



Herts NEWSLETTER



PUBS AND BEER IN HERTFORDSHIRE 5000 FREE COPIES MARCH 1987

Action call to save your pint

A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN by beer drinkers to stop further takeovers and mergers in the brewing industry will be launched this month. The Campaign for Real Ale will make a submission to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission arguing that the brewing industry should be singled out as a special case and that no further takeovers should be allowed.

The Commission is undertaking a three-year study of the pub and brewing industry with special reference to the tied house system. While CAMRA is not calling for abolition of the "tie", it is demanding major changes in the system to stop the seven giant national brewery combines from dominating the pub, club and off-licence business.

In particular, it says that no brewery should be allowed to own more than 1,000 pubs and that "free houses" with exclusive deals with one brewery should not be allowed to claim that they are free of the tie.

The Campaign's major concern is with takeovers and mergers which lead to:

- Fewer beers
- Fewer pubs
- Fewer breweries and brewery jobs.

CAMRA says that the intimate relationship between brewers, pubs and consumers make the industry a special case and that takeovers should be stopped in the interests of both drinkers and brewery employees. It calls for more stringent takeover and merger legislation and says that in the past the M&MC has often given the green light to takeovers without adequate study of the consequences.

The Big Seven companies Allied (which includes Benskins in Hertfordshire), Bass, Courage, Greenall Whitley, Scottish and Newcastle, Watney and Whitbread account for eight out of every 10 pints sold in the UK and control the vast majority of pubs. Where lager is concerned, they account for nine out of every 10 pints sold. The situation for drinkers can only get worse if more mergers are allowed.

The hit-list in the past six months makes grim reading:

September 86: Watney buy Ruddles

September 86: S&N take over Home Brewery of Nottingham. Home's prices rise by 6p a pint on lager, 4p on bitter, 2p on mild in December.

October 86: Elders IXL of Australia (owners of Foster's lager) buys Courage. First national



Bowled over at the Cricketers

HOWZAT! Wendy Casey of the South Herts branch of CAMRA toasts Mick and Liz Sweet of the Cricketers, Redbourn when the Benskins house was named Pub of the Month in January – the second time it has won the accolade.

The Crooked Billet Colney Heath
Tel: Bowmansgreen 22128



*One of
Hertfordshires
Old Village Pubs
Traditional
Draught Beer
in Olde-World
surroundings*

Hot food *always* available
Large selection of collectors Ales for sale.

Turn to back page

PROTECT YOUR PINT...JOIN CAMRA TODAY!

Ten years hard drinking

It is hard to imagine, faced by today's abundant choice, just what a tough drinking time ale lovers faced in St Albans a decade ago. The world was younger, I was poorer but slimmer and the choice in Albanian pubs, when I came to work and live in the city, was pretty desperate.

Just three pubs sold cask beer. Two of those were not easy to get into. The Lower Red Lion in Fishpool Street did not open at lunchtimes, while entering the redoubtable Farriers Arms in Lower Dagnall Street was rather like British Tommies going over the top into heavily-mined German territory in the First World War.

The gov'nor of the Farriers in those days was an irascible Cockney named George Vardey. Although the pub looms large in CAMRA's history as its first, unofficial headquarters, George had fallen out with two of the Campaign's stalwarts, Michael Hardman and Chris Hutt. To make matters worse, he confused the two and called Hutt 'Ardman and Hardman 'Utt.

On my first tentative foray into the Farriers, I nervously queried the price of my lunch and was told in stentorian tones that "If yer don't like it yer can eff off back ter 'Ardman". After this less than auspicious start, I did manage to strike up a love-hate relationship with George: I loved him and he hated me. "ere he comes, Protz the Trots," was the usual greeting when I chanced my luck by stepping across the threshold.

Behind the grumpy facade, George kept his McMullen's AK and Country in immaculate condition. I cannot recall what the Lower Red Lion sold in those days but the third outlet for cask beer, the White Hart Tap, lingers unmemorably on my tastebuds. Back in 1976, long before the re-emergence of Benskins, the Tap was an Ind Coope pub selling mild and bitter from Romford on handpumps.

The old Ind Coope bitter must have deserved a prize for the Worst Cask Beer in Britain. So lacklustre was the brew that I must confess that I preferred the pressurised version on the grounds that the taste of carbon dioxide was better than nothing at all. To add



Roger Protz casts a bleary eye on a decade of boozing in St Albans

to the problem, the then landlord of the Tap, long since departed, was not too fussy about cleaning his pipes: the mild tasted like the bitter (nasty) and on one boiling hot summer's day, when a group of us switched in desperation to Skol, that tasted just like the bitter too.

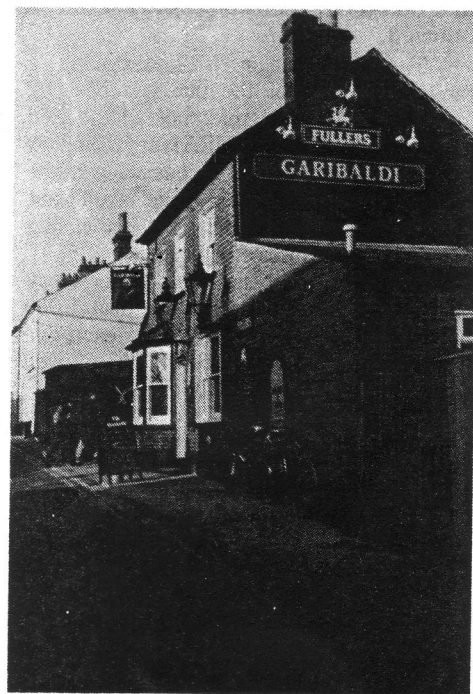
It was with enormous relief that we heard that the Jolly Sailor had gone "real" when Ind Coope leased the Stonecross pub to Charles Wells. When those first pints of Eagle Bitter (25p a pint!) trickled over my tastebuds, cleansing them of the stale residue of Ind Coope, I had found my personal Valhalla. I know there are some malcontents who like neither the Sailor nor the beer, but I still retain a strong affection for the little pub, with the sharp cultural clash of saloon and public bars, the potable beer and the success that Ken and Sylvia Adams have made in a difficult position on the fringe of town.

Hard on the heels of the Jolly Sailor came the great Allied conversion on the road to Damascus-on-Trent. In the summer of 76, Ind Coope Burton Ale was unveiled, brought welcome relief to many beer deserts, proved that there was a demand for cask beer (long denied by the likes of Allied) and that at least one of the Big Six combines could brew a decent pint.

While there has never been a bountiful supply of Burton in St Albans, the ripples of its national success washed up in the city. The other major brewers rushed to jump on a moving dray. Whitbread and Courage pubs sprouted handpumps while cask beers from the other national combines watered the free trade.

Regional brewers were given a fillip when Peter and Anthea Ransome's brilliantly revamped Goat in Sopwell Lane gave a regular presence to the likes of Adnams, Marston, Morland and Hook Norton as well as boosting dramatically the quality of pub grub.

It might seem churlish to complain, looking back at the skimpy choice in 1976, but St Albans today mirrors both the gains made by drinkers and the straitjacket placed on those gains by the awesome dominance of the



Jolly Sailor and Garibaldi... improving choice in the city.

giant brewers. Real ale there is a-plenty, but, as a result of the prominence of Allied, Whitbread and Courage, too much of it is uninspired (Benskins), overpriced (Whitbread), or a thin apology for former London brews (Courage). And how sad it is that the country's other independent brewer, Rayment, has no outlet for its gulpable ale.

On the plus side there is the welcome if grudging move by McMullen to take the pressure off their cask beers and the resounding success of the skilfully extended Garibaldi, though Fullers should give customers shoehorns so that they can get into the place.

Ten years on I have still to drink in every pub in the city and I shall boycott such monstrosities as the Bell in Chequer Street, with its hideous design and vulgar "mini-Pizza Hut". I remain both a creature of habit and a nostalgist, frequently going all the way from Fleetville to the Jolly Sailor for Charlie Wells. And how I miss the ribald abuse in the Farriers. No one has told me to "eff off" in a pub for ten years. I must be getting soft, or, worse, respectable.



Going for a Burton

(and an Ind Coope, Benskins and Ansell's)

IND Coope Benskins is the most commonly represented brewer in southern Hertfordshire. With this in mind a dozen members of South Hertfordshire and Watford & District branches accepted an invitation by the company to visit the brewery at Burton on Trent in January.

We arrived at the brewery at 12.15 and were ushered into the Brewery Vaults, the new functions room and bar, and were introduced to the brewer and the area representative of Ind Coope Benskins. There were four handpumps on the bar serving Ansell's Mild and Bitter, and Ind Coope Bitter and Burton Ale. To the surprise of the staff of the brewery almost everyone opted to drink Ansell's Mild. Will we see it in Benskins' pubs? Watch this space.

After a splendid three course lunch including roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, we were divided into two groups and taken round the plant. The brewery has its own maltings which produce pale and crystal malt which is used by the modern production plant. There the emphasis is on mass production and automation, the brewing process being controlled from a central console by four people. The capacity of the two production lines is 100,000 barrels a week, including real ales, lager, and bottled and keg beers.

The liquor for Ansell's beers and lager comes from a well near Lichfield, while the Burton ales use liquor from the brewery's own wells. The Ansell's beers also use their own yeast. We were entertained to tea and were given a chance to sample the various real ales in the brewery sampling room.

On the way home our ports of call were the Snibstone New Inn in Coalville selling excellent Marstons beers, the Black Horse at Walcote whose fine Thai menu (watch the sauce, it is hellfire!) sustained us to our next stop, the Boat at Newbold selling Davenport's beers and Wem Special.

Here we stumbled upon a meeting of CAMRA's Rugby area branch and played some darts.

Our final stop-off was the Green Man, an ABC pub on the A5 at Brickhill.

Our thanks go to Ind Coope Burton Brewery for their hospitality and to our abstemious South Herts chairman, Bob Norrish, for driving the minibus.

Cask Tyke

TETLEY's Bitter from Leeds is now widely available in keg form in Benskins pubs but the cask version is beginning to make an appearance. Handpumps for Tetley's have sprouted in the Old Bulls Head in Ware and the Harts Horns at Hertford.

Peter & Lesley Reynolds welcome you to

THE STAR INN

FURNEUX PELHAM

Rayments BBA ★ Greene King KK & Abbot

GOOD HOME COOKED FOOD
MONDAY TO SATURDAY

☛ Brent Pelham 227

Beyond the boundary

Pub crawl in t' North

Once again armed with my copy of the *Good Beer Guide* for 1986, (the 1987 guide was still with Santa), I set off across the Pennines to Lancashire and, in particular, Chorley. Time was even shorter on this trip, because I only had one evening to visit the four recommended pubs.

Having seen how accurate the guide was for Harrogate in Yorkshire, I was interested to know if the Lancashire lads and lasses would "do me proud", being from Chorley myself. So off I went accompanied by my long-standing or long-suffering friend John.

The **Market** in Cleveland Street was our first port of call. On entering the crowded but quiet town centre pub we were shown by mine host to an even quieter little room called a "snug". The Peter Walker Dark Mild (1031) was on handpump and, at 73p a pint, was smooth and slid down a treat. We tried the bitter next (1033) and at 76p was quite pleasant but a little too mild for me. The pub was well recommended in the guide, it was friendly and quiet with excellent bar staff.

Next we made our way to the **Wheatsheaf** in St. Thomas's Road only to find that it was closed and is due to be turned into a wine bar. Ah well, a wasted journey on such a cold night. Half time 1-1.

Our next pub in comparison to the first was the extreme opposite. On entering the **Crown** in Chapel Street, the noise and the density of the smoke hit us like a 14lb hammer. There was a high-pitched, earsplitting din

Benskins put the Boot in

THE Boot Inn, the only pub in the village of Dane End, is up for sale. Benskins have closed the pub, which could become a free house. Ian Crowhurst, for licensed premises agent Colliers, Bigwood and Bewlays, said: "This is an excellent opportunity for someone to develop a real country pub." The freehold price is £98,000.

Helping Hand

THE Bird in Hand at Gosmore was voted Pub of the Month for January by the North Herts branch of CAMRA. The landlord is Keith Elliott, who has run the pub for the past 12 years and has won a deserved reputation for his beer and food. The Bird in Hand has been selling ale since 1886 and was carefully and sensitively modernised three years ago.

Queens is trumps

HERTS South Pub of the Month for February is the Queen's Head, Sandridge, the first time that landlord Dennis Remington and his wife Marion have won such an award. Dennis used to be landlord at the Nag's Head, Hertford, before moving to the Queen's Head, also a Whitbread house, 3 1/2 years ago. He promptly installed two handpumps which serve Wethereds and Castle Eden/Flowers Original/Fremlins. Meals are available every lunchtime except Sunday and the two contrasting bars provide the kind of pub which really does have something for everyone.

Smart move

THE Artful Dodger in Potters Bar has moved to bigger premises at 35 High Street. The beers are Bass, Courage Directors, Gibbs Mew Salisbury, Younger IPA and guest beers.

which obscured any normal conversation and it seemed to get louder as we not so much walked as staggered (not drunkenly) into the modernised but not too plastic interior. "The tiled floor would be more suited to an abattoir" shouted John, "and its not my round again, is it?". There was standing room only and the average age of the drinkers looked a little young to us.

Not to be deterred by the noise, we tried the Matthew Brown Mild (1031) at 74p a pint. It was, as I always find it, bland. I liken it to one of the local brews in Hertfordshire. We sank down the mild quickly and tried a pint of Theakston's XB (1045) which was a very tasty full-bodied bitter and at 74p was "morish". One pint in all that din though was enough, so with pieces of cheese in our ears, (shades of "Allo Allo") we left to continue on our way.

It was a long walk to the next pub and time was getting really short now. The **Albion** in Bolton Street is a super pub with genuine wooden beams and at last a civilised atmosphere even though it was a little smokey. Teddy boys and teeny boppers were conspicuous by their absence, but the clientele, like the writer and his friend, were "mature". We tried the Tetley Bitter (1035.5), which was crystal clear and at 76p a pint was a very good buy. John was just finishing his second half (he's such a slow drinker) when I said, "Let's try the Tetley Mild". Once more John was heard to remark, "What my round again?". The mild (1032) was very light in colour and as smooth as silk and at 73p it was one mild I could have drunk all night. However as it was almost 11 o'clock we drank up and left. Having missed the last bus, we walked home a little cold but merry.

Like Harrogate, the *Good Beer Guide* had scored again, but this time it was a 2-2 draw as against a 4-1 win last time. The prices fared better at an average of 75p a pint. I bid my friend goodnight and as he disappeared into the distance he was heard to say, "What my round again?", but then after all, he still had the cheese in his ears. Cheers!

Brian Mason.



PROTECT YOUR PLEASURE

JOIN CAMRA NOW

Just fill in the form below and send, with a cheque for £9 (payable to CAMRA Ltd) to
CAMRA, 34 Alma Road, St. Albans,
Herts AL1 3BW.

APPLICATION FORM

NAME

ADDRESS

..... POST CODE

I wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association. I enclose a cheque for £9 (£12 if overseas).

Signed Date

Action call

From page one

British combine falls to an international predator.

October 86: Okells of Douglas, IoM, takes over other island brewery, Castletown. Brewery closed in November. Brands lost: mild and bitter on draught, plus three bottled beers.

January 87: Allied buy Drybrough of Edinburgh from Watney. Brewery closed in February, 29 jobs lost. Brands lost: six draught, three bottled, one canned.

Watney has now closed its breweries in Norwich, Manchester (Wilson's) and Edinburgh. There are persistent rumours in the City that if the parent Grand Metropolitan group is split up, then Anheuser-Busch of the US, owners of Budweiser and Michelob and the world's biggest brewery group, may buy Watney. Anheuser-Busch is now quoted on all major European stock markets.

British drinkers face the prospect of losing more breweries and traditional beers and seeing their locals swamped with expensive international lager brands. Our brewing heritage can be saved only if there is massive pressure on the next government to take urgent action to protect the British brewing industry.

Pub changes in South Herts

Tudor Tavern, St Albans now reopened. Combes Bitter, Ruddles County.

Plough and Harrow, Southdown, Harpenden now reopened. Combes Bitter. Websters Yorkshire Bitter, Ruddles County.

Peahen, St Albans, closed for major alterations.

Black Lion Hotel, St Albans, closing shortly for alterations.

Green Man, Sandridge, landlord moving to Grandison Arms, Bramfield.

Pinks Hotel, Shenley, rumoured to be up for sale.

Crystal Palace, St Albans, planning application for conversion to offices.

Victory for Good Honest Sense

Batemans of Wainfleet in Lincolnshire, brewers of renowned "Good Honest Ales", has been reprieved. A damaging split in the family, with the younger ones keen to sell their shares, looked

certain to lead to the demise of the traditional brewery. But now chairman George Bateman controls all the shares and the company seems certain of a sound future.

Down your way

6 March: **Crown, Stanstead Abbots**, 8p.m. Bread & Roses at Hoddesdon Folk Club.

8 March: **Brewery Tap, Ware**, 8p.m. Helen Royall at Ware Folk Club.

8 March: **Crown, St Albans**, lunchtime. Traditional music session.

13 March: **Crown, Stanstead Abbots**, 8p.m. Dick Miles at Hoddesdon Folk Club.

15 March: **Brewery Tap, Ware**, 8p.m. Life and Times at Ware Folk Club.

20 March: **Crown, Stanstead Abbots**, 8p.m. John Kirkpatrick at Hoddesdon Folk Club.

22 March: **Brewery Tap, Ware**, 8p.m. Singers Night at Ware Folk Club.

22 March: **Crown, St. Albans**, lunchtime. Traditional music session.

27 March: **Crown, Stanstead Abbots**, 8p.m. Pilliwigs at Hoddesdon Folk Club.

29 March: **Brewery Tap, Ware**, 8p.m. Nick Dow at Ware Folk Club.

5 April: **Brewery Tap, Ware**, 8p.m. Cosmotheke at Ware Folk Club.

Every Thursday evening: **Rose & Crown, St. Albans**. Traditional music session.

Listings in this column are free. Send details to the Editor by first of month.

Answers to the Christmas crossword:

Across

- 1 Diplomat
- 6 Apsley
- 9 Steamcoach
- 10 Rack
- 12 Angel's Reply
- 15 Exit
- 16 Lion
- 17 Fertile
- 20 Cash
- 21 Alec
- 22 Ardeley
- 26 Chip
- 28 Sear
- 29 Piccott's End
- 32 Ware
- 33 Puckeridge
- 34 Grapes
- 35 Sinister

Down

- 2 Iota
- 3 Learnt
- 4 Machete
- 5 Transit
- 6 Ashwell
- 7 ShriII
- 8 Etch
- 11 Peacock
- 12 Airship
- 13 Yielded
- 14 Unicorn
- 18 Red
- 19 Ill
- 23 Recipes
- 24 Entices
- 25 Eastern
- 27 Pileup
- 28 Snails
- 30 Fair
- 31 Ogre

First correct entry out of the hat was from Caroline Hall, Station House, Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Herts, who will receive a copy of the Dictionary of Beer.

Two up

THE landlord of the *Good Beer Guide* listed Monken Holt in Barnet has taken the Chequers in Potters Bar as a second tenancy. Real ales restored are Courage Best Bitter and Directors.

CAMRA branch news

NORTHERTS

Wednesday 11 March: Social at the Two Diamonds, Stevenage, 8pm

Wednesday 15 April: Social at the Three Tuns, Ashwell, 8pm

Contact Ray Sirrett ☎ Stevenage 362577

SOUTH HERTS

Monday 2 March: Committee meeting, Barley Mow, Tyttenhanger Green, 8pm

Tuesday 10 March: Guided tour of Borehamwood boozers, meet Woodcock, Croxdale Road, 8pm.

Tuesday 17 March: Branch meeting, Artful Dodger, High Street, Potters Bar

Tuesday 24 March: Pub of the Month, Baron of Beef, Welwyn Village

Monday 30 March: Committee meeting, Woodman, Wildhill.

Contact Adrian Jolliffe ☎ St Albans 69675

WATFORD & DISTRICT

Wednesday 4 March: Branch darts tournament, West Herts Sports Club 8pm.

Wednesday 11 March: Branch meeting and AGM at the Wheatsheaf, High Street, Watford, 8pm.

Wednesday 18 March: Social at Halfway House, Rickmansworth, 8pm.

Wednesday 25 March: Three pub crawl, start at Load of Hay, Watford Heath 8pm, Royal Oak, Watford Heath 9pm, Haydon Arms, Upper Paddock Road 10pm.

Sunday 29 March: First meeting of new committee at West Herts Sports Club, 8pm.

Contact Tony King ☎ Garston 672587

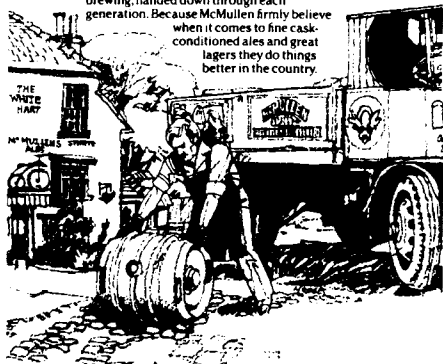
MID-CHILTERNRS

Tuesday 10 March: Social, White Lion, Apsley 8.30pm

Tuesday 7 April: Pub crawl, Top Amersham start Boot and Slipper 8.30pm

When it comes to Country Best- McMullen deliver

In 1827 Peter McMullen founded his brewery in Hertford. Today it is still very much a family business employing traditional time-proven methods of brewing, handed down through each generation. Because McMullen firmly believe when it comes to fine cask-conditioned ales and great lagers they do things better in the country.



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in Hertford with many guest beers
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Reduced prices on cask ale
5-30 to 7.00 pm Mon-Fri.

Home cooked food at all times

The Hertfordshire Newsletter is produced by the Hertfordshire North, Hertfordshire South, Watford & District and Mid-Chilterns branches of the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor, CAMRA Ltd or its Branches. The Editor gratefully receives articles or letters for publication. These should preferably be typewritten and double-spaced; handwritten items should also be well spaced and as legible as possible please. Send to: Roger Protz, 43 Burnham Road, St. Albans, Herts.

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