



ISSUE No. 19

Solihull BORO BANTER



AUGUST 1984

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SOCIAL AROUND KENILWORTH

Our social in June was a Sunday lunch walk and drink around Kenilworth. Plans were to meet in the Castle car park at 10.30am. No one was aware that this happened to be the finishing point of the 'Two Castles Run' between Warwick and Kenilworth on the same day and time as our projected start, so that our start was delayed by 30 minutes.

We took a pleasant circular walk of 3-4 miles behind Kenilworth Castle which gave us fine views of the Castle and sightings of hares bounding over the fields. Despite ominous signs the weather, although not sunny, remained dry. Two of the party were almost lost as they were so deep in conversation that they nearly missed the path.

12 O'Clock came and we were not at the pub. Misery! The late start had delayed us by some 30 minutes and it was thirsty CAMRA members who arrived at the Virgins and Castle for a welcome pint of Davenports mild and bitter on handpump. Considering the style and decor of most Davenports houses which are rather bland, this pub is a pleasure to be in. Small rooms leading away from the serving area give the pub a 'comfortable' feeling enhanced by stone flag floors and not much in the way of silly bric-

a-brac. A garden at the back is also quite small and intimate.

We then moved on to the Wyandotte wishing to renew our friendship with Marstons Mercial Mild, which was unfortunately not as we had had it in the past. Maybe turnover is low thus the standard may have dropped a little. However, I was informed that the Pedigree and Bitter were in good condition.

As is usual on these Sunday socials a good time was had by all, and it was content CAMRA members who fell out of the pub at closing time.



Home has hit the area. Kingshurst some 15 minutes drive from Solihull now has two Home pubs. The Mountford on Overgreen Drive was an Ansells House until some two months ago, now proudly exhibits Home colours, but unfortunately they are not, it would appear, proud of their traditional beer as only keg mild and bitter is available. Maybe Home are being cautious and I only hope that things change for the better soon. The other pub, the Punch Bowl has not yet been visited but I assume it will be keg as is the Mountford.

INDIA COMES TO SOLIHULL

The Old Colonial, Damson Lane is M and B's new pub in Solihull. The brewery have spent a lot of money on this pub whose theme is that of the old Raj. What more can be said? Points for: Traditional Brew XI and Mild.

Points against: No Public Bar.

Wooden parrots!

Verdict: Definately not a traditional pub, designed possibly for the younger market.

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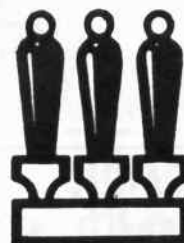
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BOB AND ANN COPPACK
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WARM WELCOME



BREAKING UP THE BIG SIX

CAMRA believes that as long as six national brewing companies dominate the British brewing industry, real competition will never occur. We would like to see the major companies broken up into smaller, independent, regional companies.

This would mean a more competitive market and the need for a better product. If they were dismantled, it would be imperative that action should be taken to eliminate local monopolies, otherwise the whole point of the exercise would be lost. Companies would have to have overlapping trading areas. The big six are the very reason for the need for CAMRA. Without such large tied estates and such heavy advertising and promotion, keg beer may never have got off the ground. While the big six exist as they are, they can manipulate the consumer and rip him off terribly. With the big 6 so dominant CAMRA can NEVER win! In 1977 the Price Commission made a report on the brewing industry and said the "National brewing companies charge higher prices for their beer than regional and small companies". They went on to say, the high prices were charged because of higher costs of selling, administration and distribution

incurred by the big 6. We believe simple management structures, better labour relations, lower distribution costs, lower advertising and promotional expenses and a good local image often gives smaller breweries the edge in profitability and pricing. It is unlikely the brewing industry will take any steps themselves to dismantle the big 6 but we feel the Government should require them to

take such action, in the interests of the consumer and in many cases the industry itself. It has already stated the need to encourage small enterprises and businesses. Small breweries are finding it almost impossible to get a fair share of the market because so many pubs are owned or part owned by the big 6. The Government has already taken

steps in other fields to reduce monopolies, so it is about time they turned their attention to the brewing industry. There are signs that this might be happening. Only recently, Scottish and Newcastle attempted to take over Camerons of Hartlepool, a move that would have drastically reduced competition in the N.E. Acting on advice from the Office of Fair Trading, the Minister of Trade, Norman Tebbit referred the deal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the takeover was halted. It now seems that another bid from a national company is unlikely. Hence, in this case anyway, the Government is trying to preserve competition. There have been recent developments within the big 6 that have given clear pointers to how a break-up could be achieved and the benefits this would bring. Bass maintain a firm distinction between production which is nationally controlled

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and marketing which is regional. Courage and S and N have adopted similar structures. Allied Breweries and Watneys used to operate on similar lines but have now reverted to operate on more regional lines. Both breweries experienced a lack of morale among workers and a loss of enthusiasm among customers during the 1970's. Allied divided its trading side into regions and now its southern region (based at Romford) has been broken down into new trading companies, each with its own exclusive brand of beer. In 1972 Aylesbury joined Allied. It operated almost as an independent brewer with 200 houses but no brewery. However, the operation was successful and this probably accounts for Allied's enthusiasm for devolution. Watney's image was much damaged by "The Red Revolution" during the 1970's. The sheer size of the com-

pany meant the senior management and decision makers were so far removed from publicans and consumers that they couldn't see what a disaster the red image was proving until too late. With smaller breweries such a situation is unlikely to arise because the head of the company often knows every pub. Whitbread used to run many regional breweries but these are being closed down at an alarming rate. They seem to be less and less interested in brewing and more obsessed with catering. They have recently closed their massive keg brewery in Luton. This has only been open about 20 years and millions of pounds have been spent on it, but it never even brewed to capacity. The people who had it built read the future horribly and expressively wrong. Yet another case of being too big for your own good.

Bass too, seem to be a giant lumbering company, unsure of what direction to take. In the past, managers of a particular region haven't even known what beers were available to them. They seem slow on the uptake compared with Allied, who seem to be more imaginative and also brew better beer.

One brewer who is extremely unhappy about the present situation is Paul Soden of the Jolly Roger Brewery, Upton on Severn. He would love to sell his beers over a wider area but the iron grip on most pubs by the big 6 makes this almost impossible. He would like to open another brewery sometime in the future and also hopes to help set up other independent breweries by selling brewery equipment cheaply. Let us hope eventually something positive is done to at least lessen the grip of the big 6 so that people like Paul can get down to making the industry more competitive and selling better products.

The big 6 acts against public interest and change is needed. If they cannot be dismantled all efforts must be made to stop them getting any bigger (halting takeover bids for example). Then they might be more responsive to the demands of the consumer as well as being more efficient in providing the services he wants.



WHITBREAD CHANGE ANOTHER
BEER'S NAME.....(AGAIN)

Whitbread Traditional Bitter has been completely withdrawn from our area and replaced by a "new" brew called Flowers 1PA. The old bitter was not a very inspiring drink and unfortunately 1PA doesn't seem to be all that different. The manager of a local pub who sells it even said that he couldn't tell the difference. It has an original gravity of 1036 (one degree lower than trad - more watered down perhaps?) and is brewed in Cheltenham.

Traditional Bitter sales were slumping and this is why Whitbread have launched the new beer. It will be interesting to see how it goes.

NOT THE G B B F!

Sadly, with Bingley Hall now closed there will not be a Great British Beer Festival this year. However, the Midland branches of CAMRA have got together and come up with a great alternative. "Not the Great British Beer Festival!" This will be held at Digbeth Civic Hall from 5th September to the 8th. The entrance fee is only 50p which is a small price to pay for the chance to try over 60 beers! There will be some local favourites such as Highgate Mild and Ansell's ales (including the new Holts) plus superb beers from Taylor, Marstons, Jolly Rodger, Lees and Miners Arms are 2 of the more unusual beers on offer. It should be a great occasion, all lovers of good beer make sure you are there

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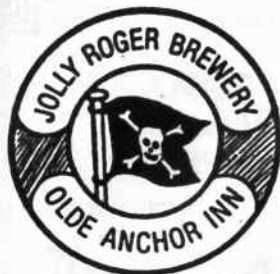
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100% IMPROVEMENT AT THE
GOLDEN LION, SOLIHULL

The Golden Lion, Solihull has doubled its range of real ales. Once, only Courage 'Directors' was available but now we welcome a Courage Best Bitter. It is good to see this beer available in our area.....how about some real mild too!!

Whilst on the subject of the Golden Lion it can be reported that a garden has been developed in the grounds behind the pub and includes a small, childrens' playground with various play equipment.



THE WILSONS ARMS

The Wilsons Arms in Knowle has been converted to handpumps. M and B Mild, Brew XI and Bass are now all dispensed by this method. I tried the Bass and was surprised to find it tasted quite good. Several people have said that it has improved slightly in the last few months although I don't think it will ever return to its former glory.

It is very unusual for M and B to replace electric pumps with hand-pumps. This is a welcome bit of news. Why can't they do it more often?

SOLIHULL CARNIVAL

Did you see Solihull CAMRA at the Carnival? We were there, but unfortunately not serving ale. The weather was excellent and much interest was shown in the Campaign's stand. Goods were on sale and over all, we made a reasonable profit - all of which, is to go into Campaign funds. It's at events such as this that Solihull CAMRA gets known in the area and we will most definitely be there next year.

ROMANTICA IN CHADWICK END

The ex-Ansells training school (once the Tom O' Bedlam pub) in the village has been leased for 10 years off Ansells and will re-open shortly as a pub but what sort of pub remains to be seen. It is going to be called CUDDLES, so prepare for the worst!

It sounds like it will be yet another 'fun pub' but who knows? perhaps it will widen the choice of ales if it turns out to be a free house. Who knows? it could be a pint of Ruddles in Cuddles - wishful thinking!!!



BRANCH DIARY

Saturday 1st September - Evening social to Lichfield. West Midlands Bus Preservation Society providing transport (£2.50 each). Provisional date only, phone contact for details. A good chance to drink and not drive!!!!

September 5th - 8th
"NOT THE GREAT BRITISH BEER FESTIVAL"
See above for details. If you would like to work there, staffing forms are available from the contacts

Monday 10th September - Committee Meeting: Navigation, Lapworth, 8.30 pm.

Monday 8th October - Committee Meeting: Winged Spur, Ullenhall. 8.30 p.m.

Tuesday 16th October - Branch AGM - The Golden Lion, Solihull 8.30 p.m.

More details? Then contact Dave Queenborough 744 3113 or Steve Dyson 705 1168



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