

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

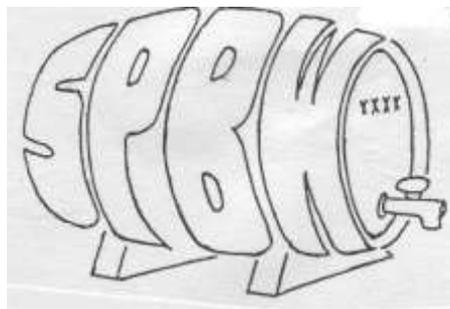
*PINT in HAND*

**Number 92**

**November 2004**



*A perfect pub in deepest Essex – The Swan at Little Totham  
(more on page 14)*



## ***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 issue should reach the Editor by **20 January**.
- 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***

One of the more memorable drinking experiences of my formative years was my first pint of Boddingtons bitter. I had heard much about this revered and renowned brew and my first taste (in the Wickstead Arms in Nantwich, should you be interested) lived up to every expectation. As pale as a lager but with an aftertaste more redolent of Guinness. That was more than 25 years ago when Boddies was just about unobtainable outside its north west homeland and the brewery seemed to be just as dedicated to its quality and traditions as, say, Youngs in the south.

But the powers that be at Strangeways decided to expand the availability of their beers – a good thing it would seem. Unfortunately they also decided that southern softies (plus, no doubt, west country wimps and midlands milksops) would be unable to handle the bitterness of their brews. So they made it more bland. Then they sold their souls to Whitbread. Eventually Boddies became a nationally available, heavily promoted beer that was no longer worth getting excited about. Nowadays there is no such entity as Whitbread in the beer industry. The Boddington brand is owned by Interbrew, a Belgian conglomerate with worldwide interests. Unfortunately it appears to have no interest in traditional British brewing. No sooner has Boddington bitter been relaunched as a new improved brew (sorry, my research hasn't stretched to

sampling this) that we learn that the old Strangeways brewery is to be closed down. Interbrew are more interested in the dustbin versions of the beer which will be brewed at various dustbineries, while production of the traditional version will move across Manchester to Hydes, who do at least still know how to brew properly.

The notorious old Big Six may have been bad enough but at least they understood traditional brewing. Say what you like about the products of the major regional brewers like Greene King and Wolverhampton & Dudley, but they are still primarily brewers of traditional beers who have been known to do it quite well. Interlopers like Interbrew, grabbing prime brand names, can offer little or no benefit to the consumer. I'm most definitely no one-eyed, union flag-waving jingoist, but I have no wish to see a classic brewing style slaughtered on the altar of mass profiteering by greedy bastards who don't give a toss about their customers.

It's a pity that Boddingtons couldn't have followed the example of their trans-Pennine rivals Theakstons. A management buyout, reversion to independent status and the restoration of the beers to their former glories would surely be the best way forward. If we only lived in an ideal world.

Let me put in a good word for all brewers and publicans who take pride in their profession; and to all of you who have contributed to PiH or helped in its production.

*Roger Jacobson*

## ***NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE***

The SPBW National Executive Committee holds its regular meetings on the second Monday of each month, hopefully starting at 7 pm. Our new venue is the Royal Oak, Tabard Street, London SE1. This top-class Harveys pub should need no introduction in these pages.

These are strictly business meetings, but they are kept as brief as necessary. All members are welcome to attend, particularly representatives from branches. Wantz branch stalwart Peter Willet has been co-opted on to the NEC although he is currently without portfolio.

## ***NATIONAL WEEKEND***

The 2004 event is just about upon us. The good folk of Banbury will be putting up welcoming banners and bunting to welcome the lucky 20 or so members who will be enjoying the hospitality of Hook Norton and the Plough at Bodicote among other delights.

If you've paid for the brewery trip but not heard from me since, do contact me urgently so I let you know about meeting places and other vital information – my personal details are on page 2.

## ***SPBW WEBSITE***

Our website (<http://www.spbw.com>) has been much revamped recently and is better than ever. Please do take time to visit and perhaps sign the guest book. Our thanks to Mark Hutchison who generously volunteered his services as our Webmaster.

Another of Mark's initiatives is the SPBW Bulletin Board (<http://www.spbw.com/bb/>). This is intended as a way for members to

exchange information. There was more about the Forum in the last issue; basically 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; contact Mark at: [marksalehousecom@hotmail.com](mailto:marksalehousecom@hotmail.com).

## ***CHRISTMAS CARDS***

We have unearthed a small stock of various old designs ; if you are interested in buying some of these, please contact Bill English (contact details on page 2) and he will gladly describe them to you and tell you how much they cost.

## ***SPBW BUFFET SOCIAL***

Following the great success of the events at the Wenlock Arms there will be a similar event at the **Royal Oak** (44 Tabard St London SE1) on **Monday 29 November** at 7.30. For £5.00 you will be able to attend this prestigious social event, with food provided by the highly esteemed caterers at the award-winning establishment. The Royal Oak should need no introduction: it won the SPBW London pub of the year in 2004 as well as awards from another beer consumer's organisation. The full range of

Harvey's beers can be found, always featuring the mild and the current seasonal brew, and always served in peak condition.

If you want to go please send a cheque to John Rooth (payable to SPBW) for £5.00, (details on page 2); please give your address and contact details so that we can send you an advance ticket. Deadline for applications is Wednesday November 20<sup>th</sup>. The pub is just off Borough High St, close to Borough tube and London Bridge tube and mainline stations.

## ***BEER FESTIVALS***

Although we weren't able to run our usual stand at GBBF, the SPBW PR team has been out and about at smaller festivals of late. Peter Willett and our exile in Turkey, Dave Brightwell, did the business at Clacton in late August; a team of NEC members, led by the indefatigable Bill English, met the drinking public at the Croydon &

Sutton festival at Wallington in October. This participation has benefited the Society's bank balance if not our livers.

We'll be looking to tap into other local beer festivals where we can. These will most likely be in the London area, since this is where the products are. So keep your eyes (and your wallet!) open for us.

## ***FROM THE ARCHIVES***

The Editorial of the November 1994 issue warned of the dangers of nitro-keg beers which were then in their infancy. Another technical innovation reported was the 'beer saver'. This is/was a device which allows beer to filter back into the cask at the end of a session, rather stand in the pipe and become stale. Does anyone know if this caught on?

Elsewhere there was a distinct north of England flavour to the

issue. North Riding had visited Bronte country, while their West Riding brethren had gone in the opposite direction to Bridlington. The latest National Weekend had been based in Leeds and included an evening coach trip to Scarborough from which not everyone returned. And the Perfect Pub was from the Yorkshire Dales – the White Lion in Cray, which is in the latest Good Beer Guide described a 'rural gem'.

## ***ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING***

The 2005 AGM of the National Executive Committee will take place on Monday 14 March at a

venue to be confirmed. Full details will appear on the SPBW website and in the next issue of PiH. This is

traditionally a brief informal business meeting with plenty opportunities for drinking and socialising before, after and even during.

Anyone interested in standing for a post on the NEC should contact John Rooth (details on page 2) as soon as possible).

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

Nominations have been received for the following pubs:

Black Bull - Whitechapel  
Britannia - Barking  
Buckingham Arms - Westminster  
Coborn Arms - Mile End  
Dog & Bell - Deptford  
Harp - Charing Cross  
Oakdale Arms - Harringay  
Red Lion - Ealing  
Robin Hood - Sutton  
Sekforde Arms - Clerkenwell  
Wenlock Arms - Hoxton

One or two notable omissions there, but a worthy selection. The judging will take part during November; the winner will be determined before Christmas; and the presentation to the winning pub will be made at the end of January. The results and details of the

presentation will appear on our website and the on-line forum as soon as they are known. If you don't have access to these sources, please contact Bill English or any other of the individuals listed on page 2.

## ***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 ([secretary@spbw.com](mailto:secretary@spbw.com)) 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 OF OAK***

At the end of July a joint Campden Hill and Wantz party visited the Oakleaf Brewery in Gosport. The brewery is situated in an Industrial Unit close to the harbour. We were entertained by the Managing

Director Dave Pickersgill who, on a very hot day, led us into the cool room and let us sample some Oakleaf Bitter and the strong bitter Hole Hearted. The latter is Oakleaf's star brew and won the

champion beer of Hampshire in 2002 & 2003. As there are several fine Hampshire breweries, this is no mean feat. Oakleaf brew 7 regular beers ranging from Farmhouse Ale (3.5%) up to the Gosport bitter at 5.2%. These are augmented by a wide range of seasonal and special beers, including what Dave called a proper IPA of 5.5% which is about what the traditional IPAs which

were loaded on sailing ships to India approximated to, rather than today's generally much weaker offerings. Another seasonal beer of interest is Green Gold, a 4.3% brew available in September and October. It's brewed from fresh green Golding hops direct from the field. Oakleaf beers can be found in more than 100 outlets and they also have a contract to supply Inns.



Dave's son-in-law Ed Anderson is the head brewer in what is very much a family concern. Ed had previously brewed at the Fuzz & Firkin in Portsmouth before the powers that be decided to reduce consumer choice. Ed's next move was to brew for a small local pub chain (Winchester Ale Houses) based at the Clarence hotel in Gosport. The brewery was founded in 2000 just over the road from the Clarence; the first beer was produced in December of the same year on the same date as the SPBW anniversary. Apart from Dave and Ed there are just two others in the Oakleaf team: an office administrator and a drayman.

All of the beer is made with traditional hop flowers rather than pellets or, God forbid, concentrate. Oakleaf is a credit to our recent heritage of microbreweries. Across the road at the Clarence we tried some more Oakleaf beers including "I can't believe it's not bitter", which is a citrus flavoured brewed lager. Oakleaf are planning to move to a new site across the harbour in a year or two, where they will install a 20 barrel plant. The current site may be small and unprepossessing, but there is no denying the superb quality of their ales.

*John Rooth*

## **A RANDOM RAMBLE**

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

And here is yet another selection of intriguing inns for your delectation folks! How do I do it? We commence with one of the premier pubs in the coastal resort of Scarborough, over in the North

Riding of Yorkshire. A quartet of us visited various inns about the town one day in July and walked up to the northern end seeking the **Cricketers** on North Marine Road. We strolled along the coast road to

the rear of the pub and were nearly on it before realising that the 1960s edifice to the left was what we were looking for. There doesn't appear to be an entrance from this side, so we went through the front like everyone else. There is a sort of foyer here with the bar room through to the left. This is quite sizeable with a large central bar counter and all the space is needed as Yorkshire cricket's second home is straight across the road. About 5 minutes after our arrival the dinner time crowd poured out of the ground, with a goodly percentage heading to the Cricketers. Such was the crush that I was unable to see much of the pub to note down details. There was a decent selection of beers on and three that I got a chance to record were Boat mild (excellent), Jennings Cumberland and Wards bitter. Who is brewing the last named I know not and never got the chance to find out due to the horde at the bar (*Jennings – RJ with a GBG*). The Cricketers is a great favourite with the local CAMRA branch and probably has the best selection of beers in Scarborough. Well worth the walk from the town centre.

The town of Holmfirth may be best known nowadays for the long running series on the idiot box about a trio of geriatrics. It should be more greatly honoured for possessing a pub like the **Rose and Crown**, better known as the Nook. This excellent pub is in Victoria Square, near the junction of Victoria Street and Hollowgate in the town centre. Keep your peepers peeled for the sign bearing the pub's full name or you might walk past the opening! Note the stream running past the building – is this the river Ribble?

The layout is pretty traditional, having a number of different areas and rooms (on two levels) with red

floor tiling predominating throughout: décor is otherwise spartan indeed. There were 6 draught beers on the bar when we visited last August bank holiday Sunday; this included Moorhouse Black Cat and offerings from some local independent breweries. Even though this is a good haul of beers, what had brought us all the way from grotty Leeds was the pub's inaugural beer festival. This was being held in the back yard, which had been roofed over with assorted bits of canvas and plastic sheeting in anticipation of the usual god-awful bank holiday weather.

I counted 17 beers available in the festival, ranging from 3.4% to 5.2% in strength. There were, if memory serves, 5 beers from the Golcar and Holme Valley breweries and I tried 3 milds, which included Golcar's rather superior and low priced example. Since I can't locate a copy of the festival programme, I am unable to expand on the subject of ales available. The quality was pretty good, though it might be an idea next time to allow folk to hand their glasses back for a deposit refund afterwards, as I don't like lugging them around. In this case, mine must have slipped unnoticed out of my pocket when I was on a train later that night and thus never reached home. Not mine anyway.

The weather at least lived up to expectation. We had about an hour of sometimes torrential rain during the early afternoon, with plunging temperatures to match. This solved the problem of the 'Summer Wine' drones infesting the town, as they were all washed to their deaths; and quite right too.

Over to Lincolnshire now, and two of the inns in the rather pleasant town of Barton Upon Humber. First off, we have the **Mill** at the bottom end of the main street on Market Lane. This Marston's house is hard

to miss, given the size of the eponymous mill building and annexe. The main bar area is to the left of the entrance and is a large rectangular room, laid out in the manner of a restaurant, which the Mill is really, notwithstanding the Pedigree and Banks' bitter available at the bar. This part of the building seems to have been almost tacked on to the side of the mill proper, such is the scale of the latter. We (Sue and self) ordered our drinks: a bottle of J20 fruit juice for Madame and a half of Pedigree for yours truly. The cost was £2.81! I reeled momentarily before recovering sufficiently to indicate to Sue that it was her round (ho ho). She fixed me with a laser-like glare and sprang, chittering, at my jugular.

When I managed to pluck her from my throat, which she had been worrying ("you're getting a double chin"), we surveyed our surroundings. Apparently, the mill itself was operative until 1950, though in its latter days had been powered by gas. It seems that at some time in the past, one of the sails had fallen off into the street which caused the owners to look for a form of motion other than wind. There is a small spiral staircase at the top end of the bar which takes you a short way into the mill tower. The scale of things can be grasped from here and

there has been a good job done of restoring it from its derelict state. Interestingly, the site was also that of a pagan Anglo Saxon cemetery, and many burial sites were excavated along with grave goods. We then walked up the main street to the top end of the town where, on the left hand side, we saw the **Wheatsheaf**. Immediately attracted by the traditional looking exterior, which had no mention of plasma TV screens or non-stop 'sport', we entered in. Was this once a Wards/Darleys house? The choice on our visit included Deuchar's IPA and Theakston mild. A pint and a half of mild cost £2.72 and I must say it was in excellent condition. There's a sizeable lounge-cum-dining area with a much smaller snug or lesser lounge to the rear of the bar. We seated ourselves in the latter room which, like its larger counterpart, is carpeted and pleasantly furnished. My only gripe is in regard to the cacophony emanating from the speakers – it appeared to be either mambo or salsa (or suchlike) and although we were spared the appearance of Carmen Miranda, it did detract somewhat from the otherwise quite decent surroundings. Worth a visit but take earplugs or take up cha-cha lessons.

Andy Whitley

## ***MEET the BRANCHES***

*Most social activities in the Society take place within branches so it makes sense to get involved with one. You're sure to get a good welcome and most branches prefer to keep things very informal. Details of our branches are listed below; if*

*there isn't one in your area you are welcome to start one! Bill English, (Branch Liaison Officer, address on page 2), will be pleased to tell you what you need to know. We will be happy to put you in touch with other local members.*

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

**CAMPDEN HILL:** Meetings held first Monday of each month at the **Britannia Tap**, 150 Warwick Road, Kensington. 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 (address on 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).

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

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

**IPSWICH (Sid's Kitchen):** Contact Phil [01473 644923] or Iain [01473 251586] to find out in which pubs in Ipswich and when meetings are held.

**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 the pub on 01424 425079 for further details.

**NORTH RIDING:** Meetings held in various pubs in Scarborough. Contact Bill Broadmore (01723 397066 [daytime] or 01723 351315 [evening]).

**NORTHERN IRELAND:** Contact Mark Hutchinson for details of meetings and events: [marksalehousecom@hotmail.com](mailto:marksalehousecom@hotmail.com)

**PONDS:** Meetings held third Monday of each month in the Swan Bar of the Greyhound Hotel, Carshalton. Contact Dave Hamer (020 8395 8716 or email [davehamer@btinternet.com](mailto:davehamer@btinternet.com)).

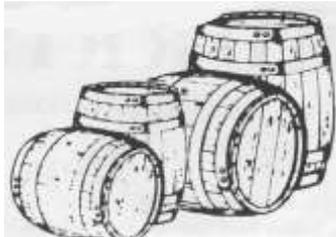
**RACS:** The Real Ale Club of Sawbridgeworth meets last Wednesday of each month at The Gate, London Road. Contact Jan Mead (01279 864398) or email [meadspanner@aol.com](mailto:meadspanner@aol.com).

**SPECIAL:** Now reborn after 14 years, the branch holds annual, week-long gatherings around the inland waterways network. Check our website at:  
[www.geocities.com/canalnav/SPBW1.html](http://www.geocities.com/canalnav/SPBW1.html)

**WANTZ:** Meetings held third Monday of the month at the *Britannia*, Church Street, Barking (Youngs), starting at around 8 pm. Contact Roger Jacobson (see page 2).

**WEST RIDING:** Meets on Sunday mornings in various pubs in and around Leeds. Contact Graham Hewitt (0113 2624574) for further details.

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



## ***BRANCHES IN ACTION***

**Campden Hill** have been quite busy in recent months. We went on a day trip to Winchester to visit some of their finest establishments. This was followed by a pub-crawl in Barnes; the diet of Young's and Fuller's was augmented by a trip to the Rose of Denmark. This once GBG outlet and purveyor of Woodford Wherry was sadly closed

down about a year ago to become the unlikely Guerami Fish restaurant. This establishment failed to reel many in, so it has now reverted back to being a pub, but sadly bereft of WW, even though the beer range was quite good. The highlight of the year was the trip to Oakleaf Brewery in Gosport,

and a chance to explore Portsmouth Dockyard.

**Special Branch** is already planning its annual gathering for next year. This will be in North Wales on the Llangollen Canal. Handy at least for out far flung members in Oswestry and Nantwich.

**RACS** were much involved with the Gate beer festival at the end of August, their tombola stall raising loads of money for charity. They also visited the Chapple beer fest in September and are planning to come down to London's east end for the Pig's Ear bash in early December. By then they'll have enjoyed a long weekend in France.

**Wantz** branch's latest pub walk was in Hammersmith. Fuller's pubs featured prominently, notable the famous Dove Inn by the river. This

Wantz branch got into the swing of their 30th anniversary celebrations by winning the latest competition for the highly coveted **Tony Littler Trophy**. This was held upstairs at the Rugby Tavern in Bloomsbury, these days a Shepherd Neame pub.

As a change from the customary darts and/or quiz we played Devil Among the Tailors (a form of table skittles). The necessary equipment was provided by Ponds branch and later raffled. Apart from Wantz,

hasn't changed at all over the years. Our latest gastro outing saw us consume some excellent tapas at Navarro's in Charlotte Street. We had aperitifs at the One Tun, the Youngs pub round the corner. In early November was our first international pub walk, taking in bars in central London specialising in beers from particular countries.

*You will notice that only a few branches are covered here (of which I'm a member of two). If your branch is not featured it's because you've not bothered to send me any reports. Please put this right in future.*

Woolwich, Campden Hill and Central London branches were represented, numbers being made up by members of RACS, a small coach load of whom boosted our numbers. DAT demands a certain skill and most of the participants performed pretty well, given lack of experience. Thanks to Dave Hamer and Clive Poge of Ponds branch for doing the organisation.

## ***A THOROUGHLY BARKING BRANCH*** **30 YEARS OF WANTZ BRANCH**

Wantz branch, 30 years old on 11 November, has really defied the odds to be alive, meeting and drinking today. The branch was formed in Rainham, Essex. The name 'Wantz' was soon adopted; this is the Anglo Saxon name for this part of Essex. The second meeting saw membership more

than trebled with future stalwarts Alan Martin, Ossie Tillet and Kevin Rowley coming on board.

In the very early days there was some campaigning to get proper beer restored to local pubs, not to mention a couple of charity pub walks. But since then the focus has been strictly on social events,

including weekends in exotic locations such as Stourbridge and Macclesfield, and the inevitable trips to breweries, including Young's on several occasions. For many years we ran a stand at the Dagenham Town Show which was useful for publicity, recruitment and product sales. With no decent beer on site we had to bring in our own; this was donated by friendly breweries such as Firkin and Young's. We weren't allowed to sell this to the public but could get away with exchanging samples for a donation. But of course we drank most of it ourselves.

After the initial enthusiasm, membership declined and regular attendance at meetings was down to 4 or 5. Around 1980 we had temporarily left Rainham and moved to the Royal Oak in Romford. This was one of the early London Pub of the Year winners but a few years later it made way for a new ring road. So we decamped to the Phoenix in Rainham (where you can still see a SPBW mirror), then down the road to the Bell. Finally, in the late 80s we relocated meetings to the Britannia in Barking, a renowned Young's house for a few years in the early 90s the branch prospered with attendances regularly in double figures, boosted by the recruitment of George Ansell and

friends. We enjoyed a second weekend trip to Batemans around this time.

Numbers dwindled again, include the sad loss of long-standing (and falling over) chairman Alan Martin, who decided to spend more time with his family. We eventually settled at a hard core membership of 6 – Joe Reeves and myself, the redoubtable Peter Willett (Treasurer), Bill Stansfield (Thespian and events organiser) plus Russell Pugh and Michael Elliott. To maintain interest, we set about devising a regular programme of events. Main activity is our pub walks, which have covered numerous areas of London – we have taken in more than 130 pubs in 33 walks to date. There have been day trips to places such as Bath, Bristol and Brighton as well as the odd brewery visit. This April saw our first overseas venture, a long weekend in Brussels.

We celebrated our 100<sup>th</sup> meeting with a wild weekend based around the now-defunct Penrhos Court brewery in deepest Herefordshire (who provided a celebration beer, the dubious Wantzmore Ale). Our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be toasted in Hook Norton brewery and should be equally memorable. You just can't keep a good branch down!

R.J

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

It's all too rare to visit a pub that leaves you full of pleasure and satisfaction. When I dragged myself away from the ***Swan*** at Little Totham, Essex I felt full of the joys and not simply from the excellent beers I had consumed. This is just about everything a pub should be, something recognised by our friends at CAMRA who voted it the National Pub of the Year in 2002.

Set back from the road behind its garden, the Swan is a 17<sup>th</sup> century much-beamed pub. It has a long main bar with a public bar beyond, complete with bar billiards and darts. Also adjoining the main bar is a restaurant. It's not too large a pub so the atmosphere is cosy and friendly.

John and Val Pascoe took over the pub in 1996 and one of the first things John did was to remove the

handpumps from the bar. All the draught beers (11 on my last visit) are served direct from the cask in a ground floor cold room (look out for the beer list to the right of the bar counter). The ones I tried were all in prime condition; John remarked "it wouldn't be worth serving them if they weren't in top condition." Well, sadly, that worthy philosophy is not shared by all pub landlords, so let's be thankful for John's desire for excellence. Crouch Vale and Mighty Oak – the local independents – are heavily featured as well as more common brews from Fullers, Greene King and Adnams, plus guests! Locally produced draught cider is also on tap.

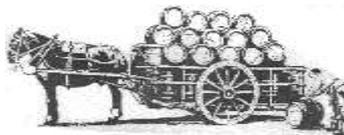
As well as its liquid refreshments, the Swan also offers top quality food either in the restaurant or as bar meals. Oddly enough, the food

side is run as a separate business by a friend of John and Val's who just fancied being a chef.

John and Val have worked hard in their time at the Swan to ensure that the pub provides what their customers want and have become a vital part of the local community. It makes you wonder why so many rural pubs close down these days – but of course there is no faceless suit in a remote office telling John and Val what to do.

If there's one thing wrong with the Swan for most of us, it's just a bit out of the way (unless you happen to be lucky enough to live locally). Little Totham is midway between Maldon and Tiptree, well out of the scope of public transport. Beg a lift from someone, get on your bike, just go there!

*RJ*



## ***BRAKSPEAR'S BACK HOME***

Having worked for and drank Brakspear for 38 years I went into deep shock when it was announced that the brewery was to close in 2002. The first shock was the impending loss of my job, and the second the loss of one of the best beers in the country.

It was learned that Refresh UK, the owners of the Wychwood brewery at Witney and the Burtonwood brewery in Cheshire, were to take on the Brakspear brands. I thought

all was not lost if they brew at the Wychwood brewery; at least there may be a resemblance of the Henley brew.

Then dismay again – due to lack of spare capacity at the Witney brewery, only the Brakspear seasonal beers could be brewed there. Arrangements had to be made to brew the higher volume brands – bitter and special – at Burtonwood. However, there was one ray of hope in that Wychwood

committed themselves to bringing the brewing of all Brakspear beers back to Oxfordshire.

They started the site on which to build a new Brakspear brewery. Along with many others I had my doubts as to whether this would come to fruition. Thankfully the doubts were unfounded when an industrial space adjacent to the Wychwood brewery became available. The site was purchased and building work commenced in December 2003.

The newly enlarged Wychwood brewery incorporates a new brew house using the original Brakspear copper and a separate Brakspear fermenting room using some of the original Henley fermenters and dropping vessels. Those of you that visited the Henley site will remember seeing the dropping vessel system in operation.

As a member of the Brewery History Society I was invited to the

launch of the Society's book on Commercial Brewing in Oxfordshire\*. This took place at the Wychwood brewery at the end of July. On arrival at the brewery on this very warm day it was great to be welcomed with a superb pint of Brakspear bitter. In my opinion the beer was close to the Henley brew. After the book launch we were taken on a tour of the brewery. I was amazed how they managed to fit all the Brakspear equipment into such a small space, a credit to the team at Wychwood. Jeremy Moss, the Wychwood head brewer and Peter Scholey, the former Brakspear head brewer, are to be congratulated on producing such a good match to the original Henley Brakspear beer. I hope you will all soon be enjoying an Oxfordshire brewed Brakspear pint again.

*Alan Lister*

\*The Oxon Brews; the Story of commercial brewing in Oxfordshire by Mike Brown, is available from the Brewery History Society priced £12.50 plus P&P. Write to: Paul

*Travis, Beer in Print, Long High Top, Hepstonstall, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire HX7 7PF.*

## ***Real Ale In Canada***

I started my epic journey across Canada by train in Vancouver where I had found three microbrewers listed. I visited the Steamworks first where I tried a small glass of all six beers available. All were top pressure and cold but the Coal Porter was particularly enjoyable. Next I tried Yaletown Brewery where two beers were on handpump. Unfortunately although the handle was 'pulled' artistically the flow did not seem to vary and the staff refused to allow

me to examine the pump! The beers I tried were all distinctive and tasty (especially when allowed to warm up a bit) and the steak was excellent. I didn't have time to visit Granville Island Brewery but their bottled beers that I tried on the train were very good.

Only cold keg beers till Winnipeg where the only listed brewpub had closed. However the Kings Head Pub was enjoyable with real Guinness and a large selection of

Canadian beers plus Boddingtons and Newcastle Brown on draught. Toronto was disappointing as the train was three hours late and I missed visiting the Granite Brewery. Bars near my hotel had only national and American beers available.

Moncton NB was a very good town for bars with the Pumphouse coming out top. This is a brewpub in a converted fire station and the ten beers I tried were all distinctive and enjoyable. (I bought two at once so when the first was finished the next had warmed up).

Halifax was also good for bars with two being notable, the Ale House and the Granite Brewery. The Alehouse had a good range of Canadian beers and a band that

started at 11pm. However the star prize for the trip must go to the Granite Brewery where four ales were on handpump and I was allowed to examine them and see the cellar. The beers were the best of the trip but still too cold for my taste. The barman commented that the brewer would like to serve his beers 8 degrees warmer but the Canadians would not drink them then. Labatts even have a digital display on their pumps to show that their beers are at 2 degrees. The Granite Brewery in Toronto is owned by the same people and apparently uses proper handpumps too.

Altogether a very good trip.

*Peter Ramsbottom*



## ***SOME ANIMADVERSIONS ON BEER IN WOODEN CASKS***

*Inspired by the launch of Innis & Gunn of their revolutionary oak-aged bottled beer*

*PiHs 89 and 90 featured the first parts of an article about the use of wood for beer. The story continues – and ends.*

### ***New Cask Seasoning***

Once a cask has been made it needed curing and seasoning before it could be passed into use. Both Baltic and American Oak contain a certain amount of impurities which impart a peculiar flavour to beer and may also have a discolouring effect. In a raw and unpickled state a cask would not only impart a black tint to the beer, but would also transmit a very woody flavour. With Baltic Oak it

was possible to remove the impurities sufficiently to prevent harmful effects by seasoning. This seasoning must not be confused with the original seasoning of the timber.

The normal practice for seasoning was to dissolve 14lb of salt and 7lb of soda in a kilderkin of boiling liquor. Half a gallon of this solution was added to each 36 gallon barrel, and then it was filled up with

liquor at a temperature of 160 degrees. It was most important not to go any hotter than this or the staves were likely to crack. Most of the colouring matter and woody flavour was extracted within 36 hours. After a good washing out with hot water and steaming the cask was ready for use. But it was still advisable to fill the new cask for the first time with stout or porter, as these were not so adversely affected by colour or flavour should traces of either remain. On no account was a delicate pale ale to be put into a new cask for its first filling.

Insufficiently pickled new casks usually imparted a slight flavour to the beer. Customers who had experienced this had a strong objection to their beer being delivered in casks. To overcome this problem brewers were advised to colour the outside of their new casks to give them the appearance of ones that had been used before. The seasoning process was not effective with beer casks of American Oak, partly owing to the greater impurity content and partly owing to the greater density and closer grain of the wood. American Oak casks used for beer were therefore given an internal lining.

### ***Cask Lining***

The wooden cask has many merits, and one defect. The defect is that it is porous, and into its interstices bacterial and other minute organisms were extremely liable to effect an entrance. To prevent this required the time-consuming practice of hand scrubbing casks each time before filling, which involved much hand labour and wear and tear of the cask, as well as the use of cask-washing machines. The idea of lining the insides of casks first began as a means of "rendering the cask staves impervious to putrescible matter". Its use grew steadily with the increasing use of American Oak which could not be used without lining. The practice of lining the whole of the interior of new casks with wax or enamel, so that the beer never came in actual contact with the wood, had been extensively adopted in Europe well before it became customary in this country. The nature of a cask was altered by lining: the timber merely provided structural support and thermal insulation. In the 1920s casks were more likely to have been lined in the

North and the Midlands, than in the South of England, which remained more sceptical, for the time being, about the necessity and benefits. Whitbread did not line its casks, even those of American Oak in the 1920s, but this changed, and by 1935 after a fourteen month programme all the company's casks were lined, and the Head Brewer there said he had no intention of changing the system. In 1874 Dr. Graham recommended forming a coat of paraffin wax on the inside of the cask, applied at a high temperature, filling up the pores and forming a smooth surface which was easily kept clean and not liable to mould and mustiness. It was essential the pores were open to enable the wax or enamel to penetrate well into the wood and not merely form a surface covering. The wax was not acted upon by the strongest acids or alkalis, and because it did not dissolve, did not impart any flavour to the beer. However, even with the high temperature required for its solution paraffin wax would not stand steam or hot water, and the wax broke off too easily.

There were also a number of enamels used to line casks. The best known of these was Dukeron, developed by Tetley's, and often known as Tetley's enamel. After the cask had been warmed two or three coats were applied to the timber, which had to be absolutely dry, with a brush, although some recommended a spray gun. The solvents were unpleasant to work with, and also stuck to the cooper's tools. Two or three days were allowed for the enamel to harden, after which the cask was filled with very hot liquor and allowed to stand for 24 hours, and again filled for two hours to remove all flavour. Such coating would last for a year. For lager beer the traditional and most reliable lining was brewer's pitch. It was compounded in various ways from the resin of

coniferous trees melted down and boiled to drive off volatile constituents. The resulting brown residue, usually known as colophony, was then melted and mixed with resin oil, linseed or cotton-seed oil, and sometimes with paraffin wax or ceresine to reduce the viscosity and make thinner coatings possible. The melting point was ideally about 113 degrees F. If it was higher the melted pitch flowed with difficulty, solidified too quickly and did not penetrate the wood. A lower melting point meant that the pitch would soften and melt in the sun. Rather higher melting points were preferable for cask-conditioned beers, to reduce the tendency to adhesion of hops and sediment. A good brewers' pitch added little, if any, flavour to the beer.

#### ***Sam Whitbread's Cisterns***

When Sam Whitbread completed the Great Storehouse (now the Porter Tun Room) in Chiswell Street in 1784 he used large vaults beneath the building at first for storing casks of maturing porter. He then had the idea of actually filling the vaults themselves with beer. This took some time to achieve but by 1790 he had created seven cisterns with the total capacity of 12,000 barrels. As well as the obvious savings he

found that the quality of the beer kept this way "so superior to that kept in Butts as they preserve its flavour and spirit, and it always falls transparently light on which account the victuallers very much commended it." There is no record to suggest that any other brewer followed Whitbread's pioneering work. They continued to store beer, as indeed he did as well, in ever-larger vats.

#### ***The Bursting of Meux's Great Vat***

In the 1780s London porter brewers vied with each other in building large vats. In 1785 Meux built one at his brewery in Tottenham Court Road "the size of which exceeds all credibility, being designed to hold 20,000 barrels of porter, at a cost of £10,000". Disaster struck in October 1814 when defective hoops on Meux's

great vat, then 22 feet high, and holding 3,555 barrels burst. Houses in nearby streets were flooded with porter, two or

three collapsed, and no fewer than 8 people died, either in the ruins or by drowning, from the fumes of the porter, or from drunkenness. Brewers continued to keep their

beer for considerable periods of time in their very large vats before racking it into casks, but by the 1880s the practice was dying out, and many of them by then were

little used. Whitbread finally dismantled its great 600 barrel vats in 1918.

*Anthony Redman*

## ***The Last Word – from Hertfordshire***

The Red Squirrel brewery is a new micro in Hertford, brewing since March 2004. In June the plant was upgraded to 10-barrel capacity. They already have a large beer list with six regulars and a number of occasional and seasonal brews. The standard bitter is the RSB - Red Squirrel bitter at 3.9%, brewed using American hops. In the medium range are Gold 4.2 %, IPA with a refreshing lemony aftertaste at 4.1 % and Conservation bitter, a malty best for which the brewery donate 1p to conservation for every pint sold. The stronger beers are the Stout at 4.9% & the Honey porter at 5.0 %. Amongst the specials is mild and a wheat beer and Scottish type ale, brewed using Edinburgh water. The brewery aims to support the Red squirrel which is indigenous to the UK, but which is an endangered species, so we can all do our bit to help by quaffing some of the Conservation bitter.

*J.R*

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*only*

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