

Solihull



Drinker

Issue No: 51

Winter 2009

40 beers at the start, 20 beers at the end

A good time was had by all at the 11th Solihull & District Beer Festival on Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd October. The event was opened by Malcolm Stent, local lad and all -round performer, who also kindly returned on Saturday afternoon to see how the festival was getting on.

The keen drinkers who arrived on Friday afternoon at opening time were confronted with no less than 40 beers, two ciders and a perry, and after collecting their commemorative glass and programme, settled down to the decision of what to drink first – and second – and third. With so much choice the task was a hard one! but everyone seemed very contented and the evening passed busily but pleasantly. It's always difficult



The calm before the storm

to decide when the best time is to attend, and a sudden rush of visitors mid -evening meant a queue formed, but our thanks to the good humour of those who had to wait their turn to enter —we are sure they found it worth while once they had got in.



At the height of Friday evening

Only one beer, Thornbridge Jaipur IPA, plus the perry, sold out on Friday, which meant a still exceptional choice

for the Saturday lunchtime visitors, who were entertained by the Silhill Morris Men, a black -faced troupe who performed two dance sessions, with a sup of our ales in -between.

The Saturday evening session saw the Emma Kotka Band entertain visitors with a great selection of rock covers from the 1960s to the present day. The beers sold out steadily, but at 10.00pm there were still 20 real ales on offer – where else in Solihull can you get that sort of choice?



Smiles all round

(Continued on page 3)

Inside: Don't miss the Dates for your Diary



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fine pint awaits you at The Bull's Head in front of their open fires —and if
you're really lucky there will be roasted chestnuts too! See you soon.***

40 beers at the start, 20 beers at the end (continued)



More smiling faces

Thornbridge Wild Swan was chosen as the beer of the festival, and unwanted beer tokens raised a total of £142.00 for the 2009 festival's chosen charity, Jeans for Genes. The weekend was declared a resounding success by all and many compliments were passed on the range and quality of the real ales available.

Thanks to the Royal British Legion for hosting the event and providing food during the sessions, to all the CAMRA helpers, and most of all to the visitors who, in choosing to attend, keep the festival going from strength to strength.

Look out for the 12th festival at the beginning of



October next year when the same number of beers are planned.

We look forward to seeing you—put the date in your 2010 diary now!!



...and more still!! (we must be doing something right!)

The Solihull Drinker is the newsletter of the Solihull & District Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

**All contributions, comments and enquiries should be sent to Julia Hammonds:
The Editor, Solihull Drinker, c/o 4, Kendrick Close, Solihull, B92 0QD
or e-mail julia.hammonds@blueyonder.co.uk**

The Editor reserves the right to amend or shorten any contributions in the Solihull Drinker, but will always honour the spirit of the contribution.

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Hail to the Ale! - local Beer, Pub, Club & Brewery news

The Rowington Club

The Rowington Club recently celebrated being the first Club in the Solihull area to be voted into the CAMRA Good Beer Guide. This accolade reflects the dedication of Adrian, the landlord, and the Rowington Committee, who have put a lot of effort into making the Club a welcoming place for all ages and the centre of community life in the village. There



Adrian, left, receives the certificate from Carl Wright, CAMRA branch chairman, right, whilst Bob Bird, Club Committee Chairman, looks on.

is always a choice of three real ales available, and a relaxed atmosphere in which to drink. Full membership is available at £20 per year, but visitors pay only £1.00 per single visit, and CAMRA members may visit for free on production of their card. Already known for its wonderful beer festivals at the end of August Bank Holidays, the Rowington Club puts on a variety of entertainment throughout the year, including regular bands on Saturdays and other special events, such as their Marrow Day in October which celebrates the fun side of the harvest season. Solihull & District CAMRA were pleased to present a certificate commemorating the Club's entry into the Good Beer Guide to Adrian, and recommend that anyone in the area drop in and experience the hospitality for themselves.

The Cock Horse, Rowington

It is sad to report that Simon Chaloner, who took over the management of the Cock Horse three years ago, is moving on. The Cock Horse will be under new management, organised by Punch Taverns, from the end of January next year. Solihull & District CAMRA wish Simon all the best in his next venture, and ask that he keep in touch. We also hope that the Cock Horse continues as a lovely country pub with a new manager in due course, and it would be wonderful if the real ales and real ciders were kept on. An eye will be kept on the situation.

The Cheswick Green Inn

The above pub, on the corner of Tanworth Lane and Dickens Heath Road leading into Dickens Heath, was closed at the beginning of October and, according to a big banner, is due to open on 27th November, just days before the publication of this magazine. It is owned by Mitchells and Butcher and is being branded as a Miller and Carter (M&C), which according to M&B's website is "a stylish, yet informal premium steakhouse". Prior to its refurbishment it did not have real ale and we would doubt if it will in the future, as M&Cs are described as having 'ales', rather than 'real ales'. If anyone ventures in after the reopening, feel free to email your views to the editor at the address on page 3.

The Woodman's Rest

The Woodman's Rest in Union Road, Shirley, was voted into CAMRA's Good Beer Guide earlier in the year by Solihull & District CAMRA, and was recently presented with a letter of congratulation on its entry. Pubs are voted into the guide by volunteer members of CAMRA and it was because of the range and quality of their real ales that the Woodman's Rest was voted into the 2010 edition of the guide. Real ale has been available in this pub for a number of years but its now better than ever. There are two 'resident' beers, Greene King Abbot and IPA, and three ever changing guest beers from breweries throughout Britain. Featured at the time of the presentation were Purity Brewery's UBU, Roosters Prost, and from Scotland's Brew Dog Lager, 77, a particularly delicious ale. Assistant manager, Stuart McLaren, said that real ale in the pub had become very popular, increasingly so with younger people. The pub, even on the Thursday evening was very busy, not just with diners but drinkers too. The high turnover of the ales meant that there were three different guests each week and as many as four during the winter.



The pub has also just won the Branch's Solihull & District CAMRA's 2009 Most Improved Pub of the Year, again due to the range and increase in quality of the real ales. A presentation of a certificate will be made in the near future.



The Assembly Rooms

JD Wetherspoons

The Assembly Rooms, Solihull CAMRA's 2008 Most Improved Pub of the Year, was closed until 9th October whilst having a dance floor installed on the ground floor. The pub reopened with this additional feature but the real ales still take centre stage. The pub was also voted into the Good Beer Guide by the local branch for the first time, which landlord James takes as a great honour.

The White Swan round the corner in Station Road was awash at the same time with WEM ales; and Purity Mad Goose was also being prepared for serving. Possibly as a result of the temporary closure of the Assembly Rooms, the pub had almost sold out on Wednesday 7th October

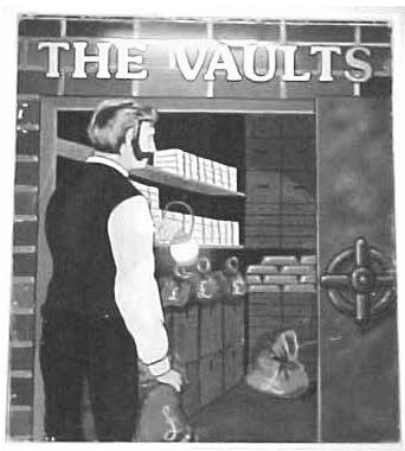
Tom o' the Wood

The Tom o' the Wood at Rowington has reopened again after the last manager left. At the time of going to print it is not known how the new incumbent is getting on or if the pub has changed in any respect. Any information would be gratefully received.

The Old Colonial

The Old Colonial on Damson Lane has been transmogrified into a Latino bar and grill called Bardellos. It is not expected to serve real ale —but then neither did The Old Colonial in its later years; so no change there then.

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Rowington Club beer festival

With Winter on the way, let's look back at a Summer event that missed the last issue.....

August Bank Holiday 2009 was the 4th Rowington beer festival. Adrian had laid on 11 real ales (ranging from 3.7% to 4.5%) and 3 real ciders in various day -glow colours. In case this wasn't enough there were a few more beers inside at the bar. Sadly the weather was not so kind to us this year, but it remained dry and warm if not actually sunny. Apart from that it was as good as ever. There was live music each afternoon and into the evening; the pig roast was superb and good value too. As usual the cricket club next door provided some additional entertainment, with some drinkers moving round into their seating to enjoy the match and reporting some entertaining play.



The beers were all in excellent condition and being on the lighter side they were ideal for a summer's day and it was possible to sample quite a few over the afternoon. At the lighter end were a couple of beers from the award winning Nethergate brewery, Umbel Ale, the lighter of their 2 coriander flavoured ales, and Drunken Monkey, which was particularly good. Continuing the East of England theme, from Elgood's there was a 3.7% Feel Good Fresh (the name said it all). From the West Country: Blindman's Brewery (with their own springwater) had a new beer Summer Breeze which went down well. A local (Black Country) brewery, Blackwater, provided an excellent 4.3%, Rustler, which was probably the most popular with the crowd that afternoon. Another fine beer was Ducking Stool from Mayfields of Herefordshire. In fact reflecting on this list, the majority of beers were either new or even new breweries - so full marks to the Rowington Club for offering an interesting range of beers to try, which is exactly what beer festivals are for; (although on this occasion it was out -scrumped by the nearby Cock Horse which hosted a cider festival that weekend of over a dozen dangerous confections). There was also Acorn's Forester (well



known for their Old Moor Porter). Idle Dog from Mayn-erd's; Rudgate's Ruby Mild at 4.4% is well known - not surprising as it was a CAMRA national prize -winner in 2008 and 2009 (and probably before). I don't like mild as a rule, but this was good. Another from Blindman's: Yogi Bear, 4.2%, but don't let the name put you off, this was not a joke beer, but a hoppy summer ale. There was also a wheat beer. It was also a chance to meet the local committee members who kindly open their doors to visitors and show what a club really can do for their community.

The overriding impression was yet another convivial day with friends and good conversation over a few beers; the general atmosphere was the usual friendly village crowd just enjoying a day out. On that note it was time to cycle home (it rained a bit but who cares). Robert Cawte



The 10 most haunted pubs in Britain??

1) The Mermaid Inn, Rye, East Sussex —Often quoted as the most haunted pub in England, the Mermaid Inn has a long and rich history with parts of the building dating back to the 12th century. Guests have reported seeing figures walking through walls, being woken by a man dressed in old -fashioned clothing sitting at the foot of their bed, and the ghostly figure of a woman rearranging her clothing.



The Mermaid Inn

2) The Devil's Stone Inn, Shebbear, North Devon—A 400 year old former fishing pub, the Devil's Stone Inn gets its name from the nearby "Devil's Stone", a huge rock that has mysteriously found its way into the village. The story goes that the stone fell from the Devil's pocket as he fell from Heaven to Hell. The Inn itself has had reports of much paranormal activity such as taps turning themselves on and strange noises in the hallways at night.

3) The Bucket of Blood, Phillack —Legend has it that the Bucket of Blood got its disturbing name many years ago when the landlord went to the on -site well to get a bucket of water but found there to be just blood. Further investigation found there was a badly mutilated body at the bottom of the well. Often visited by criminals and smugglers in the past, the pub now has reports of ghostly figures standing across the road, strange noises and lots of other strange phenomena.

4) The Royal Castle Hotel, Dartmouth —Built in 1639, the Royal Castle Hotel is reportedly haunted by a host of spirits. Guests have claimed seeing ghostly men fighting outside the entrance, and a spectral horse and carriage pulling up outside the hotel in the middle of the night.

5) The George and Dragon Hotel, West Wycombe —The story behind this pub's haunting goes that the notorious "Hellfire Club" would meet up here before going onto to do many a debauched thing. One night the young and clearly naive barmaid agreed to join them, only to turn up dead the next morning. Her ghost is said to walk the halls of the hotel, weeping.

6) The Grenadier, London —Once the officers' mess for the Duke of Wellington, this pub is reported to be haunted by a spooky guards officer. Well known to the locals, the story behind the haunting goes that the officer was caught cheating at cards, leading to a fight with his fellow players before falling - or being pushed - down the stairs to his death. Strange visions and mysterious occurrences have been frequent ever since.



The Grenadier

7) The Brushmaker's Arms, Hampshire—This pub is said to be haunted by a man named Mr Chicklet, who was robbed and murdered whilst staying at the building one fateful night a few hundred years ago. Many guests have since said they have seen a shadowy figure roaming the rooms, believed to be the murdered man searching for his money.

8) The Crown Hotel, Dorset —Legend has it that many years ago deformed twins were kept locked away in a room in the hotel. The hotel is now said to be haunted by the sound of children playing, as well as various other ghostly phenomena.

9) The Hyde Tavern, Hampshire —Supposedly the oldest pub in the city of Winchester, the pub is said to be haunted by a ghost that pulls the bedding off visitors' beds. The ghost is believed to be that of a woman who died in one of the rooms from cold and hunger centuries ago.

10) The Ostrich Inn, Buckinghamshire —The Inn was once owned by the Jarmans, a husband and wife who would murder their guests by dropping them through a trapdoor in a bedroom, plunging them into a vat of boiling liquid and, ultimately, their deaths. There have been reports of strange occurrences, possibly the ghosts of murdered people trapped within the walls of the pub.



The Ostrich Inn

Have you had a ghostly experience or encounter in one of these, or any other pubs?? If so, write in!

ADRIAN AND THE COMMITTEE WARMLY WELCOME YOU TO

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Rowington Green, Rowington, Warwickshire CV35 7DB

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Christmas Day: 12 noon –2pm; Boxing Day: 12 noon –6pm; 27th December: 12
noon -10.30pm; 28th, 29th and 30th December: 2pm –11pm; New Year's Eve:
9pm -1am: Buffet and Disco: free to members, additional tickets available ahead
of time @£10 per head (ticket numbers limited; no tickets on door)

**Adrian and the Committee extend seasonal wishes to all and a thank
you to everyone who visited the Club in 2009**

Ale on our holidays

On a recent visit to Toronto and New York, cask ale was not very high on our list of expectations. The thought of a week or more drinking Labatts & Budweiser did not really appeal so we did some research on the internet before leaving home. Breweries in Ontario were very thin on the ground and located a good way from Toronto. However, a search for brew pubs produced a few results. On our first day, we sought out a bar called 'C'est What' which has been around since 1989 and said to sell beers only from local breweries. When we sat down at the bar, we were somewhat amazed by the choice on offer. There must have been about 15 draught beers although only 5 of them were described as cask. The rest were interesting, including an oatmeal stout & a porter but served with an element of gas. I found this out by default as my first order was one served with gas. We worked our way through the cask ales, some of which had very familiar names (Arkell's Best Bitter & Durham Hophead & Hopping Mad) but our favourite by a long way was Al's Cask Ale. This was described by the knowledgeable waiter as having a grapefruit tang and sure enough, it really did! The only problem was the prices - between \$5 & \$8 for a pint.

We also found by chance, a brewpub called the 3 Brewers (not that original!) which sold a range of 4 beers. Newcomers are offered a tasting tray which offers a small sample of all the beers. Perhaps some of our pubs should do that! The blonde was just a lager but the others were ales of varying quality. Red was drinkable but somewhat bland, but the wheat beer and Dark ale were well worth the visit.



The next day, we were sightseeing and in the very tall shadow of the CN Tower in central Toronto, we stumbled across the Steam Whistle Brewery, located in an old steam engine shed built in a semi circle. They offered us samples and we also took a brewery tour (\$8 including more samples) The tour was somewhat hurried but as they only brew lager styles, we did not prolong the agony but we did enjoy the chilled end product in the 70 degree heat.

Moving on to New York, there were a good number of breweries and brew pubs listed, but many were way out of Manhattan so we focused on the accessible ones.

On our first day, we were sightseeing on 5th Avenue by the Empire State Building. Right underneath the City's tallest building was a bar/restaurant run by the Heartland Brewery. No time for beer at that time but we sought out their main bar in Union Square next day. Whilst very food biased, we did ask for the sample tray which included 6 of the 8 beers produced by Heartland. 3 of them were drinkable but the other 3 were a real find. My own favourite, Indian River Light, had real flavour (orange & coriander) that you would only expect from an established brewery. The Stout was really stouty and went down extremely well. Brenda's favourite was Indiana Pale Ale – you could really taste the hops. After trying all the samples, we were then able to order a pint of our favourites (albeit at \$5-7 each). Waitresses came back asking for food orders but they eventually got the message that the weird English couple were only here for the beer!

Holiday Cottage in Tintagel, North Cornwall Coast



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Our other accidental find was in Battery Park Beer Garden after visiting the Statue of Liberty. They had 4 beers on offer from the Victory Brewery. 2 were lagers so we steered clear and each tried one of the other 2. Brenda's was Sunrise Weiss bier a 5.7% bitter with a real hoppy taste. Mine was Victory Hop Devil which, at 6.7% was a strong ale which I would describe as dangerously drinkable. Mind you at \$6 a pint, you don't have too many.

One last accidental find was in the City Crab restaurant on Park Ave South. This was a typical American seafood place except that they sold decent draught beer (admittedly in addition to the usual rubbish). I tried Sam Adams Season Brew and Brenda had Red Hook Longhammer IPA from Seattle. Both went down great with the seafood.

Rather than fly home, we had decided to treat ourselves to a slow trip home on board the Queen Mary 2. I did not expect much in the way of beer on board so I was not disappointed to find just keg Bass & Boddingtons in the pub on board. However, there was a real discovery to be made — Stella Artois & Becks on hand pump as this picture proves (or maybe not!).



On arrival in Southampton, we were at least able to find a GBG pub for lunch. Unfortunately, it didn't really show us what we had been missing during the past 2 weeks.

It was a Greene King pub!

Allan Duffy

Discovery Ales

Simon Cox, the brewer at Discovery Ales, Meriden, has had a busy couple of months recently, brewing for beer festivals at Hinckley, Harbury, Tanworth and Maxstoke. He brewed a special beer, 'Reverend Lee', for the Hinckley festival, in honour of the man who introduced the stocking frame to Hinckley. The Maxstoke festival had a firkin of 'Davy's Glow' (4.2%) and praise for the beer was widespread. Simon has most recently been experimenting with strong ales. He has brewed two at 6.2%, 'Prate's Pleasure', and another, 'Guy Fawkes' Folly', which went to the Merchants' Inn pub beer festival at Rugby. Some of the original beer range have now been discontinued but as evidenced, Simon has no plans to stop brewing new ales.



Simon tries a sample of his ale

Wye Valley Brewery

At the 2009 SIBA Brewing Business awards Wye Valley Brewery were delighted to come away not only with Best Launch for their limited edition beer Morgan Centenary Ale, which celebrated the Morgan Motor Company's centenary year, but also Overall Winner for their continued commitment to the proactive marketing of their beers.



Wye Valley sales manager John Gardner (l) and chairman Peter Amor (r) receive the award from Pete Brown

Well known beer -writer Pete Brown presented Wye Valley Brewery with their overall award, saying 'In a departure from previous years, our overall winner for 2009 has not been chosen from one of the category winners alone. The winning brewery has indeed won a category with one of its entries, but the judges decided to combine that achievement with the undoubted quality of its other entries, in recognition of a wide -ranging and extremely impressive overall commitment to the proactive marketing that must be utilised to complement the brewing of exceptional beer. This really does represent what the SIBA Brewing Business Awards stand for.' In response to the awards Peter Amor, brewery

chairman said, 'It is incredibly pleasing and satisfying to know that 25 years of dedication from a wonderful team of people has resulted in recognition'.

In 2010 Wye Valley Brewery will celebrate their 25th year of brewing, but for now it is toasting record sales. Vernon Amor, Wye Valley MD, said "Cask ale is the star performer in the UK beer market and pubs which offer excellent cask ales are riding the current economic climate far better than those which aren't. We have grown like for like sales by 24% so far this year. It's all about quality and provenance now: people are interested in where their food and drink is made, what goes into it and how far it has to travel before it reaches them. At Wye Valley Brewery we use top quality locally grown hops and have recently teamed up with a local farmer to grow our own Herefordshire barley. We are looking forward to brewing a true Herefordshire beer for our silver anniversary next year.'

Wye Valley Brewery currently employs 30 people and produces over 4.3 millions pints of beer annually. Next year will see major investment to increase capacity and create more local jobs.

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Hampton in Arden



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Dates For Your Diary

Branch Meetings

Monday 7th Dec
2010

The Railway, Dorridge

Monday 4th Jan

The Heron's Nest, Heronfield

Monday 1st Feb

The Red House, Solihull

Monday 1st Mar

The Bluebell Cider House, Wareings Green

Monday 12th April

The Bulls Head, Barston

(Branch meetings start at 8.30pm except where noted otherwise)

Committee Meetings

Monday 14th Dec
2010

The Coach House, Solihull

Monday 22nd Feb

The Vaults, Knowle

(8.30pm start. Ordinary members may attend Committee meetings but only participate if invited to do so by the Committee)

Socials

Wed 16th Dec
2010

Christmas Pub Crawl, Solihull area

Sat 30th Jan

Adam Gilson & Nicky Burkey's wedding 'do',
The Bird in Hand, 7.00pm onwards

***For more details, contact Secretary Allan Duffy on
01564 200 431 or visit our website : www.solihullcamra.org.uk***

Membership Matters

Our branch membership has risen dramatically during the last month and now stands at 355. Most of these new members joined at the our beer festival at the Solihull British Legion in October. This shows that it's not only CAMRA members that go to CAMRA festivals, but the wider public too. The interest in real ale grows all the time and this is reflected in increasing choice of real ale in the pubs; not just in our area, but nationally. So why bother to join CAMRA? Because the organisation is no longer just about real ale. It supports the brewing industry, publicans and consumer rights. The more members, the more clout. At this time of year there are wonderful membership gift packs available from CAMRA, and all purchases of membership will be put into a prize draw, see <http://www.camra.org.uk> for further details.

Bob Jackson, Membership Secretary

Oh what a Knight!

On the edge of the Cotswolds in the sleepy little village of Whichford lies a warm and welcoming pub called the Norman Knight. So when my cousin told me that his friend Tim had taken it over and started up a micro-brewery, Adam and I just couldn't resist a visit. We headed over on a Tuesday evening but had to book as that is fish and chip night and is very popular —and boy, was it good! Worthy of the £7.50 eat-in or £6.50 takeaway price, and the additional chocolate pudding was divine. However, on going for the real ale, we were slightly disappointed to find that Tim's wasn't going to be ready until Thursday.



We had a peek at the very high-tech micro-brewery (originally meant to be taken to Spain as a showcase brewery aimed at the export-pats) and it was very impressive. Tim's ale, 'Patriot Missile', 3.6%, is brewed from Challenger and Bramling Cross hops. Adam couldn't leave without having a taster and reported that it was light,

golden, and very drinkable.

Also available on the night were Old Hooky, Purity UBU, and Springhead Levellers. Cider and perry were also represented with Westons county perry, traditional cider, and Stowford Press cider.

All in all, a really great 'knight' and we hope to make a return journey in the very near future!!

Nicky Burkey



Top marks for loos

When you go to a pub, you want a great pint, a pleasant environment, maybe some good food —and probably you will have to visit the loo and it's nice if they are clean and welcoming. Well, the two JD Wetherspoons' Solihull pubs, the Assembly Rooms and the White Swan, have just scored top marks in the Loo of the Year Award 2009. Every year around 1,500 public conveniences are inspected and graded from 1, to 5, the top mark —or given no grade at all. But the JD Wetherspoons' pubs were the best of the best. Remember that next time you drop into either of them for a drink!



If you've picked up this magazine You'll find it's not for sale; It's free from Solihull Camra, In support of Real Ale.

You'll see articles and pieces From your local Camra team, Lots of useful information And adverts in between.

So if, like us, you have a love Of hand pulled tasty beer, Why don't you pen a piece yourself And see it published here?

If your local serves a decent pint Why don't you let us know? Log onto the Solihull Camra site, Or use the e-mail shown below.

Just a word of caution now... We're bound to be berated If we publish anything you send That proves to be x-rated!!!

Our website address is:
www.solihullcamra.org.uk
Or email us at
julia.hammonds@blueyonder.co.uk

Jeanette Lloyd

The Golden Acres

Joint Solihull & District CAMRA Most Improved Pub of the Year 2005

**** FREE BEER!!!** Bring this page to The Golden Acres over the next 3 months and



swap it for a free 1/2 pint of Real Ale. Choice will be from whatever is on tap at the time of your visit***

Three guest ales
plus a regularly
changing
traditional cider

Children Welcome
Beer garden with
play frames

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Damsonwood, Solihull

Tel. 0121 704 9002

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Regular entertainment Saturdays

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Try our authentic Chinese food
Eat in and/or Take -away

0121 711 8130

Mondays - Saturdays (except Tuesdays) 5.00 - 11.30pm
Sundays: Eat -in 5.00 - 10.30pm Take -away 5.00 - 11.30pm

Off Our Patch

Should you find yourself in Suffolk any time soon, then you could do worse than seek out the Moon and Mushroom, a lovely country pub in Swilland. On the evening my partner and I and our friends visited, by the time of our arrival it was dark, but the outside bower affording shelter for smokers was lit up beautifully with white fairy lights, and containing climbing plants and plants in pots, would no doubt have looked equally as spellbinding in daylight.

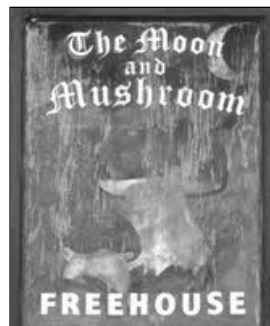


There was an immediate welcoming feel to the building inside with a real log fire — which I cosied in next to —and a bright, fresh aspect to the single —bar room with its country-style décor and clean scrubbed tables. The staff couldn't have been more helpful, and handed over menus straight away so we could make our food choices

ahead of time. As well as the standard a la carte menu, there is a specials board, both featuring a wonderful selection of dishes —in fact it was hard to choose as so many things tempted the taste buds. I went for a cheese soufflé, followed by partridge, finishing with a sticky date and walnut sponge pudding with toffee sauce and ice —cream. Every course of their own selections.

The real ale choices were also good: Woodforde's Wherry, Wolf Bitter, Crouch Vale Brewers Gold, Buffy Hopleaf and Little Terrier were on at the time of our visit, and to the delight of the two real ale-drinking chaps, were served on gravity from the tap —room. Various other ales by the same breweries frequently feature, again on gravity.

The pub has won quite a few accolades, including winners of the best country/village pub two years running. It also has occasional live music, and themed nights are featured (on the night of our visit two witches and a cat visited —but then it was Halloween!).



Julia Hammonds

CAMRA's West Midlands Club of the Year

After a hard —fought contest, Kinver Constitutional Club, at 119 High Street, Kinver, DY7 6HL, has been named the CAMRA West Midlands Club of the Year. The club had strong opposition , including the Little Stoke Cricket Club, the Bignal End Cricket Club and the Somers Club, plus others, but the passion of the Committee towards real ales and customer satisfaction shone out at every turn. On at the time of judging were: Hobsons; Town Orier & Best Bitter, (served in a very attractive Hobsons branded half —pint glass); Wye Valley; Hereford Pale Ale; Enville and Enville Ale; Kinver Half Centurion; Greene King Abbot Ale; Ruddles County; and Marston's; Draught Bass. As if that wasn't enough, guests were: Malvern Hills; Black Pear; Sarah Hughes; Ruby Mild; and Pardoe's Bumblebee.

2009 Fuller's brewery visit (Friday 26th September)

The branch weekend somehow evolved into a London day out by the Thames, based around a visit to Fuller's Griffin brewery in Chiswick. Why Fuller's? There has been a brewery on the site since the 1650s (Oliver Cromwell's time) and the current owners can trace the brewery in their family back to 1845; all 3 of their main beers have won CAMRA Champion Beer of Britain; that's why. Some breweries are too small to swing a cat and others are so big you may as well call it a factory, as there is nothing to see except the odd inspection hatch. The Griffin is in-between: it's a 6 acre site that developers would like to get their hands on and the brewing process is fully automated (we saw 2 chaps in a goldfish bowl) but you can still touch the equipment which is warm, it looks and smells like a brewery.

The day started with a mid-morning train from Solihull to London Marylebone with a splinter group arriving via Euston, followed by various tube journeys to Turnham Green (Chiswick) and a 15 minute walk down towards the river Thames under a perfect blue sky and warm sunshine. We met for lunch at the brewery tap – Mawson's Arms and The Fox & Hounds (family ownership issues led to the 2 names for 1 pub). In fact the Euston wing had stopped at the George & Devonshire for an aperitif of Chiswick Bitter or Discovery (a blonde offered with head). Anyway, the full team (Ken, Bob, Robert, John, Barry & H) sat down to lunch with more Chiswick Bitter & London Pride which were both excellent, worthy of a 4 or even a 4½ out of 5. Already subtle differences could be noted between the 2 pub's delivery of the Chiswick – obviously one was newer than the other – but that is the joy of real ale. Most of us went for the steak and ale pie which was not only first class and large, but a mere £6.50, and in London at that. For pudding a few of us had a half of ESB (also scoring a 4 out of 5) At this point some Finnish students arrived covered in badges and wearing tasselled hats, apparently they had just visited the brewery as the last trip of their business tour. A lively conversation ensued, again one of the joys of the English pub.



Patronising The Mawson's Arms
& The Fox & Hounds

Tim, our tour guide, arrived: a long standing employee, the former plant and building manager who had helped install many bits of the equipment we were to see in use, so he was very knowledgeable about the more recent history and the brewing process. They make around 650 thousand pints a day including 3 lager contract brands, 10 tons of waste yeast in a week and 2/3 of their beer is cask ale. What we didn't know was that he doesn't drink much beer, or even like it. Anyway, hurry up, you're late (actually he was



Inside the Hock beer cellar

late, we'd been at the starting point for an hour) and so to Fuller's brewery visit and we started in the Hock beer cellar (Hock is a name for Old Ale) where we were issued with high-viz jackets (why? nothing in the place moved, but a sad sign of the times). Tim knew his facts and this was a visit with a difference: it was a trifle hurried, we were told of the ingredients, but little about how it affects the taste; most breweries encourage you to try the pale and crystal malt for that Horlicks taste, to rub and sniff the hops for their sticky

resin. Most of the ingredients are British, and they do now get their organic hops from Kent and not New Zealand. The pale malts are mainly spring Tipton in favour of the former Optic, plus crystal & some chocolate malt when required for colour. The Honeydew does use some organic honey (but at nearly 10x price of malt one can hardly claim that this is due to the bean -counters!). Hops are Target for bittering (at the start of the boil) and North-down, Challenger and Golding for late copper aroma. ESB and Chiswick are also dry hopped using a hop pillow of Golding. The water used to be taken from their own artesian well and stored in tanks on the office roof, but now comes from the town main and is Burtonised to suit. On numerous occasions he commented how it is now all enclosed and controlled by computers (in turn operated by the goldfish) and how it used to smell awful, but now you can hardly smell anything. Is this really progress? (true, you only get



a whiff of it in some places and the fermenting room is certainly aroma free) They export to 14 countries, one of which is the US (a dozen states) so there is an upside, these people are all paying to support a real brewery.



The tour was all controlled by more computers (which explains the lack of anyone else in the brewery during our visit, despite them employing 400 people on the site) making 3 full mash brews per day, 5-6 days a week. Health and Safety came up several times – especially as we passed the glass-walled lab. Actually, whilst I am sure that the H&S is excellent, I think what he meant was hygiene – the place is scrupulously clean and we all know that is vital to prevent off-tastes or a ruined brew. Along the way we saw bits of old disused equipment trapped inside the modern brewery.

(Interestingly the new kit was made by the same company one hundred years on – and still based in Burton.) This is the old kit that let the smell out. It serves to explain how it all works as now they can leave them open. We were introduced to a piece not normally seen in breweries (none of us could remember one) – a Sugar Dissolving Vessel (labelled SDV) – what is this? Find out more next issue.

Robert Cawte

(To be continued)



CAMRA 2010 AGM

Preparation is now well under way for the 2010 CAMRA Members' Weekend and AGM, which will be held at the Isle of Man's Villa Marina complex, and will commence on Friday 16th April and end mid-afternoon on Sunday 18th April 2010. There will be also be outings in the week prior to this weekend, including visits to the island's three breweries. There are also plans to organise various other trips giving members the opportunity to see more of the island. It is now possible to pre-register to attend the Members' Weekend by going online to the CAMRA website www.camra.org.uk, and following the link from the Members' Weekend pages. Further information about the weekend can also be found in 'What's Brewing' and online, and there will be regular updates before the weekend.

Good Week/ Bad Week

One letter in a beer's name may have cost over \$500,000 . Correct spelling in the eBay auction is essential. Here is an example showing how leaving out one letter may turn out to be very costly.

The item in question is a full bottle of Allsopp's Arctic Ale brewed in 1852. The item was first listed on eBay with the title: allsopp's arctic ale.full and corked with a wax seal. Unfortunately, he left off the second 'p' in Allsopp's. This meant that any potential buyers searching for the correct spelling of Allsopp's would not be able to find it. This error is clearly a typo by the seller as he spells Allsopp's correctly in the description.

The auction had a starting price of \$299.00 and closed with a winning bid of \$304.00 with 2 bids from 2 different users. The seller was probably satisfied with the sales price until he saw what happened when it was listed on eBay again eight weeks later.

This time Allsopp's was spelled correctly using the auction title: Museum Quality ALL-SOPP's ARCTIC ALE 1852 SEALED/FULL!!! The second listing had a much more robust description along with more pictures of the bottle from different angles. The auction received 157 bids from 56 unique bidders and closed with a winning bid of \$503,300.00.

It turns out the original seller's typo cost him over \$500,000. The \$304 he received doesn't seem like much anymore. You have to feel sorry for the original seller. The bottle has been in his family for over 50 years before he decided to sell it. After all the publicity about the auctions, he has received many nasty emails calling him an idiot. The anonymity of the internet certainly allows people to be heartless.

The bottle is clearly worth several thousand dollars. Whether it is worth \$10,000, \$100,000, \$500,000 or more is anybody's guess.

The person that found the Allsopp's auction with the spelling error made a handsome profit. Surprisingly, auctions that contain spelling mistakes are fairly common. By finding these auctions, you may discover some incredible bargains too. Endeavour and you may find another hoppy diamond in the rough.

A bad week for Responsible Drinking

Three Australian jockeys were fined and suspended from racing for a month after drinking beer on a flight in defiance of a steward's instructions. They were returning home after a seminar on responsible drinking.



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J.D. Wetherspoon

Solihull Town Centre now boasts two Wetherspoon pubs offering you a choice of casual drinking, wine and dining.

Both pubs are **'Cask Marque'** accredited and both have achieved the **'Best Bar None'** accreditation.

The Assembly Rooms, 21 Poplar Road, Solihull, B91 3AD

Phone: 0121 711 6990

Opening times :

Sun — Wed: 8.00am — 1.00am

Thurs — Sat: 8.00am — 2.00am

The winner of 'Solihull & District CAMRA Most Improved Pub of the Year 2008' Award, and a new entry in the CAMRA 2010 'Good Beer Guide'

Offering a total of 15 hand pulls with a range of regular and guest ales, this pub also screens SKY / national / international sporting events with sound.

Offering a general background music tempo and featuring live DJs at weekends.

James and his team extend a warm welcome to all.

The White Swan, 32–34 Station Road, Solihull, B91 3SB

Phone: 0121 711 5180

Opening times :

Sun — Wed: 8.30am — 12.00am

Thurs — Sat: 8.30am — 12.30am



The pub has recently improved its ale range by increasing

from 5 hand pulls to 8, offering 3 regular ales and a minimum of 4 guest ales daily.

Screens freeview sporting events but is music -free, leaving you room to chat.

Dawn and her team extend a warm welcome to all.

Both pubs offer breakfast daily 'til 12 noon. The main menu is available until 10pm daily and offers a wide range of dishes to suit all tastes and occasions.

Why not visit on one of our club nights/days?...

Tuesday is Steak Club offering a choice from our grill menu, Thursday is Curry Club offering authentic dishes, and on Sunday Club choose from chicken, beef and pork roast dinner (vegetarian option available). All meals include a selected drink and all regular and guest ales are available in the offer.

NOTE: Christmas Ales will be available over the festive period



Wye Valley Brewery
Herefordshire
www.wyevalleybrewery.co.uk