

FREE



The Campaign For Real Ale HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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The Two Faces Of Courage

The recent spate of pub swaps in the south of the county, from Ind Coope to Courage, has resulted in an increase in real ale outlets! To their credit, Courage have not only supplied Best Bitter and/or Director's Bitter to pubs where Ind Coope were previously selling handpumped beer - to preserve the status quo - but have also fitted new handpumps in many other pubs for Director's - perhaps if this sells well landlords will be tempted to fit a further pump for the Best Bitter - a pattern set by Ind Coope landlords who followed up the introduction of Burton Ale with hand-pumped Bitter. Sadly though, we have yet to find one of these pubs serving Courage's superb dark mild - pubs are being offered keg mild instead. Still, already Courage have done more than many people would have expected and have stuck to their pledge (in Hertfordshire at least) of providing choice in the pub swap houses. However, before we get carried away with the euphoria of all this extra real ale, we must remember the broader aspects currently surrounding Courage and must view this small Hertfordshire advance in context with the overall Courage picture.

Worton Grange

Regular readers will know of Courage's massive new megakegery being built at Worton Grange, just off the M4 motorway in Berkshire and of the implications involved ie. the closure of the Reading brewery and, one conjectures, the shaky future of the company's Plymouth, Bristol and London breweries, because Worton Grange could eventually have the capacity to brew enough beer to make all three redundant. The problem is, Worton Grange will not be producing any real ale.

Premium Bitter

Not surprisingly, Courage want to promote their premium real ale bitter - Director's and it has been rumoured that Courage would like to 'show willing' to real ale drinkers by continuing to brew Director's but at the same time phasing out the Bitters and Milds. So the local brews from the regional breweries would disappear and Director's would be transported all over the country - even to John Smith's (the other half of the Imperial Tobacco brewing division) who do not produce any real ale at all.

Cynical

The fact is, unfortunately, that Courage have a rather appalling record of denying rumours which then materialise some months later - it's no wonder that drinkers are cynical of this brewing giant. Perhaps a little more openness might help project a better image of the company. Meantime, we must congratulate Courage on their good sense in supplying their real ale to Hertfordshire, while remaining just a little sceptical that this may just be a temporary halt until Courage again set their wheels grinding on the mediocre road to keg. Let's hope not!

Electric Abbot?

After last month's very informative article by Dennis Robertson on the actions and policy of Greene King, I felt that one extra point could be made. On our visit to the Biggleswade Brewery we were told that the reason most of the GK pubs served pressurised beer, was that your average publican could not be trusted to clean out his handpumps properly or at the regular intervals necessary to clear the yeast traps which occur in this system of dispense. This, of course, isn't very convincing but the fact of the matter is that we are all too pre-occupied with the handpump and have not given enough consideration to electric dispense.

Piping

What about the first few pints of the lunch-time or evening session which have been lying in the pipes, especially in pubs with long runs between the cellar and point of dispense. Bad publicans serve this beer and if you ever taste it you'll know what I mean. The difference between the electric and handpump systems is the piping - electric is small bore $\frac{1}{4}$ " , hand-pump $\frac{3}{8}$ ". The electric pump can draw beer over a much longer distance than any handpump and will therefore destroy the last of the 'cellar is too far away' arguments. Lastly those yeast traps in beer engines: an electric pump is self cleaning to the point where much less maintenance is necessary.

Excuse

I think Greene King, who use the handpump as an excuse not to serve real beer, are putting up a false argument. So come on Greene King, we want real ale, not necessarily handpumps - try some in the Fox, Aspenden or the Red Lion, Radlett and note the high quality. Let's have no more of these groundless excuses.

BY STEVE BURY

Real Ale In Hatfield By Dave Burns

As a member of CAMRA I am used to surprises, some of them pleasant, but it was still a little unexpected to find out that due to recent changes 8 of the 13 pubs in Hatfield are now selling real ale. Any town which can boast an increase of 8 in less than two years is certainly worthy of further investigation and so your friendly neighbourhood newsletter editor and myself decided to do just that. On one Saturday lunchtime we visited all 13 (yes fizz as well). Since they are rather spread out we decided not to suggest them as a pub crawl as such but leave it to the Dear Reader to make up his (or her) own mind as to the best way to get around them. I have included the gassy pubs since these are the real ale pubs of the future and it is time the Campaign paid more attention to them instead of reflecting on its successes in real ale havens all the time.

Red Lion Start

Starting in the old town, the recently revamped Red Lion offers Mac's Country bitter on handpump. This is a new real ale outlet but, sadly, as is the case with nearly all this brewery's changeovers, AK mild is fizz only. The decor is typical of Mac's; difficult to fault in detail, but lacking in that indefinable something - atmosphere. Next is the Wrestlers, an Ind Coope pub selling bitter and mild on the pump. This place isn't exactly easy to find even though it is situated on the old Great North Road, now a cul-de-sac. If you're a horse brass freak then this is the place for you. The ale was good, but at 32 pence for mild it should be. Not far away is the Hopfields, another pub selling Mac's Country on handpump. Again the mild is gas impregnated but prices in the public are very reasonable - 27 pence for bitter. This bar is somewhat basic but certainly has more character than the saloon.

Old Town

Back in the centre of the old town is the Eight Bells, certainly the most attractive pub in Hatfield and easily the best known. It is old and is mentioned by Dickens in Oliver Twist. On entering you are greeted by the sight of 3 beautifully kept handpump handles on the bar. Unfortunately the illusion is soon shattered as the rear of the bar sports an indigestion - inducing line of fizz taps and it's time to order a bottle of Guinness. Just down the road in Park Street is the Horse and Groom, a small and attractive pub which has just changed over to Courage from Ind Coope. There is no real ale to be had at the moment but the installation of Director's bitter is in the pipeline - so to speak. Behind the Horse and Groom is the Hatfield Arms near the Railway Station. Whatever this place has going for it, it certainly isn't the ale, which is all keg.

Mac's Monopoly

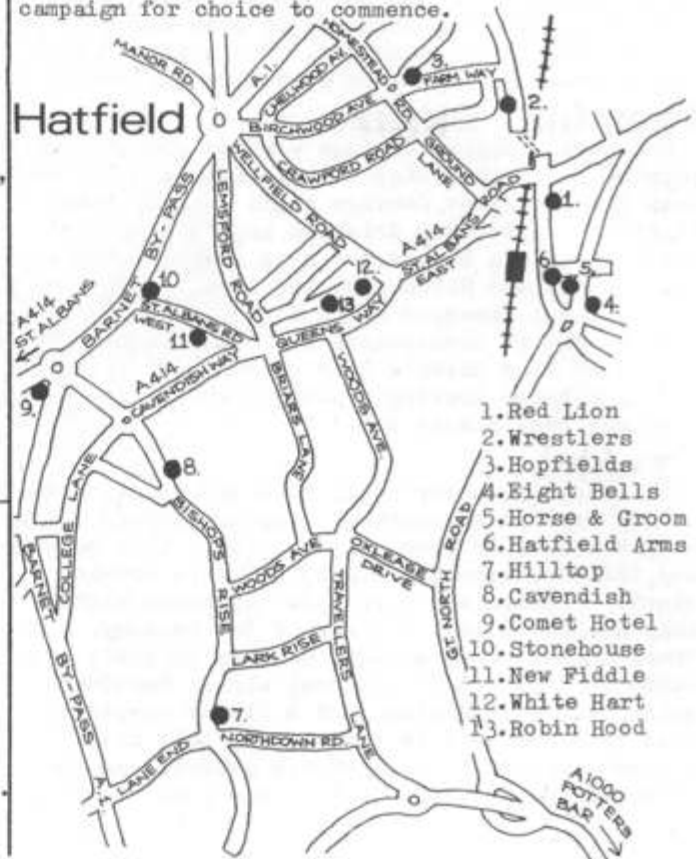
Further across town is the Hilltop in Bishop's Rise, another Mac's house. The barmaid was from New Zealand which confirms my belief that this brewery have cornered the market in Australasian bar staff. Again the Country is ungasped and the AK isn't, which is sad because, given the choice, I will always drink the mild. Why won't they give us the choice? This pub isn't exactly to my taste but it was very full of people who do like it, or could it be that the only other pub in the area is just as...well...unexciting. That is the Cavendish in Bishop's Rise. Another pub which has swapped to Courage, it has been improved, in one respect at least, by the addition of a pump selling Director's. Bitter and mild are yet again subjected to the dreaded 'Carbon Dioxide Treatment' - are these

brewers trying to get me drunk or something? This is a modern pub, popular with the young. It gains one extra bonus point for having bar billiards and no pool table. Back down to the A1, on the Comet roundabout is the Comet Hotel, so named because of the nearby aircraft factory. This modern hotel is owned by Crest Hotels, a subsidiary of Ind Coope. Hence the handpump in the bar selling Burton Ale - and very good it is too. Due, no doubt in part at least, to the fact that the assistant manager, Mr Fernyhough, is a CAMRA member. Standing in the bar one almost feels that Noelle Gordon will walk in any minute. Just up the A1 from the Comet is a slightly less welcome sight, the Stonehouse. As its name suggests this pub is a large, stone building, the only Bass-Charrington in the area. Inside the piped music is loud and the food pre-packed. The ale is keg, but then so is the general atmosphere of the place. Around the corner, in St. Albans Road West is the New Fiddle - the only pub in the town to have been included in the Good Beer Guide. So far. This popular pub sells all 3 Ind Coope real ales on handpump at very reasonable prices (for Ind Coope anyway). The public may seem rather spartan to some people and the overall pub rather ordinary but it does a good trade and seems to serve the area well.

Town Centre

Into the middle of town and the White Hart, by the market place sells Ind Coope bitter and Burton Ale from handpumps. This pub is a typical modern new town pub and not to my taste, although the beer was good enough. Number 13 proved unlucky in so far as the Robin Hood, in the shopping precinct, is pure fizz. More bottles of Guinness. My advice is don't bother, although the pub does have two bar billiards tables.

13 pubs of varying types. Hatfield has certainly improved as far as real ale is concerned. Too many of those pubs, though, sell only the premium bitter and no ordinary or mild. Now that the tide of fizz is receding in the area it's time for the campaign for choice to commence.





VISIT TO RIDLEYS

In 1840, T.D. Ridley, the millers of Chelmsford, decided to branch out, and this move has resulted in one of the more oddly situated breweries in

Britain. Built on some spare land at the end of the drive of the family's house at Hartford End, the brewery stands alone in the fields of a beautiful part of rural Essex. The eccentricity of the site has meant that water has always had to be piped in, and the Lea Valley Water Company now supplies hard London tap water which is perfect for brewing. There are no maltings on the site and all the ingredients for the brew are bought from outside firms. This includes the yeast, as Ridley's unlike many other breweries, do not cultivate their own yeast strain.

Tower Brewery

The building is a typical Victorian tower brew-house which follows the regular pattern with two oddities - a special sparging fitment and a rather antique but very effective cooling apparatus. A brew takes between 5 and 6 days and 400 barrels per week are produced, to supply the 65 tied houses. This figure rises to 500 barrels during hot weather.

Beers

A wide variety of beer is brewed and bottled at Ridley's, including all for Cook's of Halstead, an export line for Holland and Mann's Brown Ale. Some beer is supplied under agreement to Truman houses but Ridley's are not interested in what is now a very cut throat Free Trade market in south east England. They are also brewing to capacity and do not wish to go through the upheavals of fitting the extra equipment that would be necessary. 64 out of 65 Ridley's tied houses serve real beer from the wood (one bad penny), some by gravity the rest by electric pump. A bitter and a mild are brewed, though the mild sales are on the decline - the only other beer with worse sales figures is their dreaded keg! The famous face on the bottle labels is Bishop Ridley who unfortunately got burned at the stake for heresy during the Reformation and it is his direct descendants who now own the brewery.

Fresh Attitude

The trip ended at the sample room which is annexed to the barrel racking area on the ground floor. On the way we met the brewery mouse which met with a bit of a crunch - Jim had stamped on it but it didn't look too badly hurt. Many thanks to Ridley's for a great visit and for their excellent ales, sampled at the Compasses, Little Green as well as at the brewery. Ridley's attitude to the brewing and the tied trade is very refreshing and although not as well known as some of the other small brewers, this attitude can be an example to the rest of the trade.

BY STEVE BURY.

ALL CHANGE

Welcome to Eileen and Alan Dent, who took over the George in Hitchin, in May. As well as serving good ale, Alan is an experienced football referee, so mind you don't get sent off for bad behaviour! Hello and goodbye to Roy and Anna White, moving from the Cricketers, Hitchin to the Cricketers, Redbourn. We know they will take their excellent pint of Ind Coope with them, but regulars in Hitchin have great hopes of new landlord Geoff Noland and his wife.

BY PETER ARGYLE.

HITCHIN OF THE PAST

"Hitchin Inns and Incidents", by Pat Gadd and Ron Pigram, lists 124 licensed hotels, pubs and ale-houses that have served the town since the 14th century. Alas that only 31 are still open, though many of the original buildings still remain. No surprise to drinkers that the last pubs, with names as characteristic as The Shoulder of Mutton, Tumbledown Dick's and The Bushel and Strike, were being closed (largely by Whitbread) up to as recently as the late 60's. In the last century, there were even 9 breweries in the town, but none now survives.

Paperback

The copiously illustrated paperback, published this spring, is alive with anecdote and the aroma of lost ales from years past. One ancient hostelry, still open, is said to have been the site of the last local public hanging, no doubt a cause of much carousing! Another was witness to an early road accident, when a clergyman whizzing jauntily down the street, feet on handlebars, somersaulted over a cart being wheeled out of the stables. Those heady, pre-breathalyser days!

On Sale

Copies of the book can be obtained from local bookshops, where it has been selling well together with the Herts Real Ale Guide, or direct from Mrs Gadd at 3 Burford Way, Hitchin (£1.20 incl. p & p).

BY PETER ARGYLE



Beer Festival

For all the CAMRA branches in Hertfordshire, the beer festival held at Hatfield Polytechnic over the last weekend in June was probably one of the most successful events yet. This success can be measured in terms of hard cash but more important is the publicity given to the cause of real ale. This was achieved by the festival itself and by the local press and radio coverage surrounding it.

The event started quietly at Friday lunchtime but by the evening was in full swing. By nine o'clock the hall was packed with avid drinkers enjoying their pints to the music of The Crusty Sock Ensemble and The Tippen Family. Because of the overwhelming demand over the previous sessions, numbers were restricted on the Saturday night. However, the music - from the New Era Jazz Band and popular one-man band Pete Hogman was greatly appreciated by the slightly less cramped audience.

Graffiti

Other attractions over the weekend were the graffiti (which brought out many an hitherto unknown talent) and the CAMRA products stall which did a roaring trade thanks to the sophisticated marketing approach of our campaign administrator, Peter Foy!

Thanks

Of course the festival would not have been possible without the support of CAMRA members from several local branches (including 3 from South Hampshire), who worked so hard throughout the festival. Thanks very much to you all! We would also like to say thanks to John and Betty Blackwell for supplying the licence and their assistance, to Fullers, Greene King, Paines and Brakspears for their extra help and to everyone at the Polytechnic for their co-operation.

BY ADRIAN GREEN

Pub News

Bishop's Stortford The Baker's Dozen is no longer selling Theakston's Old Peculier. Instead Marston's Owd Rodger has been introduced.

Hertford The Dimsdale Arms is soon to have handpumps fitted - for Mac's Country Bitter? **Leavesden** The Hammer in Hand is now selling handpumped Charrington's IPA.

Potters Bar The Chequers has had a handpump fitted for Courage Director's Bitter.

Rickmansworth The Halfway House now has Courage Bitter and Director's Bitter served by gravity.

St.Ippolytts The Greyhound is now selling Ind Coope Bitter and Burton Ale on handpumps.

South Mimms The White Hart is now selling Mac's Country Bitter on handpumps.

Tytenhanger During week commencing 18 August, The Barley Mow will be featuring all the real ales brewed by Fullers.

Uphire Just over the border in Essex but one which should have been in the guide: The Good Intent which serves Ind Coope Bitter and Mild by electric pumps.



Membership

CAMRA is an independent organisation fighting to improve the quality of beer and pubs throughout the country. Why not join and help us improve the lot of Britain's drinkers. For your £4 subscription you will receive, monthly, 'What's Brewing', CAMRA's newspaper on what is going on in the world of beer.

HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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.

Name

Address

Signature Date

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

What's On

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

- 26 Jul Darts Match v West Herts Sports and Social Club at The Clubhouse, Park Ave, Watford. (Range of Real Ale) 8pm.
- 10 Aug Darts Match v Pub Team at The Hope and Anchor, Welham Green, Nr Hatfield. (Courage) 8pm.
- 17 Aug August Branch Meeting
The Three Horseshoes, Garston. (Ind Coope) 8pm.

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

- 26 Jul Campaigning Social at The Fox and Duck, Buntingford (Greene King) 8pm.
- 9 Aug August Branch Meeting
The Roebuck, Stevenage. (Rayment's) 8pm.
- 16 Aug Social at The Cat and Fiddle, Pirton. (Charles Wells) 8pm.
- 23 Aug Social at The Fox, Aspenden. (Greene King) 8pm.

HERTS/ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH

Note: There is no August Branch Meeting.

- 21 Aug Social at The Nag's Head, Moreton (Charrington's) 8pm.

Lost & Found

An anorak and a jumper were found at Hatfield Polytechnic after all the people had left. If you think these belong to you, contact Bob Norrish (whom they don't fit!), telephone no: St.Albans 59507 (home)

Branch Contacts

Herts North: Dennis Robertson, Tel: Stevenage 782779 (Home); Herts South: Dave Burns, Tel: Welwyn 7805 (Home); Herts/Essex Borders: Rob Candlish, Tel: Waltham Cross 32045 (Home).

Newsletter

The Hertfordshire Newsletter is produced by the Herts South, Herts North and Herts/Essex Borders branches of the Campaign for Real Ale. Any up to date news would be gratefully received. Editor: Les Middlewood, 81a Linden Way, Southgate, London, N14 4NG.

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