

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

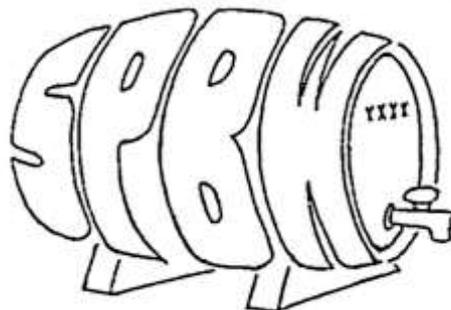
PINT in HAND

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Cross Guns, Avoncliffe, Wiltshire (see page 17)



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 2011 issue should reach the Editor by **25 October**.
- The Editor or the National Executive Committee of SPBW does not necessarily share opinions expressed in *Pint in Hand*.

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All photos by Roger Jacobson unless stated otherwise

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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

In the last issue I finished this piece with a reference to the 40th anniversary of a fellow campaigning body. It just happens that a similar, personal landmark falls this month – four decades have passed since I achieved legal drinking age. Of course, I may have strayed on to licensed premises prior to then, if only to be sociable. In those far off, innocent days I knew little about beer and breweries, other than the major brands that were all that I came across, given the limited range that my home environs could offer.

Strange to think that, back then, just about every pub seemed to be tied to a brewery, either one of the all-pervasive 'Big 6' or a regional – and I would have had to travelled several miles from home to find an independently brewed pint. And what was the choice? Mild (although disappearing in many parts), bitter, best bitter and maybe a winter ale if you were in the right place. Most of what I drank in those formative years would have been 'dustbin' beers; there may have been the rare handpulled pint, but to my uneducated palate, beer was beer and that was it. As for breweries, Ind Coope's Romford plant was a mile or so down the road, but it was little more than a large factory that pumped out interesting smells on a regular basis (the site is now a shopping centre – such is progress). Odd to think that within four years I would have joined Camra and two years later I would sell my soul to SPBW.

So I honestly can't say that things were better in my day. Nowadays the Big bad 6 and their nasty mass produced keg 'bitters' are a distant memory. An ever growing number of small and smaller independent breweries produce a wide range of beers, showing imagination and enterprise in giving the drinker a larger spectrum of tastes. And there are many more free houses (ok, some freer than others) to give a platform to these brewers. And all this since I started drinking legally!

I do recall that when some of the larger brewers responded to the resurgence of interest in 'real ale' that they began to put out some fairly high gravity ales, thinking that this is what the serious drinker wanted. Even now, most of the heavily promoted ales are in the 4% and upwards range (apart from one produced in a town in mid-Suffolk), since 'session' bitters are presumably considered passé. It's been interesting to come across a few examples of very weak beers. Harvey's came out with a 2.7% Ration Ale at the beginning of the year, with the aim of producing a cheaper beer to help customers through the post-Christmas and New Year period. More recently I tried a 1.9% beer by Brodie's of Leyton which did have a notable hop flavour if not a great deal else. But there must surely be a niche for such brews, so it'll be interesting to see if any other brewers have a go.

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 4JU. 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.

NATIONAL WEEKEND 2011

This year we are heading to **York, 18 – 20 November**. We have arranged visits to two breweries: York, on the Friday evening; and Roosters of Knaresborough, early Saturday morning. We will also be touring the best pubs in York, Knaresborough and Harrogate. Spaces on the brewery trips are being snapped up so, if you want to come along, contact John Rooth fairly pronto: he'll ask you for a £16 deposit and supply a list of accommodation if you need it.

LONDON PUB OF THE YEAR

We have 13 nominated pubs for the 2012 contest – thanks to individuals and branches for putting forward the following:

Blythe Hill Tavern, Catford; ***Calthorpe Arms***, Clerkenwell; ***Cleveland Arms***, Paddington; ***Craft Beer Co***, Clerkenwell; ***Duke of Hamilton***, Hampstead; ***Durell Arms***, Fulham; ***Eleanor Arms***, Bow; ***Harp***, Covent Garden; ***Hope***, Carshalton; ***Old Fountain***, City Road; ***Pembury Tavern***, Hackney; ***Royal Oak***, Borough; ***Sultan***, South Wimbledon; ***Ye Olde Mitre***, Holborn.

Two first time nominations here (indeed, the Craft Beer Co only opened in early July!) alongside three past winners. Bill English will mercilessly whip his judging lackeys around these pubs between now and October and he will proclaim the winner by the end of October. Watch the website for the blog of the judging and November PiH for the breath-taking climax!

BEER & BUFFET

Our next B & B event will be on **Monday 24 October**, at **Ye Olde Mitre**, Ely Court, Holborn, London EC1N 6SJ. Tickets cost £5 and are available from John Rooth (cheques to SPBW please). The event will be the upstairs function room, 7.00 pm for 7.30ish.

Ye Olde Mitre is a genuine historic pub hidden in a passage way off Hatton Garden. Although YOM is owned by Fuller's, it continues to serve guest beers, notably from Caledonian and Adnams, but with smaller independent breweries also represented.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Let's start 30 years ago when I began my Editorial career by producing the SPBW Branch Newsletter 34 in July 1981. This was the time when National and Branch members had separate newsletters, for reasons I fail to recall. Being frustrated at the lack of action on the newsletter front, I foolishly offered my services to get at least one issue out as I was keen to advertise Special Branch's forthcoming 100th meeting celebration dinner. Somehow I scraped enough material together for a 7 and a bit page issue (3 pages devoted to an account of Wantz branch's weekend in Macclesfield); a colleague of Derek 'Catweazle' Legg did the typing and I paid to have it photocopied by a printers in Monmouth Street. It may have been a fairly skimpy affair but from this small acorn grew the mighty oak that is Pint in Hand.

10 years later I was still warming up. PiH 39 was pretty much in the format you know and love today (albeit with no photos). There were accounts of the National Weekend in Burton, with visits to Ind Coope and Burton Bridge breweries and the Heritage Brewery Museum; and Malton, courtesy of Andy's golden pen. We had run an SPBW stall at the GBBF held, for that year only at the now-defunct London Arena on the Isle of Dogs. Transport and ventilation were the main problems although we did quite well in terms of recruitment and sales. I had been invited to sit in on one of the judging panels for Champion Beer of Britain, tasting strong bitters, a very interesting experience. Fullers ESB got our vote but the overall Champion was Blackadder Stout by Mauldons.

We reported on two new branches – Casablanca, based in St Albans, most of whose members I believe worked for a beer campaigning organisation that was then 20 years old. Their first meeting was attended by the Head Brewery from Budwar. North Riding was based in Scarborough. Sadly neither of these groups passed the test of time.

On a sad note, there was an obituary of Tim Wilding who had died suddenly. Tim was a founder member and secretary of SPBW Ponds branch and a familiar figure at many a beer gathering.

Ten years ago I see that there was no National Weekend for the only time since these events began in 1982, due to lack of volunteers. However, we were still running a stall at GBBF ("between the Cornish pasty stand and a watch retailer complete with token bimbo sales assistant") and had resurrected the London Pub of the Year contest. We had another new branch – Mayday, based at the First In Last Out brewpub in Hastings. The pub and brewery are still in business, unlike the branch. From further afield, Andy gave his account of a weekend in Antwerp while Jason Lever reported on microbrews in New York and New Jersey. So, from trying to promote one local event, I ended up going global!

BRANCHES IN ACTION

Campden Hill's meeting place has now changed to the Cleveland Arms in Chilworth Street, Paddington. In May we visited the Seven Stars in Carey Street, where Dark Star Hophead was in great condition. Mike freely availed himself of the range of free bar snacks, before it was pointed out to him that they were in fact food for Roxie's cats which are allowed the run of the bar (on as well as around). Scotty was his usual excellent host in the Ye Olde Mitre. He had Harviestoun mild and Gales Festival mild on for mild month, to augment the Deuchars and Fullers.

In June we had our annual away day. This year we went to Portsmouth, taking in HMS Victory and Invincible and the Spinnaker Tower on the Harbour. The Olde Customs House is a former Gale's pub with good views of the quay. The nearby Invincible is recommended for cheap pub grub and TT Landlord. Back in Southsea we visited the adjacent Barley Mow (always has a mild on tap), and the Hole in the Wall, both of which had a wide range of cask beers. Both are friendly community locals, the latter shading it for beer quality. Heading back we dropped off in Havant for the Old House at Home, another ex-Gales now Fullers, and the Wetherspoons in Woking, which again had a mild (B&T) available.

Also in June, we went to the Durell Arms in Fulham Road. This is a pleasant pub with three real ales and a cider and good food. The beers were two from Adnams and Sambrook's Junction. On to Putney for the Dukes Head, good Youngs but music far too loud, causing most people to shout. The highlight was the nearby Bricklayers Arms, now selling micro brews instead of Tim Taylor. They had eight beers on including two each from Bath, Dark Star and Stonehenge.

Most members of **Kingston** branch congregated for the Kingston Beer Festival in May with all agreeing it was an improvement on last year. We enjoyed a BBQ at Branch HQ for our July meeting with excellent beers from Twickenham Fine Ales to wash down the food once we'd finally managed to light the BBQ! Plans are afoot for visits to local beer festivals including Woodies in New Malden in August, for a beery Saturday in Southwark and also for a leisurely ride around the 2012 Olympic Time Trial cycle route taking in several hostelrys on the way.

First Awayday for **Norfolk Bears** and what a cracking start! Ten met at The Trafford in Norwich for a couple of pints of breakfast, then on the coach at 10.00 hours for the thirty minute journey to Norfolk's largest (of 30) brewery. A late arrival joined us from Spain for a tour celebrating Woodforde's 30th birthday in style- and tastings- with magnificent new equipment proudly presented by MD Mike Betts and Head Brewer Neil Bain. Of special interest to SPBW was the parade of eight gleaming, refurbished wooden barrels, which had once held French wine and which were due to be called into the much more appropriate duty of maturing Norfolk Nip, Nog, Headcracker, whatever takes the Brewer's fancy. Then we were taken the full ten yards to the magnificent Brewery Tap, the Fur and Feather, where the Sundew, Nelson's

revenge, Once Bittern, Nog, Headcracker, Admiral's Reserve, Mardlers and Wherry flowedand flowed. To the restaurant, for gut-bustingly excellent Steak and Kidney pudding, fish and chips, three-pie platter, steak sandwich.....the lot. And more beer. An excellent visit, topped off by a presentation pack including a bottle of Woodforde's Limited Edition Norfolk Nip, 'based on the original Steward and Patteson recipe of 1929.....matured in oak barrels for four months.....8.5%, rich in dark malt, hints of liquorice, rich fruit and warming alcohols.' Coach back to The Fat Cat and the Trafford where we all tried to remember our names and the more fussy of us tried to remember where we live.

Special Branch's annual canal week was this year on the Kennet & Avon in Wiltshire and was another winner. You can read about some of the best pubs we visited elsewhere in this issue. Sadly our hoped for skittles match with Coate branch was non-starter as the home team had scattered for fear of a thrashing. However, it was a pleasure to visit the New Inn at Coate and meet branch stalwart Eric Clark.



The New Inn, outside and in

Many of the branch also enjoy a week in the Lake District every late June. The majority of us go hiking every day while the more sedentary of our group boost the pub trade in some of the excellent hostelries this region has to offer. With getting on for 30 independent breweries in Cumbria, there is plenty of good beer to choose from as well. One favourite pub I don't think I've mentioned before is Tweedie's Bar at the Dale Lodge Hotel in Grasmere. It provides a warm welcome for the weary walker and offers six well-kept draught beers, almost all from Cumbrian micros.

Wantz branch have had two pub walks in recent months: the first was in the environs of Euston station, starting at the Bree Louise. This is not a large pub but it offers a wide range of ales served either by handpump or direct from the cask. The Doric Arch was formerly the Head of Steam before being bought by Fullers; some guest ales are available. In between is the Euston Tap, situated in one of the old lodges on Euston Road. Eight real ales are on tap here, although the exact method of dispense is a mystery. You can also choose from a much larger range of 'craft world' beers either on tap or in bottle.

Our second walk was in the area south of Tower Bridge. The Pommeliers Rest is a fairly average Wetherspoon; the Draft (*sic*) House is aimed at a younger, wealthier clientele and specialises in Continental beers, although 4 handpumps dispense more downhome fare; the Dean Swift round the corner is similar but smaller; I tried two beers from Brodies of Leyton and found the quality ok but less than perfect. Finally, the Anchor Tap, close to the former Courage brewery down by the river. Now owned by Sam Smith, this is a rare multi-roomed pub; I know opinions of Sam's can vary, but they do know how to preserve traditional pubs. Very cheap draught ale as well! Coming up later in August we have a pub walk in Clerkenwell, tagging on to London Pub of the Year judging, plus a return to Ciao Bella, an excellent Italian restaurant in the same general area.

Our meeting nights now coincide with the weekly pub quiz at the Pembury Tavern. We managed to come first in May (thereby boosting branch funds) but have failed so far to repeat this triumph. In July, our ignorance of computer games was part of our undoing.

West Riding branch continues to expand and now boasts 102 members after some recruitment at a recent visit to Kirkstall brewery. As well as the usual visits to local pubs and beer festivals, forthcoming events include visits to Driffield and other places east of Leeds (20 August) and Lancaster (17 September); the next meeting is on 28 August at the Leggers Inn at the canal basin in Dewsbury.

A wonderful English summer day saw us splash our way northwards to Geordieland. First port of call was the multi-award winning CAMRA Northumberland 'Pub of the Year,' the **Boathouse** in Wylam. This old traditional homely 2 roomed pub by the station served 14 beers including brews from High House, Hadrian & Border and Fyne. From there we made our damp way into Newcastle and first the **Bacchus**, a bar in a modern classic style, with pillars and acres of dark wood, with leather seats and armchairs. The 10 beers included a couple of new breweries: Silhill and Rod Hills. Further along the cobbled High Bridge is the **Duke of Wellington**, an old, basically-furnished street corner house with pictures of a mainly military nature around the walls. 5 beers, mainly regionals, including Mordue Workie Ticket. A reasonably lengthy walk, in ever increasing rain, took us to the **Newcastle Arms**, by the Chinese Arch. A very well-worn, one roomed pub with curved bar and plain wooden furniture and décor. Photos of the city adorned the walls. 8 beers normally but also a beer festival! (Which was just as well as the rain had now turned torrential and a veritable river ran past the door). When the rain had downgraded to an annoyingly persistent drizzle we made it down to **Tilleys**, adjacent to the Tyne Theatre. This is a modern quirky little bar with a simply furnished main lounge and a small side room where it hosts its own film club. A large number of surrealist paintings decorate the walls. Half a dozen beers of which I tried York Citra. Up the road, past the Theatre, you find the **Bodega**, a pub of great character with a central, vaulted, doomed glass ceiling. An opened planned pub with bar under the doomed section and wings either side. Leather bench seats and booths and part wood/ part tile floor.

Again about 6 beers. The final destination was the **Crown Posada**, an historic gem! A long corridor, one roomed bar, which gently tapered towards the far end. A small sectioned ante-room by the entrance contained two tall church-like stained glass windows, each with a male and female figure. Small booths, leather seats, decorated ceiling and subtle lighting and walls of a gentle plum colour. On the beer front, another 6 brews. A very damp day, but a wonderful choice of very different pubs, with a substantial range of beers. To top it all the sun came out as we were leaving Newcastle. Ah well!

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.

OUT AND ABOUT

We have recently run stalls at the Beckenham and Ealing beer festivals. The Beckenham event was the first at that venue and was a great success for the organisers. At Ealing we had a good turn out of volunteers – thanks to all who helped out (and to Kimberley for the staff beer and food tokens!)

We hope to be at the Croydon & Sutton beer fest in Wallington 13 – 15 October. Contact John Rooth if you want to volunteer.

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 **Cleveland Arms**, 28 Chilworth Street, Paddington, London W2 6PT. 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 Ed James, email secretary@spbw.org. Website: www.spbw.org.

CHESHIRE REAL ALE PEOPLE: Are based mainly around the Crewe/Nantwich area. Informal meetings are held each Monday from 7.30 in the Borough Arms, Earle Street, Crewe (some beers £1.50 a pint), then to 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 <http://spbwkingston.co.uk/diary> or email mike.lapworth@talk21.com

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: Normally meet at the Bridge House (JDW), Belfast, on a Friday night after 8pm, at the pillar beside the handpumps. Occasionally the Tuesday Bell (JDW), Lisburn, after 8pm on a Saturday. 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, Cumbria, 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. We aim to get the meeting out of the way before the pub quiz starts. 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!

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.



A BINGE IN BERKS

A visit to Bingham's Brewery and beyond

On 16 July some 20 members of assorted SPBW branches in the south east paid a visit to Bingham's brewery. If this is a new name to many of you that's because the brewery has only been in operation since November 2010. It's the brainchild of Chris Bingham who began home brewing as a teenager and has long held the ambition to make his hobby into a commercial business. After being made redundant some five years ago he gained some useful experience by working at Hogs Back brewery while searching for a site where he could brew under his own name.

Chris finally found suitable premises on an industrial estate in Ruscombe, just outside Twyford in Berkshire, and obtained his brewing equipment from David Porter (see PiH 75) who has supplied plants for more than 100 microbreweries. Once the brewery was up and running, the beers were on sale in a number of local pubs including the Royal Oak, literally just over the road from the industrial estate. So far Chris's beers have only been available in the Reading area, although they have been known to appear in the Cask Pub in Pimlico and even in North Yorkshire, thanks to a beer swap with Great Heck brewery. They may well soon be in greater demand: just the day before our visit Bingham's won two awards at the SIBA South Beer Competition: Space Hoppy IPA won Gold in the Strong Bitter category and Vanilla Stout won Silver for Speciality Beers. Congratulations!



Andy Shuttleworth of Central London branch presents Delia Allott with the SPBW certificate
We were shown around the brewery by Delia Allott, an accountant by trade but a director of Bingham's in her spare time, and obviously very enthusiastic about the business. We sampled five brews: Twyford Tipple, a 3.7% session bitter; Brickworks Bitter at 4.2% (the industrial estate is on the site of a former brickworks); the award-winning Space Hoppy (5.0%); Doodle Stout (5.0%, named after the brewery dog); and Ginger Stout (5.0%). I certainly enjoyed them all, and I got the impression that all present had no complaints whatsoever. So, look out for Bingham's beers and check their website: www.binghams.co.uk.

After leaving the brewery our mob crossed the road to the Royal Oak where we were booked in for lunch; Twyford Tipple and Brickworks were on tap. We also tried out two pubs in Twyford, the Waggon & Horses and the Duke of Wellington, both of which were pleasant establishments with one or two local beers. The W & H has a very large garden with an aviary and a few of us passed the time talking to the budgies. Most of us then moved on by train to Reading, where we visited three more pubs.

First off was the **Blagrove Arms** in Blagrove Street, quite close to the rail station. This former Courage pub has been through numerous management changes in recent years but was reopened last October by an enterprising young licensee who introduced a range of usually four cask beers, mainly from micro-breweries or major regionals such as Timothy Taylor. It is also becoming well known as a live music venue.

Second port-of-call was the perennial **Hobgoblin** in Broad Street, which serves three beers from the West Berkshire Brewery and a rolling selection of five others from micro-breweries. Almost every inch of the walls and ceiling was covered in used pump clips. The pub was named the London Tavern up to 1994 and the present name reflects its former position in the Wychwood Brewery estate. Somebody from on high has at last dictated that the name must change and a number of SPBW visitors were tempted to put suggestions for a new name into the box provided.

Final visit (at least for most of the party) was to the **Allied Arms** in St Marys Butts, which despite being one of Reading's smallest pubs manages to retain two distinct bars. It also has a large and very popular garden. Here the choice is London Pride, Loddon's Hullabaloo and three others selected from the micro-brewing sector. The name, unusually, refers to the three allies in the Crimean War of 1854!

Credit must go to Bill English for organising the day's entertainment and to all at Bingham's for their hospitality.

RJ (with thanks to John Dearing for information on Reading pubs)

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.

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.

TWO TO TANGO, ONE TO HOP

South America combines the strange (the world's largest rain forest, the driest desert, and the largest navigable lake, to name three) with the familiar (the European languages of Spanish and Portuguese, and a very European look to some of the big cities like Buenos Aires and Santiago). Having failed to find much from CAMRA or various internet searches, I pursued the researches to my favourite continent more in hope than expectation. Both Argentina and Chile are famous as new world producers of wine, so when I arrived in Mendoza in Argentina, I did two things: went to a wine tasting room to sample the region's excellent red Malbec and then went on a tour of some local bodegas (wineries). The third thing was to check into my hotel.

Mendoza, lying in the rain shadow of the Andes, receives no more than 5 inches of rain a year and the summer temperature often reaches 90 degrees F, so it's definitely a flip flops and shorts place. It has always been a strategic point before crossing the Andes to Chile and although the passenger railway service has sadly been discontinued, the highway is busy with public transport. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in 1861 ("a bummer for the locals" in an appalling understatement of the Lonely Planet). Hence it was rebuilt with low rise houses and wide streets; since most of these are lined with trees, it is a relaxing place of about half a million people.

My hotel, keen to give tourists an all-round appreciation of the city, helpfully displayed brochures of an establishment called Antares in a smart neighbourhood of the city. Although opening time was advertised as 7 p.m. I arrived 15 minutes early but still was served with enthusiasm. If the barman thought my knowledge of Spanish was basic, he hid it well. Antares is a trendy place which brews on the premises, and if the pleasure of being served before opening time wasn't enough, it improved further when the barman said it was happy hour. Whatever one might say about those draughty little rocks off the southern coast of Argentina, most of the locals seem to be Anglophiles and pick up bits of English culture by serving in pint glasses. I kicked off with Kolsch, a German-style creation of 5% and a relative thirst quencher. Their Scotch is a chestnut brown ale with a nice nutty flavour and to be treated with respect at 6%. The Porter, at a mere 5.5%, has a delicious smooth but smoky taste and in my opinion the best of the three. Antares also do Honey Beer, Cream Stout, Barley Wine (at 10%!) and Imperial Stout, but I thought that four pints in total, in an hour and a quarter, were enough. There would be other chances for these, for Antares have ten branches around the country. And anyway I was due for a wine tasting session that evening at the hotel.

Buenos Aires is one of the great cities of the Americas and its population is approaching 15 million. It has two amazing British-built railway stations (Retiro and Constitucion) and an atmospheric metro system which was opened in 1913. It boasts shiny high rises on the former docklands which make Canary Wharf look so last century, but recent economic crises have hit hard, with poverty and homelessness on the increase. One of the main arteries, Avenida

9 de Julio, has ten lanes of traffic each way, and many of the smaller avenues are elegantly lined with apartment blocks reminiscent of Haussmann-era Paris, but I preferred staying in the more bohemian and grubby quarter of San Telmo which starts ten blocks south of the commercial centre. Although there is an Antares in Buenos Aires, as luck would have it there is a real ale pub in San Telmo. It is a fair imitation of a traditional English boozery, dark and woody in décor, with six hand pumps and a menu that includes Thai jungle curry (I tried both red and green and they were excellent). The pub is called the Gibraltar, and the irony of it being named after a British enclave beside a Spanish speaking country can't be overlooked.



Photo by James Collonette

After arriving at 5.30 a.m. in B.A. from an overnight bus journey, I badly needed some medicine, and the Gibraltar obliged with three of the Antares beers and a sweetish brew called Kingston which weighed in at 6%. Better was the Gambrinus Stout, smoky again with a nice coffee sort of finish, and best of all was the news that happy hour lasted until 10 p.m.

The following evening was, sadly, my last before flying home so I decided to drink quietly in a local no-frills bar called La Coruna. A big local brewery, Quilmes, do a Pilsen which is pleasant without being special. Their stout, however, has a nice Christmas pudding sort of flavour and they also do a Bock which is a bit stronger (6%). Things went downhill after that; it happened to be the 17th March and a couple from Dublin at my hotel pointed out that Argentina has the fifth-largest number of people with Irish ancestry in the world. So what followed were Kingston in one glass and Malbec in the other, plus a filthy headache that is the worst piece of baggage one should take on to a long-haul flight. Oh well, it was all in the interests of research.

James Collonette

WILTSHIRE BY WATER

Special Branch's 2011 canal week was a return to the Kennet & Avon, enjoying some delightful countryside as well as, hardly surprisingly, a selection of fine pubs. This is very much Wadworth country, although we found the Devizes brews less to our taste these days. There are, however, plenty of alternatives from smaller breweries in the south-west. I'm not giving a blow by pint account of our exploits here, but instead will highlight the pick of the pubs we visited.

We began and ended our trip in Bradford on Avon, a very attractive town, something of a miniature version of Bath. The Barge Inn (Marstons) and Canal Tavern (Wadworth) are handiest for the canal, close to the lock; the Three Horseshoes close to the rail station is a free house (not sure of the usual range but the pub was holding a beer festival the weekend we left), and there are several pubs in the town centre. The best of the lot, however, is the **Castle** on Mount Pleasant. The address betrays that getting here from the canal does involve a steep climb (more mount than pleasant some may say) but your efforts will be rewarded.



The Castle is set in a characterful Georgian building and has been a pub for some 160 years. There is a large drinking area with flagstone floors around the bar and a few smaller interconnecting rooms leading off. You can also sit outside and enjoy the views over the town and across to Salisbury Plain. The pub was acquired by the Flatcappers pub co in 2006 and carefully restored. It offers accommodation and serves food all day. There were 5 beers on tap on our visit, most from the Three Castles brewery in Pewsey, plus Glastonbury's Lady of the Lake, which we all enjoyed. We also enjoyed the downhill walk back to the boat!

The Castle, 10 Mount Pleasant, Bradford on Avon BA15 1SJ;
www.flatcappers.co.uk

Little more than a mile west of Bradford the canal does a double bend to cross the river Avon on Rennie's impressive aqueduct at Avoncliff. You should stop here, not just to admire the architecture, but to visit the **Cross Guns**, which is conveniently sited between the canal and river. This is an ancient building, parts of it dating back to the 1490s and it became an inn in the early 1600s, providing respite for travellers and drovers using the ford across the Avon. The pub was further extended when the canal was built in the early 19th century and in 1914 was bought by Ushers of Trowbridge. However, 50 years later with the canal then derelict, Ushers sold the pub and it has been privately owned ever since.

The Cross Guns is run as a free house although it has close connections with the Box Steam brewery at nearby Colerne. Four Box beers are on draught, alongside one or two guests. The pub is mostly taken up with tables for dining (fair enough, it's a major part of the trade), so you may have to squeeze in around the bar; or you can take advantage of the garden which is terraced down to the river. You'll do well to find a more attractive spot for a pint or two.

Cross Guns, Avoncliff BA15 2HB; www.crossguns.net

Now we'll retrace our steps about 5 miles east of Bradford and stop at the small village of Semington. You can still make out traces of the junction with the Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal which opened in 1810 and ran to Abingdon on the Thames before being abandoned in 1914. I suggest you then cross the bridge and walk a couple of hundred yards to the **Somerset Arms**. I recall visiting here in 1984 when it was owned by Ushers. More recently it was closed for a couple of years before being bought by a local family and reopened in 2009. It's now a smart, upmarket pub with an inevitable emphasis on food, but there is a friendly welcome and the beer drinker is well catered for. There are four handpumps and Bath Ales Gem and a Box Steam brew seem to feature regularly. We also sampled beers from local micros such as Arbor and Blindman and most enjoyable they all were too.

Somerset Arms, High Street, Semington BA14 6JR;
www.somersetarmssemington.co.uk

No trip on the K & A is complete without a visit to Devizes. You can work up a nice thirst by tackling the 29 locks leading up to the town, including the famous Caen Hill flight. Wadworth's brewery is an imposing sight and most of the town's pubs are their tied houses. However, the two pubs we visited are Waddy-free zones. First off is the **British Lion**, just outside the town centre. This is a genuine free house, its four handpumps offering an ever-changing selection of ales from south-western breweries at highly affordable prices. Although basically open-plan, the pub has various drinking areas and you can play darts or pool if you wish. No food, I'm afraid, but this is very much a traditional community pub, open all day. The long-serving landlord, Mike Dearing, is an SPBW member and therefore he deserves your custom!

British Lion, 9 Estcourt Street, Devizes SN10 1LQ.



The British Lion and Southgate – the best of Devizes

And so to the final pub on this tour: the **Southgate** is on the far side of town from the canal but our gang can't have minded the walk too much as we voted it our favourite pub of the week. This is another free house, although there is an emphasis on Hopback beers, two always available plus one, on our visit, from Downton. This is also very much a locals' pub, one of whom just happens to be Chris Callow, lately Chairman of the NEC. Chris joined us in a lively evening, helped out by the friendly bar staff and fellow imbibers. The beers were well kept and just about the least expensive of the week. There is a skittle alley in an outside building and I believe there is occasional live music and other entertainment on offer.

Southgate, Potterne Road (A360), Devizes SN10 5BY.

RJ



THE WOODEN CASK CLUB

Back in 1993 we carried out a survey on the use of wooden casks, sending a questionnaire to all the established breweries of the time. We had an interesting reply from Mr M J D Howard, General Manager of Flowers of Cheltenham. He told us "I actually joined the Young's Wooden Cask Club when I was a pupil brewer in Dutton's Blackburn brewery in 1967 and still have the tie today! The rules were that you should only drink beer 'from the wood' and that if you were caught drinking beer from a keg or metal cask, you had to buy everyone else in the bar a pint!"

I don't know for sure when Youngs stopped using wooden casks but I'm fairly certain I'd never heard of this Club at the time of the survey. Does anyone out there recall the Wooden Cask Club, or even be a former member with a tie? I'd love to hear from you if you were.

Last Orders – Worksop & Retford again

Thanks to everyone who responded to Dave Pickersgill's appeal in PiH 118 for information about the Worksop and Retford Brewery to aid his forthcoming novel. Mike Richards, the Head Brewer at Thorne Brewery informed him that both his father and grandfather worked at the brewery and also provided a number of useful photos. The photograph below shows the brewery yard with members of staff and motor vehicles lined up. We believe this photograph was taken in the 1930's. He heard from Frank Greaves who worked at the bonded warehouse and packaging plant built on the site of the Brewery by Tennants. He was Manager from 1974 until his retirement in 1993. He has also come across some interesting photographs of the brewery insignia: the Half Moon (Retford) and the Langold Hotel (now demolished) and have information regarding the 'Hop Gardens' at Willingham.



If there is any more information out there, please contact: dave@stksbge.demon.co.uk

Some back issues of ***Pint in Hand*** are available:- numbers 46; 49; 86-118. 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.

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The Somerset Arms, Semington, Wiltshire (see page 17)