

FREE

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 1985

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NUMBER 87

GREENE KING CLOSE COUNTRY PUBS

Following the news that Greene King have recently closed down two country pubs across the border in Cambridgeshire, comes a report that three of the company's rural pubs in this county are also under threat. Indeed, one has already closed its doors for, it is suspected, the last time.

The closure of the **Royal Oak** at Albury (operated by Greene King's subsidiary, Rayments) came as quite a shock to villagers in July of this year. In recent memory, the village had four pubs (Ind Coope's **Labour in Vain** and McMullen's **Fox** having closed since the last War). Now only the **Catherine Wheel** remains - a somewhat up-market Benskins house north of the centre of the village, at Graves End, and of an entirely different character from the **Royal Oak**, a true locals' local. The closure of the **Royal Oak** is ascribed by the brewery to the landlord's financial difficulties, but many Albury residents (who prefer Rayments ales to Benskins) consider that a go-ahead new licensee could have run the pub profitably.

Petitions were sent to Greene King from the village asking them to keep the pub open, and CAMRA and the local Parish Council also became involved. Nevertheless, at a Board Meeting in August, Greene King took the decision to close and sell the **Royal Oak**, and it seems unlikely that it will ever be a pub again. Greene King Director Timothy Redman commented: "Sadly, I believe we must all face the fact that, particularly in rural areas, there are just too many pubs around these days for the available trade."

The same week that Greene King told CAMRA that they had decided to dispose of the **Royal Oak**, came a newspaper report that the company are this month to close the **Adam and Eve** at Hay Street, Braughing, on the retirement of the present landlord, Malcolm Minter. The pub has been licensed since 1499.

The third pub under threat is Rayments' **Turkey Cock**, more familiarly known as the **Crazy Pub** at Hunsdon. Rumours are circulating in the locality that this unusual hostelry is shortly to close. The current **Turkey Cock** is a temporary building, as the original pub was on land commandeered by the RAF for the construction of an airfield during the last War.

CAMRA views the closure of all country pubs with concern, but agrees with Greene King to the extent that if a company cannot run a pub profitably, it should sell it. Where CAMRA and Greene King part company, however, is that it is CAMRA's view that a rural pub remains a valuable and unique part of community life, and if one brewery cannot make a go of it, the premises should be sold on, either to another brewery or as a free house. In this respect, we offer our congratulations to Ind Coope Benskins, who in recent years have decided to close the **Golden Fleece** at Braughing, the **Bell** at Widford and the **Chequers** at Wareside, but have allowed each to be re-opened as free houses.

‡ Another Greene King pub to close, but this time hopefully temporarily, is the **Rose and Crown** at Tewin, a lovely listed building, which was unfortunately severely damaged by fire during August.

HERTSMERE BEER FESTIVAL

(in conjunction with CAMRA)

Oakmere House, Potters Bar

☎45005

- ☆ Fri 12 Oct - Traditional jazz from 6.30 ☆
- ☆ Sat 13 Oct - Folk music from 6.30 ☆
- ☆ Sun 14 Oct - Country & Western from 6.30 ☆

Tickets nightly - £1.50 in advance
£2 on the door - Special offer £3 for 3 nights
Free glass on entry

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Please find enclosed cheque for my renewal of membership and to say how much I have enjoyed being part of the campaign for the past year.

I thought while renewing membership I might include my views on the McMullens AK Mild on handpump at the **Blue Anchor**, St.Albans. Whilst not having a regular pub in St.Albans - I vary my drinking - I find the mild there easily the most consistent pint in St.Albans and area. It is always served at the right temperature (even during heatwave) and always comes up with a consistently good head and crystal clear. In fact I know of a few 'converts' to handpump in the past few months owing to the consistency of the ale.

While heaping fully deserved praise on 'Macs' beer I have only one small criticism of 'Macs' pubs and that is their coke -Maxicola. Not that I ever drink it myself but my girlfriend drinks Bacardi and coke and cannot stomach their coke saying it is much too sweet. At first I thought she was being too fussy but have found other people with the same views. Indeed I am sure I would use 'Macs' pubs much more often - especially the 'Blue'-if something could be done about the coke.

Also, a quick word of praise for Jock Christie, landlord of the **Queens Head**, Colney Heath - always with a friendly smile and always a good pint.

Anyway thanking you for your time, and hope you find my views interesting. (Maybe even a mention in the newsletter might not go a miss!).

Yours faithfully
Kevin Lerwill.

Beer Festival

8th Bedford Beer Festival is taking place on Wed 2nd Oct - Sat 5th Oct at the Bedford Corn Exchange. Times are Wed 7.30-10.45pm; Thurs - Sat 11.30am-2.15pm, 5.00pm-10.45pm.

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?

Indoor and outdoor barbecues, weather
permitting, now in full swing

**PLEASE NOTE NO COACHES
INCLUDING MINIBUSES**

JUST ADD WATER

Do you ever feel that your pint has been watered down? Well, it shouldn't happen in this country, but in France, it may yet happen. France's third largest brewery Fischer, of Alsace, have spent the past 30 years trying to produce a beer concentrate which, when mixed with six parts of carbonated water, is indistinguishable from the real thing. The process is called "inverted osmosis", and is said to be similar to that used in some Arabian countries to remove salt from sea water. Fischer are trying to negotiate export deals with Japan, Germany, the United States, the Far East and North Africa, and are offering a variety of types for different tastes - sweet for the Americans, bitter for the Japanese, non-alcoholic for Muslim countries. Which will be the first British brewery to latch on to this appalling trend? With the brewers' attempts over the past two decades to foist mediocre, bland, insipid brew upon the nation, we can predict that it may not be too long in coming. And who says there is no need for campaign for **real ale**?

Irish hours

Whilst on holiday in Ireland with the editor this summer I was interested to read a report in the Dublin Sunday Press of proposals to extend the already liberal opening hours. As in Britain, these proposals are part of a plan to boost tourism; other measures are allowing full drink licences to restaurants and cutting spirits prices. The Licensed Vintners Association suggests that Dublin pubs should open until midnight on Friday and Saturday and eleven on Sunday. The vintners also want to end the so called "holy hour" whereby Dublin pubs close for one hour in the afternoon in the midst of otherwise day long drinking hours. Perhaps most intriguing is the request to extend drinking up time from ten to **thirty minutes** - this must surely be to allow the final pint of Guinness time to settle before being drinkable. The Sunday Press is slightly mocking in referring to the Government's National Plan including longer drinking hours as a 'masterstroke' for saving the economy. The publicans themselves cannot agree on the proposals: country vintners want to open late on Thursdays as well and some publicans have been arguing that tourists don't drink as much as the Irish anyway! Whilst Ireland, like Scotland, does not altogether deserve its reputation as a nation of heavy drinkers, it is interesting to see a country with more of a tradition of longer drinking hours than us proposing to extend them even further, for the right reasons. Perhaps it will not be long before drinking hours in England and Wales are similarly enlightened. J.F.F

CRACKDOWN ON PUB PRICE LISTS

Is your local clearly displaying the prices of all drinks for sale? Do you know what your round of 4 pints of bitter, a coke, and a dry martini with bitter lemon will cost before you pay for it, or only after the barmaid has totted up the tally?

Well, by law, drinks prices in licensed premises should be "readily discernible" by purchasers at the bar, or by an indication "in such a position that it is readily discernible by an intending purchaser before he enters the supply area".

A recent survey of pubs in the southern part of the county revealed that a considerable number appeared to be displaying no indication of bar prices whatsoever. CAMRA has raised this matter generally with Hertfordshire County Council, who are responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Price Marking (Food and Drink on Premises) Order 1979, who tell us that people feeling that the spirit of this Order is not being complied with, should contact their local Divisional Trading Standards Office, either at Hertford (tel: 54242 ext 5538), St Albans (te: 50542) or Watford (tel: 21218). It's up to you.

Herts Brewers Win National Awards

Many congratulations to Rayment's, who entered their BBA for the first time in the Ordinary Bitter category of the CAMRA Beer of the Year Awards, and were delighted to see it awarded fourth place by the panel of judges at CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival. The winning beer in the section was Gale's BBB, brewed in Hampshire. Winner in the Mild category was Ansell's (brewed in Burton-on-Trent); the best Premium Bitter was Young's Special (from London), and a beer from the capital city also walked away with the prize for the best Strong Beer, Fullers ESB. Meanwhile McMullens took third prize in the competition for small beer packs (pale ales) at an international brewing competition held at Burton on Trent.

One of the most interesting aspects of being involved with the local branch of CAMRA is delivering Hertfordshire newsletters once a month to local pubs. My particular area is St.Albans town centre, where, fortunately, all the pubs serve hand-pulled beer which is nearly always in good condition, although a bit on the costly side in comparison to say, Hertford or Stevenage.

The landlords of St.Albans town centre are generally a pleasant and helpful breed; they all take and display the newsletter, and maybe have a few words about the occasional bit of controversy in this month's issue, as well as the usual "why aren't I in this month's?", (especially in the **Bell!**). And there's nothing like some good old-fashioned criticism from a hard working 'guv'n'r to bring us CAMRA idealists down to earth. Mind you, I don't seem to have met some of the managers yet, but then the bar staff soon get to know you, and sometimes have time for a chat too.

Which reminds me, last month as usual, I popped into a certain large McMullen's pub on my round and handed the newsletters over to a young, fresh-faced barmaid who I hadn't seen before. Being very fond of McMullens Country I ordered a pint, but to my consternation and disbelief she made a beeline for the brightly lit fizz box on the bar. Fortunately I managed to stop her just in time (to her obvious bewilderment) and got a pint from the handpump. Not surprisingly it was warm and flat, symptomatic of the first pint from the pump in a very long time.

If McMullen's must persist in serving top pressure AK and Country alongside the same beers on handpump, then could they please educate their staff to the fact that real ale doesn't have such a long shelf life as pressurised beer, and should therefore be served as often as possible in preference to the top pressure version to keep the handpulled beer in good condition. Obviously some die-hard regulars may prefer fizzy beers, but if a complete stranger appears at the bar and asks for AK or Country it is more likely that he or she would prefer their beer from the handpump, especially in St.Albans where tourists are usually quite happy to drink "the real McCoy". Congratulations to the staff at the **Blue Anchor**, St.Albans and the **John Bunyan**, Colemans Green, to name but two pubs where a drinker can always be guaranteed hand pumped beers of good quality, despite the retention of the fizz pumps. With a little thought this could be the same in all McMullen pubs.

AJ

Peter & Lesley Reynolds welcome you to



THE STAR INN

FURNEUX PELHAM



Rayment's BBA ★ Greene King KK & Abbot

GOOD HOME-COOKED FOOD
MONDAY TO SATURDAY

☎ Brent Pelham 227

LOCAL BEERS HIT NORFOLK

Hertfordshire visitors to Norfolk may sense a certain air of familiarity in some of that county's pubs. For Rayment's BBA has become something of a cult beer there, its availability being widely and competitively advertised by local free houses. BBA is available to the Norfolk free trade via Greene King's Norfolk depot (despite its being totally unobtainable west of the A1 in Herts), but it is less clear how McMullens Country Bitter came to be on sale at the **Crown**, Dickleburgh over the Whit Bank Holiday weekend, where according to CAMRA's Norfolk newsletter, it was on splendid form.

PLANNING NEWS

No more banquets will be held at the **Kings Arms**, Berkhamsted, if current proposals to convert the banqueting hall into offices are approved. Staying at the upper end of the market, there are plans afoot to extend the bar at the **Noke Hotel**, Chiswell Green.

Life with the Lions in St Albans will be a little different if two current planning applications are approved. Ind Coope are hoping to extend the **White Lion** and to bring the toilets indoors, while extensions are also planned at the **Black Lion**.

Back again in the West, amended proposals have been submitted to Dacorum Council to extend and alter the **Rose and Crown**, at Tring.

Meanwhile, in the department of rumours, the local press in St Albans has reported that the jolly **Mermaid** pub might be redeveloped for housing. And in Ware, there is speculation that the interior of the **Old Bull's Head**, at present nicely divided into a number of drinking areas, may soon be given "the treatment".

Our Success Speaks for Itself

I refer to your article entitled 'Real Beer by Roundsman' (July 1985) and would draw your attention to the following facts.

Since Benskins was re-established at the start of the decade, some £15m investment has been pumped into upgrading and refurbishing our pubs, increasing professionalism among our personnel, and improving the quality of our service to the customer. Creating fresh and highly popular drinking environments (like the **Game Bird** at Aldenham); restoring the original splendour to heritage inns (like the **White Hart**, St Albans); and broadening our consumer appeal by adding new products (like Benskins Strong Ale) are just a few of the ways in which the money has been used. Nor is the investment by any means at an end. That is the measure of our attitude and pride in our business.

The results to date? Despite rising unemployment in the community at large and increased competition for every leisure pound, Benskins has succeeded in increasing its custom year by year. We believe that our level of service to the customer is no worse than that of our colleagues from other Brewers in fact, we would question the validity of a survey that only has one Brewer present. We look forward to hearing the results of the CAMRA survey of our pubs and indeed, to discovering the criteria for judgement. Meanwhile, I trust that you will allow our thousands of customers to speak for themselves.

Yours sincerely,

For: IND COOPE BENSKINSLTD.

J.D. Hughes.

Marketing Manager.

ROUNDSMAN comments:

My article was clearly stated to reflect a personal view only and while I do not doubt anything that Mr. Hughes writes, I maintain that some Benskins pubs are poorly maintained and that some are less than welcoming. Furthermore, Mr. Hughes has declined to comment on the main point of my article, which was that Benskins beer is a matter of indifference to many local beer drinkers. And I am amazed that the company make such an issue of introducing a new (bottled) strong ale so soon after killing off their cask KK mild. Personally, I would rather drink in a good pub than a "drinking environment" or even a "heritage inn".....

COMPETITION WINNER

The winner of the Summer Competition is Ruth Farrer of Hitchin who receives a CAMRA t-shirt.



The Fisherman, Stevenage.

Standing at the edge of Stevenage New Town on the road to Todds Green you will find the **Fisherman**.

Originally a beerhouse, the pub was completely refurbished in 1978 and now attracts a varied clientele and caters very well for the family trade with a large garden and playground for children as well as a collection of animals.

Jane and Ken Symonds have run the pub for the last two years and have built up a reputation for good food as well as good ale, as a visit any lunchtime will testify, as the pub is extremely popular with the business fraternity.

Thursday 24th October sees North Herts branch celebrating this Benskins house with their pub of the month social.

The White Hart, Welwyn

Congratulations are in order for the **White Hart**, Welwyn which has won the South Herts Pub of the Month for October. This Public House is a classic historical building which was originally a coaching inn. The archway leads to a courtyard and stables which are now the car park and inside the interesting split level saloon bar has a flagstone floor on the lower section.

Fred Cox, the landlord, has entertained the campaign on many occasions letting us use his pub for our monthly meetings.

In the early '70's the White Hart was the only Whitbread Real Ale outlet in Hertfordshire and Fred insisted that the brewery supply the sort of beer his customers wanted. This brought Wethereds Bitter into the county when Whitbread closed their London Chiswell Street Brewery. Fred's other achievements have been mechanical owning a collectors Vincent motor bike and an Allard car. More recently he has taken an interest in livestock with horses and cows at Ayot Green.

A visit to sample the Wethered Bitter or Flowers Original is recommended. Why not come and celebrate with CAMRA at the award presentation on Tuesday 29th October.

SOUTH HERTS SOCIAL SCENE

This year has witnessed a resurgence of interest in CAMRA in the South Herts area. Notable achievements so far have included a comprehensive survey of all 131 Benskins/Ind Coope tied houses in the area, and the launch of a Pub of the Month award scheme. But alongside the business meetings and campaigning issues members have enjoyed some well attended social functions during the summer.

On a Saturday in July, we undertook a minibus trip to the delightful Hook Norton brewery in Oxfordshire. Hidden away up a narrow lane amidst Cotswold farmland is a Victorian tower brewery that is solidly traditional, fiercely independent and very successful. As well as owning 34 pubs of its own in a 30 mile radius of the brewery, it also supplies its bitter and Old Hookey to the free trade over a much wider area, including a number of outlets in Hertfordshire. Over the years the brewery has made few concessions to modernity. The ingredients are wholly traditional - malt, hops, yeast, sugar and water. Pure water is drawn up from the wells below up to the top of the tower by the original steam engine of 1900, which also operates all the lifts and hoists via a complex series of cogs and pulleys.

Our guide for the visit was Fred, a sprightly seventy-four year old. He displayed considerable agility in leading us up and down steep wooden staircases in the six storey building and afterwards entertained us in the hospitality room with personal anecdotes from lifetime spent in and around the brewery. All this was of course, washed down with a liberal supply of ale. Then, after leaving the brewery we finished off the session (or rather it finished us off) in the nearby Pear Tree Inn which serves Old Hookey as well as the Bitter.

The summer also saw S.Herts members competing against neighbouring branches at darts and boules. The darts match was against Mid-Chilterns branch, at the **Rose and Crown** Trowley Bottom, in which the singles contest ended in a draw, but S.Herts managed to win the team beer leg.

The boules match was against Watford branch, and was held on an unusually fine summer's evening in the garden of the **White Lion**, St.Albans. There was a very good turnout for both branches. Watford branch surprised us with their flair for this pentaque business and went away clear winners at the end of the night.

The autumn and winter will bring further social activities in all branches, so watch the branch diary column for details.

BRANCH DIARY

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

Wednesday 2nd October

Darts match at the Maidens Head, Whitwell 8pm.

Tuesday 8th October

Joint social with South Herts branch at the Lytton Arms, Old Knebworth 8pm.

Thursday 10th October

Branch meeting at the Crown, Buntingford, 8pm.

Thursday 24th October

Pub of the month at the Fisherman, Stevenage 8pm.

Thursday 7th November

Social at the Bay Horse, Old Hall Green, 8pm.

Contact Peter Clarke ☎ Stevenage 65957

WATFORD & DISTRICT BRANCH

Thursday 3rd October

Games evening versus Mid-Chilterns branch at the Sportsman, Chorley Wood 8pm.

Wednesday 9th October

Social evening at the Villiers Arms, Oxhey 8pm.

Wednesday 16th October

Branch meeting at the Fox & Hounds, Rickmansworth 8pm, free pint to all newcomers.

Monday 28th October

Darts competition, West Herts Sports and Social Club, extra participants welcome - phone contact.

Friday 15th November

Weekend trip to Herefordshire including Westons Cidery. Book now.

Contact Tony King ☎ Garston 672587

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Saturday 5th October

Demonstration to protest about S&N's attempt to take over Matthew Brown. Meet 11am CAMRA HQ for march to S&N's offices Victoria Street.

Monday 7th October

Committee meeting at Barley Mow, Tyttenhanger 8pm.

Tuesday 8th October

North herts joint social, Lytton Arms, Old Knebworth 8pm.

Friday-Sunday 11th-13th October

Potters Bar Beer Festival. Helpers wanted.

Tuesday 15th October

Branch Meeting at the Brewery Tap, Ware 8pm.

Tuesday 22nd October

Two pub social in Potters Bar. Meet at the White Horse 8pm then the Artful Dodger.

Tuesday 28th October

Pub of the Month at the White Hart, Welwyn Village 8pm.

Monday 4th November

Committee meeting at the Barley Mow Tyttenhanger 8pm.

Contact Adrian Jolliffe ☎ St.Albans 69675

MID-CHILTERN BRANCH

Thursday 3rd October

Joint social and games night with Watford branch at the Sportsman, Chorleywood 8pm.

Thursday 17th October

Branch meeting at the Green Dragon, Flaunden 8.30pm.

Tuesday 22nd October

Social at the Fountain, Apsley 8.30pm.

Tuesday 5th November

Social at the Queens Head, Long Marston 8.30pm.

Contact Peter Yorke ☎ Rickmansworth 770488

Five Years Ago

October 1980's Newsletter reported on a Consumers Association survey of lagers. Their testers used such complimentary adjectives as "bready" and "cardboardy" and their spokesman 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." Meanwhile the Daily Express was saying: "Britain's lager lovers wouldn't recognise a decent pint if it got up and sang the National Anthem." Strong words indeed. So what's new?

PUB NEWS

Real ale returns after many years to the Old Red Lion in Shephall Green, Stevenage, serving Greene King Abbot, IPA and XX Mild, all on handpump, the latter making an unexpected return to the town. This is the kind of pub where real ale is always welcomed and so the Abbot and IPA can be expected to stay for some time - lets hope the XX does similarly.

Pubs of some other breweries in Stevenage New Town seem to have adopted a 'Now you see it now you don't' approach to real ale in the past couple of years.

Our reporter can definitely say that rumours that real ale has returned to The Anchor on Weston Road nr. Stevenage are untrue. The Greene King Ales, still on top pressure, and the Keg Ale was the worst he had had in a long time.

The Red Lion Radlett, could close before the end of September for a £350,000 face lift. The changes will be extensive with the beer being provided from the cellar below the now "Lion Bar" hopefully with a more consistent quality.

The Queens Head Sandridge, is now selling Castle Eden alongside the Wethereds Bitter.

The Kings Arms, Tring now does the new Adnams Special alongside Wadworths 6X, Charles Wells Eagle and Fullers London Pride.

The Crown and Sceptre at Bridens Camp, a long standing Free House becomes the latest Banks and Taylors pub. They sell the full range of B&T Beers plus Greene King Abbot and IPA.

The new landlord and landlady have taken regulars advice at the Plume and Feathers, Markyate, and got rid of the jukebox.

The Bridgewater Arms, Little Gaddesden, have on Monday nights from 7pm onwards, all cask conditioned beers 20 pence off.

Pinks Hotel Shenley is receiving major development with an additional bar called 'Panthers' opened on 3rd September. The Real Ales are Youngs Special, Brakspears PA, Flowers Original and guest Cocktails and continental beers also available.

The Fox at Darley Hall is now serving Greene King IPA. This is a miraculous survival of a North Herts 'hedgerow' pub and is worth a visit - if you can find it.

Slightly further north, the Lilley Arms, is another good Greene King pub to have gone real, serving Abbot on handpump in the saloon. The tenants intend to add IPA and possibly mild as soon as the handpumps arrive from the brewery.

The excellent Bull in Great Offley is serving Watneys' Combe Bitter and Webster Yorkshire Bitter. Greene Kings Gloucester Arms is the only one of the villages six pubs still without real ale.

The Wicked Lady, Nomansland, has recently been serving Burts VPA, a beer with does not normally stray from the shores of the Isle of Wight.

Blakes are taking over the Bay Horse, Old Hall Green nr Puckeridge, and will be offering Youngers IPA, Morrells Varisty, Marsdens Pedigree and a variety of guest beers. The pub will have full restaurant facilities Wed-Sat evenings and bar snacks will be available at all other times. There will also be a childrens room and playground facilities next year.

Watford Auction

Watford and District branch will be holding an auction of rare and interesting bottles, brewery and pub souvenirs, general breweriana etc., immediately following their branch meeting at the Wheatsheaf, Watford on 20th November 1985. A worthwhile event for any collector. Any late donations gratefully received. Contact Tony Knowles - Rickmansworth 770267.

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

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.

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