

**SOCIETY for the PRESERVATION of
BEERS from the WOOD**

(founded 1963)

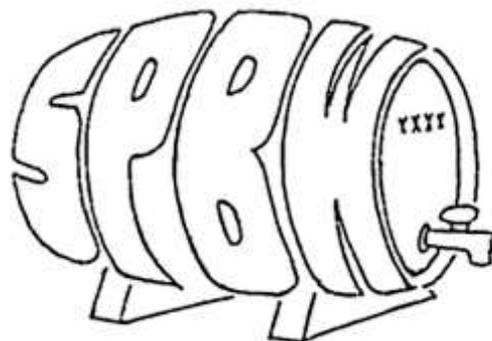
PINT in HAND

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The Engineers Arms, Henlow (see page 8)



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 February 2006 issue should reach the Editor by **20 April**.
- The Editor or the National Executive Committee of SPBW does not necessarily share opinions expressed in *Pint in Hand*.

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Anyone reading this that is not already a member of SPBW might like to know that annual membership costs only £5 (£6 non-UK). For information about SPBW together with a membership form, please send a stamped addressed envelope to the National Membership Secretary as above.

OPENING TIME

I used to write regularly about Whitbreads in these columns. For the benefit of younger readers, Whitbread was one of the longest established of England's major breweries, with a proud tradition. In the 1950s, and for a few decades subsequently, they set about tearing the heart out of the national brewing industry, taking over and closing numerous local and regional breweries and pouring many much loved beers down the metaphorical and actual drain.

Now I read about Whitbreads in the financial pages described as 'the leisure conglomerate'. It appears that this company has distanced itself further than ever from its heritage by disposing of some 250 of its Beefeater and Brewers Fayre 'pub restaurants'. To digress a bit, I have to say that I think the practice of using a 'y' in words to suggest some kind of olde traditional connotations, is pathetic beyond belief. Just right for the major conglomerates in fact.

Now, I'm not a betting man, but I would stake fair odds that most SPBW members would not darken the doors of Beefeater and Brewers Fayre outlets except under the auspices of 'unacceptable hospitality (and/or at gunpoint)'. But this same article states that 'analysts' describe the pubs for sale as 'the cream of the British pub industry'. Now I'm not sure what planet these cretins have been chucked out of, but they've clearly not been into many decent pubs. Oh but hang on, they go on to say that these pubs could be worth as much as £400m 'despite underperforming in Whitbread's hands. That works out at a cool £1.6 million per 'pub'. I don't often get the chance to quote Bob Dylan but I will: "Money doesn't talk, it swears."

It's not that many years ago when the serious beer drinker's enemy was the big six major brewing companies, with Whitbread prominent among their number. Those days may have gone but it's more than a little scary to note that some 20,000 pubs in Britain are owned by just two companies. These companies have no legal obligation to offer their customers any decent choice of beer should they prefer not to. Think what might happen if some accountant floated a theory that profits and dividends to shareholders might rise if that inconvenient real ale stuff was removed from the portfolio. And I think we can safely assume that all these pubs are regarded as little more than real estate; if they're worth more as houses than as pubs, then residential they may well be.

Support the genuine free houses – there are still a good few out there. And support your local brewers who still have some regard for their brewing and pub heritage and are unlikely to hanker after ownership of the likes of Pizza Hut and TGI Friday's – leave that to the likes of Whitbread.

Roger Jacobson

<p>Some back issues of <i>Pint in Hand</i> are available:- numbers 43; 44; 46-57; 60-62; 68; 70-81; 84-97. These can be obtained from the Editor (address on page 2) in return for fifteen second class stamps to cover postage for the full set. If you don't want the whole lot, send enough stamps you think may cover costs.</p>
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NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The SPBW National Executive Committee holds its regular meetings on the second Monday of each month, starting at 7 pm or thereabouts, in the Royal Oak, Tabard Street, London SE1. If we're lucky we use the upstairs room. These are strictly business meetings, but they are kept as brief as necessary. All members are welcome to attend, particularly representatives from branches.

We have co-opted Peter Willet back to the post of Products Manager pending his migration. We still welcome volunteers for the job on a long term basis.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The NEC's AGM happened on 13 March at the famous Royal Oak in Southwark. 25 members were present, a fair proportion of them from RACS, and were treated to a sumptuous buffet to wash down the fine Lewes brews on sale. We had the pleasure of a visit from Miles Jenner, Harvey's head brewer and MD, who said a few kind words and bought a round! By now we'd done the business, including the election of the 2006 Committee, which has a familiar look:

Chair: Chris Callow
Vice-Chair: Mike Hall
Secretary: John Rooth
Treasurer: Jim Woodcock
National Membership: Roger West
Branch Liaison Officer: Bill English
Editor, Pint in Hand: Roger Jacobson

The post of Products Manager could not be filled, due to a surprising lack of volunteers.

Jim had to humbly confess that the accounts for 2005 were not complete and that previous years' accounts had yet to be audited. We're sure this will be sorted one of these days!

LONDON PUB OF THE YEAR

It's that time of year again when we ask London members to nominate their favourite pubs for this prestigious ward. The Royal Oak, as current winner, is ineligible, but this still leaves a good many worthy candidates. Contact Bill English for a nomination form (an SAE would be appreciated if applying by post); London branches will be sent forms direct. The closing date for nominations is the end of July and we aim to judge and decide the winner to be announced in the November PiH. If you fancy joining the judging panel (this involves going to pubs and drinking beer) let Bill know as well.

NATIONAL WEEKEND

The 2006 gathering will be held **17 – 19 November**, based in Wolverhampton. We've arranged a visit to Highgate Brewery in Walsall for the Friday evening; Highgate is a traditional Victorian brewery (built 1898) and still uses some of the original equipment. There are numerous classic pubs in the Black Country and we'll be touring some of these during the rest of the weekend.

Because there's a charge for the brewery tour, we have to ask for a £10 deposit (there'll be a partial refund); send this to John Rooth (cheques to SPBW). Details of accommodation and further itinerary will be made known when we know it.

These events are always much enjoyed and we hope to see another good crowd of members in attendance.

BEERS AND BUFFETS

We have two more of these popular events lined up:

Monday 30 July at the **Wenlock Arms**, Wenlock Road, London N1. Catering courtesy of Dundee's gift to the culinary world, Alasdair Boyd coupled with the customary fine range of ales from the bar. A winning combination indeed. Tickets cost £5 – send an SAE to John Rooth with cheques made out to SPBW.

Wednesday 6 December at the **Royal Oak**, Tabard Street, London SE1. I don't think I need to say more about the pub! The date is, of course, the SPBW's anniversary – 43 year's worth. Look out for more details of this event in the next issue.

TONY LITTLER TROPHY

The 2006 competition for the Tony Littler Trophy will take place on Monday 16 October at the Wenlock Arms, London N1. Wantz branch are again the hosts and the contest will take the form of a quiz on beer, general knowledge and anything else we can think of. All branches are invited to compete and we'll welcome any individual members who want to enjoy the fun and the excellent range of beers on offer. More details in the August issue.

BATH BANK HOLIDAY BASH

Saturday 26 August 2006. Possibility of a visit to Bath's own brewery, Abbey Ales, with a crawl of some of Bath's truly excellent hostelries afterwards. Option of a trip to Bristol on the Sunday for those who wish to stay over. For further information please contact Somerset Mark – somersetmark@hotmail.co.uk Text/phone 07749 750965 or contact Chris Callow – details on page 2.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2006

Welcome to the Royal Oak here in London for this AGM. Congratulations to the Royal Oak in winning the title of SPBW London Pub of the Year. There was stiff opposition, and it must be remembered that this is not the first time this title has been awarded to the Royal Oak, they must sell good beer.

I thank Peter Willett for his work as products manager and wish him good luck for his future adventures. We have a greatly improved product line and it has also been possible to produce some one off items made to order. I hope that the new products manager can take this forward. Possible changes will allow the purchase of products from the website, and an increased product line.

Last year that we temporarily moved the printing of *Pint in Hand* to Wiltshire and we have decided to continue this for the foreseeable future as the printing is performed efficiently and to a high quality. I am pleased to report that there have been also been some technology improvements in the taking of photographs. I would like to thank those people that picked this up and commented favourably on the hi-res picture on the front cover of *Pint in Hand*. As always if you have something you would like to report, please pass it to Roger Jacobson. Roger has also produced a flier document which explains the background of the SPBW, please contact the NEC if you would like some to distribute as it helps to increase our profile.

Last year the National Executive Committee tried to visit Mark Hutchinson in his home town in Northern Ireland, but although we were there, Mark was quite ill and consequently not available. The NEC did visit the Kings Head which has been chosen as the SPBW Northern Ireland pub of the year. The SPBW website has come on leaps and bounds under Mark's management, it now has an active forum with over 2000 messages and some diverse but relevant topics. I would encourage all members to use the forum as it is a great way of getting relatively immediate feedback to questions. I would also like to see more contributions from branches as there is a separate area dedicated for this purpose, let us know how busy you are! Take this as an opportunity to advertise any events that you are running. There is very little policing on content, though we do try to eliminate any postings that can be thought of as spam. Other internet extensions involve articles on the Wikipedia and actively publishing our details on other websites.

There have been some social events over the last year which have had write-ups in *Pint in Hand*. These have included the National Weekend visit to Derby; the Wenlock beer and supper; attendance at Ealing; Wallington and Clacton beer festivals; and yesterday's beer and curry walkabout. We also welcome the Ipswich branch and we have interest in a few other areas so we may get more branches in soon. For the future, we are laying down the groundwork for the 2006 National Weekend, at this time we have confirmed a trip to the Highgate Brewery in Walsall at 7 PM on Friday 17th November. We are looking at repeating the Wenlock beer and buffet event, the beer and curry and there is a possibility for a new day event in Bath for later in the year. Let's raise a glass to those who cannot be here tonight and hope for another enjoyable and successful year.

Chris Callow, Devizes, March 2006

PUBLICITY

Thanks to all members who helped to disseminate the SPBW publicity booklets. We won't be producing any more of these for the foreseeable future; instead we have revamped the one-page information leaflet/application form. Using the technical skills and printing facilities of Katherine Callow we've produced a more attractive and punchy version which will be thrust upon the drinking public wherever possible.

SPBW WEBSITE

As you should all be aware, the SPBW Members Forum is still going strong at www.spbw.com/bb. Mark Hutchison, our webmaster, will always welcome suggestions on how to improve this and our general site; contact him at: marksalehousecom@hotmail.com.

The Bulletin Board is intended as a way for members to exchange information. It's very easy to get involved with and, as with most things, the more the merrier. We are particularly keen to see representatives of branches acting as moderators to help keep their sections up to date.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

If you want to receive up to the minute news about SPBW events, you can get this information in the comfort of your own PC monitor. Send your email address to John Rooth and he will add you to his circulation list. We promise that your email details will only be used for the transmission of SPBW material.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

May 1996 and the news that Whitbread had bought the free trade rights to Wadworths 6X. Remarkably, the Devizes brewery has survived, unlike its larger competitor which is no longer brewing.

The NEC Chairman's annual report bemoaned the lack of a Branch Liaison Officer so we were delighted when Graham Canny of the then fairly new RACS took on the post and proved to be fairly pro-active. Elsewhere in PiH 58, regular correspondent Somerset Mark provided one of his first articles, covering his bike ride round the Cotswolds, sampling the likes of Donningtons and Hook Norton ales.

Among the branches we find the first stirrings from Northern Ireland and the first meeting of the short-lived Norvic Nippers from Norfolk. The Perfect Pub Page featured the excellent Bhurtpore Inn at Aston, Cheshire. I've come to know this pub quite well and look forward to my next visit. It's a big favourite with our new Cheshire branch as well.

The May 1986 issue included a lengthy article on beer in Colombia and a shorter piece on pubs on Anglesey. PiH global as ever!

THE PERFECT PUB PAGE

This bit of PiH is a platform for members to spread the word about the best pubs they have encountered. As ever, contributions for this page will be very welcome; even more so if accompanied by an illustration!

You could look long and hard before finding a better example of a community pub than Engineers Arms in Henlow, Bedfordshire. The fact that it offers a superb range of ales: 15 – 20 beers weekly on 9 handpumps, adds very much to the perfection quotient. Everards Tiger is a regular and the other beers come from a wide variety of small breweries, including the local Pottons. The available beers are listed behind the bar and you can order by number if you prefer. If you want something slightly more exotic, Leffe Blond is also available on draught.

There is a quiet lounge at the front of the pub, decorated with a collection of jugs, and a larger area to the rear with big screen tv for sports events. For those who prefer their entertainment in the flesh, as it were, there is regular live music and comedy nights. Regular beer festivals also occur. The tops of the bar areas are generously bedecked with hops and look out for the antique illuminated Watneys sign over the till in the lounge! An interesting eccentricity, unique in my experience, is a selection of aftershaves and colognes in the gents (sorry ladies, my research was not completely comprehensive) for the use of customers. This is also the only pub I can recall with its web address on the sign outside - <http://www.engineersarms.co.uk>. This reveals close links between the pub and the local football club and golf society. The pub also organises regular outings – forthcoming destinations include Burton, Black Country and Bamberg.

The Engineers was originally established on 1830 and was owned by a number of small local brewers before being sold to Charles Wells of nearby Bedford in 1884. It was only around this time that the pub acquired its name (it's not known why). The pub was sold as a free house in 1993 – Kevin and Claire were already in residence and they have really put the place on the map, winning a number of local CAMRA awards.

The village of Henlow – noted for its health farm – is between Letchworth and Biggleswade, a fraction over a mile west of Arlesey station on the Kings Cross to Peterborough line. The Engineers Arms is in the High Street – you'll get a friendly welcome and the beers are excellent. Do yourself a favour and visit at the earliest opportunity.

R.J

Back Page Pub: *The Beartown Tap*, 18 Willow Street, Congleton is one of Cheshire's most renowned pubs. On the A54 close to the town centre and also very close to the Beartown Brewery, the pub opened in its present guise in 1999. It was the first pub owned by this enterprising small brewery which now owns nine houses. It serves a wide range of the excellent Beartown beers, plus a guest ale, a draught cider and a big selection of Belgian bottled beers.

MEET THE NEC

John Rooth, General Secretary

I was born in June 1955 in Derby. In the days when education was valued, the government kindly paid for 5 years in the higher education system, so I have a degree in Industrial Chemistry from Brunel University and an MSc in Technological Economics from Stirling University. I have subsequently wasted these qualifications, by working for 27 years in data processing for various Market Research companies.

Whilst at Brunel, I was chairman of the first Real Ale Society. Subsequent trips to Morrells and Wethereds breweries ended with us being banned from the use of both Student Union transport and the local hire firm. At Stirling, I failed to organise a piss-up in a brewery, by taking a group of people to Lorimers on the wrong day. It is a sign of the times, that none of these 3 are still with us.

I joined Camra in 1977 and have been a member ever since. I came across the SPBW because of Sue & 'Arry Hart inviting me to join the Campden Hill branch. I have been NEC Secretary since 2001, having originally attended a meeting socially and volunteered to fulfil the vacant role. I've retained the position as no one else wants to do it. I am also treasure of Camal (Campaign for Authentic Lager), the highlight of which is an annual beer holiday, usually to Europe, often to Germany.

I have many hobbies, such as supporting Derby County and Harrow Borough. I am currently a member of 3 cricket clubs, Derbyshire, Middlesex and Essex (in order of allegiance), and at times have been a member of 5 others. I also used to regularly follow the Rugby League team now called Harlequins RL (formerly Fulham etc). I have been to a home ground for all 92 football league clubs, plus many non-league and Scottish (same thing), and 70 first class cricket grounds; so I have been to most localities in Britain. This means that to date I have visited 1,112 of the 4,500 pubs in the 2006 Good Beer guide.

I love jazz (especially avant-garde), and go and see most acts at Ronnie Scotts. I have attended the North Sea Jazz festival in Holland, for the last 15 or so years. I run the Derby County London supporters quiz team and have played (poorly) in a Wednesday darts team for 20 years. If I have any time left at all I enjoy theatre, especially classical and fringe.

I am not known for my career ambition, stoicism, tolerance, or sartorial elegance.

J.R

Mike Hall, Vice-Chairman

Mike is also chairman of SPBW's oldest branch - Campden Hill, based in West London. He is a retired civil servant who is involved with Service pensioner welfare organisations and is on the management committee of the Civil Service Club, close to Whitehall in London. Interests apart from pubs and beer festivals include canal walking/narrow boat holidays, films and music.

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.

One of our regular contributors, Somerset Mark, is interested in getting a branch going. Anyone living within about 50 miles of Bath who would like to get involved, please contact Bill and he'll pass your name on.

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 **Hammersmith Ram**, King Street, Hammersmith. 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: Our newest branch, this dubiously-acronymed bunch are based mainly around the Crewe/Nantwich area. The emphasis is on the social side with trips planned in the near future. Contact Colin Donald 01270 623376 email colinsdonald@aol.co.

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

IPSWICH: We hope the branch will finally get up and running in the near future. Contact Phil (01473 644923) or Iain (01473 251586).

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.

MAYDAY (Hastings): Based at the *First In Last Out* brewpub, 14-15 High Street. Contact Helen or Tony Champion at the pub on 01424 425079 for further details.

NORTHERN IRELAND: Contact Mark Hutchinson for details of meetings and events: marksalehousecom@hotmail.com



Mark Hutchison of NI Branch presents an award to the Kings Head, Belfast

PONDS: Time and place of meetings varies but usually in Carshalton area. Contact Dave Hamer (020 8395 8716 or email dehamer@tiscali.co.uk .

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

SPECIAL: The branch holds annual, week-long gatherings around the inland waterways network. There are also unofficial visits to pubs of renown in London, Cheshire and Shropshire, or wherever we happen to be. Check our website at: www.geocities.com/canalnav/SPBW1.html

WANTZ: Meetings are held third Monday of the month at the *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; graham-hewitt@tiscali.co.uk) for further details.

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

Are the details for your branch correct on these pages? If not please the Editor know before the deadline for the next issue; thanks!

BRANCHES IN ACTION

Once again, only a few of our branches have contributed to this section. I'm sure these can't be the only active branches, so please keep me informed of what you have been, and will be, up to.

RACS have celebrated the feasts of Robert Burns and St George at the Gate in recent months. The AGM takes place on 24 May and on 3 June they visit the Rare Breeds Farm and Beer Festival.

Special Branch held a gathering of old acquaintances in Maidstone in April, the venue chosen since a good few of our number have become Kentish People. We met in a Wetherspoon pub for convenience but some of us did break away to try some of the more traditional pubs in town. Best of these was the Rifle Volunteers, owned by local brewers Goachers, a cosy and friendly one room pub serving mild, light and stout at very reasonable prices. The last week in May sees our annual convention afloat in Cheshire and a bit of Staffordshire.



The Rifle Volunteers, Maidstone

Wantz With Peter set to join ex-branch member Dave Brightwell in Turkey we did our bit to pre-acclimatise him with a visit to the Tas restaurant on Farringdon Road. Food was very good and not too expensive (although our vino consumption whacked up the bill somewhat!) and service was very efficient and friendly. This branch of Tas is just a door or two away from the Sir John Oldcastle, a typical 'Spoons pub whence we retired for post prandial pints. Aperitifs had been consumed at the **Butchers Hook & Cleaver**, the Fullers pub by Smithfield Market.

We began March with a return visit to the **Dovetail** in Clerkenwell for some eager sampling of the vast range of Belgian beers on offer. The bar was rather crowded but we got there early enough to grab a table and have a good evening.

Just before Easter we dragged ourselves down to deepest London SW19. First stop was the **Sultan**, renowned Hop Back house, where we took advantage of 'Beer Club' night - basically an extended happy hour with all beers at £1.75 from 6 to 9. Odd to see that the guest beer was Youngs Special, hardly a rare brew in these parts. After this we crossed Merton High Street for the **Trafalgar Tavern** in High Pavement, a small friendly pub with a good selection of beers, one of very few London pubs that regularly serves mild. Between pubs we called in at Nelson Wines (168 Merton High Street, corner with Nelson Road). This is a small off licence with a remarkable range of bottled beers from the UK, Belgium, Germany and beyond, at very reasonable prices, and we all came out laden down with take-home goodies. We further broadened our horizons with an evening at the **Bavarian Beerhouse** in City Road. This is a large beer cellar serving half a dozen or so Bavarian brews such as Paulaner, Erdinger *weissebiers*, Diebels Alt, Küppers Kölsch (by the litre if you wish) along with hearty portions of authentic German food. The beer is by no means cheap but it's worth a visit if you're into German refreshments. The BB is just a few minutes walk from the Wenlock Arms, whence most of us repaired afterwards. A few of **West Riding Branch** visited Liverpool beer festival and this was as good as ever, the numbers allowed in had been limited due to the new licences but this did not change the superb atmosphere and made the visits to the bar a little easier. A crawl round the excellent pubs there after the festival made the day complete. Festivals in Huddersfield and Leeds, London, Colne, Oldham and Newcastle were also visited. The May branch meeting is on Sunday 28 at the Shepherds Rest in Sowerby Bridge, followed by a visit to Fox and Goose, Hebden Bridge, beer festival.

THE SHEPHERD ON THE BRIDGE

Andy's Roving Report

Crown & Kettle, Great Ancoats Street, Manchester

An article that I wrote about this pub appeared in the February 1990 PiH. This former Wilson's house closed shortly afterwards and remained shut for 15 years, reopening in summer 2005. Amazingly, the fabric of the building had withstood vandalism, arson and, vilest of all, 'property developers'. Its reappearance as a free house was rightly heralded with some enthusiasm in the local press. I revisited the *Crown* in January this year as part of a wider pub crawl of the area and visit to the Winter Beer Festival nearby.

This is a three-room hostelry, having a large tap room, a sort of small lounge or eating room at the rear, and a snug with a most ornate ceiling. Both the tap and snug have chandeliers, which is scarcely a common sight these days. The tap room itself reminded me of a church, with the stone arches behind the bar and perpendicular windows. The ceiling in here has decayed over the years but will hopefully be restored or recreated. I recall reading that the wood panelling that was once so prominent came from an old airship originally.

The building is allegedly a former magistrates' court, built in the late 18th century and if you read the history boards that are dotted about the pub, you

can't help but feel that the building was beautifully situated for this task. Seemingly, the immediate area was rather dubious (to put it mildly) in the 1800s. to be honest, one could rephrase that as 'since the 1800s' as the streets surrounding the *Crown* lack the opulence of, say, Eaton Square to a marked degree. There are a number of decent hostelries though and like some of them, the *Crown* hosts its own beer festivals with the temporary bar being set up in the tap room to the side of the bar proper. During our visit, the festival was just being set up, so we had to find something on the four handpumps in the tap or three on the bar of the snug on the other side. There's a real cider in a barrel as well for those who are impervious to hangovers.

Vox Bar, Wood Street, Huddersfield

The existence of the *Vox* was revealed to us by the landlord of Elliotts Bar in Wakefield when we remarked upon his range of foreign bottled beers. Having discovered it directly behind the town centre Wetherspoons, I am pleased to report that this is a bar worth seeking out.

Décor is quite minimalist excepting the art section over to the left; otherwise there's a bare wood floor and a bar counter with stone facing the two largish areas that make up the premises. Lighting is subdued, but it shouldn't stop you seeing the fonts for the likes of Erdinger (*weisse* and (*und?*) *dunkel*) and Maisels *weisse* on the bar top as well as the cask of cider at the back. Note the remarkable range of liqueurs and spirits also. Best of all is the wide selection of bottled offerings, varying from the likes of Cooper's Sparkling Ale, through to Brooklyn Chocolate Stout and via Trappist beers to Erdinger *Schneeweisse*. You won't find a variety like this in too many hostelries up north.

Although I imagine that the *Vox* would mainly attract the younger members of society later on, it is quieter early in the evening and gets a fairly wide mix of age groups. It is definitely one of the better examples of its type, so call in.

Sowerby Bridge

This town lies in the Pennines, just west of Halifax. At various times in the past it has been regarded as a great place for a pub crawl, only for the pubs to be sold or the breweries to be taken over or closed. I can even recall drinking beer from the Matthew Brown at the *William IV* here. The town now seems to be on the way up again.

Howbeit, here are two hostelries that I haven't written about before: the first is the ***Work's***, which opened last summer as far as I am aware. This is on Hollins Mill Lane, which is at the bottom right hand side of the main street. It doesn't take a Sherlock Holmes to guess that the name is from the building's previous use as a foundry or mill. This is a fairly huge hostelry, about Wetherspoons size, but more Spartan in décor; though note the ceiling tiles way above you! There are plain wood floorboards throughout with mainly low seating and chairs dotted about, though there's also the top part of a vaulting horse to recline upon. Very little on the walls other than a few beer advertisements as well as a postbox affixed to the side of a large fireplace. When you enter the *Work's*, you will see the bar directly in front. On our visit there were 8 beers available, including 3 from Tim Taylor, a beer from Copper Dragon of Skipton, Moorhouse Black Cat mild and Little Valley's Stoodley

Stout. This latter beer is 4.8% and was extremely good, but dear around here at £2.40 a pint. I spotted a cask cider as well, but can't recall the brand. The wine list here is pretty extensive and judging by the work going on upstairs, I think that there'll maybe be room up there before long.

Back on Hollins Mill Lane and left up the main street to the fork at the top – keep left on Berry Brow and you'll see the **Shepherd's Rest** (again on your left) almost immediately. The road here is steep and has been the scene for big scale fatal accidents in the past. The *Shepherd's* is one of Ossett Brewery's recent acquisitions – so there's 4 of their beers available as well as 4 guests. We tried the Boggart Hole Clough dark mild at £1.85 a pint. This was another good one (as was all the beer drunk that night) and worth the walk uphill. The pub itself is wedge shaped and has 3 areas, with the top one being through an arch. The 'point' of the wedge contains the tap room with the central part, a sort of lounge, being the largest bit. Flooring is mainly wood, though with some stone as well. There is a small selection of foreign bottled beers and, yet again, a sizeable wine list. Somehow they manage to fit in the occasional live band, but presumably of the more minuscule size.

BEER IN BRUSSELS

(part 1)

Lambic beer

All of the best bars in Brussels have an impressive list of bottled beers, usually upwards of 30 to in one case over 2 thousand, but more usually in the hundreds. However I will concentrate on draught beers, most particularly my favourite lambic beers, in which wooden casks play a key role.

Briefly, lambic beer is produced by spontaneous fermentation using wild yeast from the atmosphere. The wort is poured into large shallow open trays and then, when cooled, is transferred to oak casks for further fermentation and maturation over several months, up to 3 years in some cases. This oak ageing process gives a very lactic taste to the beer. Old hops are used more for their preservative powers than for flavour. After a year the lambic is considered to be young. The longer the fermentation continues in the cask, the more sugar is converted to alcohol, and the sourer the beer becomes. Blending old and new lambics produces *gueze* beers. Fruit beers such as Kriek (cherry), Framboise (raspberry), or Peche (peach) are produced by steeping the fruit in lambic beer in the oak casks. Faro is a lambic, which has been additionally sweetened with brown sugar, to produce a secondary fermentation. Due to a recent Belgian legislation change, beers which use lambic technique somewhere along the process are allowed to be called lambic. This means that some of the more commercial labels such as Belle Vue, particularly with their fruit flavoured ranges, tarnish the reputation of the 100% lambic producers.

Brussels bars

In the spectacular Grand Place is the **Brasseurs** brewpub. This is a multi-level wood panelled bar. The best choice is a sample pallet with Speciale

Blonde a 6% fermented beer, Grand Place white, a wheat beer 5.2%, Grand Place Brune 8 % and Brussels Tripel a blonde beer also 8%. Also in the Grande Place is the Brewers Guild House, a brewery museum dating from 1695. After a small tour you can enjoy a pils and a Kriek. This is something of a blind tasting, as the museum is not allowed to say who brews these, so as not to be seen as promoting a particular brewer.

Opposite the Mannekin Pis statue is **Poechenellekelder**, whose theme is hundreds of puppet models of the famous little flasher, as well as many murals and posters. In here I had Lindemans faro, a sweetened filtered lambic beer. Next stop, in a hard to find alley off Rue des Bourchers, is **Estaminet Toone**, an atmospheric, dimly lit wooden decorated bar, with its own puppet theatre. This had Kwak and Mort Subite Kriek on draught. The toffee flavoured Kwak is served in a glass shaped like a chemist's retort, held in a wooden frame. **La Becasse**, a late 19c brown café, with a backdrop of dark wooden panelling has sweetish Timmermans Lambic, and Kriek, served in ceramic jugs, by waiters wearing the traditional aprons.



*Wantz branch members stagger out of the Poechenellekelder
(photo by Bill Stansfield)*

On either side of the Bourse (stock exchange) are *Le Cirio* and *Falstaff*. Cirio is an ornate café/bar with gold fittings on a red felt background, serving Liefmans. Falstaff is a well-preserved end of 19c traditional bar, with glass framed dividers, traditional wood panelling and ornate mirrors, and stained glass windows depicting Shakespeare's bon viveur Falstaff. The beer list sadly is quite standard, with Belle Vue Kriek on tap. Also nearby is *Soleil* a pavement café bar with a young clientele and a fairly basic beer list.

Either side of Place de Monie, are *Lunette*, a large split level café bar with a disappointing Belle Vue based beer list, and *L'Ecuyer*, a basic bar, but serving good food and Lindemans. Another square further on is the opulent grandeur

of the Metropole Hotel bar. Chandeliers and potted plants abound, and very formally dressed waiters serve drinks and meals in this prestigious establishment.

Another old-fashioned brown café in an impasse (narrow alley) near the Bourse is *Au Bon Vieux Temps*, which has very wood panelling and carvings in dark wood and sold De Kirsch Pils and Morte Subite Kriek. In another impasse off Marche aux Herbes is *Imaigi de Nostre Dame*. This is a basic, dimly lit bar, without much natural light, but very friendly and comfortable and serving Liefmans. The café with the most spectacular beer list is *Delerium*, in an alley way off the main fish restaurant area. This has over 2000 bottles available, from all over the world. 12 beers were on tap with the Huyghe brewery well represented. Pink Killer, a grapefruit flavoured beer from Silly brewery was an unusual draught.

The *Morte Subite* café is another late 19th century bar. It is a long bar with wooden panels and benches, serving Morte Subite Gueze, Peche, Faro and Kriek on draught. *Spinnekopke* is a brown café with a large pavement area. It has a very good menu and serves draught Cantillon beers, including a Faro which they blend themselves.

The *Paon Royal* "Royal Peacock" is also close to the Bourse, near St Catherine's Church. This is a good place to eat, horse (cheval) being a particular speciality. This is quite cramped and very busy at lunchtimes. The De Koninck on draught is very good. La Paon closes at 10.30. Most of the bars open up very early in the morning, so may not do late opening, although it usually isn't a problem getting in at least one of the good ones in the central area up to about 1 AM. Nearby is *Monk*, the "self-service" bar named after the jazz pianist, featuring an excellent selection of draught beers.

A couple of blocks beyond the Mannekin Pis from the Grande Place, in the Marolles area is *Porte Noir*, a brick lined, candle lit atmospheric cellar. This is the only bar in Belgium to have St Feuillien Tripel on draught, a superb hoppy 8.5% blonde beer. Next door to this is *La Fleur en Papier Doree*, where Rene Magritte used to drink. This is another friendly atmospheric café/bar in which the Kriek was pleasant.

Heading up hill and out towards the Palace of Justice, we find *Warm Water*, a Girardin specialist café bar, and a great place for a substantial brunch. Most of the furniture, fittings and tablecloths are decorated green. This is the only bar which sells Girardin Faro on draught.

Nearby is the gourmet bar *Restobieres*. The proprietor and chef (Alain) handpicks unusual draught beers and the menu is excellent and unusual. I had veal liver & kidney and Kerkom Bink Blonde. La Rulles triple was also on Draught. Alain's bar is also a mini museum, with many artefacts celebrating Belgian history and the Royal family. We were given an impromptu guided tour as well as mein hosts impersonation of Mr Chouff.

John Rooth

To be continued

BEER BOOKS REVISITED

THE DEATH OF THE ENGLISH PUB by Christopher Hutt

(Arrow Books 1973)

This slim volume is, I would imagine, the first book to highlight the damage being done to Britain's great beer and pub heritage by the major breweries. It presents a nightmare scenario in which the dreaded Big Six are producing beers that are weaker, fizzy and less pleasant than traditional ales, served mostly in pubs that have been modernised and gimmicked, hosted by surly managers who have taken the place of hard working tenants. The warning is: if it hasn't happened to your local yet it soon will – unless you're lucky and it's owned by a regional brewer.

There are more than two pages about the SPBW, including some lengthy quotes from founder member Arthur Millard. It says that membership is around 2,500 (there were no membership fees in those days, it should be noted) and that 'many of the new members are bringing a more militant attitude into the Society'. Hutt recounts the tale of the mock funeral service for the demise of Truman's draught bitter, held at the Who'd 'a' Thought It in Plumstead with the local branch Chairman (Howard Purdie of Woolwich?) dressed as a vicar. But he adds that many SPBW members were dissatisfied by the general lack of a campaigning approach and lack of success when it did campaign. It was this vacuum which the founders of CAMRA – then very much in its infancy – hoped to fill. I guess they have.

Naturally, Hutt turns his attentions to the national keg beers that were all prevalent in that era. He quotes a *Which* survey which concluded that the likes of Double Diamond, Tankard etc had no characteristic taste. What's more, they were of no more than 'cooking bitter' strength and retailed at slightly more than traditional brews.

When Watneys so-called revolution changed Red Barrel into Red in 1971, apart from the cost of advertising, and the research involved in giving a so-called premium bitter a sweeter taste, the cost of changing over the cowns on bar counters exceeded £100,000. Ultimately it is the customer who pays for this and Watneys claimed they were reacting to a shift in demand. Did they seriously believe that, given a choice between a penny off a pint or a new set of lurid lights, the beer drinker would opt for the latter?

It quotes one Roy Wilson-Smith, the designer of some 30 London Watneys pubs, explaining his philosophy: "I want to give people who use my houses a rare and primitive relationship with the raw forces of nature. People love to be awed when they enter a pub by a superior natural force – a strange sort of higher masochism." You couldn't make it up could you?

Hutt had some nice words to say about Greene King, even then one of the largest regional brewers. The company had taken the decision to stick with traditional products rather than jump on the keg bandwagon. In 1971 the company reported that the policy had paid off and record sales had been achieved the previous year. GK continue to major on proper beer, to their credit, but have become just as voracious in destroying the brewing industry as the Big 6 ever were.

Interesting mention of David Bruce who, along with Paul Theakston, formed 'certainly the youngest management team in the brewing industry' – some years before the advent of the Firkin chain or Black Sheep brewery.

Quote: *As the major brewers have increased in size, they have become less and less accountable to the public it is their job to serve. They are already guilty, in my view, of what elsewhere might be termed robbery and violence. They have robbed the public of so many aspects of their leisure, and their violence has already caused the death of thousands of pubs. There are still many corners of excellence and variety in the brewing industry and the licensed trade. But if the major brewers are allowed to move with as much freedom and as little accountancy in the next ten years as they have for the last ten, then the death of the English pub, which has already happened in many parts of the country, could well be accomplished elsewhere.*

The book is liberally illustrated although the pictures have no captions and are scattered at random with only a spurious relevance to the text. One of the most damning is of the Prince Albert in London NW1 whose impressive tiled façade is ruined by an intrusive Charrington sign. It's message mostly seems dated with hindsight – not all the changes in the beer and brewing world since 1973 have been for the worse – but it starkly catches the spirit in which many of us 50-somethings (and older) began to fight the demon keg and its purveyors.

Thanks to Joe for the loan of the book.

R.J

The Last Word – from Lewes

Harveys Newsletter for April included a nice little front page article about the Royal Oak winning our London Pub of the Year award. There's an interesting quote from Michael Hall's (sic) presentation speech – I can't for the life of me recall what he said, so I have to assume that it's correct. Of even more interest was this paragraph:

"It is interesting to note that, in 1970, Harveys was still using wooden casks while making the slow transition to metal. Most brewers and drinkers of that decade would stress that the advent of metal casks improved the quality of cask conditioned beers immeasurably. However good the insulation qualities of wood and however romantic the concept, you cannot repeatedly wash wooden casks and guarantee sterility."

On a related note, *The Guardian* of 18 April carried an obituary of Stanley Grundy, who had died at the age of 91. Described as 'an original thinker', his best known idea was said to be the creation of the National Back Pain Association in 1968. Prior to that, having found a way to weld aluminium, he introduced the 'aluminium beer barrels which replaced wooden casks in public houses...' I suppose someone had to do it.

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The Beartown Tap, Congleton (see page 8)