

FREE



The Campaign for Real Ale

HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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LAGER'S A RIP-OFF – OFFICIAL

A recent survey by the Consumers' Association magazine WHICH? has some harsh things to say about the quality and freshness of most canned and bottled lager sold in supermarkets and off-licences. Out of 42 different brands sampled only four were considered fresh enough to drink by the magazine's panel of experts. Many of the others were described as "bready" or "cardboardy".

Panned Lager

Many of the bottles and cans were five months old, some nine months. Canned beer is supposed to have a shelf life of between three and six months. WHICH? recommended the introduction of date stamping to help the consumer. Of the samples, including the fresh ones, the WHICH? panel had little good to say. Harp was described as "metallic"; Carlsberg as "slightly sulphury"; Heineken as "Rather flavourless with harsh aftertaste". These descriptions come as no surprise considering the fact that these beers are only pale, insipid copies of real lagered beer and bear little resemblance to the, often great, beers produced in some continental breweries, although their Germanic sounding names try to suggest otherwise. A spokesman for the Consumers' Association commented: "It seems to me that most drinkers of the stuff can't be that discerning or they'd be sending it back by the lorry-load".

Slim Chance

WHICH? also criticised the implication by some brewers that Lite lagers and Diät Pils can help you slim. CAMRA bought this to light last year in its newspaper, What's Brewing. The simple truth is that if you want to lose weight then you must drink less. Many lite and Diät beers are, in fact, more fattening than some ordinary bitters and mild ales.

Give Me Strength

Tables in the magazine also showed up the country's weakest lager: Scottish and Newcastle's Kestrel lager, recently introduced in a flutter of ornithological publicity, clocks up a staggering original gravity of 1031. McMullens AK mild has a gravity of 1033. While there is no suggestion that beers have to be strong to be good, the difference in price between expensive, weak lagers and cheaper milds and bitters yet again shows how many brewers are taking the lager drinking public for a ride. A recent quote from the Daily Express may provide the answer to how they get away with it: "Britain's Lager lovers wouldn't recognise a decent pint if it got up and sang the National Anthem".

In the past CAMRA has pointed out what an overpriced, second rate drink lager is. Now it's official.

You Can Take It With You

As CAMRA has been saying for some time, the best way to get your take home beer is to have a container filled up at your local pub. Not only can you be assured of the quality of the beer (you can try it before you buy it) but it also works out cheaper (the cost of the can amounts to between 5 and 11 pence of the cost of canned beer) and reduces the number of energy- and material-wasting cans being produced. Finally, real beer from the handpump tastes better than filtered, pasteurised beer in a bottle or can. Brewers King and Barnes and, soon, Greene King operate systems where take-away containers can be bought, for a small sum, over the bar precisely for take-home beer. Let's hope that more brewers latch onto the idea.

NO HEART IN HERTFORD

Our friendly local brewer has again been on the move putting handpumps in some local managed houses. The latest are the Green Man in Ickleford and the Cowper Arms in Digswell, by Welwyn North railway station. In both pubs a single handpump has been installed in the saloon bar. One must assume that they are serving Country Bitter since there is no pump clip (not when visited anyway), and there is nothing to advertise the fact elsewhere in the pub. Visitors to the public bar could quite easily be excused for not realising that handpumped CB was on sale at all.

Unnatural Gas

The same story is repeated in several other McMullens managed houses where handpumps have been installed in the past few years. The company have been approaching the matter with the same total lack of enthusiasm that they bring to everything they do. If they are really interested in offering choice, or in gauging demand for traditionally served beer then why do the staff in these pubs almost always jump for the fizz tap as soon as you order a pint instead of offering you real or fizzy? Why are the handpumps placed in such places as the ends of bars or in corners, out of the way? Why do they never advertise the fact that it is available, especially in other bars where the pump can't be seen? Often the result of all this is that sales of the handpumped beer are so low that it is not as good as it should be. No doubt this will enable the brewery to conclude that top pressure is indeed the best way to keep and serve beer. However, if they think that they are operating a meaningful comparative test, or offering a real choice, then they are very much mistaken.

Mac-Who?

It is this attitude which the company appears to have which contributes to the fact that they are probably the most anonymous traditional ale brewer in the south-east, if not in the country. While the Adnams, Wadworths, Youngs and Boddingtons of this world all achieve national appeal, the mention of McMullens outside Hertfordshire (and sometimes even in it) brings nothing but blank looks. All the other brewers, however, stress their traditional attitudes and actively promote unpresurised beer. McMullens, a similar sized concern, still clings to the outdated belief that fizz is best, putting in a handpump here and there, and to an image which is more on the lines of a miniature Grand Met rather than a Brakspears or Riddleys. Grand Met, these days though, probably have a more traditional image than Macs (partly because they can afford the media time to produce it), and Brakspears and Riddleys still have the policies and unspoilt pubs to be seen to be so. Macs have neither. They are the only independent brewery in the county (for the time being at least) and if they set their minds to it could be considered to be the Adnams of Hertfordshire. All they need to do is to put their hearts into it instead of carrying on in the rather apathetic manner that they have in the past. It would certainly mean installing two pumps – one for Country and one for AK, in all their managed houses, and encouraging their tenants to do likewise. It would also mean a lot of other changes for them, not least in the way that they renovate their old pubs. The alternative will be to remain the poor relation of the independent brewing fraternity. You'll still hear people at CAMRA beer festivals going up to the bar and saying; Macs, what's that? Give me a pint of 6X. The answer lies with the brewery. The question is whether their hearts are in it.

Dave Burns

NORTH HERTS VISIT MACS

by Steve Barber

On Monday 15 September, a party of twelve from North Herts visited McMullen's Brewery in Hertford. The hospitality given by Macs must be amongst the best of any brewery and is certainly the best that I have enjoyed. Macs are proud to show off their 400 year old cottage, which was renovated from a dilapidated state and is now used for receiving guests and housing the brewery museum and a few offices. It really is a gem, and it is a pity that some of Macs' new pubs could not have been designed with the same sensitivity. Ex-Macs landlord "Tiggy" Firmin comes in part-time to guide tours around the brewery, and described Macs' development since 1827, while his wife brought in coffee and biscuits. These days Macs really seem to be making an effort to improve public relations.



Well Run Brewery

The tour through the traditional tower brewery assured everyone of Macs' commitment to continue brewing real beer, as all the equipment – some of it old – appeared well maintained and functional. The Brewery have even fitted new plastic roofs over each of the copper-lined wooden fermenters. The two new conical fermenters are only used for lager (proper bottom-fermented stuff, they say). Macs have spent £1m on their new kegging plant, used for the new keg bitter "No 1" and lager, but as Tiggy pointed out, it is dependent on the traditional part of the brewery for supply; so if the ancient belt-driven grist mill packs up, so does the kegging plant. Down in the cellars we spotted a tapped firkin of Steingold, and this was reluctantly confirmed. Could this be real lager from Macs? Most people will have noticed the advertising for Country Bitter, No 1 and Steingold, and Tiggy claimed that "people go for Country", but he is kidding himself because the barrillage of AK mild is still twice that of CB, even though it is not promoted.

Tasting Session

After visiting the new bottling plant (£1¼m worth) and the wine and spirit store, we returned to the cottage where we were joined by Production Director Tony Skipper, Brewer "Robby" Robinson and Roy Shadbolt of the free trade side of the business for an excellent buffet lunch, and, of course, a tasting session. As expected, there was an argument on the fizzing-up of Macs' excellent beers by the top pressure used in most of their pubs. Tiggy claimed that pressure was essential to keep the beer for longer than three days in a pub, and they could not understand why the CO₂ spoiled the taste of the beer, although I noticed that Tony Skipper only drank beer from the handpump.



Landlords Please Note

It was conceded that Macs landlords had the brewery's blessing to install handpumps (albeit at their own expense). Clubs could take unpressurised cask beer also, but keg No 1 was aimed at them. So watch out, because I found it tasteless and fizzy after a pint of Country. Several of our party tried a sip of the Steingold, which Macs claim is better than most and have even won a prize for it. It did have some flavour, for a lager, but was cold and fizzy and not a patch on Country. It is a shame that AK was only served on pressure at the brewery.

CAMRA Challenged

Then came the acid test. CAMRA was challenged, or specifically, the author was challenged, to tell the difference between CB dispensed by pressure and by handpump, secretly drawn, in front of witnesses. Needless to say, the pressure beer was immediately recognised by its fizziness; which spoiled the taste in the judge's opinion.

Ban the Can

To help ban the can (and the rubbish beer usually found in them), it was suggested that Macs start up a take-away refillable bottle scheme like King & Barnes, CAMRA Investments, and in the near future, Greene King. Macs are re-structuring their free trade policies at the moment, so there may be a chance of getting some real Macs into N Herts free houses (nil out of 31 so far).

Much to Lose, Much to Gain

Macs seem proud of their brewery, brewing tradition, pubs and products, and rightly so. They have so much to lose if they spoil what has been built up over 150 years, and they realise it. Macs have so much to gain if they stop fizzing up their beer and think carefully about pub changes, and this they don't seem to realise. Herts North Branch would like to thank McMullens for showing us around and listening to what we had to say.

DEUTSCHLAND ÜBER ALES 2 – BERLINER WEISSE



The most famous of the two German wheat beer types is the Berliner Weisse or white beer. The beer isn't white at all but a pale golden colour. To confuse matters further it is often drunk with a dash of fruit syrup, called a *schuss*, making it green or red. The green is *Waldmeister* (essence of Woodruff), the red raspberry juice. Whatever your choice, *mit schuss* or otherwise, the result is deliciously refreshing, a feature of all the wheat beers.

Berliner Weisse, as its name implies, is as much a feature of the Berlin drinking scene as Guinness is in Kilburn. It is light, not very alcoholic, and with a slightly sour edge, which makes it an ideal thirst quencher. It's drunk from traditional bowl shaped glasses, often through a straw, unlike the Southern German wheat beer which is served in tall, thin glasses. The right glass for the right beer, however, is all part of the ritual of beer drinking in Germany which gives a sense of occasion to a visit to even the most ordinary of bars. Quite often, even the correct beer mat is brought along with your beer!

Berliner Weisse is a top fermented beer with a quarter of the mash being wheat, three quarters barley malt. Two major breweries produce the beer, *Schultheiss* and *Kindl*, the latter being the best known. Although available widely throughout Germany it is best appreciated in a street cafe in Berlin on a warm summer's day while watching the world go by.

Dave Burns

Next Month – Düsseldorf *Alt*



GREENE KING BACK KEG

To a gathering of astonished shareholders, Greene King Chairman Major John Bridge announced at the company's AGM in August, that the company would soon be producing a new keg beer. Neither Major Bridge nor any of his fellow-directors would tell us exactly what sort of beer this would be, so we are forced to guess. I would tip either a "lite" lager (Lite Green? Weak King?) or a replacement for the awful King Keg, a beer about which I have never heard a good word spoken. It looks as if Greene King are returning to that part of the 1960s inhabited by McMullens, whose No 1 Keg has recently hit the market to waves of apathy. Perhaps CAMRA is wrong to refer to real ale as "traditional" beer; after all, one man's tradition is another's horrific memory.

Gas Bored

At Greene King's AGM, for the 5th successive year, CAMRA members questioned the board about their policy of serving top-pressure beer (with added CO₂ gas) rather than the real thing, in almost ¾ of their pubs. As usual, we received answers along the lines of "this is a matter of company policy, of little interest to our shareholders and of little importance". I wonder, if it's so uninteresting, why do CAMRA members bother to buy shares in Greene King, to enable them to attend the AGM year after year, taking time off work to put these questions? This is not a matter of nit-picking, it's a question of taste and customer preference. There are few people who actively prefer gassy beer; there are a hell of a lot who prefer real ale – particularly Greene King's when available, which is widely regarded as one of the best in the country. I wonder how many people would come to CAMRA's beer festivals, if all the beer was gassy? Finally, it looks as if Greene King's much looked-forward-to Christmas Ale might not, after all, be available this year, owing to "production difficulties". We shall have to wait and see.

Peter Lerner

COMPOST CORNER

by S. Stirrer

Bad Pub Guide

Regular readers of this publication may remember the quote I took from Derek Cooper's excellent column in the Observer where he appealed for entries for a Bad Pub Guide. The best he received were printed last month, with a prize for the winner. One pub with an obsessively clean landlord was described as resembling a "hospital waiting room, its customers anaesthetised with fear". In what is described as the worst pub in London an old Edwardian pub has been converted into a reconstruction of the Captain's cabin aboard HMS Victory: "Windows were boarded up and blacked out, electric storm lanterns hung, brass nautical gear displayed and the whole was finished off with a caged parrot which told customers to F--- Off. A Victory for bad taste."

The winning entry, however, had it all. How many times have you been into this pub, or one very much like it?

"Well signalled to the approaching visitor by its piped car-park music by day and fairy lights at night, The Bull, though 17th century, is carefully disguised internally by a motif of flying ducks surrounded by lacquered horse-brasses. An oak beam across the bar is covered with Fablon designed as an oak beam, carrying the legend 'Duck or Grouse'. Conveniences labelled Steers and Heifers. Poetry readings Mondays, Hammond organ all other nights."

More Bar Billiards

One addition to my list of pubs with bar billiards is the Great Northern in St Albans. A recent match between Herts South and Mid-Chilterns branches was won 3-2 by Herts South, and a very enjoyable event it was too. I am still waiting to hear from anyone who is interested in joining a Bar Billiards league, and of any more pubs which have tables but have not appeared in our lists.

Cuttings

Finally, a cutting from the New Scientist, 10th July:

Tucker bag scare

Dr Brian Tucker, who heads the Division of Atmospheric Physics at the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, has found evidence of climatic change over the fair southern isle. He lays the blame squarely at the door of carbon dioxide, levels of which have increased by 10 per cent over the past 30 years. But where did the wicked CO₂ come from? Tucker says from fossil fuels, but we say from the excess fizz Aussies put in their canned beer. □

THE BARLEY MOW

VARIETY IS
THE SPICE
OF LIFE



TRY OUR
14 REAL
ALES

TYTTENHANGER GREEN

In addition to our normal range there will always be a cask on the bar from our range of guest beers which could be one of the following: Eldridge Pope, Bourne Valley, Donnington, Arkell, Archers, St Austell or Brakspear's 6X.

Try our 'Cook it yourself' Barbecue, open Saturday lunchtimes throughout the year and Friday and Saturday evenings, weather permitting. You can choose from the following: Steak (70p), Hamburger (15p), Sausages (12p), Rolls (12p). (Butter - 4p, Sauces - 6p, Mustard - 2p).

Our aim is to sell the best beer in the county - if ever you are dissatisfied with it we will change it without question.

THE CORNELL COLUMN

by Martyn Cornell

The Long and the Short of It

How do you pronounce the Ind in Ind Coope - short, as in independant, or long, as in mind your own business?

The brewery will tell you that the correct pronunciation is with a short Ind, as in ink. However, most drinkers say "Eynd Coope", with a long I - and it seems that historically that may be the proper way to say it after all.

The Inds - pronounced as in inn - came originally from Baldock, where James Ind ran a brewery in the 1790s. A century and a half before, however, there was a man living in Baldock called James Hynde, as in female deer, which is pronounced with a long I. There were Hinds living in Ashwell, too, and assistant archivist at County Hall, Hertford, Tony Palmer told me recently: "In at least one case in Ashwell, the same man is referred to both as Hind and Ind."

So it seems that perhaps it ought really to be Hind Coope, pronounced Heyend, and the brewery has got it wrong. But there is another twist. A certain well-known brewery actually has a hind as its trademark - the second-biggest brewery company after Ind Coope locally, Whitbread.

Scrumptious

Tremlett's bitter, Kingston Black, Bloody Butcher, Sweet Coppin, Slackma-girdle, Knotted Kernel, Fox-whelp, Yarlinton Mill, Dabinett, Harry Master's Jersey, and Chisel Jersey. What are they? The names of the apple varieties that go into traditional West Country cider - and they sound as good as they are to drink.

Plastic Macs

Quote: "Something called atmosphere is so important to a good pub. Traditional natural building materials - brick and wood - warm interiors and friendly-looking bars are all aimed at continuing the great tradition of the English pub. People **feel** it's right."

Who said that? Why, McMullens, the people busily pushing their "traditional" image, in a colourful and glossy new booklet now being handed to all visitors to the Hertford brewery.

But who is it, pray, installing garish light-up plastic bar displays for draught AK and Country, more often than not in bars that would be a model of that quiet and tasteful traditionalism that is, indeed, the essence of the English pub at its best. One prime example is the saloon bar of the Rose and Crown at Aston - a top-pressure pub, alas, but with masses of atmosphere. All except for the bar top, where two new plastic light-up displays now stick out like the biggest sore thumbs you ever saw.

All this is taking place at a time when people like Watneys are moving right away from the plastic excrescences that once disfigured so many bar tops. Pack it in, Macs - people **feel** it's wrong.

No Burton Unions?

Keep politics out of beer drinking, they say, but I wonder what your reaction is to this quote from a director of Adnams' brewery at Southwold to the Spectator magazine:

"We don't allow our staff to join a union. We don't allow union representatives to address the staff on our premises, or in one of our pubs."

Wonder if Len Murray ever drinks the stuff?

Booze at Ten

Every newspaper recently seems to have been full of the exploits of A Certain Former ITN News Reader, following the publication of his autobiography.

So not to be outdone, the Cornell Column brings you this little titbit. Reginald Bosanquet's second wife, Felicity Fearnley-Whittingstall, was descended from a family that ran Watford's second-biggest brewery, taken over by Benskin's in 1923.

Thought you might just like to know.

HERE'S A HEALTH TO REAL MACS LANDLORDS

McMullens is our only independent brewery in the county (Rayments being part of the Greene King empire), and should enjoy a reverent local following. Over the years, real ale drinkers have been exasperated by the use of top pressure and blanket pressure dispense in the pubs, which invariably turns good beers fizzy. Pub closures, restrictive covenants and abominable new pub buildings have dismayed many pub users. This exasperation is turning to annoyance, and will lead to Macs getting some stick. When one pub or brewery gets slated, many landlords think that the criticism applies to them. So let us make it quite clear: the local branches of CAMRA are 100% in support of Macs licensees who sell a good pint of unpressurised AK and Country, and fortunately for us, there are plenty of you. We recognise that Macs have pubs that are as attractive as anybody else's, and that individual pubs have good local followings. As we all know, it is the landlord who makes a pub.

Steve Barber

AROUND THE PUBS

The Rose and Crown, Baldock is now selling Greene King XX dark mild on handpumps. In Norton, near Letchworth, the **Three Horseshoes** has Charrington's Crown, IPA and draught Bass on pump. The **Green Man** in Ickleford and the **Cowper Arms** in Digswell have both had a single handpump installed for Country bitter. The company seem to insist on keeping their appalling record for selling unfizzed AK in their managed houses intact, despite the fact that it is by far their most popular beer. See the article entitled No Heart in Hertford on page 1.

One of the hardest jobs in the world is to take over in a pub after a popular and much-loved landlord and landlady have left. So CAMRA wishes all the very best to John and Joyce Ward, who are now behind the bar of the **Plough** at Ley Green following the departure of Jack Day and his wife Barbara.

Jack and Barbara have now retired to nearby Breachwood Green after twelve years at the Plough. Their pub was a constant fixture in the Good Beer Guide for the quality of its Greene King beers, and this year it was voted North Herts CAMRA branch's pub of the year. To show their appreciation, members of the branch presented the couple before they left with a copy of Michael Jackson's book on the English pub, and a pot plant. Fortunately John and Joyce are well-known to the pub's regulars, and everyone is confident that the pub will continue to be highly popular.

SIMPSON'S LIVES!

North Herts CAMRA branch are holding a piss-up in a brewery – or an ex-brewery, at any rate. The first ever Baldock real-ale beer festival is taking place on Saturday October 25 in the Baldock Community Centre, Simpson Drive, Baldock, on the site of the old Simpson's brewery. More than a dozen real ales have been ordered, including Palmer's from Dorset, Jennings from Cumbria, Elgoods, Ruddies, Wethereds and Adnams. Tickets cost £1.25, which includes food and entertainment, and numbers are limited to 220 – **not** 22, as claimed in last month's newsletter. Anyone who urgently requires tickets should contact Martin Connelly on Stevenage 61332.

LETTERS

from Brian Long, 6 Trident House, Hatfield.

As a person afflicted with that all too common disease Barley Mow Habitus, I have to repair to the aforementioned public house at Tyttenhanger Green for regular treatment. Last year however the therapy was developed slightly in that whilst taking the prescribed medicine, known amongst sufferers as E.S.B., we were advised to practise the old fashioned remedy of playing conkers. This proved to have some effect as consumption of the medicine shot up, no doubt due to remaining in an upright position and being outside, where the E.S.B. showed all its warming characteristics. In addition the Barley Mow Conker Team thrashed all opposition into the ground. Such was the success of last year's season that the Barley Mow team adopted the motto "E.S.B. it's the one for me".

This year we would like to challenge similar treatment centres to practise this ancient art and therefore through your organ I would like to ask fellow patients, if interested, to contact me on Hatfield 67563. A team should consist of 6 people and come equipped with their own conkers. Being such a short season it's advisable if matches are arranged as quickly as possible.

As a warm up to next year's season we are considering extending the treatment to Dwyde Flonking and are therefore looking for opposition. Details from the same number.

BRANCH CONTACTS

- Hertfordshire North Branch**
Steve Done ☎ Stevenage 721960
- Hertfordshire South Branch**
Eric Sim ☎ Hatfield 60647
- Herts-Essex Borders Branch**
Terry Smith ☎ Epping 73677

WHAT'S ON

- HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH**
Tuesday October 7th
Darts match at the Bell and Crown, Hertford. 8.00pm prompt start. (McMullens)
- Wednesday October 15th**
Conkers Match and social with Mid Chilterns Branch versus the pub team. 8.00pm sharp (Wethereds)
- Tuesday October 21st**
BRANCH MEETING at the Cricketers, Redbourn. 8.00pm (Benskins)
- HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH**
Saturday October 4th
Pub crawl with Hertfordshire South Branch from Knebworth to Welwyn North Stations. Meet Knebworth Station 11.10am or at Red Lion, Woolmer Green (Benskins) at 11.30am.
- Tuesday October 7th**
BRANCH MEETING at the Chequers, Woolmer Green. Guest speaker Mr Harry Shindler, National Secretary of NALHM. 8.00pm prompt. (Benskins).
- Wednesday October 15th**
Campaigning social at the Green Man, Great Wymondley, 8.00pm (Greene King).
- Wednesday October 22nd**
Social at the New Found Out, Hitchin. 8.00pm (Tolly Cobbold).
- Wednesday October 29th**
Social at the Fox, Aspenden. 8.00pm (Greene King).
- Wednesday November 12th**
BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING at the Sun, Hitchin followed by Slide-Show and Grand Breweriana Auction. 8.00pm (Charrington).
- HERTS-ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH**
Wednesday October 15th
BRANCH MEETING at the Axe and Compasses, Aythorpe Roding 8.00pm
- Monday October 20th**
McMullens brewery trip. Meet at Brewery at 11.00am.
- Tuesday October 21st**
Darts match and social at the Hand and Crown, Sawbridgeworth. 8.00pm (Ind Coope, Benskins).
- THURSDAY 2nd – SATURDAY 4th October**
The Third Bedfordshire Beer Festival at the Bedford Corn Exchange. Open 11 - 2.30 and 5 - 10.30 (11 Sat), entrance free. 40 real ales, cider and food.

THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

By Nigel Meadows

Hidden in these letters are the names of 39 breweries. The names may be read up or down or diagonally, backwards or forwards. Each letter may be used once, more than once or not at all. Solution in November issue. There will be a small prize for the first correct answer pulled from the hat received before 20th October. Entries to the editor at 11 Turpins Chase, Oaklands, Welwyn.

Y S N I K S O H H S S H S E E L
 F E L I N F O E L O O H S L W Y
 M L L L H M N L L L L M D G S O
 A D T T E A E O D B I D S O G U
 N R A O I W R E T L U H V O N N
 N I R R L H N V E R I R O D I G
 S D P P L L W S E P O O T I N A
 M G R R L E Y L S Y S N E I N L
 A E P E A A Y T L E N E K J E E
 N P K A A H O L T A N E D O J M
 D O N N I N G U T O N N E Y Y O A
 A P I V E N U S H E R E I Y H H
 Y E A Z G R E Y E S N R E U G T
 W U R X B E A R D W A R D R G A
 X Y B L E S G N A N E T A B G B

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