



NEWS OF THE ALE WORLD *Free*

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

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or see

www.LSTCamra.org.uk

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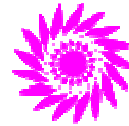
L.A.S.T. Orders Edition 38 Oct / Nov 2011



This issue ...



Balkans Boozing



Getting Steamed



Hamburg & Hannover

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

Hamburg Heatwave

Three sultry summer days provided the ideal backdrop for a short city break to Germany's second city, Hamburg. Like Amsterdam, the city centre is criss-crossed with canals and bridges, and the historic port area is well worth a wander. Only a small number of old buildings survived WW2. The St Nicholas church is reminiscent of Coventry cathedral – the main surviving structure is the spire, offering city panoramas from the top. The intact St Michael church also offers fabulous views, though the ascent takes you past 7½ tonne bells. The experience of climbing up when they are ringing with body-shaking intensity is both deafening and highly unnerving!

As is usual in Germany, Steve Thomas's *Good Beer Guide Germany* is the vital companion. It relates the sad decline of breweries in Hamburg, from a mighty 457 in medieval times to the three city brewpubs of today, plus Carlsberg-owned Holsten.

First of the brewpubs is **Joh. Albrecht**, one of a chain of five nationwide. Sitting beside a canal, it offers the standard Joh. Albrecht beers of *Messing* and *Kupfer*, plus a seasonal which for this visit was *Sommer* – a good refresher in the wilting temperatures. The interior, right, is pleasant enough, with brewing kit and a mass of copper, but I have to be a Joh. snob and say that the Düsseldorf branch is better.



Just down from the Joh. is an upmarket fashion shop, sign pictured left, which suggests two equally unlikely alternatives: that Germans have a sense of humour, or that their knowledge of English is not that good.

The second brewpub requires a short stroll toward the docks area. The **Gröninger** occupies the pristinely picturesque building below, reminiscent of a rich Amsterdam merchant's house. Drinking is relegated to the subterranean Braukeller, but the Keller is as impressive in its own way as the main building; it seems to go on forever, a maze of varied and intimate drinking areas amid columns and arches. The three-vessel brew kit occupies pride of place in the Keller, producing just two house beers. The *Weizen* is amazingly fruity, but it's not the typical banana notes – instead, oranges and peaches punch you on the nose. The *Pils* is equally unusual, murkily unfiltered and orangey-brown to boot! The strange peppery-fruity taste soon grows on you. I did have the *Pils* elsewhere in the city and it was a different animal, clean and less pronounced flavours. Maybe the brewery tap is more confident to serve murky, more natural beer! Either way, Gröninger was certainly the highlight of Hamburg for me.



Hamburg's third brewpub, **Brauhaus Hanseat**, is in reality just an offshoot of the Gröninger, situated on the opposite side of the block facing the docks. *GBG Germany* suggested

Hamburg Heatwave cont.

uncertain opening times, and sure enough it was not open during my visit. The brewing kit is in full view from the street, but who knows whether and when it is used!

The walk back into town takes you past the majestic Ratshaus, pictured right. Hamburg's bureaucrats certainly have classy quarters!

The local delicacy is a strangely schizophrenic dish. *Labskaus* starts out weirdly enough, a sort of sloppy corned beef topped with fried eggs, but the addition of beetroot, gherkin and rollmop herring elevates it to surreal. Strangely nice with beer though!

To escape such chalk-and-cheese food, Bavaria lends a helping hand. Two recommended bars bring the delights of Munich up to the north, both beer and food. The **Franziskaner** offers both the light and dark Franziskaner Weizen on draught, plus a number of Löwenbräu draughts, including the excellent *Dunkel*. Alternatively the **Paulaner's Miraculum** by the imposing main railway station offers the Paulaner range, though sadly not the hefty *Salvator*. Again the *Dunkel* is a good choice. Both the Franziskaner and Paulaner serve up the weighty Bavarian food which is delicious at the start, but which reminds you of the delights of a light salad towards the end!



Sir Robert Peel

Local



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Tipple Tattle

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE



We've been saying for ages how good the ale choice and quality is in the **New Dolphin** at Atherstone, so we thought it was high time they had an award! Pictured is branch member Eric Randall (left) presenting our branch award for Warwickshire Pub of the Year 2011 to landlord Ron Noble. The award is richly deserved, as the pub always has a choice of at least two, sometimes as many as four, interesting micro beers from near and far. For the local beers, Ron usually has a little jolly by picking them up direct from the brewery. He probably knows more brewers than us by now!

A welcome development in Mancetter is what we believe could be the first ever beer festival there! The **Blue Boar** (see advert page 10) will be offering a range of mostly local ales towards the end of November. It's pretty much a festival-free time of year so all the more welcome for that. The festival will be indoors so don't worry about the weather! If you go along to the event you may also find out about a new brewery which will be opening soon ...

At Alvecote, the bar of the **Samuel Barlow** now occupies the ground floor rather than the first floor, but still offers good views of the canal and marina. Two mainstream ales, two micros (Church End and Leatherbritches on a recent visit). The place is cosy but still can't decide whether it's a restaurant or sports bar.

We're pleased to report that real ales have returned to the **Bulls Head** at Polesworth. Two hand pumps are usually in action and have looked quite interesting to date, featuring breweries such as Beowulf, Blue Monkey and Daleside, so definitely a pub to watch. There's an independent Indian restaurant on the first floor of the pub – we'll have to find out if they allow BYO from the pub below!

Elsewhere in Polesworth, only the **Fosters Yard** does not feature real beer. The **Spread Eagle** still has its Coach House special, *Spread Eagle Bitter*, a nice toffee-edged 4.2% brew, at a bargain £2.25. The **Royal Oak** is a Marstons house, while the **Red Lion** was featuring *Tiger* and *Pedigree* during a recent visit.

At Pinwall, the **Red Lion** has a fairly settled ale range, with *Pedigree*, *Old Peculier*, Timothy Taylor *Landlord* and Black Sheep *Bitter*. Lovely pub, but it's a strangely cliquy place; the landlord here will give you a warm welcome – if you're a regular.

Nuneaton's **Round Table** beer fest in mid July was a real success. The busy charitable event had mostly local ales, but an imaginative selection rather than just the usual suspects. The event was also throbbing with bands, but the beer tent was a quiet refuge. Look out for it next year!

We reported last issue that Nuneaton's **Felix Holt** JDW is offering £1.30 guest ale pints to card-carrying CAMRA members. Unfortunately it's now gone up – by a whopping 5p to £1.35! Premium beers like Thornbridge *Jaipur* are, as we thought, excluded from this offer. The town's other JDW, the **William White**, was also doing it for a period, but the





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Tipple Tattle cont.

manageress there now categorically denies that they ever did! Please yourself! As you too can do if you are faced with a choice between the two. The Felix Holt probably is the better of the two, both for choice and quality.

Also in Nuneaton, the **Griff & Coton** club had an interesting little beer fest, organised by steward David Bellamy. Star beer was the risquely named *Vicar's Cock* from Nobby's. The club (on Heath End Road, CV10 7JQ) is well worth a visit, with regular Wells *Bombardier* and a guest at weekends, usually from a micro. There's also *Griff & Coton Lager*, a 5.2% brew very much in the style of a Munich lager – no prizes for guessing which local brewery makes it! Opening hours are 6 (12 Sat & Sun) until 11 (12 Fri & Sat).

The *Good Beer Guide 2012* came out on 15th September – and Nuneaton should have the honour of the first deletion! The listed **Bilberries** no longer serves any real ale.

A pub in North Warwickshire (which had better go un-named!) was offering Timothy Taylor's *Landlord*, but with a hand pump clip (pictured right) bearing the hand-written name of Timmey Talores Landlord – we reckon it's the export version for the Spanish market!



Nuneaton's **Crown** had a nice little Oakham Ales festival in September, ten unusual ales from a brewery which knows how to use hops! The pub also does an excellent Sunday lunch, £4.95 with all the trimmings. It's served from noon to 4pm, and you can pre-book on 02476 373343.

The **Gate Inn** at Nether Whitacre welcomes a new face to the kitchen. Paul Woodcock has taken over the running of the food side of the business, with a new menu. The week-day special offerings has also expanded – £10 will buy two meals, with Monday featuring curries, Tuesday steaks, Thursday pies and Friday fish & chips. With six or seven different real ales on the bar, you should find something to wash it down with!

Just around the corner, the **Dog Inn** is now offering a third-pint deal – three thirds of your choice for the price of a pint (typically £3). They've seen some interesting guests of late such as Fraoch, Castle Rock, Goose Eye and Beowulf. Lovely pub, though in our humble opinion we reckon the ales are served far too cold.

STAFFORDSHIRE

The **Malt Shovel** at Chorley near Lichfield (WS13 8DD) held a nice little beer festival on the August bank holiday Sunday, with a dozen ales and four ciders, plus four other ales inside the pub. Particularly good were the Fyne Ales *Vital Spark* and Holts *Humdinger*. It's a great village pub – boisterous bar, cosy lounge, and separate dining room. The regular ales are *Abbot*, *Tetley Bitter* and *Black Sheep Bitter*, with a changing guest from the Punch Finest Cask scheme – Mordue *Radgie Gadgie* during the festival.

Not far away, the **Drill Inn** just outside Burntwood (WS7 9HD) will also be having a beer festival on the 15th October (see ad and fest listings), featuring 15 ales, two ciders and a perry. The afternoon part will be family-friendly, and there'll also be live entertain-

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Tipple Tattle cont.

ment and food. Outside of the fest, the pub has three changing guest ales from the Punch range. This part of the world seems to be improving on the beer scene – or has it simply been off our radar? We can't be everywhere – we need more feedback from you, the punter! Let us know what is going on in your neck of the woods!

At Amington, the canalside **Gate Inn** has recently gained Cask Marque accreditation. Six handpulls are on the go, featuring beers from the Marstons portfolio, so in addition to *Pedigree* you'll see the likes of Wychwood (who also do Brakspear brands), Jennings and Ringwood. The place is a cosy mix of eating house and boozier, with an excellent beer garden next to the cut.

It's always nice when a pub returns to having real ale, and such is the case at the **Albion Inn** in Rugeley town centre (Albion Street, WS15 2BY). For about five months now, the pub has been in the hands of Michael Cooper, and his wife Karin, who comes from Rischenau in Germany, near Hannover. The pub now has two hand pumps on the go, serving rotating guests from the Marstons portfolio – for example Wychwood *Scarecrow* and Marstons *Long Hop* on a recent visit. You are unlikely to see *Pedigree* or Banks's *Bitter* – why have those when almost everywhere else does? The pub has a pleasant outdoor seating area. Opening hours are 12-12 Fri & Sat, 12-10.30 Sun and 12-11 midweek.

Congratulations are due to Tony, Paula and staff at the **Sir Robert Peel** in Tamworth. The pub has scooped our branch Pub of the Year 2011 awards, for both Staffordshire and Overall (i.e. overall across our three counties of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and the West Midlands). Tony and Paula Hill are pictured (centre) receiving the awards from branch members Dave Parkes and Ian Eason (left and right respectively).



The JD Wetherspoon chain starts its next beer festival on the 5th October, and the **Plaza** in Rugeley will be marking this with a meet the brewer evening on the 5th. The guys from Tower Brewery will be present to chat to from 7.30pm. There will be about ten beers available on the night, including a couple from Tower and a few new and exclusive beers from the festival.

Just outside Rugeley at Colton, the **Yorkshireman** has started doing Fish & Chip Mondays. Freshly beer-battered fish, homemade chips and mushy peas are served 12-2.30 and 6-9 at £6 a throw. We don't know what beer is used in the batter, but one clue is that the regular cask ales are Blythe *Palmers Poison* and *Bagots Bitter*!

The **Red Lion** in Brereton is still turning out some quality ales. Banks's *Sunbeam* was recently put on Manager's Special at a respectable £2.50 a pint.

Another **Red Lion** – this time in Longdon Green (WS15 4QF) has reopened. We hope to tell you more about it in the next issue.

Tipple cont.

WEST MIDLANDS

Last issue's ad for the JDW **Bishop Vesey** featured "children's face painting", so we must apologise to any sadists who turn up, only to find that the screams are ones of delight from children involved in face painting. Mind, we're assuming it was a misprint? Regardless of what's happening with the kiddies, we're happy to announce that the Vesey has yet again won our branch Pub of the Year for our part of the West Midlands.

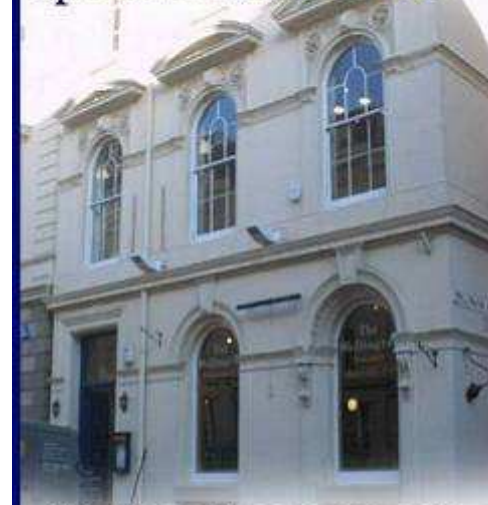
The **Greenhouse** (formerly the **Half Way House**) near Four Oaks station has been very busy since the July re-opening. However, most of the original drinkers no longer use it, as there is far less space at the bar, and the emphasis is on food and those wishing to eat. It seems that some of the regulars have migrated to the **Old Speckled Hen** on Mere Green Road

Nearer to Butlers Lane station, the **Crown** is probably still the best range of real ales in Four Oaks, and always in good condition, though busier than ever Saturday nights!

The **Fox & Dogs** on Mere Green Road was closed for a few weeks for refurbishment. It has now reopened with a differing layout for diners and wishing to attract a wider range of customers.

The **Apres Bar** at Mere Green closed down in July, and apparently it (together with a building extension into Pier 39 Restaurant) is to be converted to a Wetherspoons pub, probably a Lloyds No1 bar. This will certainly be an upset to other bars in the area, as there could be a decent range of beers at cheaper prices, and it may attract the younger crowd away from neighbouring pubs.

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Well Intentioned Lies or Bad Sums?

Here at Last Orders, we take pleasure in highlighting the beer-related rubbish quoted by politicians and the various figures of the booze trade. Sadly, this time we have to point the guns at one of the key faces of our national *Whats Brewing* newspaper – veteran beer hack Roger Protz.

In September's issue, Roger's article began with Benjamin Franklin's famous quote that "nothing is more certain in life than death & taxes." He was highlighting the increases in beer tax on beers of more than 7.5% ABV, which came in as of 1st October. Beer duty will rise by 25% on such beers. So if you just come into this bracket at 7.6%, the duty per pint will rise from 80p to 100p. And given that the taxman cleverly adds VAT on top of excise duty, the increase is not 20p but 24p.

The article quickly went pear-shaped when Roger claimed that the tax hike (exact words) "will mean an average rise of 25% in the cost of making beer." Wrong of course – the cost of making the stuff will not be directly affected. You, the punter, will be paying that extra 24p on a pint of 7.6% beer. You'd probably be paying at least £3.50 for such a pint, meaning an increase of about 7%. Very unwelcome, but not the headline 25% you might expect on a casual reading of the words.

It rapidly got worse. "On average, high-strength beers will see duty rise by £1 a pint." This is utter rubbish, scaremongering which would surprise even *Daily Mail* or *Sun* journalists. Allowing for both duty rise and VAT, a £1 rise would need the strength to be 31.6% ABV. If that's an average then Mr Protz must be visiting different beer shops to us! The article concludes with a long list of brewers who, despite the rises, "will not reduce their levels of alcohol." Does this just mean they can do the (quite easy) sums?

If Benjamin Franklin had to add a third candidate to his "death & taxes" soundbite, then we'd suggest that "journalists misrepresenting facts to support their story" would fit the bill nicely.

The shame is that this really is a loathsome tax increase. It is the government claiming to "do something" about alcohol abuse. True, it will hit the super-strength lagers, but at the same time it ignores industrial ciders, the main boozed-up-yoof drink which benefits from a fabulously low duty rate. The hike will also hit many classic connoisseur beers, a point brought out well by the Protz article, even if the brewers of such beers said it would be business as normal.

Will we see a backlash? Cider producers managed to get their "13% tax increase" abolished. This was another case where journalists either misunderstood or misrepresented the facts, cider drinkers believing this meant a 13% increase in the price rather than a 13% increase in the relatively puny tax component.

We suggest that Mr P leave the easily detected spinning and misrepresentation of facts to the politicians. We'd prefer to catch them out rather than him!



Beers in the Balkans!

I was lucky enough to be able to do a two week tour of the Balkans & Transylvania region – Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania in July. Having done some prior research to see if there would be any decent beers on the trip, I expected very little of interest, but did learn of two brewpubs worth visiting, one in Sofia, and one in Bucharest.

Most breweries in the area are linked to the large brewers like Heineken, Tuborg, SAB Miller or Carlsberg, so even the popular local lager beers are all very similar and pretty uninteresting, or just plain awful! I was however surprised that Hungary (being adjacent to Czechoslovakia and Germany) has no really decent beers or well known breweries. Budapest is a stunning city and does have several well known Belgian beer bars and also a Paulaner outlet opposite the Basilica.

But, unless you try, you don't know! My first stop at a small bar in Budapest yielded a local lager beer called *Dreher*, which was very acceptable and was under £1 a half litre! Other beers in the area were very gassy and bland, but the other locally brewed beer *Soproni*, was also fairly good and worth trying. The *Munich Hell* at the **Paulaner Brauhaus** was more costly, but still cheaper than in Germany at around £2 a half litre, and always a good lager beer.

Our next major stop was Belgrade in Serbia where the only beer I tried was *Lav*. This was the usual gassy battery acid tasting stuff, a bit like Fosters, only acceptable because it was cold on a hot day and cheap!

Next stop was in Sofia, Bulgaria where a recommended brew pub was found to be close to our hotel. Only a few minutes walk from the amazing Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the **Pri Kmeta** (Mayors Pub) is on ul. Parizh (Paris Street). Our party, pictured below, descended on this bar, down a narrow alley entrance with outside seating and a large bar area and downstairs function room. We were welcomed by staff and we joined some tables together in the outside eating area so room for us all. The cheerful waiter spoke little English, but knew we wanted beer!

He suggested he brought a 'Metre of beer' and shortly came back with a long old fashioned wooden tool box (a metre long) containing eight pints of beer, two each of the house beers: *Pale*, *Red*, *Wheat* and *Dark*. We dived in and tried the different beers, all

were about £1.25 per pint. I can't say any were especially good, but the general view was that the *Red* and *Dark* were the best, the *Wheat* was slightly sour and the *Pale* fairly ordinary. None were in the usual highly carbonated style. We certainly enjoyed the evening with several more beers arriving and the locals seeming happy we were there too!

The only other beers I tried in Sofia were *Ursus* (awful) and *Kamenitza*



Beers in the Balkans! cont.

(should be named *Kamikaze* instead)! Other beers in Bulgaria were *Staropramen*, the well known Czech beer, which was good, and two others with unpronounceable names.

The next major stop was in Bucharest, Romania, where another recommended brew pub was top of the list to visit. **Caru' Cu Bere** on Stravolopeos Street is in the city centre and is well known and very popular with good reason. A spectacular building with an ornate exterior and amazing interior of carved wood panels, arched ceilings, stained glass windows and spiral staircases to upper balconies and seating areas has to be seen to be believed! It was very busy as four of us arrived around 7.30pm but we were quickly shown to a table in the upper balcony dining area. Four 0.4 litre glasses of their pale lager style beer arrived (at around £1.40 a pint) and I have to say it was the best beer of the whole trip. It was an excellent German style Munich lager, good texture, malty and bitter at the same time, not gassy and very drinkable. We also had an excellent meal here, two courses, six beers and good service from a friendly waiter who knew some English, and the total bill for the four was around £41! Very good value. If I ever visit Bucharest again – and it is an amazing place – I would come here every night!

Romania is a country of extremes, the major cities are spectacular with beautiful parks, historic buildings, some grotesque (from the years of the dictatorship), some amazing, down to appalling apartment tower blocks that come from your worst nightmares, and awful gipsy encampments.

Food and drink throughout the Balkans is very cheap and excellent value. In the bigger cities most staff in restaurants and bars speak some English, and may have menus in English. For the most part the bigger breweries beers are the usual fizzy acid heartburn-inducing 'lagers' (using the word in its widest sense) but there are exceptions. In Brasov for example, by pure chance we found a street cafe with a menu of 60 bottled beers – 70% from Germany and 30% from Belgium, and all at around £2 a bottle. Needless to say we went there twice!

The beers to avoid are *Kamenitza*, *Ursus*, *Cuic* and *Lav*, but there is a dark bottled beer called *Silva* which is reasonable and worth looking out for. Other beers of dubious quality – apart from being served very cold on a hot day – with unpronounceable names appear below!

All in all, an amazing trip, some incredible sights to see (not mentioned here) and worth considering. Budapest is a wonderful place, and I hope to return.

John W



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:

The Shakespeare



It goes without saying that Shakespeare was a popular chap. He's certainly popular with the Nicholson's pub chain, as they have acquired the two pubs in Brum city centre which carry the name of the bard!

Nicholson's is a pub chain dating back to 1873, when the Nicholson brothers opened their first pub, and they make quite a positive contribution to the UK pub scene, both for the elegant buildings and ale choice. Primarily a London chain, they have four pubs in Brum, notably the Old Contemptibles. This Shakespeare, the one on Summer Row, near the Central Library, is very much in the Nicholson style. It has the polished feel of a gentleman's club room, with wood, brass, and classy lighting to the fore.

This is evident in the main L-shaped bar room, which has a fine mirrored gantry and a solid brass-railed wooden bar featuring six hand pulls. The big, leaded glass windows feature a lot of etched glass, and give the room a very light and airy feel. And when the sun goes down, the place is dazzled by a pair of splendid chandeliers and a number of hanging pendant lamps. Old pictures, heavy curtains, flock wallpaper and embossed ceiling paper complete the traditional feel. It is all no doubt the result of a modern refurbishment, but it's an object lesson in how to do it.

The exterior is presumably fairly original, from the elegantly arched windows of the ground floor, to the terracotta-style upper floors which continue the Doric column mouldings of the ground floor. The internal part of the entry porch features a glazed upper level (below right) which also looks original. At the rear of the pub is a handsome dining room; it feels like a posh restaurant where your pockets may not be deep enough, but the food is pretty good value. For fine days there is a pleasant

little beer garden to the rear, and pavement seating at the front.

Six hand pulls are generally divided between three regulars (*Pedigree*, *Purity UBU* and *Sharps Doom Bar*) and three guests, good examples being *White Horse Saracen IPA* and *Moor Unfined Revival*. The Nicholson's chain also held an interesting IPA festival at the end of August and into September, featuring two dozen examples of the style.



Fest 2011 in Brief

Many thanks to all those punters who came along and enjoyed Tamworth Beer Festival, and apologies to the few who couldn't get in on Friday night.

Best beers of the fest went to:

1. Brightside IPA 4.5%
2. West Country English Ale 3.9%
3. Church End Meaty Peaty Mild 3.8%

Our membership drive produced 37 new members, an excellent figure, and if you are one of those reading this now, welcome on board!

Customers donated the tidy sum of £627 to St Giles, and drinkers of Church End's *Captain Fantastic* allowed us to donate profits of £102 to the SCOGG stomach cancer charity.

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SUNDAY NOON–6PM

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Walking along the Falls Road in Belfast on the last day of a city break was a thoroughly pleasant experience – sunny weather, a beautiful hilly backdrop, and the only concern being where to find the next pint of real ale. One day later – and I’m back in the mainland thank goodness – the sectarian riots along that very same road are top of the headline news. Petrol bombs, hurled rocks, hijacked buses crashing into barricades.

Despite this, I’ll be going back to Northern Ireland in the future, as I found the whole trip very enjoyable, in particular the friendly people. The province has embraced the peace process, and the few sectarian malcontents who remain are very much in the minority.

A delight awaits as soon as you arrive in Belfast. The short bus ride from George Best Airport drops you near the **Crown Liquor Saloon**. This is one of the finest gin palaces in the whole of the UK. Owned by the National Trust, this fabulously ornate boozery is a riot of gilded mirrors, stained glass, mosaic floor tiling, and elaborate multi-colour tiling of the curving bar front. A series of lovely wooden snugs surround the room, pictured right. Only chest high, superbly carved and glazed, each little enclosure allows a cosily private drink. Three ales from Whitewater brewery feature; £3.55 a pint makes the eyes water, but £3-plus is the norm for much of Belfast.



It needs to be said that Northern Ireland is not exactly a real ale mecca. Eloquent comment comes from the *Good Beer Guide*; poor old NI CAMRA are so desperate for entries that it includes two pricey restaurants, where legally you can only drink if you eat, plus every single JD Wetherspoon in the province! And lest the JDW reference be taken as a negative, let’s stress that JDW has massively improved the NI beer scene, serving both NI ales and desperately rare mainland beers.

The NI pub scene has of course been influenced by that competition-killing monopoly from the south, Guinness, and its collateral-damage spin-offs like *Harp* and *Kilkenny*. NI’s three micros – Whitewater, Hilden and Clanconnel – struggle to find bar space in the Guinness closed shop.

Escape the tyranny of Guinness at the **John Hewitt** just north of the city centre. My visits saw specials from Hilden: a very nice *Poetic Justice*, and *Barney’s Brew*, a wheat beer. The few forlorn pump clips showing previous beers from the mainland show just how rare mainland beers seem to be in the province.

Not far away on the attractive Customs House Square is **McHugh’s**, offering over-the-top *Craic* plus a couple of Whitewater ales, and outdoor seating to enjoy the view.

That pox of modern life, shopping centres, ejected an old Belfast classic, the **Kitchen Bar**, to a modern building just around the corner from its original home. The new building is okay, and two Whitewater ales are served, but it ain’t a patch on the old place. As we know from Peterborough and the Oakham tap, councils and planners seem to have a fatal attraction for ever more anonymous shopping arcades!



To get a flavour of what was lost, pop into the nearby **Bittles Bar**, pictured left. This towering flat-iron style building has only a small bar, and no real ale, but is full of character. Mural style paintings of local characters abound, including enemies-turned-friends Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams. College Green bottled beers, made by Hilden, prevent the need to drink the black stuff, though £3.75 a bottle is a bit of a kidney-punch.

Another non-real bar worth a visit for the *Bejasus-Craic* is **Kelly’s Cellars**, pictured below. Hidden down an alleyway near the City Hall, it’s all whitewashed walls, uneven floors, rough wooden tables, and enough tat to fill a seedy junk shop. Tourist fodder to be sure, though the custom seemed mostly local.

On the tourist trail, there’s plenty to keep you out of the pub for a while. The opulent City Hall offers free tours of the magnificent interior, including a sight of the solid gold Mayor’s Chain of Office, weighing in at 14lbs! The Ulster Museum has a wealth of historical material, including a poignant account of the Troubles. And though the Harland & Wolff yards are now more about wind turbines than ship building, it’s hard to escape the Titanic story, with the local motto being “she was alright when she left here.”



A pleasant bus ride takes you to Londonderry. You can walk the ancient and intact city walls, wallow in the historical misery of Bogside and the Bloody Sunday massacre, and then cheer yourself up by a walk across the new and beautiful ‘Peace Bridge’ footbridge.



Pictured left, Belfast’s **Bridge House** is NI Pub of the Year for the second year running, and it’s not hard to see why – an array of handpumps offering both local and mainland beers, all at less than £2. The prices should tell you that it’s a JDW, undercutting every other bar in town. Quality was spot-on during a number of visits, the staff were consistently friendly, and the usual good-value food offerings included a number of NI specials.

During my trip I visited four JDWs in the province, with pretty much the same story. And while the non JDW real ale bars offered only Hilden or Whitewater beers, the JDWs also saw ales from Titanic, Vale, Stonehenge, Caledonian, Cotswold Spring, Elgoods and Warwickshire, with prices from £1.70 to £1.95. As on the mainland, such JDWs can be both blessing and curse – it’s great that they are there and raising standards, but how on earth will competitors ever establish a foothold and provide a real alternative?

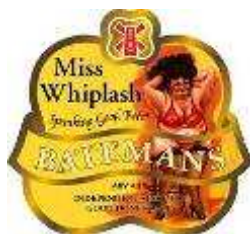
Beer Snippets

We love Samuel Smith Brewery. It is the Basil Fawlty of the beer world. The latest surreal bit of comedy came from their **Swan & Three Cygnets** pub in Durham. A troupe of Morris Dancers, the 'Slubbing Billys' from Huddersfield, had finished their frolicking for the day. But they were ejected from the pub because the bells on their clogs went against the strict no-music policy of miserable old Sams! Said one of the troupe: "We couldn't believe it when we were told in the strongest possible terms to leave. A woman member of staff hollered 'no bells' at us."

Spitting Feathers brewery in Cheshire is one of many breweries who are spitting mad at the Government. Taxes and red-tape are the issues, and to mark this the brewery is doing a range of beers which show their displeasure. *Fool's Gold* refers to the beer-duty escalator, as more duty won't raise more money if it makes people drink less ale! Also planned are *Red Tape* and *False Economy*.

The latest Russian Revolution finally saw the country recognising beer as an alcoholic drink! Until July, anything containing less than 10% alcohol had been considered merely as a foodstuff, and was sold in a completely unregulated way. Beer has soared in popularity in Russia; over the last decade, sales have risen by 40%, while vodka has fallen by around 30%. Good news you'd think, but it sounds like the Russki politicians want more limitations on its sale.

A licence review on a pub in Grimsby ran in to problems after reports that the pub was to host a stripper. When the licensing officer visited, she queried an advert on the pub's chalkboard, proclaiming "Coming soon: Miss Whiplash." Honour was restored on finding out that it was a new Batemans beer. Though quite what will happen when the Batemans *Hooker* comes on is anybody's guess.



A lazy article in the *Observer* highlighted a 'trend for real lagers', citing a 150% growth in the past year. Turns out they're on about imported US craft beers, and two of the four examples cited (*Blue Moon*, a wheat beer, and *Sierra Nevada Pale Ale*) are not even lager! But it's good news in a 'lager' wrapping – there's a move away from the bland smooth-flows and barely-lagered lagers like *Carling* and *Carlsberg*, to craft beer with flavour.

Talking about barely-lagered lagers, Fosters have recently completed a two-year development programme to allow bar staff to pour the "perfect pint" of the stuff. Given that you can only do so much with crap, the new dispense tap simply blows a jet of tiny bubbles, "locking in" the head. Laughably, a spokesman said this should satisfy "the more sophisticated and more demanding" drinkers of the genuine Oz fizz – made in the UK by Scottish & Newcastle.

If the term 'gastropub' has you reaching for the sick-bag, then help is at hand from no less than the *Good Food Guide*. Editor Elizabeth Carter has banned the term from future editions of the guide. Criticising the trend of pubs turning into restaurants, she asked for pubs to "return a focus to drinkers and good quality bar snacks, as well as maintaining a quality food offer." So it's official – good food does not have to be posh!

Want An Andy Capp?

This year's CAMRA's National Breweriana Auction is again at Burton on Trent, giving you the opportunity to own something special as well as a slice of history.

Amongst the lots this year is an Andy Capp/Manns Brown Ale paperweight; a lovely water jug from the Star Brewery in Eastbourne which closed in 1967; a pottery ash tray from Portsmouth United Breweries (stopped brewing in 1962); a Rayments brewery tie (brewery closed by Greene King in 1987); a Simpkins Old Ale show card (sold out to Greenalls in 1985) and an old Ind Coope Allsopp mirror.

But if you are looking for something more unusual, then maybe an old wallet advertising Reid's Stout and Watney's Ale or a pocket-sized Bass world atlas from the 1920s/30s is up your street.



The event takes place on **Saturday 15th October** at Burton Town Hall, King Edward Place, near the station (DE14 2EB). Doors open 11am, giving you the opportunity to browse before proceedings start at 12.20pm. There is also a bar throughout, featuring Old Cottage beers.

Entrance is by catalogue (£2.50), available on the day, or £3.50 in advance, by post from Bill Austin, 01923 211654 (answerphone) or baustin@supanet.com. If you can't get there, postal bids are accepted, just contact Bill.



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Getting Steamed

After making tracks we arrived at Froghall in Staffordshire and checked into our farmhouse B&B which overlooked the picturesque valley below. We then headed to the Kingsley and Froghall station of the Churnet Valley Steam Railway. This was the starting point for a unique event held over a July weekend, the Churnet Valley Rail Ale Trail. Cask ales and ciders were available at the three stations along the scenic five mile long line as well as at three pubs close to the railway. One real ale and four bottled Titanic beers were also available on the trains, as were the four bottled beers at Consall and Cheddleton stations. The largest choice of eighteen cask ales was inside the waiting room at the Kingsley and Froghall station (pictured) with transport awaiting.



As we would be travelling in style on the steam and diesel trains running, we decided to have a beer of a suitable name, *First Class* from Titanic. It was red with malt, grain and hop flavours. Another aptly named beer was the pale, citrusy and hoppy *Light Railway* from Kinver brewery. After boarding a train and enjoying the ride and scenery (pictured) we arrived at the furthest station of Cheddleton where two beers awaited our eager palates in the waiting room. *Steerage* from Titanic and *Lordship's Own* from Shugborough. The latter had marmite and grain flavours and a pleasant hop finish.



It was all aboard once more for the brief journey to the halfway station of Consall. This was the smallest of all the stations with a quaint, wooden rather than brick-built ticket office and waiting room. As at Cheddleton, a beer was available from both Shugborough and Titanic breweries. *Anchor* from Titanic was pale with an astringent hoppiness and fuelled us for the short walk to the **Black Lion**, (pictured) the first pub visited. This is a fabulous pub in a lovely canalside location, also with a view of the steam trains. Instead of afternoon tea we plumped for the pale and hoppy *BG Sips* from Blue Monkey followed by the dark and delicious Titanic *Stout*. A final train ride took us back to the K&F station to try some more rail ales. After sinking a Titanic *Iceberg* and several other choices from the varied range we settled for the Titanic *Chocolate & Vanilla Stout* for a night-cap. With its wonderful contrasting flavours it was a good finish to a unique and enjoyable event.

Eric Randall



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Triple A Rated

You wait ages for a Patron Saint to turn up, and then three turn up at once! Brewers have no fewer than three patron saints, and to make matters more spooky, they all have names beginning with A. A for Ale?

First off the blocks was **Saint Arnulf** (born 582, died 640). Confusingly – as we'll see in a bit – he is known as St Arnold in English. Born in Metz in what is now present day France, he rose to become Bishop of Metz (right). He retired to a remote monastery and was buried there on his death. But why the saint bit? Turns out the citizens of Metz wanted him buried there, so he was exhumed and they undertook a long dusty trek to carry his body home. Half way, thirsty and exhausted, they prayed for the “blessed Arnold to bring us what we lack.” They were granted a bottomless pot of beer, which legend says they were still drinking after they got back to Metz. Instant canonisation fodder!



Next up in the same era is **Saint Amand** (584-675), a missionary bishop who converted the pagan inhabitants of Ghent to Roman Catholicism, and then continued the evangelising roadshow in Maastricht, Liege, Tournai and Nivelles. Sadly no booze-related miracles for his sainthood, but he's got a lot to be getting on with, as he is patron saint for “brewers, innkeepers, bartenders, hop growers and Boy Scouts.” Amand is shown left, allegedly with a serpent, though it looks more like a griffin to me! Apparently one party piece was getting snakes to bugger off by praying for them to move underground.

From a later era altogether is our second Arnold, **Saint Arnold of Soissons** (1040-1087). He's another multi-tasker, with hop pickers and brewers under

his wing. Started out as a bit of a shirker. Spent three years as a hermit, then rose to become abbot of a monastery in Soissons, France – though legend has it he scarpared because he didn't want the job, returning only because he was forced to by a wolf, you know how it is. But Arny was at least hands-on, turning his hand to brewing beer in the monastery (*Abbot?*), and encouraging the local peasants to drink beer instead of water, due to its “gift of health,” not a line you hear modern health experts trotting out. The stained glass of Arny (right) is claimed to show him with a mashing rake in his left hand.



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Staggering Beer

The latest from the world of surreal brewing – and of course we mean BrewDog – is the release of what they claim is the world's strongest fermented beer. *Ghost Deer* comes in at 28%, and is a golden Belgian-style ale, aged in a series of oak casks. It falls far short of their strongest brew, the 55% *End Of History*, but that monster was produced by ice processing to remove water. *Ghost Deer* has used fermentation only, starting with the BrewDog house yeast, then moving on to an American ale yeast, and finishing off with a champagne yeast.

The beer is available for a month in the **BrewDog Edinburgh** bar, and in the usual loony BrewDog style, they'll be serving it from a stag's head font. And *Ghost Deer* will be appropriately dear, at £9.99 a pint – though we hope it won't actually be sold by the pint! James Watt of BrewDog said that “*Ghost Deer* is designed to fuse craft beer, art and taxidermy.” Critics will tell him to get stuffed!

To see a funny video explaining the name of the beer, go to the BrewDog website.



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12/10

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Hannover Hangover

Air travel has become so loonily cheap that the accommodation for a trip can often prove more expensive than the flight. This was certainly the case for a recent trip to Hannover, where two nights B&B in a simple hotel (€90) looked ludicrously expensive compared to a Birmingham-Hannover return flight (£67 all in). True, it was a Flybe sale special, but it hardly encourages you to save the planet by flying less.



Hannover is no tourist heaven, but there's enough to justify a two-day visit. The imposing *Neues Rathaus*, left, has a splendid waterside setting, and sweeping views from the tower. The *Altstadt*, largely reconstructed after wartime devastation, looks authentic enough for a pleasant ramble. Maybe most impressive is the *Großer Garten*, an expansive arboretum complete with fountains, statues, and themed sub-gardens. The accompanying *Berggarten* is home to many thousands of striking plants and trees from

across the globe, an interesting illustration of what biodiversity really means.

On the surface, Hannover offered four brewery taps/brewpubs. However, it seems that the bigger you get, the less you care about the little things. The two big brewers in Hannover have proved this by either selling their brewery tap (the Gilde brewery) or closing it (Herrenhäuser). I did get to try their beers elsewhere in the city, and the big surprise was that the *Premium Pilsener* from the independent Herrenhäuser was not a patch on the *Ratskeller* from Gilde – now owned by the world-domination-minded AB InBev. The *Ratskeller* is a good German pilsener, well balanced with an assertive hop presence.

The two city brewpubs are still going, and both well worth a visit. The newer one, *HBX Stadtbrauerei*, has a splendid view of the *Neues Rathaus*, albeit across a busy main road. The HBX beer range is pretty standard – a light, dark and weizen. The *Helles* has a nice clean maltness with a touch of toffee, and enough hoppiness to round it all off. The *Dunkel* was also quite good, dark and roasty with an unusual dose of pear drops, akin to *Old Hooky*.

On paper, the *Ernst August* brewpub looked the less interesting beer-wise, with a single Pilsener style beer. But probably to keep up with the HBX, they've added a dark and a weizen to the range. The interior is quite funky – brew kettles on open view from a seating area sitting below an artificial tree canopy, pictured right. I had my suspicions about whether the dusty-looking brewkit was actually in use, but sure enough it was steaming away on my second visit. I also pledged here to improve my diction, as my request for a weizen resulted in a mildly revolting herbal brew of *Weißer Tee*, "white" tea!



Hannover Hangover cont.

Beyond brewpubs, the more interesting bars in the city tend to represent out-of-towners. The **Bavarium**, for instance, right, has a range of Löwenbrau beers from Munich. This is a pub for all tastes, with a leafy beer garden, sports bar corner, and a number of rustic timber dining rooms. Appropriately enough, it has robust Bavarian cooking, with that unmistakable savoury smell of sausages and sauerkraut.



Meanwhile the **Ständige Vertretung** (Permanent Mission) offers an amusing take on German political life, the interior plastered with pictures and cartoons of German leaders, somewhat in the style of *Spitting Image*. It's a strange glass building – unkindly labelled as a “vile modern glass pile of shit” in one bombastic guide. The only beer is *Kölsch* from Cologne, but you need something light to match the hefty food offerings.

Back to Munich at the **Paulaner am Thielenplatz**, selling the Bavarian stereotype again – industrial-sized pork meals washed down by Paulaner beers. The luscious *Salvator Doppelbock* is the ideal 7.5% nightcap.

Another pub of note was the **Broyhan Haus**, pictured right. The building illustrates the style and quality of the rebuilding which took place in the Altstadt after the war. They major on Einbecker beers. The *Dunkel* is particularly good, with a nice toffee-chocolate edge. Meanwhile the *Urbock* is unusual. It's a 6.5% bronze brew, but it misses the over-sweetness of many bocks. Instead it has a nice dry edge and an identifiable hoppiness.



The **Vater und Sohn** is a friendly little back-street boozier, enhanced by low noise levels – just the hum of conversation and the gentle slap of playing cards. The food was excellent (albeit from a crabbily hand-written menu which would have been difficult enough in English!) and yet more out-of-town beer choices including Köstritzer, and creamily sweet Weihenstephan, served in a stone jug.



One local speciality I didn't have the guts to try was the *Lüttje Lage*. The idea here is to accompany a glass of the beer with a shot of schnapps – drank simultaneously, holding the glasses as shown below, with the vain hope that the schnapps will trickle into the beer as you sip at the beer. If like me you are already quite good at spilling drinks, you won't need the extra challenge of this!

Newsletter Information

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Newsletter distribution:

Our newsletter is produced every two months. Current distribution is 2,500 copies.

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Contributions are welcomed, pub news particularly. Please submit text and pictures to the editor. We thank all contributors and sponsors for their support.

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Next issue:

Issue 39 is due to be published on 1st December 2011. The copy deadline for inclusion is 15th November 2011.

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Ale and Arty

It is not just modern brewers who have artistic licence for design and detail on their bottled beer labels. This intricate label was for an ale from the Webb & Barron Warwick Brewery Co. and dates from around 1866. The main theme of the logo is Guy's Tower of Warwick Castle.

The image is taken from the book *Warwickshire Breweries* by Joseph McKenna. The book contains a lot of interesting old adverts and information. For example, in the post-war period, Flowers were making a barley wine called Dragon's Blood, and a claimed high-quality German-style lager, recommended to be served chilled.



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Local Festival Diary

Festivals with a **bold heading** are CAMRA festivals, where entrance is either free or discounted to CAMRA members. Why not join? See page 26.

30th Sept-1st Oct, Horseshoes World Beer Festival
The Horseshoes, Heath End Road, Nuneaton, CV10 7JQ
10 ales, around 20 draught Bières Sans Frontières, ciders, bottled beers. 12-11.

30th Sept-2nd Oct, 12th Solihull Beer Festival
Royal British Legion, Union Road, Solihull, B91 3DH
35+ ales, 2 ciders, 1 perry. Fri 5.30-11, Sat 11.30-3.30, 5.30-11



5-9th Oct, Newton Solney 2nd Acoustic & Ale Festival
Unicorn Inn, Repton Road, Newton Solney, DE15 0SG
25+ ales, various bands, hog roast and fish & chip van. More info on 01283 703324.

5-23rd Oct, JD Wetherspoons Real Ale & Cider Fest
All JD Wetherspoons and Lloyds No.1 bars.

6-8th Oct, 12th Loughborough Oktoberfest
Charnwood Club, Shelthorpe Avenue, Loughborough, LE11 2ND
45+ real ales, plus ciders and perries. Thu 5-11, Fri & Sat 12-11.

13-15th Oct, Nottingham Robin Hood Beer Festival 2011
Nottingham Castle, Friar Lane
800 casks of ale plus ciders and perries. Thu to Sat 11-11.

15th Oct, The Festival in the Field
The Drill Inn, Springlestyche Lane, near Burntwood, WS7 9HD.
Noon-11. 15 ales, 3 ciders/perries. Entertainment, food, afternoon family-friendly.

27-29th Oct, Birmingham Beer Festival
Second City Suite, 100 Sherlock Street (off Hurst Street), B5 6LT
240 ales, 40 ciders & perries. Thu, Fri & Sat 11-11.

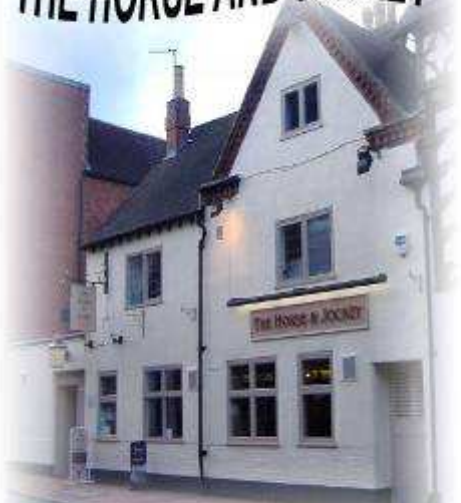


24-26th November, 26th Dudley Winter Ales Fayre
Dudley Concert Hall, St. James Road, DY1 1HP
Over 70 ales, plus ciders and bottled beers. Thu 5.30-11, Fri/Sat 12-11

25-27th November, 1st Blue Boar Beer Festival
Blue Boar, Watling Street, Mancetter, Atherstone, CV9 1NE
13 ales, 2 ciders. Indoor event, Saturday band. Fri to Sun 12-close.

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

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Welcome from Jean & Mark

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