

THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

The Campaign for Real Ale

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THE GOOD AND THE BAD

There were two sets of beer awards at the Great British Beer Festival held in Leeds in early August, one for the best beers in Britain, the second for the worst.

The Best of British Beer Awards were given for beers in six categories, with the best in each going forward to compete for the accolade of Champion Beer. Full results in each category were:

- Mild/Light Bitter —**
1. Batemans Mild
 2. Highgate Mild
 3. Timothy Taylors Golden
- Standard Bitter —**
1. Tetleys Bitter
 2. King & Barnes Sussex Bitter
 3. Hook Norton Best Bitter
- Best Bitter —**
1. Timothy Taylors Landlord
 2. Wadworths 6X
 3. Fullers London Pride
- Special Bitter —**
1. Batemans XXXB
 2. Youngs Special
 3. Holdens HSB
- Strong Ale —**
1. Ringwood Old Thumper
 2. Fullers ESB
 3. Gibbs Mew Bishops Tipple
- New/Micro Brewery —**
1. Banks & Taylor SOS
 2. Sarah Hughes Mild
 3. (joint) Hop Back Special
Woodforde Wherry

The Champion Beer Award went to Old Thumper, with Landlord second and Tetleys Bitter third.

For the Worst Beer award competition was fierce and three were described as being 'so bland it was difficult to tell them apart'. The three in question were: Hofmeister, Miller Lite, and Skol. Closely behind were Castlemaine XXXX and Fosters. The lagers that fared better were Harp, Carlsberg and Heineken. The judging was carried out by 100 volunteers at the GBBF and included two 'control' beers in Pilsner Urquell lager and Old Thumper.

The Crooked Billet

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EATING OUT IN HERTFORDSHIRE PUBS

This is the first in an occasional series of articles about the standard of food in Hertfordshire pubs. Readers' views and comments will be welcomed.

On our way home after a long day out, we decided to stop at a pub for an evening meal. You can rely on a Beefeater, we thought, and decided to stop at the Bull in Wheathampstead.

This is a very attractive old pub by the river, with a garden at the back, and the standard Whitbread Beefeater steak house menu. The food smelled appetising as we approached.

Normally, we have a drink before eating, but this time hunger got the better of us, and we marched in anticipation straight to the restaurant reception area. There was no-one in attendance, but a girl, who was drying something, asked us to go and stand in a different place and "someone would be with us shortly".

We went and stood as instructed, and spent the next few minutes being stared at in a bored fashion by another girl drying something and a bar-person in his moments of idleness.

No-one attended to us, and after a few more minutes, we left as hungry as we came in. I doubt if anyone noticed.

A few miles along the same road is the village of Sandridge, a pleasant place, whose Rose and Crown (another Whitbread house) goes to some lengths to advertise its cuisine on signboards outside — "groaning board" and the like. When we got inside there were plenty of seats, but a crowd of harrassed-looking people by the bar was very noticeable. The reason became obvious.

Although it was 8.30pm there was only one young man on bar duty, serving drinks and taking food orders. The range of food is displayed on blackboards which are at a level where even a person of average height has to strain one's neck, but after some waiting I managed to get my order in. Returning to my table in triumph, I realised that I had been waiting so long that I had forgotten to order drinks, and I had to re-join the crush of harrassed people at the bar. The young man did his slow best, not helped by two or three decorative young women who occasionally dried things, exchanged jokes, and resolutely refused to serve anyone. The food, when it came, was overcooked and unimaginative. We thought about having a pudding, but

maidaid bucks and shires



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the thought of the crush at the bar was by this time off-putting. Not to mention the fact that what appeared to be the committee of the Sandridge Women's Institute had joined us at our small table, crushed up against both themselves and ourselves and engaged in earnest discourse, making pleasurable eating an impossibility. Note to those responsible for selling food in pubs: yes, by all means take short cuts and cut corners to maximise your profits, but please don't entirely forget your customers, comfort and good service.

WHITBREAD'S PEDIGREE

Having got rid of so many beers in recent years, Whitbread are now having to buy in a quality beer as a way of providing them with a national cask beer! From December Marstons Pedigree will be on sale in 'hundreds of selected Whitbread pubs and restaurants'.

Marstons expect this deal, which involves them putting Heineken and Stella Artois into more of their pubs, to mean a 50% increase in sales of Pedigree over the next few years.

Whitbread have a 5% stake in Marstons with Whitbread Investments holding another 31%.

THE MISSING LINE

For those few of you who wondered, the final line of the articles on low alcohol in the last edition was unfortunately omitted and would have read 'pints of tasty mild, instead'.

**YOUR LOCALS
'BEST'**

**BENSKINS
BEST BITTER**

Your Inn for the Best **BENSKINS**

A BOUTIQUE BREWERY IN THE USA

On a recent trip to North America, I was taken to the Oldenburg Brewery, which is one of a wave of small breweries in America. The Oldenburg Brewery is situated in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, about 5 miles south of Cincinnati.

The beer is a German-style lager, plus a "lite", and is available at the brewery complex on draught in a restaurant/bar or in a large beer hall. The bar is raised above the eating area, similar in style to some of the American-style bars springing up in Britain, such as Calendars in Watford.

The beer hall has a series of glass cases displaying a fantastic collection of breweriana — mostly American of course, but there are at least two cases of British exhibits including trays, ash trays and bottles. You can spend a happy hour or so looking round these exhibits, unless there is live entertainment in the hall, which when I was there was so awful, I was pleased to get out.

The brewery is compact, only brewing for the premises, but is much larger in area than similar British micro-breweries. Here again is a large collection of breweriana. There is also a souvenir shop where you can buy T-shirts, beer mats, bottles of the premium lager and an amazing selection of other items bearing the brewery name. Back to the beer, it is brewed in accordance with the 'Reinheitsgebot' with no adjuncts or additives, and is definitely a much tastier beer than any I have tried in the States, before or since.

The address of the brewery is:

Oldenburg Brewer, 1-75 and Buttermilk Pike, Fort Mitchell, Kentucky 41017

If you are in this area, I recommend a visit.

John Hurrell

LOST BEERS (CONT)

As had been expected Trumans have formally announced that they have stopped brewing their Sampson Strong Ale. In most of their outlets it will be replaced by Ruddles County. This leaves Truman's Best Bitter as the only real ale produced at the Brick Lane brewery.

CITY NEWS

Elders stake in Scottish & Newcastle is now 9.3%, Queens Moat Hotels now own 5.6% of the Vaux Brewery group, and New Zealander Ron Brierley now has 6.6% stake in Gibbs Mew. The sale of Buckleys has been delayed as the last set of annual reports has yet to be produced, but it was expected that the brewery would be on the market by the beginning of October.

NOW IT CAN BE REVEALED SLOT

According to a recent report on Benskins in the Morning Advertiser, the Swan at Bushey is the favourite pub of Benskins' MD, Jim Glover.

It also noted that Benskins yearly budget for refurbishments and renovations is currently in the region of £8 million.

The same report also made comments about the appearance of Martin Davies, Benskins marketing and development director, but as he has been known to read this newsletter, we'll save him further embarrassment by not repeating them.

LEADING INNKEEPER

Our congratulations to go Mick Cairns of the Unicorn, Abbots Langley who is the only Herts landlord to reach he regional finals of this year's Institute of Innkeeping's Innkeeper of the Year Awards. Mick joins 34 other finalists from throughout the country from whom the winner will be chosen.

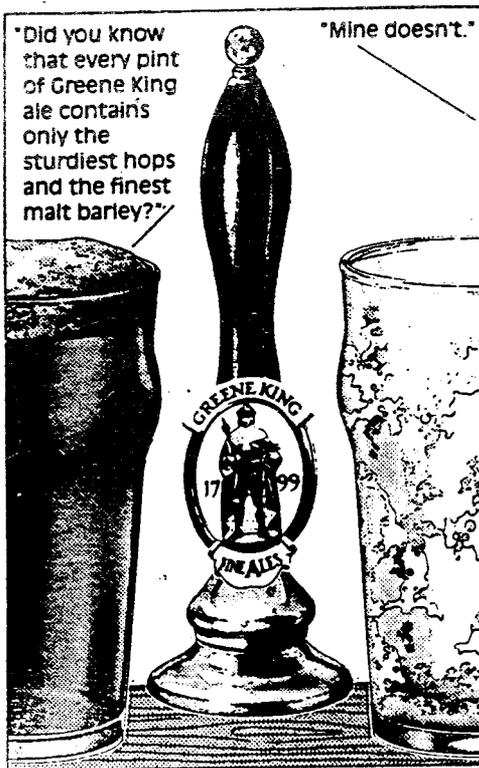
LOW ALCOHOL UPDATE

The competition in the low alcohol/no alcohol market is continuing to increase. Following on from Greene King's release of Lowes, comes Wyvern from Gales, Bass LA, (all low alcohol bitters) and Smithwicks AFB, an alcohol free bitter from the Kilkenny subsidiary of Guinness. Those travelling further afield might also like to know that Randalis of Guernsey also produce a bottled low alcohol bitter. In the cider market, Strongbow low alcohol cider has been joined by Coates Somerset low alcohol cider.

TURNING FROM CIDER INTO WINE

Those of you who have travelled down the M5 into Devon will no doubt have noticed the semi-decrepit Whiteways sign in a cider orchard. Well it's not going to be there much longer because Whiteways are giving up cider production to concentrate on British wines, and the orchard is to be sold off.

Whiteways cider was once well known throughout Britain but being a sister company of Showerings has meant that parent company Allied Lyons concentrated more on the latter's Coates-Gaymers range. Sales of Whiteways dwindled rapidly and the increase in its wine business has led to its withdrawal from the cider market.



BRANCH DIARY

Hertfordshire South Branch

Tuesday 27 September: Pub of the Month, the Huntsman, Goose Green, near Hoddesdon. 8pm.

Tuesday 11 October: Branch Meeting, Attimore Hall, Ridgeway, Welwyn Garden City (a new pub!) 8pm

Wednesday 19 October: Pub of the Month, the Hope and Anchor, Welham Green, 8pm.

Tuesday 16 November: Branch meeting, Prince of Wales, Hertingfordbury, 8pm.

Tuesday 29 November: Pub of the Month, Lower Red Lion, St. Albans 8pm.

All Hertfordshire Branches

Tuesday 18 October: Hertfordshire inter-branch liaison meeting, venue to be announced.

For further information contact Bob Norrish, 05827 63133 ext 2554 (work) or 69923 (home).

Everybody is welcome to attend any of these meetings.

OLD NEW PUB FOR WELWYN GARDEN

As most of our pub news concerns close-downs and refurbishments, it is pleasing to report on a new opening, serving the population of Welwyn Garden City.

From the 18th century farmhouse of Attimore Hall Farm, which for many years has been home to a local vet, Benskins have retained much of the house's character, in its conversion to the latest licensed premises in the area, **The Attimore Hall**.

The licensee is Paul Fairweather, who with his wife Val hails from Nottingham where for the past 16 years they have run a variety of Allied Breweries pubs. A member of the Guild of Master Cellarmen, Paul is very keen on keeping his cask ales in top condition and welcomes CAMRA members offering Tetleys, Burton and Benskins Bitter.

Innovations at this large, friendly house include a no-smoking room and the house's original 85 foot well viewed from the main bar.

The pub's prices already reflect the imminent price hike the big boys are again inflicting on us shortly, but in this pub-starved area the Attimore Hall is a welcome change.

Roger Fuller

MYSTERY PUB PREVIEW

It is no secret that Benskins have been busting guts to get some favourable publicity in this Newsletter. No doubt this is why some of our correspondents have been receiving invitations to attend the openings and re-openings of some of their pubs. As if we could be bribed by free drinks and a buffet meal...

However, even at our most charitable we would find it difficult to say something nice about the French Horn, where we were invited to a little celebration in August. Why? Because the official invitation forgot to mention where the pub is!

Over to you, Rob and Cath Eyre, the Directors and Staff of Ind Coope Benskins Ltd, and Fiona Bushnell, who mailed the invitation. The Newsletter columns are open to you to tell us all about the French Horn. Just one proviso — how about telling us where to find it!

PUB NEWS

The Newsletter understands that **The Pre** in St Albans which has in the past sold beers by Gibbs Mew and Charles Wells, is now owned by Whitbread.

The Ancient Briton, one of St Albans' roadhouse pub-restaurants, has had its handpump re-instated, to serve Benskins Best.

Boarded up and apparently for sale is **The Nelson** at Wheathampstead; this pleasant little village local could make a fine pub for a local small brewery.

STOP PRESS — LATE PUB NEWS

The Kings Head at Bushey, which was undergoing welcome and indeed overdue renovation, may have to be demolished. Current works have revealed severe structural problems, and this listed building may have to come down. We understand Benskins would like to continue to have a pub on the site.

Currently also undergoing alterations are the **Robin Hood** and the **Farmers Boy** in St Albans, and the **Pinks Hotel** at Shenley.

The Newsletter understands that the long-serving licensees of the **White Horse** at Burnham Green, and the **White Lion** in St Albans, will be leaving their pubs before the end of the year. Both have been loyal supporters of real ale and will be sadly missed.

A new pub is being built for Charringtons at Jersey Farm St Albans. Its name is the subject of a competition in a local newspaper, which records that the **Jersey Cow** is the most popular suggestion.

ALL DAY OPENING

At the time of going to press, the following pubs are experimenting with all-day opening:

St Albans: Blacksmith's Arms, Cricketers, Fighting Cocks, Horn of Plenty, Boot, Cock, Fleur de Lys, Black Lion.

Potters Bar: Green Man, Chequers.

Shenley: William IV.

Colney Heath: Crooked Billet

The Newsletter would welcome further information from other parts of the county.

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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