It's just an Indian restaurant now, as clearly the residents of No Man's Heath were busting for a curry rather than a pint.

So the **Queens Head** at Newton Regis is now our most northern pub. Plenty of food offerings, and four cask ales. Wells *Bombardier*, *Courage Directors* and GK *'IPA'* are regulars, with a changing guest such as Cairngorm *Callie*.

Time for a shock to the system. A Greene King beer with a good smack of hops? The *Old Golden Hen* was on offer at the **Samuel Barlow** in Alvecote, and it's a nice citrusy beer. In typical GK style they've camouflaged it as a Morlands beer, but no need for modesty this time. The pub is now thriving under new landlord Paul: three or four cask ales doing good volumes, with a mix of local and national beers. Paul hails from Cairns in Australia, swapping the Barrier Reef for the Coventry Canal outside the Barlow!

The **Horseshoes** in Nuneaton will be holding its second beer festival (see fest listings), styled as a winter ale festival. There'll be ten ales inside, plus ten beers in the heated marquee outside – five stronger ales on hand pull plus five strong continental beers. The present plan is to offer Belgian-themed food during the fest.

We're pleased to report that the **Dog Inn** at Nether Whitacre has now separated out the ale cooling system, so that the five ales on offer are now just pleasantly cool rather than lager-frigid. Star beer in January was Sadler's *Jack's Pale Ale*, a superbly hop-fragrant beer in fine form.

Just round the corner at the **Gate Inn**, we may be seeing some of the Marston's single-hop brews. Marston's have finally twigged how good some of the new hop varieties are, and each month will be doing a single-hop 4.0% pale brew, with varieties such as Galaxy, Cascade, Nelson Sauvín and Citra. Landlord Mark is toying with getting some in – go and show your support!

The **Griffin Inn** at Shustoke is doubling the size of its on-site brewery, going from a ten to twenty firkin brew length. The intention is to start supplying the free trade.

Church End Brewery Tap will be offering the main competition to London's Olympics with its very own Publympics – a number of weekly competitions, both indoors and out, including things like welly-wanging and horseshoe-throwing. There will be prizes, plus a series of themed beers to accompany the period.

WEST MIDLANDS

The Apres Bar in Mere Green (adjacent to the Mere Green Library) was closed down in September, and at the end of November re-opened under the Wetherspoons flag as the **Mare Pool**. Since opening it has been busy, being a new venue in the area. It is not a typical Wetherspoons following those in Birmingham, Lichfield or Tamworth, and is a bit more up market with prices to match. The interior is smart modern, but more cafe/bar than pub, with low tables and seating in much of the area. There were three real ales on

Tipple Tattle cont.

during a recent visit, and all more costly than the usual JDWs; 'lagers' were at the £3+ a pint level, similar prices to other pubs in the area.

The nearby **Old Speckled Hen** continues to be popular, and on some Saturday evenings does have live music, but if you sit around the corner from the bar, it's not too loud. There have been some change in the cellar arrangements, so beer consistency might improve – there are four hand pulls but only two in use. They usually have Greene King *IPA* on tap, then maybe *Abbot Ale*, *Pedigree* or *Old Speckled Hen*.

The **Crown** is still the only pub in Four Oaks area that has a decent selection of real ales, and usually in good condition. Generally very busy on Friday and Saturday nights.

The **White Lion** at the Hill Village Rd/Butlers Lane junction started to have Karaoke nights on Saturday – much to the dismay of most regulars – but this idea was abandoned at the start of December. Still no guest beers, Thwaites beers only. There is a quiz night Wednesday evenings.

The **Greenhouse** on Lichfield Road in Four Oaks continues to be very busy with the 'in crowd' but we hear on good authority that it has been attracting some less desirable element from outside the area, with some trouble in the evenings resulting in police involvement and investigations. None of the regular drinkers from when it was the Half Way House have returned, due to the prices and change of status.

• Thanks to contributors John W, Mike D, Adam R, Duncan A, Ivan D, Dave B

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Liverpool Loss Leaders

It's 6am on Saturday January 7. Along with the rest of the Tamworth FC Real Ale Crew, I'm heading for Liverpool – via Birmingham.

“You're going the wrong way!” I hear you cry. But wait....there is method in our madness. The Lambs are, of course, due to play Everton in the third round of the FA Cup. Along with the 8-900 diehard fans, several thousand Tammies who have never or rarely seen the team play before are going to Goodison Park - and it seems as if most of them will be on the 7.30am train to Stafford.

So the nine-strong RAC have a plan – the 7.09 to Birmingham means we can join the Liverpool train when it leaves New Street, at least guaranteeing us a seat. That proved a wise idea because when it pulled in at Stafford, roughly 300 Tammies, most carrying bottles of Budweiser or cans of Stella, charged into the carriages.

Now it wasn't the quietest train journey I've ever had, but neither was it the rowdiest, and when we got to Lime Street, our different groups went our different ways. They headed off in search of the nearest Wetherspoon while we began a pub crawl which I definitely aim to repeat in the near future.

After breakfast and a rather wind-battered stroll around Albert Docks, we were off to Dale Street, the middle of the city's business district and, it seems, home to some of its finest pubs. At 11.01, we were in the **Ship & Mitre**, right – 13 handpulls, separate pumps for foreign beers and four, yes, four floor-to-ceiling fridges full of continental bottled beers.

We could have stayed all afternoon and one day, I will – but a stone's throw down the road was the **Vernon Arms**. A proper old street-corner local, it had half-a-dozen real ales including a rum porter from Boggarts Brewery which tasted as if someone had made what is already a distinctive brew and then hurled three shots of rum in the glass. Fantastic.

Another few steps down the road to **Thomas Rigby's**, which had the great advantage of having another pub, the **Lady of Mann**, in its back yard. The two share an outside courtyard and drinkers can stroll out of the back door of one pub and in through the front door of the other – perfect.

Then, it was round the corner to the **Lion Tavern** where, as the CAMRA Good Beer Guide rightly notes, the pork pies were as good as the ale.

Pre-match prep completed at just after 2pm, our party quickly found three taxis for the £6 journey to Goodison Park – split nine ways, that was amazing value.

The game? Oh, you know what happened. Tamworth played one of the best 90 minutes I've ever seen from a Lambs team and were heading for a deserved draw when, as a Villa fan I know put it, Everton's Royston Drenthe hit the ground 'just as you're taught to fall



Liverpool cont.

over for a penalty when you're on £30k a week.’

Enough of that, then. The club banked a handy six-figure cheque and the town got a weekend of great publicity.

Back into the city for the **White Star**, below, just up the road from the Cavern Club. Apparently, a famous 60s beat combo have their roots around this part of the city. Rather than music, the White Star deals in boxing and shipping memorabilia.

We could have stayed longer – but there was a train to catch and one final pub – the Cains-owned **Dr Duncan's** by Lime St station. Finally, we had found a loud and rowdy venue but then, it was early on a Saturday night in Liverpool by now.

And to top off the good news, the 18.46 unexpectedly stopped at Tamworth, delivering us home just after 8pm. The perfect end to a perfect day – and no-one even felt inclined to argue about refereeing decisions.

Martin Warrillow



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Munich on the Margins

Munich is a fabulous beer city, and I don't mean Oktoberfest. That is more suited to party animals, who don't mind fighting for a table so they can drink the same beer all day amid the chaotic oompah. Try it once if you're adventurous! Mature drinkers will prefer the variety of classic beer halls, breweries and gardens (see for example *Last Orders 25 and 31*). But the joy of Munich is that there are plenty of even better places to go in the suburbs, helped along by an extensive transport system. Here's a look at some of the places served by the S-Bahn and rail (all times from the central rail station).

Herrsching (49 mins): Home to the fabulous Andechs monastery brewery, right, about an hour's uphill walk from the station through thickly wooded river gorges. The **Klostergasthof** offers magnificent views from its beer terrace, and it's a splendid place to eat. Almost next door is the **Bräustüberl**, more in the style of a Munich beer hall, with self-service beer counters, more down-to-earth food, and lots of varied seating areas and terraces. The **Bräustüberl** is the cheaper place to drink, but the **Klostergasthof** offers the fullest range of beers. It's well worth looking into the Kloster itself, a richly decorated baroque church. It features no fewer than 12 confessional booths, presumably for monks who've had too many of the classic *Doppelbock Dunkel* at 7.1%.



Freising (25 mins): No fewer than three brewery taps to go at here! Freising's jewel is the Weihenstephan brewery, founded in 1040 and Germany's oldest. Right next door to the ancient brewery, the **Bräustüberl** has a lovely beer garden shaded with lime trees. Amongst the wide range of beers on offer is the *Korbinian* bock, a chewy 7.4 percent.



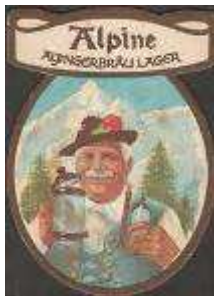
Across town, the Hofbrauhaus Freising, left, is a relative youngster, founded in 1160. The **Hofbrauhauskeller** has an excellent beer garden, and a choice of beers including a dark wheat beer, *Weißer Dunkel*, 4.8%, and a nicely hoppy *Jägerbier* at 5.3%, intentionally cloudy. Finally there's the **Bräuhaus Freising**, a brewpub founded in 1991 but looking older

inside than both of its ancient neighbours! The bar, right, is the centrepiece of the rustic beer hall. The *Helles*, 4.6%, is a refreshing cloudy brew, while the dominant feature of the *Schwarzbier*, 4.8%, is its rich, roasty aroma.



Aying (37 mins): This is one of those little towns which illustrate how deeply beer is embedded into the German psyche – or at least in the minds of Aying town planners. On the one kilometre walk from station to brewery, you pass *Hops Road*, *Barley Road*, *Malt Road* and *Brew Alley*. There is even a *Grist Road*, which seems to be taking the concept too far! All this pays tribute to the Aying brewery, which co-operated with Samuel Smith

Munich on the Margins cont.



Brewery years ago to produce the *Ayingerbräu Lager*, left, contract-brewed in the UK and characterised by the benevolent old Bavarian gent standing against a mountain backdrop – not a sight that you will see in Holland-flat Aying! The formal brewery tap is the **Brauereigasthof Aying**, but as this is an excessively posh fine-dining hotel, you'll be more at home in **Liebhards Bräustüberl** just across the road. This is a cosy, friendly place, with a vaulted ceiling, wooden panelling and hefty wooden tables. It's the de facto tap, serving the full range of Aying beers, from the nice gentle *Liebhards Kellerbier* to the superb rich *Altbairisch Dunkel*. The nightcap beer has to be the *Celebrator Doppelbock*, 'only' 6.7% but drinking like a 10 percenter. Each bottle comes with its own plastic billy goat, or bock, as pictured right.



Erding (50 mins): Another world famous name with a tap just a short stroll from the S-Bahn station. Anybody who likes wheat beer will surely be familiar with the Erdinger name, and so they should, as it's the world's largest producer of the stuff. However, if you're not too keen on *Weizen*, then maybe a trip to the **Erdinger Weißbrau**, left, is not a good idea – as they sell nothing but wheat beer! Admittedly there are four or five different types on offer, but there's only so much you can do with it given the distinctive flavour. Erdinger do pretty much all the combinations – clear or cloudy, light or dark, strong or not. The outstanding specimen is the *Pikantus Weizenbock*, a 7.3% brew.

Perlach (20 mins): The **Forschungsbrauerei** is a superb suburban brewpub which should not be missed. The scholarly-looking owl on the logo, right, is presumably a nod to the translation of 'Research Brewery'. Quite what research goes on is a moot point, as they have only two standard beers which never change. However, once you've tasted them, you'll understand why! *Pilsissimus*, 5.2%, is a superb pilsner, juicily hoppy and quite unlike the German norm. The *St. Jacobus Blonder Bock*, 7.5%, is sadly a seasonal beer now rather than a regular (September onwards), but it's just the thing to brighten up autumn and winter! There have been two good developments here of late. Firstly, it used to close on Mondays and for most of winter, but is now open all week and year-round. And secondly, they had a bizarre practice whereby beer would only be served by the litre after 4pm! This has now been relaxed, making for more sensible drinking.



[For more information on all of these places, consult Steve Thomas's excellent Good Beer Guide Germany or the companion website www.german-breweries.com]

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On The Ball In Rugby

In December I decided to attend the CAMRA regional meeting hosted by Rugby branch from noon at the **Merchants Inn** (pictured below). It was of special interest on this occasion as the CAMRA chief executive, Mike Benner was invited as the guest speaker. There was also a very convenient, hourly rail service from Lichfield to Rugby at a cost of £11 return with a journey time of around 40 mins. The regional director, Gary Timmins promised that all business would be completed by 3pm so that visiting branch members would have plenty of time to share a pub crawl with the Rugby members. I give full marks to Gary, since despite the lengthy agenda, the meeting was closed just before 3.30pm! The Merchants is adorned with an ever-increasing collection of breweriana and serves ten regularly changing ales, two ciders on gravity, and a range of Belgian beers. During the meeting I had already quaffed pints of Oakham *Baby Belma*, Griffin *One Of My Favourites* and Dark Star *Hophead*, so I was well warmed up ready to visit a few more local pubs.



We took the short walk to the **Raglan Arms** where I propped up the bar and opted for a pint of Wye Valley *Butty Bach*. The Raglan stands opposite the famous Rugby School, and is a classic, wooden-floored local's pub selling a range of cask ales from both nationals and micros.



It was not long before we moved on back past the Merchants to the compact **Squirrel Inn** (pictured left). No problem in finding this cosy old hostelry as the exterior is painted in bright pink! Dowbridge *Mild* was my chosen tipple.

As soon as I had finished my pint it was time to head off to the **Victoria Inn**, where the local CAMRA members were keen to present an award! This fine example of a Victorian pub is owned by the local Atomic Brewery and consists of a tradi-

tional bar, comfortable lounge, plus two small snugs. There are fourteen hand pumps offering an ever-changing choice of micros as well as of course, examples from the Atomic range. After quaffing a pint of Atomic *Fusion* followed by a Castle Rock *Black Pear*, it was time to take the downhill stagger to the station for the short journey home.

There are several other pubs well worth visiting in Rugby and I have already vowed to make this real ale pilgrimage a regular day out in the future!

Dave Backhouse

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 22.

3-5th Feb, Horseshoes Winter Ale Festival
The Horseshoes, Heath End Road, Nuneaton, CV10 7JQ
15 ales on hand pull, 5 continental beers, ciders. Food all sessions.

3-4th Feb, Redditch Winter Ale Festival
The Rocklands Social Club, 59 Birchfield Road, Redditch, B97 4LB
33 ales plus cider and perry. Fri 5-11, Sat 11-11. See www.redditchwaf.org.uk

9-12th Feb, SIBA Champions Beer Festival
Canalhouse, 52 Canal St, Nottingham, NG1 7EH
56 ales on handpull. From 5pm on the Thursday.

15-18th Feb, 11th Derby Winter Beer Festival
Roundhouse, Derby College, Pride Park, DE24 8JE
300+ real ales, plus ciders and perries. Wed 4-11, Thu-Sat 11-11.

29th Feb-4th March, Newton Solney 4th Winterfest
Unicorn Inn, Newton Solney, DE15 0SG. www.unicorn-inn.co.uk
20+ beers. Live music, hog roast. Wed & Thu 12-close, Fri & Sat 12-1am, Sun 12-close.

1-3rd March, 36th Loughborough Beer Festival
Polish Club, True Lovers Walk, Loughborough, LE11 3DB
Around 70 ales plus cider and perry. Thu, Fri & Sat 12-11

7-10th March, Leicester Beer Festival
The Charotar Patidar Samaj, Bay St, Leicester
Over 220 ales, 35 ciders/perries. Wed 5-11, Thu & Fri 11-11. Sat 11-10



14th March-1st April, Wetherspoon Beer Festival
Up to 50 beers over the three weeks, JDWs across the country

15-17th March, 33rd Burton Beer Festival
Burton Town Hall, King Edward Place.
Around 100 ales plus ciders/perries. Thu 7-11, Fri & Sat 11.30-11.

20-23rd April, 4th St Georges Beer Festival
Rose Inn, Baxterley, CV9 2LE. Around 22 ales, a perry and two ciders.
Food throughout, various bands and Morris dancers. From noon each day.

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

Beer Geek

Birmingham welcomes another new brewery, in the form of **Beer Geek**. It's based at Avenue Road in Aston, about two miles from the city centre. The brewery is the brainchild of Paul Bennett, who has set it up as a career change from electronics. He's been brewing on a small scale for five years, and clearly felt that now was the time to go professional. Rather ambitiously, he built the 15 barrel brewery himself with help from his father and brother.



CAMRA members can go along to the formal launch of the brewery, which is being held at the **Post Office Vaults** in Birmingham (see article this issue). This will be from 3-7pm on Saturday 25th Feb. Cask and bottled beers should be available. The brewery promises to "push boundaries", so are we looking at a Brummie BrewDog?

Slightly controversially, one of the core range is the 3.8% *Chic Geek* – for poor, feeble females who can't deal with proper beer? Beyond that there's *Geek Unique* (4.3%), *Great White Geek* (4.5%), *Legend of the Golden Geek* (4.5%) and *Dark Side of the Geek* (5.5%). The descriptions sound like hops are prominent, so we could be in for a treat!



- www.beergeekbrewery.com, 0844 27 27 207

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