



Solihull drinker

free

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

Issue No: 14

Autumn, 2000

Bulls Head, Barston voted Solihull CAMRA Pub Of the Year 2000

Following its success in 1998, the Bulls Head, Barston has again been voted Pub of the Year by the branch.

As anyone who goes to the Bull knows, Martin and Joy Bradley run a friendly traditional pub offering a choice of four real ales, Draught Bass, M&B Brew XI, Fullers London Pride and a guest beer from the Punch Tavern listing. Another plus is that this can be enjoyed in a pleasant atmosphere free from piped music

or juke boxes. Martin is particularly proud of the fact that his regulars drink more real ale than lager [almost unheard of in the Solihull area] and that the high volume turnover ensures the quality remains excellent as it was on the evening of the presentation. The Bull is also a consistent entry in the GBG. The branch congratulates Martin and Joy on both their dedication and achievement



Branch chair Brenda Duffy presents Martin Bradley with the Pub of the Year award

In this issue...

Three new Thwaites pubs in Solihull... Blue Bell, Henley re opens... Boozing in the East Midlands... the demise of real Worthington Bitter in Solihull... Independents Day pub crawl of Solihull town centre... plus Spotlight Inn, the White Lion, Hampton in Arden

editor's round...

This issue contains quite a few references to what used to be known as Bass Worthington, famed for its bottle conditioned White Shield. This brings to mind the state of the bottle conditioned beer market. There has been a real upsurge in bottled beers available from supermarkets in recent years. This has rubbed off on the bottle conditioned market, seeing the introduction by small breweries of real ale in a bottle. Ten years ago all that was available was White Shield, Thomas Hardy and Courage Imperial Stout. Imperial Stout has gone, White Shield is being moved from pillar to post and Thomas Hardy is on the verge of, if not extinct [again as elsewhere in the quality beer market, its down to the micro's to deliver]. So, if you're perusing the supermarket shelves try the bottle conditioned beers if they are available, which brings us back to White Shield. Many years ago the branch had an invite to tour the Cape Hill Brewery in Smethwick. When we got to the tasting room there was no real ale other than White Shield. The tour guide and bar staff could not grasp why we would only drink the White Shield and not the keg bitter. Furthermore, there was no mild available... that just about summed up Bass in the late 80's, they've continued to go downhill as far as quality is concerned ever since.

As I read the beer festivals section in "What's Brewing" the CAMRA national newspaper I see festivals advertised for Birmingham, Hanbury, Burton and Worcester all not too far from Solihull, but nothing for Solihull. We've had three festivals in Solihull, all of which were profitable for the branch and most enjoyable for everyone who both worked and drank there. The problem is finding a venue at reasonable cost. If anyone reading this knows of a suitable venue, available from Tuesday to Sunday then please let the editor know.

Wolverhampton and Dudley are in trouble. Having bought Marston's and Mansfield they suffer from over capacity. The shareholders are jittery over the expense of keeping the three breweries open and seem keen to negotiate with Bott and Co. Wolves boss David Thompson doesn't want to sell... CAMRA should support him, otherwise I see Wolves being asset stripped.

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.

Contributors to this issue were Dave Hobbis, Steve Wood, Keven Parker and the pics provided by Allan and Brenda Duffy

Solihull CAMRA 2000 ©

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Sun 10.00-3.00, 7.00-9.30**



Independents day... worth the [Th]wait?

July is nominated by CAMRA as Independents Month, when we highlight independent breweries and their beers. The Solihull area is not well blessed with choice. Of the 80+ pubs we monitor, only a handful are owned by independent breweries, even less are true freehouses. This year we focused on beer choice in Solihull town centre. Among the Bass, Brew X1 and Tetley's you can find beers from smaller regional breweries if you look hard enough. We started at the Coach House, owned by Wolverhampton and Dudley. On offer was their standard selection of Banks's Bitter and Marston's Pedigree, representing two of the breweries that the company now owns. Don't, however, confuse this pub with the typecast image of a back-street Black Country boozier populated by elderly locals. The Coach House attracts a young and trendy Solihull Saturday night crowd where a flat cap is a fashion statement, not to keep your head warm. The real ale on offer appeared to take second place to the music, lager and cider. Undaunted, we moved on to the local Hogshead.

Part of a national chain, at least they are supporters of independent breweries. However, on this particular night the choice wasn't as inspiring as it has been in the past. Marston's Bitter, Wadworth 6X and Brakspears Bitter were the Independents on offer. The Hogshead seems to attract a more discerning and dare I say it, slightly more elderly crowd, but was no less quiet for all that.

By now the eardrums were in need of a break, so we decided to venture outside the town centre to the Red House on Hermitage Road. This has recently been acquired by Thwaites, the regional independent brewer from Blackburn. A welcome addition to beer choice in our area, this pub now offers Thwaites Mild and Thwaites Bitter. The M&B doesn't appear to be missed, the pub is as popular as ever.

So a good night for sampling from some of the larger Independent breweries, though it is sad that no one is brave enough to support some of the more local micro-breweries such as Church End, at Shustoke, Beowulf from Yardley or the Coach and Horse's Weatheroak Brewery

Steve Wood

BERNIES



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Water, water, everywhere and all of it to drink

Rutland was the venue of our social. After a breakfast stop we arrived at the Blencowe Brewery at the Exeter Arms, Barrowden. I have never been in a more spotlessly clean brewery and we could not fault Peter Blencowe's professionalism. The beers were on the "boys" theme [an old English beer style]. His stock beer is Danny Boys Bitter, a superb golden quaffing beer. We then moved onto the Stout, a complex roasted chocolate-y drink that belied its strength. Peter does not sell to other pubs but has won several awards at the Peterborough Beer Festival. The Exeter Arms is a classic 17th century pub with a duck pond.

Our next stop was to Oakham Brewery in Peterborough famed for its Jeffrey Hudson Bitter which has won so many awards that the brewery had to move from Oakham to its present site in what is the largest brewpub in Europe. The brewery is behind huge glass windows so you can see the whole brewing process whilst you drink. After a tour of the brewery we tasted their new 6% strong ale, The Four Horsemen. We were joined by a party from Peterborough CAMRA for a chat and a pint. Then off for a Peterborough pub crawl.

Bogart's is a basic boozier with eight beers from small breweries at good prices. On to Charters Real Ale Bar, actually a boat moored on the River Nene and owned by Oakham Brewery. The sloping floor levels out after a few beers but as far as real ale pubs go Charters is unique. Our final stop in Peterborough was the Palmeston Arms. An unassuming looking pub, it did not prepare us for the inside. Hundreds of beer jugs hung from the ceiling, brewing memorabilia dripped from the walls and on tap were ten ales, including my favourite Hop Back Summer Lightning

Back on't bus and off to the Grainstore Brewery in Oakham. Set up by a Scot, Tom Davis some years ago, he sells his beer in Leicestershire and elsewhere on the guest beer circuit. Our tasters were served from large beer jugs that helped wash down the nibbles provided. We sampled Cooking Beer, a smooth coloured malty brew, Triple B the mid-range fruity ale and Ten Fifty strong ale, a tawny hoppy beer and my favourite.

I am convinced that all brewers have a screw loose. You have to be odd to start making beer at 4am and at our next stop we met Barry at the Parish Brewery in Somerby, who was further proof. Parish Brewery is famous for its Baz's Bonce Blower, a deadly 11% concoction of all things treacly [amazing that the locals drink pints of the stuff]. Barry showed us round the brewery at the back of the Old Brewery Inn and described how he captured the "Worlds Strongest Beer" title. "Baz's Super Brew" did not go quite according to plan. After boiling the brew away for ten hours the yeast could not cope and gave out at 15%. Using Champagne yeast might not be very traditional but it did the trick and 23% was the final tally! Alas there was none to try but it tasted awful apparently. We did, however, have time to sup a pint of Parish Bitter though, a good light quaffing beer before heading off once more for our final port of call.

You don't expect to find a pub in the middle of a working farm but that's exactly what we found at Farmworld, Oadby near Leicester. During the day the pub is frequented by chickens, ducks, pigs and children on school trips. At night the pub is only allowed to open until 9pm as the farm owners were worried about the animals sleep being disturbed by late night revellers. It is a treasure-trove of a pub and the landlord Barry made us feel most welcome. There were seven real ales to try, mostly from Leicestershire and Lincolnshire, including Hoskin and Oldfied's super HOB Bitter and a special seasonal brew from Bateman's.

We retired to bed looking forward to our next trip.... Of which more anon!



Kevin and Penni comparing Grainstore Brewery beers

Keven Parker

in brief...

Adnams Extra dumped

Adnams Brewery have announced the death of Adnams Extra. This beautiful 4.3% beer, winner of the Champion Beer of Britain at the 1993 GBBF is possibly their best beer. This news is an absolute tragedy. If a quality beer such as Extra can't survive what hope is there for the future of real ale?

Highgate taken over by Aston Manor

Highgate Brewery in Walsall, brewers of Highgate Dark and Saddlers Bitter, have been taken over by local brewers Aston Manor. Aston Manor exited real ale brewing many years ago concentrating on PET's. The July edition of "What's Brewing", CAMRA's national newspaper, insinuates that this takeover may be good news for Highgate... maybe this statement is a little premature.

Solihull Branch donates £168 to CAMRA HQ

The branch recently hosted a quiz night between local CAMRA branches at The Lamp in Digbeth. The proceeds were donated to CAMRA HQ with local breweries donating prizes. Keven Parker organiser, quiz master, devised all the beer related questions and said, "It was a most successful and enjoyable evening, more so as the objective of boosting CAMRA's fighting fund is such a worthy cause".

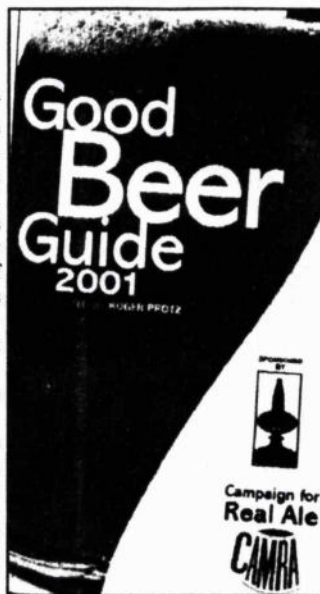
CAMRA launches nationwide campaign

CAMRA will launch its campaign in September entitled "Ask if it's Cask". Watch for TV, radio and press coverage. The campaign is funded from CAMRA's fighting fund.

Good Beer Guide 2001

Year 2001 Good Beer Guide will be available in October from CAMRA HQ and from the local branch. As usual it will highlight 5000 pubs throughout the country noted for the quality of their beer. This really is the beer drinkers bible.

Articles appear about organic beers, bottle-conditioned beers and the closure of rural pubs. As in previous GBG's there will be sections on breweries and a comprehensive beer index. Full retail price is £11.99 but CAMRA members pay £7.50.



Wolverhampton and Dudley the next brewery takeover?

Wolverhampton and Dudley owners of Banks's and Camerons and who recently bought out Marstons and Mansfield are, at present, the subject themselves of a takeover bid.

The situation at the time the Drinker went to press is fluid but it would appear that after an initial rejection of the bid from Bott's and Co., the Wolves board has been asked to reconsider the offer by the their shareholders. Wolves have spent a lot of money recently on acquisitions and in a market where there is over capacity running four breweries is stretching their funds. Everything seems to hang on the pressures subjected on the board by the shareholders. More news anon...

Burton Beer Festival...

To be held at the Town Hall in Burton, Thur-Sat 21-23 September. As usual free admission to CAMRA members... 95 kils of beer to get through. Food and entertainment at all sessions. This is always a festival well worth going to.

Severn Valley Beer Festival...

Over the weekend 13-15 October. Over 90 different ales. Concessionary train fares for card carrying CAMRA members. For further details contact L. Spragg on 01952 400386 or A. Morris on 07776 17579

Great British Beer Festival winners

At the recent Great British Beer Festival in London, brewers, beer writers and journalists voted Moorhouse's Black Cat Mild from Burnley the Best Beer in Britain. This is only the third time that a mild has won this accolade. Second place went to Hogs Back TEA, followed by York Brewery's Yorkshire Terrier Bitter.

Beers were also judged by their styles. Black Cat won the Mild category; Gold from Bulmastiff the Bitter; Hogs Back TAE the Best Bitter. The Strong Bitter category was won by Monkman's Slaughter from Cropton and the Speciality beer winner was Nethergate's Umble Ale.

Also judged at the festival were bottle conditioned beers, which have experienced a renaissance recently. The overall winner was Worthington White Shield one of the classic Burton beers. Second was Pride of Romsey from Hampshire, third Festive from King and Barnes.

Solihull gains three Thwaites pubs

Thwaites the Blackburn brewers have moved into the Midlands. Solihull has seen three pubs come under their wing. The Bulls Head, Earlswood an ex Allied eating house, the Red House in Solihull and the Golden Arrow, Olton. The Golden Arrow is all keg, whilst the Red House has the mild [3.3%] and bitter [3.6%]. The Bull has mild, bitter and Daniel's Hammer [5%]. Chairman's the Best bitter at 4.2% and their seasonal beers have yet to make an appearance. Although none of the pubs are real ale gains for our area they have increased the choice of beers found in Solihull.

in brief....

Birmingham Beer Festival

Not to be missed... At the Aston Students Guild, Gosta Green. Open Thur/Fri/Sat 5.30-11; Fri Sat 12-3. 90 real ales, ciders and perries and bottled beers from Bavaria. Live entertainment and food available. Commemorative glass and programme £2. Free admission to CAMRA members

Peacock, Forhill

Fears about the beer range following the Scot Co takeover seem unfounded. Indeed recent reports claim the range has improved... Why not check it out

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Solihull CAMRA Pub of the Year 1998 and 2000

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Spotlight Inn...

White Lion, Hampton in Arden



Opposite the church the White Lion epitomises the typical village pub

Hampton in Arden, some three miles from Solihull is on the main Solihull to Meriden Road and boasts two pubs. The Engine, an all keg eatery and the much more pleasant and traditional White Lion opposite the village church

Originally a farmhouse this 17th century Grade 2 listed, timber framed building has been licensed since at least 1836. In 1883 licensee John Cox sold it to Davenports of Birmingham, thus it became Hampton's first tied house.

The present licensee John Moffit has run the pub for the last twelve years

and has ensured the Lion retains its status as a local village inn. Offering real ale, a restaurant and accommodation, and, unusual for Solihull, a traditional public bar.

Until recently the pub was owned by Bass, but is now under the wing of Punch Taverns. In the past John Smith's Bitter was available but at present the beers on handpump are Draught Bass and M&B Brew XI. John does not serve any smooth flow either, despite being rigorously encouraged to do so

Inside the pub consists of a restaurant open from 7 to 10 every night which offers a full restaurant menu and bar meals. There's a comfortable, unassuming lounge, and a gem of a public bar which has not changed much since World War Two. On the walls are original M&B and Bass memorabilia, around the walls are wooden settles. The only modern intrusion is a TV hidden in one corner. There's no intrusive music preventing conversation and with both bar and lounge being relatively small, compared to other pubs in the area, serves to reinforce the "local village inn" character of the Lion.

The range of beer may not be all that exciting but the White Lion is the kind of pub that is becoming increasingly scarce in Solihull, where loud music or gaming machines seems the order of the day.

in brief....

On the border of our area, Harry Ramsden's on the Coventry Road has been converted to a Tom Cobleigh eatery called the Shooting Star serving Courage Directors, Old Speckled Hen and Marston's Pedigree.

The Hogshead in Solihull is apparently still offering a 10p discount per pint to card carrying CAMRA members.

GBBF sell out

This years Great British Beer Festival in London was a sell out. 41,121 drinkers consuming 202,000 pints.

Attendance was up compared to last year by 1,049 with more than 600 new members joining CAMRA. The beer and cider just about lasted, running out an hour before closing time on Saturday night.

Blue Bell, Henley in Arden saved!

The Blue Bell at Henley in Arden has recently reopened after being closed for several months.

It looked as though the pub would join the other former fixtures of the Henley Mile, the Golden Cross and the Red Lion, by being converted into flats. Apparently a bid was made by a well known Pizza chain. Fortunately this old coaching inn has resurfaced as a pub. Internally it has changed a great deal. Previously there was a small island bar in between the lounge and small back bar. Several walls have been removed to create one large room with several alcoves. Although it is sad to see the loss of yet another traditional multi-roomed pub, it still retains much of its former character. Beer choice has also improved. Tetley Bitter and Marston's Pedigree are available [as they are throughout the land]. Good news is that a guest beer should normally be on offer, alongside a traditional mild [Ansells]. A recent visit saw a very drinkable Church End Bounty Bitter available. How refreshing to see a local pub support a local Warwickshire



The Blue Bell before its recent refurbishment

In brief...

Bar Nevada in Solihull High Street is up for let...

Hardy and Hanson's have moved into Sutton Coldfield buying the Wylde Inn. The pub should open shortly following refurbishment

The All Nations, Madeley one of the original homebrew pubs is up for sale. Owner and brewer Keith Hardman is to retire after 25 years at the pub... lets hope brewing continues under the new owner

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
Burton on Trent	Dave Pantry	01283 815396
Coventry	Paul Hamblett	024 7641 7675
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	Brett Laniosh	0976 610144
Shakespeare	Vaughan Hully	01789 778726
Solihull & District	Keven Parker	0121 242 5548
Stafford & District	Trevor Edwards	01785 252546
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	Peter Bottomley	01684 573018

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

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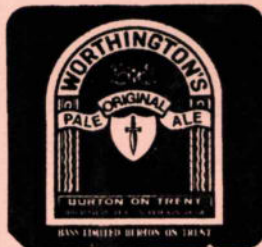


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**BIRMINGHAM CAMRA
PUB OF THE YEAR 1998/9**

Worthington - It's A Keg Thing

The Saddlers Arms in Solihull has recently removed cask Worthington Bitter replacing it with the smooth-poor [sic] version ie. the dreaded Nitrokeg.



*White Shield, will this soon be
the only real ale bearing the
Worthington name?*

This was the last outpost for this particular real ale in our area and a reminder of how the mighty can fall. In the heyday of the great brewing town of Burton on Trent, Worthington and Co. was a major player, having been founded in 1744. However, in 1927, the company and its brewery were acquired by Bass. For marketing purposes they kept both name and the brands, calling themselves Bass Worthington, whilst quietly closing the old Worthington brewery a short time later. This was not to be the last time that Worthington Bitter migrated to a new brewery. For a time, Worthington brands were an important part of the companies portfolio. Older drinkers may remember Worthington E, a famous beer name in the Midlands. However, Bass decided to concentrate their efforts on their flagship beer, Bass Ale, so Worthington E was phased out. In the 1980's, the remaining Worthington brands [except the bottle-conditioned White Shield] were moved again, this time to the Bass owned brewery in Cardiff. The story could well have ended here, but probably as a result of the great nostalgia boom of the 1990's, Worthington

Bitter found itself heavily promoted as a national brand, even lending it's name to sponsored football competitions. This didn't stop the beer from being moved again. In 1999 Bass sold the Cardiff brewery to Brains, so Worthington returned to Burton. It is now brewed in the Bass-owned Ind Coope Brewery, ironically the former home of one of its great competitors, Burton Ale. And so to the present. The keg version of Worthington receives the investment and backing and once again cask Worthington looks destined for oblivion. A sad end to a proud brewing heritage.

Steve Wood



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!]

Peak District mini bus tour 30th September

A day long pub crawl visiting classic Peak District pubs including the Lamb at Holymoorside, the Three Stags' Heads at Wardlow Mires, the Gate Inn at Brassington, the Barley Mow, Kirk Ireton, the Bentley Brook Inn home of Leatherbitches Brewery. Lunch stop at the Sycamore Inn, Parwich and evening in Leek. Cost to you £10...contact Kev asap... yet another very full day!!

Branch Meetings

Monday 9/10/00	Wharf, Hockley Heath
Monday 6/11/00	Short meeting and AGM, see below
Monday 4/12/00	Bulls Head, Earlswood

Socials

Friday 15th September	Birmingham Beer Festival
Friday 17th November	Dorridge crawl
Saturday 9th December	Christmas Chinese meal and beer
Monday 18th December	Christmas crawl in Knowle

Beer & Baltis

Friday 6th October	Anchor, Digbeth, Birmingham [Note change of date]
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Branch AGM

Advance notice for AGM at the Forest Hotel, Dorridge on Monday 6/11/00 combined with a short Branch meeting.... Early start at 8pm

Committee Meetings

Monday 25/9/00	White Lion, Hampton in Arden
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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 15th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on the 4th December, 2000.

The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be Saturday the 18th November 2000. Solihull CAMRA © 2000