

FREE



THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 1985

CIRCULATION 5000

NUMBER 80

QUICK ONES

Big Spenders

Would you buy a pub for £2 million? Especially when you can buy a brewery and 40 pubs for £5 million? Yes, £5 million is the price which Blackburn brewers Thwaites are reported to have paid for Lancaster's Yates and Jackson and their 40 pubs, while £2 million is the rumoured sale price of the Olde Swiss Cottage pub in Finchley Road, NW London, sold by Berni Inns to Tadcaster brewers Samuel Smith. And here we were thinking that McMullens had taken leave of their senses when they paid a reported £¾ million for the Nag's Head in Hampstead. Has anyone in any of these super-profitable breweries thought of reducing the price of a pint recently?

The Book of the Goat

The St Albans Architectural and Archeological Society have produced a most informative little book detailing the history and architecture of the city's ancient Sopwell Lane free house, complete with floor plans, lists of former landlords, and photographs. Copies are available at £1.50 from the **Goat** or local bookshops, or write for information to the book's Editor, Kathleen Goad, 130 Hatfield Road, St Albans.

Is this a record?

On visiting a nearby Trumans house in Stevenage New Town, an impressive bank of handpumps greeted me. "A pint of bitter, please" I asked. "Do you want to try it first?" said the landlord, "we're not sure about it." He was correct. "A pint of best bitter instead," I replied. This was even worse, but at least there was Samson. "I'll have the Samson." "That's off," said the landlord. Three beers, all undrinkable. Is this a record?

Peter Clarke

Rising Sun, Halls Green

After a long period of closure for refurbishment, the **Rising Sun** at Halls Green has at last re-opened. The pub has been tastefully refurbished by its owners, McMullens, and has lost none of its rural charm. It is still a one-bar pub, but it has been enlarged and the real log fire gives it a cosy feel.

Four handpumps dispense AK and Country, and meals are available seven days a week. Those who remember the **Rising Sun** will be glad to hear that the large outdoor drinking area has been retained. This is the first venture for Mine Hosts Elaine and Graham Firth, and we wish them every success. For those visiting the pub for the first time, it is hard to find as Halls Green is not signposted, but you'll find it on the minor road from Weston to Cromer.

XX - it's a winner!

With the threat of extinction again hanging over Greene King XX dark mild, it's nice to be able to report a small success. The **Three Tuns** at Ashwell replaced KK light mild with XX three months ago, and manager Chris Ashley is delighted. "Sales have shown a substantial increase since we changed", he said. "It would be a great shame if Greene King's dark mild were to disappear".

The **Three Tuns** is well worth a visit, in the picturesque village of Ashwell. As well as dark mild you'll also find IPA and Abbot on handpump.

'Here for the Beer'

This highly-recommended exhibition of Hertfordshire's brewing history is at **Oakmere House, Potters Bar** from 2nd February until 2nd March, after which it will move on to **Royston Museum**.

**UNIQUE
NEW PRODUCT!**

ALREADY PREPARED

kebabs

A tasty variety of best quality, marinated, cooked and frozen kebabs.

**Great FOR PUBS
AND CLUBS**

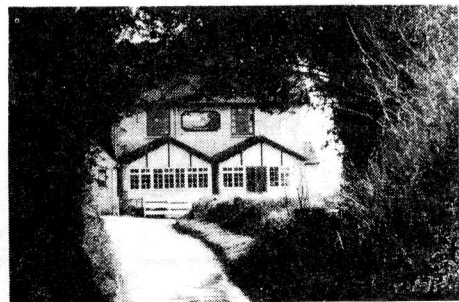
'Deli-Stiks' are an all year round food, which can be easily prepared in a variety of ways, eg. Frying, grilling, by micro-wave oven and even indoor & outdoor B.B.Q.'s.

The minimum cooking time from frozen is only 4-5 mins. Cooking and serving suggestions are given in our FREE information sheets.

DELI-STIKS LTD.,
53A Park Street Village, St. Albans, Herts.
Telephone: (0727) 74363.

See for yourself as cooked on the new indoor Barbecue at the Barley Mow, Tyttenhanger Green.

THE BARLEY MOW



TYTTENHANGER GREEN

WE HAVE THE LARGEST SELECTION OF REAL ALES IN HERTFORDSHIRE

We also pride ourselves that they are all in the best of condition. Why not try our menu of hot and cold meals at lunchtime?

We are always first so come and try our indoor Beer-B-Q

**PLEASE NOTE NO COACHES
INCLUDING MINIBUSES**

BEER FESTIVAL



This March, for the first time for many years, CAMRA is running a beer festival in central London. The venue, the Camden Centre, is just off Euston Road behind Camden Town Hall, opposite the spires of St. Pancras Station, making it a short walk from either Euston Station or Kings Cross.

During the festival over 15,000 pints will be available for drinking. There will be 40-plus different beers and cider from all over Britain including such well known beers as Thwaites.

Good, wholesome food is on sale all sessions, and to help it all down there is entertainment every evening, including the well-known Fulham Brass Band on Friday and the infamous Mad Jocks and Englishmen on Thursday night. Definitely something to make you smile! Something else to smile about is the Happy Hour between 5.00 and 6.00 p.m., when there will be price reductions on selected beers. Come early to avoid disappointment.

The festival is open to the public from Wednesday 13th March to Friday 15th March 11.30 am to 3.00 and 5.00 to 10.30 pm. Admission is free lunchtimes and £1 in the evenings. So, if you fancy tasting some of Britain's heritage and enjoying yourself while you're at it, we'll see you there.

For further details contact John Cryne on 01-452 6965.

BLAKES

96 Queens Road, Watford

Morrells • Brakspears • Hook Norton
Draught cider • Wines

Plus two unusual guest beers

GOOD FOOD AT ALL TIMES
Open pub hours, 7 days a week

HAPPY HOUR

Each evening
5.30-6.30pm

25% off all drinks

Sunday
12-2pm

FIVE YEARS AGO

At the beginning of 1980 the Newsletter Editor announced his intention to produce the paper punctually and so introduced copy deadlines. Five years on, people are still taking no notice... Meanwhile the introduction of McMullen's draught Christmas Ale was celebrated. But the most important news was the forthcoming launch, by Ind Coope, of the re-generated Benskins company, with new (old) colours for the pubs and a new beer, to have an OG of 1040 and to be brewed in Burton-on-Trent. Said our correspondent: "Whilst I applaud Ind Coope's attempt to get back to regional beer flavours, it does seem somewhat nonsensical to close down small, local breweries producing very distinctive beers only to introduce an imitation a few years later." Those sentiments still ring true today, but unfortunately we were wrong about the beer; it's 1037, brewed in Romford and still, at times, of inconsistent quality.

WINTER WARMERS by Roundsman

Our county of Hertfordshire must be one of the most fortunate in the country for the selection of special draught beers available to drinkers during the winter season. It was once normal practice for small local breweries to produce special brews for different seasons and particular events, but in many areas the practice had died out with the regrettable moves towards standardisation nationally. A small revival has taken place in this area, and in the interests of research, I set out to sample as many different winter brews as possible.

My first visit was to Southwold in Suffolk to sample Adnams Old. Also available in some free houses in Hertfordshire (so I was not cheating, really) this dark ale was served via a handpump and was delicious - not strong, but full of maturity and flavour. Eight marks out of ten.

Next stop a Benskins roadhouse back in Hertfordshire, where I was surprised to find Benskins Christmas Ale being served from a poly-pin. Having not previously been aware of the beer (poor promotion, Mr. Benskin) I was keen to try it, but despite being in sparkling company I could muster no great enthusiasm for the beer, which lacked distinction and tasted somewhat tired, and was glad to return to the ordinary bitter. Only 4 marks, I'm afraid. On the other hand, Benskins' new seasonal and ultra-strong bottled Colne Spring Ale, which I must admit was consumed in the comfort of my own home, proved delicious and powerful, meriting 9 marks, the highest possible for a non-real ale.

My next stop was at a McMullen's house, in the distinguished company of your Editor, no less, to try McMullen's Christmas Ale. This was a delight - black, malty, warming and delicious, and demanded several refills. No hesitation here in awarding 10 marks and all accolades to Messrs McMullen.

Disappointingly, Greene King's Christmas Ale turned out to be something of an anti-climax. Served from a poly-pin, like the Benskins my sample seemed somewhat insipid and lifeless - possibly what is needed to ensure the full flavour of these delicate beers is a proper cask in a proper cellar, with service via a proper handpump. Only 5 marks.

Next, to a Whitbread house, to sample Wethered's hand-pumped Winter Royal. Another cheering and deceptively strong dark brew, served in good condition. A potential 9 marks, but for the effect which it later had on my digestive system, which must necessitate a reduction to 7. At that point I made the decision - enough winter ales. Apologies to those I have missed; will spend the remainder of this year getting into training for next winter's round.



PRICES

Watford Watchdog

Watford is now one of the most expensive places to drink in Britain. Even in London the drinker can get a better deal if he shops around. When compared to the Midlands and the North West, where a larger and better variety of beers are available, Watford drinkers are paying between 33 and 50 pence in the pound more.

An average pint of Benskins Bitter or Courage Best, the two most common ordinary bitters in the area, will cost you 82 pence, whereas beers of a similar strength will cost a mere 61 pence in the Midlands or the North of England.

Another alarming feature of drinking in Watford is the difference in price between one pub to the next for the same beer. For instance, the recently renovated **Oddfellows Arms** charges 74 pence for Benskins; the price in similar pubs in Oxhey is 84 pence, whilst other pubs in central Watford charge 83 or even 85 pence. In Bushey Heath the same pint will cost you 86 pence, and in **Ye Olde Greene Man**, Batchworth Heath 88 pence. Courage Best varies in price from 76 pence in the public bar of the **Red House**, Croxley Green, to 86 pence in the **Stag** in St Albans Road, Watford.

What do get for your extra 10 or 14 pence? The answer is frequently nothing, except louder music from the jukebox. You are just being taken for what can be squeezed out of your wallet.

But the big brewers can't take all the blame. Free houses are selling beers at prices ranging from 86 pence to £1.05 per pint, and these are beers that cost between 58 pence and 70 pence on their home ground.

In a survey of most Watford & District pubs in December, CAMRA members found that the best value for money was obtainable in Greene King houses. The **Swan** at Leavesden, the **Estcourt Tavern**, Watford and the **Fox & Hounds** in Croxley Green all offer consistent beer at fair prices (70 pence for Mild, 74 pence for IPA and 86 pence for Abbot in public bars).

Although Bass offered the cheapest beer in the area (68 pence for Toby), the houses offered little in the way of comfort, and most sold only pressurised beer, the main exception being the most expensively-priced **Horse & Chains**.

The best value in a Benskins pub was found at the **Feathers** in Rickmansworth, where the public bar prices were 74 pence for Bitter and 82 pence for Burton Ale. Even the lager drinkers could smile, as they were paying less than in 98 per cent of the pubs in the area. The bar lunches are also very reasonable, making the **Feathers** a must for Benskins fans.

Still the question must be asked – why are prices in Watford so high? The old chestnut of higher rates and wages cannot possibly account for 20 pence a pint, and rents are fixed by brewers according to the profitability of the pub, in order to guarantee them a bigger share of the punters' money.

If you can tell us of any prime examples of good or bad value in your local please let us know. We in Watford will continue to keep you informed of any improvement in the services offered in exchange for your hard-earned cash. Remember, we are the customers and are there to be served with good products to our satisfaction, not to the satisfaction of the brewers and their accountants.

Watford & District Branch

BRANCH REPORT

South Herts – down but not yet out

The time has come to make known the threatened demise of the once-proud South Herts branch of CAMRA. The active members can be counted on the fingers of both hands, and the Committee is almost non-existent.

Attendances at branch meetings have been so poor of late that the meetings have been suspended. Campaigning is an impossibility, and the few who still deliver the Hertfordshire Newsletter are covering more pubs over a larger area. Some of our old outlets no longer receive their monthly visit, and the word does not get around like it used to do.

The early days were full of optimism, and when Hertfordshire split into four branches South Herts became a leading light in the Campaign at all levels. The membership consisted of people from all walks of life, and ambitious campaigns were undertaken. The memories are good ones, of plenty of fun and action.

The membership is STILL OUT THERE SOMEWHERE – but we do not see them nearly so often. The Campaign is in no way over, even though South Herts has an abundance of real ale pubs. We still have pubs charging exorbitant prices, and many outlets dispensing beer of disappointing quality.

The AGM has been postponed from December, in the hope that we can attract a better turnout in the Spring. It will now take place at 8pm on **Tuesday March 19th**, at the **Queens Head, Colney Heath**.

I look forward to meeting members old and new there. Don't you?

Steve Bury

PUB OF THE MONTH

The Buffalo's Head, Puckeridge

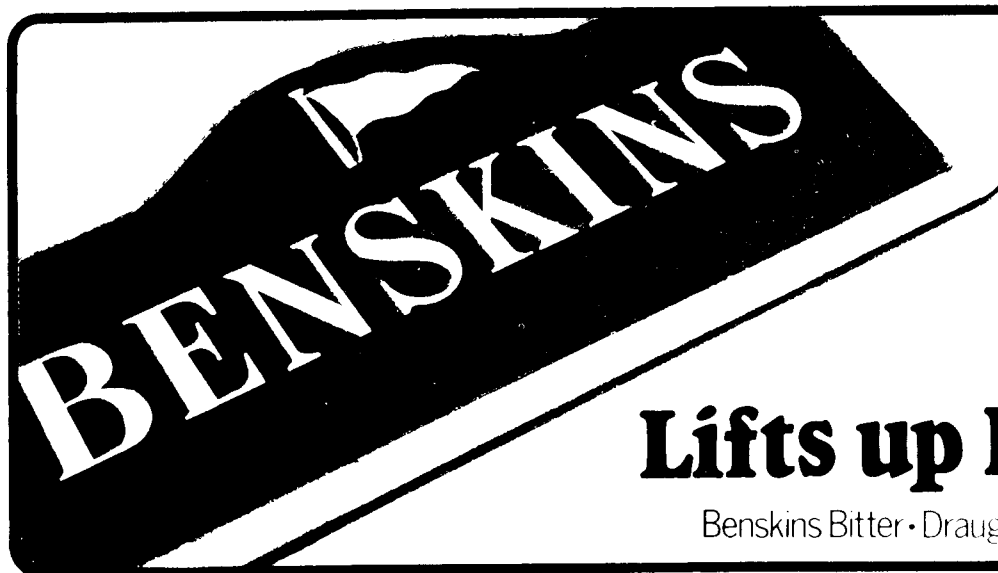
Hertfordshire North Branch's Pub of the Month for February is a Benskins pub with a difference. The difference is that the pub is not tied, for beer sales, to Benskins. Beer-loving visitors to the **Buffalo's Head** can always be sure of a treat, and in the last couple of years since landlady Chris Edwards took over the tenancy of the pub, have been treated to draught beers from Youngs, Lees, Marstons, Paines, Crouch Vale, Old Mill, Thwaites, Victoria, Oak Brewery, Moorhouses, Theakstons and many, many more, never served in anything other than excellent condition.

The **Buffalo's Head** is at the south side of the village, close to the junction of the A10 and A120, and is well worth a detour. It is a homely, two-roomed pub, with a welcoming "real fire" in winter, and a huge garden for lazy summer days. Food is available at almost all times, and Chris is renowned for her good-value home cooking and special meals. The pub is always a hive of activity, whether taking part in sponsored schemes for charity or folk-singing evenings.

Herts North Branch congratulates the hard-working Chris and her husband Ron on winning this much-deserved award, and hope that some of the Newsletter's readers will join us at the pub on Wednesday 27th February, to celebrate and enjoy an evening to remember.

PL

The Pub of the Month award is made each month by CAMRA's Hertfordshire North Branch, and is limited to pubs in the North Herts branch area.



PUB NEWS

Reports have reached us that **The Lamb** in King's Langley, a Benskins pub, is closed and boarded up, while we should also note that the **Waggon and Horses** at Ridge Hill was demolished in late 1984 to make way for the M25. According to a letter in a local publication, the Waggon and Horses was the first original Trust House.

The **Marquis of Lorne** in Stevenage Old Town is now the Saturday-night venue for the Stevenage Folk Club. It is good to know that the CAMRA connection with this club is not broken, as it was Herts North Branch who assisted the club in finding its former venue, the **Chequers** at Woolmer Green; meanwhile, the licensee of their new pub, Bob Else, is a former Chairman of the same CAMRA Branch. The **Dun Cow** in Stevenage Old Town has been selling Brakspears Bitter while Flowers Original was unavailable. In the New Town, the **Gamekeeper** has been renamed **Poachers** by the Host Group, converted into a one-bar pub and started selling real ale again – Truman Best Bitter at 80p a pint.

A survey of pubs in Welwyn Garden City has revealed the following: At the **Fairway Tavern** Courage Best has replaced Charringtons IPA, and a good pint of Benskins is still also available. Charringtons IPA is now available alongside the Trumans Best Bitter at the **Gosling Stadium Bar**, both in excellent condition. At the **Pear Tree**, Wethereds has been discontinued in favour of Flowers. The quality of the beer here, as in several of the pubs in the city, is depressing to say the least – why should WGC drinkers be so hard done by? At the **Cottage**, Bass has been taken off, but a good pint of IPA can be found. Also recommended is the **Chieftain** for McMullens Country Bitter. The **Beehive** is presently closed for alteration to a Beefeater, and when it re-opens the **Cherry Tree**, also a Beefeater, is due to be closed for good. Most recent convert to real ale is the **Mayflower** in Haldens, selling Brakspears, Wethereds and Flowers.

The **Swan Inn** in Lower High Street, Watford, recently reported as having real ale, has been horrifyingly converted in **Shades** – a disco pub with no real ale. The **Foresters Arms** in Bushey Heath has been knocked through into a one-bar pub. Four real ales are available – Watneys Stag, Combes Bitter, Websters Yorkshire Bitter and Ruddles County. A new off-licence in the Parade, Watford, **Wine in Case**, is selling polypins of real ale from London's small independent brewer Godsons. The range is Wilmot Ale, Black Horse and the powerful Stock Ale.

The **Bridge House** in Potters Bar has added Brakspears bitter and Wethered Winter Royal to its range. The **Angel** in Waltham Abbey, now re-opened after major alterations, has Macs AK and Country.

News from New Barnet. The Newsletter was very sorry to hear of the tragic death of the landlord of the **Builders Arms** in a fire at the pub. Described in the local guide as a 'Mecca for local real ale lovers', the pub is closed at present but will re-open in due course. The **Railway Bell**, which has been closed for some months, has been re-opened as a free house and renamed the **Rat & Parrot**. Beers available include Marston Pedigree, Samuel Smiths, Arkell Kingsdown Ale and a 'house' beer (of unknown origin) called Empire Ale. Guest beers are also on offer, including Greene King Abbot, at weekends only, until the Builders Arms re-opens. The **Railway Tavern** has Draught Bass alongside IPA, and the **Lytton Arms** has Watney Stag and Combes Bitter, replacing Hammertons Porter.

FLINTS WINE BAR

Market Hill, Royston

☎ 47512

MARSTON PEDIGREE & OWD RODGER
on handpump

Home-cooked food available all day

Monday to Saturday

Closed Sunday

BRANCH DIARY

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

Wednesday 6th February

Joint Social with South Herts branch at the Abbot John, Wheathampstead, 8pm.

Wednesday 20th February

Branch Meeting at the Three Tuns, Ashwell, 8pm.

Wednesday 27th February

Pub of the Month social at the Buffalo's head, Puckeridge, 8pm.

Wednesday 6th March

Branch Meeting at the Motte & Bailey, Pirtou, 8pm.

Contact Peter Clarke ☎ Stevenage 65957

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Wednesday 6th February

Joint social with North Herts, Abbot John, Wheathampstead, 8pm.

Tuesday 19th March

Branch AGM at the Queens Head, Colney Heath, 8pm. Will all members of CAMRA living in the South Herts area please try to attend, and help get the branch active again. Please come along with your suggestions. N.B. The Branch constitution requires there to be at least 25 members, otherwise the branch is to be wound up.

Contact Eric Sim ☎ Hatfield 60647

WATFORD & DISTRICT BRANCH

Wednesday 6th February

Joint social with Mid-Chilterns branch, at the Vine, Mill End, Rickmansworth, 8pm. All welcome - non members too!

Friday 22nd February

Watford Heath/Oxhey pub crawl. Start Load of Hay, Watford Heath, 8pm. Royal Oak 8.30, Villiers Arms, Oxhey, 9pm.

Wednesday 27th February

Branch Meeting at the Sportsman, Croxley Green (separate room), 8pm. Free pint for newcomers!

Wednesday 6th March

Social at the Hammer in Hand, Ganders Ash, Leavesden, 8pm. Come and sample the best-value pint in the branch area!

Wednesday 20th March

Branch AGM at the Wheatshaf, Lower Watford High Steet (upstairs room), 8pm.

Contact Tony King ☎ Garston 672587

MID-CHILTERN BRANCH

Contact Pete Freeman ☎ Hemel Hempstead 69773

THE ROYAL OAK, BUSHEY

Free House

★ 6 Real Ales ☐ Food ★
★ Guest Beers ★

Restaurant and carvery now open

Reservations preferable ☎ 01-950 2865

SPARROWS HERNE ★ ON THE A411

PLANNING NEWS

Starting with the far east, in Bishops Stortford plans are afoot to extend and alter the **Half Moon**. Ind Coope have similar ambitions for the **Chequers** at Bragbury End, near Stevenage, a picture-postcard pub which is a listed building.

The Hertsmere Council in the south of the country has had three recent planning applications to extend pubs, these being the **Pinks Hotel** at Shenley, **Wyllyotts Manor** at Potters Bar, and the **White Horse**, also in Potters Bar. Staying in the same town, plans are under consideration for the conversion of the former **Red Lion** into offices.

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. The Editor gratefully receives articles or letters for publication.

Send to **Cathy Totman, Flat 1, The Old Stables, Woodside, Hatfield, Hertfordshire.**

Subscriptions: £2.25 for 12 issues. Send to address above. Cheques/POs payable to CAMRA Herts Campaigning Fund.

Advertising: £7 per 2.5cm column. Artwork can be made up at extra cost. Contact **Eric Sim ☎ Hatfield 60647** for details.

COPY DATE FOR MARCH EDITION FEBRUARY 8th. FOR APRIL EDITION MARCH 8th.

Printed and filmset by D & S Graphics, 61/63 High Street, Ware, Hertfordshire.