



solihull
drinker



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

Issue No: 10

Autumn, 1999

Railway, Dorridge voted Pub of the Year 1999

The Railway, Dorridge has achieved the accolade of Solihull CAMRA's Pub of the Year.



Branch chair Brenda Duffy presents Joe with the award

The 1981 Good Beer Guide described the pub as "a small local south of the town", serving M&B Mild and Brew XI on handpump. It then lost its entry in the GBG for some years but recently regained it due to the quality and range of beers on offer. The pub has been in the same family for nearly a century and has expanded in size providing both lunch and evening meals. The old lounge has become the bar, whilst the old bar is now a lounge/dining area. The pub has an extensive garden and children's play area

On the evening of the award the branch and locals supped Hop Back Summer Lightning and Badger Dorset Best as well as the usual range of Bass, Highgate Dark and Brew X1. To celebrate the award Joe laid on a buffet for everyone and dropped the price of his guest beers to £1.20... This ensured that the whole pub had an enjoyable evening!

more pics over...

Inside this issue

Punch Taverns hit below the belt? Drinking and eating in Earlswood... Solihull CAMRA visits Belgium...
A brewery visit to bring a smile to your face... Prices Survey results... plus pub scams

editor's round

It's always a pleasure for the branch to award the Pub of the Year Award for the quality of its beer and in the case of the Railway the choice. However, the future of real ales from small independents must be of concern with the recent reluctant admission by CAMRA spokesman Mike Benner that real ale drinking is on the decrease. Together with the march of smooth flow across the country it seems that real ale drinkers need now, more than ever, to support independent and microbreweries. If that were not enough the relentless bout of takeovers has done nothing to improve choice for consumers.

CAMRA has opened a fighting fund and would appreciate all donations. To fight the big breweries who spend mega bucks on advertising the campaign must likewise be able to fight like with like, please donate what you can... the future of our distinctive beers depends on us



Brenda Duffy, branch chair pulls a pint of Hop Back Summer Lightning. The beer, from Salisbury has won many awards including being a past winner of the Champion Beer of Britain at The Great British Beer Festival

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 whose scribing appears in this edition of the Drinker are The Editor, Dave Hobbis, Keven Parker, Allan and Brenda Duffy and Steve Wood

Solihull CAMRA 1999 ©

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	Adrian Zawierka	01952 590467
Burton on Trent	John Hoddy	01283 225669
Coventry	Paul Hamblett	01203 417675
Dudley and South Staffs	Steve Amos	01384 252266
Heart of Warwickshire	John Crossling	01926 431376
Kidderminster	Richard Lycett	01562 861951
Lichfield & Mid Staffs	Ray Jennett	01543 255195
Nuneaton & Bedworth	Les Hall	01203 311835
Redditch and Bromsgrove	Paul Long	0973 596650
Shakespeare	Vaughan Hully	01789 778726
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Stafford & District	Paul Mudge	01785 226529
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

If you have any complaints about short measure, contact Solihull Trading Standards on 0121 704 6844

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BERNIES



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CAMRA Price Survey results

CAMRA's annual price survey reveals that the cheapest place to drink is in the north west where the average price of a pint is £1.58, the dearest area, London comes in at £1.95 a pint. The West Midlands comes in at a relatively healthy £1.68. Solihull branch input to the survey reveals that most of our pubs charge roughly the same give or take the odd few pence. Most of the nitro-kegs such as Caffreys etc. cost £1.90-2.10, and the cost of Guinness is consistently high, usually over £2.00. The cheapest beer amongst the pubs surveyed in Solihull was Boddington's Bitter in Yates Wine Lodge, Solihull at £1.45, whilst the most expensive was Guinness at £2.18 at the Harvester, Olton. It is fair to say though that not all pubs in the Solihull area were surveyed so there could well be cheaper or more expensive beers on sale in our area. Let the editor know if you can beat the prices quoted above. Can anybody beat, for instance £2.40 for a pint of Black Sheep Bitter at 3.8% in the Old Contemptibles, Birmingham... undoubtedly out of the area but what a rip off!

Another interesting fact revealed from the survey is that 91% of pubs surveyed did not give a full measure. Meanwhile another survey undertaken by Encyclopaedia Britannica reveals that with inflation taken into account a pint that cost 1p in 1899 should now cost 24p! Somebody's onto a winner here and it certainly isn't the consumer.

Brewery closures continue...

Hot on the heels of Mitchells and Morrells closures come the impending closure of Courage Georges Brewery in Bristol, and that of Morland, taken over by Greene King. If that wasn't enough now rumours are about that Mansfield may be going the same way. It's such a pity that a brewer once all keg, having changed to becoming heavily committed to real ale in the early 1980's may be taken over. Which brewery next?



... yet another
brewery closure

in brief....



GBBF 99 Report

Attendance was up at this year's festival by 1,500, as 40,000 downed over 300 different beers. As an added bonus the campaign boosted its membership by a further 700.

Champion Beers of the Year announced at the festival were:

Supreme champion - Timothy Taylor Landlord; Mild - Bateman's Dark Mild; Bitter - Oakham Jeffrey Hudson Bitter; Best Bitter - Timothy Taylor Landlord; Strong Bitter - Ballards Nyewood Gold; Bottle conditioned beer - Youngs Special London Ale; Speciality beer - Harviestoun Schiehallion.

A "new" beer launched at the festival was Bishops Tipple by Ushers who bought the brand from Gibbs Mew.

Burton-On-Trent Beer Festival

At the Town Hall, King Edward Place, Burton from Thur 23rd to 25th September. Free entrance to CAMRA members at all times. 80 beers all cooled by cask coolers. Cider, country wines and foreign beers. Live music at all session. Quiet rooms. For more details contact 01283 511783 or 01283 567979



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Solihull CAMRA Pub of the Year 1998

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OR IN OUR SEPARATE RESTAURANT

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ON THESE COOL AUTUMN EVENINGS WHY NOT
BASK IN FRONT OF OUR REAL LOG FIRES

Local Pub Scams

Two pub scams have come to the notice of the Drinker recently. First there is the appearance of house beers at some pubs in the area. Some make their origins plain, others may lead the drinker to believe they are specifically brewed for the pub, when in fact they are standard brews. Some pubs may be unaware that they could be flying close to the winds with the Trading Standards. A recent example was a pub giving its guest beers the same house name whatever beer was being offered. Solihull CAMRA had a quiet word and the situation was resolved without resorting to the Trading Standards. In this case the pub was unaware that they may have been breaking the law. If you see the same elsewhere, contact the Solihull CAMRA via the Drinker and CAMRA will take it from there. Moral of the story: A quiet word and constructive advice seems to work better than going in with guns blazing.

The second scam is reprehensible. A recent visit to Henley's Festival Ale House the Nags Head revealed two interesting guest beers. However on ordering we were told that they had both run out. We spoke to the Assistant Manager saying that most pubs turn the pump clips round. She said that it was company policy not to turn pump clips round. So, although the range of beers looked OK when we first entered the pub we were now left with Ansell's Mild, Ansell's Bitter, Tetley Bitter or the nation's guest beer Marston's Pedigree, and this a Festival Ale House? There was no doubt in our mind that this policy is meant to deceive the drinker into believing that the range of beers is really good, when in fact it's pretty poor. Moral of the story: Give as good as you get when the circumstances warrant it!

Solihull CAMRA in Belgium

Having sampled in the last couple of years the best that Bavaria and the west coast of the USA could offer I had high hopes that Belgium would at least match them in both choice and quality of beers... I, and fellow Solihull CAMRA members were not to be disappointed. It would be impossible to overstate the variety of beers on offer in Belgium and though none of them weighed in at less than 5% abv, they were dangerously drinkable, if only in small measures.

Due to the horizontally laid back nature of Belgians, together with compulsory table service, completing a pub crawl took literally all day, however, having a whole week, together with the invaluable "CAMRA Good Beer Guide of Belgium and Holland" we discovered some cracking bars and beers. Though, I admit that I can't remember every one of the beers I drank, the following come highly recommended.

Timmermans Peche a wonderfully light and fruity concoction, Kwak, a dark beer drunk from what can be best described as a foot of ale in a wooden stand. Then there are the astringent Lambic beers from the Cantillon Brewery in Brussels where beer is brewed with three different strains of yeast, naturally impregnated through the roof of the brewery.

Of the many bars we visited those in Brussels stood out. Of note was La Morte De Surbite, [Sudden Death], a German beer hall style bar named after a card game played by its customers who gambled their intended investments in the bar if the bank next door was busy. The Toone Bar was a strange venue in an alley off one of the main shopping streets that doubled as a puppet theatre and where performances are played out in a Flemish dialect that even the locals can't understand. Then there was Le Cercueil, [The Coffin], a bar where drinkers descend to a cellar bar with a décor similar to that of an undertakers shop, and where you can drink very expensive beers out of skull shaped mugs, whilst sitting at tables inlaid with coffins!

There are, however some noteworthy bars outside the capital. Tucked away up a back street in Bruges near one of its many beautiful canals was the Oude Vlissinge where the generous range of beers included the wonderful Liefmans Framboise, a stunningly fruity beer which proudly displayed its Gold Medal Award for a Bottled Beer presented at the 1998 CAMRA Peterborough Beer Festival. However, what made the bar so appealing was its fantastic beer garden, complete with boule rink which made for a very pleasant spot to while away an afternoon.

However, I have left the best to last. Our trip to Antwerp took us to the Kulminator Bar, which boasted over 500 beers listed on a massive menu. It was almost a feat in itself to choose a beer, particularly when it included bottles of Chimay Red dating over the last 15 years, steadily rising in price the older they got! An additional nice touch were the slips of paper provided on which you could vote for your favourite beers and at the same time enter all your personal details for later transfer to the huge Visitors Book. Coincidentally I discovered a recent entry of a Mr. Atkinson from Solihull. Come out Mr. Atkinson wherever you are, because you sure know the best places to drink!!

Dave Hobbis

in brief....

Birmingham Beer Festival

A local festival not to be missed. The festival runs from Thur 16th to Sat 18th September at the Aston Students Guild, Aston Triangle, Gosta Green. Open Fri/Sat 12-3; Thur-Sat 5.30-11. Over 100 beers available, together with foreign beers, ciders and perries. Live entertainment every evening, commemorative glass available. As usual discounts on entrance fees to CAMRA members. More details from Rob Walker 0121 478 1653

Burton Ale stays in Burton

Carlsberg-Tetley has contracted out to Marston's production of Burton Ale. This famous ale will continue to be produced in its hometown. This is a change of heart from Carlsberg-Tetley who was going to transfer production to Leeds. Lets hope this change of heart will be followed up with a promotional budget worthy of this once classic ale

Year 2000 Good Beer Guide

The year 2000 edition has over 5000 of the countries best pubs. Also listed are all breweries and their beers with copious tasting notes. Copies to members cost £7.50, non-members £11.99. Why not join CAMRA and take advantage of discounts on the GBG and festival attendance. More details about the Guide will be in the next edition of the Drinker

Put a Smile in your face

The Branch recently enjoyed a mystery trip organised by Keven Parker, Social Secretary, here's his report.

A bright and early start saw us heading down the M5. Congrats to Press Officer, Dave Hobbs who guessed we were heading for Smiles in Bristol [no prize Dave as you had plenty of free beer]. The brewery frontage is no bigger than two shop widths but being four stories high they are able to cram in a good sized tower brewery and pub. With the closure of Courage Bristol Brewery Smiles are hoping to fill the gap in the market with their successful portfolio of seasonal beers.

Smiles were very generous, five firkins, one each of their five best beers were put on for us to try, free! That's 22 pints each, but only an hour to drink it in! My favourites were Golden Brew, a lovely, hoppy quaffer at 3.8%, Best Bitter, a bit darker at 4.1% and the gorgeous Heritage at 5.2%; a complex dark beer tasting of fruit, chocolate malt and with a roasted finish

Next, off on a tour of the city's best pubs with our Bristol CAMRA tour guides. We took in The Bridge on Passage St., a super little back street boozier close to Courage Brewery where we sampled Bath Gem Bitter, a dry, malty, fruity beer. The Commercial Rooms, a large lofty Wetherspoons in an ex bank building offering an excellent selection of local beers, the Butcombe Bitter being particularly good. The Bag O' Nails was another great backstreet local where we found a very friendly welcome and finally the Hope and Anchor where we supped under the sun in their beer garden.

Back on the bus and back up the M5 to The Three Kings at Hanley Castle near Upton on Severn, a 17th century pub which has remained in the same family for 80 years. It was a worthy winner of the CAMRA National Pub of the Year Award in 1993, an excellent place to stop on our journey north

Finally, we had time to stop off at the Teme Valley Brewery at the back of the Talbot Hotel, Knightwick near Worcester. This upmarket, imposing hotel and bar has a small brewery supplying itself and the odd beer festival. The brewer does not have the time to sell to other pubs as he has to get the cows in for milking, otherwise they tend to wander off! The hotel has its own farm and uniquely grows its own hops. A brief tour and sampling rounded off the evening. It must be strong stuff as our spontaneously arranged football match with the local opposition ended in heavy defeat, quite a feat as they were only old enough to drink milk.

It was then off home. However, a hardy few took the opportunity to sup at the Anchor in Digbeth, followed by a curry. I passed on the chance as I was still wearing a smile from the days entertainment - I must wash that shirt

Eating out in Solihull

Part 5: Earlswood

The Red Lion

This is an open plan "Vintage Inns" food pub but it still retains much of its old-fashioned character. It has been a well established real ale outlet in the area, but choice is now limited to just Bass and Brex X1. Both were in good condition at the time of our visit, when the pub was buzzing with midweek diners enjoying the evening sunshine.

The menu and the décor are very similar to the Heron's Nest [part of the same chain], even down to the use of wooden spoons to guide waitresses to your table.

Service at the bar was speedy and polite. The food was served promptly, although I thought the chips could have been hotter than they were. The lemon chicken went down very well, and was pleasingly different from other versions I have tried. Salads were interesting, but ask for dressing, if that is your preference. Prices for main courses range from £4.95 to £8.95

Red Lion



The Bulls Head

Built in 1792, this pub has been modernised in recent years and its appearance somewhat spoiled by its mock rustic look. The beer range is a little limited – Ansells Mild, Tetley and a guest [Old Speckled Hen]. The mild was a little warm for a hot evening, the Tetley was fine and the Old Speckled Hen at £2.10 a pint beyond our budget!

On the food front, there were a relatively small number of meat dishes with prices from £5.95 to £11.95. Vegetarian dishes were more plentiful and sounded more interesting than the average pub "veggie" offering. Watch out for the extra charge for vegetables with main dishes. There was a separate specials chalkboard but with no prices shown! I did not bother to ask

The Reservoir

Geared primarily to families with young children, most of whom were enjoying the delights of the extensive play area at the back of the pub. In terms of food, I can only describe it as a typical Millers Kitchen [see Drum and Monkey and Boat in previous issues]. At the time of our visit the beers on offer were Tetley and Greenall's Original but, disappointingly, no guest beer.

The Millers chain as a whole offers a regularly changing range of guests, many of which are rare in the Solihull area.

Allan and Brenda Duffy

in brief...

A new pub in the area, The Little Owl on Bickenhill Parkway has opened. Food orientated, but it does serve real ale

Punch Taverns

The Case for the Prosecution

In case readers are not aware, Punch Taverns are taking over the world. Not content with purchasing some 1600 pubs from Bass Breweries, Punch are, it seems, now to get their greedy little paws on Allied Domecq's pubs.

It doesn't seem that long since Punch Taverns appeared in the area, and whilst at that time I was concerned at the effect their ownership may have on some of our best pubs, I thought that I'd give them a year to settle in then review the situation.

Sadly news reaches me that Punch are playing an underhand and all too familiar game with their licensees, a game that stops them selling local microbrewery beers, and has put two of them out of business. On being bought, pubs with a proven track record of high barrelage of real ale were offered beers off two lists. The "A" list featuring breweries from the traditional Bass supply agreements such as Fullers, Everards and Greene King. The "B" list featuring beers from smaller regional breweries

On examining the "B" list I must admit I was quite impressed, it wasn't perfect, but it was a start allowing licensees to offer quite a wide range of ales [though not always exactly what they wanted to serve].

Punch promised to update the list every quarter and to increase the range of beers [availability and huge discount permitting]. However, they also said that they would be operating a bonus scheme to licensees offering discounts on barrels sold i.e. the more barrels sold, the more the discount. Fair enough you might say, however here's the catch, only beers from the "A" list were subject to the discount bonus scheme!!

Punch knew, or suspected that licensees, being astute businessmen, or women, would feel pressurised into buying off the "A" list to please the bank manager. Punch I suspect will shortly claim that there is less demand for beers from the "B" list and reduce the choice or even withdraw list "B"

The future in my opinion is not rosy. Punch has little or no interest in supporting independent breweries, aiming only to expand their empire, which as a non brewing company not subject to the Beer Orders can grow unchecked.

The message to the drinkers of Solihull is, find your local Punch owned pub [and with Punch's avid acquisitions policy there will shortly be no lack of choice!] and support those landlords who wish to offer a wide range of beers from both national and independent breweries

Don't let Punch Taverns have it all their own way!!

Dave Hobbis, Branch Publicity Officer

in brief...

The Punchbowl at Lapworth is currently closed. Rumour has it that it has been taken over by the ex management of the Peacock, Forehill... could be good news, watch this space

It is hoped that the branch will publish a local guide in 2000

Church End Cuthberts seems a permanent fixture at the Red Lion, Shirley

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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!]

Friday 22nd October - Branch Social

An Olton pub crawl. Olton has a reasonable number of pubs, which are well worth a visit. We shall be visiting the Harvester, The Lyndon and the Olton Tavern. However this could change. Exact details of the itinerary is available from Keven

Saturday 20th November - Branch Social

Coach and Horses, Weatheroak Hill. Home of the Weatheroak Brewery, an excellent evening is guaranteed!

Monday 13th December - Christmas Social

A pub crawl of Central Birmingham, for details contact Keven

Beer & Baltis

Friday 24th September

Brewer and Baker, Camp Hill, Birmingham

Friday 29th October

Nags Head, Henley in Arden

Friday 26th November

Old Fox, Hurst Street, Birmingham

Branch Meetings

Monday 11th October

Felon and Firkin, Knowle

Monday 6th December

Red Lion, Shirley [tbc]

Annual General Meeting

Monday 8th November

Forest Hotel, Dorridge

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 11th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on December 6th 1999.

The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be

Saturday 13th November 1999

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