

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

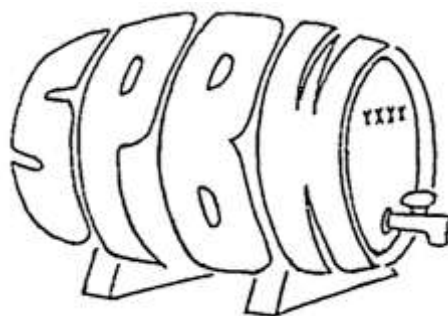
***PINT in HAND***

*Number 105*

*February 2008*



*The Bhurtpore Inn, Aston, Cheshire  
A gem of a free house*



## ***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 May 2008 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***

You know how every so often you read about these various reports that say certain foods and drinks are good for you, or that the same foods and drinks are a virtual death sentence. I suppose in the end it comes down to what you want to believe. In the same way, we've recently heard about one report that says that traditional draught beer is on the way out; this was followed by another report painting a much brighter picture for real ale. The first report was commissioned by the drinks industry (ie the major corporations), the second by CAMRA, SIBA and the Family Brewers of Britain. Did anyone mention vested interests?

The 'good news' report bases its conclusions largely on the ever-increasing number of small breweries in operation. Glancing at the current Good Beer Guide, the independent brewery section covers almost 150 pages, something like a 50% increase over the 1998 edition (sorry, I didn't quite manage to count the exact number of breweries). We must presume that all these brewers have can find outlets for their beers and customers to consume them. This would indeed paint a bright picture. It's worth noting however, that 2008 GBG also lists more than 20 breweries that have closed in the past year. For so many small breweries to survive and prosper must require a proliferation of genuine free houses; buying tied houses does guarantee a market but can also be a big financial gamble for the smallest brewers.

It's a sobering thought that more than a quarter of Britain's pubs are owned by just two companies: Punch Taverns and Enterprise Inns. This is surely too much power in too few hands although, to their credit, both pub groups are signed up to SIBA's Direct Delivery scheme, which gives their pubs the opportunity to stock beers from the smaller brewers. It's worth mentioning here that SPBW's current London Pub of the Year, the Harp in Covent Garden, is owned by Punch; although their beer range is thus restricted it still offers a better than average selection and is thoroughly worth its accolade.

To return to my original theme, having just spotted an item in the Guardian of 2 February. This reports that the British Beer and Pub association says that the number of pints of beer sold in Britain's pubs declined by 8% in December with January likely to show a further decline. This was partly put down to pubs in England and Wales coming to terms with the first winter since the smoking ban. On the other hand, Greene King reports that its (Belhaven) beer sales in Scotland have risen by 5.6% over the last nine months. I suppose we're meant to draw the conclusion from this that Scottish beer drinkers are either giving up the demon weed or simply coming to terms with the ban; and that the same will follow south of the border.

Whether you're a smoker or not, there's only one way to support the market for traditional beers – go to the pub and drink some. I think I shall do just that shortly!

*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.

### ***ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING***

The National Executive Committee's 2008 AGM will be held on **Monday 10 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 (Northern Line) 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).

### ***MEETING THE PUBLIC***

A few of us ran a stand at the Pig's Ear festival in Hackney in December. This was our first appearance at P's E for a number of years and it proved to be quite successful for us (even though we seemed to spend half our time directing lost souls to the upstairs hall where the beer was). Thanks to all of you who came and had a chat/brought products/joined; we expect to be back at this year's event. Other beer festivals we hope to grace with our presence are at Ealing (now in July) and Wallington (October).

### ***BEER AND CURRY***

This regular annual event take's place in London's bustling East End. This year's date for your diary is **Sunday 16 March**. First meeting point is the Bow Bells, 116 Bow Road (nearest tube Bow Road or Bow Church on DLR) from noon; then the Coborn Arms, Coborn Road 1.30; Palm Tree, Haverfield Road (next to Regents Canal) 3.00; Pride of Spitalfields, Heneage Street 5.00. Eat in Brick Lane from around 6.30. All welcome as usual; it might help if you let John Rooth know if you plan to come along.

## ***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 on **Thursday 21 February 2008** at the **Calthorpe Arms**, 252 Grays Inn Road. This is a small but perfectly formed Youngs house renowned for friendly service and well kept ales; the fun will happen in the upstairs function room. There will be charge of £3 per head for the food but, from my experience, it should be good value. The competition will be some combination of darts and a quiz. All branches are welcome to enter a team (but note that the winning team must organise the next event in a London pub); any SPBW member who does not actually belong to a branch will also be welcome to come along.

## ***LONDON PUB OF THE YEAR***

Regular readers will recall that ***the Harp***, Chandos Place, Covent Garden, is the new worthy winner. A fair bunch of us turned up at the pub on 17 January for the presentation to Binnie and her staff. After a quiet formal handover in the upstairs room the certificate was presented again downstairs and the assembled throng of customers gave a rousing ovation when Mike Hall announced the Harp's triumph. SPBW members present were treated to some free beer and food (thanks ladies!) and it was generally a very happy occasion. When I finally left that evening the certificate had been given a prominent pride of place behind the bar. Do go and check it should you be in the area.

Before too long we'll be starting the process to find the next winning pub and details of how to make nominations will appear in the May issue.

*Below left: Mike presents Binny with our award; right: the jubilant bar staff accept the acclaim of the assembled throng.*



## ***NATIONAL WEEKEND***

The 2007 event was another success and you can read about it at great length later in these pages. We're now thinking about the 2008 Weekend. As of now we expect this to be from 14 – 16 November and we have a few ideas for a venue. Hopefully some firm arrangements will appear in the next issue.

## ***FROM THE ARCHIVES***

The cover of the February 1998 issue of PiH depicted the Royal Oak in Delph on the edge of the West Riding of Yorkshire. The pub is otherwise known as 'Th'Heights' and was that issue's Perfect Pub. Whatever you want to call it, the pub is listed in the 2008 Good Beer Guide so we can assume it still has its merits. Mind you I found Delph in the Greater Manchester section of the Guide so I suspect the administrative borders have changed over the years. Another pub featured was the Watermill Inn at Ings, on the edge of the Lake District. As a regular visitor (once a year) I can assure readers that this remains a highly recommended pub, not least for the beers from its own micro-brewery. Ten years earlier, issue 25 was the last to be produced in A4 newsletter format. The branch section revealed that brewery visits were very popular, especially those doomed to close – King & Barnes, Gales and Morland were among those providing hospitality. Sadly some of the branches involved are now equally defunct.

One time Special Branch member Hugh Kelly has suggested that I extend the range of this feature to cover the 1970s. To date I've confined it to the PiH era (1982 to date). Before this there were newsletters aimed at either branches or national members and I have by no means a full collection of these. The earliest I can unearth is dated July 1976, a fairly basic item with no clue as to who produced it other than an address in Brentwood. It's mostly devoted to branch reports including from the long defunct Britannia (Barking) and Salopia groups. Campden Hill had recently held a charity crawl round Kensington, raising £160 towards a geriatric ward at a local hospital; I'll refrain from the obvious joke. Two dinners had been planned, to celebrate the anniversary of the siege of Gibraltar and Yom Kippur. Special Branch had visited the Barley Mow at Tyttenhanger (near St Albans) and had impressed the staff by sampling all nine brews available; it's not clear whether this means that all present tried all nine, but it wouldn't surprise me. Wantz had run a stand at the Dagenham Town Show and a float in Rainham Carnival, the later in rare wet weather for that summer. Meanwhile Campden Hill had proposed that the Society changed its name to 'the Society for the Preservation for Traditional Draught Beer'; SPTDB – not too snappy really, and obviously the proposal got nowhere. Finally there was a history of Special Branch and a brief account of a recent canal trip taken by some of their members.



## ***BOOK REVIEW***

Postcards From the Past: Somerset Pubs

Andrew Swift & Kirsten Elliott

Akeman Press ([www.akemanpress.com](http://www.akemanpress.com)) ISBN 978-095461386-0; £8.50

This impressive book describes itself as a journey into the past, featuring photographs of more than 140 pubs, mostly from a century or more ago. Many of these pubs are still open for business but the way of life captured in the photos is long gone. In many cases, contemporary photos are shown alongside the historic ones to indicate the contrast as 'progress' takes effect. What is most noticeable is the virtual absence of the motor car and the almost deserted streets with just the occasional horse and cart and people on foot. The downside to this is that at the time the countryside was going through a time of depopulation, unemployment and poverty. The authors do take the trouble to record the merits of the pubs as they are now, with particular regard to real ale and cider.

An interesting aspect of the book is that Cecil Sharp, the notable folk song collector, was very active in Somerset at the time many of the pictures were taken, and the text records where songs, many still well known, were first noted in particular pubs.

It's not quite all pubs – steam railway buffs will be interested in the pictures of the only narrow-gauge brewery railway in the country. This was built by the former Oakhill Brewery in 1903 to transport its beer to the nearest railhead, two miles away. The railway only operated until 1921 when lorries took over; four years later the brewery suffered a disastrous fire and was taken over by Bristol United Breweries (themselves acquired by George's of Bristol in 1956 who in turn were absorbed by Courage in 1961).

All in all the book provides a remarkable slice of social history and will be of interest whether or not you live in, are or familiar with, the county of Somerset.



*The Lord Nelson, Brighton*

*Nothing to do with the article above but it's a good pub and it fills the page!*

## ***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. There is a new branch to welcome: not content with CRAP we now have CRAPS (see below) who fill in the south London gap left by the demise of Ponds branch.*

**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](mailto:DominicCantalupo@ChampionRealty.com). Website: [www.spbw.org](http://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@sky.com](mailto:colinsdonald@sky.com).

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

**COMMON & ALDBRICKHAM:** Meetings usually held in Reading; contact John Dearing 0118 958 0377 or [gpwild@btconnect.com](mailto:gpwild@btconnect.com) to find out where and when.

**CROYDON REAL ALE PRESERVATION SOCIETY:** Newly affiliated to rival the Cheshire group in the dodgy initials stakes. They meet on the first Tuesday of each month in The Green Dragon, High Street Croydon CR0 1NA, and also every subsequent Tuesday at a pub somewhere in, or easily reachable by public transport from, Croydon. (These additional venues change weekly, and are intimated by email during the previous couple of days if you have supplied your email address to John Smith.) Contact Pete McGill 07831 561296 (m) or John Smith 02071884844 (w).



**FÝČÝ:** A social group formed by ex-pat SPBW stalwarts Peter Willett and Dave Brightwell. Contact Peter for more details: [peterwillettuk@yahoo.com](mailto: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. Contact Rick at the Willoughby [020 8546 4236]; or our website: [www.spbwkingston.co.uk](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:meadspanner@aol.com) or the website [www.racs.org](http://www.racs.org).

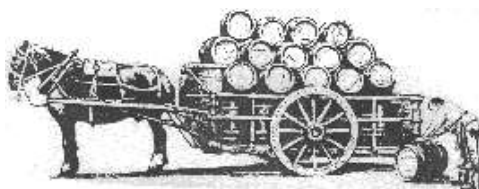
**SPECIAL:** The branch holds annual, week-long gatherings around the inland waterways network. There are also unofficial visits to pubs of renown in London, Cheshire and Shropshire, or wherever we happen to be. Check our website at: <http://www.geocities.com/canaladmiral/Special.html>

**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](http://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](mailto: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!*



## **WHIM AWAY DAY**

### **Andy's Roving Report**

#### **Wilkes Head, Leek**

I called in at this hostelry at the start of December along with various cronies, ratbags and sloths. We headed out from Sheffield by bus to Buxton in Derbyshire, where we connected with the Leek conveyance. Arriving on time and discovering that Den Engel, Belgian Beer bar is closed on Wednesday dinner times, we headed to the **Wilkes Head** at 16 St Edwards Street. The only pub owned by Whim brewery as far as I'm aware, this is an excellent example of a traditional basic boozery, with bare boards and no mass produced tat masquerading as décor. The place is fairly minuscule, with just a main bar area served by a small brick faced counter, plus a sort of 'overflow' room at the back. Live music is definitely promoted here, with a rather sizeable stage in the beer garden for the drier months. As one might guess, the pub is named after the 18<sup>th</sup> century political and loony John Wilkes (1727 – 1797) and appears to be of the same vintage.

As for the beers, there were 5 from Whim Brewery plus one from Oakwell. The prices were reasonable and the beer in good form. Visitors should beware of the dog, as you may trip over it, the said pooch being knee high to a flea, though more amiable. My verdict on this hostelry? Call in when in the area – you won't be disappointed.



#### **Yarborough Hunt, Brigg**

My previous visit to this market town in north Lincolnshire was about 15 years ago during glorious weather when, in between visiting a few inns, a group of us watched some ducklings swimming up the river. When I was here on the first Saturday in December last year, all was inclement, with icy rain bucketing down. The ducklings (or their descendents) could have swum up the main street and passed myself and Sue wading down it. We were heading for the **Yarborough Hunt** on Bridge Street, at the bottom of the town centre. The building stands just across the bridge in question on the right hand side and is plainly of some antiquity, apparently dating from the early 1700s. It was once

the Brewery Tap for Sargeant's Brewery, which at the time stood directly behind the pub. Sargeant's closed in 1967 and so did the pub, which remained closed for many years after.

To cut a long story short, the pub re-opened in 2003 following extensive and lengthy renovations by local CAMRA member Martin Robertson and his brother Andy. So impressive was the work done that the pub won the local Civic Award that year and the Joe Goodwin CAMRA award in 2005.

Howbeit, Sue and self were washed in through the doors to the immediate warmth of a proper fire in the main bar where ye will find the bar counter. No less than 6 beers were on sale, 3 from Tom Wood and one each from Bateman, Titanic and Greene King. If this does not suffice, there are foreign bottled beers as well, making a fairly extensive selection of beer types. You can hardly fail to notice the rather striking framework of beams over the bar and bottom end of the room. These were left *in situ* when the floor that they supported was removed – one can see straight up to the roof! One of the locals pointed out a small cross-beam that was once the top of the stairs.

Anyone requiring the gents will have to pass through a side-room called 'Ron's Shop'. This, along with the loo, was formerly the site of greengrocer's run by a Ron Winterbottom. By the way, make sure you turn right when you go through the door marked 'Gents' as a left turn will take you straight into the stillage area! I understand that the room at the rear of the pub was apparently once the landlord's living quarters.

This pub is Sue approved and should be visited by all SPBW members at once.

## ***SPBW WEBSITE***

The SPBW Members Forum is still going strong at [www.spbw.com/bb](http://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.

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| <p>Some back issues of <b><i>Pint in Hand</i></b> are available:- numbers 43; 44; 46-51; 53-54; 60-62; 70- 71; 74; 76; 79; 84-104. These can be obtained from the Editor (address on page 2) in return for twenty 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.</p> |
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## **CHESHIRE CHEERS**

### ***The 2008 National Weekend***

SPBW's annual gatherings have centred on numerous parts of this green and pleasant land and in November 2007 we again struck new ground. The event was centred on Crewe, which is hardly the most attractive town in England, but is rather handy for transport links; not surprising since it would be no more than a village but for the railways. Crewe also provided a useful base for exploring the pubs in surrounding Cheshire and visiting two excellent small breweries.

Eighteen members travelled from various corners of England on the Friday and set about exploring the best pubs in Crewe. To be fair, there aren't that many of interest to the beer lover. The **British Lion** (popularly known as 'The Pig') on Nantwich Road near the rail station is a former Tetley house with mild and bitter from Leeds alongside a couple of guest ales from small breweries; it's very much a traditional 'locals' pub. Up in the town centre, the **Angel** is large basement pub with just one handpumped ale: Oakwell Barnsley bitter at a bargain £1.52 a pint. Heading east along Earle Street is the **Crown**, a Robinson house but further along, across the railway tracks was our main meeting place: the **Borough Arms**. This is a one roomed establishment split into a few drinking areas with a bar downstairs as well. This is very much a free house, the eight handpumps offering a fine range of beers from small and micro-breweries. If you prefer something slightly more exotic, the Borough also serves quite a range of draught and bottled Belgian beers.



*Borough Arms, Crewe*

Though it merited an extended stay, we had to leave the Borough in late afternoon and make our way to the nearby bus station. When our bus arrived the driver was somewhat freaked out when John Rooth asked for tickets for our entire party, quite a mathematical and logistical challenge. Our destination was Burslem in the Potteries, a one hour journey which, following the earlier imbibing, led to some crossed legs by several of our number. Happily we disembarked with no mishaps and relief was sought in dark and quiet corners as we made our way to the Titanic brewery, tucked away in an industrial estate.



At the brewery we were greeted by the head brewery Ian Bradley, known as Brad, who apologised for the extremely cramped surroundings and supplied us all with a pint of Captain Smith's (5.2%) Ale. Cap'n Smith was of course the skipper of the ill-fated Titanic and hailed from these parts. Most Titanic beers (which of course go down well) have appropriate names such as Lifeboat, Iceberg and White Star. The brewery started in 1985 and now supplies some 300 free houses. It also has three pubs of its own, all in the Potteries area, two of which are leased from Everards in an enterprising trading agreement. The brewery itself seems to be working to capacity with no apparent room for expansion. Consequently the tour of the plant involved much squeezing between various brewing vessels. Brad proved to be an entertaining source of anecdotes and someone who clearly enjoys his work; he can be proud of his end products.



*Bulls Head, Burslem*

Leaving the brewery the next stop was the nearest Titanic house, the **Bulls Head**, in St Johns Square in the centre of Burslem. Mine host here is the estimable Bob Crumpton who has the good sense to be an SPBW member. The BH is a fairly trad two room pub with table skittles in the public bar, as well as an extensive range of ales, mostly from Titanic of course, but you can expect a guest ale or two. The pub is popular with Port Vale supporters and Bob often themes the guest beer to reflect the opposition (as an example I once visited the weekend Leyton Orient were in town and the guests were all IPAs – work it our for yourself). As part of fund raising in aid of Children in Need there was a barbeque out the back which provided useful ballast. All in all, the Bulls Head is highly recommended; the 34 bus between Hanley and Crewe stops nearby.

To round off the evening, Duncan led the majority of the party to the excellent **Blue Bell** in Kidsgrove (see PiH 99) which is a few bus stops towards Crewe. The entertainment on Saturday was a bus tour from Crewe on the 84 route to take in a selection of the many fine pubs in the area. First stop was the **Harrington Arms** in Gawsforth, a couple of miles south of Macclesfield. This is a Robinsons house (the brewery is just 12 miles distant) featured in Camra's National Inventory. It's a brick built establishment with a narrow bar area surrounded by four quite separate small rooms. Among the beers on offer was OB, which turned out to be Oldham Bitter. The Oldham Brewery was



taken over and closed by Boddingtons some years ago and I guess this is meant to be an approximation of the old brew.

Then we were back on the bus to Macclesfield itself. This was once renowned as one of the best drinking towns around for the wide range of ales its pubs could boast; it used to be popular with Wantz branch for weekend visits. You can still find Holts, Marstons and Robinsons houses but we concentrated on two free houses. **The Railway View** in Byroms Lane, south of the town centre, is unsurprisingly adjacent to the London – Manchester line; the patio is ideal for train spotters as well as beer lovers. Inside the pub consists of one large room with a long bar sporting numerous handpumps. Beers were from small breweries, mostly fairly local, and the couple running the pub were very friendly. Trade was quiet this afternoon but it gets more crowded when Macclesfield Town are playing at home (they were at Notts County that day, trivia lovers).



*Railway View, Macclesfield*

The **Waters Green Tavern** is closer to the town centre and quite handy for the bus and rail stations. I'm pretty sure this was an Ansell's house when I first came here, although there is a large Tetley sign on the side of the building. Don't let this put you off since there is an impressive range of ales on offer at the bar which is sited in the corner of the pub by the front door. Although effectively one large room, the pub has three drinking areas and a separate pool room. A friendly atmosphere prevails and I'd say the WGT is an essential stopping point if passing through town. Several of the party also stopped for a good lunch at the **Dolphin** in Windmill Street, a Robinson house.

Leaving Macc we were heading back towards Crewe for the rest of the day. Next stop was Congleton and the very wonderful **Beartown Tap** in Willow Way. The Beartown brewery is just a couple of hundred yards away across the road and the Tap has been serving its beers since 1999. I've visited this pub a number of times now and it's one of my favourites. The bar area is to the right as you come in, the room beyond being the former no-smoking area. On the left is a larger room decorated with beer and local sporting mementos. If you look closely you may find out why Congleton became known as 'Beartown'. No real life grizzlies roaming around although our furry friends are commemorated in the names of the beers – which I've always found excellent.

No food here by the way, but there's a decent chippy a few doors down and you can bring takeaways into the pub.



*Beartown Tap, Congleton*

Darkness was setting in over south Cheshire as we reached the **Cricketers** on the main road on the southern outskirts of Sandbach. This was another pleasant and friendly pub with Hydes ales and a few guests. Not far down the road from here is the canalside village of Wheelock where we visited all three pubs. The **Nags Head** is an attractive half-timbered building with one large main bar and smaller public bar to the rear. Three beers, usually from local breweries are available and a trad jazz band was blowing. Closer to the Trent & Mersey Canal is the **Commercial**, another National Inventory pub. This has at least three rooms to drink in and there are two or three ales including Weetwood WPA to choose from. The free cheese on the bar also went down well. Finally, across the main road is the **Cheshire Cheese**, a Hydes house with bitter and Jekyll's Gold on tap.



*Nags Head, Wheelock*

Final stop before Crewe is the small village of Winterley. Here the **Hollybush** had a fairly bland Black Sheep; better was the **Foresters** with good Weetwood Eastgate; both pubs are on the main road. Back in Crewe we made a final call at the British Lion. Quite a few of us were staying at the Royal Hotel across the road. This had a fairly loud disco on both Friday and Saturday. Mike checked this out and his presence doubled the number of

punters, but made little difference to the average age. Well worth being kept up until 2.00 for. The hotel was otherwise excellent, including a very good breakfast.

After a long day's drinking it was only natural that we wanted to be back on the beer at 10.40 Sunday morning. This was when we arrived at Woodlands brewery just behind Wrenbury station (a request stop on the Crewe – Shrewsbury line). The brewery is owned by John Skeaping and run by his son Peter who was our host. John and Peter owned a farm nearby which had a natural spring; when they had the water tested they were told that it would be ideal for brewing. They had a sample brew produced by the Khean micro-brewery in Macclesfield; not only did the beer turn out to be excellent but the owner of Khean told them that he was closing his brewery and would they like to buy his brewing equipment. The answer was yes and the 5-barrel plant was installed in 2004. Around eight beers are regularly brewed and four of these were available for sampling. Drummer bitter and Oak Beauty were the lower gravity ales but my favourite was Midnight Stout (4.4%), not the sort of beer I'd usually drink before midday but excellent nonetheless. Several of the brewery staff came along and everyone was very friendly. Woodlands supplies well over 100 outlets and in September 2007 opened its first pub, the Globe in Audlem Road on the southern edge of Nantwich.



*A rare quiet moment at the Woodlands bar*

Come about one o'clock we thought we ought to drag ourselves away and we set out on the mile or so walk to the **Bhurtpore Inn** at Aston (see PiH 58 and 86). This is another of my favourite pubs and I think that all first time visitors were impressed as well. As usual some 11 beers were on tap, all of them excellent. We all indulged in a traditional Sunday roast to help wash down the ale in a lively and convivial session.

It was a shame to have to drag ourselves away but most of the party had to go back home that evening. The rest of us got off the train in Nantwich and tried out some of the best pubs in town, starting at the aforementioned **Globe**, which was doing a good trade and offered 7 Woodlands beers plus a guest from Chester's Spitting Feathers brewery.

And that's about it, another winner of a weekend. Special thanks to Colin and Duncan, local boys who did most of the groundwork, and to John Rooth for co-ordinating the whole thing.

## **BRANCHES IN ACTION**

**Campden Hill** held the annual NOT the Christmas meal in November, having NOT traditional Christmas fare at the Mongolian Barbecue on Maiden Lane in Covent Garden. If I ever get to Ulan Bator, I would not be at all surprised to find that this is not what the average Outer Mongolian eats for dinner. The chefs used to be mainly Australian, but although the current ones look at least Asian, I doubt whether they are Mongolian. We met up first at the London Pub of the year 2008, the Harp; as usual the beer in was in very good form, and Binny and the girls were their usual warm and friendly selves. Landlord, Harveys Best, Black Sheep and a couple of others went down well. Then onto the Mongolian Barbecue. I squeezed in an extra portion of soup and after eating a very hot chilli concoction, needed an ice cream so was unfairly in my opinion nominated as branch eater. Yet I only had 3 self-assembly visits to the barbecue (the others had 4) and I am sure that my mixes were more culinary balanced and smaller of portion than the others. A few bottles of wine and some Russian Lager washed it all down.

Instead of the December meeting we held a social at the Andover Arms in Hammersmith, which incidentally will also be the venue for our 500<sup>th</sup> branch meeting social on Monday 3 March (8.00). Other forthcoming socials are: 28 April, Carshalton Pub crawl; 8 May Polish meal (meet at the Brook Green Tavern 7.00). The Keith Hudson darts competition is on Thursday 27 March probably at the Sekforde Arms. (7.30).

Over in **Chesapeake Bay**, Alan Moore has taken on the reins as SPBW President. We spent the afternoon of 9 February at Brewers Alley after a Noonish brew tour at Wild Goose. Some 30-40 members made the trek out to Frederick for some quality food and brew.

The **FYÇY** branch has not been meeting regularly, due to sickness of members and visits to the UK and also visits of family members to Fethiye. However, we recently went for a branch meal to Hisaronu, where we visited the Piano Bar on 18 January. This was paid for out of branch subs and was supposed to be for the restaurant's curry night, but that didn't start until the following Friday, we were told. The food was good anyway and some curries were available off the usual menu. The beer was of course EFES lager, but we're all quite used to that now.

**RACS** had a busy run up to Christmas with socials, quizzes and a pub crawl of Hertford with 30 members in attendance; the White Horse and Old Cross Tavern were deemed to be the best pubs visited. A Burns Night evening was held at the end of January, followed by a Belgian beer evening in early February, and there will be a Valentine's Day quiz at the Gate on Sunday 17 February. 27 April is the St George's celebration, also at the Gate from 7.00. On 4 May RACS are running a tombola stall for charity at the Sawbridgeworth Fayre. The AGM will be on Wednesday 25 May. RACS were dismayed to lose long-standing member Allan King at the end of November. He was killed in a road accident while on a break in Belgium with some close friends.

**Special Branch** has not been active as a group lately. However, its quiz team offshoot, Accrington Cylindricals, has just finished last in the Quiz League of London Division 2, despite intense training on Harveys beers. Our annual canal week is in May, starting at Stoke Prior in Worcestershire.

**Wantz** Branch's first outing of 2008 was a pub walk in the Euston area, five good pubs in no more than half a mile. Three were tied houses: Mabel's Tavern (Shepherd Neame), Skinners Arms (Greene King) and the Euston Flyer (Fuller). Then there was the Doric Arms (formerly Head of Steam) which, though owned by Fullers and serving their full range, also offers four beers from other breweries. The best of all was the pub where we started, Bree Louise in Cobourg Street, just a couple of minutes from Euston mail line station. This cosy back street pub offers 10 beers: 5 by handpump and 5 straight from the cask. The pub is named after the landlord's daughter and is highly recommended.

**West Riding** has enjoyed visits to Sheffield and Belgium as well as a Christmas party. Among beer festivals to be visited is the London Drinker event – branch trip is on Wednesday 12 March.

## ***THE PERFECT PUB PAGE***

I'm grateful to Dave Johnson of Hainault for this issue's suggestion, although it's clearly not his local! - the **Otley Arms**, Forest Road, Treforest in Glamorgan. The pub is almost opposite the rail station where you can get a train to Cardiff. Dave visits the Otley Arms over the August Bank Holiday when (and I quote) the Football Groundhop of the area and/or Hellenic League Hop is based there. From the outside the pub seems quite small but once through the door it opens out. As well as local trade (and Groundhoppers) it is also very popular with students from the nearby university. The beer range includes at least two ales from the Otley Brewery (based in nearby Pontypridd since 2005) plus guests – on Dave's last visit these came from as far apart as Wye Valley and Northumberland breweries. Despite the pub being very busy, the service was first class and the welcome friendly. Big screens show Sky Sports for those not into Groundhopping or the delights of the Hellenic League (in my desperation to fill this page I can report that the full name is the Sport Italia Hellenic League and the 2006-07 Premier League champions were Slimbridge; spare a thought though for Eton Wick, who finished bottom of Division 1 South, winning just one out of 34 games and conceding 168 goals. Are we there yet?)

If you get bored with the Otley Arms, Pontypridd is just two minutes away by train and there are two Good Beer Guide listed pubs there: the Llanover Arms in Bridge Street opposite the entrance to Ynysangharad Park (there's a challenge to my spellcheck!) and the Bunch of Grapes in Ynysangharad Road, just outside the town centre. The Llanover Arms is close to Pontypridd Town football ground and it only leaves me to report that the team last season finished third in the MacWhirter Welsh League, just below Goytre United on goal difference. But you probably knew that already.



## **GRAIN CHECK**

Real ale is beer that has been brewed in the traditional way, and has undergone a secondary fermentation in the container from which it has been dispensed.

In the Middle Ages, brewers were indiscriminating in what they used to make beer. Consequently the beer was often of poor quality and could make drinkers ill. In 1516 Wilhelm IV and Ludwig X extended to the whole of Bavaria the *Reinheitsgebot* (purity law), first introduced in Munich in 1487, which stipulated that beer could only be brewed from water, barley and hops – at the time they were unaware of the role of yeast in fermentation.

Wheat was omitted, because if consumption of wheat beer was widespread this would raise the price of bread, given the shortage of wheat. Rye was probably omitted for similar reasons, being widely used for bread in Central and Eastern Europe. However, one brewery was granted a monopoly to brew wheat beer; the monopoly was lifted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and wheat beer became very popular in southern Germany. The other exemption to the purity law is beer intended for export.

Purity laws were introduced in Britain as part of the malt tax, first introduced in 1660, because it was in the interests of the Treasury to maximise revenue by prohibiting brewing with materials other than malt. However, wheat beers did survive in Britain.

All cereal grains can be used to make beer-like beverages, and at some time or other, most have been. Like maize, rice adds little flavour or body to beer, and is more expensive to use. However, wheat, rye and oats can have positive effects on flavour and body.

So, non-barley grain in beer isn't in itself an adulteration; it just so happens that 95% of the cereal used in beer is barley, and it just so happens that if your aim is flavour and body, some cereals just aren't worth the bother.

*Colin Mills*

### ***The Last Word – from Croydon***

Locals are up in arms at news that one of the former Youngs estate, the Tamworth Arms in Tamworth Road is being closed. It will be replaced by a block of luxury flats. The Tamworth was built in the 1850s and was acquired by Youngs shortly afterwards. Beer drinkers in London will no doubt recall a time when Young & Co of Wandsworth was a brewing company who actively championed tradition, not only in brewing, but in the maintenance of genuine community pubs – the Tamworth being a prime example. Now, it appears, the new Wells & Youngs conglomerate sees its tied houses purely in terms of real estate to be cashed in whenever the opportunity arises. Am I imagining this or did Youngs really say that the sale of the historic Wandsworth brewery site would raise capital to develop its tied estate; silly of me to assume that 'develop' would mean 'increase'. Wells-Youngs aren't bothered it would seem as the Tamworth's exiled customers can go 'round the corner' to the Dog & Bull (a few hundred yards away), another of their pubs. So that's all right then.

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*The Waters Green Tavern, Macclesfield*