



Solihull drinker



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

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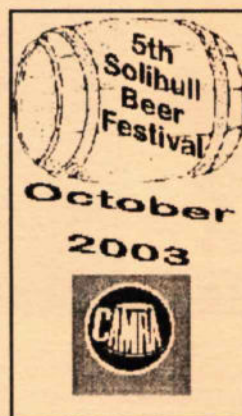
Winter, 2003

5th Solihull Beer Festival hailed as a roaring success...

Over 700 real ale drinkers enjoyed this years Solihull CAMRA Beer Festival held at the British Legion in Union Road Solihull. Between them they drank over 2000 pints, leaving less that 12 gallons left at closing time on Saturday night. Even then, there were still 8 beers on offer, better than any other pub in the centre of Solihull!

Festival Organiser Steve Dyson said, "We got the beer order just right this year, however Bernies Off Licence in Shirley bought us some beer in for the Saturday night session. It was also good to see people of all ages and sexes enjoying the range of beers. I was most surprised at how many women enjoyed the real ale, cider and perry we had on offer".

As usual a Beer of the Festival vote was conducted over the festival. Hambleton Nightmare Porter came first followed by Oakham JHB. Equal third was Batham's Best Bitter, Phoenix White Monk and Red Lion Chardonayle. 24 new members were signed up at the festival and all but 10 of this years festival glasses were sold. "All in all a successful festival" said Steve, "Let's hope for another one next year".

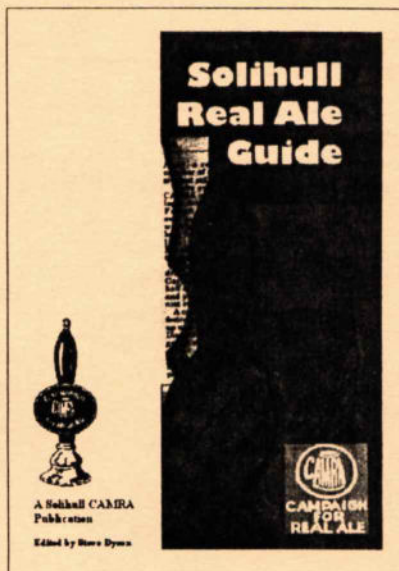


2004 Good Beer Guide now on sale...

The 2004 CAMRA Good Beer Guide is now available. At £12.99 it lists over 4500 of the best pubs in the UK serving real ale. Furthermore, if you are a CAMRA member it is available at Solihull CAMRA meetings at the members price of £9.00. The guide includes information on facilities for families; food; the history of the pub, its architecture and atmosphere; accommodation; county maps to locate the pubs; full contact details for each pub and of course both real ales and cider sold at each pub. Also included are a variety of beer related articles.

If you can't get to a Solihull CAMRA meeting you can buy it at all the major bookstores in Solihull.

New Solihull CAMRA Real Ale Guide selling like hot cakes....



The new guide published by Solihull CAMRA is selling like hot cakes. Bernies in Shirley have all but exhausted their stock of 50. Dave Queenborough said, "Since the beer festival we have had stacks of real ale drinkers coming into the shop and seeing the guide resulted with them flying off the shelves.

Steve Dyson guide editor added, "We only did a small print run of 300 and up to now we have sold nearly 200 copies. Not bad considering the guide only came out at the beginning of October. It shows there's a great interest in real ale".

The guide covers all the pubs in Solihull and district stretching to Claverdon, Henley, Ullenhall and Lapworth. Shirley, Majors Green and Solihull Lodge and over to Barston in the east. Over 80 pubs are in the guide with descriptions of facilities available and of course the beer range available in each pub. Steve Dyson said, "It's a comprehensive guide. All the pubs have been surveyed this year. We even point out pubs with no real ale so you can avoid them!" For those who like to tie a visit to the pub with something else, particularly if you have a family, nearby places of interest are noted and country walks are suggested with a pub or two along the route.

Where to get the guide? Bernies, Shirley; WH Smiths, Solihull; Books etc., Touchwood, Solihull; The Tourist Information Shop, Solihull Central Library; The Vaults, Knowle; The Bulls Head, Barston and The Cock Horse, Rowington and at Solihull CAMRA branch meetings or direct from the Solihull Drinker editor.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO OLTON? ...

A recent walk around Olton proved quite disturbing. First pub I saw was the Highwood, with its proud banner - 'Evening Mail Pub of the Year 2002'. Obviously tasty beer is a low priority in this particular poll as no Real Ale was in evidence. Moving on, I came across the Lyndon. Once famed for its mild (and indeed was local CAMRA Pub of the Year 1989 principally on the quality of the Mild), it now offers Tetley Bitter - take it or leave it. Next stop was the Hobs Meadow. Tetley Bitter again, plus Ansells Mild - hoorah, though this Yorkshire version is a pale shadow of its Aston counterpart. Finally the Olton Tavern, recently refurbished with pine, pastel shades and big cushions to distract people from examining the beer choice too closely (yet more Tetley Bitter). So what do these Olton pubs have in common? All were once part of that glorious Ansells empire of the 70's and 80's, battling with M&B for global Midlands control in that great Cold (Beer) War of the last century. But what has happened since? Beer drinking has moved on, these pubs have been abandoned by the Pub conglomerate that once owned them. All are now forced to eke out a living promoting themselves as community pubs, attempting to appeal to the lowest common denominator (ie families, food and lager). Olton now resembles nearby Sheldon, another Birmingham suburb which has been a Real Ale desert for some considerable time now. The nearby Harvester (Solihull Pub of the Year 1997) has also fallen from grace - recent guest beers being Courage Directors and Morland Old Speckled Hen tell their own story. In CAMRA terms this is becoming a major Brush-Fire. Solihull itself is hardly a mecca for Real Ale drinkers. So what are the once active drinkers of Olton doing about this? Are they holding torch-lit vigils outside the Hobs Meadow, storming the gates of the Olton Tavern, or complaining vociferously to their local CAMRA reps and the local press? Seems not, they are more likely to say - well we are only 6 miles from the Anchor, Digbeth, and only 13 miles from the Griffin, Shustoke - what's the problem? The Campaign for Real Ale should start here. Olton - I Cant Hear You!

Steve Wood

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Just fill in this form and send with a cheque
[payable to CAMRA Ltd.] to:

**The Membership Secretary, CAMRA,
230 Hatfield Road,
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Current rates are: Single £16, Joint £19,
Concessions £8, Joint Concession £12

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.....

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I/We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and
agree to abide by the Memorandum
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I enclose a cheque for £.....

Signature [s]:

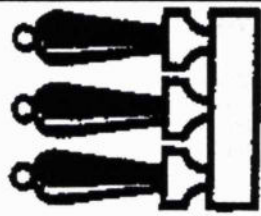
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Solihull Branch sent to Coventry...

An intrepid band set off from Solihull to make a snap judgement about the latest state of Coventry pubs. We congregated at the Nursery Tavern in Spon End, an old favourite which didn't disappoint. A typically interesting range included Brunswick Triple Hop from Derby. Mouth-puckering dryness doesn't do it justice. Just up the road was the Craven Arms, very much a back-street local, with a welcoming (Taylor) Landlord behind the bar. Down the hill to the Malt Shovel, where an old pub serves modern classics such as Church End Gravediggers and Oakham Bishops Farewell - no complaints here. Across the inner ring road next to the Gatehouse Tavern. First disappointment of the evening. A new pub built with history in mind, maybe it needs a few more years to settle down. Nice to see a Church End beer but as an alternative to Bass, there wasn't much competition. Across the road to the Town Wall Tavern, where a choice of 3 bars and several beers awaits. For novelty value we chose the Donkey Box, a small snug with only a door to the street in between the 2 larger bar/lounges. Probably used for off-trade only in the past, we sampled the likes of Adnams in quiet seclusion. Final port of call was the Old Windmill. Not on the original list, a beer festival enticed us in. 14 gravity served beers were tucked away in a cosy back room (I wouldn't recommend a Summer festival in these conditions!). Nice to see and taste a good selection of Frankton Bagby beers from nearby Rugby, the rest were From Lancashire or the South West - not sure what the theme was. On the whole - an interesting crawl, though the phrase 'Coventry - more interesting than Solihull' may take a while to catch on.

Steve Wood



BERRIDGES

REAL ALE

Off Licence

*** AN EVER CHANGING SCENE
OF EXCITING DRAUGHT
BEERS THROUGHOUT THE
YEAR**

*** 200 DIFFERENT BEERS
DURING A YEAR**

*** CAMRA GOOD BEER GUIDE
LISTED
CONTINUOUSLY
SINCE 1983**

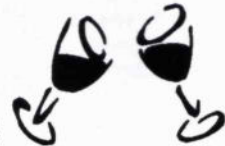


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DISAPOINTMENT**

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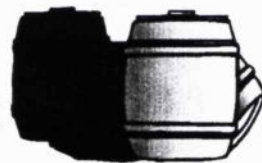
*** EXCITING
RANGE OF
BOTTLED BEERS**



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Branch Awayday Weekend in Norwich Part 1...

For this years Annual Weekend Away the branch headed east to Norwich. Many years ago East Anglia was a beer desert... not so anymore. On the way we visited two GBG pubs... the Rose and Crown, Islip where we tried Nethergate IPA and Shepherd Neame Masterbrew where the quality was a little disappointing. We then moved onto our lunch stop at the the Waggon and Horses, Milton an Elgoods pub where the Black Dog Mild was superb. They also served Elgoods Cambridge Bitter, Pageant, Barleymead and a real cider.

We arrived in Norwich and sorted ourselves out in our accommodation at the Station Hotel, ideally located near both city centre and the station, and then off to the pubs.

The Wig and Pen near the cathedral was our first port of call, a locals pub serving guest beers. We chose from Oldershaw Alma's Brew, Icini Raspberry Wheat, Spectrum Don't Panic, Buffy's Polly's Folly, Woodforde Wherry and Adnams Bitter. A good start to sampling the Norwich pub fare!

We moved onto the Rosary Tavern not far from the station and Chalk Hill Brewery. A friendly pub with a fine selection of beers including Adnams Bitter, Black Sheep Best Bitter, Fullers London Pride, Caledonian Kangabrew,

Titanic Engineerroom, Ridley Withfinder Porter and Hop Back Hop Fest. I tried the Caladonian, very moorish with a flavour of vanilla. Time to move on to Coach and Horses the tap of Chalk Hill Brewery. We were originally to go on a brewery tour here but due to ill health the brewery had to cancel. However, when we arrived at the pub we somehow went on a brewery tour hosted by James "Tiny" Little who was anything but little! The brewery uses Slovenian Goldings hops and yeast from Woodforde. In the pub I tried their Winter Golden a beautiful beer. Our next port of call was Ketts Tavern a free house with an excellent range of real ales served from a bank of handpumps. On offer that night was Clarks Juicy Lucy, Wolf Granny Wouldn't Like It, Leyden Nanny Flyer, Summerskills Cellar Vee, Buffy Bitter, Woodforde Great Eastern, Paradise Promised Land and Castle Rock Elsie No. 47. The pub was really busy and all the beers were in good condition. We could not tarry here so moved on to the Adam and Eve with the reputation as "probably the oldest pub in Norwich". Maybe, but the beer range... Wells Bombardier, Adnams Bitter, Theakstons Old Peculiar and Greene King IPA, not an inspiring range and a bit of a let down as this was my last pub of the night. A successful first day... only 3 more days to go...



Touring Chalk Hill Brewery. Tiny and branch members admire the raw materials used in the beers... pint in hand of course!



Ketts Tavern... The branch were most impressed with the bank of eight handpumps. By the way Bob our organiser was quite taken with the bar staff... I wonder why?

Part 2 Buffys Brewery then off to Great Yarmouth in the next Drinker

Steve Dyson



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Listed in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2004

Solihull CAMRA Pub of the Year 2000 and 2002

HOME COOKED MEALS AVAILABLE
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LOUNGE, IN FRONT OF OUR LOG FIRE, SUPPING OUR GOOD BEER!**

Wolverhampton and Dudley [Banks's] Brewery visit...



The Branch kindly accepted an invitation from Banks's brewery in Wolverhampton to tour the brewery and sample the new beer that they have produced for Midland's drinkers.

As we were in Wolverhampton we took advantage of visiting one of the pubs in the Good Beer Guide near to the brewery, The Combermere Arms in Chapel Ash.

As a CAMRA member of some 30 years I am ashamed to say that this was my first visit to the pub and what a gem I found it to be.

Tucked away in a terrace and easily overlooked The Combermere is all a friendly local should be. Multi roomed and famed for the tree growing in the gents it has a covered patio area and a surprisingly pleasant garden. As to the beers at the time of our visit Hanson's Mild, Hook Norton Old Hooky, Banks's Bitter and Mansfield Cask were on offer, all in good condition.

We did not tarry long here, arriving at Banks's for 7pm, where we were met by Head Brewer Richard Frost who has worked for Banks's for some 25 years.

A quick but interesting tour of the brewery ensued and by 8.15 we were back in the sampling room. Our main reason for being here was to sample the new brew, Marston's Old Empire India Pale Ale, but more of that anon.



Marston's Old Empire pumpclip, the new beer from Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries

I took advantage of trying all the beers on offer, as I expected the beers here to be in top notch condition... and they were.

Mansfield Cask, Banks's Old Original and Bitter, Old Empire and Marston's Pedigree were all lined up on handpump. Which would be my favourite I wondered. Well the Pedigree won. It had been a long time since I had tasted the beautiful sulphur taste that only Burton beers have and this Pedigree was full of it.

So what of the Old Empire India Pale Ale? At 5.7% it is a true pale ale but not as bitter as I expected, but is nevertheless full of flavour. Brewed at Marston's in Burton it is part brewed using the Union system and open fermentation method, then mixed to produce the end product.

I was under the impression from others that the new beer was intended to lure away M&B and Ansells drinkers to Banks's beers but I can't really see what is in the M&B and Ansells range that it would usurp, apart from Burton Ale which is rare to find anyway nowadays.

That apart, we enjoyed the new beer and the sumptuous food provided by Banks's and all in all a good night was had by all.

Steve Dyson

Famous Drinkers of Our Time...

With due respect to characters such as Oliver Reed and George Best, here are some well-known toppers:

Mustafa Pint, Arthur Bitter, Ivor Angover, Ivan Eadache, Evan Betterinastraightglass, Dee Licious-Taste, Haile Drinkable, Ewan Me-Goforapint, Lars Torders, Ann Other-Half, Hans Up-Whoseforanother, Willy Getaroundinthistimeforachange, Isla Getthisone, Paul Thehandpump-Slowly, Juan More-Drink, not forgetting the comedy duo, Ale and Pace.

The list is endless but thankfully our esteemed Editor has decreed that it must come to a

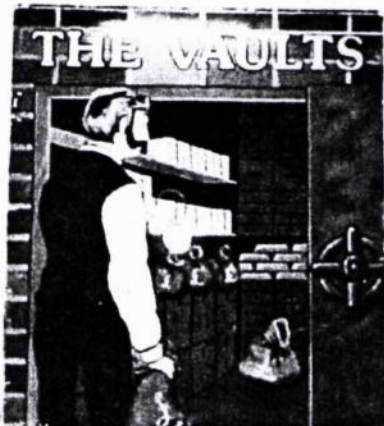
Martin Collinge

Nick and Gwen welcome you to the Vaults, Knowle...

The Real Ale venue in Knowle with:

- ◆ **Six handpumped beers including regulars, Ansell's Mild, Greene King IPA, Burton Ale, Tetley Bitter and two guest beers**
- ◆ **Real cider from Weston's**
- ◆ **Food available lunchtimes Monday - Saturday**
- ◆ **Occasional Beer Festivals**

Solihull CAMRA Pub of the Year 2003



CAMRA Good Beer Guide listed since 1993



*The Vaults, St Johns Close, Knowle.
Tel: 01564 773656*

The Wild, Wild West (Brom)...

A number of 'pardners' recently donned their ten gallon (or should this be ten pints?) hats, saddled their trusty tram and moseyed on down (or across) to West Bromwich as part of Solihull & District CAMRA's Metro Link crawl.

Our intrepid travellers started at The Vine, a pub which specialises in Indian cuisine, which was heaving because of this and also due to the fact that West Brom had played and won, not a rare experience just in case there are any Baggies fans reading this! Only one real ale was on offer, Nellie Dean from The Old Mill Brewery: pleasant enough but nothing out of the ordinary. Then back on the tram and of to The Old Crown. This pub again does Indian food, although it seats fewer people, however the range of ales is bigger (and better?). During our visit one could sup Ma Pardoe's Old Swan (a mild) plus the more well-known Charles Wells' Bombardier and Greene King Abbot. Despite my reputation as the branch 'human dustbin' who can eat for England and Germany (owing to the nationality of my mam) I actual desisted from partaking of the culinary delights*.

The next port of call was a Wetherspoon's, namely the Billiard Hall. The usual Wetherspoon's interior décor, i.e standard wooden, plus the usual mix of house beers and guest beers, the former being Hop Back summer Lightning, Shepherd Neame Spitfire and (again!) Greene King Abbot, with the latter being Badger's Fursty Ferret, Woodforde's Norfolk Nog and Ringwood's Fortyniner. Now as most people will know, Wetherspoon's has the 'get 'em in, sell 'em cheap' strategy, but the prices here were ridiculously cheap, £1.29 a pint! We thought it was a mistake at first, but the manager said that prices in West Brom town centre pubs are very competitive. I actually spoke to him at length and he came across as very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about real ale: he was also very helpful.

Last, but by no means least, we ventured into The Wheatsheaf, a Holden's pub. Being a fan I particularly enjoyed what was on offer, being Mild, Bitter, Special, Golden Glow, plus Midsummer Madness and Jolly Harvester. Very tasty beers!

All four pubs had a very good atmosphere, with Wetherspoon's being the more 'modern' and the other three being more traditional. The quality of the beers in all the pubs was very high, and the range generally good. We'd recommend this trip to anyone!

Martin Collinge

* although I couldn't resist the odd packet, 3 being the odd number to be precise, of scratchings!

CAMRA... you too could join in...

CAMRA. What's it all about? Surely there is plenty of real ale: what is CAMRA needed for any more?

Lots of reasons! Country pubs are closing at a rate of knots, lost for ever.

Favourite brews are axed and well-loved breweries closed. Popular pubs are turned into theme pubs where many people no longer feel welcome. Pubs with a good choice of real ales stop trying and sell only boring nationally-brewed beers, or even worse, just keg beers. What can you and CAMRA do about it? For a statr, you can go to the pub more often.

Yes, there are many alternatives competing for your time and disposable income, but the only one that is in danger of disappearing after serving the people of this happy land after centuries, is the traditional pub.

There is a pub for everyone. Our pubs are a part of our precious heritage. Put simply, you must use them or lose them.

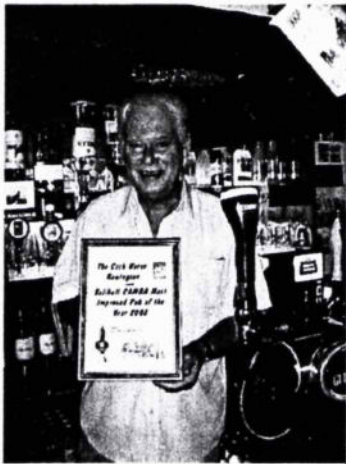
With over 2000 Real Ales to choose from in this blessed island, only the staggeringly unadventurous would stick to the handful of national brands. Take a chance on finding a truly great beer: go for the hand pump.

~ You can join us. The last time I looked, the campaign had over 67,000 members. People of all types and ages, united by a love of quality and choice.

CAMRA is Europe's most successful consumer organisation and it's best social club. Give us a call, or talk to us at one of our Branch meetings, Socials, Beer Festivals. You would be most welcome.

Ian Hunter

Cock Horse, Rowington, CAMRA Solihull Most Improved Pub of the Year 2003.



David, proudly shows off the plaque

At the Branch's recent AGM at the Cock Horse, the branch took the opportunity to present David and Wendy with a plaque congratulating them on being voted Solihull CAMRA's Most Improved Pub of the Year 2003. David in a previous incarnation was a teacher and also ran his own garden centre. Then some two years he and Wendy ago took over the Cock Horse during which time their has been a marked improvement in the pub. 4 real ales are

available Adnams Broadside, Hook Norton Bitter, Flowers Original and Fullers London Pride. There is an intimate restaurant serving a range of home cooked meals lunch and evening. The pub also has a small bar and is well worth seeking out as it remains one of the few unspoilt village locals in the Solihull area... and to put the cherry on the pie the Cock Horse makes its first appearance in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2004.

Pub's Campaigning...

"Greetings to all Solihull CAMRA members and readers of The Drinker magazine I have just been appointed Solihull CAMRA Branch's Pubs Officer, with responsibility for keeping an eye on pubs in the Solihull and district area, supporting the supply of real ales, ciders and perrys at these pubs, campaigning on relevant issues and trying to prevent pub closures. I can't be everywhere so I'd be grateful if YOU could help with research as you travel round the area and drop into your favourite pubs for a night out. If you feel that a pub's offerings have improved, decreased, or are generally worthy of mention for one reason or another (good or bad), or if you know of a pub that has undergone recent improvements, or, sadly, is under threat - please can I ask you to let me know and I will pass the information on and/or take action as necessary. I can be contacted on phone: 0121 603 1621, or via email: Julia.Hammonds@Blueyonder.co.uk I look forward to hearing from you!

Julia Hammonds Pubs Officer"

Cider is the apple of their eyes ...

Cider was appealing, or should that be 'apple-ealing'(?), last Sunday at The Blue Bell Cider House in Warings Green during the Solihull & District CAMRA Branch's social to celebrate National Cider Month. Fans of the drink flocked to partake of traditional 'real' cider, with both medium sweet and dry varieties being available.

Branch Publicity Officer Martin Collinge stressed that CAMRA, The Campaign for Real Ale, supports not just quality real ales but backs producers of genuine cider and perry. "Like beer brewing, cider and perry making goes back hundreds of years in this country, so it's part of our heritage and is a great British tradition", Martin commented. "We encourage more licensees to stock genuine cider. It is a drink produced in many parts of this country, including the Midlands, so we also urge drinkers to seek out and ask for this wonderfully tasty drink".

Branch chairman Ray Cooke praised The Blue Bell for its range of 'real' drinks. "Not only two quality ciders but also two real ales are available", he noted. "The Blue Bell was our local branch's Most Improved Pub of the Year last year, and we would recommend local drinkers to try this hostelry. The food wasn't bad either!" remarked Ray

Martin Collinge.

in brief...

New Committee members Join Solihull CAMRA

3 new members were welcomed onto the Solihull branch Committee following the recent AGM held at the Cock Horse, Rowington. Julia Hammonds takes on the post of Pubs Campaigning Officer. Carl Wright takes on board the Membership Secretary post and our Webmaster Roger Dipple also joins the Committee.

Wetherspoon's Solihull

Due to open in February 2004 next door to the Hogs Head.



Solihull times

Socials

Monday 15th December	Knowle Christmas Pub crawl. Meet at Saddlers Arms, Solihull 8pm. Then to Knowle by bus at 8.35. Wilsons Arms, 8.45pm; Greswolde [if open], 9pm; Red Lion, 9.30pm; Vaults 10pm... or thereabouts!	
Saturday 17th January	Mystery Pub crawl of Birmingham. Meet in Wetherspoons, Paradise Forum [under the Central Library]	7.30-8pm
Saturday 21st February	Red Lion, Shirley. National Pubs Week	8.30pm
Saturday 13/20th March	Oxford Pub Crawl by coach. Details from Bob Jackson	

Pub & Grub

Friday 2nd January	Hogs Head, Station Road, Solihull	8-8.30pm
Friday 30th January	Boat, Catherine De Barnes	7.30-8pm
Friday 27th February	Vaults, Knowle	7.30-8pm
Friday 26th March	Heron's Nest	7.30-8pm

Branch Meetings

Monday 5th January	Sharmans Cross	8.30pm
Monday 2nd February	Bulls Head, Barston	8.30pm
Monday 1st March	Heron's Nest, Heronfield, Knowle	8.30pm

For those meetings/socials as yet unconfirmed or where more details are needed please contact the Social Secretary Bob Jackson

Bob Jackson is the Branch Social Secretary and you can contact him for information about events during the evenings on 0121 705 8743

Steve Wood is the Branch Secretary on 0121 704 5258

Any complaints about short measure? Contact Solihull Trading Standards on 0121 704 6844.

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 the Editor on 0121 603 8994 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.

Solihull CAMRA 2003 ©

The 28th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on March 1st, 2004
The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be
February 21st, 2004

Wendy Owen and David Preston invite you to

The Cock Horse

Country Pub and Restaurant
Old Warwick Road, Rowington,
Warwick, CV35 7AA
Tel: 01926 842 183



4 Cask Conditioned Ales - Fullers London Pride, Adnams Broadside,
Hook Norton Bitter and Flower's Original.

Our Christmas menu will be available from the 1st to the 24th December consisting
of a 3 course Christmas Lunch at £9.95 or a 4 course Christmas Dinner at £19.95.

We shall be open on Christmas Day from 12-2 and on Boxing Day from 12-6 when
we shall be serving drinks only.

Finally, may we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and extend an
invitation to you to join us for meals in the bar or in our small intimate restaurant.
We also hold a Folk Club on the 3rd. Wednesday of the month.

***CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2004 listed**

*** Solihull CAMRA Most Improved Pub of the Year 2003**