



Solihull drinker

free

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

Issue No: 18

Autumn, 2001

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Banks's retain independence - a hollow victory?

As the Drinker went to press it was learnt that Wolverhampton and Dudley [Banks's]

has retained its independence by the narrowest of margins.

A just cause for celebration, tinged with a hint of malice. To pay shareholders back for their support Banks's has promised to make £200 million available to them next year. This may keep the shareholders happy in the short term but takeover bids do not go away. Wolves will need to look to securing its future from further takeover bids, maybe by joining forces with another regional. This must be to the detriment of its drinking customers. And what of their other breweries. It's tragic that Mansfield Brewery whose management had agreed a buy out from Pubmaster if the deal had gone through and thus would have saved will be closed by Wolves with the attendant job losses. Meanwhile it looks like Cameron's, Wolves northern arm will be sold to Castle Eden who will move from Castle Eden if planning permission is granted to develop their old site. That leaves Marstons Brewery in Burton where Pedigree is brewed by the unique Burton union system. Its future seems safe at the moment but a lot depends on how desperate Wolves will get to deliver the £200 million shareholder windfall. This story is not over yet



Editors round:

Both the trade paper The Publican and CAMRA have revealed the findings of their price surveys this month showing that price rises have stayed within the bounds of the inflation rate. That has got to be good news for drinkers. Not so good if you live in London where you can expect to pay the most for your pint, whilst in the north a pint is over 20p cheaper. The trend where 5p seems to go on the pint every year does not seem to have surfaced this year, presumably due to the fierce competition within the brewing industry, or maybe due to the industries jitteriness over possible takeovers.

One thing I feel certain about is that if the industry further consolidates with takeovers in the brewing and retail sides of the industry we will see both price hikes, further brewery closures and a decrease in the number of beers available. What, I here you ask leads the editor to paint such pessimism. Well, the government promised licensing reform then dropped it after being elected... and the strength of pub chains marches on, still with the government not insisting that their landlords be given the right to stock a guest of their choice. Furthermore, when can we expect the promised full measure law to come in? So it leads me to believe the government is not particularly interested in consumer concerns.

Then there's the industry itself. Look at Banks's. Who would have thought ten years ago we would see this stalwart black country brewer in the state we see it today. Banks's was as much a part of the Black Country as Aynok and Ayli, and faggots and peas, but today we see it as a predatory brewer ready to close breweries and probably dispose of some of its pubs and raise prices to keep its shareholders happy. As with many companies their problem was trying to grow too fast too soon, now they've fell flat on their face and no doubts the drinker will be the one to lose out.

So where to from here? Thank god for the small craft brewers who have proved themselves at the GBBF this year in the Champion Beer of the Year awards. We should support them in every way we can, not only by drinking their beers, but also by raising their profile in the ear of government who should encourage through legislation both their diversity and their quality product and not allow the regional or national brewers to rule the roost. Its up to us as CAMRA members as individuals to do this. As an organisation we can bring pressure to bear but MP's will only act if enough individuals make their feelings known.

Where will we be this time next year... Banks's on the run again... brewery closures... less beer choice... micro's and small regionals struggling. Maybe it is time for an honest review of the way our brewing industry and its retail side operate with input from both the industry, interested groups and consumers because what is clear is that most of these groups are not particularly happy with the current state of affairs

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.

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Sun 10.00-3.00, 7.00-9.30**

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	Pete Clarkson	0121 420 1901
Burton on Trent	Dick Allen	01332 865790
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 824760
Lichfield & Mid Staffs	Ray Jennett	01543 255195
Nuneaton & Bedworth	Les Hall	024 7631 1835
Redditch and Bromsgrove	Stuart Dench	01527 501175
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	Andy Cooke	0121 359 1100
Telford & East Shropshire	Peter Arden	01952 244954
Walsall	Rob Bentley	01922 861626
Wolverhampton	Dave Powell	mobile: 07754077399
Worcester	Peter Bottomley	01684 573018

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Spotlight Inn...

Greville Arms, Elmdon Heath

The Greville Arms, Damson Lane is an old pub, having been built in the 1930's to provide sup to the local residents of Elmdon Heath. Its name derives from the Greville family, local Solihull landowners. Some four to five years ago the pub's interior was completely gutted to facilitate an open plan pub with a dining area. There's a large lounge area and tucked away is a lounge bar with darts and the ubiquitous wide screen TV. Many locals will



recall the Greville before the refurb with its rather run down lounge and basic bar. However the bowling green at the back of the pub, retained after the refurb is as popular as ever as is the pleasant outdoor drinking area at the rear of the pub. The beer range, however is not very inspiring being M&B Mild and Draught Bass all served through handpump. Food is served Monday to Saturday 12-2.30, 5.30-8 and Sunday from 12-4

CAMRA Annual Price Survey

CAMRA has just published its annual price survey of pubs comparing beer prices around the country. The results from the survey revealed that:

- ◆ Average prices have risen by 2.2% since last year, making the average pint cost £1.86
- ◆ Average cost of a pint of lager is £2.06, up 2.5% on last year
- ◆ Cheapest beer is in the North-west at £1.65 - 31p cheaper than in London, the most expensive region at £2.06
- ◆ Beer in Yorkshire rose most in price by 8.6%
- ◆ Most expensive pint was found in London at £2.60, the cheapest in Yorkshire at 95p
- ◆ Most expensive pint of lager was found in Scotland at £2.80, whilst the cheapest was in the South-east at £1.25

In Solihull, where prices were compared in free, managed and tenanted pubs. The price of Mild was about £1.60, Bitter at £1.80, Lager £2.00, Cider £2.15 and Guinness at £2.25

Also revealed in the survey was that nearly a third of pubs were breaking the law by not displaying prominently a representative sample of their, 14% displaying no price list at all, with a further 15% placing them in such a position as to make them impossible to see. The editor acknowledges Ted Bruning's article in *What's Brewing*, September 2001 for the major content of this article



Nigel, Elaine and staff at the Boat, Catherine De Barnes are seen here receiving Solihull CAMRA's Pub of the Year Award for 2001, presented by branch chair Dave Hobbis. The Boat won the branch's award for Most Improved Pub for 2000. To celebrate the pub put on four guest ales on the night of the presentation... a good night was had by all!

Nigel and Elaine with Dave Hobbis receive their award



BOAT PICS



Over 20 CAMRA members sank four guest ales at the Boat, taking over nearly half the pub!

Champion Beers of Britain 2001...

Oakham Jeffrey Hudson Bitter [JHB] is the worthy Champion Beer of Britain 2001! The Peterborough brewed beer won the Supreme Champion Gold Award at CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival at Olympia, London in August. This light bitter [abv 3.8%] is a real classic of its style - crisp, clean tasting and a very hoppy, citrus bitter finish. It's available at Bernies Off License on Cranmore Boulevard at least once a month but sadly, is hardly ever available in pubs in the Solihull area. Hopefully that may change following this award.

Another cracking beer, Hop Back Summer Lightning [abv 5%] won the Silver Award, whilst the excellent Brains Dark [Mild abv 3.5%] won the Bronze award. These two beers were also the Gold Medallists in their category.

Other winners were RCH Pitchfork in the Best Bitter class, with their RCH Ale Mary winning the Bottle Conditioned Beers class. Oakham White Dwarf [abv 4.3%], a wheat beer won the "Speciality" class confirming the overall quality and standard of Oakham's beers. Harviestoun from Dollar in Scotland also did well with Schiehallion

[abv 4.8%] gaining the Silver medal in the Speciality class. This beer has won Beer of the Festival in the Solihull Beer Festival some years ago. Its Brooker's Bitter and Twisted [abv 3.8%] won joint Bronze in the Bitter class. Moorhouses Black Cat [abv 3.4%] was Silver in the Mild class. Silver in the Bitter class went to Woodforde's Nelsons Revenge [abv 4.5%]. If your local has guest beers try and talk the gaffer into getting any of these beers in... you won't be disappointed



JHB... Champion Beer of Britain 2001

Red Lion, Knowle reopens...

The Red Lion Knowle has recently reopened following a major refurbishment. An ex Firkin pub it has now been changed into a pub to appeal to the 25+ age group. However, at the time of my visit it was full of youngsters. Admittedly this was in the first week of opening, maybe in time the youngsters will come to the conclusion that the pub is not really aimed at their age group. Now owned by Punch Taverns it is unrecognisable from its former self. As to the beers, there are three beers available, Draught Bass, Fullers London Pride and Greene King IPA, not a very imaginative range when compared with the beers available under the old Firkin badge

Orange Tree closed...

The Orange Tree at Chadwick End is undergoing what is presumably a refurbishment. On passing recently the pub was closed and building work was in progress. Since being sold off by Whitbread some three years ago it has gone through hard times... lets

Beers seen around 'ere...

Guest beers seen around the Solihull area recently include at the Hogshead, Solihull, Hop Back Crop Circle, Lees Bitter, Batemans Godivas Gold, Youngs Waggledance, Youngs Bitter, Old Mill Old Curiosity, Hook Norton Old Hooky Bird in Hand, Everards Beacon, and Everards Tiger. At the Bulls Head, Barston, Badger Best and Black Sheep Bitter, whilst the White Swan, Henley has sported Theakstons Black Bull Bitter and staying in Henley at the Bluebell, Weatheroak Ale and Timothy Taylors Landlord has been sampled. Over to Dorridge to the Railway, Fullers London Pride, Adnams Regatta, Wychwood Hobgoblin and Greene King Abbot have been on offer. At the Wharf, Hockley Heath bibulous fluid has included Otter Bright Black Boy and Everards Tiger. The Boat, Catherine De Barnes has proffered Oakhill Yeoman, Badger Tanglefoot, Arundel Boss Hogg, Shepherd Neame Goldings, Timothy Taylor Best Bitter, Orkney Northern Light, Hop Back Summer Lightning and Wychwood Hobgoblin, Cains Triple Hop and Hardy and Hansons Guinea Gold. Another canalside haunt the Navigation, Lapworth has had on tap Badger Tanglefoot. The White Lion, Hampton in Arden, now under new management continues to sell Black Sheep Bitter. Likewise the Bell Inn at Tanworth in Arden, has served Black Sheep Bitter and Brakspears Bitter. The Woodmans Rest following on from its recent successful festival is currently sporting Adnams Bitter

hope that on reopening it will reassert itself as a pub worth a visit

Nags Head, Henley...

The Nags Head, Henley in Arden has been awarded the prestigious Casque Mark Award for the quality of its beer. However, there is no sign of the award plaque and no change in the beer range, which is rather unimaginative

Changes afoot at the Peacock, Forehill...

The Editor received a call recently from a concerned user of the Peacock. Apparently there are plans being banded around for substantial enlargements to the Peacock including the loss of the public bar with the emphasis on food. This does not seem to be going down well with locals, even the publican's not keen. No plans have been lodged with the planning authority but when or if they are Scottish and Newcastle will have a fight on their hands

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A bit of an argy bargie at the Bell, Tanworth in Arden

A local Solihull member when visiting the Bell recently saw a prominent notice on the bar from the Landlady, apologising to her customers for the fact that she had been instructed by the new owners to close during the afternoons, a policy which, by the tenure of her message, met with her disapproval! It's refreshing to see a publican show tangible concern for her regulars

Good Beer Guide 2002

The Good Beer Guide for 2002 is due out at the start of October. This years guide will be bigger and better than previous guides. There will be longer descriptions of the pubs, but there will be still 5000 entries detailing the best pubs throughout the country and their facilities. Features in the Guide include:

- ◆ The fight for the survival of country pubs
- ◆ The determination of regionals and craft brewers to survive in the increasing international beer market
- ◆ Casque Mark and its drive to improve beer quality nationwide
- ◆ A review of the growing bottle conditioned beer market
- ◆ Susan Norwak on the Campaign for Real Food's drive to improve pub food

The Guide will retail at £12.99. However, if you are a CAMRA member you can obtain it for as little as £7.50. So, if you are not already a CAMRA member now is the time to join. Don't forget that CAMRA membership also gives you discounts on entry to beer festivals and discounts on CAMRA products purchased via CAMRA HQ.

in brief....

Birmingham Beer Festival



The Birmingham Beer fest will take place over the weekend Thursday 13th to Saturday 15th September at the Aston Students Guild, Aston Triangle, Gosta Green. Opening times are: Thur 5.30-11; Fri 12-3, 5.30-11 and Sat noon-11. About 90 real ales will be on offer, with international bottles beers, ciders and perries. Live entertainment on evening sessions and food at all sessions. As usual admission is free to all card carrying CAMRA members. Commemorative glass available

Bellafield, Birmingham reopens.

After a four month closure for roof repairs the Bellafield, Winson Green is reopened. Plans are afoot for a winter beer festival in November... pop in and reacquaint yourself with this classic super pub

in brief....

Barley Mow, Solihull Website...

The Barley Mow in Solihull has its own website at www.the-barleymow.co.uk. At present its quite basic giving no more than opening times, a photo and an e-mail address... why not e-mail them and ask them to get some real ale in other than Tetley!

6th handpump at the Vaults, Knowle...

Probably the largest bank of handpumps in the Solihull area, the Vaults now has Ansell's Bitter available

White Lion, Hampton in Arden changes hands...

John Moffat has left the White Lion. The new owners still have Black Sheep Bitter on handpump. However, on a recent visit the editor had to ask for it as the their was no pumpclip advertising its availability

White Swan, Henley back with real ale

It seems that the three real ales have been restored to this GBG pub. Ansell's Mild, Upping Bitter and Theakstons Black Bull Bitter are on offer

Stoke, Beer Festival

From Wednesday 12th to Saturday 15th September at Staffordshire University, Leek Road [5 mins from station]. Over 170 cask ales, 25 ciders/perries, British and foreign bottle conditioned beers. Wed-Fri 11-3; 6-11. Sat 11-11. Admission is free at all times to card carrying CAMRA members. H&C food and entertainment available. More details from www.stokebeerfestival.co.uk

Solihull CAMRA targets local members with questionnaire

Solihull and District Branch, like many other CAMRA branches are concerned that active members form a very small percentage of the membership attributed to each branch area. So the branch recently sent out a questionnaire to all non-active CAMRA members in the branch area in an attempt to find their views about the local branch and its activities.

The questionnaire sought to obtain details about length of membership, reasons for joining CAMRA and reasons for non-attendance at branch meetings and socials.

The branch was delighted with the response which topped 50% returns particularly because such a high return gave the branch ideas and suggestions to mull over as to how we could increase active membership. Members were keen to visit more local breweries and had a keen interest in a variety of socials. Also highlighted was the need for another Solihull beer festival, which has always been hampered by lack of a suitable venue

In an effort to get as many returns as possible all returned questionnaires were entered in a prize draw with a chance to win free beer from GBG listed Bernies Real Ale Off License.

The lucky winner seen here is Gordon Baker [centre] who received his prize at the branch meeting held at the Fleur De Lys, Lowsonford. Presenting the prize is secretary Richard Lawton [right] and Dave Queenborough from Bernies [left]



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PUB OF THE YEAR 1998/9**

Red Lion, Earlswood

Re-opened in August after a refurbishment, it is now a fully-fledged Vintage Inn. The old bar/function room at the back has been incorporated into the main body of the pub, and is now the main dining area. The beer range is the same (Bass & Tetley Bitter)

Shelly Farm, Monkspath update

Two pubs for the price of one, unfortunately only one half sells Real Ale these days. The Barn is the more impressive of the two buildings, but is now keg only. It is open all day and mainly caters for families & diners. The Farm is only open in the evenings during the week, but does sell Real Ale. Until recently it was Tetley Bitter only, but after trying Morlands Old Speckled Hen for a while they have now moved onto Tetley Dark Mild. This is extremely rare for this area, what a shame it has appeared in Monkspath, not known as a mild drinking area. I hope I am proved wrong, but I feel it wont be long before it is replaced by a more common and hence less interesting beer. By the time of my next visit the Tetley Dark Mild had been removed

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 first 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!]

Socials

The big one is our annual weekend away, now three days away. Dates are Fri 5/10-Sun 7/10. Staying in Rochdale, plans include visits to Saddleworth Brewery for early arrivers on Thursday evening [an extra nights B&B required]. Friday is a train journey from Rochdale to Leeds and back taking in some superb pubs at Hebden Bridge, Todmorden, Halifax, Dewsbury, Huddersfield and the famed Stalybridge station bar. Breweries include Ryburn Brewery and at Marsden the Riverhead Brewery. Saturday will be a brewery tour of Holts in Manchester. The afternoon and evening is free time to visit pubs in north Manchester or head on back to Rochdale. This is guaranteed to be a world beater weekend. Places are limited so if you are a CAMRA member get in quick! Phone Keven...now!!!

Saturday 8th September	A mini bus social/pub survey crawl...phone Kev for details
Saturday 20th October	Local microbrewery tour
Saturday 17th November	A visit to Warwickshire Breweries pub in Atherstone
Saturday 8th December	Christmas meal and beer, Black Eagle, Hockley
Monday 17th December	Christmas pub crawl

Beer & Baltis

Friday 28th September	Anchor, Digbeth, Birmingham
Friday 26th October	Blue Bell, Henley
Friday 23rd November	Old Crown, West Bromwich

Branch Meetings

Monday 1st October	Greville Arms, Elmdon Heath
Monday 5th November	AGM and Branch Meeting, Bulls Head, Barston. <u>Start time 8pm</u>
Monday 3rd December	Harvester, Olton

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

Brenda Duffy is the Branch Secretary on 01564 200 431

The 18th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on 3rd December, 2001

The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be
Saturday 24th November, 2001