



Solihull drinker



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOLIHULL BRANCH OF CAMRA,
THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

Issue No: 13

Summer, 2000

Whitbread sells out



...Bass to follow?



Bass

Founded in the 1750's one of Britain's oldest breweries, Whitbread has sold its breweries to Interbrew, the Belgian drinks group, owners of the Stella Artois brand.

Boddington's in Manchester, Magor and Salmsbury breweries have been given assurances by the new owners that there will be no significant job losses, but for the real ale drinker, there is much to worry about. Whitbread is the third largest brewer in the UK and its exit from brewing will serve to reinforce the lager stranglehold which foreign breweries are determined to force upon British drinkers. Whitbread is left with 3000 pubs. Strategic Planning Director David Richardson has said that he "personally would not expect us [Whitbread] to grow significantly in pubs" Whitbread's beer brands have decreased significantly in recent years leaving Boddingtons Bitter, Flowers Original, Whitbread Trophy and Whitbread Best Bitter. Flowers IPA has recently been demoted to nitro keg in most pubs.

Meanwhile Bass has confirmed it is in talks to sell its breweries, probably to either Heinekin or Carlsberg-Tetley.

So, two breweries with over 500 years of brewing are turning their backs on the rich heritage that is British brewing... these are indeed sad times for both the industry and the real ale drinker

In this issue.....

Solihull CAMRA in Cumbria.... May's Mild Month promotion..... A look at the history of the Heron's Nest, Heronfield....plus news of local beer festivals and beers

editor's round:

The news that both Whitbread and Bass are to exit brewing shortly is a blow to all real ale drinkers. Many may say, "who cares" when we survey the way Whitbread has decimated the industry with brewery takeovers and closures during the last 30 years. Both Bass and Whitbread, likewise, have left many drinkers lamenting the loss of their local distinctive ales, being served up instead with national brands, which when first produced were good beers, but are now shadows of their former selves. The true tragedy here is that a collective span of 500 years traditional brewing is thrown out of the window in the name of profit. When breweries are taken out of the hands of brewers they just become "production facilities" run by City whiz kids and accountants. You can say this today for almost any British industry...look at Rover. As long as our industries are run for short term profiteering we shall see further brewery closures. I say to our "City" gents and their reluctance to invest long term, "It's another fine mess you've got us into!" to quote the famous duo Laurel and Hardy. Alas, though, this is no comedy.

And yet more bad news this time on the mild front. The Railway at Dorridge has since time immemorial served mild real ale. It was a pleasure to drink a full flavoured M&B Mild there some years ago and many lamented it's loss, but soon came round to its replacement Highgate Dark.

But now...nitro keg Highgate has replaced the real thing. Mild in Solihull is virtually extinct, being served in only a handful of pubs. The shame of it is that most people associate it with a cloth cap image, that's why Banks's Mild became Banks's Original, when in fact, it is a beer style which is quite unique and distinctive. Ansells Mild when at its best has a superb "nutty" taste but is virtually impossible to find. Is the death of mild just round the corner?

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 Hobbs 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 Steve Dyson, Steve Wood and thanks also to Allan and Brenda Duffy for the pics
Solihull CAMRA 2000 ©

Spotlight Inn...

The Heron's Nest, Heronfield

When the Bridgewater Hotel just outside Knowle was reopened as a pub by Bass, they appealed for suggestions as to what to call it. Eventually it was named The Heron's Nest in deference to some local residents. Whilst I would have preferred it to have reverted to its original name, I have found that it has accumulated a number of different names in its 200 year history.

The completion of the Grand Union Canal near Knowle, in 1799 signified the opening of a number of waterside inns to serve the passing boats. One of the first to open was on the site of the Heron's Nest, where the Warwick Road crosses the Grand Union, no doubt enjoying a healthy trade from both road and canal traffic. Earliest records show that the pub was in existence in 1816 and was called the Blue Boar. By 1841 the inn had become the Kings Arms, a name it retained until the late 1930's. Keen eyed observers will have noted that an inscription still exists on the bridge, referring to it as the Kings Arms Bridge. However at the turn of the century the pub was affectionately known to locals as the Cat in the Window due to the landlord's cat who could be found sitting in the pub's window watching the world go by. In 1959, the pub was renamed the Cat in the Window in honour of this former resident and the landlord at this time placed a succession of furry toys in the window in memory of the original cat. However, this practice was halted by over zealous souvenir hunters!

The pub also claims to have a resident ghost. During the building of the canal in the late eighteenth century it is rumoured that a worker hung himself in one of the outhouses, a building in which his spirit has remained ever since. Perhaps in a future incarnation the pub will change it's name to the Cat and Gibbet!

And so to the present. Following a spell as the Bridgewater Hotel, the pub underwent a major refurbishment in 1998 to become one of Bass's Vintage Inns. Very much food orientated, it has a comfortable, traditional interior with, on a recent visit handpumped Brew XI and Draught Bass



Steve Wood

in brief...

Following the recent beer festival at the Hogshead, Solihull it seems that the 10p discount offered to CAMRA members has been withdrawn... any other members found this to be the case.? Contact the editor, and he'll follow it up

More brewery closures

Ushers Brewery's is to close. However, the beers will be brewed under contract by Thomas Hardy in Dorchester and Burtonwood. Hall and Woodhouse who recently bought King and Barnes have announced that they will close the Horsham brewery



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Two local pubs worth a look...

Fleur De Lys

New tenants have recently moved into the Fleur De Lys at Lowsonford. Lynette Burton, the landlady and her husband Chris have been in the trade for some time. The pub, home of the original Fleur De Lys pies is alongside the Stratford Canal and is very popular in the summer months. An extensive menu is served, whilst a recent visit saw beers available including Fuller's London Pride, Flower's Original, Morland Speckled Hen and a guest beer, Wychwood Shires XXX. For those who can't get through the whole range in a night 2 pint carry home containers are available.

The Fieldhouse

Not far from Solihull town this pub has undergone a transformation during the last 18 months. Publican Gregory Stacey has worked hard to change the image of the pub aiming for a more adult clientele, and is female friendly. It is now one of Bass's Ember Inns, serving food, but this is secondary to drinking. Beers on offer are hand pulled Draught Bass, Brew X1 and the guest Fullers London Pride. Two reports received by the editor have noted that the beer is a little over cool, a worrying trend showing up in many Solihull pubs. However, it is fair to say that this pub has improved outside of all recognition from its sorry state in the mid 1990's

in brief....

Yates's completes its image change

Following the withdrawal of its real ales Yates's has had a quick two week refurb and has changed its name from Yates's Wine Lodge to just Yates's. Of no interest now to the real ale drinker, this is a real ale loss and a denial of Yates's long history as a wine drinking bar.

Durham Ox under new ownership

This ex Marston's pub at Shrewley is now owned by Greene King and offers IPA, Abbott and XX Mild all on hand pump

CAMRA CAMPAIGNING ISSUES

The year 2000 sees CAMRA prioritising three key issues.

Liquor Licensing:

Plans are afoot to enable 24 hour opening in certain areas; moving responsibility for licensing from magistrates to local authorities and stricter laws on underage drinking. CAMRA main priority here is to secure a more permissive approach to opening hours. A cautious welcome to changing the licensing responsibility is in order as magistrates have in the past made the issuing of Children's Certificates to some pubs very difficult. Local authorities may be more enlightened

OFT review of the beer orders:

This is currently underway by the OFT, but its terms of reference do not include pub chains. CAMRA would like to see all pub chains subject to the guest beer ruling applicable to the national and regional brewery tenancies. CAMRA will try to highlight this in its submission

Full Pints:

Following last year's submission to the DTI by CAMRA, which was warmly received, this issue will be on our agenda during 2000

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It's a Mild, Mild, Mild, Mild World

Each year CAMRA designates May as "Mild Month", where this particularly British beer is given maximum publicity to

make sure it isn't forgotten amongst the many bitters and lagers on offer. On the first Saturday of May, branches up and down the country held events designed to highlight the Mild available in their area. Solihull was no exception, we decided to feature Highgate Dark, a quality ale brewed locally in Walsall, and available to all those pubs in the area which look no further than Brew X1 and Bass. We took the train to Lapworth, where Highgate Dark is normally on offer alongside a guest beer, plus the aforementioned Brew X1 and Bass. Unfortunately for us, havoc had been created by the sudden appearance of the sun in British Summertime! Being such a nice day, the Navigation had been overwhelmed by people out to drink and eat in pleasant surroundings. The Mild barrel was empty before all our party had been served, and as we were on a fairly tight schedule we couldn't wait for the stressed out bar staff to connect the new barrel. The moral of this tale is - the Navigation isn't for rushing in and out of, it's a pub to savour.

On to Dorridge, and the Railway Inn, where disaster struck. The hand-pulled Highgate Dark had been recently replaced by its evil counterpart, Highgate Dark - the Smooth Chill version [i.e. the dreaded nitro-keg]. Despite the national CAMRA press-releases assuring us of an upturn in the sales of mild, it seems that Dorridge drinkers don't drink as much as they used to. Once again we were forced to sample guest beers instead, in this case a choice of a very drinkable Enville Ale and Belhaven IPA. Perhaps the guest beers are attracting the attentions of the former mild drinkers. We can only hope they have attracted an equal number of lager drinkers.

So, some of us celebrated Mild day without sampling any mild at all. However, all is not doom and gloom. Cask mild is still regularly available in pubs in Olton [eg. the Lyndon], Solihull [eg. The Saddlers], Shirley [eg. The Red Lion] and Knowle [eg. The Vaults].

Mild - the beer you can drink between beers, without spoiling your morning after [excluding Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild].

Wolverhampton and Dudley Brewery closures!?

Wolves are reviewing their brewing operations which will probably result in them closing down at least one of their breweries. Banks's in Wolverhampton, Cameron's in Hartlepool, Marston's in Burton, or the Mansfield Brewery are their brewery portfolio. Cameron's or Mansfield seem the most likely. They surely can not even consider closing Marston's, where Pedigree is brewed using the last operational Burton Union system, which was abandoned by Bass some years ago, some say, to its detriment. When Wolves bought Mansfield last year they assured workers that it would stay open for at least two years. So Cameron's may well be for the chop. One bit of good news is that Wolves have delayed the withdrawal of Marston' Bitter following complaints from its drinkers.

in brief....

Beers around here

Guest ales abound in the Solihull area. Seen recently:

Slaters Bitter; Enville Ale, Belhaven IPA, Church End Bounty, Hampshire Pendragon, Church End Cutter Ale, Woods Wonderful, Thwaites Chairman's Ale, Timothy Taylor Best, Hampshire Wild Thing, Elgoods Wisbech, Oakhill Mendip 2K, York Cream f the Crop, Titanic Butler's Revenge, Stonehenge Heal Stone... to name but a few

Red House, Solihull

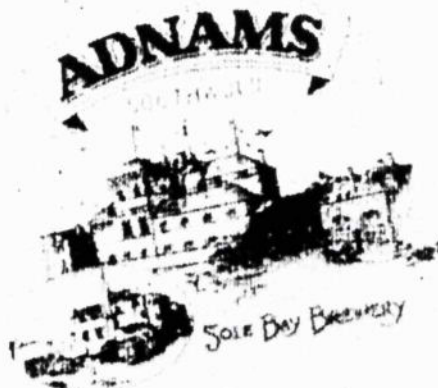
Rumours about that the Red House is up for sale by Bass, no firmed up details... watch this space

Woodman's Rest changes

There has been much negative press in the local papers recently about the impending refurbishment of the pub. However, it seems that on reopening it will sport three handpumps; Brew, Bass and a guest

Fat God Beer Festival

Over 40 plus beers will be available over the week 23rd June to 2nd July. Seasonal and special brews available. On at the Queens Head, Iron Cross, home of Fat God Brewery the other side of Redditch



**Year 2000 Branch
Weekend Away...
Adnams at Southwold,
October 27th - 29th
2000**

Definitely the top social of the calendar for Solihull CAMRA is our annual shindig weekend away. This year our destination is Adnams country in Suffolk.

Travelling down on Friday night to our B&B will prepare ourselves for a busy Saturday. We begin the day with a tour at of Adnams Southwold Brewery, followed by the usual tasting session. Then off to an Adnams pub for lunch. Then boarding our minibus we go to Laxfield and the Kings Head, a superb unspoilt pub serving direct from cask. Our next port of call will be Bungay for a tour of the St. Peter's Brewery with tasters of course, and then whilst in the area we shall be touring the Green Dragon Brewery. *[Kev also mentioned the possibility of finishing up in Lowestoft for last orders. Is there no end to this man's determination to drink Suffolk dry! Ed.]* The cost of this will be £70 per person, including B&B, minibus and brewery visits. All you need to do is get yourselves to the B&B

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	024 7641 7615
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	024 7631 1835
Redditch and Bromsgrove	Paul Long	07973 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	01952 728738
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.

CUMBRIA SUCCUMBS TO SOLIHULL CAMRA

Cumbria... famous for its lakes, mountains, dramatic weather, wildlife and outdoor pursuits. 18 of us were proud to join in this tradition albeit that ours were indoor pursuits. Friday night saw us in Bowness-on-Windemere, where true to Lake District folklore it chucked it down. However, we busied ourselves by visiting two Jennings pubs and the superb Hole in T' Wall, a 16th century pub made famous by an enterprising blacksmith. In the 1700's he persuaded the landlord to knock a hole through the wall between his blacksmiths shop and the pub in order to facilitate increased beer sales [and presumably to prevent his beer from being watered down by the weather]. Onward to the Watermill at Ings, a tremendous pub which recently came third in CAMRA's National Pub of the Year Award. It is a superb genuine olde world pub built on a river and sporting 15 beers, most brewed locally. On arriving there seemed that most of the West Midland population was in situ, including Walsall CAMRA and a group of Black Country Thora Hird look-alikes intent on drinking the pub dry - "y'am' all roit" apparently. Black Sheep, Theakston's, Durham, Yates's, and Coniston's previous Champion Beer of Britain, Bluebird Bitter to name but a few were imbibed. Some of the party needed food and luckily there was a raisin fruit cake of a beer to devour - coal in a glass Dent T' Owd Tup at 6%... it helped us sleep.

After a hearty Cumbrian breakfast and with glorious sunshine we set off for Keswick. After checking into the B&B we boarded the minibus and headed to Cockermouth and Jennings Brewery. Founded in 1828. It is impressive dominating the town, and is the biggest single employer after Sellafield [I know which one I'd choose!] Our guide Phil gave us an excellent tour, informing us of all the quirks which made Jennings beers unique giving all sorts of weird explanations, teabags and all! Off to the tasting room for an hour, downing Cumberland Ale, Snecklifter and the gorgeous Millennium Mash, a creamy, hoppy 5% which belied its strength. Phil then serenaded us with the Jennings



Steve Wood on the pull at Jennings Brewery

Brewery song which hastened us in the direction of the brewery shop for souvenirs, [no one wanted a repeat of the CAMRA karaoke at the Keighley weekend two years ago]. Then into the sobering sunshine and across to the Bitter End brew-pub round the corner for a spot of lunch. This cosy innovative pub hosts the smallest brewery in Cumbria - its fermenters look more like cotton reels in comparison to Jennings. We supped home brew stuff and a few others including one from Isle of Skye. Sitting at the base of the lakes and mountains Cockermouth is blessed with fantastic scenery and quaint little shops. However, for the more patriotic of us it was off to the Jennings tap to watch the England rugby on the box. Then, back on't bus and over the hills to Yates's brewery at Westnewton near the Solway Firth coast.

Yates's is on a remote farm in a small Cumbrian village and the scene was truly picturesque. The Yates's Bitter went down very well, Graham and Caroline looked after us splendidly. Graham told us all about the business and how he had changed the style of the beer to suite the modern palate during the 2 years that he had been there. We supped in the sun - life was pretty good.

Our final port of call was a hillside brewpub, the Old Crown at Hesket Newmarket, a real rural community pub. When the independently run pub was put up for sale some 2 years ago, the villagers were so upset that they bought it themselves! 6 beers were on offer all named after the local fells and they were very good. A brief brewery tour was undertaken including the usual sampling then back to the bar and the beer whilst trying to remember how to play pool.

The final hurdle - a Keswick pub crawl. However, most of us had enjoyed the day a bit too much to attempt this. In fact it degenerated into being propped up in the Kitchen Cellar Bar, the only Yates's outlet in the town.

Another good breakfast next morning and we were all off our separate ways via various chemists. The end of another excellent Solihull CAMRA weekend away!

Keven Parker

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Listed in CAMRA Good Beer Guide 1998, 1999 and 2000



Solihull times

Non-members and guests are welcome to attend our branch meetings and social events. Branch members are welcome to attend Committee meetings but will be unable to participate unless invited to do so.

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!]

Social at the Waggon and Horses, Halesowen on Saturday 10th June

Our annual outing to the Waggon... 10 beers to sup, always a good night. Meet at the Briar Rose, Birmingham at 6.30pm

Bishops Castle Beer Festival Saturday 8th July

A guaranteed excellent time in this town with two breweries including tours of Corvedale and Munslow Breweries. Coach fare £15 to Keven asap... places will go fast!!

Shropshire Pubs by Train, Saturday 22nd July

Heading for Oakengates on the 5.22pm train from Birmingham New Street. More details? Phone Keven

Solihull CAMRA Annual Weekend Away 27th - 29th October

Now an established institution... miss it if you dare. A weekend in Adnams country ... See inside for more details. Places are both limited and popular so sort yourself out and contact Kevin asap

Beer & Baltis

Friday 30/6/00
Friday 28/7/00

Old Fox, Hurst Street, Birmingham
Old Joint Stock, Temple Row West, Birmingham

Branch Meetings

Monday 10/7/00
Monday 14/8/00
Monday 11/9/00

Three Tuns, Henley
Winged Spur, Ullenhall
Wilson's Arms, Knowle

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 14th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on 11th September, 2000.

The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be

Saturday 26th August 2000

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