



ISSUE No. 23

Solihull BORO BANTER



FEBRUARY, 1985

PUB NEWS

SARACENS HEAD, Shirley - Golden Oak Inns Ltd., are now operating Shirley's principal pub and have embarked upon a major refurbishment programme to convert it to an hotel. Construction work on the 34 bedroom extension is progressing well and together with complete refurbishment of the present restaurant, lounges, function rooms and reception area, completion is envisaged mid-summer this year. Mike Stevens the Manager, says that final decisions on the range of beers on sale have not been finalised yet but let us hope the present cask range of Ansells Mild and Bitter and Tetleys Bitter are retained.



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The Crown

Very slow off the mark, the branch have only just realised the Crown at Monkspath sells well-kept traditional beers and was very well renovated about two years ago. Cask Brew XI and Mild are sold on electric pumps and Highgate Old is sold in the winter on a miniature handpump. The Lounge is fairly smart and sports some nice stained glass windows above the bar counter and the Public Bar has happily been retained which is more than can be said for the pub mentioned in the next paragraph.

The Red Lion, Earlswood

This pub lost its bar during major renovations but in the process gained handpumps for the real Mild and Brew XI. Springfield Bitter was also installed on handpump, making the Red Lion one of only two pubs in our area to sell it traditionally. However, all the handpumps have now gone and the Springfield is in keg form. We were told that air in the pipes was disturbing the beer but this seems funny as beer engines have been in use for many decades without too many problems. It seems like another case of M and B not quite knowing what direction to take in life. At least there is a sign proclaiming traditional beers are still on sale.



VINTAGE TAVERNS

Always quick off the mark to follow Allied Breweries, Bass have decided to turn 15 of their houses into traditional pubs with an "atmosphere like the early part of the century". Vintage Taverns will be the name of the chain of pubs that will be Black Country based and they are supposed to be a similar set-up to Allied Breweries' pubs run by Holt, Plant and Deakin, although there will be no new brewery. However, I was not terribly impressed with The Sandwell in West Bromwich, the first pub to be opened. It has a huge garish looking lantern hanging outside and inside was most un-traditional, being terribly over-decorated and having no public bar. Most Holt's pubs seem to be infinitely preferable in my opinion.

In the next three years over £1m will be spent on the refurbishments of the pubs, the majority being in the Black Country but a few may appear further afield such as Shropshire.

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WARM WELCOME



ARE WE DRINKING REAL ALE?

Comments from a Small Brewer

There is something extremely satisfying about having worked to achieve a goal in life - and actually arriving there. For myself, that satisfaction has been achieved by surviving as a small independent brewery for 18 months. (although "survived" is about the correct word for it). For CAMRA and beer enthusiasts, the satisfaction is that Real Traditional British Beer, exclusive to the U.K. has itself survived and is now enjoying a great amount of support and popularity. Everyone who has contributed to its survival must, I feel, have a sense of pride and satisfaction that at least one great British tradition craft lives on. But, - beware! what may appear to be all beer and skittles on the surface is indeed a sad tale of small traditional breweries starting up and collapsing shortly afterwards.

As real ale is still available, why, you may ask, is this a problem? It is I believe because the range of choice, taste and ingredients that produce that beer vary greatly from small breweries to the giant nationals. The battle for the long-term survival of the traditional pint, as we would like to see it, is far from over. There is a definite need for Britain to have a number of new-wave small breweries to survive and represent traditional beer from traditional methods of brewing. The large number of small independents who have "gone under" is no reflection of the beer or the management, but the weight of odds against their success is too great to bear. Few small independent breweries are going to survive, let alone make money, which is required for reinvestment, unless the public

recognise why small breweries have difficulty becoming established. One of the reasons is the strength of the competition and it is no good crying about it, competition is what business is all about. However, certain factors are unique in the brewing world. The great majority of pubs which could sell the products of small independent breweries are tied to the nationals and well established breweries. Those pubs which are not tied are frequently offered many and various inducements to sell the beer produced by those same companies that own the tied estates. Small independents, therefore try to sell on lower price margins, consequently making the business less viable. Even these lower price margins may not allow them to obtain outlets into pubs who have accepted incentives from the nationals. The outlets left available for small breweries are often those the nationals regard as low volume potential or lack suitable Real Ale facilities.

As the popularity of Real Ale has continued the Nationals rose to the situation by re-introducing "Local" Breweries and re-naming well known national beers as new "Real ales". With their strength of marketing, advertising and financial reserves, the new Real Ales have sold well in their own

tied estates and in the "Free Houses". Perhaps the most significant little trick was the new Real Ales being praised for their settling qualities, clarity, and consistency of taste. How odd, when, in days gone by, Real Ale was well known for being a pint that differed in flavour, colour, clarity and settling qualities for every brew, - although by very small margins. Now small independents are expected to produce a "Keg-like-consistent" bitter for every brew on the hand pump by using the old traditional methods of water, yeast, malt and hops. How, without a fortune in capital for scientific equipment and chemicals can you do that? Are the new National Real Ales - REAL?! If so, why are they so consistent with every brew - week after week! Even the larger independents have flavour variations from time to time, using traditional methods of brewing - so one wonders by that standard, why the National Real Ales don't.

CAMRA have now moved on to the desire for a change in the licensing laws and removal of the Pub Tie. These are both necessary and worthy causes but again beware! The superficial level of Real Ale success is reflected in the number of Real Ale Breweries - and may at any time slide back to the "Keg Days." CAMRA should concentrate on the fact that Real Ale should be enjoyed and equally so, perhaps, if on occasions it is "different". Real Ale is a craft industry, it is temperamental and needs support from Beer Enthusiasts. Bland Real Ales are available everywhere, but different distinctive real ales are scarce and need to be sought out. But how? Even if and when the tie

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is removed, the Nationals will have inter-company trading agreements - allowing real ales to be exchanged in the Nationals tied houses - that then answers the charge of "No Choice" - or does it?

The future for small independents with their wide range of real ales, varying tastes, strengths and characters, does not look good. Perhaps the answer lies in three areas:-

- 1) The introduction of Purity Laws for Real Ales, as used in various parts of the continent allowing the use of pure-malt, hops, water and yeast in Real Ales. This would prohibit many of the present Real Ales from being sold as such and give a boost to the smaller independent Real Ale Breweries, who generally only use these ingredients anyway.
- 2) The introduction of (again a continental system) allowing small brewers a reduced excise duty below a certain gallonage of production, so that in the early years they could become established, before they are crippled with massive excise bills - often due for payment before receiving payment for beers sold.
- 3) A move towards more "home-brew pubs" being established, which in most respects, are not within the competitive system I have described. They are usually well supported, successful and none have closed down - yet.

Finally, REAL "Real Ale" should be free of certain chemicals and in this day and age, when the public are becoming increasingly aware of the addition of these in food and drink, it may be worth a look at what various additives are included in some so called "Real Ales" (and keg beers too). Real ale should be a constitution of malt, hops, water and yeast. We can say that about the beers we brew, who else can?

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GOOD BEER GUIDE LISTED

Paul Soden,
Three Counties Brewery
Gloucester.

A BOOZY BROWSE AROUND SOLIHULL BOROUGH

To read the Solihull Times you would think that CAMRA reckons that the Golden Lion in Solihull town centre is the only pub worth going to. However, the Borough has many pubs on a par with the Golden Lion.

The Lyndon Arms, Olton is a pub that is possibly the pub within Solihull that caters for all tastes. Having a bar, lounge, function room, childrens' room and an adventure playground, together with Ansells beers and an enthusiastic landlord makes it an ideal pub to visit as a family or with friends.

Hampton in Arden has the White Lion with a truly traditional bar which is a pleasure to pass time in although the beer (M and B) is expensive which reflects the affluence of the village. The Engine just down the road has a bland interior but Martin is a dedicated real ale publican and serves his Bass, Brew XI and Mild well.

Two miles away lies Barston which boasts two pubs. The Malt Shovel has a basic bar and lounge and only serves Bass in traditional form. Many will remember in the not too distant past when this

pub was a pleasure to be in. Sadly much of its character has been lost. The Bulls Head is a bland pub inside but does serve Bass and Brew XI traditionally.

A new pub recently opened in Solihull is the Old Colonial on Damson Lane. The design of the pub follows the theme of the Raj, sporting wooden parrots and plastic plants, but the best point is the M and B beers. Usually a tasteless range, at best mediocre, the Mild and Brew XI are of consistently remarkable quality. One wonders if M and B are brewing special beer for the pub!

The Wharf, Hockley heath is a pub that does not have any traditional features but is worth visiting to taste the handpumped Manns Bitter, and, unusual in the area Marstons Pedigree, a beer with many devotees.

The New Lodge, Solihull Lodge, is a modern estate pub with few really endearing features except the excellent Ansells Mild, Bitter and Burton Ale all on handpump and served by the publican who again is a keen traditional beer man.

Earlswood is a popular spot in the summer months and a visit to one or two pubs in the area is recommended. The Bulls Head, Salter St. also serves Ansells Mild and Bitter and Burton Ale and in surroundings that include a traditional public bar. Not far away is the Reservoir with a good public bar and serves Davenports Bitter although speculation is rife as to whether it is served on blanket pressure. It is a shame that more Davenports pubs have not preserved their public bars because most serve the Mild and Bitter in traditional form, together with Flowers Original. Having covered most of the breweries who serve the Solihull area mention must be made of Whit-

I wish to become a member of the Campaign for Real Ale Limited. I agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Campaign.

I enclose £7 (£10 overseas) for full membership for a year. ☐

Any additional amount will be welcomed as a donation. ☐

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bread. Their pubs are not very traditional and the beers tend to be expensive and a little tasteless but, if you like Whitbread then try the Orange Tree at Chadwick End and the Winged Spur at Ullenhall who both take guest beers from within the Whitbread group. The Cock Horse in Rowington is a pleasant country pub architecturally but seems to have an unfriendly atmosphere inside.

So there we have it. Not an exhaustive guide. Maybe your favourite pub is missing but the list does cover a wide range of beers and shows the range of pubs we have in Solihull. There are pubs to suit all tastes but far too few that appeal to a wide range of the drinking public which brings us back to the popularity of the Golden Lion with its many facilities.



GOOD BEER GUIDE, 1986

With the 1985 GBG hardly on the bookshelves a few months, it is time for all CAMRA branches to consider entries for the 1986 edition. The pubs to go in the 1986 GBG have to be decided on by the end of March, so please, could all nominations be forwarded to the Secretary by February 11th, 1985. This will allow time for Committee Members to compile the information needed for the 1986 Guide.

The vote which is open to all CAMRA members with current membership cards (so please bring them along with you) will take place at The Golden Lion in Solihull on March 12th 1985 at 8.30 p.m.

Please try to be there as this is your chance to decide on the pubs to go in the 1986 Guide.

Send your nomination to:

Steve Dyson,
79, Walsgrave Drive, Solihull,
West Midlands. B92 9PP

or tel 021.705.1168

G B B F - 1985

The venue for the 1985 GREAT BRITISH BEER FESTIVAL has at last been decided upon and unfortunately it is many miles from Solihull - BRIGHTON! The Metropole Hotel has offered us its exhibition halls quite cheaply and although it is not located in a very good position, CAMRA has accepted. The Festival should be successful, however, because Brighton will be very busy with holiday makers and is situated in a very affluent area so most of the visitors will have plenty of money in their pockets. It will be open from August 13th to August 17th. It should be a tremendous event, but what a distance to travel!

If you want any information regarding CAMRA nationally or locally, contact Steve Dyson at 79, Walsgrave Drive, Damsonwood, Solihull (021.705.1168) or

Dave Queenborough, at 11, Upton Close, Shirley, Solihull. (021.744.3113). We would be delighted to help you or see you at any of our meetings.



BRANCH DIARY

Monday 11th February Open Meeting at THE RED LION, KNOWLE. Good pub with a wide variety of rooms, selling Tetley Bitter and Burton Ale.

Wednesday 20th February Branch meeting at THE LYNDON, BARN LANE, in OLTON. Ansells Mild and Bitter on sale. The General Manager of Holt, Plant and Deakin, Mr. Bob Smith has been invited to the meeting as the Guest Speaker, so it should be a very interesting night.

TUESDAY 12th MARCH
GOOD BEER GUIDE VOTE and OPEN MEETING at the Golden Lion in Solihull.

See below for more details.

To be confirmed Sometime in March we hope to have a brewery visit around HOLT, PLANT and DEAKIN in OLDBURY.

Ring contact for details.

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