

**FREE**



The Campaign for Real Ale

# HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

APRIL 1980

NUMBER 27

## SURVEYING THE FACTS

The average cost of a pint of bitter in the saloon bar of a Hertfordshire pub is now somewhere between 40p and 45p, but did you know that if your favourite beer is, say, Whitbread, you are likely to pay around 5p more per pint than you would if your preference was for a local beer, such as Greene King or McMullens?

If you are a lager drinker, we don't know of any pub in the county where your pint in a saloon bar will cost you less than 46p. Yet the usual price of a pint of mild, which is about the same strength as an ordinary lager, is somewhere between 35p and 38p — and we know of at least one pub which will sell you a pint of Greene King XX mild, straight from the barrel, for as little as 32p.

CAMRA's price surveyors have been out and about in the north of the county, and find that the best value in beer today is given by the local independent breweries: McMullens, Greene King and Charles Wells. To their credit Ind Coope, who own more pubs in the county than any other brewer, are only slightly more expensive. Three years ago, McMullens beer was unquestionably the cheapest in the county. Since that time, though, Mac's prices have risen by some 60 per cent to catch up with the rest, compared with Ind Coope (50 per cent) and Greene King (around 40 per cent).

Greene King beers are in fact excellent value for money. The average pint of Abbot in a saloon bar costs 46p, the same price as a pint of ordinary bitter in some Whitbread pubs and cheaper than most pints of ordinary lager (you're paying for those TV ads!) A pint of strong lager, of similar strength to Abbot, will cost you more than 50p, while Draught Guinness is also a luxury rarely had for less than 50p, and in some Whitbread houses costs as much as 60p per pint!

### Short change

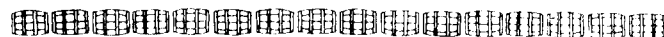
Many of us like to visit free houses where a choice of interesting non-local beers is available. Not surprisingly, prices in free houses are generally a few pence higher than those in pubs owned by breweries. For example, the average price of Adnams Bitter in the saloon bar of a Hertfordshire free house is around 45p, while Greene King IPA in a tied pub averages at a little over 40p. We stress, however,

that when we quote averages there are some pubs considerably cheaper than the prices stated, and also some considerably more expensive.

Had you realised, incidentally, that today the price of a pint of mild is about the same as a nip of whisky? 18 years ago, the mild would have cost you 1/6d and the whisky 2/6d. Once upon a time, beer was the working man's drink; are those of us who can still afford to drink beer subsidising the spirits drinkers?

Finally, a friendly warning to some landlords. It is now illegal for you not to display in each bar a price list, clearly written and in a position where the public can clearly read it. Our price surveyors found that a disturbingly large number of you are not conforming with the law. We won't tell the authorities who you are but, be careful, someone else might.

*By Sandie and Peter Lerner, with grateful thanks to the Herts North Price Surveyors and to Eric Sim of Herts South who provided additional information.*



### Keg crumbles

Greene King have reported increased sales for both their milds — KK and XX. Sales of their King Ken bitter, however, are falling, and it is being withdrawn from a number of managed houses in the Biggleswade area.

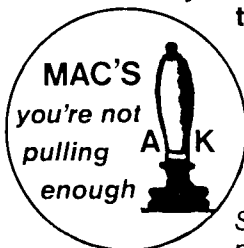
## MAC'S—BOTTOM OF THE LEAGUE

When so many of the Big Six and larger independant brewers have, over the last few years, increased the number of their pubs offering handpumped cask conditioned beer, McMullens have almost remained static.

With only 31 out of 88 tenanted and 23 out of 78 managed pubs currently serving beer by handpump, Mac's must be bottom of the league — a poor statistic for our Hertfordshire brewers who pride themselves on tradition.

This is not only an unhappy state of affairs for the drinking public, but is also a restriction on publicans who would welcome the chance of joining in the market for the 'real ale' drinker. So come on Mac's, it's time to pull back into the big league, with more handpulled beer.

See next month's Newsletter for more interesting facts on McMullens ...and look out for the Campaign's new badge.



# COMPOSTCORNER — A tale of simple country folk

“EEC LEGISLATION HITS CAMRA BRANCH OUTING!” ran the headlines on the day we departed, at as inhuman an hour as our organiser could devise, on this year’s branch weekend trip to Scotland. The newly installed tachograph in our Grey-Green coach (which actually had some white and red bits as well) was destined to hit us where it hurt most — in our drinking time. Consequently our lunchtime stop at Sheffield was somewhat curtailed, though most of us still managed to imbibe quite enough Wards and Stones ales to see us through the long hike up to Dunbar. Armed only with a demijohn of Wards bitter and a Yorkie bar the intrepid party set off.

## We labour soon, we labour late

On arrival at the Goldenstones Hotel we offloaded the coach and made straight for the bar — it was already after opening time and, as everyone knows, sitting down in a coach (or anywhere) makes you thirsty. Friday evening was spent getting to know our hosts and after an excellent hot-pot supper, at around 10, the evening drew to a very satisfactory close — at about 4.30 in the morning I think! Malt whisky’s nice isn’t it? The story of Colin wandering around the hotel with a bent coathanger, brandishing his sporrán, will be serialised in later editions of this newsletter. Suffice it to say that the event stood him in good stead in the voting on Sunday morning.

## Inspiring, bold John Barleycorn

It was around 10.30 on Saturday morning — some of us were actually awake — that we arrived at Belhaven’s brewery, a splendid old stone building near Dunbar. Knowing our predilection for a certain form of refreshment our host lead us immediately into the reception room to be greeted with a couple of barrels of 70/- and 80/-. A little early in the morning for some of us (it was still the middle of the night to me) but that didn’t deter the majority and the pints flowed. Sandy Hunter, MD of the brewery gave us a very amusing talk, interspersed with films (I seem to remember one with Dave Allen talking about Guiness of all things) and questions from the floor (almost literally!). One of the most interesting aspects was that Belhavens used to malt their own barley until recently and the process was explained to us with help of a very good little ‘home movie’ about the brewery produced by Sandy Hunter himself. Also there to greet us was Richard Gunn who did the groundwork for our trip (including the installation of three handpumps into our hotel specially for our visit!) and who plied us with ale the whole time. After the presentation of the excellent branch plaque, made specially in the form of “Belhaven Bill” by Ian Stewart, Richard brought out a special treat — Traquair House Ale, from a watering can! After a brief trip around the actual brewery buildings we left, with all the ale finished and some of us as well. Martin Harrison’s 10 pints by 1.30 looked like putting him into an almost unassailable position in the Slob-of-the-Trip stakes.

## Land O’ cakes and brither Scots

Edinburgh was our Saturday afternoon stop. With the advent of all-day opening in many pubs we set off immediately to try a drop of local brew — what’s this? Darleys and Wards again! One pub (looking more like a prison with its barred windows — and by the look of its clientele) was selling Adnams at a mere 62 pence per pint (Local free trade landlords please ignore). In contrast the city has a

wonderful legacy of beautiful old Victorian pubs such as the Cafe Royal and Bennet’s Bar, which are crammed full of lovely carved panelling and etched mirrors. It was at the former that I last saw Martin Harrison, sitting on the floor, grunting “Jimmy!” in a reasonably good imitation of a drunken Scotsman. He went unnoticed by the pub in general. And so back to the hotel, where its weekly disco was still going strong. The evening was rounded off in style with some fine community singing lead by Dave “The King” McKerchar.

## But fare you weel

After breakfast and good-byes we left Dunbar for Newcastle and the Wellington, CAMRAIL’s only pub in the North East. On the way there the traditional Slob-of-the-Trip vote was taken with Colin coming in as a convincing winner but Martin Harrison putting up a fine show in second place. Better luck next year Martin. In Newcastle, after presenting Colin’s splendid looking plaque, produced by Messrs Stewart and Allen, we spent a good lunchtime in the Wellington, meeting members of local branches and tucking into the fine spread laid on by David Waldren, the landlord. (I don’t know why he laid on it). Midway through the session, branch public relations officer, and man controlling the puse strings, Rusty Patten, presented North East CAMRA branches with shekles to help their big local campaign. Sunday afternoon brought the long trek home — in time to get a final pint in at the local before a nice early night.

An excellent trip, enjoyed by all, made possible by Tony, the organiser, and our hosts at the Goldenstones — Francis and Jimmy — and Belhaven Brewery, especially Richard Gunn and Sandy Hunter. I understand that the Goldenstones will retain at least one of the ‘temporary’ handpumps, which is good news.

As Robbie Burns said: ‘Freedom and Whisky gang thegither!’ Aye — and Real Ale too!

Dave Burns  
(with apologies to Robbie Burns)



Dave is impressed with the interior of the Green Tree, Edinburgh.

# TUSKER IN TOWN



This is the news that Whitbread

seem to want to impart. They have indicated that the new Fremlins Tusker bitter will now be available to landlords in their London Trading Area, which includes Hertfordshire. Tusker, which is brewed at Faversham in Kent and takes its name from the familiar old Fremlins elephant symbol, is described as a

**"strong, satisfying premium cask conditioned bitter" with an original gravity of 1046.**

The availability of Tusker is understood to be intended to overcome the production capacity problems at Marlow where Wethered's Bitter the other Whitbread real ale available in the London Area, is brewed. This stretched capacity problem, together with industrial problems among distribution staff, has led to unreliable availability of the Marlow beer.

Appearance of Tusker in your local Whitbread house is, of course subject to sufficient demand, amongst other factors, but it is encouraging to see some further change in Whitbread's attitude to the demand for real ale in the Home Counties and East Anglia. However, there does seem to be some continuing ambivalence in their attitude. This is apparent in the introduction to their recent series of leaflets listing the availability of Whitbread "Traditional Ale". This is worth quoting:

"In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in traditional ale and a great many drinkers have become beer connoisseurs. Thus we often get asked which of our pubs sell "real ale". The simple answer is that all our houses sell real ale since all Whitbread beer is real! However, we do have an increasing number of pubs now selling an extremely popular brew known as Thomas Wethered's Marlow Bitter, which is an excellent traditionally brewed and dispensed bitter.

"The following is a guide, chiefly to houses which serve Marlow Bitter, most by traditional hand pump, some by top pressure. Customers are advised to check with the houses concerned about the latter technicality."

Why not take their advice?

by Jonathan Fynn

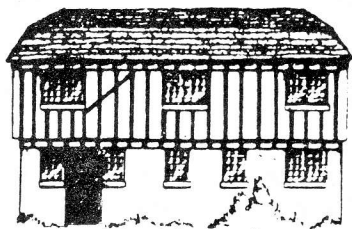
# READING AND DRINKING

Due to an England v Wales rugby match and FA Cup football matches, only a small number from Herts/Essex Borders branches set out on a 125 train to Reading — a fine drinking town with plenty of real ale in a variety of pubs. Drinking started in the Tudor Arms, a basic yet comfortable pub where Wethereds Mild was consumed while we waited to see if anyone had missed the train! Soon it was off to the Wallingford Arms, a Morlands house tucked behind the Alder Valley bus garage, and a splendid pub with a variety of games and excellent mild and bitter on handpumps. From here it was back to the main road Chatham Street, for some Fullers at the Butler. This was an old wine bar run by the Reading bottlers Butlers, but now a comfortable, if expensive by Reading standards, Fullers tied house. From Butlers into Castle Street, just off the Butts shopping centre for some Reading Courage at the Sun — an 'olde worlde' pub. The brew is definitely the best of the southern Courage bitters, but will no doubt soon disappear when Worton Grange eventually begins to churn out its trash. Almost next door to the Sun is the Sweeny & Todd serving Wadworths fine ales and real meat pies made on the premises. We popped across the road for some more Morlands in the Cross Keys, a pub with an Irish flavour, in the shadow of the fated Courage Reading brewery.

## East Side Story

We decided to give the rest of the town centre a miss and make our way to the east side for some more Morlands and our first Brakspears. On the way, closure of a public convenience forced an unscheduled stop in the Borough Arms, a recent Wethereds conversion with both mild and bitter available. Then onto a new housing estate just off Regent Street where we got lost, ending up at the Plasterers Arms, an old pub extended in the style of the estate — a thriving locals pub serving Morlands. Finally up the road, in sight (well almost) of the Plasterers is the Dove, an old back street boozier, frequented by the younger element. Once again, excellent ale — Brakspears special, ordinary and mild. Finally a stagger back to the station. The best beer....mild—Morlands; bitter—Brakspears Ordinary. The only complaint... the 125 home is too fast to sleep it all off before Paddington — do visit Reading!

by John Hurrell



The dolls house

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WE ARE ABLE TO SELL QUALITY FREE HOUSES, HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS. IF YOU HAVE ONE FOR SALE PLEASE TELEPHONE CHELMSFORD 81181

### HOOK NORTON IN SOUTHWOLD

That's the name of my beach hut, 2 minutes from the Sole Bay. The ideal compliment to a pub holiday, being fully equipped with cooking facilities for 6.

Bookings through Adnams (estate agents, not brewers!). Tel. Southwold 3292. Available weekly from April 21st to October 31st from £8 to £14. Mike Turner. Camra Brewery Liaison Officer, Ridleys.

## PUB NEWS

**Bushey Heath** — The Devonshire Arms now has Ind Coope Burton, but even more exciting news is that the Royal Oak is soon to be open as a free house — details of the real ales next month.

**Hertford** — The Dimsdale Arms in Fore Street has at last got its handpump for Mac's Country. What about real mild now?

**Mill Green, near Welwyn Garden** — The Green man is a new real ale outlet — Ind Coope Burton available.

**St Albans** — The salubrious surroundings of the Pre Hotel, hidden in the woods just off the A5 on the northern edge of the city, can now be enjoyed while drinking Gibbs Mew Bishops Tipple from the barrel.

**Watford** — The Essex Arms in Langley Road has Ind Coope Bitter but no Burton Ale. Worse news is that the Red Lion in Vicarage Road now has no real ale at all.

● Have you come across any Benskins yet? The nearest that we've come is spotting a new Benskins sign outside the Lord Nelson in Wheathampstead — but they haven't got any beer yet.

Apologies to the **Three Blackbirds in Flamstead** which temporarily changed its name to the Three Horseshoes last month.

## SUCCESSFUL EVENING

One of the most interesting and enjoyable local CAMRA socials took place recently at Rothamstead Experimental Station in Harpenden. The event was a 'real draughts' challenge between the Station and South Herts CAMRA, with the home side clearing the board in almost every game! They obviously enjoy the real ale up there as every pint 'taken' had to be consumed. Teams playing with 'black draughts' — Greene King XX dark mild — obviously didn't do too well as the beer ran out well before time! Adnams 4X proved a good replacement.



Rothamstead's Bob Snellgrove tempts the fate of his XX with this move.

## WHAT'S ON

### HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

#### Tuesday 1st April

Snowball fight v Enfield & Barnet Branch outside Builders Arms, New Barnet. 8.00pm. Social after at the Railway Bell.

#### Wednesday 16th April

Social and games evening at the Abbot John, Wheathampstead. 8.00pm. (Ind Coope)

#### Tuesday 22nd April

BRANCH MEETING at the Garibaldi, Albert St., St Albans. 8.00pm. (Ind Coope)

#### Tuesday 29th April Provisional date

Social and dominoes at the White Horse, Potters Bar. 8.00pm (Ind Coope)

#### Monday 5th May

May Day Madness at the White Horse, Burnham Green, opening time onwards.

### HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

#### Wednesday 9th April

BRANCH MEETING At the Old Bull, Royston. 8.00pm (Free House)

#### Wednesday 16th April

Campaigning social at the Gloucester Arms, Great Offley. 8.00pm (Greene King)

#### Wednesday 23rd April

Social at the Fox & Hounds, Barley. 8.00pm (Free House)

#### Thursday 8th May

Joint social with South Herts at the Rest & Welcome, Haultwick. 8.00pm (McMullen)

#### Wednesday 14th May

BRANCH MEETING at the Bird in Hand, Gosmore. 8.00pm (Greene King)

● On Saturday 26th April the branch will be holding a fund raising Jumble Sale at the Holy Trinity Church Hall, Stevenage Old Town. All contributions will be welcome. For further information contact Kathy Roberts on Stevenage 60675.

### HERTS/ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH

#### Wednesday 2nd April

Pub crawl of South London (not all of it!). Meet at the Globe, Bedale Street, Borough market (nearest station is London Bridge) Move on from Globe around 6.15pm.

#### Monday 14th April

Social at the Nags Head, Little Hadham. 8.00pm (Rayments)

#### Tuesday 22nd April

BRANCH MEETING At the Three Tuns, Bishops Stortford. 8.00pm (Rayments)

#### Monday 5th May

Joint social with South West Essex at the Rose & Crown, Woddford Green. 8.00pm (Wethereds inc mild)

#### Wednesday 21st May

Visit to Bass Brewery Museum. Still a few places left. Names plus £5 deposit to Branch Contact.

### HERTFORDSHIRE IS HOP COUNTRY

Home brewers can help save our traditional hop varieties, and save themselves money. Hops are easy to grow, perennial once established, they come up every year. Now is the time to start your own hop patch and add a bit of the real thing to your own beers.

Send for genuine English hop seed and full instructions to: R. Prince, Bow Cottage, Gosmore, Hitchin, Herts. Seventy pence per packet, cash with order.

## CONTACTS

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