

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

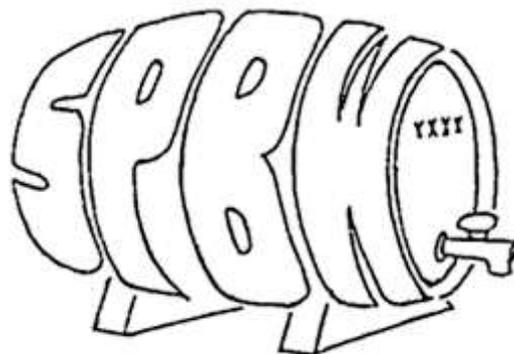
PINT in HAND

Number 117

February 2011



The Charlton Arms, Ludlow (see page 16)



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 2011 issue should reach the Editor by **25 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

It's a regular shock horror story these days, the number of pubs that are closing down, for whatever reason. At the same time there are still micro-breweries being opened fairly regularly. Fewer pubs and more beers – does the equation work out? Presumably if someone is opening a brewery, she or he would take the trouble to find out if there are accommodating publicans who are prepared to take the beer – otherwise they may find their bank managers are less accommodating!

Given the number of pubs that are tied to breweries or pub groups (where beer choice is inevitably restricted) there are competitively few pubs which are genuine free houses and can provide a regular outlet for our aspiring new brewers. Do these people try to tap in to their local market (helped by the admirable LocAle scheme) or do they sell their souls to a wholesaler which can spread their wares throughout the country. Even assuming that real ale is an expanding market, there must surely be a saturation point; ultimately there can only be so many handpumps on a bar counter.

The late Peter Smith, once SPBW Chairman, always said that the best way to campaign for real ale was to get out there and consume the stuff – a philosophy with which I'm sure we can all relate. Most of us would, I'm equally sure, when confronted with a beer from an unfamiliar brewery, be keen to sample it, if only out of curiosity (research, I call it). But there may well be many more ale drinkers who prefer their tipple from the cask, who are rather more conservative and prefer to stick to what they know – so Nurdler's Rib Tickler may not get their vote over Pedigree or GK IPA or whatever.

Are there simply too many beers about? I regularly frequent a free house in north London which is popular with that curious breed of human being, the beer ticker. I'm sure you've come across the type – you may even be one yourself. I'm a bit suspicious that some micro-brewers produce beers for the ticker market (two more hops in the brew, new name). Archers, for example, before their demise, were notorious for this. While I would hate to deprive anyone of such a harmless pleasure, I really would prefer brewers to concentrate on excellence in terms of quality rather than column space in the breweries section of the Good Beer Guide.

Much of this issue is taken up with an illustrated account of the SPBW's 2010 National Weekend in Shropshire, where 25 or so of us spread our goodwill, mostly into the tills of deserving publicans! It was interesting to visit two enterprising small breweries as well as a few rural pubs which are doing their best to avoid being further casualties in the pub closure story.

Roger

Articles on beer/pub related issues are always welcome! Contributions to the Perfect Pub Page and Last Orders features in particular, as well as responses to my fevered ramblings above. If sending articles by email it would be very helpful if they are in Arial plain 12pt, single spacing with absolutely no formatting! Pictures should be in JPG format. Thanks.

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 possible 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 2011 AGM of the SPBW's National Executive Committee will be held on **Monday 14 March**, at the **Royal Oak**, Tabard Street, London SE1 4JU. The meeting will take place in the upstairs John Harvey Room, kicking off at 7 pm. All SPBW members are invited to attend; AGMs are usually fairly brief and light-hearted business meetings leaving plenty of time for socialising and imbibing the excellent Harveys beers on offer. Solid refreshment will also be provided.

The Royal Oak is just off Borough High Street and Great Dover Street; Borough tube station (Northern line) is just a couple of minutes away and London Bridge station (Northern and Jubilee lines and national rail) is within half a mile. Various bus routes run close to the Royal Oak.

As ever we will welcome volunteers for an NEC post; please contact John Rooth if you are interested.

TONY LITTLER TROPHY

The Tony Littler inter-branch competition will take place on **Wednesday 6 April**, in the cellar bar of the **Wood** (formerly Hobgoblin) pub, 21 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6HE (close to Marylebone station and 5 minutes from Baker Street), 6.30 pm for 7 pm start. The evening will comprise traditional pub games and a quiz with, needless to say, plenty of drinking of real ale. All branches are welcome to participate, but outlying branches should note that the winner has to arrange next year's event to take place in Central London. If you don't belong to a branch don't let that put you off - we will find a place for you in one of the teams. For further details please contact Central London Branch, current holders of the trophy.

PRINTER'S DEVIL

Apologies for the glitch in PiH 116 which saw pages 2 and 19, and 6 and 7 transposed. Not my fault! Also the reference to 'page 15' under the front cover photo was of dubious value as the pages were not numbered! I'll put my hands up to this one and hope that this and future issues will be paginated.

SPBW ONLINE

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.

The SPBW now has its own **Facebook** page (if that's the right technical term). If you're not familiar with this 'social networking' site, go to www.facebook.com – set yourself up with a password and put 'SPBW' in 'Search' and all will be revealed!

PINT IN HAND BY EMAIL

How would you like to receive PiH by email rather than by post? This would be of particular value to overseas members and would save the SPBW a few bob in terms of postage and envelopes. Beware that PiH is a substantial document (PiH 116 was 5,300 KB) so you may need broadband if it's not to jam your inbox.

If you want to go for this, please email Roger West and Roger Jacobson (details on page 2) and we'll take it from there.

SPREADING THE WORD

We regularly produce a publicity leaflet for SPBW incorporating a membership application form. Some of you may even have joined us having picked one up! We put these leaflets in friendly and obliging pubs but we would like to spread them as wide as we can, especially outside the London area. If you can help us with this, please let Roger Jacobson (details page 2) know and a bundle of leaflets will be sent. Thanks to those of you who have already helped in this way.

PINTS IN PUBS

We have at least a dozen publicans among our membership. If you are such a person and you are organising a beer festival, or any other special event in your pub, why not let us know? We can advertise the event in these pages and hopefully encourage our members to get along.

OUT AND ABOUT

Our public appearances at beer festivals look likely to be restricted to Ealing (July) and Wallington (October). It looks like Pig's Ear will have another year at the same venue, which sadly couldn't squeeze us in. Some of us did brave the freezing weather to go along for a session.

LONDON PUB OF THE YEAR

The presentation to Charlie and Eileen at the Dog & Bell on 24 January went off very well with a decent turn out of members. A hearty buffet was provided to help wash down the excellent beers – Dark Star Hophead, Loddon Gravesend Shrimpers, Hogs Back TEA, Nethergate Umbel and 1648 Warrant we available at various times as well as the regular Fullers London Pride and ESB. There was a good story about the pub and award in the *Lewisham Mercury* (complete with quote from yours truly!).

We'll be inviting nominations for the next competition in the May PiH.



A happy scene as Mike Hall (L) presents the award to Charlie and Eileen Gallagher. The Dog & Bell's three previous awards can just be made out on the left.

NATIONAL WEEKEND 2011

The 2010 event based in Shrewsbury was a great success and you can read all about it elsewhere in this issue.

This year's National Weekend will take place in **York** on **18 – 20 November**. York is a historic and attractive city with a fine selection of pubs (10 entries in current Good Beer Guide). We expect to arrange a visit to the York Brewery among other entertaining and cultural activities. Watch out for more details in the next issue or via the usual electronic sources.

BRANCHES IN ACTION

In November **Campden Hill** enjoyed a Chinese meal at the New World, just off Shaftesbury Avenue; the food is recommended. In January we had a veggie curry at the Ravi Shankar in Drummond Street, which is Bel Poori Mecca. We met in the Bree Louise which had the usual large quantity (too many?) of beers on hand pump & stillage. We have a pub crawl coming up on Monday 21 February starting in the Castle, Furnival Street (off High Holborn) and heading west, and hope to visit Tooting for another curry, and arrange the Keith Hudson darts soon. We look forward to competing in the Tony Littler trophy, which Central Branch is putting on soon. Campden Hill events are listed under the Campden Hill Forum on the bulletin board/SPBW forum: <http://www.spbw.com/bb/>.

On 22 January, five weeks later than planned, four members of **Common & Aldbrickham** branch journeyed to the Bell at Aldworth to present the branch Pub of the Year certificate (below) to landlord, Hugh Macauley and his wife, Mary. The original date had to be abandoned when heavy snow covered the route from Goring station to Aldworth via the very steep Streatley Hill. Hugh had never heard of SPBW before but he is now “wised up”.



Photo by John Dearing

The Bell is a frequent winner of awards from CAMRA and many other organisations, now joined by our own. As a heritage pub, family-run and with a strong emphasis on drinking of beer it was an obvious winner. Sadly Hugh’s father, the legendary Ian “Jack” Macauley died in November but he was

certainly with us in spirit, as we celebrated the Bell's success, along with Dave Maggs of West Berks brewery, the main suppliers of beer to the inn.

The branch will hold its annual Peter Smith Memorial Pub Crawl on Saturday 5th March, visiting pubs in the Newbury area. Any other SPBW will as usual be welcome. We will catch the 11.48 train from Reading to Kintbury, arriving 12.28 to visit the Dundas Arms (next to the station) and then journey back to Newbury to visit a variety of pubs, including (no doubt) the new Wetherspoons outlets in this previously "JDW-free" stronghold! Please contact John Dearing (0118 9590377) nearer the time for more details.

Norfolk Bears held their first meeting at the Fat Cat, Norwich on 2 December; they are a reincarnation of the former Norvic Nippers branch which began life in February 1995. After a few years most of the members drifted away and the branch folded. The Fat Cat provides ales in wooden pins for the lunchtime meetings. Trips are being planned to breweries such as Woodforde, Shepherd Neame, Batham and Sarah Hughes.



The Fat Cat, Norwich

Wantz's latest gastronomic outing was to the Lahore Kebab House just off Commercial Road, where we enjoyed a better class of curry than you'll find in nearby Brick Lane. We 'brought our own' beer in our stomachs, having supped earlier in the Carpenters Arms in Bethnal Green and the Pride of Spitalfields. At the end of January we visited Barnet, at the far end of the Northern Line. Pick of the pubs here is the Old Mitre in the High Street, a genuine old establishment, offering a good range of ales, including the likes of Landlord, Summer Lightning and seasonal beers from Bateman and Hydes.

West Riding's annual visit to Belgium was even better attended than usual. Based in Ostend, members enjoyed trips to Brussels and Bruges. The usual visits to beer festivals in the northern half of England are being arranged. The Winter Pub of the Season is the Old Cock at Otley, a free house only recently opened.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The cover of the February 2001 PiH was a rather lacklustre affair, being a drawing of a (full) pint glass, tied in with the perennial issue of short measures. Events in London centred on two venues no longer used by SPBW: the NEC had moved its monthly meeting place to the Market Porter in Borough Market, where the AGM was to be held. Although I believe the Porter has changed hands since then it still serves a wide range of beers and is worth visiting when it's not too crowded. Meanwhile the Tony Littler Trophy competition was scheduled at the Rugby Tavern in Clerkenwell. This was then a Fullers house but is now owned by Shepherd Neame.

Staying in the capital, the London Pub of the Year competition was being revived after more than ten years' dormancy. Happy to report, this event has been kept alive ever since.

Thankfully, my correspondents were venturing further afield. Andy Whitley reported from the Lake District and it's interesting (to me at least) to note that the three pubs he focuses on are ones I've not visited on my regular visits to this area. Meanwhile, Jason Lever offered a pocket guide to the best pubs in Oxford. Neither of these fine folk had travelled anything like as far as John Rooth, who provided a guide to Prague's best bars and beers, the names of which provided a nice challenge to my spellcheck.

Ten years earlier, PiH 37 featured a rather fuzzy drawing of Ridley's brewery on the front. This fine old traditional brewery had been visited by Wantz branch and friends the week before. Of course, we can't go back since it has brewed its last, but at least the former brewery tap, the Compasses at Little Green, is alive and in the current GBG, still serving beers direct from the cask. Not content with this trip, Wantz were visiting Robinson's in March.

Looking at the branch section, we see that St George branch (now defunct) had spent a weekend in November in Devizes. This was an extended social with Coate branch and included a skittles match at the New Inn at Coate, which I believe still serves its beers straight from wooden casks. Another defunct outfit, Suffolk branch, had spent New Year's Eve on a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle pub crawl of Stowmarket. Well, wouldn't you?

The international flavour in this issue was provided by John Conen, with an article titled 'Beers from the Wood in Germany'; and by Harri Ahola, then Chairman of the newly formed Finnish Society for Traditional Beers. The aim was to advance the Finnish beer culture by increasing the supply of good beers. This seems to be still going:

<http://www.posbeer.org/yhdistys/summary.php>. I should have spent Christmas in Finland, but was foiled by a light dusting of snow at Heathrow. Maybe when I do manage to get over there I can discover if there are any beers of note.

If Finland is too far afield, there's always Cleethorpes, where Andy & Co had been checking out a few pubs; he concluded that "it really is quite a decent drinking spot".

MEET the BRANCHES

We have 17 affiliated branches and details of these are listed below. We always encourage members to join a local branch and get involved with its social activities. Most branches would appreciate new members so you can expect a warm welcome. Branches tend to be fairly informal, meetings being free of boring bureaucracy.

If you don't have a local branch, why not start one? Bill English, (Branch Liaison Officer, address on page 2), will be pleased to tell you what you need to know.

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**, 42 Brendon Street, London W1. 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: Are based mainly around the Crewe/Nantwich area. Informal meetings are held each Monday from 8.30 in Hops, Prince Albert Street, Crewe – all real ales £2 a pint for Camra members. Contact Colin Donald 01270 623376 email colinsdonald@sky.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 usually held in Reading; contact John Dearing 0118 958 0377 or gpwild@btconnect.com to find out where and when.

CROYDON REAL ALE PRESERVATION SOCIETY: 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. Contact Pete McGill 07831 561296 (m) or John Smith 02071884844 (w).

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

IPSWICH: Contact Phil (01473 280822) or Iain (07707 465750) for details of meetings.

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.

NORFOLK BEARS: Meetings held first Thursday of each month at 12.30 in the **Fat Cat**, 49 West End Street, Norwich. The landlord, Colin Keatley, regularly supplies three pins of Fat Cat (and other) beers from the wood. More details at: <http://www.spbw.com/norfolk/about.html>

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@ntlworld.com or the website 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.

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 (usually) on last Sunday morning in month in various pubs in and around Leeds. Brewery trips, day trips and crawls and other socials. Contact Graham Hewitt (0113 2624574; graham-hewitt@tiscali.co.uk) for further details.

WOOLWICH: Meetings held first Thursday of each month at 8.30 pm at the Prince Albert (Rose's), Hare Street, Woolwich. Usually four handpumped guest beers are available. 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!

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 46; 49; 86-116. These can be obtained from the Editor (address on page 2) in return for 12 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.

Most issues from 90 onwards can now be found on the SPBW website, in PDF format.

FOLLOW THE BEAR

The city of Oxford has many fascinating pubs, to the extent that in a short pub crawl of four or five, one can never visit all one's favourites. One that features more often than not on my itineraries is the Bear, a tiny three-room pub, that claims to be the oldest in the city. Purists will dispute this as the present Bear was originally only the Ostler's Cottage attached to the vast coaching inn of that name from c1600. The original inn dated from at least the 15th century and acquired the name of the Bear in 1432 through a connection with the Earl of Warwick, whose emblem was the bear and ragged staff. Surprisingly perhaps, it closed in 1801, long before the demise of the coaching era. The present Bear was already an inn by then, having become the Jolly Trooper in 1774 and took over the name of the larger establishment when it closed. When I first visited it in the 1970s the pewter bar counter was uneven but perhaps as a result of glasses slithering to the floor was replaced by a smooth surface some years later.

For most visitors, principal interest collection of ties, every conceivable and even the numbering around by a landlord in the cartoonist for the acquired by cutting belonging to a visit last summer the ties to a fellow pointed to one never noticed "There's an odd Preservation of Wood" - wonder about?" So of can be seen the date was about 1971 and the "donor" has signed the slip of paper. The name appears to be E V Payn. Do any readers recognise the signature?

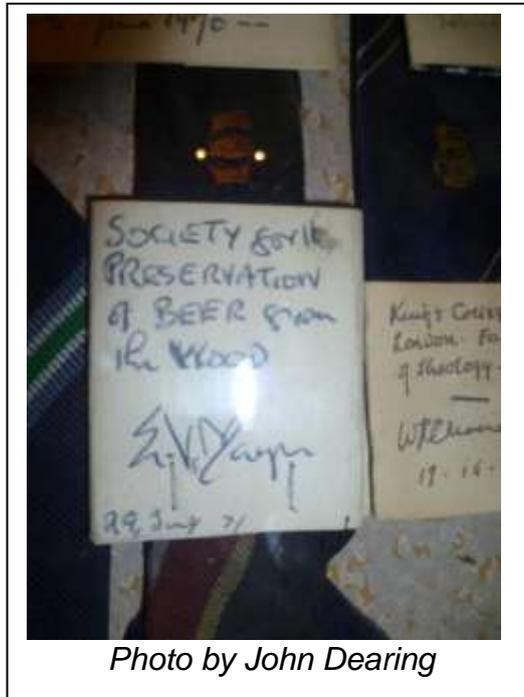


Photo by John Dearing

For many years the Bear was part of what eventually became Allied Breweries but in recent years the pub was acquired by Fullers and now sells the range of beers from Chiswick, usually with guest beers from independent breweries including, on my most recent visit, the Oxford-based Shotover brewery.

however, the will be the vast which covers almost surface on the walls ceilings. Now 5,000, it was begun 1950s who was also Oxford Mail, many the ends off ties "unwary visitors". On I got chatting about customer who behind me (which I'd before) and said one - Society for the Beers from the what that's all course I told him! As

John Dearing

THE SPBW BRINGS EVOLUTION TO SALOP

The 2010 *SPBW* National weekend, 12 – 14 November, was based in the quaint medieval Shropshire town of Shrewsbury. Besides being well populated with ancient churches, abbeys and historic buildings, twelve GBG 2011 real ale pubs reside inside the A5 Ring Road that loops this Salop town. An inner loop is supplied by the fast flowing River Severn which confines Shrewsbury, making it easily accessible on foot around the sloping roads and lanes which serve the plethora of shops, bars and restaurants. Famous for the likes of Charles Darwin and Brother Cadfael, Shrewsbury proved a pleasant backdrop to the *SPBW* weekends' real ale imbibing exploits.



Admiral Benbow



Coach & Horses

Early arrivals were already assembling in the towns' pubs before I arrived on parade at the ***Admiral Benbow*** (24 Swan Hill). I didn't frequent the nearby ***Coach & Horses*** (Swan Hill) due to a large throng of evening drinkers, so attended the "Benbow" to be greeted by some eight local real ales. *Six Bells Cloud 9* (4.2) and *Severn Gorgeous* (4.8) from the Shires/Severn Valley/Worfield brewery were imbibed at this proper real ale enthusiasts' backstreet boozier. At least three ciders were also available amid the *Ludlow Gold* (4.2), *Ironbridge Foundry Gold* (4.5), *Slater's Top Totty* (4.0) and house beer *Benbow IPA* (3.6) from the *Six Bells*. If you are under the age of 30, drinking may only proceed at the landlord's discretion. But it was OK, for all of the *SPBW* members in attendance had eclipse this milestone a while back!

The ***Salopian Bar*** (Smithfield Road) is 200 yards from the town bus station, so a good pub to rendezvous at before the short bus ride to this evening's Society visit to the ***Salopian*** brewery. A welcome supper buffet was laid on to soak up the brewery brews on offer which happen to be *Shropshire Gold* (3.8) and *Silhouette* (4.0), with their *Porter* (4.5) available on gravity dispense. An instructive question and answer chit-chat was presented by Mr Wilf Nelson from the brewery in the brew plant, before we retired back to the tap room for further re-fills and replenishment.

The return bus journey saw us disembark then splinter to preferred destinations. I popped back into the *Salopian Bar* and ticked a new beer on since a couple of hours ago, *Hurricane Jack* (4.4) from Fyne Ales, before

Dave Laing and I ventured into **Montgomery's Tower** (Lower Claremont Bank), a vibrant Wetherspoons establishment, where the mid-twenty to mid-thirty brigade congregate. But alas not even the well-kept *Mordue Coriander 1879* (4.9), *Exmoor Dark* (4.2) or the *Hilden's Scullions Single X Plain Porter* (4.2), a gorgeous drop that one, could entice either of us to party on the dance floor. Plus they don't play Punk Rock anymore.



Salopian Brewery was established at an old dairy on the outskirts of Shrewsbury in 1995, the plant having been moved from Snowdonia brewery in North Wales. The brewery was rebuilt in 1999 with the brew length quadrupling in size and the plant generally being modernized. Since 1999, sales have grown every year and capacity has been increased twice in that period. The brewery also produces ales under the Blackwater name. The **Bull in the Barne** in The Mount, on the western outskirts of Shrewsbury, serves as the Salopian brewery tap. Shropshire Gold (3.8%) and Oracle (4%) are the best known of Salopian's beers, which are distributed to over 200 pubs, mostly in Shropshire and surrounding counties.

Saturday morning twenty-five *SPBW* cohorts were subpoenaed to the Abbey Foregate car-park for a coach pick-up and then apparition to the **Stone House** brewery at Weston, near Oswestry. A stone-clad house sits next to the brewery, hence the name, and the brewery itself inhabits old chicken sheds.



The brewery is the brainchild of Shane Parr, an Australian who has had a keen interest in brewing since he was 16. He developed his love of British cask beers shortly after arriving in the UK in 2000. After full mash home-brewing for a couple of years, Shane was encouraged to follow his dreams of setting up a microbrewery. Stonehouse brewery was thus established in 2007. It is a family-run business, located on the Cambrian Railway line just outside Oswestry. The plant mainly consists of second hand tanks customised as liquor tanks and copper, with new open top fermenters and mash tun, custom built by a local dairy plant manufacturer. Five ales are regularly brewed, these being available in some 120 pubs in the Severn valley area.

The brewery itself has a very small workforce which, apart from Shane Parr, comprises his wife Alison, father-in-law Iain Reid and Carl Maxfield. Shane gave us a candid oration on the brewery's short history and a brewing discussion, while we enjoyed generous helpings of hand pumped *Station Bitter* (3.9), their regular session beer, and *KPA* (*Kingston* was proved in the form of French sticks, a selection of cheeses, tomatoes and pickles, which exalted the taste of their beer to another level. I snared a couple of their bottle-conditioned beers, *Off the Rails* (4.8) and *Wheeltapper's Wheat Beer* (4.5), before boarding the coach for further real ale pursuits in Shropshire.



NEC Vice-Chairman Mike Hall in full presentation mode: L with Wilf Nelson of Salopian; R with Stonehouse's Shane Parr (photo by David Laing)

A short ten minute scoot to Selattyn, and the **Cross Keys** (Glyn Road), where licensees Phil and Hilda Rothera opened their pub especially for us on the usually closed Saturday afternoons. Three local beers showcased, *Stonehouse Station Bitter* (3.9), *Six Bells Cloud 9* (4.2) and the most drunk ale there today *Llangollen Bitter* (4.2). A lovely pub listed in CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors, and well worth a visit – but beware its limited opening times.

Another wee jaunt on the coach before we arrived at the **Last Inn** at Upper Hengoed, an interesting pub boasting a huge function suite. Landlord Jeremy Jordon offers an impressive myriad of six ales, obtained mainly from the Brewers Wholesale fine cask programme; the four that I tried were *Blackwater Death Metal* (4.0), *Nelson Loose Cannon* (4.3), *Exe Valley Autumn Glory* (4.5) and *Diablo* from the *Elland* brewery weighing in at a hefty (5.6)! A worthy inn and not the last today! A great array of beers, a good vibe and friendly locals, especially Glynis Birks. Thanks for the inviting chat and I wish I had longer to talk. Next time!

Next port of call was the **Royal Oak**, locally known as "The Tiddly", at the rural Ellerdine Heath. On arrival at early evening, the pub had a bustling patronage amassed at the bar, viewing ales such as *Rowton Bitter* (3.9) and *Wye Valley HPA* (4.0), and *Wholesome Stout* (4.6). I plumbed for the *Super IPA* (6.4) from Woodlands in Cheshire. Another well-chosen and well worthy hostelry, idiosyncratic but analogous to the previously attended pubs on today's

excursion. A big thank-you goes to local *SPBW* member John Lewis, who expertly marshalled the days' itinerary and organised the weekend's brewery visits, especially Stonehouse for whom he honours the BLO position for CAMRA.



On our return to Shrewsbury, I had a spruce up before the Saturday night onslaught which started at the ***Wheatsheaf*** (50 High Street), a Marston's pub, with their assorted range of beers and assorted owned breweries. I opted for *Bank's UCB* (5.3) and *Ringwood Huffkin* (4.4) at this town centre street-corner pub, popular with all ages.

Loggerheads (1 Church Street) is another ***Marston's*** pub, a real gem, tucked down a side street, but a must see when in Shrewsbury. Again, a CAMRA National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors entrant, with its intimate aura and its many small rooms, nooks and crannies. A *Jennings Worlds' Biggest Liar* (4.3) was tested amongst ales from the Marston's portfolio.

Around the corner is the ***Three Fishes*** (Fish Street), another fine pub with some eight ales on at any one time. I've drank here before on a previous trip to Shrewsbury, and it's a pub that never disappoints. I managed to scoop *Corvedale St. Georges Stout* (4.5) and *W90* (3.9) from the fabled Marble brewery, my personal favourite brewery in the UK.

The ***Nags Head*** (Wyle Cop) was heaving with Saturday night revellers, but I managed to prise a *Hobson's Best* (3.8) from its hand pump. A good, solid, two-roomed locals' pub. After "The Nags", I put in appearances, token I think, at ***Montgomery's Tower*** and then at the ***Salopian Bar*** where I snagged *Off the Rails* (4.8) from the earlier toured ***Stonehouse***, a fitting tribute to a sublime day of real ale consumption.

The mandatory English fried Sunday breakfast put me in good stead for the train trip to Ludlow in the south of the county, close to the Herefordshire border. The town dates way back to 1086 when the impressive Ludlow Castle was first constructed overlooking the rivers Teme and Corve. Nearly 500 listed buildings grace Ludlow, but it was the two Good Beer Guide real ale pubs that are located in the town centre that interested the *SPBW* today.

The ***Charlton Arms*** (Ludford Bridge) was a busy pub, where terrific views, packed with Sunday dinner diners, but the well-appointed bar, hosted *Hobson's Best* (3.8), *Wye Valley Butty Bach* (4.5), *Ludlow Gold* (4.2) and a

very flavoursome *A Little Less Conversation* (5.0) from Sheffield's Kelham Island. A good start to the Sunday vigil in South Shropshire, as we ambled back across the River Teme and up to the **Wheatsheaf**. Again crowded with diners, the beer range was a little disappointing with only *Jennings Cumberland Ale* (4.0) and *Marston's Burton Bitter* (3.8) putting in an appearance. An average pub, hence no GBG 2011 diploma.



On to the **Church Inn** in the Buttercross (above). Ah yes the **Church Inn**, full of soldiers, the town mayor and other town dignitaries from the Remembrance Sunday service, plus us admiring the eight brews on offer. When in Ludlow! Well three Ludlow Brewery ales were exhibited here so it only seemed right to do them justice and put them through their paces. *Gold* (4.2), *Boiling Well* (4.7) and *Stairway to Paradise* (5.0) were warmly received. These were alongside *Hobson's Mild* (3.2) and *Town Crier* (4.5), *Wye Valley Bitter* (3.7), *Three Tuns Cleric's Cure* (5.0) and a wondrous *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* (4.5), a velvety-smooth porter from Kelham Island. The pub was offering three thirds of a pint for the price of a pint in a wooden frame, a novel idea and epitomized the effort and devotion to real ale that this pub prides itself. A cracking watering hole, easily one of the best this weekend!

We trundled back by rail for a few more drinks around Shrewsbury, some of us marching up to the **Abbey Hotel** (83 Monkmoor Road). This spacious, bright and airy bar paraded intriguing panoply of ales, *St. Austell Black Prince* (4.0), *Celt Experience Native Storm* (4.4), *Jersey Liberation Ale* (4.0), *Harviestoun Bitter & Twisted* (3.8), *Williams Fraoch Heather Ale* (4.1) and the favoured *Cropton Project Green Hop* (4.5).

A repeat trawl around certain town centre GBG hostelries was trumped by the **Coach & Horses** where I hunted down *Gertie Sweet Cherry Diva* (4.7) and *Aston Dark* (3.6), a mild, from the fairly recent ABC brewery at Aston in "Brum". I hit "the sack" at stupid o'clock, reminiscing on another full and enjoyable day of socialising and imbibing the "proper stuff". I depart Salop with

fond memories of a gratifying and pleasurable weekend away with fellow real ale adherents. A win, win scenario, if alas no Darwin!

Plaudits to John Rooth, who puts his time and effort into these weekends beforehand with organising accommodation ideas and such like. I look forward to the whereabouts for the next one Mr General Secretary!

Alan Sheppard

DRINKING WITH THE DUKE

Early last December, I visited one of my favourite London pubs, the recently saved **Duke of Hamilton**, Hampstead. Woody, the pub's guv'nor of 20 years, informed me that he's about to sell the lease to another publican, so that he can take an overdue and well-earned retirement on the South coast. He also stated that his successor intends refurbishing both the pub and kitchen, so that he can serve food regularly like his current pub. I can't be certain how great the work will be as both the building and interior are unlisted. After passing on this information to SPBW and CAMRA members, I decided that I would like to show my appreciation for the work that Woody and Mary have done in keeping this pub as a great local and place for real ale, by organising the same pub crawl in the area, on two separate dates, ending at the Duke, for others that wanted to do the same.



*L-R Alasdair, Bill, Hugh, Aidan
Possibly not their first pint! Photo:
Dominic Pinto*



Duke of Hamilton

The first, on December 17th, was attended by Campden Hill SPBW members Hugh and I, accompanied by CAMRA local Richard. At the Duke, we met fellow Campden Hill members, Alasdair and Bill and another CAMRA member Dominic. The second, on the 29th, was attended by SPBW members Alex, John, Hugh (again), Roger and I, with CAMRA members Albina, Chris, Colin, Daniel, Gerald and Matt. Here are the pubs we visited before the Duke.

The Holly Bush in Holly Mount, a deservedly popular traditional pub, was less crowded the second time, as the first was on a Friday evening and it also attracted some 'once a year' drinkers still on the loose. There was room for us

to sit in the larger room in the back of the pub. It served the regular's Fuller's London Pride and ESB and Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter (not 17th) and seasonal Fuller's Bengal Lancer. I tried the last two and both were in good condition.

The Horseshoe in Heath Street had Camden Best Bitter and Pale Ale on handpump and Wheat Beer on tap with Redemption Urban Dusk (17th) and Rooster's Xmas Ale as the guest ale. Everyone enjoyed the beers on offer including myself as I tried both cask Camden beers. One or two were not so impressed with the modern refurbishment made after Wetherspoons sold it. It's tame compared with the work carried out on the Old White Bear.

The Flask, round the corner from the tube station in Flask Walk, another old favourite traditional pub, had its regular ales Young's Ordinary and Special plus Sambrook's Wandle Ale. The seasonals available were Winter Warmer (17th only) and Xmas Ale. I tried the Ordinary and Winter Warmer, both were fine and had a taste of Xmas Ale. Though in good condition, taste-wise it disappointed, as I felt it didn't punch its weight as an ale of its style should do. The first group drank in the public bar and were entertained by a bunch of merry, good-natured 'mature' lads that had decided to finish their Xmas pub crawl early and were engaged in a Xmas singsong. The second group sat in the lounge near the conservatory. No singing on that occasion! The **Old White Bear** has been converted from a very traditional local to a very modern restaurant with a bar, serving Fuller's London Pride and Green King Abbot. Both the refurbishment and the change of beer selection is at the very least unimaginative and uninspiring. Nothing to recommend it and a travesty of what it used to be like. Both groups walked in, took one look and walked straight out again and carried on to the Duke.

Aidan Kerrigan

Andy's Roving Report

Andy hasn't roved anywhere lately but he has promised to leave his humble garret with pencil and notebook before the next issue.

Last Orders – from Suffolk

A couple of months back, when the icy weather was doing its worst across Britain, it was reported that a certain large brewing company based in Bury St Edmunds was having trouble delivering its beers to the midlands and beyond. Far be it from me to introduce a note of cynicism here, but perhaps if they hadn't closed breweries such as Hardy & Hanson, this might not have been such a problem. Let's hope their customers were supplied with some tasty alternatives as a change from the usual bland output.

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*Propping up the bar in the Cross Keys, Selattyn, during the National Weekend
(see page 15)*

Photo by David Laing