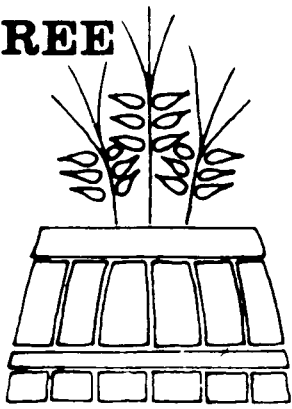


FREE



The Campaign For Real Ale HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

March 1979 • Number 14

BREWERS BUMP UP PRICES

As predicted in the January Newsletter, Britain's beer drinkers have been hit by a burst of price rises. Standard bearers for the brewers were Allied (Ind Coope in Hertfordshire) who slapped 3p on a pint. Although this was supposed to include V.A.T. etc., some landlords have taken the opportunity to add another penny, which means that in some pubs Ind Coope Bitter, an average strength beer, is selling for the exorbitant price of 40 pence per pint (Imagine what Burton Ale costs). To add insult to injury there is a strong possibility that Chancellor, Denis Healey will increase the duty on beer in this year's Budget by about 1p per pint. The Prices Commission, so-called champion of the consumer, has given the go ahead to price rise applications from most of the brewers, except Bass and Whitbread where the Commission has announced an investigation, likely to be little more than a 'token' gesture to allay mounting criticism from drinkers. Here interim rises have been granted.

Easy Way Out

Locally, McMullens have announced a 2p rise. To justify their rises, the brewers point to increases in the cost of raw materials and heating together with a pay award granted to bar staff. With many of the brewers amassing record profits last year, CAMRA feels some effort could have been made to absorb these costs - it seems all too simple for the brewers to take the easy way out and demand extra money from their customers.

XX: 20 OUTLETS

Despite Greene King's indication that XX, Biggleswade brewed dark mild, may be phased out due to poor sales, Hertfordshire CAMRA members have failed to find a single pub where consumption is falling. All 94 GK pubs in the county have been surveyed and 20 sell XX, although top pressure dispense is mostly used. Five free trade outlets are also known. Promotional leaflets, beer mats etc. have been distributed by CAMRA volunteers and posters and car stickers will be available soon. The response from licensees has been enthusiastic but as yet the brewery remain unmoved.

Ask For XX

Overall, success in preserving this fine fruity beer, often costing only 28p a pint, may depend on many small village pubs where scarcely one firkin a week is sold, but in Hertfordshire sales seem to be improving. It is the drinker who will determine the future of XX - demanding it in GK outlets is the only way to save it from the long list of extinct beers. Real XX outlets in Herts. are The George IV (Baldock), The Plough (Ley Green), The Woodman (Chapmore End), The Waterford Arms (Waterford) - gravity, The Wilbury Hotel, Ballroom Bar (Letchworth), The Crooked Billet (Colney Heath), The Cabinet (Reed) and The White Horse (Hertford).

BY DEL TURNER

HATFIELD: NO LONGER A BEER DESERT

It seems only a short time ago (2 or 3 years?) that the real ale drinker in Hatfield was forced to leave town to find anything worth drinking. The sanity of many residents was maintained only by making the pilgrimage to Tyttenhanger Green. All this has changed and now, thankfully, there remain only a handful of the town's pubs which still serve nothing but fizz.

New Outlet

The most recent convert is The Robin Hood, conveniently situated next to Woolco in the town centre. Just before Christmas 3 new handpumps appeared on the bar and from these flow Ind Coope Bitter and Burton Ale. Why not mild too? If you want real mild in Hatfield you will have to go to The Wrestlers, another house which did not appear in the 1978 Herts Guide. Here you will find IC Bitter & Mild - but no Burton. Plenty of horse brasses, bits of plough, a nice open fire and good lunch-time snacks. If you want Burton try The Comet. The Mosquito Bar has one handpump at the far end of the bar. The White Hart and The New Fiddle both serve IC Bitter & Burton by handpump but the latter no longer serves KK Mild without gas.

Courage And McMullen

Ind Coope's near monopoly in the town has been eased a little with the transfer of The Cavendish Arms and The Horse and Groom to Courage. The Cavendish now sells Directors Bitter by handpump but The Horse and Groom is still on gas. Incidentally, do not be fooled by the 3 handpump handles on the bar at The Eight Bells, up the road. These are for show - or to confuse the tourists perhaps. The other brewer to be represented in Hatfield in real ale form is McMullen. The Red Lion now has Country Bitter on handpumps as do their two large estate pubs, The Hilltop and The Hopfields. Why only Country though.

Within Reach

The overall choice of beers is still limited and the pubs, with one or two exceptions, lack character, but it must be a good thing that most people in Hatfield are now within walking distance of a pub serving real ale.

BY NICK COCKCROFT



McMULLEN & SONS -

Herts South branch have in the last few years visited a wide variety of breweries eg. Guinness, Hook Norton, Theakstons, Charles Wells, Ind Coope and Ridley's, yet the one brewery which had always remained elusive, was our own local brewery, McMullen's of Hertford. Despite numerous approaches, we had always been refused, so there was some elation when it was announced that a firm date had been fixed - Thurs 25 January at 10.30am.

Room At The Top

On arrival we were split into two groups of ten and introduced to our two guides, head brewer Tony Skipper and his colleague 'Robbie' Robinson. Mr Skipper (who led our party) directed us to the top floor of the brewery, to a room housing two mash tuns and a rather surprising resident, the pet rubber plant. Here Mr Skipper gave us a brief history of McMullens and a simplified description of the brewing process which he amplified in more detail as we went round.

To All And Sundry

As their own printed history says "The name McMullen now represents 150 years of brewing history. In 1827 Peter McMullen, the great-grandfather of the present Chairman, established his first brewery in Back Street, (now Railway Street) Hertford. At that time, owning no pubs itself, the brewery existed by selling its beer to all and sundry." Their first pub opened in Bengoe in 1836 and with expansion business was transferred to the Mill Bridge Brewery and in 1891 a new brewery, the present one in Hartham Lane, was built. While many other small breweries were being taken over in the first half of the century (some by Mac's themselves), McMullen's maintained their independence and today McMullen and Sons are the only remaining independent brewery in Hertfordshire. It is interesting to note that in 1900 there were 35 breweries in the county, in 1949 nine and today just two, the other of course being Rayment's who are owned by Greene King.

Tower Brewery

The present brewery is of the tower variety, where basically, the brewing process starts at the top of the building and works its way to ground level, and there has been little change since it was built, although new equipment, where necessary has enabled Mac's to keep up with current brewing trends. Today Mac's brew 4 - 5 times the beer that was originally brewed at Hartham Lane and supply 162 tied houses and an expanding free trade market.

Finest Malt

Mac's once had their own maltings but today malt is brought in from East Anglia. Mr Skipper uses mostly pale malt from the finest barley, although some dark mild is used to adjust the colour. Malt represents 86% of the grist used, good by most brewery standards, the remaining 14% being made up of flaked maize (6%) and the addition of liquid dark sugar (8%), both of which aid in the clarity of the beer. The malt is milled at Mac's to grist.

AK And Country

McMullen's today brew two cask-conditioned beers namely, Country Bitter (Original Gravity 1042) and AK, a light mild (OG1033) which outsells Country by 2:1. However, it was not too long ago that Mac's range of draught beers read Best Ale, Bitter Light Mild, XXX Dark Mild and XXXX, presumably a strong dark beer. Mr Skipper said that a typical

brewing week might be: Monday: Mac's No.1 320 barrels, Tuesday: AK 390 barrels, Wednesday: 330 barrels of Country, Thursday another large AK and Friday a smaller Country.

Burtonised

The malt is lifted, using an elevator, to a grist case and passes through a Steel's masher (invented in 1850). Here liquor, the brewer's term for water, is blended with the grist and then flows into the mash tun. The spent grains are run off and the remaining consistency, now called wort is drained off into the brewing copper. Mac's water is obtained from wells beneath the brewery, supplied by a 200ft deep artesian basin, although the water is near the surface. As with most brewers in the south, gypsum is added to the water. This likens the quality of water to that found at Burton-on-Trent, considered ideal for brewing. Salt is added to the water used for the Brown Ale but the water used for Steingold lager has no additions at all.

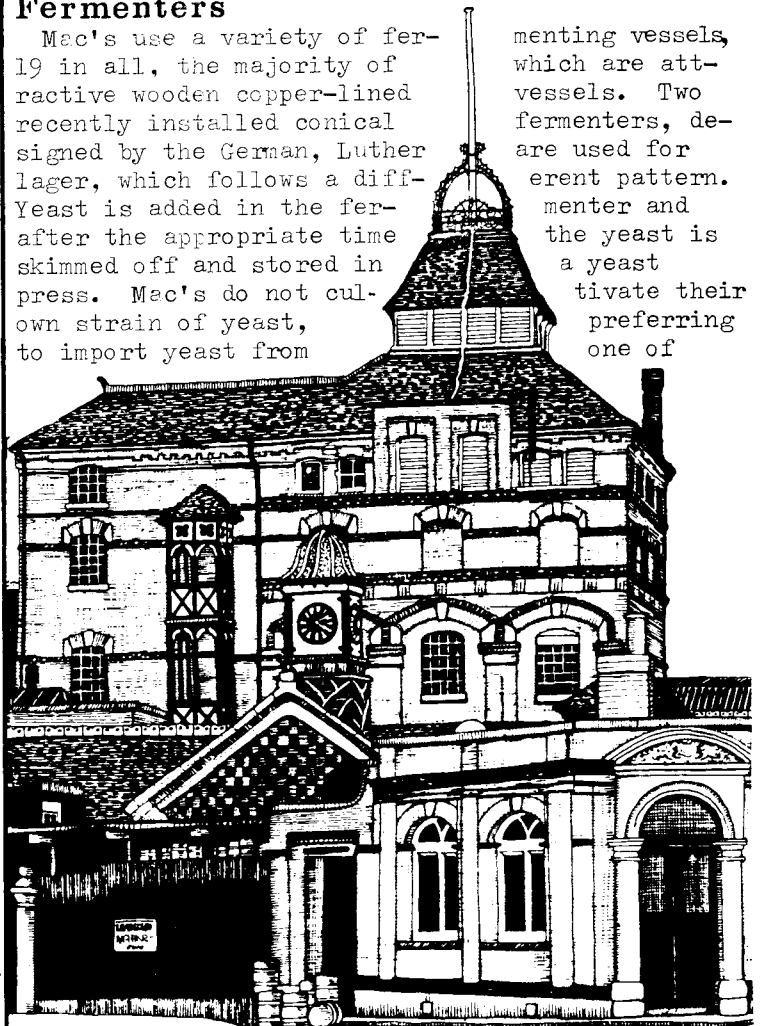
Kent Hops

Hops are added in the copper, and Mac's supply is usually from Kent, currently priced at around £1 per pound. Whole goldings are used with alpha acid to give the beer its bitterness (an experiment with hop pellets proved unsuccessful). The exception is Steingold, where Yugoslav hops are used. The wort at this point is boiled to sterilise and is drained into the hopback. Here the wort is held and eventually passed through a modern enclosed cooler which replaced an open cooler (similar to that seen at Ridley's) some 12 years ago.

Fermenters

Mac's use a variety of fer-
19 in all, the majority of
ractive wooden copper-lined
recently installed conical
signed by the German, Luther
lager, which follows a diff-
Yeast is added in the fer-
after the appropriate time
skimmed off and stored in
press. Mac's do not cul-
own strain of yeast,
to import yeast from

menting vessels,
which are att-
vessels. Two
fermenters, de-
are used for
erent pattern.
menter and
the yeast is
a yeast
tivate their
preferring
one of



- A VISIT TO HERTFORD

their bigger rivals. The beer is directed to a tank and is eventually racked. Dry hops are added to some of the brews and priming sugar is added prior to leaving the brewery to enable secondary fermentation in the pub cellar in the case of Country and AK. From the brewery we moved to the cask-washing plant, bottling hall and the two kegging plants. Today Mac's use barrels, kils and firkins. Pins are rarely used but polypins have been introduced. Like other brewers, a contemporary problem seems to be the amount of casks not being returned - we have all heard of the illegal thriving trade in aluminium barrels. Mac's old kegging plant is still in operation but in twelve years has become inadequate. A brand new kegging plant with increased capacity is now thumping out kegged Harp and Steingold.

Wine, Sherry And Minerals

Apart from brewing Mac's also retail and bottle wines and sherris. They bottle such 'brands' as Elizabethan, Slovener and Valdaina and have their own trade name range of wines called Paul Becasse. The whole of the wine bottling is hand-operated and Mac's extensive wine vaults house some very interesting vintage wines and ports. Mac's also make mineral waters and soft drinks to their own recipe - some of which have won national awards - as well as retailing some of the more familiar brands.

Mac's Museum

After a fascinating tour, we moved on to a nearby building, currently being kitted out to become a museum of McMullen's brewing history. Many of the cabinets are already in place. Downstairs are tools once used by the brewery cooper and upstairs old advertising material - glasses, goblets, ancient beer mats and dispensing equipment together with interesting facts and pictures of pubs and events of long ago.

Tucking In

Downstairs we sampled excellent gravity-drawn AK and tucked into a very welcome and totally unexpected spread. We were joined by Mr Skipper, 'Robbie' Robinson, Roy Shadbolt (who is in charge of the Free Trade side of things) and Mr Wilson, a second brewer. The informal discussions which follow brewery visits are often enlightening and Mac's was no exception. Mr Skipper said that sales continued to do well and that sales of Steingold lager were very encouraging - to the point where McMullen's were thinking of producing another lager, but of a weaker gravity.

A New Image

Mac's are currently looking for a new image. Somehow, it seems, McMullen as a name is not very well known and often customers don't associate Country Bitter with McMullen's or visa versa. Branch members felt that a good way to publicise Mac's and cheaply, would be to re-introduce horse-drawn dray deliveries to the Hertford-Ware area where the company have a large number of pubs. This would surely promote interest and as such companies as Young's, Adnams and Wadworth's will testify, is often cheaper than lorry delivery.

Modern Pubs

Mac's are very happy with their new pubs, such as The Sun at Hoddesdon and Crocodile, Cheshunt and more are on the way - CAMRA members hoped that this wouldn't mean pulling down any genuinely old and pleasant pubs just to replace them with

characterless, one-bar, plastic decked emporiums. The general standard of Mac's new pubs has improved considerably - the John O'Gaunt, Hertford and the Saracen's Head, Ware, two examples of the modern plasticated pub don't seem to have been the success that was intended.

Mac's Like Fizz

Sadly however, the company are still convinced that top pressure is the best way of dispensing their draught beers although they are more inclined to agree these days that there is a sizeable demand for un-gassed beers - borne out in the appearance of new handpumps for Country in some pubs (including their new pubs). Local CAMRA members feel that if Mac's are looking for a new image, they need not look further than AK and Country, which are two very distinctive and drinkable beers - worth promoting as such, but preferably without the gas.

Winter Brew?

Trad Bitter, Mac's offering in the polypin market, does quite well and the company may soon enter the 'four-pint-can market' to rival such dubious competitors as Watney's Party Four, Jackpot and other insipid brands. Lets hope Mac's can come up with something better. Suggestions that the company might brew a strong winter brew met with interest - if it's good, there will be no effort required in spreading the word 'Mac's' here.

Our Support

I think it can be said that in the main CAMRA supports companies such as Mac's - independent, brewing excellent draught beer and with some very good pubs. Our main difference is in the method of dispense used in the majority of Mac's outlets.

Thank You

We would like to thank Mac's, Messrs Skipper, Robinson, Shadbolt and Wilson for a really informative and worthwhile visit and for the smashing buffet lunch laid on by Mr Shadbolt's secretary, Linda Skuce. It was 2pm, just time enough to finish off an eventful morning with a pint in a local pub - the Bell and Crown. The beer? McMullen's of course! BY LES MIDDLEWOOD

Spurred On

The Fighting Cocks, set in the heart of the St.Albans tourist area, near Verulamium, is the latest of Ind Coope's houses to be converted to real ale. The pub, reputedly the oldest inhabited licensed premises in England, is now selling both Bitter and Burton Ale on handpumps, but there are no plans at present to introduce mild. There are only 5 Ind Coope pubs in the city with beer on top pressure, so it may not be long before all their tied outlets in St.Albans offer traditional beer. BY NICK PAGE

FEMALE DARTS PLAYERS

It is felt that there must be sufficient female darts players within the Herts South branch, to warrant a challenge against the all-conquering (?) blokes. Would any interested ladies please contact Val Sandy, Tel: St.Albans 33810 (Home). Meanwhile, the branch team, under the captaincy of Roger Eaton, recently beat Enfield and Barnet Branch (5-2) and West Herts Spts/Social Club (6-3).

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PUB NEWS

Busheyheath The Windmill is now selling Courage Directors Bitter by handpump.

Caddington The Horse and Jockey now sells Litchborough Northamptonshire Bitter on handpump - a rarity this far south.

Datchworth Green The Inn on the Green has withdrawn Ruddle's County in favour of Young's Special - the first Youngs in Herts North.

Flaunden The Green Dragon is now selling hand-pumped Marston's Pedigree and other real ales are being experimented with to assess popularity.

Harpenden Ind Coope Burton Ale and Bitter are now on sale in The Harpenden Arms.

Hemel Hempstead After a considerable wait, The King's Arms has finally had a handpump installed for Mac's Country Bitter.

Hertford The White Horse, is now selling Greene King XX Dark Mild on gravity.

Leavesden The Hare is now selling Stone's Bitter by electric pump - but this is almost certainly 'bright' beer unfortunately.

Little Hadham Contrary to last month's article, The Nag's Head (Rayment's) has been unable to secure deliveries of XX Dark Mild from Greene King, who remain obstinate that Rayment's landlords can only have the KK Light Mild. Why?

Nuthampstead At The Woodman, Courage Directors Bitter has been replaced by Greene King Abbot.

Perry Green (nr. Much Hadham) The Hoops, a Free House, tied for beer to Mac's, now has Country Bitter on handpump.

Potters Bar The Lion has recently had handpumps installed for Ind Coope Bitter and Burton Ale. The George and Dragon in St.Albans Rd now sells handpumped Wethered's Bitter (On A1081).

Redbourn KK Light Mild has been withdrawn at The Cricketers (Ind Coope).

Royston The Old Bull Hotel: Wethered's Bitter has replaced Bass on handpump. Other real beers remain the same.

St.Albans The Fighting Cocks now sells Ind Coope Bitter and Burton Ale. The Peacock, in Hatfield Road, now sells Wethered's Bitter on handpump. It's worth keeping an eye on the Black Lion in Fishpool Street where a 'Beer of the Month' is being featured each month, to compliment the existing range of beers.

Upshire Sadly a deletion, The Good Intent's electric pumps, used to dispense Ind Coope Bitter are now redundant. Top pressure is being used.

Welwyn Garden City The Fairway Tavern, next to the Golf Course (where else!), a Free House, now sells Ind Coope Burton Ale. Handpumped Bass is on sale at the Hollybush.

Ware The Old Bull's Head in Baldock Street has newly-fitted handpumps for Ind Coope Bitter and Burton Ale.



MEMBERSHIP

Why not join and help us improve the lot of Britain's drinkers.

I wish to become a member of CAMRA Ltd. I agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Campaign. I enclose £4.00 as my annual subscription. (£5.00 husband and-wife).

Name Address

Date / /79. Signature

Please send to The Membership Secretary, The Campaign for Real Ale, 34 Alma Road, St.Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 3BW.

WHAT'S ON

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

- 20 Mar March Branch Meeting
The Dimsdale Arms, Fore Street, Hertford (McMullen's) 8pm. Real ale will be available in the meeting room.
- 25 Mar "Folk and Real Ale" A Sunday night folk evening run in conjunction with Hertford Folk Club at The Dimsdale Arms. 8pm. Guests will be The Calico String Band and floor singers are welcome. The evening will be recorded by Hertford Radio. An extension has been applied for.
- 11 Apr April Branch Meeting
The Robin Hood, High Street, Potters Bar (Ind Coope) 8pm. Extension applied for.

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

- 14 Mar March Branch Meeting
The Old Bull Hotel, Royston (Wethered's, Charrington's and Courage) 8pm.
- 23 Mar Social and Darts Match (versus a pub side)
The Sailor Boy, Walsworth (Wethered's) 8pm.
- 28 Mar Social at The Fox, Pirton (Wethered's) 8pm.
- 10 Apr April Branch Meeting
The Sun, Hitchin (Charrington's) 8pm
- 18 Apr Social at The Brewery Tap, Furneux Pelham (Rayment's) 8pm. A coach will run from Stevenage - for details contact Steve Done Tel: Stevenage 721960 (evenings).

HERTS/ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH

- 19 Mar March Branch Meeting
The Coach and Horses, Greenyard, Waltham Abbey (McMullen's) 8pm.
- 20 Mar Visit to McMullen's Brewery - 20 people maximum. For further details contact Isabelle Langridge Tel: Roydon 2441 (home).
- 26 Mar Joint Social with South West Essex Branch at The Wheatsheaf, Loughton (Charrington) Starting 8pm.
- 27 Apr 'Folk and Ale' Party arranged by South West Essex Branch at St.George's Hall, Woodford Avenue (A406), Gants Hill. Seven real ales. Tickets £2 including food.

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HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Dave Burns Tel: Welwyn 7805 (Home).

HERTS/ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH

Peter Foster Tel: Bishop's Stortfd 59942 (Home).

Newsletter - New Editors

The Hertfordshire Newsletter is produced monthly by the Herts South, Herts North and Herts/Essex Borders branches of CAMRA. From next month, the Newsletter will be edited by Nick Page and Val Sandy of Herts South Branch. Nick is currently Press and Publicity Officer for the branch while Val is busy trying to organize a women's darts team to thrash the pants off the male branch members. I would like to wish them the very best of luck as joint editors and urge you to make their task that bit easier by continuing to supply articles and information, to 28 Inkerman Road, St.-Albans. By Les Middlewood - Editor of this issue (81a Linden Way, Southgate, London, N.14 4NG).