



solihull
drinker



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

Issue No: 11

Winter, 1999

Golden Lion wins local CAMRA branch award

MOST
IMPROVED PUB
OF THE YEAR
1999
awarded to
THE GOLDEN LION
SOLIHULL



Special Beer of
the Year

The Solihull Branch of CAMRA has awarded the Golden Lion in Solihull town centre the accolade of the most improved pub of the year for 1999.

Steve Wood, Campaigns Officer for Solihull CAMRA said the award is intended to recognise the pub in the Solihull area, which according to local CAMRA members has shown the most improvement during the last year. He went on to say, "The Golden Lion has had some ups and downs in recent years but during this year it has changed from a pub which seemed to be dying on its feet into a pub used by the whole community. Its good to see a pub in the centre of Solihull, which caters for the needs of the whole community and serves real ale."

Steve said, "This is the second time that the award has been presented. We missed out one year as there wasn't a pub worthy of the award. Can Drinker readers suggest a pub for the millennium?"

The Golden Lion serves three real ales, Charles Wells Bombadier, John Smiths Bitter and a guest beer all on handpump. Food is served all day and the pub is a popular venue for live music. Brenda Duffy, Solihull CAMRA chairman added, "Peter and Chris Scoltock have built a reputation at their pub the Harvester in Olton where real ale drinkers can be guaranteed a well kept pint...I'm pleased to say that the same now applies to Solihull town centre". The pub is managed by Peter and Chris's daughter and son-in-law Mark and Louise Jaeger and is part of the Unique Inns chain. The previous winner of the award was the Forest Hotel in Dorridge.

In this issue

An Olton pub-crawl... drinking in Australia... Cold Beer Blues... The 2000 CAMRA Good Beer Guide...
on nicking intellectual property... and pubco's increasing stranglehold

editor's round:

I make no apologies for mentioning the stranglehold that pubco's are exerting on the retail beer market again. For example Punch Taverns and cohorts Bass are carving up the market between them leaving the consumer with less choice than before. Punch has closed down all the Firkin brew pubs and withdrawn the right of tenants to choose a cask beer of their choice. This is a catastrophic state of affairs for the small brewer who cannot hope to compete with big brewers who sell their beers at a large discount. Almost overnight the small brewers have lost numerous accounts putting their very livelihoods in jeopardy. CAMRA is urging the Office of Fair Trading to review the situation and include pubco's in the 1989 Beer Orders thus enabling their tenants to stock a cask beer of their choice. What can we on the ground floor do? Support your local CAMRA branch. Support your local publican if they are coming under pressure from pubco's and write to your local MP expressing your views about the loss of choice.

Meanwhile, I await the opening in Solihull of two new pubs, the Hogshead and Bar Censsa. The Hogshead will serve real ales and is to be welcomed despite the inevitable high prices, the second we shall have to wait and see. However, with a name like Bar Censsa I'm not too optimistic that it will hold much interest for real ale drinkers. I'd like to be proved wrong though! Whilst we're still in Solihull, congratulations must go to the Golden Lion for winning Solihull CAMRA's Most Improved Pub of the Year 1999, a worthy accolade for what is, as the lead article states the only real community pub in Solihull town centre.

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 and Steve Wood
Solihull CAMRA 1999 ©

Nomura to double number of pubs?

Despite rumours that Japanese investment bank Nomura is considering selling the 2600 pubs that comprise its Unique Pub chain, it has now been reported that it is considering doubling the number of its licensed outlets.

A source close to the company is said to have indicated that Nomura is looking to buy one of the major pubco's. City experts suggest that Pubmaster, a privately owned chain of around 2100 pubs is the target. Valued at £450 million, Pubmaster has denied having entered into talks with Nomura, whilst conceding that it has had on and off talks in the past with Nomura.

Nomura is also believed to be considering making a bid for around 700 pubs from Scottish and Newcastle following their acquisition of Greenalls estate. If this were to go ahead Nomura's estate would stand at some 5500 pubs.

Beers around here!

Why does the Drinker tell you of beers you've missed in its round up of beers seen in the area recently, many readers have asked. Well, the intention is to give some indication to drinkers as to which pubs are well worth visiting for an unusual guest beer.

The Bulls Head, Barston – Hall and Woodhouse Badger Best; Bell, Tanworth – Caledonian 80/- and Whitbread Trophy!! [however quality was suspect]; Harvester, Olton – Bateman's XXXB and Gibbs Mew Bishops Tipple; Vaults, Knowle – Batemans XXXB; Old Royal Oak, Wood End – Jennings Cocker Hoop; White Swan, Henley – Elgoods Barleymead and Batemans Mild; Nags Head, Henley – Black Sheep Bitter; Bird in Hand, Beaudesert – Everards Tiger; Forest, Dorridge – Woods Woodcutter and Bernies, Shirley amongst all their varied guest beers has stocked Marble Arch beers, which are otherwise unobtainable in any local pubs.

in brief....

Burton-On-Trent Winter Beer Festival

At the Town Hall, King Edward Place, Burton on Friday and Saturday 28th and 29th January 2000. Free entrance to CAMRA members at lunchtime; evenings, £1.50 inc glass. All beers cooled by cask coolers. Live music and food at all sessions. For more details contact Richard Perry 01283 564983

Red Lion, Claverdon website

Local pubs are getting themselves on the web. One in our area is the Red Lion at Claverdon at www.web-sites.co.uk/redlion.

Inform the editor if you find anymore.

West Midland Pub of the Year

This year's winner is the Rising Sun, Horseley Road, Tipton, near A461/4035 junction. Three guest beers are available as well as beers from Bankss and RCH. GBG quotes it as a "welcoming, two roomed local", and it has been Dudley CAMRA's Pub of the Year for 1998 and 1999.

Pub-crawls book

A new book published by CAMRA called 50 Great Pub Crawls is available from booksellers. At £8.99, it's a great Christmas present. Crawls include a Leeds to Manchester crawl using the rail network.



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BASK IN FRONT OF OUR REAL LOG FIRES

Good Beer Guide 2000 millennium edition

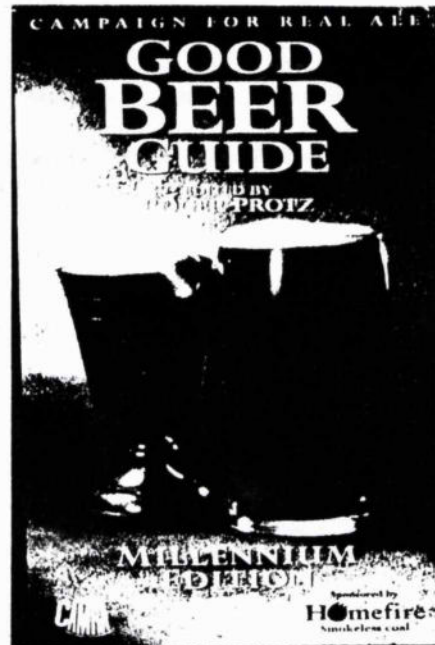
The millennium edition of the Good Beer Guide hit the bookseller's shelves during October, and at 578 pages is a bumper edition.

Shop price is £11.99. However, Solihull CAMRA branch members can buy a copy from the branch for £7.50... a saving of nearly £4.50!

This year's edition lists 5000 pubs from around the country and includes an A-Z index of beers, lists details of breweries and comprehensive notes on all their beers.

This is supplemented with over 30 pages of comment on the current state of the pub industry/market.

The GBG is completely independent and demands no payment for inclusion, the only criteria being to serve good real ale.



and a note about plagiarism...

Beer drinkers take for granted the strange names that brewers adopt for their breweries and beers. Initially, beers such as Wychwood's Dogs Bollocks had shock value. Now, the current edition of CAMRA's Good Beer Guide is full of names such as Church End's What the Fox's Hat and Baz's Bonce Blower from Parish. However the conspiracy theorists amongst us may take a closer look following the revelations made by the author of a rival consumer book, the Good Wine Guide. He has admitted that for the last 10 years he has been fooling the wine snobs by including a spoof entry each year. No one spotted when he wrote, "smokey, grassy and mellow" from Mari Juana's fictional Rizla Valley vineyard. Likewise, no one spotted the reference to the eucalyptus wines from the imaginary Australian Koahla Leep winery.

It started when he was advised to include fake entries as a trap for other writers who might be tempted to copy his research for their own works. He was able to camouflage the spoof in the midst of a book, which like the GBG is full of peculiar and unfamiliar names. Wines and grapes such as Cakebread, Breaky Bottom and Bastardo actually exist. The most worrying aspect of this is his claim that the inclusion of spoofs is standard practice by authors to trap plagiarists. Apparently, mapmakers regularly slip fictitious street names into their index.

However, rest assured that CAMRA's GBG doesn't resort to such tactics.

Or does it???????

Steve Wood

The End of Firkin Brewpubs

Punch Taverns has closed all the Firkin brewpubs following their acquisition from Allied Domecq. This has resulted in the loss of four beers to the beer drinker, including the popular Dogbolter. Visitors to the Felons and Firkin in Knowle will doubtless be disappointed with the loss of their usual range of beers, a decision made by Punch, with no consultation whatsoever with pub goers.

It was inevitable that Punch would close the brewing operation as it would have made them a national brewer and they would have come under the provision of the Beer Orders. This would have forced them to allow tenants to buy in a cask beer of their choice, a situation that Punch does not want to happen. When Punch took over Bass tenancies they prevented landlords from continuing buying in a guest from whatever source they wished, despite support from local drinkers.

CAMRA is pushing the government watchdog to reopen the investigation into the retail beer market and to exercise some control over pubco's. Punch, in particular seems to have a cosy relationship with Bass, which needs closer scrutiny.

Punch has said that they are considering making beers available from microbreweries. If this were the case surely it would be in the interest of individual publicans to decide what beers those would be.

One thing is true. Punch's march to dominate the retail pub market will result in the beer drinker losing out in terms of choice.

in brief.....

The Punchbowl, Lapworth has reopened following change of ownership serving Marstons and Bankss' beers.

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	0123 417675
Dudley and South Staffs	Steve Amos	01384 252266
Heart of Warwickshire	Dave Rosling	01926 431376
Kidderminster	Gill Waller	01562 515040
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
Solihull & District	Keven Parker	0121 242 5548
Stafford & District	Paul Mudge	01785 226529
Stourbridge	Patrick Bird	0121 422 5394
Tamworth & Sutton Coldfield	Gary Clay	01827 705711
Telford & East Shropshire	Simon Bruce-Jones	07971 955892
Walsall	Rob Bentley	01922 861626
Wolverhampton	Fred Morton	01902 426513
Worcester	Jane Thompson	01386 750178

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

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Shepherd Neame BB	28.80	62.00

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An Olton pub-crawl

On a cold Friday evening in October the branch did a pub-crawl in Olton visiting four hostleries, most, I am sure you will be familiar with.

Our first port of call was the Olton Tavern, Lode Lane, a Wacky Warehouse, [we were slightly too old to take advantage of this!] However, the Tetley Bitter at £1.80 a pint was enjoyable and of particular note was the Ansells Mild

We then moved on to the Harvester in Tanhouse Farm Road where Bateman's XXXXB at 5% and £1.90 was very good. We managed to get John Smiths Bitter and Wadworth 6X down our necks too... all in good form and drunk in a convivial atmosphere.

In good stead we moved on to the Hobs Meadow. Four people were in the pub, unusual for a Friday night? This should have told us something. We started on Ansells Mild which was average. Tetley Bitter followed, it was absolutely putrid vinegar. Being good CAMRA people we discussed the state of the beer with the landlady who told us that she checked the beers before every session [i.e. at 10am daily!] We returned the beer to the landlady who then changed the barrel. Would you believe it the new barrel was off too! Maybe there's a problem with the pipes! I fear that this pub won't last much longer as poor quality beer, slashed seats and exposed springs in the upholstery are hardly going to attract the punters.

To finish the night off we hit the Lyndon on Barn Lane. Tetley Bitter, Marstons Pedigree and Ansells Mild all in good form in what must be one of the best of our local Ansells suburban pubs.

Keven Parker

Cold Beer

I hate cold beer. I don't much like warm beer either, but the former really takes the biscuit. When I take the first mouthful of my pint I don't want to experience a numbing, chilling sensation on my tongue, effectively anaesthetizing my taste buds for a good while after. Any sensation of flavour is quite often lost on me until half way down the glass by which time my hands have hopefully warmed the beer enough to allow me to taste it. Cold beer is not suited to this country. We don't live in sun baked America or Australia; therefore the foremost reason for having a beer is usually not to counter dehydration!! In my opinion beer is being served colder and colder and I think I know the reason why.

National brewers are encouraging licensees to serve their real ales at the same temperature as lagers. They don't want drinkers to discover too much flavour in their beers. That would defeat the object. The more used to cold, bland beer we get, the better. Less taste in beers means that breweries can take short cuts and use cheaper ingredients, thus increasing profit margins [nobody will notice if it's tasteless anyway!]

The blander beers are brewed, the easier it will be for drinkers to switch to keg beers such as Caffrey's and John Smiths Extra Smooth, which are traditionally served cold and bland. The sooner that national breweries wean people off real ale the better. It costs too much to produce and involves teaching licensees how to look after it. Licensees, who probably think that you need a chemistry degree to look after it

Together with the virtual 100% use of swan necks and tight sparklers in pubs in London, which, have more or less the same effect, the nationals are playing an underhand game, which will eventually sound the death knell of real ale in this country. Take all taste away from beers and you won't care what you drink... So, that's my theory. You may not agree, but I'm sticking to it!

Dave Hobbis

in brief....

Takeover news

Always depressing news... Shepherd Neame has its eye on King and Barnes. Both Sussex breweries date back to the 17th and 18th century respectively. Shepherd Neame see both companies as "complementary". Does this mean both breweries and pub estates will remain independent operators? Past experience doesn't usually show this to be the case....time will tell.

...and then there's Greenalls

Since the last Drinker Greenalls has sold its 765 pubs to Scottish and Newcastle. In the Solihull area pubs such as the Drum and Monkey, Bentley Heath; Reservoir, Earlswood; Drawbridge, Majors Green and the Boat, Catherine De Barnes will be affected. Greenalls had some interesting guest beers in their pubs. S&N however, will probably replace them with John Smiths and Theakstons beers.

Punch latest

Pubco Punch only has to offload 30 pubs following its purchase of the Allied estate.

Drinking down under

I've just come back from a holiday in Australia which is a fabulous place for a tourist, but a bit of a struggle for a beer hunter. I started off in Melbourne, where there was nothing of note, Carlton and United Breweries dominating the scene. The best on offer was Coopers Sparkling Ale or better still Coopers Dark. An Adelaide bottle-conditioned beer, it can also be found on draught in some places. However, it soon became obvious that all beers are served ice-cold, they need to be warmed up a bit before any taste and flavour can be appreciated. If you take a trip to a goldmine in Bendigo, you have a chance of an evening in the Rifle Brigade Brewery Hotel. They brew a range of beers, of which three are normally on. Two were lagers, the other was called Old Fashioned Bitter. They definitely had that home brew taste all kit brewers will be familiar with.

Next stop was Brisbane, home of Castlemaine XXXX Brewery [the lager wasn't any better over there]. Ex-pats there seem to have given up on Aussie beer some time ago, they spend all their time in Irish bars drinking Guinness and Kilkenny. However, I did find a new microbrewery called the Aurora Pub and Brewery which had a couple of really nice English style ales. Things were starting to look up. Further up the coast I was surprised to find reasonable Firkin Ale in the Fox and Firkin at Cairns. The bar staff couldn't tell me where it was brewed, my only clue was the Guinness logo in evidence on much of the pub merchandise.

My final port of call was Sydney. Three pubs near the Harbour Bridge are well worth a visit. The Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel claims to be the city's oldest pub. It still brews. I sampled Victory Bitter, Trafalgar Bitter and Quayle Ale [a wheat beer]. At the Hero of Waterloo, UK beers are available on tap [Bass, Boddingtons and Newcastle Brown]. However, I preferred Tooheys Old, a dark ale from a large Sydney brewery. Nearby, the Australian Hotel also brews their own beer. I had Sharer Lager and Burraborang Bock, both in good condition.

Tips for drinkers? Firstly, with bottle-conditioned beers such as Coopers, they automatically shake/roll the bottle before pouring to mix up the yeast, you may want to prevent this. In one restaurant I had let a bottle settle on the table and poured it myself. I only just stopped a passing waitress from pouring the sediment into my glass. She was most puzzled, and went away wondering what was wrong with the beer left in the bottle. Secondly most places refer to pints and halves as pints and pots, except in Sydney. They call a pint jug a pot [much as we do], a half is called a middy instead. Finally, many restaurants are unlicensed, but are labelled BYO [bring your own], a tactic familiar to Balti-goers, so it is worth finding decent off-licenses [called bottle shops]

Steve Wood

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solihull

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!]

Monday 13th December - Christmas Social

A pub crawl of central Birmingham. Factotum and Firkin, Bennetts Hill 7pm; the new Wetherspoons, Bennetts Hill [if open] 7.45; Bennetts, Bennetts Hill 8.30; Old Joint Stock, Temple Row West 9pm; Hogshead, Newhall Street 9.30. If the new Wetherspoons is not open all times will move forward.

Friday 14th January - Ten Pin Bowling Evening

Meet at the Lamp Tavern, Barford Street, Birmingham at 8pm

Annual Weekend Away

Over the weekend of Feb 19th-20th, 2000 the branch will descend on Keswick. Brewery visits arranged to Jennings, Yates and Hesket Newmarket. Solihull CAMRA members have priority booking so book early with Keven... cost £35.00 inclusive of minibus to breweries and B&B. Friday evening B&B available

[Make your own way to Keswick arriving by 10.30am]

Beer & Baltis

Monday 27th December

Harvester, Tanhouse Farm Road, Olton

Friday 28th January

At the Burton Beer Festival, phone Keven for details

Friday 25th February

Anchor, Digbeth, Birmingham [Anchor Beer Festival]

Friday 31st March

Red Lion, Shirley

Branch Meetings

Monday 10th January

Golden Lion, Solihull

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

Jamie Crompton is the Branch Secretary on 0121 704 4987

The 12th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on March 13th 2000.

The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be

Saturday 19th February 2000

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