

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

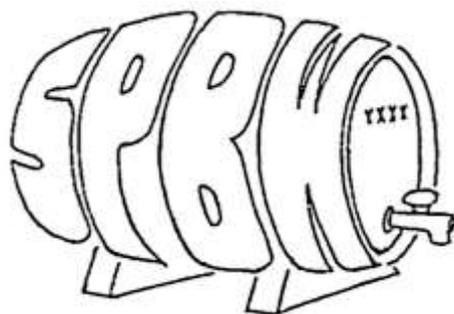
PINT in HAND

Number 103

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Eagle & Child, Staveley, Cumbria (see page 18)



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 November 2007 issue should reach the Editor by **20 October**.
- 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

Twice in recent weeks I've read about some committee or another that's been paid to look into the horrors of binge drinking and come up with the idea that the solution is a swingeing tax increase on alcoholic drinks. You have to wonder what sort of planet these people live on. It seems that there is some 'culture', particularly amongst young people, of drinking to excess, even unto oblivion. Just how widespread this is I've no idea; needless to say it only gets media coverage when there's drunken rioting in the early hours in downtown Nuneaton.

Now I'm pretty certain that if I were a lad again and wanted to get to get pissed, lashed, sozzled, befuddled and generally intoxicated in short order I don't think I'd sit in a pub drinking low gravity draught ales. Low priced booze (with quality to match) is easily available in supermarkets and in most town and city centres it should be able to find bars aimed at young pissheads offering happy hours and cheap deals on spirits. Surely these should be the targets of any reforms. I'm sure all the pubs frequented by SPBW members (for all of whom, I'm sure, moderation is a byword) are bastions of civility, run by responsible publicans. If everyone drank sensibly in such a controlled, yet relaxed, environment, the world would be a better place. A hefty price increase would simply drive a lot of customers out of pubs and provide no kind of solution to the original problem.

I enjoy visiting the north of England and drinking (sensibly!) in the pubs there. So it's with some trepidation to raise the one slightly irksome feature of local imbibing: the custom of serving the beers through swan necks and tight sparklers. For one thing, it's an amazingly inefficient way of serving beer with no apparent benefit to the consumer. Here we come to the thorny problem of the merits of a head on a pint. Chuck out the swan neck and the sparkler, give two steady pulls on the hand pump, plus an extra bit to top up and there is your pint with some natural foam on top to indicate the beer is properly conditioned. How do all the extra paraphernalia and head retentive chemicals actually improve the beer? Plus of course you may well have an inch or more of froth, meaning a short measure, so either you keep schtum and get ripped off or be obliged to politely ask for a top up (but do so – only bad bar staff in a duff pub will refuse). It's a sad state of affairs that many publicans are virtually ordered by the pub owners to steal from the public in this way to make a living. Elsewhere in this issue I write about my annual canal trip which this year took in parts of Worcestershire. Barely a week or so later much of this area was submerged in the dreadful floods. My sympathy goes out to any member affected. Let's also consider the numerous pubs where the premises and stock have been ruined, and the small breweries similarly afflicted. This may be a relatively trivial matter compared to the many human tragedies, but it's close to our hearts. Let's hope that life can quickly return to normality.

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.

LONDON PUB OF THE YEAR

Thanks to all branches and individuals who have nominated pubs: here are the pubs to be judged:

Bricklayers Arms, Putney
Dog & Bell, Deptford
Eel Pie, Twickenham
Harp, Covent Garden
Jerusalem Tavern, Clerkenwell
Old Mitre, Holborn
Priory Arms, Stockwell
Richard 1, Greenwich
Royal Oak, Borough
Speaker, Westminster
Star Tavern, Belgravia
Sultan, South Wimbledon
Trafalgar, South Wimbledon
Wenlock Arms, Hoxton
Willoughby Arms, Kingston

A longer list than in previous years and an interesting selection of pubs from various corners of the capital. Judging sessions will take place from late August and the winning pub will be decided at the beginning of November. Details, including date of the presentation, will be in the November issue. In the meantime check out our website to see how the judges are getting on. Thanks to Bill English for organising.

BEER AND BUFFET

Our autumn drinking and eating social evening will happen on Monday 22 October at the Wenlock Arms, London N1. Once again we can boast the services of Alasdair Boyd in the kitchen who will cook up something to stimulate our taste buds. The comestibles can be washed down with the excellent selection of ales that is the hallmark of the Wenlock.

Tickets are £5 as ever and can be obtained from John Rooth (details page 2). I'm writing this before the early August beer and buffet event at the Royal Oak, but 22 tickets were sold so it should have been well attended at least!

NATIONAL WEEKEND 16 – 18 November

The National Weekend is now a well established highlight of the SPBW year which has been well supported in recent years. The 2007 weekend will take place mostly in Cheshire. The ideal base for the weekend is Crewe.

Events definitely arranged are:

Friday evening: visit to **Titanic** brewery in Burslem. With more than 20 years of brewing under its belt, Titanic's superb range of ales are widely found in the free trade. It has one pub, the Bull's Head, also in Burslem and we will call in here for beer and buffet after we leave the brewery.

Sunday morning: visit to **Woodlands** brewery in Wrenbury; founded in 2004 and brewing with spring water, their beers are deservedly making an impact in local pubs. Followed by lunchtime session down the road in the Bhurtpore Inn, one of England's finest pubs, serving up to 11 handpumped beers plus excellent food.

On Saturday we will arrange a bus tour of some of Cheshire's best pubs. There is a total cost of £15 to cover charges for the brewery visits and solid refreshments. If you want to come along, please let John Rooth know (with cheque payable to SPBW); you'll need to arrange your own accommodation. Thanks to Colin and Duncan for making local arrangements.

MEETING THE PUBLIC

We ran an SPBW stall at the new look Ealing beer festival (no longer on Broadway) in May and did decent business. Thanks to John, Mike and Bill for their time and effort. Our next public appearance is likely to be at the Wallington beer festival, 11 – 13 October, so come along and say hello if you're in the area.

TONY LITTLER TROPHY

This is the inter-branch competition named in Tony's memory: he was a stalwart of the SPBW and member of a number until his tragic death in 1984. The next contest will be held in February 2008: date, venue and format will be made known all in good time.

GEORGE BATEMAN

The brewing industry lost one of its great champions with the death of George Bateman in June. For many head of his family's famous brewery in Wainfleet, Lincolnshire, he is best known for his dogged – and successful - fight to save the company's independence. I well remember travelling to the brewery in 1987 soon after George achieved his famous victory. I had the pleasure of meeting George, if only very briefly, on three occasions and recall a generous, dedicated and passionate individual. He will be sadly missed.

THE PERFECT PUB PAGE

The Dirty Duck, Holywood, County Down

I visited this pub a few years ago and could not help but notice the large number of meals being served in the hour or so I was there, which intrigued me as to the quality and value. This, when I got the opportunity to call in here again this January, I determined to try the food as well as the beer.

The Dirty Duck is situated on the southern shore of Belfast Lough, with fine views across to the Antrim Hills on the northern side. There is an outside area and an upstairs restaurant, but I sat in the downstairs bar and ordered a pint of College Green brewery's Molly's Chocolate Stout. Is this still being produced at the Hilden brewery? This was excellent, but the beer here is dear I fear. Anyway, I chose a table near the door and considered the gastronomic options. The menu is very comprehensive and, being unable to choose between two of the starters, I decided to try them both instead of offering a main course. First came the bowl of Strangford Lough mussels and the quantity was such that I thought I had received a main course by mistake. The mussels are farmed and as such are available all year round; they were presented in a light creamy sauce with slivers of onion, garlic, leeks and thin strips of bacon. All pretty sumptuous really and quite delicious.

Happily, I still had room for the other started – this was chowder, made from locally sourced fish, that was served in what appeared to be a medium sized tureen and accompanied by a hefty chunk of fresh warm bread. This is an absolutely first class dish and a treat for any piscavore. Like the bowl of mussels, it is virtually a man course by itself. The total cost of the two starters was £9.75 and, considering the quantity and quality, I would say this was a very reasonable price.

Alan P



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The August 1997 issue unveiled the new SPBW logo which now adorns many of our products (so I hope you're all very familiar with it!) Page 6 announced that Harveys were on the brink of opening their first pub in London, which probably doesn't need to be named! Suffice I've spent many a happy hour and a good few quid in the Royal Oak in the last 10 years.

One of the more unusual articles to feature in these pages came from a couple of our Ipswich members, recounting a beer and cuisine evening at Wolfson College, Oxford. Elsewhere, some reminiscences from the later John Morgan revealed that Ewart Boddington, later Chairman of a once esteemed Manchester brewery, was once a lecturer and author on statistics.

A PERFECT PINT

Recently whilst on a canal trip with the Editor of Pint in Hand, we called into a pub that I last visited way back in the 70s, called the Holly Bush, which brought back happy memories or in this case a lack of them. Now everyone has a favourite beer or two but my story is about something different, an extremely rare Beer from the Wood. Please excuse the ramblings but I'll get to the point eventually.

Working for what was then the GPO, I had lots of occasions to visit Stone, in Staffordshire, as our Training School was nearby. Over the years I became friendly with Frank and Jenny Beech, the proprietors of the Red Lion in the High Street. It was with their help that Oz Tillet and the Special Branch organised the protest against the closure of the Joules Brewery, which got national coverage. Frank loved taking me to great pubs in the middle of nowhere and over the years we visited many together.



The Holly Bush, Salt, Staffordshire

One year my friends and I were on a two week canal holiday that went through Stone, naturally we had arranged a visit to the Red Lion. Frank, who was expecting us, had arranged a treat for us. At closing time on Sunday (2pm in those far off days) he and Jenny embarked with the rest of us for a very pleasant afternoon cruise down the Trent and Mersey to Salt about 6 miles away.

We moored and went to the Holly Bush. Needless to say the Governor was a friend of Frank's and we all settled in for a lock in. As we all know, lock in beer always tastes good but this was something else, Burtonwood beer from the wood. So what you might ask, it was common then, well this was different. It was about 12 weeks old.

When the wooden barrel was first tapped the beer was extremely lively and it was left whilst the Governor went away on holiday. When he got back he tested it and realised that it was going through a second fermentation. This was likely to have been caused by contamination from the wooden barrel. He left it a few more weeks to see how it turned out and found it to be in his words, "pure nectar". Frank had somehow found out about this treasure and got us eight lucky souls into the act.

Although I remember the lead up to the story and how much we all loved the beer and that some of us agreed it was the best beer we had ever tasted, I can't remember much else except one of Frank's regulars popping in to pick him and Jenny up, so they could open up their pub. I am sad to say I can't remember how the beer tasted. Since we stayed to closing time and the "pure nectar" would have been quite a strong brew that is not surprising. Maybe Frank, who is still an SPBW member, can supply more details?

John O'Connor



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.

Some back issues of ***Pint in Hand*** are available:- numbers 43; 44; 46-51; 53-54; 60-62; 70- 71; 74; 76; 79; 84-102. 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.

WHO ARE THE BIG BOYS? (Know the enemy!)

I was inspired to write this by reading a rather simplistic piece in the Guardian about "youth" choices for Fathers' Day. The logic said you'd probably end up buying a CD of Dad's choice, and was it worth it, when all there was to choose from was Mike & The Mechanics, Chris Rea or some other equally uninspiring compilation CD. Well, speaking as a 60 year old, who continues to enjoy a huge cross-section of music from many sources and parts of the globe, I say "What utter tosh the media churn out!" Then I connected to the obvious (to me) analogy in the world of beer and pubs:

So, for those of you who seldom stray from the "excellent groove" of top-quality products and places, I bring you the MEGA STARS, the MAINSTREAM, where the action is for most people (and, of course, the media).

ANHEUSER-BUSCH UK: Budweiser, UK style, coming in kegs, bottles or cans, brewed from rice, to that good old US homestyle.....Where else, but at the Stag Brewery, Mortlake, formerly home of Watney's (God rot their socks!)

CARLSBERG UK (formerly Carlsberg-Tetley): Brew their UK lagers at Northampton and all other UK products in Leeds, viz: Tetley Dark Mild, Tetley Mild, Ansells Mild, Ansells Best Bitter, Tetley Cask Bitter, Tetley Imperial, Burton Ale (no, don't be tempted) and Greenall Bitter.

COORS: What's their added value, I ask you? M&B Mild (licensed to Highgate); Stones (licensed to Everards); Hancock's HB and M&B Brew XI (licensed to Brains); Worthington's Bitter (not sure, anymore!); White Shield (original recipe from 1829) brewed at the (former) Bass Museum Brewery, Horninglow Road, Burton on Trent.....along with some other classics such as Worthington E, P2 Imperial Stout, No1 Barley Wine.

GUINNESS: London Brewery closed in 2005.....so all now brewed in Dublin. (A rare piece of inward rationalisation.)

INTERBREW: Now part of INBEV, since acquiring the Brazilian group AMBEV in 2004.....responsible for Stella Artois, Jupiler, Labatt, Molson, Hoegaarden and Leffe brands. Let's not forget Draught Bass, once turning over 2 million barrels pa, now down to 100,000 pa, and brewed by Marstons, in turn owned by W&D Breweries. And Boddingtons (now only 30% cask) brewed on licence by Hydes of Manchester.

SCOTTISH COURAGE: Bought Courage from Fosters in 1995.....and now all operations in Bristol, Nottingham and Halifax are gone and JOHN SMITHS of Tadcaster now brew JS Bitter, and (the poorer quality) Theakston's Best Bitter, SC having sold back all other Theako's products to the original owners (!) Bought Kronenbourg and Alken Maes from Danone (!) and went on to acquire the Russian Baltika group and a number of other Baltic state breweries. In 2004, closed the Fountain and Tyne breweries and did a deal with Caledonian to buy their site and outsource McEwans 80/- and other brands to Caledonian in their own retained kit on-site.

Alan Johnson

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.

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 3.00. Contact John Dearing 0118 958 0377 or gpwild@btconnect.com

FÝÇÝ: A social group formed by ex-pat SPBW stalwarts Peter Willett and Dave Brightwell. Contact Peter for more details: peterwillettuk@yahoo.com

IPSWICH: The branch appears to be up and running. Contact Phil (01473 644923) or Iain (01473 253540).



KINGSTON: Meetings held first Wednesday of each month in the **Willoughby Arms**, 47 Willoughby Road (pictured above). 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

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); also check out our website at www.wantz.co.uk

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!

BRANCHES IN ACTION

In May **Camden Hill** went on a 5-pub crawl in Teddington. Mike's last minute changes to the itinerary didn't quite manage to lose everyone. The best pub beer wise was the Teddington Arms, excellent Twickenham brewery beer, but a very noisy pub. In June we went to the Roebuck on Richmond Hill. Food and drink (Summer Lightning at +£3.00) were good, but expensive. The view over the Thames at that point is spectacular, but it was raining again, so we couldn't sit outside. Nosh included Thai chicken dishes & steaks. Bill wrested the branch eater title from Mike. On 4 August we visited Alton and the Watercress steam line. There will be a pub-crawl around Tufnell Park and Kentish Town on Wednesday 22 August. There wasn't an August meeting, the next one will be at the Wargrave Arms on 3 September.

CRAP will be visiting the Shrewsbury beer festival on 8 September and meeting up with some of our Shropshire members.

Kingston's annual BBQ was undertaken at the Willoughby Arms in early July as usual. For once it did not rain probably because we were graced by the attendance of the honoured guests of Messrs. Mike Hall and Bill from HQ. Anyway a good time was had by all, no salmonella cases were reported probably due to the good quality of ale supplied by Mr Rick of Willoughby Arms fame. The branch's 10th anniversary was celebrated on 5 August in Putney – lunch at the Duke's Head then over the road to the Bricklayers Arms.

Mayday's activities are based around events in the FILO. There is a very popular music night every Thursday from now until year end. There was a Beer Festival just finished to coincide with Hastings Old Town week. There'll be another in October to celebrate Hastings Week. Dates to be confirmed (contact Tony 01424 425079 or visit www.thefilo.co.uk). Also monthly quizzes on the first Sunday of each month.

RACS ran a stall at the Sawbridgeworth May Fayre and raised £150 for the Cystic Fibrosis Trust. The month before they visited the not-far-away Saffron Brewery and sampled eight beers from this fairly new (May 2006) enterprise. By the time you read this RACS will have taken on Camra in a games contest at the Queen's Head, Allens Green. From 22 August until the end of the bank holiday weekend is, as ever, the Sawbridgeworth Beer Festival at the Gate with RACS very much involved.

Special Branch's annual floating convention in Worcester and the Black Country was a great success and the highlights are recounted elsewhere in these pages.

Wantz branch enjoyed a cultural evening in June, watching an open air production of Henry V at Walthamstow Girls School. Main excuse was to watch branch thespian Bill Stansfield in action – he played the Duke of Bourbon. Before and after we enjoyed a few pints in the nearby Nags Head, which is recommended (a rare regular mild outlet). We were impressed by the actor in the title role who was changed and ordering pints at the bar within five minutes of the curtain call. Our July meeting coincided with the end of the Pembury Tavern's latest beer festival so there was an even wider selection of ales to choose from. Upcoming events include a return trip to the excellent Navarro's tapas restaurant in the west end and a day trip to Lewes.

West Riding have been able to enjoy the first offerings from the brand new Leeds Brewery, not least at the branch BBQ at the Grove in Leeds. August sees trips to the major beer festivals, at Olympia and Peterborough and a visit to Elland Brewery, of rather more modest size and vintage.



CALL OF THE MILD

Andy's Roving Report

Huddersfield

Although plenty of pubs host beer festivals these days, how many would have one dedicated to milds? Well, the ***Rat & Ratchet*** in Chapel Hill is one such and presented a superb range over the early May bank holiday weekend this year.

The pub was bought not too long ago by Ossett brewery, whose estate as I write consists of 9 pubs – all in either the woollen district or near the Pennines. I've written about this hostelry previously and will just mention that the layout has not changed – wooden floorboards in bar area, with a raised area to the right of the entrance and a separate room at the rear of the pub. Even though there is a 'rock' oriented jukebox of some renown, this is a pub meant for conversation. There's always a range of Ossett beers along with 4 or 5 guests and various bottled continentals. I am told that of the two European beers on fonts, one is a guest (La Chouffe on my visit) and is subject to change. The regular is presumably Erdinger Weisse. Food is served at lunchtime but I'm not sure about the exact hours.

Back to the festival: there were 11 milds available on the Sunday evening, though many of them were finished off as time went by. Two were from Lincolnshire – Poacher's Trembling Rabbit and Fugelstou Marsh mild. Empire, Ossett, E & S, Pinnacle and Anglo Dutch (from Dewsbury!) provided the Yorkshire offerings, while Vale (served on gravity), Springhead and Titanic breweries represented the midlands. The furthest flung though was definitely Bushy's from the Isle of Man. Virtually all the above were £2.00 a pint, though the Titanic was £2.25.

I managed to sample 7 of the above beers and must say that they were all in top condition. Every time that I've called in at the Rat & Ratchet, there's always been a mild available and quite often a stout or porter. Popular with drinkers and situated just south of the city centre, this is one pub that I can recommend to all SPBW members.

Southwell

Set in rural Nottinghamshire just west of Newark, Southwell is a bit of real England, possessing leafy lanes, old houses and a sizeable Minster, around which the town seems to have been built. Sue and I paid a visit here at the end of May, it being her intention to visit the local workhouse. I regarded this suggestion with grave suspicion (I don't like gruel) and as it happens, the town provided sufficient diversions for us without calling there, so I am still on the outside.

Of picture postcard standard is the **Saracen's Head**, a venerable looking building that stands in the old Market Place. This is a hotel and not simply a pub, so after entering through the main doors into the reception area, turn right and head for the Minster Lounge, which is the public bar. This is a proper old style hotel lounge, well furnished and upholstered without being overdone and of no great width – or length come to think of it.

Three beers were available and all supplied by Greene King: IPA, Abbott and the ale of my choice, Ale Fresco. A very good choice as it turned out, the beer being in excellent form and I speak as one who is no big fan of Greene King's products. Sue reclined elegantly and sipped her coffee while I perused a potted history of the building. It seems that parts of the current hostelry date back to the 12th Century, with rebuilding work being done in the 1500s – Elizabethan wall paintings were discovered in 1980 during restoration work in the oldest part of the hotel. The comparatively modern reception area and restaurant used to be part of the assembly rooms and date from 181. I read with interest that the Saracen's Head was at one time known as the King's Head. This was changed in 1961, not long after the king's head became detached from the king's body and it became uncool to express monarchist sentiments. Allegedly, the hotel gained its present name "due to the tale that Charles I was beheaded by a Saracen's sword that dated back to the Crusades". Isn't it more likely that the original building, which was standing at the time of the Crusades, was named the Saracen's Head? In 1651, the landlord may simply have decided to restore the old name to avoid controversy and unwelcome attention from local Parliamentarians. Anyway, notwithstanding the Restoration in 1660, the current name seems to have stuck. Intriguingly Charles I actually did stay here, back in 1642 when the civil war was getting underway.

Visiting Southwell? Should the Ale Fresco be available and in the same condition as when we visited, then I certainly suggest that you call in here.

Newark

Situated on Castlegate (across from Newark Castle), the **Castle** is a hostelry with a very narrow frontage which belies its actual size. The layout is unusual: as you enter, there's a drinking area at street level but the bar and most of the pub are up the steps in front of you and this upper area stretches back a fair bit. I understand that the Castle opened as a pub in 2003 but the building is way older than that. Back in the early 1900s it was a watchmakers and the owner was the last person to have the right to wind up the parish church clock.

Although it is one room, the upper level is not open plan – the seats and tables have been arranged so that the layout is geared towards small groups and couples. Thus the dreaded Wetherspoon 'shoebox' effect is happily missing. There are loads of old prints and photos on the walls, which make for interesting viewing. There's wooden flooring throughout and the loos are to be reached by going back down to the entrance and scaling the other (and much longer) flight of stairs there.

Alongside the Shepherd Neame Spitfire, there were 5 other beers on sale: 2 from Oldershaws and one each from Shardlows, Adnams and Milestone. Quite a good selection and Sue and I thought the beer quality to be pretty decent. When I suggested that Sue pay for a second round, she merely

favoured me with a pitying sneer instead of practising acupuncture on me with a pumpkin skewer. My suspicions that this may yet bode ill proved correct. Whilst I trekked upwards to the Gents, Sue must have slipped a Mickey Finn into my drink and I awoke much later aboard a tramp steamer bound for the South Seas.

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A VERY CIRCULAR SONG

The massed ranks of Special Branch gathered for their annual convention afloat in the last week in May, 14 of us including a new recruit. This year we began at Stoke Prior, on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal near Bromsgrove, and did a circular clockwise route via the River Severn, the Black Country and Birmingham. Happy to report, just about every pub we visited was of at least a good standard with beers to match. During our couple of days in the Black Country we had the pleasure of visiting classic pubs such as the Vine in Brierley Hill, Olde Swan in Netherton and the Great Western in Wolverhampton; all these have been featured in previous PiHs and all that needs to be said is that these establishments should be visited by all lovers of pubs and beer. So let's consider some of the best pubs we were previously less familiar with.



Sunday lunchtime found us in Worcester and close to the city centre, just north of Foregate rail station we descended on the ***Dragon Inn*** in The Tything. This mostly comprises of one long room with a patio area out the back and the main drinking area to the front. Six beers (and two ciders) are on handpump and our prime selection was Brief Encounter, a golden 3.8% bitter from the Foxfield brewery in south Cumbria. The brewery is attached to the Prince of Wales pub (see PiH85), both under the charge of SPBW member Stuart Johnson. The beer went down a treat and was later voted our favourite beer of the week. Other beers included choices from the Salamander and Cannon Royal breweries which were also sampled with relish. So euphoric at

this experience was our most hirsute member that he later embarked on a tour of the byways of Worcestershire, failing to reappear until the next morning.

The small town of Kinver, on the scenic Staffordshire & Worcester canal, was once renowned as one of the 'beer wonders of the waterways' for the variety of breweries represented in its pubs; this before the explosion of small and micro-breweries. These days the main pub of renown is the Batham's house, the Plough & Harrow. Due to our fairly late arrival in the evening we ventured no further than the **Vine** on the bridge by Kinver lock. This was formerly an M & B pub, which I suppose is why we never visited in the past. I'm not sure what the ownership is now but the beer choice was doubtless much improved: alongside London Pride were one fairly local and one very local brew: Enville bitter and Kinver Edge. The latter, which presumably didn't have far to travel, was very much our preference of the two. The pub itself has evidently been opened out over the years but still retains the sense of different drinking areas. Service was efficient and friendly, which always helps.

Our first taste of Batham's was not long delayed; the following lunchtime we reached Stourbridge and headed for the **Royal Exchange** in Enville Street, one of the Delph brewery's 10 houses. We arrived too early since the pub doesn't open until 1.00 pm but we made up for the delay by tucking with gusto into the excellent mild and bitter (£1.72 and £1.92 respectively). There are two quite separate smallish bars, accessed by a passageway on the left which also leads to an outside drinking area. The RE is just a few minutes walk from the canal and very handy for the town centre as well.



After our aforementioned trio of classic pubs we spent a day on a fairly straight run between Wolverhampton and Birmingham. For a break we stopped off on the aqueduct by Dudley Port station (which is actually in the Horseley Heath district of Tipton) and strolled half a mile north on the main road to the **Port 'n' Ale**. This is a large free house consisting of one large room with a conservatory for dining attached. We kept the hardworking and cheerful barmaid busy by ordering from a wide selection of ales; I can't recall them all but we were most impressed by Greene King's Ale Fresco (proves they can get it right if they try) and Adnams Explorer.

The first time I went to Birmingham by boat, the canal crept furtively through the city centre, which itself looked unwelcoming from the water. 25 years on the canal is very much the focus of activity, a vibrant area with wall to wall bars and restaurants, the towpaths thronged with cheery Brummies out to enjoy the local environment. Inevitably there are plenty of decent pubs within easy reach of the canal but we spent the evening in just one of these: the **Prince of Wales** in Cambridge Street close to the National Indoor Arena and Rep Theatre. This was busy and bustling, one room in a U shape; although a fairly small pub, it still manages to host live music on Sunday afternoons. Having settled down we had to relocate across the pub as we were occupying a seat reserved for the resident Mr Grumpy. There was a good range of beer to cheer him up, including the likes of Landlord and Deuchars IPA plus some less common ales. Back by canal, the Tap & Spile is the place for insomniacs, staying open (officially) until 4pm, which two of our more indulgent members can vouch for.

Friday found us heading back south along the Worcs & Brum and we stopped for lunch at the **Weighbridge**, just south of Alvechurch (see pic on back page). The pub is a fairly recent conversion from a former cottage which I believed also served as an office for the original weighbridge and is sited right next to the Alvechurch Boat Centre. It's quite a little gem with its three small room and covered patio, offering a beer choice of Tillerman's Tipple from the local Weatheroak brewery and one guest (on our visit, Millstone's Three Shires). Such a shame then that we had only time for a brief visit before heading back to the canal to tackle 35 locks (in 3½ hours!) of the Tardebigge flight back to the boatyard.

Needless to say we worked up a healthy thirst and hunger through our exertions and luckily refreshment was close at hand in the shape of the **Navigation Inn**, just along the road from the boatyard. This offers a public bar with pool table and a larger lounge with a restaurant area at the back. We had reserved tables and sat down to tuck into excellent and good value food, washed down with some well kept ales. London Pride, Bombadier and John Smith's bitter are the standard choices here but we chose from the two guest ales: Enville White and Adnam's Explorer. These went down a treat and helped to provide a worthy finale to a highly enjoyable week. Just to add that the Navigation's mine hosts are a very friendly couple and the pub is highly recommended if you're floating by.

RJ

CUMBERLAND BREWS

The hills are alive with the sound of brewing. Yes, the Lake District continues to be a thriving area so far as good beer goes, not least among the smaller breweries. For the thirsty traveller this is an excellent excuse to get the boots on or start tramping (or, for the less energetic, get on the bus) and visit the numerous excellent pubs in this delightfully scenic region. Andy and I have reported on Lakeland pubs in several previous issues so I'll confine myself to a few new developments and discoveries.



Old Crown, Hesketh Newmarket



Kirkstile Inn, Loweswater

Two of the best pubs in the Lake District are the **Old Crown** at Hesketh Newmarket and the **Kirkstile Inn** at Loweswater. Both have their own brewery and are expanding to meet demand; both pubs, though very hard to access by public transport, should be essential visiting points. Another must-visit pub is the **Watermill Inn** at Ings on the Windermere to Kendal road, where a small brewing plant began production last summer. The pub usually offers two or three of its own brews and the PiH tasting panel was very highly impressed by the 3.7% Collie Wobble (all the beers' names have a dog theme). If by chance the house brews are less appealing to you, the Watermill offers plenty of alternatives, mostly from Cumbria or elsewhere in the north west. As with just about every pub mentioned in this piece, the food is excellent.

A mile or so east along the main road is the quiet village of Staveley. At the far end of town opposite the bus stop we find the **Eagle & Child**. This is a genuine free house and a quite striking pub inside and out. The walls are adorned with all kinds of memorabilia from old adverts to a signed Gretna FC shirt. The pub has two gardens, one across the road by the river, where beer festivals occasionally occur. There was a selection of beers from Lakeland breweries such as Hawkshead, Barnegates and Tirrill. I've mentioned the excellence of Hawkshead beers before (PiH 87) and it seems that the Cumbrian drinking public agree. By last year the brewery had outgrown its original plant near the town from which it takes its name and a second site was set up in Staveley, just down the road from the Eagle & Child in Mill Yard, with a potential capacity of 100 barrels per week. Attached to the brewery is a beer hall, similar to many USA brew pubs, offering the full Hawkshead range. The beer hall regularly stages live music and a beer festival was scheduled for the week after our visit.

Another worthy new venture is the Keswick Brewery. This was set up in 2006 in a stone former council depot building in Brewery Lane (named for a long defunct set up) close to the town centre. The Keswick brews are much improved and highly recommended. Sadly, there is only one pub in town at which to sample these ales: the **Dog & Gun**, just off the Market Place. This is the best pub in town to my mind, comprising a long single bar. Yates bitter from north west Cumbria has long and rightly been a favourite here and is joined by three Keswick brews plus Old Peculier.



Dog & Gun, Keswick

So you see the Lake District offers much more than just Jennings and Theakstons; it's an area with plenty to delight the beer and pub lover. We'll be back next year.

RJ

The Last Word – from Gloucestershire

I read with interest a couple of snippets from *The Tippler*, newsletter of the Gloucestershire branch of a beer campaigning body based in St Albans. First one relates to Mompesson's Gold, a brew from Oakham Brewery (nowhere near Glos but what the hell!). Mr Mompesson was apparently a hated figure of the Wiltshire aristocracy, a highly corrupt individual who became one of the first ever commissioner of inns in 1617. He was eventually busted for extortion, ordered to pay a ten grand fine, lose his knighthood, walk down the Strand with his face in a horse's anus and then be banged up for life. What's the worst punishment you've ever had?

The crimes of Mr Mompesson pale beside that of the landlord of Cheltenham's Bell Hotel tap in 1903. Local umbrella maker Richard Partridge was aggrieved at the raucous behaviour of its customers and John Jackson, fruiterer and greengrocer complained that the tap stopped a lot of respectable people going into the street for trading purposes. Local police were concerned that sanitary arrangements in the pub were inadequate. The prime reason for all the indignation was that the licensee, one Mr Fisher, "had allowed a concertina to be played there frequently and was a source of much nuisance". History fails to record whether the errant landlord was required to become intimately acquainted with an equine rear end.

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The Weighbridge, Alvechurch (see page 17)