

# THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

FREE

The Campaign for Real Ale

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## DAVENPORTS AXED! — AS MUSICAL CHAIRS CONTINUE

In another blow to Britain's dwindling brewery heritage, Greenall Whitley have announced that they plan to close the Davenports brewery in Birmingham in June. Davenports were founded 250 years ago, and the closure is expected to result in the loss of up to 100 jobs with beer production being switched to the Shipstones brewery in Nottingham. Over capacity is given as the reason for the closure and follows their closure last year of the Wem brewery whose beers were themselves transferred to Davenports. Although the news was not entirely unexpected, it is still depressing news for the beer drinker: the 'Wem' produced by Davenports is inferior to the original and it is unlikely that Shippos will be able to match the current Brum products. Greenalls took over Davenports about 3 years ago after the Birmingham company had fought off a bid from Wolverhampton & Dudley, ironically the Wolves' breweries are reported to be running close to capacity and they are rumoured to be looking to acquire another brewery...

Meanwhile several breweries have found new owners. Brent Walker have bought both Tolly Cobbold and Camerons breweries (and their 855 pubs) from Ellerman Holdings for about £230 million. Together with the 386 pubs Brent Walker had already bought from Grand Met this has catapulted them into the position of being the second largest independent brewing concern in the country.

Another brewery to change hands was Buckleys who found themselves caught up in the Clowes-Cramer scandal. The brewery has been bought by the Harp consortium (owned 75% by Guinness, 25% by Greene King). Guinness have denied that it is an attempt by them to acquire a tied estate. A deal has been struck with the Crown Brewery at Pontyclun whereby Crown will run the Buckley's pubs and their free trade activities will be combined. As both these breweries and that of Felinfoel at Llanelli (49% owned by Buckleys) are running under capacity there has been speculation that one of the three breweries could close or follow Biggleswade into becoming a Harp plant.

Belhaven, are now once more owned by Nazmu Virani. He paid £18 million for the brewery and pubs, having sold out two years ago for £28 million, but that included the restaurant business (Garfunkels, Deep Pan Pizza etc) on which the remains of Belhaven now intend to concentrate. During his absence he bought the Blezard chain of pubs in the Liverpool area from Allied and there is a possibility that Belhaven could supply these pubs in the future.

Other brewery news included the selling of Burt's brewery on the Isle of Wight to Alastair Phillips, great grandson of the man who bought the business at the turn of the century for £14,500. It cost Alastair £1.8 million and should secure the brewery's independence for a few more years.

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## MCMULLENS — AN APOLOGY

The Editors wish to apologise for the comments which appeared in the December 1988 edition, numbered 112, under the heading 'News of the Brews'. In that article, a claim was made that McMullens were changing the recipe of their Country Bitter. This is not the case and the Editors accept that there is no foundation whatsoever in this suggestion and unreservedly wish to withdraw these comments and to apologise to McMullens Brewery for the distress that this article has caused.

## ANOTHER HERTS MASTER

Ian Norman of the Old Bulls Head, Ware, was this year's Allied Breweries' Burton Ale Supreme Master Cellarman of the Year. He succeeds his Herts colleague Bob Harrington who has recently left the Wrestlers, Hatfield. Both pubs have been long term entries in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide, so it proves that Benskins can occasionally agree with us on quality! The award is open to the 800 odd licensees who have qualified for the Burton Ale Guild of Cellarmen.

Bob is followed as licensee by George Johnstone who has previously run the Bell in Watford and the Goat at Codicote.

## BELATED GBG ENTRIES!

Due to what has been described as 'an admin. error', the eight entries submitted by the Mid-Chilterns branch for the Herts section of the 1989 Good Beer Guide failed to appear. The missing pubs are: the Bell, Bovington; the Swan, Boxmoor; the Three Blackbirds, Boxmoor; the Royal Oak, Chipperfield; the Windmill, Chipperfield; the Old Bell, Hemel Hempstead; the Boars Head, Piccotts End; and the Kings Arms, Tring.

## GOOD AMERICAN BEER

Oldenberg brewery, praised in an article in the Oct/Nov edition of the newsletter, produces one of the best five beers in America, according to voters at last year's Great American Beer Festival.

## PILS SALES STAGNANT

4 bottles of Holsten Diat Pils delivered to a North London pub were found to contain stagnant water. It is not known how many similarly contaminated bottles have inadvertently been drunk.

## QUOTE

'The old Wethered beer is now brewed in Cheltenham and is undrinkable' — Wethered tenant stream chairman Fred Spong, as quoted in the Morning Advertiser.

## OBITUARY

It is with the deepest regret that we record the death last November of Pete Gilbert of the Compasses, Abbots Langley, at the early age of 34. I got to know Pete well when he worked behind the bar at the Nascot Arms and spent many a pleasant day on drinking trips with him. Pete knew his beer and how to look after it, and was particularly pleased to have picked up awards from Courage in their best kept cellar competitions. He did not agree with all CAMRA's aims, but on what has regrettably proved to be my all too infrequent visits, he was always his usual friendly self, ready to swap pub news and information. Our deepest sympathy goes to his wife, Annie, and his family: he will be greatly missed by all those who knew him.  
Bill Austin

## PUB NEWS

The **Bridgewater Arms** at Little Gaddesden is on sale (£600,000) complete with brewery.

The **Estcourt Tavern** in Watford has joined its fellow Greene King house the Nascot Arms in selling XX mild. Planning permission has been granted to allow the building of a new **Kings Head** at the site in Little Bushey Lane, Bushey. Current estimates are that it could open at the end of 89.

A very welcome conversion to real ale is the **Six Bells** in Sandon, a Greene King house. This attractive one bar, village pub now has handpumped IPA and Abbot. A splendid feature is the Fordham's Ashwell Ales mirror hanging over the fireplace.

**The Hilltop**, Hatfield (McMullens) has been renamed the **Harrier**. The **Robin Hood**, St. Albans, (Whitbread), has reopened after major refurbishment, as has the **Crabtree** at Hemel Hempstead (Benskins).

The **Ancient Briton**, St. Albans, and the **Bull**, Stanborough are now Porterhouse steakhouses (Allied). The **Pre Hotel** in St. Albans has been bought by Whitbread who want to restore it to its former glory — as a steakhouse!

Youngs bitter is on sale at the **Two Brewers**, Northaw (Benskins).

Hertfords last fizz-only pub, the **Dolphin** (McMullens) is currently closed for refurbishment.

The **Rifle Volunteer** at Oxhey has been extended as part of a £40,000 refurbishment. John Smiths has joined Courage Best Bitter and Directors on handpump.

The **Wellington Arms**, Watford, is currently closed and we don't know its future.

The **Rose and Crown**, King's Langley, has reopened and will now have three nights and one lunchtime session of jazz a week. Benskins are aiming for 'a good traditional pub, serving special guest beers such as draught cask conditioned cider' — well that's what the press report said! The former **Railway Arms** at Hemel Hempstead has reopened as 'La Mirage' nightclub. Aimed at the '21-28 age group, white collar workers' entrance is £5 during the week, £8 at weekends, and you can enjoy a 'pizza-based menu'. The bad news is that Benskins are looking for sites to build more.

The **Chequers** at Baldock (Greene King) is now the **Checkers** once more.

Fullers have opened the **Boat** at Berkhamsted and the **Post Office Arms** at Boxmoor.

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## PUPPET BREWS?

To be seen drinking that seven-letter word alcohol these days is enough to turn you into the beery equivalent of a child molester. A glass of beer in your hand? — well, you are clearly about to cause mayhem on the roads/render several families fatherless/start World War Three. (If World War Three has broken out by the time you read this, please delete the final category.)

Mixed up in all the right and proper concern to stop the carnage on the roads is a new drive by the major brewers to get us to swill their latest fake apologies for beers known collectively as NABLABS. They sound like the drinks consumed by the Flower Pot Men — “Dobablob, Bill: Nablab Ben” — but the acronym stands for No Alcohol Beers Low Alcohol Beers and they are mightily profitable for their perpetrators.

The energetic and media-hungry Minister of Transport, Peter Bottomley, has praised the brewers for their backing for NABLABS. His naive belief in the “free market” ignores the way in which the giant national brewers are busily cornering the market in low-alcohol products and making an enormous profit from them at the same time.

NABLABS taste disgusting. The major brands are stuffed with adjuncts and additives — the dreaded E numbers — which give them an unpleasant, sulphury after-taste. The brand leader, promoted by that well-known abstainer Billy Connolly, is Kaliber, which tastes like chilled Ovaltine injected with sulphur dioxide. They are all horrendously expensive: the pub mark up is 70 per cent higher than in offies and supermarkets. I have paid 90 pence for half pint cans and bottles of the likes of Kaliber, Dansk and Carlton Special Lite (bought, I hasten to add, in the interests of research, not taste stimulation).

The brewers are doing with NABLABS exactly the same as they did with lager 10 to 15 years ago: they are swamping the market to stop smaller regional brewers from getting a toe-hold and, once they have established their domination, they are fleecing the consumer.

Brewers pay no duty on low and no alcohol beers. This means that the profit on a 90 pence can of the stuff is enormous. Don't be taken in by tales of the “extra cost of new plant” — we all heard that one when lager became the tasteless sensation of the seventies. No extra cost is involved at all if you use existing plant and play around with the yeast strain and the sugar levels. Those brewers who distill the end products will already have distillation plants on tap to produce a profitable by-product, industrial alcohol. Once again we are being taken for a ride by the brewers, with the full backing and connivance of the government. If you don't want to be a danger on the road or fall asleep at your desk after lunch, then don't play the brewers' game: switch instead to a half pint or two of such delicious, well-crafted beers as McMullen's AK or Fuller's Chiswick.

You know it makes sense.

Roger Protz

## TRENDY LOUTS?

Following the government's coining of the term 'lager louts' and general bad publicity in the press, it was to be expected that the PR men would soon be fighting back. So it was no surprise that a recent survey came to the conclusions that 'lager drinkers are streets ahead when it comes to style and independence'. The facts that it was produced for Molson, that none of the lager drinkers were out of work as opposed to 9% of the ale drinkers interviewed, and that none of the non-lager drinkers regarded themselves as fashion conscious does raise doubts about their sampling techniques, however. With this new concern over image, Allied's PR men could be getting a bit worried over the character they use to advertise Skol: from a recent cartoon in the Sun it would appear that Hagar the Horrible has problems counting past ten, but then it's style that counts, isn't it?

## PUB OF THE MONTH

The Silver Cup, Harpenden is the last of the South Herts Branch's Pubs of the Month in the present round and was picked out of the 30 or so pubs in the Harpenden and Redbourn area.

The Silver Cup is a long established hostelry and derived its name from the prize given at the horse races that ran past the front door on the common. Today, however the front door opens onto the busy A1081, formerly the A6. The pub has a traditional two-bar design; a plush saloon with oak beams, horsebrasses and a roaring fire in the winter; the public bar is unassuming often lively and popular with darts players, and there is always a good lunchtime menu.

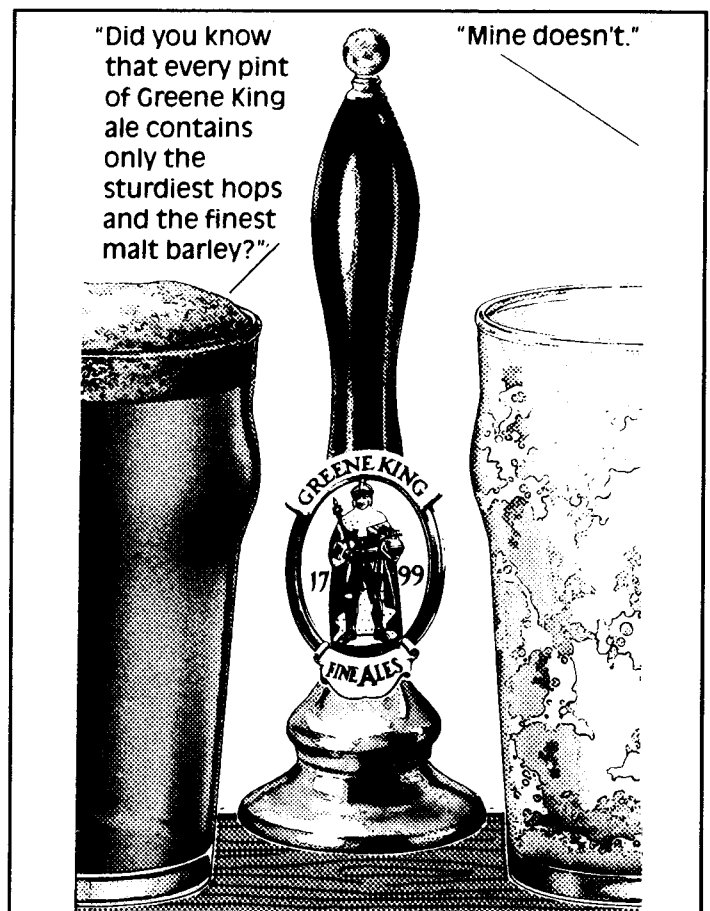
The Cup up until a few years ago was the most southerly outlet for the Bedford brewers Charles Wells and their real ales Eagle and Bombardier are still fairly rare brews in Hertfordshire so why not join us for a few on the 21st Feb?

## NEW PUB

St.Albans' first new pub for many years opened in December at Sandringham Crescent on the Jersey Farm Estate and is only Bass's second tied outlet in St.Albans. Although the exterior is obviously modern, the interior attempts to produce a Victorian atmosphere. It has a single 'L' shaped bar with a conservatory tacked on at one end and a library at the other complete with Victorian fireplace, but no fire and, in fact, this is a no smoking area.

Although it is similar in style to two recent revamps (Three Hammers, Chiswell Green and the Blacksmiths Arms) and regrettably has no public bar, it is a new pub in an area of modern housing crying out for a social centre, and it does sell decent real ale — Charringtons IPA and Bass — although you have to drink them out of those tall lager glasses.

The name Blackberry Jack was selected from a local newspaper competition and commemorates a tramp who roamed the area at the turn of the century. One can only speculate on his opinions of this shrine to the Home Counties' Yuppie.



## DIARY DATES

### MID-CHILTERNERS BRANCH

Contact Roy Humprey Hemel Hempstead 833451

### WATFORD & DISTRICT BRANCH

Wednesday 8th February: Branch meeting, **Wheatsheaf**, Watford, 8.30pm, followed by social at **Villiers**, Oxhey, 9.45pm

Friday 17th February: Belated New Year's Party, **Blakes**, Watford

Tuesday 21st February: **Darts v. Rose & Crown**, Abbots Langley, 8.30pm.

Tuesday 28th February: Two-pub social, **Royal Oak**, Bushey, 8.30pm, **Stag**, Bushey, 9.45pm

Contact Martin Few 0923 52412

### HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Tuesday 7th February: Branch meeting, **Plough**, Tyttenhanger Green, St.Albans, 8.30pm

Tuesday 21st February: Pub of the month, **Silver Cup**, Harpenden, 8.30pm (to be confirmed)

Tuesday 7th March: Branch meeting, **Old Bulls Head**, Ware, 8.30pm

Tuesday 21st March: Pub of the Year (to be decided)

Contact Bob Norrish 05827 69923

### HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

Wednesday 8th February

A.G.M. and Social at the **Red Lion**, Stevenage, 8.30.

Wednesday 22nd February

Social at the **Cock**, Baldock, 8.30pm.

Wednesday 8th March

Social in Pirton at the **Fox**, 8.30pm and then at the **Motte & Bailey** and the **Cat & Fiddle**.

Friday 17th March

Pub Crawl in Hitchin. Meet in the **George** in the town centre 8.00pm.

Wednesday 12th April

Social at the **Rose & Crown**, Ashwell, 8.30pm.

Wednesday 26th April

Social at the **Robin Hood & Little John**, Rabley Heath, 8.30pm.

Contact: Jonathan Fynn — Royston 244043

## PUB FOLK

Hoddesdon Folk Club have moved to the Old Bulls Head, Ware. Future dates include:

Feb 17 — Nick Dow      Mar 10 — Gerry Hallom

Mar 17 — Rick Christian      Mar 31 — Bob Walser

Contact Ted Ovenden (0992 583202) for further details.

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## CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Thanks to all the people who entered the Christmas Quiz, and a large percentage managed to find their way round the 1989 Good Beer Guide (available now at good pubs, bookshops and CAMRA HQ, 34 Alma Road, St.Albans) to obtain the answers. But there could only be one winner and that is Miss Anna Stanley of Edgware. The judges particularly liked her tie-breaker anagrams of 'girlies and ale' (from Andrea Gillies) and 'a boosin' din' (she obviously knows Iain Dobson) and a copy of Classic Town Pubs is on its way.

## EDUCATING THE LAW

At first sight the new licensing act introduced last September would appear to simplify matters: all pubs may now open 11am to 11pm Monday to Friday, and 12-2pm and 7-10.30pm on Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday. Nice and straight forward — except that the law permits pubs in areas which allowed opening before 1am to continue to open early (at least until the next Brewster Sessions around February time). So there was some consternation amongst the licensee and the few elder clientele at a Portsmouth pub recently when it was subject to a police raid after it had opened at 10am. The police ordered the landlord to stop serving and to stay closed until 11. The police have subsequently admitted their mistake and apologised. The new law also makes no change to the grounds for applying for extensions. However local magistrates in different parts of the country are interpreting the law differently. Some are in effect saying that the new hours are sufficiently long, and are not allowing any extensions. The result has been that over the recent holiday period pubs in some areas were not open for as long as they were last year.

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