



THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

FREE

The Campaign for Real Ale

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HOURS REFORMED — BUT WILL YOU NOTICE?

The long promised reforms to the Licensing Laws in England and Wales have received the Royal Assent and although certain parts of the new Act, including the longer drinking up period, will be in force from the 1st August, the extended opening hours are not expected to be in operation until late August. The delay in implementation has been attributed to the need to change Crown Court rules to enable appeals against restriction orders to be dealt with.

Under the new regulations a publican may:

- open between 11.00am and 11.00pm Monday to Saturday
- open between 12.00 and 3.00pm, and between 7.30pm and 10.30pm on Sunday
- implement a 20 minute drinking up time at the end of a session.

The important word is MAY — there is no obligation for a landlord to open all these permitted hours and indeed it seems unlikely that many will. Although some breweries are attempting to get their landlords, and particularly their managers, to 'open all hours', the word coming from various Licensed Victuallers Associations around the country, backed up by impromptu inquires of local landlords, would seem to be that any extensions will be limited. Some have said that they might make use of the extra hour on Sunday, and that if the pub was crowded on a Friday lunchtime they might stay open longer. One or two others said they would use the Saturday afternoon extensions during

the summer for outdoor barbecues etc. As for the additional 10 minutes drinking up time, to quote one landlord "That won't make any difference, it takes me that long now to get rid of all the bu**ers".

The conclusion would seem to be that apart from the food/afternoon coffee orientated pubs you'll still be unlikely to get a pint at four in the afternoon in many parts of the country. The amendments do not confine themselves to just opening hours (incidentally the extra hour on Sundays does not apply to clubs), and other changes could have far reaching effects. In particular, previously landlords were only guilty of serving alcohol to under age drinkers if it was done 'knowingly'. Now that word has been dropped and the onus would be on the landlord to show that he, or his staff, had no reason to suspect that the customer was under age and that he had 'exercised all due diligence' to avoid the offence. This has fuelled the demand by various trade groups for identity cards to be introduced to help them detect under-age drinkers.

Magistrates will now have the power to order a pub to be closed at any time between 2.30 and 5.30 in the afternoon if local people lodge objections on the grounds that the afternoon sessions carry a risk of disturbance.

Additionally, the new Act prevents garages from applying for a licence, but allows those garages already with a licence (mainly in the West Country) to continue selling alcohol.

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LOW ALCOHOL LET DOWN

When CAMRA produces a report on aspects of the brewing industry it is not unusual for yells of derision to emerge from certain parts of the trade. The latest report on low alcohol lagers and beers was no exception and also led to Peter Bottomley, the Transport Minister, alleging, amongst other things, that CAMRA had gone over the top.

But what did the report actually say? A summary of the findings are given below, and are in broad agreement with the personal views expressed in these columns recently.

TASTE

A panel of five sampled 18 of the low alcohol beers and lagers on the market. The panel consisted of Michael Jackson (author of the *World Guide to Beer*, amongst other titles), Keith Thomas (a director of Brewlab, Dept. of Biology, City of London Poly), Tony Humphreys (of Alcohol Concern), Simon Bussell (brewer at the Greynound, Breatham) and Andrea Gillies (Good Beer Guide editor).

Their findings were that the drinks were shallow in terms of body and character, and, apart from Clausthaler, were either inoffensive or bland, or distinctly unpleasant. Clausthaler (also sold as Sainsbury's LA) which topped the tasting was described as 'a pleasantly sweet drink', but even that rated an average taste score of only 57%. Dansk LA was the next best for taste.

The conclusion was that the brewers seem to be spending more money on the packaging than on the product taste. However there is hope on the taste front in that two independents should be bringing out their low-alcohol bitters soon.

Greene King should start selling bottled Lowes in August, while Young's intend to produce a reduced strength version of their Special bitter, and if those two can't produce a tasty low alcohol beer there's not much hope!

IMPURITIES

Only the German and Swiss-produced imports did not contain any additives or adjuncts. Although the British Brewers Society rightly claimed that none of the ingredients were banned in this country, several contained sulphur compounds which have been diagnosed as causing allergies, and bringing on asthma attacks amongst sufferers.

PRICE

Pub prices are on average 70% higher than for the same product in supermarkets and off-licences.

Although there have been several credible campaigns which

locally meant the prices were reasonable, prices generally are at least on a par with full-alcohol drinks. Witness the Alford Arms in its newsletter stating that White Label would be available soon at 'about £1.00 a pint'. (That particular article also stated that the draught version would be cask-conditioned — it isn't, despite being sold through handpumps in many places, it is a brewery-conditioned beer).

HEALTH

It was concluded that there was no inherent health benefit in these drinks except as a way of reducing the amount of alcohol consumed if they were drunk instead of an alcoholic drink.

DRINK/DRIVING

The most contentious issue in the report and the conclusion that drew Peter Bottomley's initial response, later retracted when he actually read the full report!

There is a reported confusion in the consumers appreciation of the difference between low-alcohol, de-alcoholised and alcohol-free drinks and, in particular, their affects on blood alcohol levels. It is apparently possible to drink sufficient of certain low-alcohol drinks and end up over the drinking limit (in theory anyway — see TASTE above!).

The report's conclusion was that these drinks are really of little use to drivers, who should be avoiding alcohol completely, and that mixing the odd alcoholic drink between rounds of low alcohol drinks was dangerous.

CAMRA's policy is that it welcomes moves by the Government and by the drinks industry to crack down on drink driving.

CONCLUSION

The report's conclusions were that: low alcohol brews were a let-down; that they were poor imitations of what they aspired to equal; that they were the latest manifestation of the Great Lager Con (with all the attendant dupes, image-building and high prices) rather than any wholehearted attempt to encourage more healthy and safe living through high quality, genuine products; and, as quoted by Nicholas Winterton in a House of Commons motion, that those concerned about health, alcohol consumption and their wallets should restrict themselves to under, say, two

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BREWERY NEWS, NEAR & FAR

Buckley's of Llanelli are to be put up for sale to the highest bidder again. 40% of their shares owned by former director Peter Clowes and 13% owned by fellow director Guy von Cramer are in the hands of the merchant bank who helped fund their takeover of Buckley's nine months ago. The shares were seized following the collapse of Clowes' investment empire and accusations of illegal dealings, and are expected to be put on the market shortly. Whoever buys these shares is obliged under stock exchange rules to mount a bid for the whole company. Two other directors appointed by Clowes have also resigned.

As CAMRA predicted when Scottish & Newcastle took over Matthew Brown, breweries are being closed. Workington brewery is to stop brewing and the beer associated with the brewery, John Peel bitter will be lost. Carlisle brewery, the former State Scheme brewery, has already closed. Perhaps one of the worst aspects of the Workington closure was the way it was revealed. The closure plans were only discovered on the leaking of documents giving details of 'Operation Trojan', the name given to S&N's scheme for management to carry on business as normal, including salary negotiation, in the full knowledge that the brewery was doomed. Another casualty of S&N is Trevor Green, former assistant managing director at Workington, who fought hard against the takeover — his services are no longer required after 26 years with Brown's. A further link with the past was also broken when Paul Theakston resigned as managing director of the Masham brewery. Paul, who led Theakstons into its merger with Matthew Brown, was the last member of the family associated with the company that bears their name.

Further news on the shares front, New Zealander Ron Brierley has sold his shares in S&N to Elders (up to 8.9%) and has topped up his shares in Gibbs Mew (5.2%) and Vaux (2.6%). Meanwhile Bass are believed to have taken a small stake in S&N as a suspected defensive action against Elders rumoured interest in Bass. Elders share of Greene King stands at 13.1% and another Aussie, Alan Bond, has 7% of Allied.

The Channel Islands have also failed to outlast the present take over mania with the Jersey-based Ann Street Brewery's take over of Bucktrout who control the Guernsey Brewery Company. The deal worth about £16 million was reportedly done in order to strengthen the breweries against the growth of imported beers into the Channel Islands.

In the Potteries the small Titanic brewery ran into cash problems and was placed in the hands of the receiver. The good news is that the new owners have been found and brewing has started.

SOUTH HERTS PUB OF THE MONTH

The South Herts Branch Pub of the Month of August is the Crooked Billet at Colney Heath. This popular Free House which caters for all is run by ex-publisher David Hughes. Amongst the attractions is a mini-zoo for the children in the beer garden whilst in the bar you can even buy draught milk. You can always look forward to a guest beer that has never been available before in the area, and in some cases before the beer has been registered in the Good Beer Guide. Unlike other pubs who have shelves of books for show the Billet has a selection of second hand books for sale or swap, proceeds going to the senior citizens Christmas Party. The presentation is to be on Tuesday night August 30th so why not join us then?

The September Pub of the Month is THE HUNTSMAN, Goose Green.

Though a little hard to find, lying back in a small lane between Hoddesdon and Hertford near the A10, this vastly improved Free House is well worth searching out.

An old Allied House, known for many years as The Green Man, it was considerably run-down when Ken and Christine Fagin arrived some six months ago. Trade has since picked up, due no doubt to the guest beers, rotated weekly, which accompany the regulars: BBA, Adnams and Abbot.

The outdoor drinking area is spacious with plenty of seats, a barbecue pit and a pony and goat vying for the childrens crisps. If you haven't visited The Huntsman for a while or thought 'Goose Green' was in The Falklands, why not join us on Sept. 27th when Ken and Christine hope to offer some 'Dark Star' and Mauldens to complement their other fine ales.

PUB NEWS — AROUND AND ABOUT

In London two of the Independent Breweries' houses have been sold. Thwaites have sold the George IV as a free house and Whitbread have bought the Waterside Tavern from Hoskins, both pubs are in N1. Thwaites hope that their beers will continue to be available, while Hoskins apparently received an offer they couldn't refuse and will be using the money to help them obtain 7 pubs in the Midlands bringing their tied estate to 12 pubs.

The merry-go-round of the pubs sold-off by Grand Met continues. The latest to be resold are 19 that Heron International bought and have gone to Charles Wells for a reported £2.8 million. The pubs are spread over an area from Aylesbury to Lincolnshire. This is unlikely to be the last sell-off as Heron have been reported as being interested in selling pubs outside their Midlands base as free houses to their existing landlords. In a separate deal Wells have also bought the Old Bull Inn at Royston.

Julian Bailey, the Tyrrell Formula One racing driver, has sold his pub the Lord Louis at Stanstead Abbots.

The Greyhound, a Benskins pub at Aldbury, has reopened after 'extensive refurbishment', and the Wheelwrights at Goffs Oak (McMullens) has also reopened after being 'completely refurbished'.

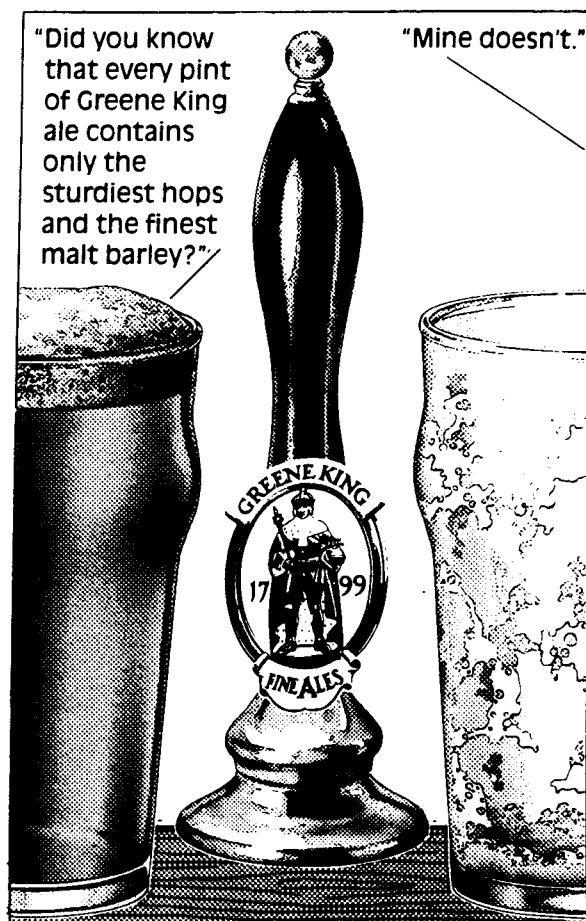
North Herts branch's pub of the year award to the Fox and Hounds, Barley, went with a bang, literally. The pub had only just finished receiving emergency repairs after a car crashed into the front of the pub causing about £300 worth of damage.

The Fishery Inn, Hemel Hempstead, has also reopened after refurbishment, it remains a Benskins house and is now selling Tetley's and Young's bitter alongside Benskins. However our correspondent was not impressed by the prices.

The Post Office Arms at Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead, a Benskins pub that has been closed for some time, has been acquired by Fullers. Reopening date not known.

The Tree, formerly the Rose and Crown, Mill End, Rickmansworth, is now selling Benskins Best Bitter, having formerly being all keg.

Other pubs recently re-opened after alterations are: Strafford Arms, Potters Bar, Crooked Chimney, Cromer Hyde, and the Bull at Wheathampstead. The Farmers Boy, St. Albans is currently closed for alterations.



BRANCH DIARY

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Tuesday 16th August
Branch meeting at the Artful Dodger, Potters Bar, 8.30pm.
Tuesday 30th August
Pub of the month: Crooked Billet, Colney Heath.
Tuesday 13th September
Branch meeting at the Bull, London Colney, 8.30pm.
Tuesday 27th September
Pub of the month: Huntsman, Goose Green.
Contact Bob Norrish ☐ Harpenden 69923

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

Wednesday 10th August
Social at the Bright Star, Peters Green, 8.30pm.
Wednesday 24th August
Social at the Black Horse, Brent Pelham, 8.30pm
Friday 9th September
Pub crawl of Royston. Meet in the Green Man, 8.00pm.
Wednesday 28th September
Social at the Windmill, Charlton, 8.30pm.
Thursday 13th October
Social at the Marquis of Lorne, Stevenage, 8.30pm
Wednesday 26th October
Social at the Fox and Duck, Therfield, 8.30pm.
Contact
Jonathon Fynn ☐ Royston 44043

WATFORD AND DISTRICT BRANCH

Wednesday 10th August
Branch meeting at the Stag, Bushey, 8pm.
Wednesday 17th August
Three pub social in Rickmansworth: Whip and Collar, 8.30pm;
Tree 9.15pm, Halfway House, 10.00pm.
Wednesday 24th August
Two pub social: Happy Hour, Eastbury Road, Watford, 8.30pm;
Victoria, Oxhey, 9.45pm.
Wednesday 31st August
Social at the Swan, Bushey, 8.30pm.
Sunday 4th September
Committee meeting at the West Herts Sports Club, 8.00pm
Saturday 10th September
Rail trip to Sussex.
Wednesday 14th September
Branch meeting — phone contact.
Saturday 17th September
Real ale ramble — phone contact.
Wednesday 21st September
Darts match — phone contact
Sunday 25th September
Committee meeting at West Herts Sports Club, 8.00pm.
Wednesday 28th September
Crawl south of Ricky: Prince of Wales, Batchworth Heath,
8.30pm; Olde Greene Manne, 9.00pm; Rose and Crown,
Woodcock Hill, 10.00pm.
Contact Martin Few ☐ Watford 52412

MID-CHILTERN BRANCH

Contact Roy Humphrey ☐ Hemel Hempstead 833451

More Pub News: the public bar at the Saracens Head, Hertford has been extended into the old off-licence; the Woodman, Chapmore End, has started taking a third Greene King beer, Rayments and XX alternating; Pints'n'Litres in St. Albans has closed down; the Crystal Palace, St. Albans has been flattened; the Plough at Tyttenhanger now has its extended bar open complete with bar billiards table.

CHARITABLE STATUS

Landlords generally have a good reputation for charitable deeds, but they seem to have surpassed themselves in raising money for the recent ITV Telethon. Although licensees from all breweries played their part, pride of place must go to Allied, whose publicans between them managed to raise £1,262,500. Of that about £130,000 was raised by Benskins landlords. No cynical comments about the event, simply a well done to all those who put a lot of effort into raising the money.

BEAR DOWN

We print these excerpts from a recent Morning Advertiser article without further comment:

'Courage is testing a lower gravity Hofmeister in pubs in Devon and Cornwall...

It puts the brand on a level with leading lagers Heineken and Carlsberg with an original gravity of 1032, four points down from the usual 1036....

"Our only motive is to produce a better product", said Courage. The lower gravity is only a nuance."

GOING DUTCH

Inn Brewing of Berkhamstead, brewers, and manufacturers of brewing equipment have sold a mini-brewery to Bestebier, a Dutch company which was set up by breweries Grolsch and Gulpener to run a number of brewpubs and restaurants throughout Holland.

This first set of equipment, valued at about £80,000, will be installed at a converted farmhouse at Peize in North-East Holland.

SLATED

A Wiltshire landlord was recently fined £175 for allowing two regulars to have drinks on credit and for drinking of a slate himself.

POST SCRIPT

And if you thought our licensing laws needed changing, how about Iceland? After 73 years it will be legal to sell beer from March next year. Previously only spirits and wine could be sold but it was legal to brew beer for export, and legal to bring beer into Iceland, which just goes to show we weren't the only ones with strange licensing laws.

Peter & Lesley Reynolds welcome you to



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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. Any articles or letters for publication should preferably be typewritten and double-spaced; handwritten items should also be well spaced and as legible as possible please. Send to: Eric Sim, 10 Heron Way, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 8QL.

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