



solihull
drinker



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOLIHULL & DISTRICT BRANCH OF
THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

Issue No: 8

Spring, 1999

Red Lion, Shirley scoops award

Solihull CAMRA sends its belated congratulations to the Red Lion Shirley which has recently won Vanguard pubs "Cellar of the Year" award.

Whilst John and Carrie Fewtrell, the licensees, have won the regional award before, this was the first time that they had come top in the country, beating off competition from 1600 other Vanguard pubs.

As Joe Baker, their bar manager explained the pub had to go through many stages including 3 unanimous visits before

they won through to the finals that were held in Prague.

Joe said that the Red Lion scored high marks in all categories, including cellar management, refrigeration systems, Health and Safety, and bar dispense equipment.

Solihull CAMRA can vouch for the hard work that John and his team

have put in. The pub has been a regular entry for the area in the "Good Beer Guide" for a number of years now. You can always guarantee to get a good pint in there, particularly the excellent ABC bitter.

Heres hoping that that the Red Lion goes from strength to strength.

Dave Hobbis

Inside this issue

Refurbs during lunchtime... Annual outing of CAMRA branch!??...
Eating and drinking in the Barston area... GBBF 99 essential info...
Walsall wins Best new pub award...and Walsall Beer Festival info

editor's round

In previous issues of the Drinker you'll have seen references to refurbishments to pubs in the area. Never a week goes by without some pub being ripped apart. Solihull does not have much in the way of traditional pubs, so at least we are spared some of the gross practices of the brewers who take pride in tearing out genuine Victorian interiors to replace them with fake Victoriana.

However, there are some pubs in Solihull, which have great character, or, with a little work on them could reflect the best of the traditional English pub.

The Golden Lion in Solihull town centre has retained its 1930's feel, whilst the White Lion in Hampton in Arden has a superb public bar, with a comfortable lounge. The Bulls Head at Barston has a homely feel to it sitting easy within the local community. When we look further afield The Navigation at Lapworth has a basic but comfortable bar, with a small front unpretentious lounge. There are of course a few others... but what I'm getting round to is that slowly but surely big brewers or particularly pub companies are relentlessly taking over many of our pubs throwing their future into turmoil. Some of our licensees are proud of the traditional features of their pub but others will be easily swayed to bow to the refurbishment trend, some will have no choice. Like the residents who are fighting Allied Domecq plans for the Lodge we need to be vigilant. If you here rumblings of a refurbishment in your pub contact CAMRA... to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

The Solihull Drinker is the newsletter of the Solihull & District Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign of Real Ale. The views expressed are those of the individual contributor and are not necessarily the views of the Solihull Branch, or the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd., or at least of the Editor.

All contributions, comments and enquiries should be sent to:

The Editor, Solihull Drinker, c/o 79, Walsgrave Drive, Solihull B92 9PP
or e-mail steve_dy@yahoo.com

For advertising contact Dave Hobbis on 0121 706 0162 who can offer very competitive rates!

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

Persons who have admitted to contributing to this edition of the Drinker have been tracked down and warned... their names are The Editor, Dave Hobbis, Dave Queenborough, Matt Bullock and Allan Duffy

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Bolting the Stables doors

The Stables bar on the Monkspath estate has closed with everything concentrated on the adjacent Hillfield Hall, a Toby Carvery. This fairly distinctive building has a gentile, upmarket feel with a big emphasis on eating...if that doesn't appeal you can just drink the handpulled Brew X!

Chequers checks out

In December last year the Chequers on Monkspath changed its name to the Fieldhouse after a refurb. It is a pleasant enough modern estate pub open all day. It serves handpumped M&B Mild, Brew X! and Draught Bass. There's a patio area which overlooks a large field and parkland [hence the pubs name] and no evidence that that field was once a refuse tip. If the name gets changed again will it become the Old Tip!



Walsall Beer Festival

This years Festival is to be held at Walsall Town Hall from Thursday 15th - Saturday 17th April. Opening times are Thursday 6-11; Friday and Saturday 11-3; 5.30-11. 75+ beers available as well as traditional cider and a selection of bottled beers. Food will be available at all sessions. Thursday evening as is quiet night, entertainment at other sessions A festival glass will be available. Entrance fees vary from £1.00 to £2.00. CAMRA members free at all times.

in brief....



GBBF 99...

Time to plan ahead for this years extravaganza. From 3rd to 7th August at London Olympia with over 300 beers to have a go at! Bottled beers, family room, real ciders...and much more

Highgate up the gravity...

Highgate Brewery, Walsall has increased the gravity of both Highgate Dark and Saddler's Bitter. The Dark increases from 3.2 to 3.4 ABV whilst Saddlers increases from 4 to 4.3 ABV.

Birmingham listing...

The Rose Villa Tavern in Warstone Lane built in 1919-20 has received Grade II listing and is well known to those who frequent the Jewellery Quarter. The beer is mediocre but the superb glass, woodwork and tiling are worth seeing.

BERNIES



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A "to do" at the Lodge

The Lodge in the High Street Solihull Lodge has over the last few years had its ups and downs, as do most pubs. The last Drinker highlighted Allied Domecq's plan to convert it into a Mr. Q Pool Hall. It appears that Allied thought that the pub, having a high street address must have potential for a business aimed at the young set. Management having taken time out to visit the pub, noted the residential character of the vicinity and have gone back to the drawing board. Moral of the story-

- listen to local people
 - Don't assume High Street means mega bucking, circuit pulling, rich young things
- Watch this space for developments...

Golden Lion – has it a future?

The Lion seems to have thrown a wobbly in that it no longer serves real ale... a sad loss, as it was the only outlet locally for Beowulf beers. It has gone through a stock market float and is now part of Unique Inns chain of pubs. Initial rumblings reaching our ears give us hope that maybe real ale will return... we'll keep you informed

Punch Tavern update

Brad at the Bulls Head, Barston informs us that the range of "guest" beers include some rare choices such as Black Sheep Bitter, Tomintoul Stag and Harvistoun Schihallion... worth a visit to see what's on.

Fancy a Stratford outing?

A new brewery attached to Cox's Yard on the bridge over the Avon is up and running. Its run by Charles Wells... no report on the beer yet... give it a try.

Greenall's guests

Recent visits to The Drum and Monkey and The Drawbridge has seen us sampling some unusual ales over the festive season. Beers such as Kitchens Gobbling Gooseberry have been seen and enjoyed. Apparently Greenalls are supplying pubs with guest beers from some really unusual beers from small brewers... long may it continue, check it out and support them!

Pitching out the Barrow!

Jack Barrows is no longer with us. It has now been turned into one of Marstons "Pitcher and Piano" chains serving Marston Pedigree.

Durham Ox changes hands

Once one of the few dwindling free houses in the area this pub is now a Marstons establishment... or should I say a Banks's subsidiary...

A Taylor Two Cities

Timothy Taylor's of Keighley, West Yorkshire, make some fine, hoppy, golden ales. Therefore, it will come as no surprise to you that our annual brewery weekend this year took us to the town of Keighley. But, sadly, not to the brewery. Taylor's do not like 'rowdy groups' drinking all their beer, and so do not admit tours, so we had to trek quietly across the Pennines into Lancashire to seek some beers there.

Our tale begins, however, back in Yorkshire, in our first city: Bradford. The city of Bradford roughly comprises 50% derelict land, and 50% curry houses, but with a few pubs mixed in. The New Beehive is one, a Grade 2-listed Victorian gas-lit establishment, which was our base for the night, and possibly with the exception of the Fighting Cock, was the pick of the pubs we discovered. The New Beehive is also on CAMRA's inventory of heritage pubs, and opens until 1 am at weekends. Thankfully, it is also handily placed for a curry house, so we made the effort at the end of the night to cross a patch of derelict land to visit it. The journey was well worthwhile.

On Saturday morning, after breakfast at Rita's (awarded four coronaries for quality by the Bradford Tourist Board), we headed for Keighley, and from there, once we had remembered to let everybody onto the minibus, for our second city, Blackburn.

We arrived at the huge Thwaites brewery at noon, and after admiring the concrete and sampling the carbon dioxide (they did give us a free glass....), we embarked on a tour of the city. We were ably guided by Barry Tyson, who kindly arranged a quick tour of the nearby Blackburn Brewing Company, where we admired the mash tun and sampled the beer. This was just one of several pubs visited that lunchtime. But time was pushing on, and we were soon rounded up and led back to the coach for the short jaunt to Burnley.

Burnley is not a city, but it is every bit as grim as Blackburn. Our destination was Moorhouse's, an old established soft drink company, which began producing cask beer in 1978. We had a short, informative talk by the commercial manager (though most people missed it whilst queuing for the toilet), and were then able to sample the beers in the pub over the road, one of Moorhouse's six tied houses, where we were also provided with supper.

It took a lot of effort to drag us away from the Pendle Witches Brew and the Black Cat (don't call it mild!), and by the time we arrived back in Keighley, we only had five minutes to prepare for the evening's entertainment.

As I have probably mentioned, Keighley is not a city, but is very hilly. Very, very hilly. We hiked the mile or so from our farmhouse accommodation on the edge of town to meet our guide, local CAMRA man John Robinson, in the 1999 Good Beer Guide listed Globe (miraculously listed under Keighley), for a few pints of the town's most famous product. We then embarked on an ambitious tour of the town's better hostelries, visiting a host of pubs owned by Worth Brewery and Tim Taylor's, including the former's award winning Brewery Arms.

The party finally trooped off to the Brown Cow, where the beer on offer was, surprisingly, brewed by Taylor's. More remarkable, however, was the entertainment: a karaoke night, which we were kindly but foolishly invited to take part in. The more ambitious members of the group accepted gratefully; the more sober members of the group declined politely, and retired to a corner of the pub. Sadly this was not far enough away to avoid listening to our social secretary, Keven Parker, singing *My Way* his way, and then joining Branch Chairman Brenda Duffy, who had previously performed something I have thankfully forgotten, in a memorable, if that is the right word, duet of *Waterloo*. Never have I been so glad to hear last orders called

Matt Bullock



LOCAL CAMRA CONTACTS

For information on CAMRA and details of your local branch's events, contact the appropriate person in your area from the following alphabetical list:

Birmingham	Robert Walker	0121 478 1653
Bridgnorth	David Haddon	01746 862454
Coventry	Paul Hamblett	01203 417675
Dudley and South Staffs	Steve Amos	01384 252266
Heart of Warwickshire	John Crossling	01926 613256
Kidderminster	Richard Lycett	01526 861951
Lichfield & Mid Staffs	Ray Jennett	01543 255195
Redditch and Bromsgrove	Paul Long	0973 596650
Shakespeare	Vaughan Hully	01789 778726
Solihull & District	Keven Parker	0121 242 5548
Stourbridge	Patrick Bird	0121 422 5394
Tamworth & Sutton Coldfield	Gary Clay	01827 705711
Telford & East Shropshire	Paula Walters	01952 641549
Walsall	Rob Bentley	01922 861626
Wolverhampton	Fred Morton	01902 426513

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Eating out in Solihull

Part 4: Barston/Hampton/Catherine De Barnes

Bulls Head, Barston

Readers will know this pub as the 1988 Solihull CAMRA Pub of the Year, and both quality and choice of beers is still excellent. So, to "wash down" my pint of London Pride, I decided to try out the bar menu. I recommend you look out for the special menu, but this can be hidden away, so look hard.

The menu is best described as traditional English pub fare but, unlike most bar meals, you don't have to remember a table number before ordering. The staff can work that out for themselves!

I had steak with all the trimmings, ordered medium rare, it arrived nicely pink in the middle, and there was no need for a steak knife. My wife had plaice, which was fresh and tasty, and, at the time of our visit, there were lots of other fish dishes on the "Specials" menu. Portions were not gargantuan, but nor were prices. Service was speedy and courteous.

The two bars can be a little cramped at weekends, but there is a separate restaurant for those who prefer a cosier atmosphere.



Malt Shovel, Barston

If you remember this as an Olde Worlde country pub, you may get a bit of a shock if you have not been there since it was "done up". Whilst you can still pop in just for a drink, at weekends it is more geared to food than before. There is a separate restaurant next door, but there is a kitchen in the pub providing bar meals in an area, which tends to be very crowded and noisy. This is not always the best accompaniment to a meal especially when you get little change from £20 for two courses.

The menu is interesting but very Nouvelle Cuisine and served in large soup plates with chunks of bread with unpronounceable names! The fish blackboard on the wall is enticing but you will need to remember your cheque book.

One point to look for on the bar - Chrome keg fonts - very clinical! On the real ale front, they had Bass and Brew XI at the time of our visit with an extra handpump for an occasional guest.

The Boat, Catherine De Barnes

Standard pub menu but with a wide choice, very similar to the Drum and Monkey and other pubs in the Millers Kitchen chain. At the food counter, the first thing you will be asked for is not your order, not your money, but your table number. Main

course prices vary from £4.50 to £10 but watch for special offers, which are regularly advertised in the local press.

Service was quick and friendly and I would recommend the "Surf and Turf".

A nice location for the long summer evenings if we get any this year, as it adjoins the canal and has a large outdoor seating area. It is also popular with plane spotters! There are three regular real ales, plus one guest, often an unusual one, which sometimes runs out by the weekend.

White Lion, Hampton-in-Arden

This is a very traditional English village pub, which I used to visit regularly at lunchtime when I fancied a change from sandwiches. However the recently refurbished restaurant a little too "Nouvelle Cuisine" for my liking. It had certainly gone more up market and the menu offers a real alternative to steak and scampi, particularly for those who prefer an Italian influence.

Desserts are more traditional - steamed sticky chocolate pudding insulates the ribs pretty well on a cold January night!

Beer is Bass and Brew XI that are always in excellent condition. Some may believe Brew XI is bland, but here it is not.

Allan Duffy

in brief....

Pubs for families...

CAMRA's new guide highlighting pubs that are OK families has been recently updated. It's available from CAMRA HQ or from your local branch. It contains 900 pubs throughout the country and costs non-members £8.99, CAMRA member's £7.99.

Premium beer £1.30!....

Manchester brewers Holts have introduced a new 5% premium bitter, DBA. Price £1.30... must be cheapest in the country, Whitbread take note?!

Beer on the Net...

The Net is burgeoning with beer related sites. Try this one:

www.real-ale-guide.co.uk.

It's a new site but its got potential. We'll let you know of others.

Quality matters...

All CAMRA members have recently received with What's Brewing a real ale quality report form. If you need more they are available from the local branch. If you're not a member and want to put your twopence worth in phone the contact for the Solihull branch and we'll send you some...

Leyland drives into Shirley

The Red Lion in Shirley town centre has been selling beer from Leyland. The merger of the former Nix Wincott and Nene Valley breweries formed this brewery, based near Northampton. It's good to see a guest beer from a small independent available in the Solihull area. On my visit the Leyland Bitter at ABV 3.6% was a pleasant easy drinking beer and in good condition and sold at a special price of £1.35. With Ansells Mild, Tetley Bitter, Aylesbury Bitter, Pedigree and Old Speckled Hen available too, the pub is well worth a visit.

Walsall beats them all!



CAMRA and English Heritage announced the winners of the Pub Design Awards 1998 recently – and for the first time in 14 years, the New Build category has a winner and a highly commended runner up... both in our neck of the woods relatively speaking. The winner, The Wharf in Walsall is shown above. Built for the Highgate Brewery it is situated in the centre of Walsall in the recently rejuvenated canal basin. The judges were impressed with the Scandinavian style pale wood and the back to basics approach to fixtures and fittings. Beers available are from the Highgate range Mild and Saddlers.

Coming in highly commended was Browns in Earl Street, Coventry, no details as yet as to the beers but probably worth a visit.



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times

Non-members and guests are welcome to attend our branch meetings and social events.

Branch meetings are held on the second Monday of each month and commence at 8.30pm.

Beer and Balti nights are generally held on the last Friday of each month [Balti not compulsory!]

Saturday 13 March - Branch Social

Visit to Cox's Yard Brewery, Stratford on Avon, 6.30pm

Friday 26 March Beer & Balti

Red Lion, Shirley, 8.30pm

Monday 12 April - Branch Meeting

White Swan, Henley in Arden 8.30pm [tbc]

Keven Parker is the branch Social Secretary and you can contact him for information about events during the evenings on 0121 242 5548

Ken Jackson is the Branch Secretary on 0121 705 8743

The 9th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on June 14th 1999.
The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be
Saturday 15th May 1999