



Solihull drinker



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

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Summer, 2004

Solihull District Summer Beer Festival Bonanza

As the Drinker went to press Solihull real ale drinkers were recovering from Wetherspoon's Bank Holiday Beer Festival at the White Swan, Solihull, which saw some 18 different beers on over the extended weekend.



In fact, real ale drinkers can look forward to a summer of beer festivals in the local area. On the 11th July,

The Reservoir, Earlswood will host a festival of real ale with some 15 different beers on sale on the day. Publican Nigel used to run **The Boat, Catherine De Barnes** and since moving to the Reservoir he has been keen to introduce a beer festival to his locals similar to that which had proved popular last year at the Boat. The festival runs from 12-10.30 with a pig roast and live music to accompany the ale.

Two beer festivals occur over the Autumn Bank Holiday. The traditional one at the **Cock Horse, Rowington** when some 25 beers will be available over the period supplemented by music, a bbq and the pub's usual fare. This has become an annual event not to be missed. It also appears that the **Bull's Head, Barston** is planning a

festival over the same weekend but we have no details as yet as Brad is sunning himself in foreign climes at the moment...

Don't forget too the **Great British Beer Festival**, further afield at Olympia, London, in early August, where over 300 beers will form a sparkling week of entertainment with beers from not only the UK but from all over the world. Also to go in the diary of course is the **6th Solihull CAMRA Real Ale Festival at the British Legion, Union Road Solihull** on Friday/Saturday 1st/2nd October.



Spotlight Inn...

White Swan, Solihull's Wetherspoons

At long last Solihull welcomes Wetherspoon's to the centre of Solihull. Sitting right next door to the Hogs Head it will prove stiff competition to a the Hogs Head a pub that has lost it way in terms of real ale.

Opened in late March the White Swan has the best range of real ales in Solihull town centre usurping the Saddlers Arms which until the arrival of the White Swan was the best real ale pub in Solihull. *[time to remove the banner? Ed.]*

Manager James Sullivan started his career with Wetherspoon's at the Rising Sun in Redditch in

1999. He then moved to London for three years before returning to the Midlands to take his first managership at The White Swan. He hopes the pub will appeal to most tastes. "Having no music" he says, "has brought in a more varied age group, some of whom have said they don't normally come to Solihull town centre pubs because of the loud music". Interestingly at the time of my visit there were quite a lot of young people so it does beg the question is loud music a necessity?

Open from 10-11 Mon - Sat, breakfasts and coffee are served 10-12, alcohol is not served until 11am. Sunday opening is 12-10.30. Food is served 10-10 everyday. Themed food nights are held during the week. Tuesdays is Steak Club Night and Thursdays Curry Club Night, both of which include a free drink.

The beers James has on offer consist of a base range which includes Courage Directors, Greene King Abbott Ale, Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Theakston's Bitter, Timothy Taylor Landlord and Ringwood Fortyniner and up to four guests. When I was there Goff Joust, Bateman's Dark Mild and Bear Town Bear Ass were the guests.

As with other Wetherspoon's the beers are good value for money being priced from £1.35 - £1.69 a pint, probably not to be beaten anywhere nearby. A visit to the cellar area reveals that the beers are served via the widget system with all the casks upended, resulting in a saving in space, a real necessity when Wetherspoons have their regular beer festivals.

Response from Wizard re Saddler's Arms...

In the last Drinker Ian Hunter wrote about the Saddlers Arms, Solihull and that he had written to Wizard Inns the owners... here's their response.

Dear Ian,

Thank you for your comments and feedback regarding the Saddler's Arms. We are delighted with the progress of our real ales in the Saddler's Arms. However, we are still finding our feet. We are investigating better products but, as you can appreciate, quality and customer demands come first. As quality is our main aim we would not be looking at discounting and we will continue to keep the quality. Thank you for your feedback and continuing support at the Saddler's Arms.

Regards,

Leesa Perks, Area Manager

[Nothing doing there then...surely they will remove the banner — see White Swan article above Ed.]



Slaughterhouse Brewery Visit...



A Friday evening saw a party of local CAMRA members boarding a Central train to Warwick in anticipation of a visit to the new Slaughterhouse brewery some twenty minutes walk from the centre of Warwick. We gathered at the Bowling Green in Warwick to await the Slaughterhouse brewer Steve Ridgeway. Whilst at the Bowling Green we sampled Charles Well's Eagle IPA and Bombardier. On Steve's arrival we all piled into his jeep heading to the brewery which is in Bridge Street and believe me is not easy to find! We arrived at the brewery with all its attendant equipment which has been purchased from Church End Brewery. The brewery itself is in a large shed cum garage, I don't know how else to describe it. Apparently it used once to be a slaughterhouse... hence the brewery name.



Steve Ridgeway Slaughterhouse brewer/manager behind the handpump

First things first we charged our glasses with Swillmore Original a tasty 4.2% beer whilst Steve talked informally about his first brewing venture and his enthusiasm for real ale.

The Swillmore was followed by some experimental brews that Steve wanted our opinion on... some tasty... some needing some more work doing on them, a task that I'm sure Steve will both enjoy and succeed in. To round the evening off we adjourned to the Simple Simon where Greene King Abbott and IPA, Youngs Special and of course more Slaughterhouse Swillmore were imbibed before visiting our final pub before the train home. A quickie at The Avon Tavern rendered us the choice of either Greene King IPA, Ansell's Mild and our final Slaughterhouse beer Wild Boar.

Contented members of Solihull CAMRA wended their way home that evening... not all of them in a straight line!

Steve Dyson

From Bar Co to Town House...

This once popular CAMRA pub in Solihull town centre has turned over a new leaf and become more of a restaurant. However, it is still serving real ale. When last inspected in late May, Charles Well's Bombardier was available on handpump.



The Brewery and Pubco Blues...

It has always been a source of great disappointment that Solihull and District's area does not include a brewery. With Beowulf moving from its original home in Yardley to Brownhills in 2003, the nearest is Weatheroak Brewery at the Coach and Horses, Alvechurch.

What we do have, though whether it is something to shout about is for you to decide, is the HQ of pubco Enterprise Inns, which will soon regain its position as Britain's largest pub owner with more than 9,000 pubs. A direct result of the trend, started by the now revoked Beer Orders of 1990, of splitting pub ownership from brewing, pubcos have not always been good news for real ale lovers. Often licensees are restricted to the head office's selection and a list of beers from the major brewers. This is not surprising given that the pubco business model is based on rental income and the supply of beer.

For Enterprise Inns though this would appear to be changing, with licensees being given the freedom to choose what suits their local market, thus allowing them to compete against other local pubs. Their chief beer buyer is quoted in a recent issue of What's Brewing as saying "cask ale can be the big point of difference, so why not exploit it?". What a shame then that the nearest Enterprise Inns pub to their HQ at Monkspath, the Saxon in Cheswick Green, sells only Tetley. Or is it a sad indictment of the local market?

Malcolm Harry



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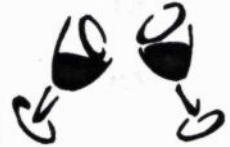


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Exploring Oxford's Pubs...

We arrived at noon, thirsty after our trip by minibus from Solihull. The bus deposited us near our first stop, the Lamb & Flag. Here we were met by Matt Bullock, a former editor of the "Solihull Drinker", who now lives in Oxford, and other members of CAMRA's Oxford branch, who were to be our guides for the day.

The Lamb & Flag is a 15th century coaching inn and offered a warm welcome after our journey. There were beers from Skinner's and Palmer's (including a house beer), alongside the better-known Spitfire, London Pride and Theakston's. We stayed a while, discussing plans for the day and savouring the beers before moving on.



Almost directly opposite is the Eagle and Child, another of Oxford's historic pubs. Either side of the entrance are intimate seating areas with wood panelling and glass, while in the main bar area is a plaque commemorating the fact that for many years this was the favourite pub of a group of literary figures including C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. We certainly appreciated the beers on offer, Hancock's HB, Hook Norton Old Hooky, Taylor's Landlord and Draught Bass.

By now we were beginning to feel hungry, so we made our way to the King's Arms, an unspoiled, multi-roomed pub popular with students. Here we found a range of meals and snacks available, as well as Smile's March Hare, Wadworth's 6X, and a range of Young's beers (Special, Bitter, Winter Warmer and Waggle dance. Unfortunately the Harviestoun Belgian White had just run out!

We were fortunate to have some local people to take us around, or we might not have found the next pub, the Turf Tavern. It is tucked away along a maze of little alleyways close to the Bridge of Sighs. We arrived at a real gem of a pub, in a quiet secluded setting, with patio areas outside, and two low-ceilinged bars inside. The pub offers a range of guest beers, including, at the time of our visit, Flower's Original, Caledonian Deuchar's IPA, Hop Back Back Row, Ringwood Fortyniner, Brain's SA & Bitter, Fuller's London Pride and Gale's Swing Low. We sampled a variety of beers between us, and then reluctantly found our way through the alleyways back to the bustle of Oxford.

Our next pub was the White Horse, a small, busy pub

with a long narrow bar. Here we were again presented with a variety of beers, including Badger Tanglefoot, Tolly Original, Smile's March Hare, Fuller's London Pride, and, for me, undoubtedly the best beer of the day, Caledonian Six Nations.

We then moved on to the Bear, another classic old pub. The walls are adorned with a collection of over 3,000 ties, and anyone who ventures in wearing a tie may be persuaded to "donate" it! Our group was casually dressed, so nobody was required to remove articles of clothing! Here, the beers were Hancock's HB, London Pride, Young's Special and Coach House St Patrick's Leprechaun Ale.

We then made our way to the Hobgoblin, an attractive old building adorned with flowers outside. Here we found Milton Constantine, and Aphrodite, Black Swan Dark Mild, Brakspear Brass Monkey and Butt's Jester. A further hand pump announced "Hors de Combat" - was this a new brew we had discovered? No, just the landlord's witty way of saying that pump was not in use!

As we left the Hobgoblin it had started to rain, so we arrived at the Wharf House absolutely drenched. As we dried out we were able to sample some of the beers on offer: RCH Pitchfork, Hook Norton Best Bitter, Boat Black Pearl, Vale Hadda's Headbanger and Doghouse Staffy Stout.

When the rain eased off, we headed off to the Far From the Madding Crowd, a fairly new pub, and with a more modern décor than the others we visited. We found another good range of beers: Taylor Landlord, Wadworth 6X, Tom Hoskin's Cat, Springhead Roaring Meg and Black Sheep Bitter. Here we were met by our minibus driver, and after sampling a quick half, it was time to thank our Oxford branch guides for showing us such an excellent selection of pubs during the day, and to bid them a fond farewell as we climbed back on board our bus. However, there was one final treat in store before arriving home.

The Cottage Tavern at Ashome in Warwickshire was our final destination. This was voted Warwickshire CAMRA pub of the year 2003, and it lived up to its reputation. We received a warm welcome, and enjoyed some of the beers available, which were John Smith's Bitter, Holden's Golden Glow and Cairngorm Sheepshagger's Gold. The meals looked delicious too! Everyone agreed it was another successful trip, and we all look forward to the next one! Thanks to Bob, the organiser, and of course to Matt and his colleagues at Oxford CAMRA for giving us such a thoroughly enjoyable day.

JOIN CAMRA NOW

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

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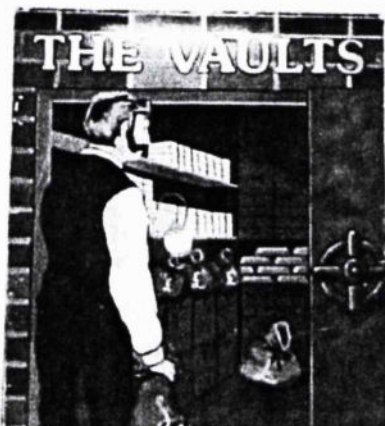
Brenda Duffy

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

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Solihull CAMRA Pub of the Year 2003 and 2004



CAMRA Good Beer Guide listed since 1993



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Food Glorious Food!

You could say that the topic of the monthly culinary get together has been 'eating away' at branch members. Should we 'take away' the opportunity to have such a gathering or are we 'making a meal of it' by doing so?

Well, basically it was felt that the monthly 'Beer & Balti' was too restrictive in its outlook. Although a couple of these were last year actually 'non-Balti', i.e. the 'Steak & Batham's' with the massive portions and excellent beer at The Church Inn in Hockley, Birmingham, or the Thai evening at The Barton's Arms in Newtown/Aston, again with excellent food and (Oakham's) beers, it was felt that more of the 200 plus branch members would come if we broadened our horizons. So this year there will be more styles of cuisine on offer, details of which are to be found in this esteemed publication.

Indeed, one question to ask is whether people would prefer to eat and drink at the same time, rather than sup till about 10 and then go for a balti or curry? In fact, should the start time be brought forward to 7.30, so people don't have to wait so long to eat? By the time you are reading this branch members will have already been to The Boat at Catherine de Barnes, with the intention of having a meal accompanied by beer. Hopefully the change of plan will be a success, but the best way to have your say is to turn up, eat, drink and have your say!

Martin Collinge

in brief

Blue Bell, Warings Green

It's reported that the Blue Bell Cider House, Warings Green is to increase the number of real ciders on offer to five which will include guest ciders other than those in the Bulmer's range. It also stocks three to four real ales

Euro Football and Beer at Home

"Why not really enjoy Euro 2004 by cheering on England accompanied by a pint or two of good English real ale at your local and/or a supply from Bernie's, Solihull's real ale off-licence, an ever-present in the guide for the last twenty years? Get those mini-barrels in!"

Fleur De Lys, Loxsonford — Solihull's First Non Smoking Pub

The Fleur De Lys has become the first non smoking pub in Warwickshire and Solihull. Although primarily a food orientated pub this will be seen as a welcome move by many real ale drinkers.

You can't rely on the Red Lion, Earlswood...

Despite a phone call to forewarn The Red Lion in Earlswood that we would be coming for a branch meeting on Monday 10th May there was no real ale in the pub when we arrived! We were told they'd run out as they'd "Had a busy weekend". Thankfully we are a resourceful bunch so we synchronised operations and went to The Reservoir, also in Earlswood. They had Courage Directors and as their guest. As a footnote-on the back of the menus at The Red Lion it said "Ask about one of our puddings". Presumably the person who didn't order enough beer.



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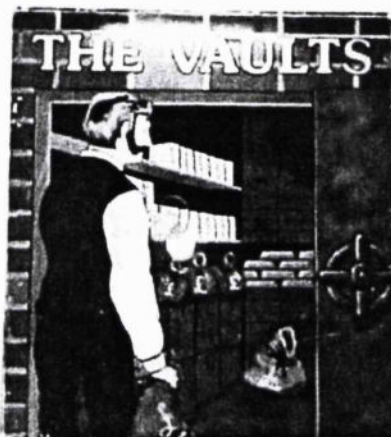
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Vaults does the 'Double'. CAMRA Solihull & District Pub of the Year 2004...

A Knowle pub is celebrating its achievement of once again winning the prestigious award of Pub of the Year. Members of the Solihull & District branch of CAMRA have bestowed their 2004 award on The Vaults.

This well-known hostelry was also successful in 2003, scooping the coveted title. Branch chairman Ray Cooke pointed out that back-to-back wins is a special achievement. "Not even Manchester United or Arsenal manage to retain their crown every year, so The Vaults deserves special praise!", quipped Ray. "The Vaults serves an interesting range of real ales to suit all tastes: there are firm favourites rubbing shoulders with unusual and exciting guest beers, plus there is always a mild and a real cider available. Licensee Nick Worrall and his staff are always helpful and cheerful and add to the friendly atmosphere in the pub."

The 'Pub of the Year' is voted for by local CAMRA members, with the six most popular pubs then forming a shortlist from which the top honour is chosen. "We have a rigorous selection process" remarked Ray. "We frequently do surveys of all the pubs in our area, real-ale or otherwise. Naturally we are concerned with the quality and range of the beers available, but we also look at other factors that make up a good pub. And we'd like to add that although this thorough research is a 'dirty job', somebody's got to do it, so new members are also welcome to join in this none too onerous task!" The Vaults will receive its award on Tuesday 15th June at 9 p.m. Along with the pub's regulars local branch members will be also in attendance and they are keen to welcome anybody else who has an interest in real ale.



Martin Collinge

In the Black...

Solihull CAMRA's participation in this year's "Mild Month" events took the form of a pub crawl to sample a few of the mild ales that are available locally. We met at the RED LION, Shirley, where a cheap lunch and an excellent pint of Highgate Dark Mild set us up for the day. Next stop was the COLEBROOK, Shirley. Despite being in the middle of a lager festival, it was good to see that cask mild was still available - this time the M&B version. The seven of us then caught a train to Henley in Arden. Here we decided to do an impromptu survey of all the pubs on the High Street, as it is an area we don't visit as much as we should (campaign for a decent public transport network anyone?). First port of call was the WHITE SWAN. No cask mild available any more, but Beowulf Reward was temptation enough to linger for a swift half. Next was to have been the Nag's Head, which until recently was a regular supporter of cask Ansell's Mild, but we confirmed that the pub is a real ale loss for the Branch. At the THREE TUNS the beer range is solid if unadventurous; despite being regarded as Henley's true drinking pub it tends to ignore cask mild. The BLUEBELL was quieter, but again had a safe beer range from well known Regional breweries (but no Mild). Then we went to the BLACK SWAN. At last, cask mild in Henley - this time the Banks's version (Original). And that was it. Sadly the once famous Henley Mile pub crawl now consists of just 4 real ale pubs, with only one cask mild. Some of us finished the day with an excursion into Digbeth, where we sampled Church End Gravedigger's Mild at the LAMP TAVERN. So, we tried four different milds in one day, all brewed in the Midlands. Maybe there is hope for cask mild after all.

Steve Wood

Real Ale Drinkers Sent To Coventry (Road!)

Or the 57 Bus Route Part II

Keen-eyed readers of *The Solihull Drinker* will remember my previous article on pubs on or adjacent to the 57 bus route going into Solihull as part of my occasional series 'From the Fringe', recounting opportunities for real ale fans just over the Solihull/Birmingham border. Well, recently the same intrepid 'Famous Five' of Steve Wood, Steve Dyson, Bob Bell, John McDermott and my good (?) self did the journey in the opposite direction, this time heading towards Birmingham City Centre. Our starting point was, like last time, The Shooting Star on the South Yardley/Sheldon border, the pub previously known as Harry Ramsden's and the erstwhile Good Companions hostelry. This time fewer real ales were available, two instead of the three on offer last time. We had a choice between Marston's Pedigree and Tetley's. Between ourselves we tried both and they both pronounced pleasant enough, although at the price of £1.25 a half(!) we had to see our bank manager afterwards!



Then it was back on the bus. We did not go in the New Inn by The Swan Island as we already knew that it is a keg pub, so we alighted opposite The Old Bill and Bull. This may be an historic pub with its police connections but just like the good old urinal which stood outside the adjacent park the good old real ale is no longer there. A visit to the nearby Redhill Tavern also provide fruitless.

As we passed the dilapidated and boarded up Plough and Harrow at the far end of Hay Mills we considered our next move. We decided against trying The George and Dragon which looks (anyway) from a bus window to be all keg.

We had high hopes for The Malt Shovel on the corner of Muntz Street, belonging to the Pubmaster chain, however our fledgling hopes were soon dashed with another row of keg fonts in view. So we walked down the road to The Brighton Arms... it looked dingy from the outside and dingy as we peered inside, so much so that we didn't stay long.

By now we were almost giving up hope of finding any more real ale on the route, and these fears seem to be confirmed when we popped in the Clement's Arms near Bordesley railway bridge. But all was not lost however, in the unexpected quarters of The Rainbow.

I have it on (good?) advice that The Rainbow used to be a pub with a gay clientele, nowt wrong with that, live and let live I say, but now it is frequented by those of Irish extraction, hence the outside mural advertising the 'craic'. Anyway we entered the hostelry, approached the bar, and there amongst the usual keg suspects was.... Wychwood Hobgoblin, and it was in good condition! An interesting guest indeed as it weighs in at 5%, perhaps too much for some. The bar staff informed me that they get a guest 'when they can' and it usually alternates between Hobgoblin and Marston's Pedigree.

I'd say it's worth a visit...I'd call it a 'proper' pub, i.e. a basic, no frills boozier. They also have a range of standard pub grub and entertainment, in fact while we were there the acts were supping.

Thus fortified we set off (on foot) again. The Old Crown maybe one of the oldest pubs in Brum but the hoped for Pedigree wasn't available, despite the promise of the pump clips, apparently real ale there is a bit 'hit and miss'. We also called in at The Big Bull's Head and The Kerry Man but they are bereft of the genuine stuff.

Where to next? The Horan's Tavern, Floodgate Street. Ok, a 5 minute walk off the bus route, but surely the idea of using public transport is that you can visit pubs a bit off the beaten track (as well, of course, meaning you're not drinking and driving). Anyroad, this pub appears in CAMRA's 2004 "Good Beer Guide". On offer were Ansell's Mild and London Pride, with the pump clips for Pedigree and 'Ruddles' County turned round, so presumably finished earlier. Again there seemed to be a number of Irish connections, and again we were pleased with the beer quality. Worth a visit, I say.

Time, gentleman, please! It was getting towards 10 so we sallied forth, into The Dubliner (obviously Irish connections here!) but apparently Irish people don't drink real ale?????

And finally... The Anchor. Birmingham CAMRA's current pub of the year, and not for the first time. If you've been to Brum and never visited The Anchor in Digbeth you

1. Must be mad
2. Don't know where Digbeth is
3. Don't know where the pub is (it's turn left at the bus stop outside The Coach station, go round the corner and it's 50 or so yards down the road on the right)
4. Are teetotal

I could fill the whole of *The Solihull Drinker* talking about and extolling the virtues of this establishment, suffice it to say it's a proper pub with an excellent range of real ales (usually all styles) plus a real cider. Read about it in *The Good Beer Guide* and you'll be seeking out your 57 bus timetable!

My special thanks to the other members of 'The Famous Five' who made this article possible: Steve W, Steve D, Bob B and John Mc.

Martin Collinge



Solihull times

Socials

Sunday 13th June	Sunday pub ramble around Meriden. Meet in car park of Queens Head at 10:30 and go for 3 mile walk - then back to Queens Head for lunch/drinks
Sunday 11th July	Social at the Reservoir, Earlswood Beer Festival
Friday 16th July	Marston's Brewery Trip. Evening visit at £6.00 per head excluding transport
September Weekend	Traditional weekend away—somewhere up north!

Phone Bob for details for all the events above

Pub & Grub

Friday 25th June	Railway, Dorridge	7.30-8pm
Friday 30th July	Coach and Horses, Weatheroak Hill	7.30-8pm
Friday 20th August	Tom O The Wood, Rowington	7.30-8pm
Friday 24th September	White Swan, Solihull	7.30-8pm

Branch Meetings

Monday 5th July	Royal Oak, Hockley Heath	8.30pm
Monday 2nd August	Punchbowl, Lapworth	8.30pm
Monday 6th September	British Legion, Union Road, Solihull	8.30pm
Monday 4th October	Blac Swan, Henley in Arden	8.30pm

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

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 2004 ©

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 30th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on September 6th, 2004
The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be
August 28th, 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**



August Bank Holiday Real Ale and Music Festival

Wendy and David invite you to celebrate our fourth real ale and music festival on
28, 29 and 30 August.

*

Sunday 29 August is our charity day, and our charities this year are MacMillan
Nurses, Acorns Children's Hospice and a local charity. There will be a pig roast
in the afternoon (4.30 onwards)

*

25 real ales 6 bands Food available Sat 12-2 and 6-9
Sun/Mon 12-8

*** CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2004 listed
* Solihull CAMRA Most Improved Pub of the Year 2003**