

**SOCIETY for the PRESERVATION of
BEERS from the WOOD**
(founded 1963)

PINT in HAND

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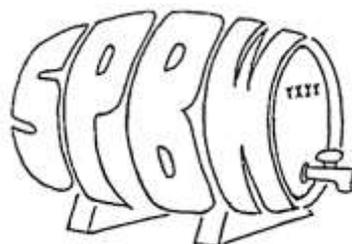
February

2007

Black Country Special



The Vine, Brierley Hill



PINT in HAND

- ***Pint in Hand*** is published quarterly, in February, May, August and November. It is issued to all subscribing members and affiliated branches of SPBW.
- All members are invited to contribute articles for publication on beer-related subjects. Contributions for the February 2007 issue should reach the Editor by **20 April**.
- The Editor or the National Executive Committee of SPBW does not necessarily share opinions expressed in *Pint in Hand*.

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Anyone reading this that is not already a member of SPBW might like to know that annual membership costs only £5 (£6 non-UK). For information about SPBW together with a membership form, please send a stamped addressed envelope to the National Membership Secretary as above.

OPENING TIME

I thought I'd start this issue with a few personal thoughts about the SPBW generally and PiH more specifically. I don't think there's any real danger that we could be recognised as a campaigning body any more. Back in the 1960s and early 70s the Founder Members and others made an effort to publicise and condemn the spread of dustbin beers, but since then a beer group based in St Albans have done a rather better job. However, by the Society's continued existence we can at least offer an additional, if small, voice in support of good traditional ale. As well as being a social group we have evolved the aim of supporting the best of beer and pubs, not least by our consumption!

I am now in my 30th year of SPBW membership and the main reason I got involved was the social and friendship angle – something I never experienced from the few Camra meetings I attended (the last of these, trivia lovers, being on the day that Elvis Presley died). I am sure that anyone who attends our centrally-organised events (a few of which are reported in this issue) will have received a friendly welcome. The same will happen if you turn up to a meeting of one of our branches, something that not enough members are doing. Ideally, branches should be centres of social activity around the country (any country – the Chesapeake Bay people will be pleased to see you).

It's an unfortunate fact that many of the SPBW's activities are centred on the London area. We do have members throughout the UK but there is an inevitable concentration in the south east. I am very conscious of this imbalance and I always endeavour to ensure that PiH spreads its coverage around the country. You can help this by contributing material – I don't necessarily need pages-long articles, short items to inform and amuse will do, as well as articles to fill the regular Perfect Pub and Last Word features. The more of you who get involved, the better an organisation with a better magazine we will be.

Turning my jaundiced eye to the brewing industry, what about the demise of Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries? This substantial enterprise was formed in the 1940s when Banks took over Hansons. It has now assumed the name of another brewery company subsumed into its mass, namely Marstons. Without bothering to check I can only assume that, since Pedigree is its best known brand name, the tail is wagging the dog, so to speak. Of course, it's less of a mouthful than W & D as well. I'm aware that the company has brewing and pub interests over a wide spread of the country but it's a shame that the new title does rather chuck its West Midlands heritage down the dumper, nominally at least.

Another hot item is that Wells-Youngs have acquired the rights to brew former Courage brands such as Best and Directors. These two beers have done the rounds since I used to drink the Tower Bridge versions in my early SPBW days. They are no longer ales that I would spend my money on and I hope that they don't displace Youngs beers. It's bad enough losing the brewery.

Happy and peaceful drinking in 2007.

Roger

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The SPBW National Executive Committee holds its regular meetings on the second Monday of each month, starting at 7 pm or thereabouts, in the Royal Oak, Tabard Street, London SE1. If we're lucky we use the upstairs room (it's quieter but further from the bar). These are strictly business meetings, but they are kept as brief as necessary. All members are welcome to attend, particularly representatives from branches.

We are delighted to welcome Dave Samuel who has eagerly stepped into the breach to take over as Products Manager. You can read about Dave elsewhere in this issue.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The National Executive Committee's 2007 AGM will be held on **Monday 12 March**, at the Royal Oak (as above). The meeting will be held in the upstairs room and should start at 7.00 pm. All SPBW members are welcome to attend. This is usually a short business meeting, unburdened by pomposity. It's a good excuse to bring SPBW members together for a few beers and a chat. The full range of Harvey's award winning ales will be available and solid refreshment will also be provided.

The Royal Oak is off Borough High Street, between Long Lane and Great Dover Street. Borough tube station is just a couple of minutes away and London Bridge station is within half a mile.

Anyone who'd like to volunteer for a post on the NEC should contact John Rooth (details page 2).

TWICKENHAM BREWERY

We have arranged a visit to Twickenham Brewery on the evening of **Monday 26 February**. There will be a charge of £5 each. Please send your fiver (cheques to SPBW please) to John Rooth (see page 2) if you want to come along – but hurry as few places are left.

For those who are coming: be at the Brewery in Edwin Road for 7.00. There are 2 nearby Fullers pubs, both open all day and both in the Good beer guide: Prince Albert -30 Hampton Road -adjacent to Twickenham Green TW2 5QB (kitchen closed 3.00 - 5.00); Prince Blucher 124 The Green (Twickenham Green) TW2 5AG (food all day). We suggest meeting in the Prince Albert first for those who want to eat before 3.00 and move to the Prince Blucher (which is slightly nearer to the brewery) for 4.00; leave for the brewery at about 6.40.

For any early arrivals, tourers, travellers & tickers, The Fox, 39 Church Street, Twickenham is also recommended.

LONDON PUB OF THE YEAR

The Pembury Tavern in Hackney was voted the SPBW's best pub in London (see last issue) and all that was left was to present the award. This was done on 22 January with a good crowd of our members along for an entertaining evening. The massed paparazzi from PiH and the Hackney Gazette flashed away as Mike Hall pretended to hand over the award to Steve Early, the winning landlord. The real presentation was done half an hour later and Steve expressed his delight at winning such a prestigious award (not his actual words!) within the pub's first year in its present incarnation. A fair old selection of beers were on tap, mostly from Milton Brewery with guests from Cottage and Caledonian and Richard Naisby, brewery and head honcho from Milton was also present.

As a special bonus we were invited to take part in a judging session on 13 bottled beers from East Anglian breweries (but not from Milton!). This was an interesting experience in which most of us participated with some enthusiasm.



Steve (left) and Mike in presentation pose

With the 2007 contest wrapped up we can now think ahead to the next competition. We'll officially launch this from the May PiH but branches and individual members in Greater London should start thinking about likely candidates to be nominated.

BEER & CURRY SUNDAY

Sample the delights of London's bustling East End and expand your waistline! Suspend your healthy lifestyle just for a day – **Sunday 11 March** to be precise. Kick off at the Coborn Arms, Coborn Road (off Mile End Road) from noon for Young's prize Bedford beers. The Black Bull in Whitechapel (Nethergate ales) from 14.00 followed by the Pride of Spitalfields in Heneage Street at 16.00. After our three halves each we jog round the corner to Brick Lane for some ethnic cuisine. All our welcome; it would be helpful if you could let John Rooth know if you're coming along.

NATIONAL WEEKEND

The 2006 Weekend in and around the Black Country was a great success – read all about it later in this issue. This year's big bash will probably be held a bit further north with brewery visits to Titanic in Burslem and Woodlands of Wrenbury as the centrepiece. This will be in November and we will confirm the date and other details in the next issue.

SUMMER BEER & BUFFET

One of the highlights of the SPBW calendar is the annual summer social at the Wenlock Arms – the combination of a range of eight excellent ales and Alasdair Boyd's fine cuisine being a winning combination, as well a good warm up for the Great British Beer Festival. This year's session will occur on Monday 6 August; cost is just a fiver as usual and, also as usual, John Rooth will look forward to receiving cheques (made out to SPBW please).

PAST EVENTS

The **43rd Anniversary** event on 6 December at the Royal Oak was very well attended. The 30 or so crammed into the upstairs room included a number of members down from Yorkshire for the Pig's Ear festival as well as more familiar faces from Ipswich and Sawbridgeworth. As ever a sumptuous spread was provided and consumed with great gusto, washed down by copious draughts of Harvey's excellent ales. Christmas Ale was making its first appearance of the season and a few brave souls tackled this 8.2% brew. The raffle was as popular as ever and raised useful funds. This event replaced the 33rd Anniversary celebration erroneously publicised in the last issue.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

In the less hi-tech production days, PiH covers tended to be illustrations nicked from any likely source. So it was that the cover of the February 1997 issue featured a drawing of the Lamb Inn at Burford, Oxfordshire. I guess this might be a Wadworth pub but it was certainly not otherwise referred to inside, or indeed in any other issue up until now. It certainly looks like a nice traditional rural pub from the outside.

'Somerset' Mark Bonson provided one of his early contributions, lamenting the demise of the Plough at Harefield which ceased trading after 140 years. Mark highlighted a variety of reasons why rural pubs were having difficulties and called on members to support such houses. The deserved success of pubs like the Swan at Little Totham and the Bhurtpore Inn in Cheshire proves it doesn't have to be all bad news.

MEET THE NEC

Dave Samuel

Hello, I'm the latest in a short line of SPBW Product Managers. I have been asked to write about myself. I can't remember being asked that before. Maybe I did it at primary school. That was a long time ago. I left there in 1970. Then came secondary school. Did I write about myself there? I still can't remember being asked. Oh well, I can't put it off any longer, so here goes.

In 1975, after leaving secondary school, I went to work for the GPO/British Telecom as an apprentice telephone engineer. After 29 years of working in various BT departments, I escaped and I am between jobs at the moment. Anyway, to the beer...

My first real ales were Young's Special and Fuller's London Pride in the late 1970's. Since then, I have consumed a variety of others but I don't keep a check of how many. I joined CAMRA in the 1980's and the SPBW in 2004. I enjoy going to beer festivals and pubs around England. My local is the Andover Arms, Hammersmith, where they serve an excellent pint of Chiswick Bitter and the rest of the Fuller's range.

Now, what else was I going to say? I've done the school bit. I've done the work bit. I've done the beer bit.

Interests other than beer? Bird watching is one of these and I am a member of the RSPB and the WWT. Also, I like various types of music, books and films but not necessarily the music from the film of the book. Photography, computers and the internet fit somewhere in my interests too. Not forgetting, I have been told I make excellent pickled eggs.

Anyway, that's all for now. I've got to go and think about some new products. And, for what it's worth, I don't smoke, I don't drive but I do own a television! So there, too! (Apologies to John and Roger)

Douglas Airey

I am sad to report that one of our members, Doug Airey passed away over Christmas. Doug had suffered a stroke, but because of his love of life, and indomitable spirit, he had managed to fight himself back to mobility. With the aid of his motorised buggy, he was thus still able to get to the pub. As well as the SPBW, Doug did a lot of work for Camra, recently in the Dorset area, but for many years in the West Middlesex branch. He was a regular worker at the GBBF and Beer on Broadway. Doug was a leading light in a social group, known as The Ring, which has been meeting to tour pubs once a month on Saturdays for over 40 years. Indeed he used to set the itinerary for many of these excursions. Doug was also a member of Camal (Campaign for authentic lager), on whose trips his penchant for missing the last train and ending up in some very strange places, usually with the assistance of the local police has become the fuel of legend.

He was a good friend, and a great character with many other interests apart from real ale (notably QPR and Rugby Union). We shall all miss him. Doug was pre-deceased by his wife Jean earlier this year.

John Rooth

THE PERFECT PUB PAGE

All contributions to this feature welcome as ever. No particular choice this time, but try the Pembury Tavern or any of the Black Country pubs mentioned if you can.

GOOD BEER GUIDE GERMANY

Steve Thomas, CAMRA Books, 2006. ISBN 1852492198. £16.99

This is a very comprehensive and detailed book, which will be invaluable to anyone interested in German beer and will provide good guidance for all visitors. The author must be congratulated on a tremendous feat of compilation - a phenomenal amount of research must have gone into it. The presentation is excellent with the information on breweries, beers and pubs laid out in an easy-to-read format. Coverage is limited to the essentials, but even so the book has 575 pages! Ownership, output and contact details are included for each brewery, together with all the beers brewed with strengths and seasonal availability; and in addition, for the brewery tap, opening times and public transport tips are given.

The listing of the 1250 or so German breweries, their beers and their brewery taps (most German breweries have a main pub outlet) takes up the bulk of this new guide. The breweries are listed alphabetically by town within chapters for each state of Germany. It might have been better if Bavaria could have been sub-divided further as this is the largest state and has the most breweries. There is a further most useful chapter devoted to the pubs of various towns and cities that are of interest to the beer drinker. This contains a lot more detail on individual pubs in Bamberg, Berlin Cologne and Munich amongst others. The photographs are also very good, although not all are captioned.

Extending the British Good Beer Guide concept to other countries brings a few problems. The GBG features pubs in Britain where "good" beer (equated to Real Ale or cask-conditioned beer) is presented in excellent condition – it's very selective! In Germany all beer is brewery-conditioned and most pubs have no problem in presenting it in good condition, so this book gives you the basic information to enable you to seek out "good" German pubs and beers for yourself. The author has named some of his personal favourites and you could do worse than follow these up.

The maps are a disappointment. The city maps are fine but the state maps have only the reference number from the text for each brewery marked and no towns or cities are named. Whilst some handy travel and tourist information is included on this book, there is no attempt to address the recent history and politics of the German brewing industry.

Overall, an essential reference book. It can be ordered online at www.camra.org.uk

John Conen

MEET the BRANCHES

Most social activities in the Society take place within branches so it makes sense to get involved with one. You're sure to get a good welcome and most branches prefer to keep things very informal. Details of our branches are listed below; if there isn't one in your area you are welcome to start one! Bill English, (Branch Liaison Officer, address on page 2), will be pleased to tell you what you need to know. We will be happy to put you in touch with other local members.

One of our regular contributors, Somerset Mark, is interested in getting a branch going. Anyone living within about 50 miles of Bath who would like to get involved, please contact Bill and he'll pass your name on.

BMAD: Meetings held first Thursday of each month at the **Burnt Mill Snooker and Social Club** (CIU affiliated) in Harlow, Essex. Contact Tony Syrett (01279 423174)

CAMPDEN HILL: Meetings held first Monday of each month at the **Wargrave Arms**, Brendon Street (off Edgware Road). Contact John Rooth (see page 2).

CENTRAL LONDON: Meetings held on the 18th of each month mostly in the form of pub evaluation walks - usually in central London. Contact Roger West (see page 2).

CHESAPEAKE BAY: Based in the area around Baltimore, Maryland USA - a great area for microbrews and brewpubs. Contact Dominic Cantalupo, email DominicCantalupo@ChampionRealty.com. Website: www.spbw.org.

CHESHIRE REAL ALE PEOPLE: This dubiously-acronymed crew are based mainly around the Crewe/Nantwich area. The emphasis is on the social side with trips planned in the near future. Contact Colin Donald 01270 623376 email colinsdonald@aol.com.

COATE: Meetings held third Friday of each month at the **New Inn**, Coate, near Devizes. Contact Eric Clark (ericclark@aol.com) or email coate@spbw.com.

COMMON & ALDBRICKHAM: Meetings now held in Reading at the **Retreat**, 8 St Johns Street, every Sunday from 2.30. Contact Peter Smith 01189 670647.

IPSWICH: The branch appears to be up and running. Contact Phil (01473 644923) or Iain (01473 251586).

KINGSTON: Meetings held first Wednesday of each month in the **Willoughby Arms**, 47 Willoughby Road. Contact Rick at the Willoughby [020 8546 4236]; or our website: www.spbwkingston.co.uk.

MAYDAY (Hastings): Based at the *First In Last Out* brewpub, 14-15 High Street. Contact Helen or Tony Champion at the pub on 01424 425079 for further details.

NORTHERN IRELAND: Contact Mark Hutchinson for details of meetings and events: marksalehousecom@hotmail.com

PONDS: Time and place of meetings varies but usually in Carshalton area. Contact Dave Hamer (020 8395 8716 or email dehamer@tiscali.co.uk .

RACS: The Real Ale Club of Sawbridgeworth meets last Wednesday of each month at The Gate, London Road. Contact Jan Mead (01279 864398) or email meadspanner@aol.com.

SPECIAL: The branch holds annual, week-long gatherings around the inland waterways network. There are also unofficial visits to pubs of renown in London, Cheshire and Shropshire, or wherever we happen to be. Check our website at: www.geocities.com/canalnav/SPBW1.html

WANTZ: Meetings are held third Monday of the month at the *Pembury Tavern*, 90 Amhurst Road, Hackney, starting at around 7.30 pm. Contact Roger Jacobson (see page 2).

WEST RIDING: Meets on Sunday mornings in various pubs in and around Leeds. Contact Graham Hewitt (0113 2624574; graham-hewitt@tiscali.co.uk) for further details.

WOOLWICH: Meetings held first Thursday of each month in Greenwich or Woolwich or sometimes in central London. Contact Bill Smith (020 8310 5907).

Are the details for your branch correct on these pages? If not please the Editor know before the deadline for the next issue; thanks!

SPBW WEBSITE

The SPBW Members Forum is still going strong at www.spbw.com/bb. The Bulletin Board is intended as a way for members to exchange information. It's very easy to get involved with and, as with most things, the more the merrier. We are particularly keen to see representatives of branches acting as moderators to help keep their sections up to date.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

If you want to receive up to the minute news about SPBW events, you can get this information in the comfort of your own PC monitor. Send your email address to John Rooth and he will add you to his circulation list. We promise that your email details will only be used for the transmission of SPBW material.

BRANCHES IN ACTION

BMAD spend a weekend in Brussels and beyond in October, enjoying the delights of Belgian beers. A more detailed account should appear in the next issue.

Campden Hill branch ate its annual NOT the Christmas meal at the Greek restaurant Kleftico in Shepherds Bush in November, preceded by a visit to the Young's pub, the Brook Green Tavern in Hammersmith. The Mezes was very substantial, but helped by large amounts of Greek wine; we were able to just manage it. 2 days earlier our Chairman Mike Hall celebrated a notable milestone or should that be millstone. Ken Livingstone gave him the freedom of the City, which he may have mentioned. The December meeting was a social at the Fullers house, the Salutation in King Street, Hammersmith. The beer was very good and the pub pleasantly quiet.

This years AGM was at the excellent Harp in Covent Garden, where a cock-up with the room hire was more than compensated for by offer of a free pint. We shall be touring the haunts of Dylan Thomas and the Bloomsbury group around Fitzrovia, a report of which will appear in May. The Keith Hudson darts trophy will be held at the Sekforde arms on Thursday 22 February.

Recent **RACS** events included a Burns Night Bash on 28 January and a Valentine Quiz on 11 February. Three forthcoming events take place at the worth-a-vist Queen's Head at Allens Green: a Raclings Easter Egg Hunt on 21 April, a BBQ on 19 May and a Games Day against Camra on 21 July. Back at the Gate, there's the first Sawbridgeworth Easter Bunny Beer Festival from 5 – 9 April with 50 beers available; and a St George's Day Bash on 22 April - from 7.00pm onwards - the usual superb English fare of steak and ale pie and Morris Dancers. Finally the AGM is on 30 May.

Special Branch held its second Bill Wadley Memorial reunion at the inevitable Royal Oak in October, with 40 odd old members and friends packing out the place. Planning is getting underway for our 2007 canal gathering, starting in the depths of Worcestershire.

Wantz branch paid another return visit to Singburi, an excellent Thai café in Leytonstone High Street; a friendly little place with good food. If you want to wash your meal down with beers from obscure Baltic states, try the offie next door but one. Coming up is another evening drinking beers from a less esoteric origin, namely Belgium, at the Dove Tail in Clerkenwell (7 March) and a pub walk in the Oxford Street/Soho area (4 April). After 17 years or so meeting at the Britannia in Barking, we've shifted our HQ to the award winning Pembury Tavern in Hackney.

West Riding branch held a meeting on the coach heading through North Yorkshire towards a beer festival at Leyburn rugby club. We then travelled the short distance into Leyburn, then to Masham, then Knaresborough and visited the George and Dragon and Blind Jacks. Both had a better choice of beers and this made a good end to our day out in North Yorkshire. On 10 February there was a trip to Cameron's Brewery.

We are very sad to announce that a long standing member, Frank Woffenden, died suddenly on 5 November, whilst out walking in the countryside. It was his passion for walking and football that kept him away from most of our meetings but he was a real ale drinker and true supporter of the SPBW; he will be greatly missed.

OUT OF THE BLUE INTO THE BLACK

The 2006 National Weekend

The SPBW Weekend brought together 20 or so members from around the country to enjoy the delights of the Black Country and beyond. Most of us were based in Wolverhampton for the duration although we did relatively little of our beer consumption here. By far the best pub in town is the **Great Western** in Sun Street, behind and below the rail station and accessed via a subway and a fairly treacherous path. If you can survive the short walk the Great Western is a true gem, with various drinking areas and plenty of rail memorabilia on show. The pub offers the full Holdens range plus Bathams bitter and sometimes other guests. Food is highly rated here too. Another excellent pub can be found outside the city centre: the **Newhampton** in Riches Street is very close to where many of us were staying and is a classic multi-roomed pub with stained glass windows. A good choice of beers was on offer and, again, good food was to be had. In sunnier days you can play crown green bowls outside – there's even a separate bar for players and spectators. A quick mention of the **Combermere Arms**, close to Banks brewery – to which it's tied - by the ring road with its three small rooms around the bar area and a tree growing in the gents!

The main event of the weekend was the Friday evening visit to Highgate brewery in Walsall (there's more about the brewery elsewhere in this issue). Our hosts here were three members of the Friends of Highgate Brewery, a kind of fan club, who made sure we were well supplied with ale. As well as Highgate dark mild we could also try Davenports bitter, as well as a 5.35% dark Old Ale.

Saturday was taken up by a bus tour of a select group of classic Black Country pubs. Thanks to a very reliable bus service we completed the route to schedule with no one accidentally left behind. First stop was Brierley Hill where there was time for a walk down the Delph flight of locks on the Dudley Canal en route to the **Vine** (or Bull & Bladder). This is Batham's brewery tap, and a pub which all beer lovers should visit. Few pubs have such a striking frontage and it's equally impressive inside. There's a cosy front bar and a much larger back room, both to the right of a long corridor. There are also two separate rooms to the left which are slightly plusher, one of which has a no smoking section. Mild and bitter, both at under £2 a pint were both excellent and the substantial baguettes at a quid a go provided good value ballast. It's hardly any surprise that a few of our group decided to linger here when most of us moved on. In fact it was very much worthwhile stirring ourselves as the 283 bus took us to Netherton, dropping us just across the road from the **Olde Swan**. Popularly known as Doris Pardoe's (she ran the pub from 1952 – 1984) this was one of the last few surviving brew pubs in the early 1970s. Brewing ceased in 1988 and the pub has had a few owners since but has now been restored to its former glory with the brewery back in action since 2001. There is a fairly basic front bar on the right side of the building with an excellent snug round the back. The left hand section of the pub seems to be a more recent addition and has a more modern design. It also boasts a Hammond organ so presumably musical entertainment is provided. Four house brewed beers

were on offer, again at prices to make most of us weep. Olde Swan bitter cost just £1.60 for instance; there was also a mild, best bitter and a strong ale. Beware that the hand pumps do not have clips so look out for the beer list on the chalk board behind the bar.

Next stop was the least impressive on the tour: the **Park Inn** at Woodsetton, Holden's brewery tap. Set back off the main Sedgley Road, the pub looked a bit dingy from the outside, whereas it was evidently quite newly and substantially refurbished inside. Onwards to Lower Gornal where we tried two pubs close together in the town centre. The **Old Bulls Head** is the home of the Black Country Brewery, which began life in 2004. The pub boasts its own tower brewery dating from 1834 though brewing ceased 100 years later. Two or three Black Country beers were available plus one guest. A hundred yards up the hill is the **Fountain**, a free house with about nine draught beers on offer mostly from outside the region.



Great Western, Wolverhampton



Olde Swan, Netherton

From Lower to Upper Gornal and another Batham's house, the Britannia on Kent Street. This is a fairly small place divided into four rooms. Most impressive is the wood panelled tap room and there's also a 'parlour' tucked away at the back. The pub was bustling with locals enjoying the mild and bitter and who were happy to welcome us. The final pub of the day ensured we finished on a high note. The **Beacon Hotel** on Bilston Road in Sedgley is another 'must visit' pub. Renowned as the home of Sara Hughes brewery it's another multi-roomed pub, the four drinking areas radiating around an island bar with its snob screens. This arrangement means you have to bend down to order – as well as ask which beers are available since the hand pumps are obscured. The best known of the house beers is of course Ruby Mild (6%) and a Chocolate Stout of similar strength was also on tap. For those less bent on brain damage, there two bitters; all the beers were highly drinkable. Unusually, the beer is served in handled jugs. As well as the pubs mentioned, John Rooth and other 'tickers' took the opportunity to visit other GBG listed pubs in the areas we visited.

Sunday was another fine day and the bulk of the party decided to head north west into Shropshire to visit Oakengates, now part of the Telford conurbation. A few minutes walk from the station in Market Street we found the two GBG listed pubs, the **Station Hotel** and the **Crown**, directly opposite each other. The Station was our first call, for the simple reason that it opens at 11 of a

Sunday and noon was 40 minutes distant when we arrived. This is a fairly basic pub with two rooms at right angles. There are 8 handpumps on the bar dispensing a varied range of beers from small breweries. These tended to be above 4%, with the exception of Salopian Shropshire Gold, not necessarily a good idea on a Sunday morning with two days solid imbibing behind us. But I was particularly impressed with the Thornbridge Jaipur IPA (5.9%) from near Bakewell in Derbyshire and everybody seemed satisfied with what they were drinking.

Across the road, the Crown was a bit more spacious but no less welcoming and with a beer range to match. Thankfully there were a few more lower gravity beers including at least one mild. The Crown dates from the 1830s and went through various owners until it fell into the dreaded clutches of Greenall Whitley, who closed it down in 1994. A year later John Ellis bought the pub, reopened it and is still the landlord, taking great pride in his business. There are regular beer festivals on March and October, using special banks of 20 handpumps, along with a variety of community events.

It was a shame to have to move on but further delights were at hand a few stops back down the line. **Codsall Station** is a pub converted from the station buildings on the northbound platform in 2000 by Holdens. This is a splendid place, an excellent example of otherwise redundant buildings converted to licensed premises. Inevitably, railway memorabilia abounds throughout the drinking areas and train spotters can look out at the tracks while sampling the well kept ales. We arrived in time to be told that the kitchen had closed for lunch, but the bar staff took pity on us (or calculated what they could make from a dozen or so of us!) and provided hot baps with fries, definitely needed to soak up the beer.

Back in Wolverhampton we visited a few more pubs in the city centre before the party had to split up further. The really hardy types were staying over another night but everyone agreed the weekend had been another real winner.

RJ

THE WALSALL CONCERTO – THE ALTERNATIVE WEEKEND

Most participants in the National Weekend elected to stay in Wolverhampton whereas Clive, Dave and I were anti-social and stayed in the beautiful market town of Walsall. The tour got off to a bad start when Clive was delayed by a domestic problem and Dave and I left Euston without him. In Walsall we checked in the not so Royal Hotel; this has seen better days but the rooms were more than adequate and I think it was for the first time in my life I had ever had a microwave oven in my room.

After a wash and brush up we headed back to the station to catch a train to Bloxwich in order to begin our evening drinking. As we were about to depart Clive emerged from London and shouting across the platforms we agreed we would wait for him in The Turf Tavern. We arrived in the pub just after opening time and after a five minute wait a trim middle aged lady appeared behind the bar clutching a cup of tea. She apologised for the delay and pulled up a couple of pints of Holdens Black Country Bitter as requested by me. Once we

were seated she asked us where we came from and warned us photography was banned in the pub should we have cameras. We alerted her to the fact that a little man dressed like a Gestapo officer would be arriving later and he had a camera hidden in his hat. Ten minutes later Clive arrived and before he had taken a sup of his beer he was asked whether he had a camera or not. We had one more pint here and then had two more of the same at The Lamp Tavern, a run down but very friendly pub where the beer was in top notch condition.

We then headed back to Walsall and caught a taxi to The Rose and Crown. Here we drank two excellent pints of Black Country Bradley's Finest Golden. The pub is a grade two listed building, very friendly, and well worth searching out. A taxi ride back to our hotel and fish and chips from the chippy opposite ended the day.

Friday dawned overcast. As the visit to Highgate Brewery was not until 7pm we had to decide how to pass the day. So it was off to Worcester. We arrived in pouring rain and took in some culture and shelter in the local museum. Our first hostelry visit was to Hook Norton's Cap'n'Gown where I tried HN's Flagship Bitter (5.3%) whilst the others tried something a little less challenging. Next we tried the upmarket Green Man and a very good pint of Malvern Hills Black Pear. Dave noted he had bought the most expensive round of the trip with the beer at £2.50 a pint. Our last stop was in The Dragon Inn. Easily Worcester's best pub. A great range of beers and some exotic food. Anyone fancy slow boiled snail and chips? Here I opted for Oakham 3 Witches and Beowulf Dragon Smoke. Back to Walsall and time for a quick sloosh before heading for The Walsall Arms where I had arranged to meet Titanic Bob and his young lady. Here we all tried Snowy Peak from The Red Brick Brewery. We, at the time could not get any information about the beer or the brewery, but I later found out via Malcolm Carter that it is brewed at Marston's. So we headed for Highgate Brewery where we were regally looked after with lots of good ale and a very nice buffet. After a very informative brewery visit we were invited to take part in a beer related quiz and a team comprising of Jo and Titanic Bob, Clive and myself romped home as easy winners. Our prize? A pack of beer and an invite to organise next years Members Weekend.

On Saturday the SPBW members were to be taken on a tour of The Black Country's most famous pubs ably led by Roger Jacobson. We elected to go with them to The Vine (also known as The Bull and Bladder) but then would do our own thing just to prove how unsociable we could be. The pub was full of WBA supporters prior to their home game against Burnley but we were comfortable and still there when the fans had left and the members departed for the next pub on their tour. After 3 excellent pints we left Brierley Hill and headed to The Lamp Tavern at Dudley for some more Bathams. Our last port of call was to The Waggon and Horses at Tipton which is home to the Toll End Brewery. We spent a happy couple of hours here downing such ales as Highgate Gnats, Worfield Ironbridge IPA and Toll End Phoebe's Ale. It was freezing outside when we caught the bus back to Walsall. Dave and I went to the local Wetherspoons with a view to a meal but Clive elected to take some fish and chips back to his room. He always seems happier eating on his bed

or out of a bucket! The JDW house was crowded and food was not available. We tried the Oakleaf Piston Porter which was ok. When was the last time you were pissed on? Talking of buckets we did try a balti house on our first night, not fish and chips as previously stated, and we were not disappointed. The starters may have been a bit dubious but the main course was fine. We did order a bottle of red wine and got great entertainment watching the manager trying to open it. After 15 minutes he gave up. When we entered the restaurant at 23.30 it was empty but by 00.30 it was buzzing. Walsall has some great pubs and clubs with no less than 7 entries in the GBG 2007. It also has a high street butcher by the name of Poxon and a deli by the name of N.E.Sandwich. Only one stabbing over the weekend as far as we know and just a little blood spilt. The transport system works well and a £4.50 all day rover ticket covering buses, trams and trains is a bargain. It is possible Porter Tours could pitch up here sometime in 2007. Happy Imbibing.

FBP

BORN TO BE MILD

The Highgate Brewery in Walsall is a grade 2 listed, Victorian tower brewery, deemed modern when brewing commenced here on 1 July 1899. Up to the 1920s a lot of the brewery's machinery including the malt mill (originating from Dresden), hoist and cask washing machine, was driven by a steam engine on the ground floor. In 1914 Highgate became famous for employing what was reputed to be the first ever woman head brewer - Agnes Mountfield who remained until 1939. Horse drawn drays were used for deliveries until 1927.

Highgate Brewery and its 50 pubs were purchased by Mitchells and Butlers of Cape Hill, Smethwick in July 1939. M&B had intended to close the brewery and transfer production to Cape Hill; however Hitler's invasion of Poland enabled Highgate to continue brewing. The declaration of war meant a shortage of raw materials and each brewery was rationed accordingly. By keeping Highgate Brewery open and operating, an additional ration of hops and malt was gained.

Highgate beers quickly became popular in M&B's own estate of pubs and production grew to a peak of 2000 barrels per annum in the 1960s. Later, however, the bottling of ales and spirits was discontinued, as was the brewing of bitter. Brewing was then focused on Highgate Mild and a low gravity mild, (nicknamed 'smackers', this was a result of experiments to make raw materials last longer throughout the war), together with the seasonally brewed and enormously popular Old Ale. The latter brew was later discontinued and replaced by Butlers Old Ale, enabling Highgate to meet the ever-growing demand for its Mild.



Some of Highgate's traditional equipment, including the malt mill (left)

Highgate continued to prosper up to the early 1970s when the national trend for lighter bitter ales and the introduction of lagers, along with a reduction in heavy industry and changes in lifestyle all took their toll. Cask racking ended in 1982 and job losses resulted in a reduction of staff from a level of 65 in the brewery's hey day to just 22. Bass gave up attempting to promote Highgate Mild in 1985 and staff were cut further to a mere 12, including a brewing team, nicknamed "the nine men of Highgate", who could boast 180 years of brewing experience and expertise between them.

Years of rumours seemed to be confirmed when, in late 1995, the closure of Highgate Brewery, then the smallest brewery in the mighty Bass brewing empire, was announced. At the eleventh hour former Bass marketing manager Steve Nuttall, and Neil Bain, Highgate's current Brewing Director, headed a buy out team negotiating a £600,000 rescue. The new management set about bringing the brewery into the modern market place by extending the range of cask beers and for the first time ever putting Highgate beers into kegs to jump on the 'smooth-flow' bandwagon. More recently Highgate has commenced brewing Davenports beers - last brewed at Bath Row in Birmingham in 1987 - to original recipes, reviving a local brew thought to be lost forever. Highgate was bought by Birmingham based Aston Manor Brewery in 2000, a move that has led to the upgrading of plant at the brewery, and the provision of funding to enable Highgate to start to rebuild a pub estate – it now owns 10 pubs and supplies some 200 outlets in all.

HAMSTERS LURCHERS AND VAMPIRES

Andy's Roving Report

North Yorkshire Coast

At the start of December, a carload of us were ferried about the inns of the North Riding of Yorkshire and an excellent day out it was. One of the hostelries that we called in at was the ***Captain Cook*** in Staithes, a most picturesque coastal village to the north of Whitby. The Captain Cook stands at the top of the hill on Staithes Hill and used to be the Station Hotel. The old station building stand just to the east of the pub and the route of the (long

disused) railway is plain to see. I think the line was closed about 1960 but I don't insist upon it.

As befits a former station hotel, the Captain Cook is a substantial edifice and is split into different rooms and areas, the central bit facing the bar having a slightly raised wooden floor. The dining room and games room are separated from the bar. The walls are mainly covered with a gigantic collection of pump clips along with articles and photographs of local historical interest. Some reviews on various websites refer to it as being a bit smoky, but I never noticed this.

As for beers, this hostelry probably has the most varied selection for miles around and hosts regular beer festivals. One our visit (midweek) we had a choice of Nick Stafford's Nightmare Porter and Burton Bridge Golden Delicious; the latter costing £1.90 a pint.

The pub is a regular live music venue and also offers good value accommodation, two of the rooms being en-suite. I have often remarked adversely on some of the entries in the Good Beer Guide, but the Captain Cook is worthy of its inclusion. A must to visit, so go there now! Immediately!

Lindum

I received a yuletide summons from Sue, instructing me to meet her in Lincoln and quoting the old adage "it is better to give than receive". Taking the hint I loaded down a few packhorses with precious metals and jewels and trekked over the Wolds to the Cathedral city.

Upon arrival I found that Sue had brought along her hamster, a colossus of its kind. Observing its habitual inertia, I remarked that it would make a nice fur duvet. Sue expressed her opposition to this opinion by jumping up and down on my ribcage, accompanied by said rodent who had awoken in wrath. After I received treatment from the paramedics, we entered the portals of the **Strugglers** (which I mentioned in PiH 87), a former Bass house next to the castle walls on Westgate. The pub's name refers to the public executions that took place nearby. The Strugglers has, or had, a phantom pooch as well, being a lurcher belonging to one William Clark (or Slenderman), a poacher who was hanged in Lincoln Castle on 26 March 1877 for the murder of Henry Walker, gamekeeper. The dog was kept at the pub whilst its owner was awaiting trial and sentencing. After Clark's execution the dog pined away and returned after death to scratch at the door of the pub. Intriguingly, one can still definitely see the dog in the flesh, as its stuffed remains comprise one of the exhibits in the castle!

The Strugglers now has no less than seven handpumps dispensing a fair variety of beers. I usually go for the Fullers London Pride here, as it has been quite superior on past visits. Sue laid claim to a table in the tiny snug, whilst I forced my way through the crowd in the diminutive tap room. I noticed that Tetley's mild was available also, so I got a half of Pride and a half of mild along with the same measure of lemonade for Sue. This came to £3.20, which I call dear. It wasn't the only expensive place though – try the Morning Star on Greetwell Gate where Well's Bombardier was £2.45 a pint. Rather more economical were the prices in the Treaty of Commerce, a Bateman house of narrow frontage on High Street near to the railway station. Here the XB was better value at £2.10 and a decent pint indeed.

How High the Moon

The West Riding branch of the Society have their Yule do around the end of December, the host pub being the **Grove** on Back Row, Leeds. (Head south of the railway station, walk across Victoria Bridge and over Water lane: Back Row is on the right shortly after. Alternatively, just walk towards the tallest building in Leeds and the Grove is next to it.) The Grove possesses a 'West Riding' type of layout, with four rooms interlinked by a corridor. Apart from having about half a dozen different beers it is also one of Leeds' best known live music venues, notwithstanding the smallness of the rooms. The local folk club has met here for over 40 years and all the rooms can be used for ad hoc sessions of all different kinds of music.

Howbeit, I attended the soiree this year and was amazed to find a host of bank managers and financial advisors dancing around a top hatted and fur coated figure in their midst. Pushing them aside, I gazed upon the visage of Les Moon, formerly of the One Eyed Rat and other pubs of fame. Leaping aboard my soapbox, I got only as far as "miser and vampire" before the mob began to bay at me and I realised that I was surrounded by Moon worshippers ("Oh Moon" they croon). Happily for me, Les's braces (spring loaded steel to deal with the weight of his money belt) gave way and scythed a swathe through the crowd, enabling me to flee. In passing I quaffed some of Daleside Brewery's incredibly nice Chocolate Stout, which I recommend to all.



The Last Word – from Epsom

I'm sure you all know that the SPBW was founded back in 1963 at the Rising Sun, Epsom. The pub was then a Charrington house but in more recently owned by David Roberts of the Pilgrim Brewery. Last year however the Rising Sun was bought by Youngs as part of their ever expanding estate. The pub had changed from its traditional two-bar layout to a more modern, café-style, to its detriment I think, and there were inevitable grumbles about the loss of the previous beer range to that of Wells-Youngs. However, I am reassured by Tom Hutchings, Young's Director of Tenancies, that, "after a sympathetic refurbishment" the Rising Sun will "continue to offer superb quality cask ales on draught in conjunction with our outstanding tenants, Debbie and John Baker". Go and see for yourself.

Some back issues of *Pint in Hand* are available:- numbers 43; 44; 46-51; 53-54; 60-62; 70- 71; 74; 76; 79; 84-100. These can be obtained from the Editor (address on page 2) in return for fifteen second class stamps to cover postage for the full set. If you don't want the whole lot, send enough stamps you think may cover costs.

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Sweatshirts <i>(Woven motif on royal blue/burgundy/jade, XL only)</i>	£15.00
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The award winning Pembury Tavern, Hackney