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The Newsletter of the Deal Dover Sandwich & District
branch of the Campaign for Real Ale



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

**Issue 28
Summer
2006**

CHANNEL DRAUGHT

INSIDE

**PUB
PROFILE:**

**The Royal
Oak
Nonnington**

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FIRE DESTROYS THE BELL, SHEPHERDSWELL

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**Blakes,
Dover
is Branch
Pub of the
Year**

See Page 28



of brass Robert Thivalts try, about

Channel Draught
is the Newsletter of
the Deal Dover
Sandwich &
District Branch of
the Campaign for
Real Ale.

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Sandwich & District

Branch of the

Campaign for Real

Ale.

Please note that

views expressed

herein are not

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Please drink

sensibly!

CHANNEL DRAUGHT



ISSUE 28
Summer 2006

Welcome to *Channel Draught* for Summer 2006.

Beer festivals and changes of landlords feature prominently in this issue. We know of at least five local pub beer festivals over the forthcoming weeks, plus of course also two CAMRA events, the Kent Beer Festival and the Great British Beer Festival – see Events Diary opposite; while at least half a dozen pubs are enjoying new owners or management. We also have reports on three earlier festivals this year, including a much delayed article on February's White Cliffs Festival. Forthcoming branch events include a bat and trap evening at the Crown, Finglesham on Tuesday August 29th and an evening coach trip around several of our more outlying pubs in October – date yet to be set.

Top Local News story is the disastrous fire at the Bell, Shepherdswell which left the pub with not much more than just four walls standing, while the rest of our local roundup provides details of what's been happening elsewhere to the area's pubs, and which ales people have been drinking. As it's summertime our roving beer and brewery expert, Roger Marples, writes about summer ale, as well as describing a visit to the Royal Oak, Nonington and providing his regularly quarterly report on the local micros. Nationally the main items of interest are the latest episodes in the current resurgence of mergers and takeovers in the brewing industry – our two largest regional brewers seemingly intent on gobbling up as many of their competitors as they can get away with, which at the moment appears to be just about anybody and everybody.

Also in this edition Jim Green reports on the latest adventures of the Beery Boaters in northwest England, and we start a new feature – for us that is – a crossword, courtesy of Trish Wells. Finally, congratulations to Blakes for being chosen as Pub of the Year, a second win for Peter and Katheryn following their success two years ago at the Yew Tree, Barfrestone. We wish them well for the future.

Martin Atkins (Editor)

07816 687 592 Jan

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EVENTS DIARY

Friday 28th & Saturday 29th July	Hare & Hounds, Northbourne – beer, cider, live music, Sat BBQ (01304 365429)*
Saturday 29th & Sunday 30th July	Red Lion, Stodmarsh – beer, live music, sea shanties (01227 721339)*
Tuesday 1st to Saturday 4th August	GREAT BRITISH BEER FESTIVAL , Earl's Court, London
Sunday 5th August	The Bull, Eastry - 'Bullstock', live music, beer and BBQ.*
Monday 21st August	The Berry, Canada Road, Walmer - Branch Meeting
Saturday 26th & Sunday 27th August	Three Horseshoes, Great Mongeham – selection of ales, Sunday live music & side shows*
Friday 25th, Saturday 26th, Sunday 27th & Monday 28th August	Crown Inn, Finglesham – beer, cider, pig roast, live music, etc (01304 612555) *
Monday 19th September	Coastguard, St. Margaret's Bay - Branch Meeting.

Branch Meetings start at 7.30pm

The branch *normally* meets on the third Monday of each month.

If you are interested in joining CAMRA please come along to one of our meetings!

*Events marked * are not organised by CAMRA*



The Local News

Contributors - Martin Atkins, Anne McIlroy, Roger Marples,
John Pitcher, Tony Wells, etc.

EAST KENT PUBS DAMAGED BY FIRE

Two local pubs have been seriously damaged by fire in recent weeks. The 250-year-old **Bell Inn**, on The Green at Shepherdswell, was severely damaged late Wednesday evening June 21st. The fire broke out at around 10.00 pm and rapidly engulfed the whole building. Fortunately no one was injured, but by next morning there was not much more than just the walls remaining. We understand, however, that these are fairly sound and there is much optimism that the pub will be rebuilt: local opinion has it being open again in nine or ten months. Meanwhile Shepherdswell has just one pub remaining, Shepherd Neame's **Brickmakers Arms** at the junction of Coxhill and Westcourt Lane. The other fire was at the **Red Lion**, Bridge, in May. Having been closed for refurbishment for several months, it suffered substantial fire damage, as it was about to reopen as a pub and restaurant. It's currently still closed with scaffolding around it.

DOVER

Surprising news, perhaps, at this time of pub closures – the town has just gained two new pubs: the **Kingfisher** and the **Funky Monkey**. However, they are new in name only, and are respectively the former **Cherry Tree**, following purchase by Punch Taverns and several months of refurbishment,

and **Jays**. The latter has retained its keg only policy, while the real ale situation at the Kingfisher is unknown.

Park Inn, Park Place: For the present, the pub is sticking with just three real ales – Greene King IPA, Courage Best and Shepherd Neame Spitfire. Your correspondent cannot speak for the first two but the Spitfire (sorry Roger) is always excellent, and one Saturday evening back in May, enjoyed a superb steak accompanied by a deliciously soft Chilean red wine.

White Horse, St James Street: Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Ringwood Fortyniner are more or less regular features. Recent interesting guests have included Hop Back Odyssey, Dark Star Original and Sunburst, and Breconshire Ramblers Ruin. A very popular quiz, normally set by the pub regulars themselves, takes place on the first Sunday evening of every month.

Castle, Russell Street: At the time of writing the pub is closed, we believe awaiting a new landlord. However the resurrection of real ale late last year has proved short lived. The pumps were removed and presumably all beer is keg only. No doubt demand was limited and certainly whenever this correspondent looked through the door there appeared to be nothing on.

Eagle, London Road: By contrast, the Eagle is staying with real ale. In late May the choice was Greene King IPA, Fuller's Discovery and St George's

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Blake's, Castle Street: Voted branch Pub of the Year 2006, the presentation of the award took place on June 29th and was well attended by real ale enthusiasts from all over east Kent (see separate report). Particularly notable recently have been excellent barrels of Titanic Captain Smith's, Skinner's Spriggan and Harviestoun Ptarmigan.

Primrose, Coombe Valley Road: The planning application reported in our Spring issue to replace the pub with 11 dwellings and 7 two bedroom flats has been refused, the development being considered over intensive with inadequate parking.

Royal Oak, River: The pub has reopened following a £56,000 refurbishment by owner, Shepherd Neame, who has created additional seating by moving the cellar. It has allocated the premises a new jargon designation – community dining pub. "The mid-18th century flint building...has been tastefully redecorated inside and out, in keeping with the pub's traditional style. An exposed flint wall inside has been restored and spotlights installed to make it a design feature of the pub", says the brewery. One relishes what might have been the comments of former landlord, the late lamented Jim Percival.

Louis Armstrong, Maison Dieu Road: Jackie Bowles regularly compliments the normal rotating guest ale selection of Burton Bridge, Grand Union, Nelson and Skrimshander with beers from elsewhere. Over the last few months Hook Norton Old Hooky has appeared a couple of times and proved most popular. Meanwhile a barrel of Skrimshander, on at the start of July, was

declared by one of the branch's sternest critics of real ale to be about the best he had ever tasted. As usual plenty of music at the pub with some special treats late July and August – see advert.

DEAL

Three Horseshoes, Gt. Mongeham: Regular beers are Gadds' No 5 and Greene King IPA. Landlord, Martin, says people like IPA as a session beer but wonders if perhaps he shouldn't make it Gadds' all round and replace it with Gadds' No 7 – sounds a good idea to us. For August Bank Holiday weekend a beer festival is planned (see advert for details).

Telegraph, Hamilton Road: Following the retirement of former tenants John and Maggie, the pub has been taken on by Jenny Maxted, who has previously worked behind the bar at the Berry and the Lord Clyde. She took on the tenancy on April 24th and has no plans to make any changes, as she likes the pub's feel. On our visit, her only real ale was Master Brew but she's going to try Earlybird and Spiffire as well.

Chequers, Golf Road: Sadly the pub/restaurant has ceased selling real ale, having found there was insufficient demand, and a lot was being thrown away. It had formerly sold Broadside and Master Brew. As a replacement it is offering a selection of bottled beers from the Cornish Ring O' Bells Brewery, which although not bottle conditioned proved excellently flavoured.

Lifeboat, The Strand, Walmer: Closed since 2004, and rumoured for conversion to restaurant and bar, a planning application has now been submitted

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and approved for change of use to residential. In 2005 a new pub licence had been applied for under the revised regulations.

Berry, Canada Road: Landlord, Chris, has refurbished the outside patio area – a quiet retreat away from the bustle of Walmer Seafront. Harveys' Sussex appears very much a fixture, and on one recent visit was the only beer available, following a particularly good weekend. Other real ales vary: in mid May being a duo from Woodforde: Wherry and Great Eastern.

Elsewhere in Deal in mid June, the **Bohemian** was selling Broadside, Wherry and Goacher's Gold Star along with Weston's Organic Cider, while a few doors along the spring line up at Shepherd Neame's **Clarendon** was Master Brew, Spitfire and Early Bird,

and a similar selection was to be found at the **Deal Hoy** in Duke Street. The **Prince Albert**, Alfred Square, is sticking with an ever-changing selection. On a visit in late May this was York Brewery Decade, Tom Wood Hop & Glory and Nelson's Spring Pride, but no sign of a fourth handpump which was being talked of in the winter. At the nearby **Ship Inn**, Middle Street, there is a choice of five real ales, currently normally Gadd's 3 and 7, Deuchar's IPA, Summer Lightning and Master Brew. In the main street the **New Inn** is selling Bass and Spitfire, and in West Street the **Alma** re-opened on Saturday May 27th (see Tony's Tappings).

SANDWICH & RURAL

Hope, Lydden: The application for five dwellings and four letting apartments, reported in our last issue, has been



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refused. Dover District Council felt that the development, as proposed, was overbearing and cramped, left inadequate parking and site lines, and would cause additional traffic hazards. Locally, the Parish Council, among other concerns, feared that the loss of the garden and accompanying summer trade might put the future of the pub at risk.

Red Lion, Stodmarsh: The pub has a beer festival lined up for the last weekend in July, Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th, which if the hot weather at the time of writing continues promises to be a great success. Robert is planning on 14 real ales, which in addition to regulars Greene King IPA and Old Speckled Hen, includes Greene King Triumph, Abbot and a special brew Harley Davison. Special IPA lasses will be £1 each.

Blue Pigeons, Worth: Plants went on sale on Bank Holiday Monday for this year's pumpkin competition at the village pub. The annual contest raises cash for charity and the entry with the biggest fruit can win its weight in beer. Plants have to be bought at the pub for the competition and, apart from the free brew, there will also be other prizes to win. In early April the pub was selling Young's Bitter, Adnams Bitter and Wadworth 6X.

Five Bells, Eastry: Mitchell & Butler's Mild still selling very well, the pub being one of only three regular mild outlets in our branch area, while Gadds ales continue to be popular – Seasider due to come on at end of June. A particular recent success, especially with landlady, Debbie, was Workie Ticket from the Tyneside brewery Mordue. Also good to see the pub selling good quantities of Stock Ale (formerly English Ale, and before that Gold Top – an old Fremilns brew inherited by Whitbread) – it may

not be real but it has a truly excellent flavour.

Plough Inn, Ripple: A visit in April found Sheps Best and Master Brew, and Broadside just finished (very rapidly apparently). Also Fuller's ESB, which "at the risk of sounding like those prats who write restaurant reviews" was found by our correspondent to be "excellent, and slipped down like a smooth desert wine!"

Rising Sun, Kingsdown: "I hate to think how long it has been since I visited the Rising Sun", says Pubs Officer, Tony Wells. I found just the one beer on - a very good London Pride. Outside the pub there is a patio area to the front and a garden with patio and skittle alley to the rear.

Yew Tree, Barfrestone: Venue for our May Branch Meeting, we found we were sharing the pub with a folk evening – which greatly impressed our branch secretary – and a fine selection of ales including Glastonbury Lady of the Lake, Salopian Golden Thread and a very good mild: Coach House Gunpowder. A month or so later the early July heat wave found another excellent mild, this time Goacher's, very lively and superbly refreshing along with Nethergate Umbel Magna, Dark Star Sunburst, Incubus and Banks & Taylor Dragonslayer.

In Sandwich the branch enjoyed a good, if small, monthly meeting at the **Fleur-de-Lis** where the choice of ale is Greene King IPA, 6X and an ever changing guest. At the nearby **Greyhound**, a long time unseen beer, Marston's Merrie Monk was recently on the handpump. In Westmarsh no change at the **Way Out Inn**, still closed (a bit Marie Celeste with handpumps still



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sporting pump clips), and also still closed, the **Endeavour**, Wootton. So also is the **Butcher Arm's**, Ashley, where an appeal has been lodged against the Council's refusal for change of use to residential. At Capel the **Royal Oak** is still maintaining a very competitive pricing regime with up to four real ales available – in mid-April Hancock's HB was on sale at £1.60 and Cottage Hound Dog at £2.00, however still no real ale at the **Chequers**, West Hougham. The **Hare and Hounds**, Northbourne and **Bell Lydden** have new landlords (see Tony's Tappings).

FOLKESTONE

Happy Frenchman, Christchurch Rd: Another change of landlord: Stuart, having been replaced after a brief incumbency as manager by Rory. Adnams Broadside is now joined by Timothy Taylor Landlord as a second regular ale, while the long awaited refurbishment is due in the next month or so: major alterations are not expected.

Chambers, Cheriton Place: The basement pub continues to offer one of the best selections of real ale in the town. Regulars are Adnams Southwold, locals Skrimshander and Gadd's No 5, and at the heavyweight end, Ringwood Old Thumper. A weekly guest is always available. Recently this has included the mouth-watering duo Burton Bridge Top Dog Stout and Dark Star Original.

Princess Royal: The hand-pumps look increasingly forlorn at this one time real pub, now

seemingly devoted to all things bottled and keg. Cartoons still occupy the large TV screen, and there never seem to be more than a couple of customers. No doubt it will end up as a kebab shop.

Lifeboat: New landlords here as well, Kevin having left at the start of July. Running the pub largely single handed proved too much of a tie, and he intends to have several months' break before making any plans for the future. One of his final guest ales was a very tasty Greene King Ale Fresco. A few streets away the **East Cliff Tavern** is sticking with an ever-changing selection, a recent visit finding Burton Bridge California Dreaming, Incubus and Dark Star Hophead. In Dover Rd. the **Martello** shows no sign of re-opening, and now the sign advertising

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'a pub business opportunity' has disappeared as well.

In Sandgate, the tucked away **Clarendon** was selling Shep's Early Bird at the promotional price of £2 a pint in mid June, alongside Master Brew and Spitfire; while the usual extensive selection at the **Ship** included, as well as Greene King IPA and Abbot, Old Peculiar, Incubus, Summer Lightning and Ridley's Prospect. And **Harveys**, Sandgate Rd., is also selling real ale at £2 a pint, on this occasion Archers' Best – other beers late June where Bass and Courage Directors.

In the Bayle the **British Lion** and the **Guildhall** are turning over an impressive list of guests. Including at the former Smiles Zing, Cains FA, Springhead Roaring Meg and Black Sheep Emmerdale; and at the latter, Summer

Lightning, Wye valley Hereford Pale Ale, Everards Svengal Tiger, Young's Waggledance and Adnams Regatta. Round the corner in Church St the **Pullman** had just one real ale at last visit, during the World Cup – a patriotic offering called English Glory.

TONY'S TAPPINGS
(The perambulations of our Pubs
Officer: Tony Wells)

All Change

"Spring has sprung, the grass has riz, I wonder who our landlord is?" It seems that change is in the air this spring as a number of our pubs have new landlords.

Punch Taverns has bought the **Hare and Hounds**, Northbourne, and the new tenants, Bruce and Tracey Doodney arrived, taking over from Tony and Sue. Their background in the pub industry includes 10 years' working for the Firkin chain, at the Phantom & Firkin and Fox & Firkin before taking some time out to raise a family. They do not intend to make any drastic changes to the pub, as they said, "why change a successful formula", and intend to continue to offer a wide choice of real ales, with customers allowed to vote for the next guest ale. They are also thinking about introducing real cider - something my wife appreciates.

At the **Telegraph** in Walmer, Jenny Maxted has replaced John and Maggie, who have retired. Some of you may already know Jenny from when she worked behind the bar at the Green Berry and the Lord Clyde. She has always wanted to run her own

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pub and sees this tenancy as a good start. Again, no drastic changes are planned, as she likes the feel of the pub. At the time of visiting she was planning to add Shep's Early Bird to the Master Brew, and possibly Spitfire as well.

And a 40th birthday present with a difference!! As was reported in the East Kent Mercury, the **Alma** in West Street, Deal, reopened after significant refurbishment with new tenants, Jane and Gary May. The pub was Gary's 40th birthday present. Greene King IPA and Fuller's London Pride are currently on offer, although Gary did say they might consider expanding the range depending on how the business develops.

Finally, there are new tenants at the **Lydden Bell**: Andrew & Sarah Anthony. This is definitely a family-run restaurant, with Sarah out front, husband Andrew in the kitchen and Kevin, Sarah and Joe, her brother-in-law, helping out. They have 10 years' experience in the restaurant trade and, following a three year search, moved from a local restaurant to take up the tenancy at the Lydden Bell. They sell Greene King IPA and Speckled Hen but, like many new pub owners, may consider different beers as their experience grows.

Elsewhere

Those of you who visited the **Jackdaw** in Denton, on Monday 19th June, may have been puzzled by the old East Kent omnibus parked outside. This was my parish's (Northbourne) annual mystery bus trip in aid of the church and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, and The Jackdaw was our first stop. A good range of beers was

on offer including Ringwood Bitter, Bath's Wild Hare, Spitfire and Broughton's Exciseman's 80/-. The Wild Hare, a golden organic beer, had a wonderful dry finish.

A visit to the **Black Pig** at Staple uncovered an unusual find – Shepherd Neame's Whitstable Bay on draught. The reason why I say unusual is that, according to Shep's web site, this organic beer is only available in bottles; definitely a beer for a summer's day.

And in Finglesham, cider is back. Now that we are into summer, we should see draught cider making regular appearances at the **Crown Inn**.

Recently...

A chance visit to the **Coastguard** at St. Margaret's Bay uncovered some changes, but not the landlord I hasten to add. Nigel has replaced keg cider with real cider and now has Weston's on offer. For those of you who like European beers, the Coastguard has always been known for its range of bottled beers from Europe. Well, a new font has been installed serving Leffe, Belle-Vue Kriek (a lambic fruit beer) and Hoegaarden. At the time of this visit the real ales available were Rebellion Blonde, Adnams Bitter, and Mauldons Mid-Summer Gold. The Coastguard is hosting our branch meeting in September, so why not join us and use it as an excuse to sample its range of beers? And there are plenty of beer festivals over the next few months – see Events Diary (page 3)

**Heard anything on the hop bine?
Then email it to channel-draught.pubnews@virgin.net**



THE GREAT BRITISH BEER FESTIVAL

Earls Court, London

Tuesday August 1st to Saturday August 5th

The Great British Beer Festival from **August 1st to August 5th** will this year be bigger than ever before as it moves from London's Olympia to Earls Court. A hand-picked selection of more than 700 different real ales, ciders, perries, and bottled beers will be available at the festival - confirming Earls Court as the new home of British beer. CAMRA Chief Executive Mike Benner said: "More than 47,000 people came to the 2005 Great British Beer Festival and because of the new larger venue we are looking forward to welcoming even more visitors this year. "The Great British Beer Festival is the best thing about the summer for beer enthusiasts. But even if you have never tried real ale before it is the perfect place to meet up with friends, come for a drink with colleagues after work, or simply soak up some Great British hospitality."

This year the festival will include:

- A Bottled Beer Bar offering more than 100 varieties of real ale in a bottle.
- The prestigious CAMRA Champion Beer of Britain 2006 will be announced on Tuesday August 1st during the trade session.
- Beers from around the world at Bières Sans Frontières, including Germany, Belgium, Italy, USA and the Czech Republic.
- A wide variety of ciders and perries from some of the UK's finest independent producers.
- Tutored beer tastings with brewing experts Full liquid pints guaranteed thanks to the use of oversized lined glasses.
- A great selection of delicious food.
- Live Music.
- A family room for under 18's.

Mike Benner added: "This Great British Beer Festival is shaping up to be bigger and better than ever before. With so much to see, do - and of course, taste - a trip to Earls Court in August will be a terrific experience."

Opening Times & Admission prices

Tuesday 1st August 17.00-22.30: Admission £7.00, CAMRA members £5.00
Wednesday 2nd August Noon-22.30: Admission £7.00, CAMRA members £5.00
Thursday 3rd August Noon-22.30: Admission £7.00, CAMRA members £5.00
Friday 4th August Noon-22.30: Admission £7.00, CAMRA members £5.00
Saturday 5th August 11.00-19.00: Admission £6.00, CAMRA members £4.00

⊖ **By Tube** Earls Court Station (Piccadilly Line and District Lines)
(For Earls Court One - Warwick Road entrance)

⚡ **By Train** West Brompton for Earls Court (Mainline trains)

🚌 **By Bus** Earls Court is served by the following bus routes
Warwick Road (Earls Court One) 74, 328, C1, C3



New Home for Young's

The latest instalment in the current round of reorganisation in the brewing industry sees Young's and Charles Wells combining in a joint venture operating from Charles Wells' Eagle Brewery in Bedford. It is understood that this is not a merger but a co-operative venture under the name Wells and Young, which will own the freehold of the brewery, the two brewers' brands, and responsibility for sales and marketing to the retail sector, pubcos and the free trade. However, the two pub estates will be run entirely separately and Young's will retain its AIM listing. The move has, to a large extent, been forced on Young's, whose Ram Brewery in Wandsworth was earmarked for redevelopment in November 2003, as part of the borough's rejuvenation scheme, and whose attempts to find another site locally since then have proved unsuccessful.

Although Young's association with Wandsworth has always had a special place in the hearts of CAMRA members, it being one of only two independent London brewers at the time of the campaign's formation, and being from the start a steadfast supporter of real ale, a move need not be seen as necessarily detrimental to its brews. Traditional wisdom usually doubts that it is possible to change breweries and retain a beer's taste unchanged, but many have moved successfully, a fine recent example being Brakspear's, whose current version of Special some consider might be better than the original. Trial brewing is believed to be already underway at Bedford, but a date for the closure of the

The National News

By Martin Atkins

Ram Brewery has not yet been announced.

As well of course as understandable concern about the character of the transferred brews, what remains at the back of the minds of real ale drinkers is that, while this might not be a merger in the true sense of the word, the companies are in effect a single operation. How often have we heard before that nothing will change and that all the brands are safe? No doubt at present this is exactly what Young's and Charles Wells intend, but commercial pressure has its own way of asserting itself. In particular, there was a somewhat unsettling reference by a member of staff from one of the two breweries about creating a major force in real ale. Young's has of late expanded its range to include some excellent seasonal beers, while Charles Wells Bombardier remains one of the most consistently good of the widely available premium bitters. It would be disappointing to see such variety diminished.

Fight for Guest Ale

The right for tenants of pubcos and breweries to have access to guest ale is being placed at the heart of CAMRA's campaigning strategy. At the Blackpool AGM National Chairman Paula Waters told members that Greene King and Wolverhampton and Dudley now both owned well over 2,000 pubs but had no obligation to allow their licensees to choose a guest cask ale - the provision introduced by the 1990 Beer Orders had disappeared when the Government

unilaterally revoked them several years ago. In any case, over half of the country's pubs were now owned by non-brewing pubcos, to whom the Orders never applied. CAMRA is calling for a guest ale right for all tenants and managers of all pub operators owning more than 30 pubs (the industry's own definition of a pub chain), whether they brew or not.

Sour Beer at Wolves

There certainly appears slim chance of any microbrewer getting its beers into Wolverhampton & Dudley's tenanted pub division, the 1,800 strong Union Pub Company. According to its boss, Stephen Oliver, micros are 'airing cupboard comedians' and 'happy hobbyists, whose beer is usually cloudy and tastes of p*ss in draught form, and is unstable, cloudy, sour and oxidised' when bottled – 'generally a nasty drink and not one that does much for the sector. They are using taxpayers' money to fund their hobby via the Progressive Beer Duty' (the low rate of duty available to those brewing under 36,000 barrels a year). 'My message to the micros,' he continued, 'is, "don't count on the subsidy in future. Wake up, wise up or get out". Interestingly, the outburst did not follow one too many pints of Banks Original at Wolves' brewery tap, but was addressed to the very object of his spleen, the Society of Independent Brewers' annual conference at Southport.

We don't know the response of SIBA members but the attack follows hard on the heels of similar attacks at the Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB) spring meeting. Regional and family brewers have seen their share of the market fall from 22% in 1990 to 10% currently. Many have closed, and blame is being heaped on the Progressive Beer Duty, which allows the micros to

undercut the regionals in the free trade by up to £10 a firkin. They are, of course, being squeezed on the one hand by the four national giants Carlsberg, Coors, InBev and Scottish Courage, with their enormous economies of scale, marketing clout and 80% of the market and, on the other, by the innovative and agile micros. However there appears no absence of their brews on the bar top – Spitfire, London Pride, Greene King IPA, Broadside and all the rest being seen with, what some might say was excessive, regularity. A case perhaps of Wolves crying Wolf.

It's hard to make any sense of Mr Oliver's attack. How many people does he know will drink cloudy beer tasting of p*ss, however cheap it is? In any case, micro brews are normally no cheaper in a pub than other beers, so by what magic are customers persuaded to part with hard earned cash for such an inferior product? Or is it all a conspiracy by 80,000 CAMRA members to drink anything but the output of Wolverhampton and Dudley and other large producers? Of course it's all nonsense. If micro brews were no good they wouldn't sell, and while we all have our own preferences and think that some are better than others, so we do also about the regional and national brewers. The best micro brewed beer is superb and the bigger brewers often struggle to match it.

Certainly the operation and extent of the PBD may need looking at (see below), but small companies need all the help they can get, to the great benefit of us all – unless of course you believe that the economy should be tied up by a few large operators with huge economies of scale. Ten years ago Wolverhampton & Dudley was happy to run some 600 plus pubs in a tight knit area in the West



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Midlands. However, following a succession of takeovers, it now controls some 2,300 pubs and is becoming a national presence, with evidently all the accompanying angst and pressure. The brewery may find it instructive to observe its two Black Country neighbours, Batham and Holden's, content to serve the local community with just thirty pubs between them.

Progressive Beer Duty

A rather more enlightened approach comes from two MPs, Mid-Worcestershire Conservative Peter Luff and Leeds NW Lib-Dem Greg Mulholland. Having persuaded the Strangers' Bar in the Palace of Westminster to stock Cannon Royall's Arrowhead, brewed at the Fruiterers Arms, Ombersley in Worcestershire, they have tabled an Early Day Motion calling for Progressive Beer Duty to be extended to all brewers producing up to 200,000 hectolitres, as in 13 other European countries. PBD has been criticised recently by many regional brewers who see it as a government subsidy that allows small independents to compete unfairly. Raising the limit from the present 60,000 hectolitres would benefit at least 15 breweries including Black Sheep, Timothy Taylor, Wadworth, Adnams and Refresh UK. CAMRA is throwing its full weight behind the Early Day Motion, which has already been signed by 70 MPs, and is calling on its members to email their own MPs asking them to support the motion as well.

Hardy & Hansons

The next chapter in the re-assembly of the pre Beer Orders brewing industry is well on the way to being completed with Greene King's takeover of Hardys and Hansons of Kimberley, Nottingham, to

end 174 years of independence. It is the brewery's tenth acquisition, adding 268, mainly East Midlands, pubs to its existing 2,400 and giving it a market value of over £1bn, placing it amongst the country's top five brewers and pub owners. Greene King says it will retain Hardys and Hansons brands but is disquietingly quiet on the future of the brewery. CAMRA's Mike Brenner has urged Hardys shareholders to reject the bid, saying, "If this deal goes through, history has shown that Hardys & Hansons brewery and beers will not be in safe hands".

The two Boards, shareholders, the City and business analysts will all, no doubt, consider this an excellent arrangement, Greene King's chief executive describing it as a perfect fit of two predominantly rural and out of town pub estates. Not so keen will be the firms' employees, particularly those at Hardy and Hanson, who might anticipate that sooner or later (probably sooner) all brewing will end up in Bury St Edmunds; while who knows what the views are of those for whom brewing supposedly exists - the publicans and their customers. As usual they will just have to lump it. In all the various takeovers and mergers over the years have these two groups ever been consulted? Highly unlikely - and it would of course be naïve to expect otherwise. After all, they only sell and drink the beer.

Rather than attacking microbrewers for allegedly undercutting them on price the IFBB might be better employed tackling the cannibalistic activities of its two largest members, currently chomping their way voraciously through their fellow brewers. At this rate there soon won't be enough left to form a federation. It all seems reminiscent of the Walrus and the Carpenter and the fate of the

oysters. " 'The time has come' the Walrus said 'to talk of many things: of shoes – and ships – and ceiling wax – of cabbages and kings.' ... and they ate them, every one.

Why Handpull?

Britain's real, ale market is currently undergoing scrutiny from a think-tank established by a number of regional brewers – Greene King, Wolverhampton and Dudley, Fullers, Adnams and one or two others. Somewhat ambiguously called *Why Handpull?*, one of its first recommendations is a reduction in the number of handpumps, so as to discourage pubs from offering more beer than they can reasonably look after and sell in good condition. Apparently the hand-pulled beer agenda (whatever that might be) has been set by a vocal minority – real ale bores, CAMRA members, etc. – and it is time to heed the

"silent majority". "Most people's experience of cask ale is that it is of poor quality, there is too much choice and the sector lacks the reassurance of tried and trusted brands."

Undoubtedly one of real ale's major problems is uncertain quality, but removing handpumps frankly seems an irrelevancy. Sceptical opinion might well see it as a way of limiting access to microbrewers, a view, which talk of "too much choice" and lack of "tried and trusted brands" only reinforces. Neither is it helpful to criticise those who want greater variety than just a limited selection of bitters. In fact many might be inclined to respond that the regional brewers should look at the initial quality of their own product before criticising the way it's kept.

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Kent Small Brewery News



The breweries that appear in this report are the Kent micros that actually deliver beers to the public houses that are in the area covered by Channel Draught. If you are a licensee, why not try the beers from one of these small craft breweries, who brew their beers to a high standard using natural ingredients.

P & DJ Goacher 01622 682112 – Maidstone Contact: Phil Goacher

Nothing changes in Kent's second oldest and perhaps most traditional brewery, with direct deliveries to east Kent now firmly established. Recent deliveries have been made to: the Crown Inn, Finglesham who has taken various Goacher's brews; the Bohemian, Deal who is fond of Gold Star; the Yew Tree, Barfrestone, where Mild quite regularly appears; the King's Head, Kingsdown; the Coastguard, St. Margaret's; Blake's, Dover, where Crown Imperial Stout is a regular; and, for members and guests, the Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club where one can find Fine Light.

Ramsgate Brewery Ltd. 01843 868453 Contact: Eddie Gadd.

The new address of the Ramsgate Brewery is 1 Hornet Close, Pysons Road Industrial Estate, Broadstairs. We already have Bath Brewery in Bristol, so why not Ramsgate Brewery in Broadstairs? Eddie describes his new site as, "a delightful little shed at the back of the town". There is a small off licence at the brewery where one can buy its products. Brewery tours are encouraged and this does involve drinking beer. As Eddie states, "there is no limit to how many visits an individual takes". To visit the brewery take a train to Ramsgate, and then the "Thanet loop" bus in a clockwise direction and alight at Pysons Road.

All of the regular beers are still brewed with the same Kentish hops as in the previous location. Gadd's No. 3 bottle conditioned ale is available in local off licenses and from the brewery. Exodus Export Stout, in bottle conditioned form is available only from the brewery, unless one travels to The Netherlands or Belgium, where it is also available. A beer has been brewed for 'football fans' and is named Half and Half. The beer is fairly hoppy and light bodied and uses German and English hops. It was recently on sale in Blake's.

Nelson Brewing Company 01634 832828 - Chatham

As we go to print, the sale of the brewery is under way. Fortunately, this will not be to Greene King or Fuller's, and the same staff, including the brewer, Ivana, will stay with the business. An announcement is expected within the next few days.. A special beer was brewed for the football World Cup. To find a suitable name for the beer a competition was held in a local newspaper, and the name 'Ingerland' was chosen. The beer was a light, golden beer and proved to very popular. So much so, that it was all sold before the England football team was eliminated from the competition, which was perhaps fortuitous for the brewery. Nelson beers will be appearing at both the Kent Beer Festival and the Dartford Beer Festival.

Hopdæmon Brewery 01795 892078 – Newnham Contact: Tonie Prins

There is not much to report from the brewery this edition. Skrimshander IPA will be available at the Great British Beer Festival at Earl's Court, London, in August and the full range of beers, including the ginger flavoured beer, Bewitched, will be available at the Kent Beer Festival in July. The sales of bottled Skrimshander in local Tesco, Sainsbury's and Thresher stores are brisk.

Whitstable Brewery 01622 851007 – Grafty Green Contact: Rafik Abidi

The brewery owned new pub/bar is due to open in East Quay, Whitstable, on Friday 7th. July. The hours will be 12.00 – 23.00 (22.30 Sundays). In addition to Whitstable Brewery beers there will be beers from Crouch Vale, Dark Star, and Oakham breweries. These will be served direct from the cask and will be supplemented by Whitstable's keg beers.

A summer beer festival will be held at East Quay from Thursday 27th July to Sunday 30th July (half day on Sunday). This will take place in a marquee on the beach, and will feature 40 cask ales..

Roger Marples



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CIDER MATTERS

So, what has been going on in the world of cider since the last instalment? Well, for a start, many of the year's cider awards have been announced. At the various county shows in the West Country, cider and perry competitions have been decided and various producers have gone home either proud or disappointed. You can find the CAMRA awards listed on the national website, while the other awards were copied to the UKCider group at the time, and can still be found in the message archive. If you are interested in cider and/or perry, why not visit the group at <http://groups.google.com/group/ukcider> ?

Locally, I've had the opportunity to visit a few pubs serving cider, and been generally impressed by the availability. Of course, in this part of the world, you can only really expect the bigger producers to have their products available, but at one well-known village pub I did find a Kent cider on sale. If you look around, it is there – don't forget that cider sales have seen a huge increase in recent years, and not all of it is down to the trendy fizzy stuff in bottles.

On the UKCider group, the usual subjects have been kicked around, but one of interest to me was the use of sulphites. They are used to sterilise equipment and inhibit infections in the natural product. However, they can aggravate asthma in some drinkers, so there was interest in finding brands and products that do not use them. Then someone with a background in chemistry pointed out that some yeasts produce sulphur dioxide naturally, and many producers like to have a little natural sparkle in their products. Unlike beer, that sparkle in cider is often sulphur dioxide, and it is the sulphur dioxide that can cause a problem for asthmatics. So, if you try cider and it gives you a problem, head over to the UKCider group to read about it.

Another subject that has been revisited recently is sweetening dry cider without using sugar, as that can reactivate residual yeast in the cider. Artificial sweeteners can leave a bitter aftertaste, and honey was another suggestion. Some ciders are produced commercially with honey in them (although under Customs regulations they are technically not cider if they have honey in them), while some people just use a little to sweeten to taste. The general opinion was that using natural un-sweetened apple juice was the best solution, and the most natural, so you might want to bear that in mind if you ever find yourself unable to get a cider sweet enough for your personal taste.

Speaking of personal tastes, one correspondent on the group likes to sample the various ciders available in supermarkets and reports back with tasting notes. So, if you see ciders on the top shelf of your local supermarket and want to know what it tastes like without risking it yourself, you know where to find the info. Believe me, those marketing guys are *really* good at getting us to try their wares, but it is often a case of style over substance. Sometimes an unknown name can be a pleasant

surprise, but not always. So, let someone else take the risks for you, and it's cheaper that way as well! You can't lose!

Perhaps now would be a good time to point out that this is not an advert for a Google group. I just want you to know that there are other people out there who take their cider a bit more seriously, so why not use the resources that they provide?

Well, by the time you read this, the Kent festival will probably have come and gone, and maybe even the GBBF. I hope at least some of you will have taken the trouble to go along and try a few ciders and/or perries. The folks on the cider and perry bar at Canterbury have always been really knowledgeable on what they sell, and the same goes for the GBBF staff, although they tend to have a bit less time on their hands.

Anyway, will you be trying a drop of the real stuff over the summer? How about a couple of bottles with that barbecue? Or maybe a trip to your local or a country pub on a hot summer's afternoon or evening? There is a tradition that says cider is a rough, cloudy drink to be enjoyed only by yokels in smocks after a hard day's toil in the fields, but there is a new tradition that says cider is an enjoyable drink to be savoured by people from all walks of life in any circumstances (except maybe on your breakfast cereal, but each to their own, I suppose). Let's just get out there and claim proper cider as a drink of the people, just like real ale. Are you with us?

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SUMMER ALES



Since the huge success of Summer Lightning brewed by Hop Back of Salisbury, about twenty years ago, summer beers have gained in popularity. The style was initially pursued by the 'micros', or craft breweries, but more latterly the regional breweries have followed this lead.

Obviously there are variations on the theme but, in general, Summer Ale is brewed with good quality pale malt, with perhaps even pilsner malt added to further lighten the colour. It is not unknown for malted wheat to be used in the mash. The beer is normally highly hopped, with perhaps traditional East Kent Goldings, or sometimes a few of the newer aromatic varieties being added. Extra hops are often added to the copper at a late stage of the boil, to give more of a 'zest' to the beer. Summer Lightning was the one beer, more than any other, that pioneered the popularity of this style. In short, 'Summer Ale' is a beer that is light in body and colour with a refreshing, pronounced hoppy taste. The strength is around 4.5% - 5% A.B.V. Summer Lightning is 5%, as is Exmoor Gold, another early pioneer of this type.



However, although not known as 'Summer Ales', there have been a few once popular beers that were similar in style to this now fashionable drink. Although not quite as high in alcohol by volume, Stone's of Sheffield and Boddingtons of Manchester were weaker precursors of the modern 'summer ale'. I well remember both of these beers, from the 1970s, before their character was destroyed by brewery takeovers and changes in recipes. They were both much lighter in colour than their contemporaries and had a pronounced hoppy flavour. Had they not been tampered with by the Philistines in the brewing industry, they would surely be much sought after today. In recent times, after yet another change of brewery ownership, Boddingtons Cask Bitter is now being brewed in Manchester by Hydes Brewery, and is well worth drinking.

Roger Marples



BLAKES, DOVER

Branch Pub of the Year

2006

On the evening of June 29th real ale enthusiasts from Dover and surrounding areas gathered at Blakes in Castle Street for the presentation of the Pub of the Year award, by the Deal, Dover, Sandwich and District branch of CAMRA. Its current owners Katheryn and Peter Garstin, took over the pub and restaurant in June last year, having formerly run the Yew Tree at Barsestone, where they also won Pub of the Year in 2004. Blakes was ideally suited to the couple, its previous owners, Chris and Roger, having established the pub as a leading real ale outlet with the aid of the Mogul's old six-barrel stillage.



Continuing with the philosophy that had proved so successful at the Yew Tree they offer a wide range of ales from small breweries all over the country (any brewery without a finance director is Peter's maxim), but with special emphasis on those from Kent. There is almost always at least one beer from Hopdaemon

or Ramsgate Brewery, and Goacher's Crown Imperial Stout is a fixture. This is a particular coup for Peter, who played an instrumental part in persuading the Maidstone brewery to deliver direct to East Kent. The dark, challengingly bitter brew, has now replaced Guinness as the pub's standard Irish style stout. The normal line up is four real ales plus Thatchers' cider. Such has been their success, that from the end of last year Peter and Kath-



Martin Atkins presents the Pub of the Year Award

eryn entirely dispensed with keg products, whose sales by then had fallen to only 2% of turnover. If you want lager or some other non-real beer, it comes in a bottle.

As well as its devotion to real ale, Blakes is also a very successful restaurant, offering an extensive menu of home cooked, and largely locally sourced, food. Whisky is a speciality and the pub carries a selection of about fifty malts. Accommodation is available on the upper floors and at the rear is a secluded walled garden. From mid April this year Blake's has been entirely non-smoking. CAMRA wishes Katheryn and Peter good luck for the future, and trusts they will continue the good work; with every expectation that, having won it twice, we might well see them winning Pub of the Year again.



Kathryn & Peter Garstin with their award

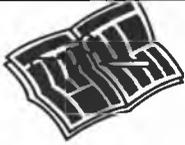
Martin Atkins

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We are, of course, equally pleased to hear from Landlords with news about their pub.



CHANNEL VIEW

MERGER MANIA

Enjoy it while you can, for if present trends continue, in five years' time we could well be back in the sixties and the days of Tavern Red and Toby Tankard. Alarmist? Perhaps just a bit, but there is nothing now stopping a return to the concentration of power in the brewing and pub owning industry that existed before the imposition of the Beer Orders in 1990 and, if it happened once, it can happen again.

In case you hadn't noticed, our two largest pub chains, Enterprise Inns and Punch Taverns, both now own approximately 10,000 pubs, and four international brewing giants produce 80% of our beer. Meanwhile the rest of the once sleepy backwater that was family and regional brewing, accustomed for decades to being the true custodians of real ale production in Britain, have been suddenly awakened from their provincial slumbers. Squeezed between the marketing clout of the internationals, and the agility and innovation of the micros, the leading regional brewers, Greene King and Wolverhampton & Dudley are, with the desperation of condemned men, earnestly seeking major acquisitions to expand their estates – currently standing at around 2,500 pubs each – while the rest anxiously look over their shoulders to see if it's their turn next. Already there has been defensive action: Fuller's taking over Gales, and Young's planning to join Charles Wells at Bedford. And the jittery atmosphere has

been reflected in the IFBB's attack on microbrewers, and by Stephen Oliver's outburst at the SIBA Conference (see National News): so much for fifteen years of diversification and choice.

At one time such activity would have been less of a worry, if it happened at all, as the Beer Orders would have required that brewers could directly run only half of any pubs they might own above a total of 2,000. In addition, their tenants would have a guest beer right. However for its own inexplicable reasons our present Government, some years ago, decided to rescind the orders - leaving the industry the happy option of reconfiguring itself to its former shape which, at the moment, it shows every indication of doing. While the Beer Orders may have been flawed they did oversee the break-up of the uncompetitive tied estates, allowed a substantial true free market to develop, and gave a great boost to the emerging microbrewers. Now everything is up for grabs, but the Government seems perfectly equanimous, seemingly believing in the perfect efficacy of the market. Will it remain so sanguine if all this is followed to its logical conclusion and our two major pubcos pursue the commercial benefits of owning the supply of beer as well as selling it? Tie-ups between Enterprise and Punch and Greene King and Wolves are all too conceivable.

CAMRA is totally opposed to the current spate of takeovers and brewery closures, with all their implications of

concentration of power and reduced consumer choice. In fact, it is hard to think of one benefit to the consumer deriving from brewery mergers and enlarged pub estates. Having awarded the campaign super-complainant status, allowing it direct access to the Office of Fair Trading to criticise aspects of brewing and pub owning that work against consumer interests, it should be taking more notice of its opinions. It might also be pertinent to know why the decision was taken to abandon the Beer Orders; we trust it did not involve lobbying from the industry.

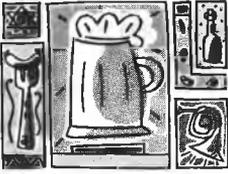
EC ALCOHOL REPORT

Once upon a time it was Government's role to keep law and order at home, fight wars overseas and uphold the established religion. Today it seems to feel that it is its duty to interfere in as many aspects of our daily life as it can. No sooner has a perceived problem been identified than it is reaching for the statute book and drawing up another great wedge of legislation to batter us with. And to guard against any hesitancy or wavering a vast array of pressure groups, advisory bodies, standards authorities, quangos, and the like, are on hand to stiffen the sinew and strengthen the moral fibre. And the European Commission seems no different. By the time you read this it should have in its hands a report on the health and social impact of alcohol, which will probably form the basis of an EC alcohol strategy, expected later this year.

Fair enough, everyone knows that alcohol is not without its problems, and it seems reasonable for Government and legislators to acquaint themselves with details – but it seems, at the very least,

injudicious to commission such a report from a temperance charity, which is what has occurred here. The report's author is the Institute of Alcohol Studies and is linked to the temperance organisation Alliance House, which defines its mission as 'to spread the principles of total abstinence from alcoholic drinks.' The report will claim that 23 million Europeans are alcoholics, that alcohol causes 16% of child abuse cases and 2,000 murders a year, that longer opening hours leads to more disorder, and that a 10% duty rise could save 9,000 deaths a year. CAMRA has condemned the EC for using a partisan lobby group, and the European drinks industry is similarly aghast. Mark Hastings of the British Beer and Pubs Association said people would be 'gobsmacked' if the EC had commissioned the report from the drinks industry.

Of course what may be lying behind this biased approach is an abandonment of all pretence that the European Commission as well as our own Government is now pro-actively steering us towards its vision of a healthy life style whether we want it or not, and is working hand in glove with those who hold similar opinions. While it would be wrong for Government to return to the hands-off approach of several centuries ago, the apparent desire to order all parts of our welfare has gone far too much the other way. A more appropriate approach for Government might be an adaptation of Voltaire's famous remark about free speech: "I disapprove of your life style, but I will defend to the death your right to live it".



Memoirs of a Beer Festival Groupie

Mid summer, and the White Cliffs Festival of Winter Ales, Dover's leading real ale festival, is now no more than a memory. Held as usual in the Town Hall, the historic Maison Dieu, it proved once again that there's no slackening of interest in traditional cask conditioned beer in east Kent. Between mid afternoon Friday February 3rd and early evening Saturday February 4th over seventy firkins of 5% plus ABV real ale were happily consumed – that's the best part of 5,000 pints, with nine barrels finished off by the end of Friday evening alone; local landlords benefited as well, as keen beer drinkers spilled over into near-by pubs. Beer of the festival, the first barrel to empty, was Nimbus Pale Ale from Highlands and Islands Brewery in Scotland, which had been dispatched by 6.30 on Friday evening, and by the end of the festival only a handful of barrels still had any beer remaining, about two firkins' worth in all. Such was the interest that again on Friday night we ran up against the Town Hall's capacity limit, and for several hours we were forced to restrict admissions just to replacement for those leaving. We had hoped that by opening earlier this year and spreading attendance, we might have avoided the problem, but all we achieved was to bring it forward a couple of hours. We will have to give this serious thought for next year, as well as reconsidering the absence of music Friday night, which we know a lot of people missed. To provide a taste of what's involved in running a beer festival, Committee Member Tony Wells has set out below his own recollections of this year's festival.

This is my fourth Festival of Winter Ales, and I thought it would be worth writing an article to give you some idea about what working at a CAMRA event is all about, in the hope that you'll join us next year.

This year I decided to help set up the festival, so my first step was to book some time off. (This is only really necessary if you are involved in setting up the festival. There are many ways you can help out, particularly during the event itself, which do not require you to take any holiday!) Monday morning and all day Friday, these are set-up days, and are absolutely crucial to the success of the festival. The majority of Monday morning is hard graft: bringing in and setting up the stillage, builder's stands and scaffolding planks, to support the barrels of beer; and the barrels themselves, which are set up on the stillage and left to settle before they are tapped and spiled in time for Friday evening.

This year I had (or was!!) volunteered to prepare the beer list. If you attend any beer festival this is THE vital piece of documentation that you rely on to make that all-important decision: "Which beer am I going to try next?" On the face of it this may seem a trivial task, but there is more to it than meets the eye: "Do I have the complete list?" "Have I spelt the breweries and beers correctly?" "Do I have the beers in the right order?" Back home I prepared and sent the beer list for printing. Now, here's something to bear in mind when working at a beer festival: never assume anything!! Even as the beer list was on its way to be printed, two firkins of Whitstable Smack had arrived – the

list was out of date already.

Over the next few days, the beers are spiled and tapped, and brought to peak condition under the experienced supervision of Festival Organiser, Dave Green, ably assisted by Tom Mitchell. My next involvement starts on Friday morning: setting up the rest of the hall. Work begins at 9.00am and has to be completed by 3.00pm, when the beer festival opens. Tasks include setting up the tombola stall; preparing the glasses and tokens; setting up the ticket area, the membership area, and the CAMRA shop. There is the bar to set up: tables to be laid out and covered in plastic sheeting, posters to be put up around the hall, labels to be put up over each barrel, and the barrel clips to be stuck up. This is also the time when the beers are sampled to ensure they are up to par. This again falls to Dave Green, and I have to take my hat off to someone who can sample 70 plus beers before lunchtime. Cheers Dave!

3.00pm soon arrives and the festival opens. Over the next three to four hours there is a steady stream of work to do as visitors arrive, purchase their tickets, glasses and tokens, and make their way to the bar area. In the main hall, the membership staff, CAMRA shop and tombola stall are attracting business. 6.30pm arrives and everything goes quiet. For those of you who are not aware, the Maision Dieu has a fire regulation limit of 500 people and this had been reached at 6.25. From now on and until about 9.30 we have to adopt the approach of one out/one in.

My job now takes on a different look - as doorman - ensuring that we don't exceed the fire regulation limit but at the same time keeping the queue of people at the door informed as to what is going on. This is something I haven't done before, but thankfully I was dealing with a bunch of keen and understanding beer drinkers, who didn't give me

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too much of a hard time. Some decided not to wait, but there were many hardy souls who waited up to one and a half hours to get in. To those of you who had the perseverance to stay the course, I hope you enjoyed yourself once you made it through the doors. At 9.30 the queue had diminished and I was back on normal duty. Eventually, closing time comes around and the last visitors are crowbarred out of the door so that the rest of us can get home and get some well-earned sleep.

Saturday, in many ways, is a complete contrast to Friday. It is far more relaxed, there are fewer visitors, and this is the day I spend on the other side of the bar as a customer. I always intend this to be a day off from volunteering, but as a member of the Festival Committee there is still the occasional job that needs to be done: tidying up, helping serve beer and dealing with the occasional query from visitors. At this point I'd like to mention one event of particular note: the landlord of my local, Dave Cooper of The Crown Inn at Finglesham, became a bona-fide member of CAMRA. Now all we have to do is persuade him to keep a copy of the GBG behind the bar (Dave... hint, hint!).

Saturday was longer and busier than normal, mainly because there was more beer left over as a result of the limits placed on us during Friday. During Saturday afternoon we did struggle for volunteers but managed to keep everyone supplied with beer. We eventually wended our way home at 5.30 for a quick pint or two at The Crown before going home and an early bed.

However, the event isn't over yet. Sunday morning arrives and this is the most unromantic time of all, the day which the vast majority of you never see – cleaning up and putting away everything ready for next year (*I think one of my jobs was one of the least romantic – washing out all of the dirty ash trays and slops buckets! – Ed Asst*). The now empty barrels of beer, builder's stands and boards need to be moved back to the loading area ready for pickup (by the way, there is usually some beer left so this is a chance to pick up a few pints of free, yes free, beer). Glasses need to be cleaned and packed away, and the hall left clean and tidy. Eventually it is all over and a few of us nip off to a local pub, in this case the Hope Inn at Lydden, for a quiet pint and a lunch time snack.

So, why do I do it? Partly because the White Cliffs Festival of Winter Ales is an incredibly successful event that contributes to the ongoing campaign to ensure that real ale remains part of British tradition, but also because I get to see the many hundreds of people enjoying themselves at this event. So, were you there, and which was your favourite beer? Why not help yourself? Why not volunteer some of your time next year? Even a couple of hours can make all the difference, and it ensures that the regular beer festival groupies get a break and a chance to do some drinking themselves.

Cheers and hope to see you next year.

Tony Wells



BEER FESTIVALS ROUND-UP

The Finglesham Contingent has enjoyed two beer festivals since the last edition of *Channel Draught* – the second Crabble Mill festival held in late May and, a week later, that of our neighbouring Ashford Hythe and Romney Marsh CAMRA branch at the South of England Rare Breeds Centre near Woodchurch, Kent. Beer festivals are about much more than just good beer and cider, however, so this time I've also included a few other worthy reasons for supporting such events.



The cider bar

On a warmish, slightly blustery bank holiday weekend Saturday, we arrived at Crabble Mill, where we abandoned a car for the weekend. Two of us had been to the inaugural festival at the same time last year, and it was great to return to this excellent venue for another delectable selection of beery treats. Whereas the last occasion saw the two of us manning the CAMRA stall in the afternoon (and even recruiting a new member and selling a few local *Real Ale in White Cliffs* guides), this time was purely for pleasure and we settled down upstairs to enjoy our beer and cider together with the usual array of crosswords and sudokus. We sat by a window overlooking the splendid millpond of the River Dour,

complete with its interesting waterfowl activity. The interior festival set-up was slightly different this year, with an additional bar area in the downstairs cellar room to accommodate several extra firkins. We sampled a goodly number of beers and ciders, for the most part trying to stick to Kentish products and those from neighbouring regions. Too many to list here from the spread of breweries, but of the local brews we three beer drinkers enjoyed excellent quality offerings



DDS Branch secretary Jim Green hard at work

from Goacher's, Hopdaemon, Larkins, Ramsgate, Shepherd Neame and Westerham, while Trish sampled the ciders and voted the Double Vision medium (7.4%) her favourite. All in all, another great festival – just as last year, it again seemed to have all right the ingredients of success, long may it continue into the future.



The Rambin' Boys at Crabble Mill

Ashford, Folkestone and Romney Marsh CAMRA's Rare Breeds Festival was as thoroughly enjoyable as the

only other time two of us managed to make it there (for it is quite some trek by public transport from Finglesham). This time we stayed at a lovely B&B in nearby Woodchurch and, in an action replay of the Crabble Mill event, drove to the festival (this time on the Friday night) and abandoned a car for the weekend. We then walked between Woodchurch and the Rare Breeds Centre that evening, and again on the Saturday for the daytime session – with, on Friday, varying degrees of success in navigating the public footpath over fields and through the woods in the late night darkness! This time, we had a spread of takers across both days for beer, cider and perry – and there was an impressive selection on offer. The beers ranged from 3.3% (Robinson's Hatters) - 6.7% (Goacher's Old) while the ciders and perries were from 5.5% (Hartlands Perry) to 8.2% (Minchews Dry Cider) – and there was again a wide choice of Honey Hole Farm cider available by the bottle. Of everything I sampled, my personal favourites were the Nethergate Old Growler (5.0% from Nethergate brewery in Suffolk) on the Friday, and a tie between Riddle's Dry Cider (7%) and Bollhayes Medium Cider (8%) on the Saturday. (We also brought home several bottles of cider, which we greatly enjoyed.) This is truly a festival with something for everyone: lovely setting in rolling Kentish countryside; beer, cider and perry of a good choice of strengths; BBQ; discounted access to the Rare Breeds Centre for festival goers; live folk music; Morris dancers; and space for campers wishing to take full advantage of all that the festival has to offer.

We are indeed fortunate to have such an interesting range of beer festivals in the local area – from large scale CAMRA events down to small pub-run mini-festivals set up by enterprising landlords. It is not merely the choice of beers, ciders and perries available



Inside the beer tent at Woodchurch

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Morris dancers at Woodchurch



at such events, but the hugely diverse buildings and settings in which they are held: Dover's ancient Maison Dieu, the huge cow shed of the working Merton Farm on the outskirts of Canterbury, pretty Kentish countryside at the South of England Rare Breeds Centre, Crabble's historic working watermill – and even the Old Monkey House up in Ramsgate. I hope to bring a report back from that event next year, because, this year, we tried

but failed to attend. The first ever 'Planet Thanet' CAMRA festival was held on Good Friday, and the organisers must feel they are victims of their own success given it was so popular that many people couldn't get in, and the beer had run out by the Saturday session... but oh what a setting for a beer festival, overlooking Pegwell Bay from high upon the Ramsgate cliffs!

Don't forget it is important to support your local landlords in their festival endeavours, too; in this day and age of village pubs closing at a rate of knots, this not only provides valuable support for your local, but has the added benefit of a great way to socialise and while away some leisure time. Sometimes your contribution can actively help to sustain a valuable local asset. With this in mind, here are just a few pub festivals I can think of that are coming up soon in

Soaking up the sunshine.....and the beer!



nearby east Kent (of course there are also others – check under Events Diary in this issue, or look out for ads in your local pub and/or newspaper):

Friday 28 – Saturday 29 July Hare & Hounds, Northbourne (beer, cider, live music, Saturday BBQ; call 01304 365429 for more details), **Saturday 29 – Sunday 30 July** Red Lion, Stodmarsh (beer, live music, sea shanties; call 01227 721339 for more details), **Friday 25 – Monday 28 August** Crown Inn, Finglesham (beer, cider, pig roast, live music and various other activities over the weekend; call 01304 612555 for more details).

Enjoy the summer, and why not let us know of any local festivals you attend? (Contact details are at the back of this newsletter.) We're always keen to hear news of such events.

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Amendments as at June 2006

The revised licensing laws mean that some the pub opening times shown in the guide may now have changed.

- **Butchers Arms, Ashley** – Now closed, future uncertain.
- **Yew Tree, Barfrestone** - The family symbol ☞ should be added. The cider is Biddenden 8% Dry.
- **Admiral Penn, Deal** - Closed.
- **Star & Garter, Deal** - Now closed. Converted to flats
- **Eagle, Dover** – Only occasionally serves real ale.
- **Millers, Dover** - Now renamed **Marine Court** and run as a 'Brewers Fayre' and Premier Travel Inn.
- **Orange Tree, Dover** – Closed and boarded up. Future uncertain
- **White Horse, Dover** - Opening Times changed to Mon-Sat 12.00-11.00pm
Sun 12.00-10.30pm.
- **Mogul, Dover** - Now Closed. Converted into offices. Stillage from The Mogul transferred to Blakes, Dover.
- **Crown, Finglesham** - telephone number should be **01304 612555**.
- **Hare & Hounds, Northbourne** - fully no smoking ☞
- **Bell, Shepherdswell** - Destroyed by fire.
- **Lifeboat, Walmer** - Closed following retirement of landlady, future of pub uncertain.
- **Chequers, West Hougham** - Has reopened as pub and restaurant.
- **Endeavour, Wootton** - Closed, future uncertain.

Please note that the ☞ in the Guide means that the landlord has indicated that the pub will admit children.

PUB PROFILE

A VISIT TO THE ROYAL OAK, NONNINGTON

As the weather was a lot better than the previous few days, four of us decided that we would spend a few hours in rural east Kent.

After alighting from a South Eastern Railway train at Aylesham, we strolled along the country byways to Nonnington, by which time it was about 11.20, and we thought that the Royal Oak might be open for business. On closer inspection, however, this proved not to be the case. As I was preparing to peer through the back window,



an extremely large dog appeared from the back door, closely followed by the landlord. When I had recovered from my initial shock, and had been assured that the extremely large dog was not as ferocious as it most decidedly seemed, I enquired about the opening time of the public house, and what ales were on offer. The rejoinder was that 12.00 was the normal opening time, and that Taylor's Landlord, Whitstable E.I.P.A, and (the ubiquitous) Shepherd Neame Master Brew, were available. On learning of the availability of the first two beers I expressed my sorrow that we could not really tarry for forty minutes without a pint in our hands to sustain us. Now, the landlord, being a genial sort of chap, suggested that should we be prepared to consume our beverages without the walls of the public house, he would serve us without delay, and open once he had taken a shower. We concurred with this splendid suggestion and, after being served with some very well kept beers, repaired to a bench seat at the front of the building to await the official opening of The Royal Oak, and to take the opportunity that this would present, to replenish our glasses.

The reason for this long introduction is to illustrate the sort of public house that The Royal Oak now is, under its new ownership, Jim and Paul Adams, father and son, who took over in September. They are from Meopham, Kent and

were not previously in the licensed trade. However they are both keen on good quality real ale. Their two permanent beers are Taylor's Landlord and Master Brew. These are supplemented by two ever-changing guest ales, which are often from Kentish microbreweries. The cellar, kitchen, restaurant and bar have all been refurbished, and an 'A la Carte' menu of totally fresh food is now being served, together with a selection of bar snacks. The opening times are Mondays 17.00 - 23.00, Tuesdays to Thursdays 12.00 -15.00 & 17.00 - 23.00, and Fridays to Sundays 12.00 - Midnight.

The Royal Oak is not too far from Snowdown station. Just turn right at the top of the steps and carry on walking until you arrive, in about ten minutes.

Roger Marples

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A GOOD DOSE OF CHESHIRE RING (With the Beery Boaters)

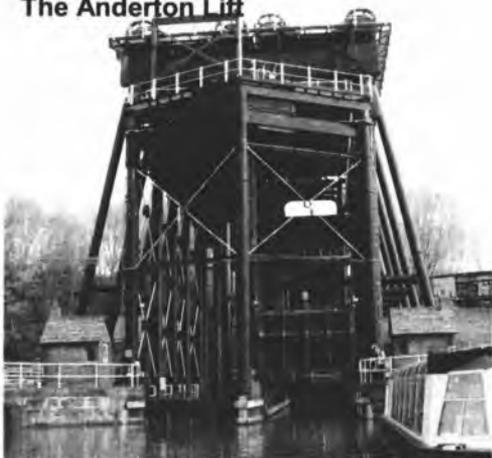
We had not done the Cheshire Ring since 1992, so the Beery Boaters decided that it was time to stage a return to the North-west. The Cheshire Ring is a circular canal route starting (in our case this time) in Middlewich and running (also in our case) clockwise along the Trent and Mersey Canal to Preston Brook, near Runcorn, up the Bridgewater and Rochdale Canals to Manchester and the Ashton and Lower Peak Forest Canals to Marple, down the Macclesfield Canal through Bollington, Macclesfield and Congleton to Kidsgrove, and then back down the Trent and Mersey to Middlewich. As it is only 92 miles with a mere 93 locks, it was mooted that we go down the Anderton Lift to the River Weaver and also try to get to Whaley Bridge on the Upper Peak Forest Canal – an extra 20 odd miles and another couple of locks.

We set off on Saturday 22nd April at about 16:00 with the 70ft *Ash* and the 56ft *Hazel*, and a complement of 14. The first night's stop was at the Old Broken Cross at Rudheath, a suburb of Northwich. A popular and busy pub, we only just got there before food orders closed – 18.30 that night. The guest beer (I forget which) was very good, but having helped to drink the pub out of it, found the Greenalls to be rather thin!

Our passage down the Anderton Lift, postponed since 1984 because it broke down just before that year's trip and only just reopened after an extensive overhaul, was booked at 09:00, and we had to be there half an hour before to check in. *Hazel* left Rudheath

not long after 06:00 with Hon. Commodore on the tiller. Five minutes later it started to rain (the soaking, penetrating sort of rain). I was wet through when we got there and, needless to say, the rain stopped immediately after mooring and the sun came out. The crew of *Ash* waited until the rain had stopped before setting off, and still got to Anderton in good time.

The Anderton Lift



The descent in the lift was very interesting, lowering the boats 50ft from the Trent and Mersey Canal to the River Weaver. We had originally planned to go to Winsford for our lunchtime ale, but owing to work at Vale Royal Lock, it would only be operated at pre-determined times, so we turned below it and returned to Northwich

for sustenance. We found Northwich to be rather a peculiar town. The only real ale pub that seemed to open on Sunday lunchtime was the Penny Black, a Wetherspoon's establishment. However it proved remarkably good, with an excellent range of guest beers at £1.59 per pint, and an obliging staff who were very good at supplying extra portions of food to replace some which were in short supply; particularly when prompted by Ray! Then it was back down the river to keep our booking to go back up the lift at 16:00. There were still 9 miles to go to our designated evening halt, Daresbury on the Bridgewater Canal, where Lewis Carroll (of *Alice in Wonderland* fame) was born in 1832. Fortunately there was only one lock, a stop lock with a fall of a few inches, and three tunnels; two short ones and the 1239 yard Preston Brook Tunnel. They are all peculiarly twisty. Perhaps the beer was strong around here when the canal was dug! However, we did reach Daresbury before dark, and had our ale in the Ring o' Bells, opposite the church where the father of Lewis Carroll was vicar.



Both boats set off together early on the Monday morning on a misty canal, which soon cleared to give a bright day with the sun reflecting off the water into the steers' faces. *Ash* made a stop for breakfast but the crew of *Hazel* had their meals on the move, there being no locks on the Bridgewater Canal only the steerer needed relieving. *Hazel* stopped to take on water by Ye Olde Number 3 pub at



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Little Bollington, once the third coaching stop out of Liverpool, and with no sight of *Ash*, made its way to Sale, tying up opposite the King's Ransom, a Hardy & Hanson house. In due course *Ash* appeared and moored up, having similarly watered up at Little Bollington. After ale (and, for some, not insubstantial lunches), it was away to Manchester, passing the Manchester United ground at Old Trafford, before arriving at the bottom of the first nine locks of the Rochdale Canal. These are wide locks and, unlike the rest of the Rochdale have always been open, so both boats went up side by side. However there is no continuous towpath, and lock-wheelers find that they occasionally have to climb up and down walls and cross busy streets between locks. On both sides are tall buildings, with at one point a lock under one.

**The Jolly Angler
near Ducie St. Basin**



Above the nine locks is Ducie Street Basin where the Ashton Canal, and our route, leave the Rochdale. We tied up here for the night and departed to the nearby Jolly Angler, a Hyde's pub and very much a proper local. After a pint or two, however, the majority of both crews went off to find other drinking holes, leaving the few of us who remained to enjoy a quiet evening with the excellent Hydes bitter and, at the prompting of our chief commissar whom the landlord remembered from a previous visit, glasses of poteen.

There was a heavy shower during the night, but Tuesday dawned fine. *Hazel* got away first and started up the eighteen Ashton Canal locks, but stopped for breakfast and was overhauled by *Ash*, only for positions to be reversed at Fairfield Junction, at the top of the locks, when *Ash* stopped for water. Fairfield Junction isn't currently one, but will be again if the Hollinwood Arm link with the Rochdale Canal is restored, as proposed. A couple of miles further at Dukinfield Junction, where the Ashton, Huddersfield Narrow and Lower Peak Forest Canals meet, we took the latter as far as Hyde, where it was mooted to stop at the Cheshire Ring, a Beartown pub, and partake of its brews. But it didn't open until 2pm, and the other three beer establishments in the road were closed also (either permanently, or at least for that lunchtime), so we continued to Romiley and drank at the Duke of York, a few hundred yards from the cut. At this point it was obvious that we wouldn't get to Whaley Bridge on the Upper Peak Forest Canal that evening (and the Commodore confessed that he had never thought that we would anyway) so we were able to prolong our stay a little.

The 16 locks of the Marple flight occupy an attractive setting, rising through the wooded Goyt Valley and then up through the town. Despite the locks being hard to work (a bit more maintenance might have helped), at 10 minutes per lock we made good time, and the flight took us two and a half hours. We moored after Marple Junction, where the Lower Peak Forest meets the Macclesfield and Upper Peak



Forest Canals, and walked down to drink Robinson's at the Navigation, where most of Hazel's crew spent the evening, followed by Chinese take-aways afterwards.



Hazel set off earlier than Ash on Wednesday morning, intending to take on water at the Upper Peak Forest Canal terminus at Whaley Bridge. The canal is lock-free but narrow and shallow, clinging to the side of the valley of the River Goyt for its 6½ miles with the only obstructions two lift bridges and two swing bridges; and in about two hours we were moored and taking on water at Whaley Bridge basin. This was the interchange with the Cromford and High Peak Railway, which carried goods over High Peak and down to another interchange at the end of the Cromford Canal, and the whole area is full of industrial relics.

For lunch we stopped at the GBG 2006 listed Dog & Partridge at Buxworth, half a mile back, and almost opposite the arm leading to Bugsworth (the original spelling) Basin. Here we were caught up by Ash, and enjoyed a good selection of beer and excellent food. We were unable to stay as long as we might, for we had 14 miles to go to our evening destination at Bollington on the Macclesfield Canal; lock-free miles, but with an 'annoying' number of moored boats that would slow our progress.



Just before darkness we moored between Clarence Mill and Bollington Aqueduct, and gathered at the first pub up the hill towards the town, the Holly Bush, a Robinson's pub included in CAMRA's National Inventory of Pub Interiors of Outstanding Historic Interest, before deciding where to go for the evening. Phil, living locally, suggested the Poacher's Arms – not far away (according to him). So we walked a very long way and eventually came across it where the town ended and the road started to go vertically upwards. I suppose it was worth the effort, but we dreaded the long hike back.

We needn't have worried, however. At the bottom of the hill a young lady bus driver stopped and offered to take us all back to the canal – for nowt, even though she was picking up other fare-paying passengers en route (*No doubt Rob gave her the secret sign! Ed*). Even the steep steps up to the top of the aqueduct didn't seem so bad after that!

Thursday lunchtime's stop was scheduled for Congleton, about 15 miles and the twelve Bosley Locks away. "We'll have to set off early", Phil, the local, said, "Or we'll be late getting there". So we set off at six and arrived at eleven. Mind you, the Bosley Locks



Moving bridge on the Macclesfield Canal

were probably the easiest to work of the trip. The Queens Head, right by the canal, was our drinking hole, with quite a good selection of beers, including Copper Dragon Black Gold, a dark beer which I don't think that any of us had come across before. An easy afternoon's cruise of six miles and one stop lock took us to Harding's Wood Junction where the Macclesfield and Trent and Mersey canals join, and a short distance after the house which was the sadly missed - Bird

in Hand at Kent Green. We moored for the evening just after the first lock down on the Trent and Mersey, and the other side of the bridge from the Blue Bell, a GBG pub for many years, run by CAMRA enthusiasts. However it didn't open until 7.30pm, and with no real ale at the other nearby pub, the Canal Tavern, some of us walked a half mile down the canal to the Red Bull, a Robinson's pub, just beyond Red Bull Aqueduct over which we had passed before joining the Trent and Mersey Canal. Then back to the Blue Bell. And what a marvelous pub! Probably the best of the trip! Good company, good atmosphere and a good choice of good beer. What more can one require in life?

Friday, the last full day, and away early through the long descent of locks, known to the old boatmen as 'Heartbreak Hill', to Wheelock. Hazel stopped for breakfast and newspapers at Rode Heath, Ash was already moored up when we arrived, and the crew in the Commercial Hotel. We had a pint of Hydes in the Cheshire Cheese opposite before joining them. The Commercial Hotel, another in CAMRA's National Inventory of Pub Interiors, sells excellent beer, and we had an enjoyable lunchtime. Finally along the rather uninteresting six mile stretch with four locks back to Middlewich, mooring for the night just above the last lock of the trip. Everyone finished the evening at the Middlewich Royal British Legion Club, a huge place opposite our boatyard, with Hydes and guest beers. It is in the current *Good Beer Guide* and welcomes CAMRA members. I had a pint or so at the Cheshire Cheese and the Narrowboat first.

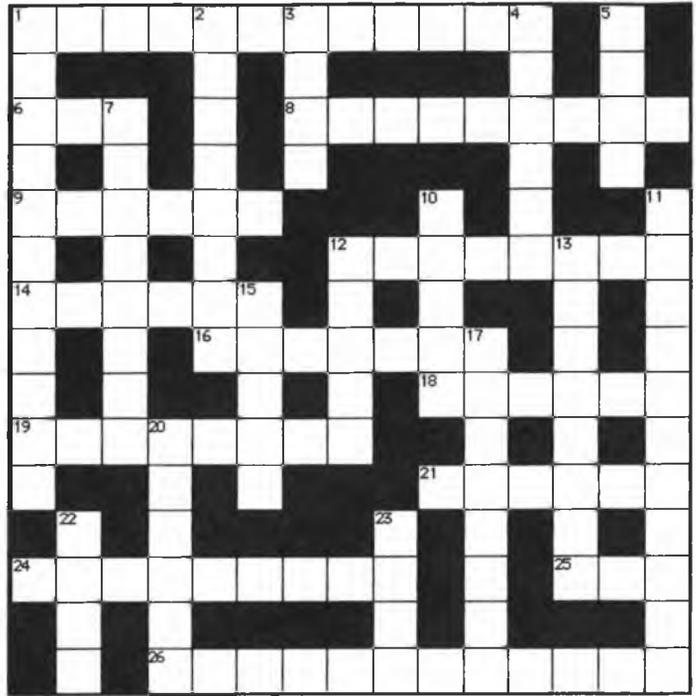
A leisurely start on Saturday morning. Ray cooked the remains of what was left for breakfast and we cleaned up the boats before locking down, passing the arm leading to the Shropshire Union Canal and tying up at Middlewich Narrowboats. Boats unloaded, group photographs taken, and the Beery Boaters departed on their various ways. Until the next time, that is.



The happy crew members

Jim Green

BEEERWORD



Across

1. You get this if you drink too much cider! (6,6)
6. Oxf or Camb? (3)
8. Square beer from 4d. (9)
9. Trouble from tangled lashes (6)
12. A bit like the colour of a King (8)
14. Look at Badger: lost first, gained right, got muddled (6)
16. Dave first had lots of scribbles (7)
18. Can set about position (6)
19. Illegal hunters from Lincolnshire (8)
21. Lifer turned up and left another one in the same glass (6)
24. I fed trout mix to get stamina (9)
25. Pixie in German eleven (3)
26. Initially, my Aunt Lucy - very elderly, retired now - helped intrepid long lost son create Worcestershire brewery (7,5)

Down

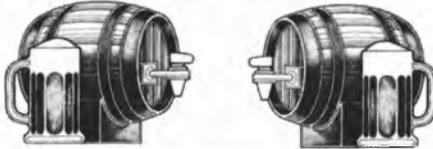
1. I purchased a shaken Caledonian ale (8,3)

2. He may serve you Madonna's favourite beer (8)
3. Elect crazy veto (4)
4. Horatio brews in Chatham (6)
5. see 22 down
7. In gin is a cocktail badge (8)
10. Cycle west to discover Harveys' home town(5)
11. It used to be an experience, but it's still a Winter Ales Festival (5,6)
12. No.3, No.5 and No.7 all come from Ramsgate (5)
13. Hampshire ale in a wheelchair? (8)
15. Sole finds much to do vertically (5)
17. A.B.V. is what one's good at (8)
20. Making Goldings Pale Ale is their tradition! (6)
- 22.and 5 down. Merit point for this strong ale from Goacher's! (4,4)
23. Ginger or Black: one of the necessities of life from Cheshire (5)

Solution on Page 57



The Chambers



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SMOKING BAN LATEST

Not for the first time Parliament's Upper Chamber is proving more of a champion of common sense and civil liberties than the House of Commons. A House of Lords Committee has been reviewing the proposed smoking ban in public places. Among other comments they felt that the 'relatively minor' risk did not justify such draconian action. It was a 'disproportionate response' when the evidence showed that passive smoking in public places caused relatively little damage. Ministers were not taking into account the impact of a ban on personal freedom and civil liberties, and Caroline Flint, Public Health Minister, admitted that 95% of smoking related deaths were caused by smoking at home. And a recent Radio Four adaptation of the life of Samuel Plimsoll clearly illustrated the falseness of making comparisons between the conditions of present day bar staff and those of 18th and 19th century workers, as is the inclination of some anti-smoking campaigns. When he started his campaign, irresponsible shipowners could send to sea unseaworthy and dangerously overloaded ships whose crews, once signed on, were by law obliged to sail, whatever their misgivings. Annually hundreds of lives were lost. A somewhat different level of risk from that experienced by the average bar worker who can leave the job whenever they want, and is probably more worried about assault by a drunk.



LAST KNOCKINGS

There's an old adage which goes something like 'just one good beer, and do it well'. Unfortunately, all too often it seems such wisdom is ignored in the anxiety to put as many beers through the handpumps as possible. Typical were recent visits to two GBG pubs, far distant from our own branch I hasten to add, and both of which carried substantial ranges of real ale with heavy emphasis on small and micro breweries. At the first the beer seemed very fresh, with little conditioning and suspiciously gassy, with tiny bubbles of beer around the sides of the glass and an extremely gassy head. I don't know much about blanket pressure, but I would have thought such effects symptomatic of its use. At the second pub, although pleasingly retaining a number of small rooms, and, when I was there, well patronised with a superb atmosphere, I found neither of the mid strength bitters that I drank particularly satisfactory – and, although both from respected microbreweries, I don't think the brewer would either. Neither was off but condition did not seem what it should have been. The pub was of the 'ever changing range school' and obviously had considerable real ale trade, but the impression was left that its high turn over was at the expense of proper looking after in the cellar.

Yet another local free house disappears, Punch Taverns having acquired the Hare & Hounds at Northbourne (see Local News). The new landlords intend to alter things as little as possible, Punch's involvement being limited to owning the structure, and so far all reports are very positive. However it's impossible to view the current consolidation in pub ownership with complete equanimity, especially when one feels that many of our legislators are oblivious to what's happening. To the average MP the pub of course lies at the heart of English culture along with St George, cricket on the village green and Coronation Street, while any concerns over ownership were surely resolved many years ago by the Beer Orders: doesn't the proliferation of 'free house' over pub doorways indicate healthy independence? Well, not exactly, as many of us know this often means no more than a selection of fairly undistinguished national brews. Meanwhile the Government's regulatory bodies do not add to one's confidence. The recently announced investigation into supermarkets seems entirely centred on the cost to the consumer – on the principal presumably that that is all the consumer, or for that matter society, is bothered about. The value of variety and choice, both of supply and suppliers, if for no other reason than variety and choice themselves, apparently is not worthy of consideration.

The most recent expedition by the Beery Boaters (See Jim Green's report) pro-

duced the normal round of disappointments and surprises. Among the former was the prevalence of Robinson's beer. I know people who hold Robinson's, particularly the Unicorn Bitter, in high regard, but it has never been to my taste, always seemingly having a certain sourness about it. However such misgivings were given further weight by what appears to have happened to Old Tom, the exceptionally strong beer (8.5% ABV) that I had always considered Robinson's redeeming feature. Here I am referring to the bottled beer only, the cask version, for all I know, might well be just as it was. Although from what I can recall not bottle conditioned, it was well flavoured, mid brown in colour and deceptively disguised its strength; and provided a good way of perking up the unsatisfying bitter. The bottle I bought in Bollington, however, at £2.60 (admittedly 330 ml and still 8.5% ABV), came with a redesigned stocky shape incorporating an embossed image of 'Old Tom' (the beer's cat emblem) and contained a dark, somewhat cloying liquid, rather reminiscent of British cream sherry – no doubt someone at Robinson's' idea of what a strong bottled beer should taste like.

Interesting news from parts of Essex, where apparently pubs are displaying signs banning MPs as a response to the MP's ban on smoking; a reflection of the genuine anger that the ban was imposed over the heads of landlords and their customers. With all the complaints about public apathy over politics it's good to see some people taking active involvement; and might serve to concentrate a few minds. The argument in favour of a ban was never particularly convincing and paid scant regard to personal liberty and freedom of choice. In particular there was no real attempt at consultation or compromise over proposed legislation, which could well see livelihoods at risk.

The next target of the health police is already being lined up. So much concern is there over obesity that all children are to be tested at the age of four, and the parents of those found to be overweight suitably spoken to. How soon before our drinking habits are subjected to similar scrutiny? (Sooner than we might think – see Channel View). It may be that our life styles are not as healthy as they could be, but in a free society that should be our concern, not that of authority. Of course things are different for children, but then Government doesn't help itself. When I was at school, long ago, school dinners were nutritionally carefully balanced. We, of course, moaned about them, but they were healthy. Some time in the intervening years it was decided to allow schools discretion, and the inevitable progression to chips, crisps, fizzy drinks and industrial protein. Of late the present Government has indicated that it wishes to move back towards the traditional school meal – but shows little appetite for tackling the sugar and fat laden food, full of additives, colourings and flavourings with which the modern child's life otherwise abounds.

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And Finally.....

Animal activists in Australia have set up a toad-for-beer exchange in order to promote humanitarian disposal of troublesome toads. RSPCA Australia, Coopers Brewery and the Cavenagh Hotel in Darwin teamed up with three Darwin organisations after a film was aired depicting toad hunters in a simulated orgy of killing.

The exchange works like this: anyone over the age of 18 who captures a toad and delivers it alive to the Darwin RSPCA receives a voucher for a glass of Coopers beer at the Cavenagh Hotel. Sean Gould of Coopers said the limit for beer vouchers was six per day, although hunters could turn in more toads.

"We want to encourage the humane treatment of animals," acting chief executive of RSPCA Darwin, Lindsay Wilkinson said. "The toads must be alive. You get no coupons for squashed toads". Cavenagh Hotel general manager Brett Simmonds added: "It's all about the toads, not about the beer". However the beer is clearly an incentive.

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