

THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

FREE



The Campaign for Real Ale

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NUMBER 120

MAY DAY REVOLUTION?

That aspect of the MMC report which, hopefully, will be the most visible to pub goers comes into effect on May 1st. From that date, tenants of the big brewers will be able to take a guest cask conditioned beer from a source other than that owning the pub.

The MMC's intention was to open up the market to provide outlets for the independent brewers and, in particular, those new small breweries without any tied pubs of their own. The question is will it be effective?

In Hertfordshire many of the big brewers' pubs have been serving a guest beer (or beers) supplied by the brewers' own wholesaling department, thus keeping at least some of the profit in the family. The result has been, for example, Whitbread pubs selling Marstons Pedigree and Benskins pub selling, amongst others, Adnams and Youngs beers. In doing this the big brewers are hoping to persuade their tenants that there is no point in dealing with other companies.

Although the government has insisted that it will act against a brewer who penalises a tenant for buying from other sources, rumours are rife throughout the

country of pressure being placed on landlords not to buy 'outside'. These threats have included comments about not qualifying for full discounts on beers and possible delays in pub refurbishment. This situation has not been helped by a leading figure in the tenants' own trade organisation, the NLVA, more or less encouraging landlords to see what concessions they can get from their brewery in exchange for remaining 'loyal'. Fortunately some local LVAs have already pointed out the advantages of buying outside the tie.

It remains to be seen how many Herts landlords will take advantage of the new freedom and allow their customers the chance of tasting some of the superb products produced by the new independents (such as Nethergate, Butcombe and Banks & Taylor) and those established independents who are not currently favoured with trading agreements locally by the big brewers, (the likes of Hook Norton, Batemans and McMullens). We can only hope that enough landlords make use of the opportunity to help give the smaller breweries the recognition and support they deserve.

The Crooked Billet

Colney Heath Tel: Bowmansgreen 22128



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World beer in
draughty
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castle street ... old hertford

*Widest selection of real ales
in Hertford with many guest beers
served on gravity and hand pump*

.....
Reduced prices on cask ale
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.....
Home cooked food weekday lunchtimes

PUB NEWS

16 landlords in the Oxhey area have grouped together to form a pubwatch scheme to provide each other with an early warning system against possible troublemakers. Grand Met are selling off 18 of their Berni Inns including the Tudor Tavern, St. Albans.

In 1984 McMullens paid what was then a whopping £425,000 for the Nags Head, Hampstead. Having failed to maintain the trade it had as a free house they are now reselling it. The sales blurb states that: 'it could remain a traditional ale Mecca or equally it would be eminently suitable for the creation of a modern cafe/bar concept with a plethora of odd (!!! — ed) lagers from around the world'.

A planning application has been submitted to turn the Green Shield Stamp shop in the Parade, Watford, into a wine bar. The local residents association, CRAW, are opposing the plan (which comes as no surprise), on the grounds that there is already too much unruly behaviour at closing time. However, to repeat the quote of Fiona McCormack, manageress of the Artichoke in the Parade: 'I think the problem of people leaving the pub might be exaggerated'.

High rent increases are taking their toll: landlords quitting claiming this as a cause include David Jeffrey of the Royal Oak, West Hyde and Bob Hallatt of the Duke of York, Croxley Green.

The White Hart, Baldock, has acquired an extra handpump and is using it to dispense Greene King XX Mild on a trial basis. Make yours Mild In May and help make this a permanent XX outlet.

We note with regret the enforced closure of the Bull, Watton at Stone, due to a serious fire in mid-February. Its future is currently unknown.

While on fires, for the second time in 10 years, a pub that owes its name and sign to a fire has itself escaped major fire damage. At the Fox and Hounds, Barley, in January two customers extinguished burning clothes

from an overheated tumble drier on the first floor after being alerted by the pub's two dogs. 10 years ago the pub was nearly gutted by an electrical fire just after it had been renovated. The original Fox & Hounds burnt down in 1950, after which the name and gallows sign were transferred to the present pub, formerly called the Waggon & Horses. All of this makes the name of the pub brewery's new ale most apt. Launched at the turn of the year, it is called Flamethrower, a strong dark malty ale with an og of 1053-1056. It joins Old Dragon (1042) to complete the Barley Brewery's new range.

A belated report: the White Horse, Stevenage Old Town, has Greene King XX and Abbot hidden in the beer store. The landlord has not advertised the fact ('the regulars know'), but will serve them straight from the cask if asked.

The Abbot John, Wheathampstead, has been sold by Benskins to developers and is expected to close by early April.

The Oddfellows in Harpenden has new permanent managers in Nick Hill and Jackie, his wife-to-be. How permanent we wait and see as its one of several pubs McMullens are offloading. Others are: Fox and Hounds, Hunsdon; Robin Hood, Tonwell; Coach and Horses, Waltham Abbey; and the Rifle Volunteer, Ware.

The George, Harpenden, is under threat as the adjacent ex-garage is earmarked for development.

The Rat's Castle St. Albans is closed and its future is uncertain. The same applies to the King's Head, London Colney.

The Barley Mow, Tyttenhanger is up for sale. The Nelson, Wheathampstead has been bought after having been closed for 2 years. It will be reopened as a freehouse by a consortium including Bob Andrews, one time landlord of the Plough, Tyttenhanger.

Benskins have submitted plans for a two-storey extension and alterations to the King Harry, St. Albans.



BREWERY NEWS

As we were going to press Elders announced the expected deal between themselves and Grand Met. Elders (to be renamed Fosters Brewing) get Grand Met's 4 breweries and will supply Grand Met's pubs and restaurants. Its own Courage tenanted pubs will join with those of Grand Met in a new company (Entrepreneur Estates) owned 50/50. The deal appears to be a way of circumventing the intentions of the MMC report, and is a merger in all but name. It will lead to reduced competition (the new group would own over 30% of all pubs in Greater London), and an inevitable loss of breweries (Ushers will be sold off immediately) and brands. If the MMC could reject Elders' attempt at taking over Scottish & Newcastle as being against the public interest, they must surely find that this deal, with even less merit, is a real non-starter.

The Berkhamsted Brewery which operated as a side-line of the brewery equipment manufacturers, Inn Brewing, has moved north from its Bourne End home to the Burton-on-Trent area. Inn Brewing will continue to concentrate on the production of brewing plants for small and pub breweries and have no immediate plans to restart brewing in their new premises.

The brewing equipment at the Bridgewater Arms has been sold, and moved, courtesy of the proprietors of the Banks & Taylor brewery, to Taynult, Argyll, Scotland to help form West Highland Brewers. Old railway station buildings have been converted to incorporate the brewery by Dick Saunders, an ex-B & T pub manager. The beers, Highland Heavy and Highland Severe, are said to have more than a passing resemblance to those brewed at Shefford.

Control Securities who own Belhaven have bought another 220 pubs from Grand Met. 60% of these are in the south-east and takes their estate to 770 pubs. The Heritage Brewery in Burton-on-Trent, which is a working brewery museum, has lost its contract to brew Tiger and mild for Everards. 9 people have been made redundant.

In order not to be classified as a big brewer Scottish & Newcastle have been selling off 250 pubs to get below the 2000 threshold. Amongst the purchasers were a bus company (their new bus routes could be interesting) and a real ale wholesaler, Legendary Yorkshire Heroes (perhaps the North East will get some proper Free Houses at last).

Whitbread have sold their 27 Scottish pubs to a Sussex based pub-retailing company. Another new national concern in the making?

It has been confirmed that Bruce's beers in the Flock, Phantom, and Fuzzock are all brewed from a full mash and are served without the blanket pressure used in the other Firkin pubs.

The old Whitbread brewery in Portsmouth has been demolished to make way for a car park for use by visitors to HMS Victory and the Mary Rose, and a planning application is in to convert the former Halls brewery in Oxford into offices.

Having astounded everyone by selling their brewery, Boddingtons will not even be fully supporting the new Whitbread brewed beer. The Boddington Pub Company have signed an agreement to put Tetleys into 500 of their pubs. They are also snubbing Whitbread by taking Allied's Castlemaine rather than one of Whitbread's lagers.

McMullens are reported to be replacing 'real' Country by a keg version in about 30 of their pubs. Low-turnover and hence 'poor quality beer' has apparently led to this move.

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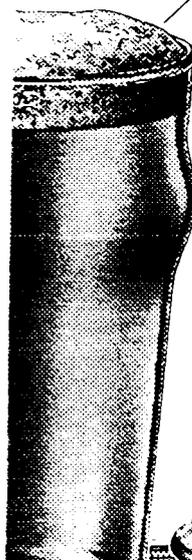
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"Did you know that every pint of Greene King ale contains only the sturdiest hops and the finest malt barley?"

"Mine doesn't."






BRANCH DIARY

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE BRANCH

Wednesday 11 April, 8.30pm Branch Meeting at the **White Hart**, Baldock

Wednesday 25 April, 8.30pm Social at the **Woodman**, Nuthamstead, then from 9.30 at the **Fox and Hounds**, Barley

Wednesday 9 May, 8.30pm Social at the **Cabinet**, Reed
Wednesday 23 May, 8.30pm Village Crawl, starting at the **Raven**, Hexton, followed by the **Lilley Arms** and the **Silver Lion**, Lilley

Wednesday 6 June, 8.30pm Branch Meeting at the **Coach and Horses**, Royston

Wednesday 20 June, 8pm Stevenage Old Town Crawl, starting at the **Mallard**, Julians Road

Contact:- Paul Coard, 0462-437249

WATFORD & DISTRICT

Wednesday 11 April Annual Branch Darts Tournament at the **West Herts Sports Club** 8.30pm

Wednesday 18 April Pub crawl **White Hart**, Bedmond 8.30pm, Bell, Bedmond 9.15pm, then bus to

Wellington, Watford 10.30pm

Wednesday 25 April Central Watford crawl: **Red Lion**, 8.30pm, **One Crown**, 9.15pm, **One Bell** 10.00pm

Wednesday 2 May Out of Area social: **Old Fox**, Old Bricket Wood, 8.30pm

Saturday 19 May Network card trip to Faversham (lunch/afternoon) and Canterbury (evening).

Contact:- Martin Few, Watford 52412

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Wednesday 11 April Branch meeting at the **Cricketers** Redbourne 8.30pm

Tuesday 24 April, Social to celebrate the **Woodman**, Wormley West End being in 10 GBGs.

Tuesday 8 May, Branch Meeting at the **Woodman**, Chapmore End (Greene King XX mild available)

Tuesday 22 May, Social starting at **Crooked Billet**, Colney Heath, 8.30pm.

Contact:- Bob Norrish 0582 76923 (h) 0582 763133 x2554 (w)

MID-CHILTERNERS BRANCH

Contact: Christ Pontin 0494 783198

HERTS-ESSEX BORDERS

Contact:- Steve Marlow 0279 304050

FIRST NATIONAL CIDER AND PERRY EXHIBITION

18th-19th May Camden Centre, Bidborough St, London, WC1

1990 WEEKEND TRIP

The 1990 Herts branches weekend trip will be on the weekend Friday 26th to Sunday 28th October to Sussex, and will include a tour of Harveys Brewery, Lewes. Names and addresses of any members interested, asap, to Jim Axford, work: 0279 87078 x142: home: 0440 730826.

TEN YEARS AGO

The price of a pint as reported in the Newsletter for April 1980 was between 40p and 45p for bitter. A CAMRA price survey found also that nowhere in Hertfordshire was lager less than 46p a pint but that a pint of mild, of similar strength to lager, was only 35p to 38p, with one pub selling Greene King XX for as little as 32p.

The local independent brewers McMullens, Greene King and Charles Wells were particularly praised for their good value, whereas beers in Whitbread pubs were likely to be 5p a pint more. Such a differential still holds true today.

Whilst McMullens were being praised for their prices, they were being criticised in both April and May 1980 for their lack of handpumps. At the time only 31 out of 88 tenanted and 23 out of 78 managed pubs served McMullens ale on handpump. In May the lament was the particular lack of handpumped AK which, then as now, often outsold Country bitter. In the intervening decade many handpumps have been installed in McMullen pubs.

JFF

ODD BITS

A group of Benskins tenants wanted to buy their CO₂ direct from BOC reckoning they would be able to save 30% on costs. We can suggest ways of making 100% savings...

It comes as no surprise that foreign lagers picked up the major prizes at the Brewing International Awards in Burton on Trent this year (even if one winner was Australian export lager from Appelstofftska Bryggeri AB, Halmstad, Sweden), however there were a couple of eyebrow raising selections amongst the cask conditioned beers. Best Mild was Davenports and best Strong Bitter was Burton Ale (perhaps debatable but not too surprising); best Best Bitter — Courage Best (hmmmm), best Bitter — Taylor Walker (!!!!!). It all begs certain questions: was it a home-town decision?; is it just that the beer doesn't travel down to London?; was it an attempt to make sure Allied carry on brewing it?; was it REALLY 'normal' Taylor Walker?

Nice idea: Scunthorpe justices laid down a policy decision that all licensees should offer a traditional ale from a recognised independent brewer as a way of breaking the Bass and John Smith's monopoly of the area. Pity they were apparently overstepping their powers.

Eagle-eyed Eastenders viewers will have notice that the Benskins Pennant style handpumps have been replaced by ones showing a hunting scene. Benskins deny any 'Abbey Road' style symbolism, its just that that's all they had available when the Beeb wanted to do a 'refurbishment'.

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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