



Solihull drinker

free

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

Issue No: 16

Spring, 2001

Bitter about Mild

Once again the future of cask Mild ale is brought into question, as we find our local choice diminishing. The latest loss is Highgate Dark from Walsall.

At the start of last year it was regularly available in three local outlets, now it's history, buried under a nitro keg font. The renaming of the brew from Highgate Mild to Highgate Dark reflects the attempts to fight against the downward trend of mild sales. The decline has been dramatic, from 40% of total beer sales to 3% in the last 40 years. The reasons for this? Many blame it's image in today's fashion conscious world. The move to lighter-coloured beers was fuelled by the advertising-led growth of lager, with mild left behind as 'the old mans drink'. The big brewers may not have been too disappointed with this, after all, for them real mild is an inconvenient product. Its lower gravity makes looking after it a more skilled task, and it has a shorter shelf life than stronger beers. Mild also, of course, offers lower profit margins. It seems an annual tradition to forecast the end of mild, but there are still drinkers out there, as pub landlords in Olton and Henley-in-Arden will testify. The most popular mild locally, based on number of outlets, appears to be Ansell's. Quite what the future of this is remains to be seen, the Birmingham brewery of that name has long gone, and after a spell at Burton, Ansell's is now brewed in Leeds. However for those prepared to look around, other milds are available. Greenall's Mild is still obtainable in Cheswick Green, though like Ansell's it has been moved around and is unlikely to have a long term future. M&B Mild, once a common sight, is still available in Solihull, however following it's recent demise at the Saddlers you'll need to walk out to the Sharmans Cross or Greville Arms to get it. Greene King and Banks's sell mild at their Shrewley and Lapworth pubs. Thwaites Mild, a relative newcomer to the area is available in their pubs at Earlswood & Solihull. Other milds have been and gone - anyone remember Davenports Mild, Felons Mild, or Brains Mild? In fact if anyone has any particular memories of these or other milds, please let us know (via the Editor)

Conclusion? - like any product, it responds to public demand. Drink it or lose it.



*CAMRA Champion Beer of 2000
Moorhouse's Black Cat Mild, but Solihull
turns it's back on Mild*

Steve Wood

In this issue

A visit to the Woodman, Shirley... Spotlight on the Blue Bell, Henley in Arden... What can you do as a CAMRA member?... Ask if it's Cask Campaign... Local brewery wins award... Local Pubs of the Year... plus local pub news

Editors round:

Whilst the branch is busy planning a Mild Campaigning social in May, with the intention of visiting pubs in our area which serve traditional draught mild, many pubs are in fact dropping it from their beer range. The leader article in this Drinker highlights the plight of mild in the Solihull area. Pubs which we have always naturally expected to stock mild like the Navigation, Lapworth and the Railway, Dorridge have either replaced them with smoothflow alternatives or withdrawn mild completely. To be fair to Andrew at the Navigation, an enthusiastic mild man, Highgate Brewery were not keen even to supply him with the smoothflow when he requested it. On the other hand, Ansell's Mild is the biggest seller at the Blue Bell, Henley.

Taken together with the sale of breweries and pubs going on all over the show at the moment, it is worrying to think that Ansell's Mild, M&B Mild and Greenall's Mild may well be lost amongst the changes going on.

There is an interest in mild out there, many of us enjoy it. The problem is we don't drink enough of it, preferring a pint then moving on to the stronger taste or alcoholic content of bitters and best bitters. Milds do not have to be weak, tasteless beers. They should have that nutty characteristic backed by a gentle hop aroma which is a pleasure to savour, and is a distinctive beer style peculiar to this country. I sometimes think, however, that some brewers do not take enough note of their milds, and indeed have demoted them to tasteless ghosts of their former selves, a great disservice to the mild tradition.

Well with all these breweries and pubs up for sale the future still seems uncertain for beer choice in the Solihull area. At present we do not know the future for Whitbread's pubs or Bass pubs which together form nearly 40% of pubs in the area. If Punch get hold of them it will mean they will control nearly all the pubs in the Solihull area.... Surely there is a need to refer such a monopoly to the Office of Fair Trading?

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.

Solihull CAMRA 2001 ©

Solihull CAMRA Needs You!!

Every branch of CAMRA needs a large active membership and Solihull branch is no exception. Over the last couple of years the branch has seen a steady decline in active members whether in their attendance at branch meetings, or in joining in our wide range of social events. This is very worrying! Without active members no branch can thrive!

Campaigning on local issues creates less impact, successful social events become more difficult to organise, surveying of the branches pubs takes longer as less people have to take on more of the work. Newsletters such as *The Drinker* become more onerous to produce, but, most importantly, without a wide range of views and news from you all, the branch is unable to obtain a true reflection of the current real ale scene in the Solihull area.

The branch takes great pride in the fact that we do not miss much. We are usually quick to learn of a pub in the area pub offering an improved range of real ales. Likewise, we are quick to hear of any proposed alterations to pubs whether for the better, or more usually, for the worse, and we are first to reply to beer related articles that appear in the local press.

So this appeal goes out to everyone in the Solihull area who cares about the future of real ale. If you are an existing Solihull branch member you will have, or are about to receive, a welcoming letter and short questionnaire. The branch is very interested in your views and would greatly appreciate you taking the time to fill it out and return it in the pre-paid envelope. All replies will be entered into a draw for the chance to win a carry keg of beer from Bernies Real Ale Off Licence, Shirley.

However, whether you are a member or not, we would love to see you at a future event organised by the branch. Meetings are never too formal or stuffy and the social events are great fun and very popular!

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of the Solihull Drinker and that the news in it and the events listed will encourage you to come and meet us.

Dave Hobbis, Branch Chairman



Local Pubs of the Year... Redditch and Bromsgrove voted for the Coach and Horses, Weatheroak, whilst Walsall voted for The Turf Tavern in Bloxwich. Tamworth and Sutton went for the Griffin at Shustoke

in brief...

Local Beer Festivals

Walsall Beer Festival is to be held from 5th to 7th April at the Town Hall, Leicester Street. Thur 5.30-11; Fri and Sat 11-3, 5.30-11. 80 beers, free entry to card carrying CAMRA members [excl programme]. Food at all sessions.

Coventry Beer Festival at City Football Ground, East Stand Mall, Swan Lane, April 20th-21st. Open 11-4, 6-11. Concession for card carrying CAMRA members. Food available... over 65 beers, including specials.

Bass estate sold to Nomura

Nomura is now the largest pub operator in Britain having acquired 988 pubs from Bass, taking its total up to some 6000. It is also bidding for the Whitbread estate of 3000 pubs that are currently up for sale. This grand sale is bound to affect many pubs in the Solihull area.

Crab Mill, Preston Bagot

A recent visit to this old country pub has seen its character change to a "country eating house", as the sign outside says. One third of the pub is given over to a restaurant offering food at the very high end of the price bracket. Another third is on a raised level and consists of leather settees/armchairs with coffee tables. The other third could be loosely described as a bar area. All this is complimented [sic] by piped music. Frankly it doesn't feel much like a pub and does not appear to be actively encouraging people to come in just to drink. Real ale is on offer which at this visit in January was Wadworth 6X, Old Speckled Hen and John Smith's, real, yes, in good condition, but not a very imaginative range.

White Swan, Henley in Arden

This consistent entry in the Good Beer Guide as fallen on hard times real ale wise. One bank of handpumps have been removed to be replaced by smoothpour, whilst the other three handpumps are serving Everards Beacon, John Smith's Bitter and Upping Good Bitter, which it is thought, is brewed by Everards.

Scottish and Newcastle brewery speak...

S&N are to shed some 1,300 jobs as part of a reorganisation of its UK operations. It plans to sell or transfer to lease 920 of its managed pubs to "increase competitiveness". Job losses will be at its Scottish Courage beer "unit". This will save £46m per annum. S&N state the changes would "position the business for continued future growth in the UK's pub and beer industry". It added that the revamp would allow it to focus on "high turnover, high quality, high margin outlets" in four strong market sectors - pub restaurants, lodge hotels, branded pubs and large traditional pubs. Brewery speak like this worries me, sounds like accountants not brewers [Ed].



Manchester Winter Ales Festival Winners...

At this years Winter Ales Festival Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild was awarded the Silver Medal. Brewed in Sedgley at the Beacon Hotel it is satisfying to see a local brewery do so well against stiff competition. It was pipped at the post by Orkney's Skullsplitter, whilst the Bronze went to O'Hanlon's Port Stout. However, in the Old Ales and Strong Milds class Sarah Hughes was voted champion, followed by Orkney's Dark Island. Watch out for them in local pubs

Spotlight Inn...

The Blue Bell, Henley in Arden

Twelve months ago Solihull CAMRA were concerned about the future of this historic Henley pub.

Luckily the fears have proven to be unfounded as the Blue Bell, built in the 15th century has undergone a transformation, not only in its interior layout but also in the real ales available there. It's also



a welcome addition to the small band of genuine free houses in the Solihull area.

Two couples, Paul Farley, Susan Hillage and Dean Underwood with partner Gillian Lawson joined forces after they got to know each other whilst working at the Cape of Good Hope in Warwick, a consistent Good Beer Guide entry. They recognised the potential of the Blue Bell and the niche it could fill in serving good food at reasonable price. They believe too, that real ale, contrary to industry analysts opinions is not dying, but, indeed is, as Dean said, "coming back with a vengeance". On a recent visit four real ales were on offer, Ansell's Mild, Tetley Bitter, Burton Ale and a guest, Cottage Golden Arrow. Dean said his most popular real ale is the mild, heartening to hear, as in some other areas of Solihull it is in retreat.

The menu is reasonably priced with starters between £2.50-£4.00 and main courses at £4.50-£10.00. Vegetarians are catered for. There's a specials blackboard and of course, puddings are available too. There is also a snack menu for "lighter bites".

Inside the drinker is met by three drinking areas. A small bar like area which is warmed by a roaring log fire, whilst opposite is a plainly furnished, traditional dining/drinking area. The servery is in the centre of the pub and overlooks a small bar with dart board and a small carpeted lounge.

Future plans include the provision of accommodation, but that will be reliant on obtaining planning permission to build purpose built units at the back of the pub.

Ask if it's Cask Campaign

Ted Bruning, editor of What's Brewing



CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, is about to launch one of its most ambitious projects yet. For the last two years we've been getting together a fighting fund, supported by many brewers, and now at last we're ready. You should be seeing Adshell sites and in pubs all over the country an advertising campaign promoting real ale and defending choice for drinkers.

Yet for all the effort we're putting into it, and for all the support we've received, we won't be able to spend even a fraction as much on

promoting real ale and defending drinkers' choice as a national brewer can spend on a single lager or smooth beer brand.

And that says it all, really.

Big brewers are interested in big brands. They'll spend millions on pushing their own brands and, hopefully, knocking out the brands of their rivals. Their ambition is to shoulder all others aside, and to freeze out the competition.

But what CAMRA is interested in is choice. Variety. A pub culture where there are beers of all styles and characters to suit beer-drinkers of all styles and characters. You choose lager? Fine - let there be lager. You choose smooth beer? That's fine too. But we'd like to be able to choose real ales as well, and unfortunately, in all too many pubs, that choice no longer exists.

Big brewers have been yanking out the handpumps out of pubs all over the country, to create the appearance of "consumer demand" for smooth beers - which are more profitable because they are easier to store and easier to serve, and they don't have any wastage. But it's bogus. Thousands of smooth beer drinkers only drink smooth because their pub no longer stocks cask ale. We know the demand is there, because regional and micro brewers are all reporting rising sales in the 20 per cent of the market they control. But in 80 per cent of the market controlled by the big brewers, power over supply is being used to distort demand.

That's why CAMRA is taking to the billboards. It's about defending choice and variety. It's not about knocking lager and smooth beer, or putting down the people who prefer them. It's about persuading people who prefer cask beer to demand it in their local pub, and to refuse to be fobbed off with something they regard as second best.

For only when every pub in the land has a handpump alongside the lager and smooth beer fonts will brewers and landlords be able to say - and mean it - that:

"THE CHOICE IS YOURS!"

So don't forget to 'ask if it's cask' next time you go to the pub!

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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	May Arthur	01283 542646
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	Rob Shanks	01782 639357
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	Andy Cooke	0121 359 1100
Telford & East Shropshire	Peter Arden	01952 244954
Walsall	Rob Bentley	01922 861626
Wolverhampton	Dave Powell	01902 620013
Worcester	Peter Bottomley	01684 573018

If you have any complaints about short measure, contact Solihull Trading Standards on
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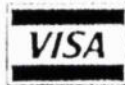
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PAY BY CREDIT



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Beer around here...

A round up of the beers seen in local Solihull pubs recently are:

Blue Bell, Henley - Wyre Piddle Piddle in the Wind and Cottage

Golden Arrow. White Swan, Henley - Everards Beacon. Harvester, Olton - Oakhill Yeoman 1767 and Oakhill Merry Maltings. Vaults, Knowle - Batemans Winter Wellie; Hardy and Hansons Rocking Rudolph. Navigation, Lapworth - Everards Tiger 50. Hogshead, Solihull - Batemans Jester IPA; Tisbury Old Mulled Ale. Bluebell, Earlswood - Caledonian Space Odyssey 2001. Punchbowl, Lapworth - Marstons Yuletide Goose. Black Boy, Heronfield - Everards Tiger. Tom O' the Wood, Rowington - Wyre Piddle Old Toms Piddle. Red Lion, Shirley - Hydes Light.



in brief....

West Midland Pub and Beers of the Year 2000

Winner of the regional Beer of the Year was Slater's Bitter followed in second place by Slater's Supreme. In third place was Gravediggers Mild from Church End. The regional Winter Beer of the Year went to Bathams XXX, followed by Holden's XL and third Burton Bridge Top Dog Stout.

The regional Pub of the Year was the Six Bells at Bishops Castle, home of the Six Bells Brewery.

Ruddles County Reborn

Greene King is to resurrect Ruddles County. Using the same recipe, the only difference will be the water, which at Greene King is hard, whereas the original brewing water used was soft.

The White Swan



100 High Street, Henley in Arden, Warwickshire B95 5BY

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

The Woodman re-visited...

We used to live opposite "The Woodman" as the Woodman's Rest was once known and were regular visitors, but we haven't been there for a long time, mainly because of the absence of any real ale

I found it quite difficult to recognise the interior after the recent refurbishment, but then, what was I looking for? The pub has been refurbished on a regular basis for as long as I can remember. Anyway, it's all very smart and comfortable, looking albeit in the "cloned style" so beloved of the pub interior designers.

The bar has, however, sprouted a handpump sporting Draught Bass, which was in excellent condition and at just the right temperature, and no real cause for complaint at £2.05 a pint.

It was very unusual for a pub serving food, I thought, not to have much of a chalk board as well as the main menu, but our modest needs were met quite adequately. Margaret had cod and chips, whilst I had the mixed grill. The meals arrived quite soon and were very well prepared, all good value at about £5.00 for most of the main courses.

Looking around, I couldn't see many other people drinking the Bass, but perhaps that's not surprising when you think how long the pub's been without real ale. Let's hope the new beer catches on and then we might even see another handpump!

Bob and Margaret Jackson



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!]

Peak District mini bus tour, Saturday 31st March

Cancelled from last September this is an all day affair. We shall be visiting the classic pubs of the Peak District, including the Lamb at Holymoorside, Three Stags' Head, Wardlow Mires, Gate, Brassington, Barley Mow, Kirk Ireton and the Bentley Brook Inn, home of Leatherbritches Brewery. Lunch at the Sycamore, Parwich and in the evening, Leek... a quiet day! Please note the itinerary may be amended. Cost £15... names to Keven asap.

Mild in May Campaigning Pub Crawl, Saturday 12th May

Another mini bus tour costing £3 per head, taking in pubs in the area that sell real mild. The schedule so far is pick up at Olton at 6.30; Knowle at 6.45; Solihull Station at 6.50 arriving at the Sharman's Cross at 7.00. Then head for the Saxon, Cheswick Green for 7.30; Bulls Head, Earlswood for 8.00; Punchbowl, Lapworth 8.40; Durham Ox, Shrewley 9.20; finishing at the Blue Bell, Henley at 10.00. This may change. Phone Keven for tour update.

Beer & Baltis

Friday 23/3/01	Red Lion, Shirley
Friday 27/4/01	Vaults, Knowle
Friday 1/6/01	Church Inn, Great Hampton Street, Hockley
	Steak and Balti
Friday 29/6/01	Lamp Tavern, Barford Street, Digbeth

Branch Meetings

Monday 2/4/01	Barn, Hockley Heath
Monday 14/5/01	Punchbowl, Lapworth
Monday 11/6/01	Durham Ox, Shrewley

Socials

Saturday 7/4/01	Warwick Crawl + optional visit to Warwick v Solihull soccer match. For pub crawl meet at the Old Fourpenny Shop, Crompton Street 6-7pm. Details from Steve Wood on 704 5258.
Saturday 28/4/01	Stourbridge Crawl taking in the Shrubbery Cottage; The Royal Exchange; The Hogs Head; and The Plough and Harrow. Meet at the Seven Stars, Brook Road at 7.30.

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 17th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be published on 11th June, 2001.
The deadline for advertising or contributions will therefore be
Saturday 19th May 2001