

FREE

Swan Supping



Issue 84

June/July 2011

Black Lion

COVER STORY

**There is a new team
in charge at the Black
Lion, Naphill!**

Page 4

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NEWS FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to the 84th issue of *Swan Supping* which covers the, hopefully, sunny months of June and July.

We have quite a few new writers who have taken pen to paper to give us even more diverse views of the beer scene in our branch. It is especially pleasing to be able to have an article from a champion cider maker, especially as the winning cider is from Buckinghamshire, just outside the branch, in Wolverton. A big welcome to all the new writers with the hope that this issue will not be their last, and that their efforts will encourage more of you out

there to have a go at writing an article for the magazine.

Not only do we have our first major cider article, we also have one about vodka! However, the vodka in question is made by *Adnams* and you have the chance on winning a bottle - see the feature on page 14.

BEST DAY OF THE YEAR

The main event we have coming up is our annual coach trip to the Black Country. Most people who have joined us in the past reckon that it is the best day of the year as we travel round some of the best pubs in the country.

As usual, we are picking people up from Aylesbury (9.45am outside the **Broad Leys**) then Princes Risborough (opposite the **Bell**), High Wycombe (at the **White Horse**) and Stokenchurch (outside the **Mowchak**). We are then whisked away to the **Coach & Horses** in Weatheroak to partake of food and the fine ales from the *Weatheroak Hill* brewery. We then head to the home of *Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild*, the **Beacon Hotel** in Sedgley, where we might be able to arrange a trip round their beautiful Victorian brewery. The route from here varies every year, but we will definitely be going to the **Olde Swan**, Netherton, which is the home of *Ma Pardoes* beer, the **Bull & Bladder**, Brierley Hill, and the **Waggon & Horses** in Halesowen (pictured) to check if they still have fifteen handpumps.



We always try and find new pubs to visit, and this year we may well be making the short detour to Stourbridge to see what they have to offer.

We have held the price at £26, which is the bargain of the year. There are a limited number of seats on the coach (which will have a loo on it this year) so it is recommended that you book as soon as possible. Please book by contacting me and details for doing that are shown on page 22.

Finally, my thanks to all our contributors and our advertisers. We couldn't give our readers their bimonthly beer information feast without you.

I'm now off to the pub to have a beer while reading the latest health scare about the dangers of alcohol! I've only been drinking beer for about forty years and it hasn't done any damage so far (my waistline is due to eating too much and too little exercise), but then again, what do I know about the subject. Perhaps the writers of these articles have a different agenda than I do!

David Roe
Swan Supping Editor

NATIONAL CAMRA NEWS

CAMRA welcomes new Scottish Government pledge to tackle irresponsible alcohol retailing

In May, *CAMRA's* National Chairman (and Edinburgh resident), Colin Valentine, has written to the newly re-elected Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond MSP. The letter welcomes the new SNP Government's pledge to address the sale of alcohol below cost in supermarkets, and calls for urgent action to prevent this 'pernicious form of predatory pricing' which seriously undermines the Scottish pub sector's efforts to promote the moderate and responsible consumption of alcohol.

Colin Valentine said: 'Minimum pricing would present a simple and effective solution to help curb binge drinking, and *CAMRA* believes a floor price of around 40 pence per unit of alcohol would prevent supermarkets from selling at below cost price. Further inaction by the Scottish Government on this issue would be to disregard the countless incidences every week whereby people are substituting a visit to a well run pub with a cheap evening drinking high strength alcohol at home, in parks or on the streets.'

The letter also calls for Mr Salmond to consider appointing a Community Pubs Minister in Scotland following the successful appointment of Bob Neill MP as Community Pubs Minister in Westminster. A Minister dedicated to community

pubs is essential to ensuring that the voices of consumers and hard-working licensees are heard.

The World's Largest Pub

The *Great British Beer Festival 2011 (GBBF)* at Earls Court is drawing ever closer, with *CAMRA* hoping for another record-breaking event from the 2nd to the 6th of August! In 2010, over 66,000 people attended the five day extravaganza, with over 1,000 *CAMRA* volunteers giving up their time to make the Festival the biggest to date.

This year, festival-goers should expect 700+ real ales, ciders, perries and foreign beers from around the world, with *CAMRA* claiming to have something to suit every drinker's taste buds! To accompany this heady range, the Festival offers a great choice of food from traditional cuisine to classic pub snacks, unforgettable live music, a wide variety of pub games to occupy your time, and an array of tutored tastings from some of the leading authorities in the beer world.

Tickets for the event are now available and can be pre-ordered for a discounted price from the ticketing website at www.seetickets.com/gbbf. With such demand at the door of Earls Court for tickets, pre-ordering is a great way of ensuring you do not miss out on the Festival fun!

Opening times: Tuesday 2nd 5.00pm to 10.30pm, Wednesday 3rd to Friday 5th 12noon to 10.30pm, Saturday 6th 11.00am to 7.00pm.



CAMRA National Club of the Year 2011

A real ale haven in Kinver, Staffordshire, claiming to have served over 250 different beers to its members in the last two years, has been named as *CAMRA's National Club of the Year*.

Kinver Constitutional Club won after a panel of judges were bowled over by the attention to detail and beer knowledge shown by the club's stewards, and the sheer range of real ales served at the bar. The club is a converted hotel with three main areas, a restaurant, large snooker room, and a bar dispensing up to 18 real ales, and is revered for its support of breweries from the local area, including *Hobsons*, *Kinver* and *Enville*.

Besides enjoying an enviable sporting reputation, the club is a valued community outlet, with most of the village of Kinver making up its 1,400 strong membership.

COVER STORY - THE BLACK LION ROARS AGAIN!

Our previous chairman has presided over a great victory in the brewing industry. In the last twenty years, the number of breweries has increased from around 250 to over 770, and membership in *CAMRA* has soared to over 122,000.

Current statistics, however, show that pubs are closing at a rate of 25 a week, nationwide.

All too often, once a pub shuts, for whatever reason, it remains closed, and is sold off, often with a restrictive covenant preventing it from ever opening again.

The **Black Lion** in Naphill looked to be one of these pubs when it closed in November last year. Another casualty to the credit crunch, and easily converted to private use, due to the nearby **Wheel**, which would then be protected as the last pub in the village.

Luckily for the branch, its owners saw that the 200 year old building had the potential to be a successful business, and investing heavily in the building, its current leaseholders, Bob and Mike, have improved the building, inside and out, with much help, often unpaid, from the local community who did not wish to see their local closed. Even the bar was lovingly sanded and varnished by a member of the village.

Situated just off the main road in Naphill, the pub is a short walk from the bus stop (on the 300 route from Aylesbury to High Wycombe). It is found down a short side road, and so easily missed if you are driving past. Fortunately for Dave and myself, our driver spotted the entrance as we sailed by, so only a short detour was required.



The pub, itself, is an attractive flint and brick building, set in a large garden. As we sat talking to the licensees, one of the Chiltern's beautiful Red Kites sailed overhead. I suspect as the summer months progress, especially if we have some of the promised hot weather, the outdoor barbecue will be heavily used. Walking into the pub via the main entrance from the garden, the interior is beautifully decorated with a dining area at one end of the bar, towards the back of the pub. The bar is directly in front of you, with their four handpumps prominently displayed. To the right is an area set out with table

for eating or drinking.

To satisfy all tastes Jack, the manager, Bob and Mike, have decided to provide two regular ales, **Sharp's Doom Bar** and **Rebellion IPA**, together with a varying selection of **SIBA** beers. This policy appears to be very popular with customers, with 658 pints of **IPA** having been drunk in the last two weeks. I can certainly confirm that the two pints of **Doom Bar** that I consumed were of top quality.

The local theme is continued with the food (which sadly we did not have time to sample). Local butcher David Nichols supplies meat from local farms to the pub, and I'm told that the Sunday Roast is very popular.

Open Monday to Saturday 11am-11pm, Sunday 12pm-11pm. Food served Monday to Saturday 12pm to 9pm and Sunday 12pm to 8pm. Further details are available on their website www.blacklionnaphill.com.

Alex Wright

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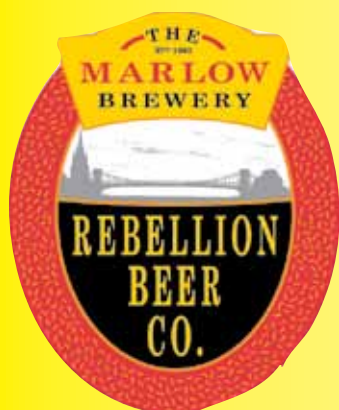
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LOCAL NEWS

ASHENDON

The **Gatehangers** is still serving two real ales. **Greene King IPA** is a firm favourite of the locals and this is supported by one other guest: **Vale Wycheart**, **Sharp's Doom Bar** or **Tring Side Pocket for a Toad**, all make regular appearances here.

AYLESBURY

The extension to the drinkers bar at the **Broad Leys** is now complete, in time for a proposed beer festival in June (no date had been fixed when checked).

The **Dairy Maid** reopened as a **Hungry Horse** pub and doesn't seem much different inside.

Building has now started on the site of the old **Duck** in Bedgrove.

The **Horse & Jockey** seems to be getting busier and busier. The manager Andy is a Geordie and is quite switched on. He knows all of his regulars by name and keeps a good pint of either **London Pride** or **Speckled Hen**. This was reported by one of their longest serving customers, who started drinking there in May 1964, so this month was his 47th year as a regular, so he should know.

The delicious bottled and draught Royal Wedding ales, **I Will**, sold out at the **Kings Head** hours before the actual ceremony itself! The **Farmers' Bar** is now stocking draught **Nut Brown** mild and **Cobblestones** will be available soon. **Golden Ale** beckons as this year's summer limited edition, seasonal draught to a special recipe, asking to be enjoyed in the courtyard.

The **Millwrights** has had a garden makeover, so it is even more pleasant to drink **Greene King IPA**, **Speckled Hen** and **Brains Reverend James** outside.

The **New Zealand** is set to close! The final session is on Thursday the 9th of June and landlords Robbie and Chris and their three kids have got a house in Castle Street compliments of the brewery until they can find other employment.

Work has started on the **Queens Head** as **Punch** have taken on a couple to run this old favourite of the branch.

Weavers is up for sale as a freehold concern by **Punch**.

BISHOPSTONE

Andy Maddern has taken over at the **Harrow** from the beginning of May. Currently stocked with three handpumps (**Vale Steam** and **St. Austell Tribute** were available when visited, the other had just run out), he is planning a cellar refit, expanding the number of handpumps from three to four. He is also investigating stocking a real cider. The pub will also sell traditional home made pub food using locally sourced ingredients where possible. For the summer there will be BBQs in the large garden, and there will be a beer and music festival (Bishfest) in the second week in September.

CHEARSLEY

Enjoy three **Fullers** beers at the **Bell** to wash down Simon's homemade **London Pride** sausages. Three **Fullers** bottled beers support **Chiswick**, **London Pride** and **ESB**. Only 50 tickets remain for the September £30 weekend event.

CUDDINGTON

The **Crown** has **Adnams Bitter**, **Fullers London Pride** and **George Gale Spring Sprinter**. Book now for Fathers' Day, 19th June.

DINTON

A village consortium is looking at buying out the **Seven Stars** from **Punch**.

FINGEST

Jaxon and Emma Keedwell, who used to be at the **Fox & Hounds**, Christmas Common, are now in charge at the **Chequers**, and have been replaced in their previous pub by the couple that ran the **George & Dragon**, West Wycombe.

FORD

The **Dinton Hermit** has **Vale Best Bitter** and, in the summer, a seasonal guest.

GIBRALTAR

Owner Chris is still trying to get a local ale on tap at the **Bottle and Glass**, but is dependent upon **Greene King** giving the nod. Two real ales are available at any one time: **Greene King IPA**, **Morland Original Bitter**, **Old Speckled Hen** or **Westgate Brewery Ale Fresco**.

HADDENHAM

Don't forget the 7th **Haddenham Real Ale Festival** on Saturday 2nd July 2011. Details appear on page 9 opposite a pub crawl report on the village on page 8.

HIGH WYCOMBE

The **Falcon (Wetherspoons)** did its part to 'Make May a Mild Month' and on the 10th of May had two super milds: **Otter Mild** (4.3%), a new seasonal brew which has recently scooped Gold at the South West's biggest Beer Festival, and **Black**

Dragon Mild from **Banks & Taylor**, which was also a very drinkable 4.3%, a strong dark mild with pronounced roast flavours.

LACEY GREEN

Fifteen years ago, the **Black Horse** was only one planning meeting away from being closed forever and becoming a private house! Luckily the locals rallied round and stopped a potential tragedy, so why not go there and raise a glass of one of their four real ales to celebrate!

The **Pink and Lily** is currently shut. Duncan and Shakira gave up after about ten years struggling to make it work in the current climate. It will be a tied **Enterprise** operation as they are currently redecorating and repairing the pub and it should be open next month.

The **Whip** held another of their excellent beer festivals in May, which was a great success, enjoyed by all. **Spectrum Oldstoatwobbler** at 6% from Norfolk, lived up to its description as a notorious, strong, dark and luscious ale - the ideal brew to finish off a session.

LOUDWATER

The **Derehams Inn** is celebrating their fifth 'Fag n Firkin' Beer Festival over the weekend of Friday 1st - 3rd July. The theme this year is local ales so they're sticking to the three counties of Bucks, Berks and Herts (except for the ciders). Along with around twenty or so beers, four ciders and a barbecue all weekend, there is also live music both Friday (Beverley Cassidy) and Saturday nights (Splash the Cash) as well as a new video horse racing event on Sunday afternoon with betting for everyone to

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enjoy. Details and beer tasting notes are available for viewing and download from www.derehamsinn.co.uk.

MARLOW

Matthew Browne opened his **Alfred The Grape** wine emporium at 17 Spittal Street over six months ago and now carries an extensive selection of bottled beers from local breweries to include **Rebellion**, **Old Luxters**, **Lovibonds**, **West Berkshire**, and **Loddon**, with the good chance of more to be added soon.

John and Tracy Hudson at the **Duke of Cambridge** were cock-a-hoop to hear that the Queen had bestowed upon her grandson, Prince William, the title of Duke of Cambridge.

The **Hare & Hounds** on Henley Road is scheduled to reopen on Friday 27th May as the lease has been taken by Anthony Burnham who is also the licensee at the **Two Brewers** pub in Marlow town. More details next issue.

MEDMENHAM

The **Dog & Badger** reopened in early May and is now ably run by the family team of Nick, Suzanne, and Jamie Massey who were previously at the **Chequers** in Fingest. Beers are **Fullers London Pride** and **Rebellion IPA** with a possible third handpump in the future.

NAPHILL

The **Black Lion** reopened at Easter and was bursting at the seams on launch day and other days over the holiday period, serving four real ales, with an emphasis on local brewers and some popular nationals. See the article on page 4.

The presentation of the **Wheel's Pub of the Year 2011** award, covered last issue, was made to Mark and Claire by local **CAMRA** chairman, Alex Wright, in April and is pictured above.

PIDDINGTON

Monday evening is Curry Evening at the **Dashwood Arms** - £6.95 buys a curry

and a pint. There are four draught ciders available as well as four real ales and recent offerings have included **Fullers London Pride**, **Rebellion Blond**, **Vale Brill Ale** and **Vale Grumpling**.

QUAINTON

The **George & Dragon** will be hosting a Classic & Vintage Car and Bike Day. This will be held on the village green opposite the pub on Sunday 21st of August between 2pm and 6pm.

SEER GREEN

The **Jolly Cricketers** features in the just-released prestigious **Alastair Sawday's Pubs and Inns of England 2011** guide. Not only that, but it has been awarded a special 'Community Pub Award' by **Alastair Sawday** - one of only three pubs in the country to get this.

STEWKLEY

The **Swan** is having a beer festival over the weekend of 18th/19th of June featuring fifteen ales, mainly local, plus live music and a barbecue etc.

STOKE MANDEVILLE

The **Bell** reopened in April following a major refurbishment and is now selling three real ales.

THAME

Chinnor Rugby Club will be holding an Oktoberfest over the weekend of Friday 7th and Saturday 8th October. A Bavarian Oompah Band on Friday night and a beer festival all day Saturday.

The rampant hop at the **Cross Keys** has made an appearance and is now halfway up the pub wall. Soon to reappear will be **Thame Brewery Hoppiness** and **Mr Splodge Mild**. In June there will be an

additional two handpumps installed giving even more choice. On 7th July, Roger Protz of **Good Beer Guide** fame will be giving a talk. The time has yet to be confirmed, so ring the pub for details.

The **James Figg** has **Purity UBU**, **Vale Best**, **Wells Bombardier** and **Black Sheep Best Bitter**. Every Monday evening they show films in the main bar on a big screen at the back with a start time of 8.30. They have installed an Aunt Sally in their newly refurbished garden with matches taking place most Friday evenings, although it will be available at other times for those wishing to try out this Oxfordshire game.

At the **Rising Sun**, home of Thame's friendliest quiz with Thame's friendliest quizmaster, they have installed a third handpump. In addition to the **Brakspear Best**, there will be a guest seasonal monthly ale and the third pump will feature a guest weekly ale - **Jennings Cockerhoop** being the first one on.

In the **Birdcage**, you can get **Rebellion IPA** and **Smuggler** whilst in the **Spread Eagle** you can get **Vale VPA**. The **Six Bells** usually has **London Pride**, **Gales HSB**, **Seafarers** and **Spring Sprinter** (a seasonal beer at 4.0%) and one from **Chiltern**, currently **Beechwood**.

Wenmans will be renamed shortly as, surprise, surprise, the **Star & Garter**.

WOOBURN COMMON

The **Royal Standard** held a very successful 'Meet the **Dark Star** Brewer' evening on Wednesday 18th May with an entertaining talk and plenty of **Dark Star** samples being passed around to the eager throng. More of the same, please!

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&
COLLEY'S
DOG

HADDENHAM PUB CRAWL



We then moved on a few yards up the road to the **Red Lion** which amongst others had on offer *Black Sheep* and *Vale Brill Steam*. Some of the group had an interesting discussion with the landlady on the merits or otherwise of whether the beer should be served through a sparkler. Others of us couldn't tell the difference, and just enjoyed the beer as it came! Another interesting feature in the pub was that they had on offer, dare I mention it, *Double Diamond*. One of us recalled *Double Diamond* as being one of the more gruesome of the beers from the 60s and was tempted to have a taste of it. It seemed to be a mixture of lager and bitter, better than as recalled from the 60s but still not one for the real ale drinker.

Our final pub was the **Green Dragon**, (where the photo featuring some of our merry band and a couple of customers who were happy to join in, was taken) recently acquired by **Oak Taverns** and with new managers in situ. Here they also had Doombar plus one other and a wonderful pint of *Harvey's Sussex Bitter*, so wonderful in fact that some of us had two in recognition of the fact that this was our last pub.

There was a good turn out on a pleasant late spring evening for the **AV&W CAMRA** pub crawl of Haddenham on Tuesday evening 10th May. At one time there were perhaps ten to twelve pubs in Haddenham, but now the number is down to a more manageable (in one evening) five, all of which serve real ale.

We started off in the **Rising Sun** (just a stone's throw away from what was one of probably two long since defunct breweries in the village) and which has recently had a facelift. This pub has a good selection of hand-drawn real ales, the most unusual on the list on this occasion being *Amarillo* (4.3%) from **Rudgate Brewery** - that uses the Amarillo hop, which is privately grown in Washington state USA. This was a good pint, with quite a bitter hoppy taste, and set us up well for the walk to the next pub, the **King's Head**.

To get there, you walk no more than half a mile down Haddenham High Street which from the name you might think is a busy through road. It is quite the opposite in fact, being a dead end - the dead end being our destination, the **King's Head**!

On the way you pass the entrance to Haddenham Museum (see <http://bit.ly/haddenhammuseum>) which no doubt has more information on the old pubs and breweries for those who are interested, and you also pass the site of another long-gone brewery which was next to the **Waggon and Horses** pub (now the Peking Rendezvous).

On offer at the **King's Head** was *Adnams Bitter*, *Fuller's London Pride* and *Sharp's Doom Bar*, although to get some *Doom Bar* the girl behind the bar needed some help from one of our beefier colleagues (Dave) to help put on a new barrel, which it has to be said was well worth the wait. Also on offer in the pub were some very tasty snacks, not laid on for us I hasten to add, but the landlady Barbara was more than happy for us to help ourselves. After all, it's such a long walk from the **Rising Sun**!

One of the very pleasant features of walking around Haddenham is the number of lanes and thatched cottages which looked a picture in the evening sunshine. To get to the next pub we passed lots of these to arrive at the attractive Church End, where the next two pubs can be found.

The first one we visited was the **Rose and Thistle** which, being a **Greene King** pub, was selling the usual *IPA* plus the clone, *Olde Trip* and a seasonal, *AlePril Fool* (4.3%), a ruby fruity beer which provided a nice contrast to the previous two rather more bitter pints sampled earlier. We were also entertained here by a practising Irish dance group who were rehearsing their music and moves in the back room of the pub.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that all the beers we had were of a high standard and were well kept, which meant that they were all thoroughly enjoyable. It was noticeable though that there were few drinkers around apart from us, maybe because Tuesdays are usually somewhat quiet, and it needs more people to use the pubs regularly to ensure that none of the pubs we visited land up being just a record in the museum mentioned earlier in this article.

Huw Davies/Chris Matthews-14/05/11



George & Dragon, Quainton

5 real ales. Good Beer Guide listed
Food served at all sessions
except Sunday evening and Monday

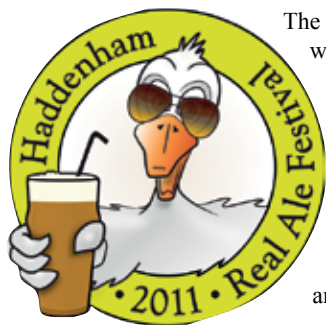
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HADDENHAM BEER FESTIVAL



The 2011 *Haddenham Real Ale Festival* will take place on Saturday 2nd July from 11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m., at the Haddenham Community Centre.

With a choice of sixty real ales, twenty ciders, and five lagers, the traditional market will be very well catered for, plus in the 'tented village' a wine bar, a Pimms bar, and a bar offering bottled beers from around the world.

To satisfy the hunger pangs, there will be the ever popular barbecue and curry tent, and a range of traditional hot and cold snacks, plus an olive and delicatessen bar.

Entertainment will be provided all day, with the Ian English Jazz Band again taking Centre stage through the afternoon with breaks for Morris Dancing and the Haddenham Hoofers Appalachian dancing team.

A welcome innovation for families will be the bouncy castles, both for toddlers and for youngsters, professionally supervised, and fully insured. This will be complemented by a kids' bar serving soft drinks and snacks.

As evening approaches, there will be groups playing pop music and a hog roast to round off a great day. A beer festival will have evolved into a family picnic, and then into a mini pop festival. All this is available at just £5 for tickets bought in advance, or £6 paid on entry, and draught beers, ciders and lagers are all still at just £2.50 per pint. Tickets available from all the usual outlets in Haddenham, Thame and Aylesbury.

There will be a *Aylesbury Vale & Wycombe CAMRA* branch social from about 12.30pm, so why not come along and join us there. Please use public transport, especially the excellent 280 bus service and the train via Wycombe and Princes Risborough to Haddenham/Thame Parkway, which is only a short walk away from the venue (or hop on the 280 at the station).



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THE GRAVEDIGGERS - PART ELEVEN

Preparations for the Gravediggers' first ever beer festival had been going surprisingly well. James rigged up a marquee in the beer garden and bribed Old Chippy, the local joiner, with a flagon of *Old Ratarsed* to set up a stillage. And James had even remembered to order the beer, which was going to have a West Country theme. The selection had been made in consultation with his local **CAMRA** branch. The chairman had given advice that procuring any beer that sounded like an outrageously smutty pun from a *Carry On* film or a had connotations of a gruesome act performed with the innards of a small animal was most certainly to be encouraged – as was, indeed, any ale that had been conjured up with bizarre or unusual flavourings.

Mazz had been in charge of the entertainment – which was designed to match the level of customers' inebriation. A re-appearance of Mariella Meringue's mime extravaganza was planned for ten o'clock on Saturday night – when it might have a chance of being taken seriously. Mazz had also booked the loudest Bavarian Oompah band in the south-east – if people were too deafened to hear each other speak then they might consume more ale. But, sadly the naked Morris men had been booked up all summer.

When the draymen arrived a couple of days before the festival with the carefully-researched ale delivery they broke some terrible news.

'Sorry mate but the beer you ordered was ambushed on the Dorset border – the paramilitary wing of the **CAMRA LocAle** campaign hijacked the lorry and refused to let the beer out of the local area. They had a mass drink-in.'

'So what about my *Ferret's Liver Liquorice and Walnut Stout* and my *Up Your Khyber IPA*?' James asked. 'And the rest?'

'We had to substitute – half a dozen *Yellowe Queen IPA* and six of their *Mediocre Monk Olde Ale*, the drayman said.

'But we've promised the tickers all sorts of weird stuff – there's going to be buckets of blood here if we serve them these corporate bland brews.'

'Sorry – but we're not risking life and limb to go down the West Country and get that beer out again – those **LocAle** guys are mad dogs. You should have ordered local yerselves.'

Later James sat, head in hand, after surveying his stillage – a contemptible selection of twelve of the most commercial and least unusual beers in the country.

'There's going to be a ticker riot if we serve them that stuff,' he said to Mazz. 'I'm worried that the Oompah Band are going to have their euphoniums stuffed where it hurts and that it might be Mariella Meringue turning on the spit, not the hog roast. And there's no time to get any replacements as the ale won't have had time to settle.'

'You remember I was reading the *Good Beer Guide* to write up the tasting notes?' Mazz asked.

'All that stuff about tasting bananas and grapefruit?' James said. 'You'd think if people drank beer then they'd want something that tasted like, well, beer. But perhaps that's just too normal?'

'We could 'improvise' a little,' said Mazz. 'If they're expecting beers to taste properly 'citrusy' or nutty or with butterscotch notes then we could make a few last-minute 'adjustments' to the barrels.'

'Ah, I get your drift,' James winked. 'Citrusy? Have we got any lemons in the pub kitchen?'

Half an hour later they sampled the first 'improved' cask.

'Oh yes – definite citrus and lemon notes on the palate,' he said. 'It might not have come about strictly through the brewing process but I reckon a raid on Freshcos might be in order.'

Taking the beer guide for inspiration, Mazz wheeled her trolley round the supermarket throwing in industrial job lots of coffee, chocolate, ginger and peanut butter. Packs of digestives were bought to provide "biscuity" character and, to add a bit of spice, she bought a massive tub of chilli powder. Back at the Gravediggers all were mixed in creative combinations into the casks. For a bit of authenticity the floral aromas benefitted from some green thinking: the wilting flowers from the ladies' toilets were recycled into the beer.

'So much for the foodie type flavours – but what about this smoky character that the tasting notes keep talking about.'

'Have you cleared the fireplace out yet?' Mazz asked. 'And we can say the ash makes it organic too – and it will darken the beer.'

'Oh yes, a bit of gravy browning for the others might come in handy. Perhaps the burnt-on dirt from inside the oven as well – that won't be poisonous,' James suggested.

'Now we've come up with the flavours, we're going to have to be equally creative in thinking up a few breweries and beer names – the tickers expect nothing less,' said Mazz. 'But I don't think they'll really care if they're real or virtual beers. They know next to nothing about the genuine ones anyway. Anyway, I'll enjoy drawing the pump clips.'

Despite the hiccups, the beer festival was rapturously received by the tickers. Never had they drunk beer that had tasted so vividly of raisins, ugli-fruit, shoe-polish or WD-40 – those tasting notes were uncannily accurate. Some of the ale, admittedly, was decidedly strange, if not outright disgusting, but the tickers were more than happy to drink foul beer if it was from breweries they'd never heard of before.

The last barrel ran dry, leaving an odd grey sludgy residue in the happy drinker's glass and James handed the list of beers of the festival to the local **CAMRA** chairman.

'Number three is *Florally Flatulent* from the Corpse Interrers brewery,' he announced to the enraptured drinkers. 'Lovely flowery notes. Runner up is *Lizard's Gizzards* from that little-known micro Six Feet Under – what a lovely burnt taste. And the winner of the inaugural Gravediggers fest is *Ring of Fire*. That's the chilli beer with a kick the next morning like a donkey – and it's from the little-know Sozzled Spadesmen brewery.'

As the cheers rang around the beer tent, a rotund man in a smart suit burst into the marquee, ran up to James and then pulled a chequebook out of his pocket.

'I had to get my limo driver to stop outside your beer festival,' he said. 'I just got a message from my marketing department's focus groups that distinctively tasting local ales are what our customers really want. I'm Lord Blandpint, the chief executive of Yellowe Queen. Lead me to those Sozzled Spadesmen. I want to close them down – oops, er, I mean invest lots of cash in their bright future.'

Charlie Mackle

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A VIRTUAL REALITY

The *CAMRA National Cider and Perry Championships* is a competition that is held annually at the *Reading Beer and Cider Festival*.

Featuring 24 ciders and 24 perries, from different regions of the UK, they are assessed on factors such as aroma, flavour, finish, and overall balance by a judging panel consisting of publicans, drinks writers and *CAMRA* members.

The overall winner this year of the Perry Gold Medal was *Rathays Painted Lady*, which the judges noted as 'a sweet, pleasant and refreshing perry, with a good astringency and light fruitiness on the aftertaste'.

However, the winner of the Cider Gold Medal was *Virtual Orchards Hard Core*, which the judges described as 'a bold, flavoursome cider, eminently drinkable, with a balanced, dryish finish.' As this originates from Wolverton in Buckinghamshire, we thought it was appropriate to get the producer, Laurence Conisbee, to do a feature on his award winning cider. <Ed.>

In 2009 it was time to stop talking the talk, eight years of talk to be precise. If I was ever to get going with the cider making then it was about time I actually bought a press and just got on with it. At that time 'the plan', if you could call it that, was to just make use of the apples from the two old trees in my garden and make some cider for personal consumption. Somehow, word seemed to get out, and in a short time I had offers of apples from quite a few sources. Very quickly it became apparent that there were an awful lot of

apple trees out there whose fruit no-one wanted.

Hating the thought of anything going to waste, and having made cider in a former life in Suffolk, I decided to invest in a large press. By early November almost a thousand litres of juice was peacefully starting on its journey to become the award winning *Hard Core* cider, made from fruit hand-gathered from the 'virtual' orchard – around a dozen separate orchards scattered over a ten mile radius. The 'Virtual Orchard' concept was now beginning to make sense. The added benefit of all the fruit coming from non-commercial orchards of course, was that at no point had the fruit been treated with herbicides or pesticides. So as well as being local, the cider was going to be as organic as you're going to get, just without the badge.

The whole production of our cider is a family affair with three generations working together to collect, crush, press and then package the final product. The process is kept as simple as possible – our guiding principle. The apples are pressed and the fresh juice is then left, allowing the wild yeasts to set in motion the fermentation which progresses slowly over the winter months. Nothing is added whilst the cider slowly matures over the spring and summer. The post-pressing pomace is taken to Springfields Farm, whose rare breed pigs eagerly tuck into their seasonal treat and, of course, their meat tastes just that little bit sweeter for it. In all, there are around twenty people involved in the creation of the cider and, hopefully, they all feel that they play a part in the

crafting of an award-winning product.

When it comes to style, *Hard Core* is made entirely from a blend of culinary and desert apples. The cooking apples are typically Bramley, the eaters are a combination of a dozen or more varieties. The 2009 vintage has a natural dryness tempered with a small quantity of raw cane sugar and, at around 7% abv, is not to be taken lightly. At the time of going to press, *Hard Core* is available exclusively at the *CAMRA* award-winning *Bell & Bear* pub in Emberton village near Olney, to the North East of Milton Keynes.

With apple trees seemingly in abundance, I'm often asked why there are not more cider makers in Buckinghamshire? Well, as I started on my journey with Virtual Orchard I began to discover a secret subculture lurking amidst the roundabouts and red-ways of Milton Keynes. For several years, hundreds of gallons of cider have been quietly crafted and consumed in relative obscurity. A few, on occasion, have even made one-off guest appearances in local hostelrys.

So what does the future hold for Virtual Orchard and cider in general in North Bucks? Well, this autumn production of 'Hard Core' will increase to around 2500 litres, maybe more. We'll be relocating to larger premises, and there may even be another cider variant in the offing. As to other producers in North Bucks, don't be surprised if 2012 sees a few more Buckinghamshire ciders appearing at a beer festival near you.

Laurence Conisbee

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LOCAL BREWERY NEWS

REBELLION

The extension to the brewery, in a former cowshed opposite the shop, is nearing completion. The site has been converted to a new industrial unit and will house a new 25 barrel plant (doubling the brewery's capacity) and tanks to service the shop. It is due to be finished by July, so it should be ready for the Open Day over the weekend of 9th/10th of July.

The monthly special for June is *Twelfth Man*, which is a copper and hoppy ale at 4.2%.

TRING

After a record Christmas, trade and shop sales at *Tring Brewery* continued to improve against last year. There is no doubt that their new location, rebrand, enhanced visibility as a result of local advertising, event promotions and charity support have helped increase their customer base. They have yet to implement a number of plans during the latter half of 2011 that will further enhance the flavour and quality of the 25 beers they produce annually. The decision to relaunch the best twelve monthly specials from the last ten years has proved to be a big hit with publicans and customers.

To sit alongside their bottled *Side Pocket for a Toad and Death or Glory* they are also introducing *Jack O'Legs* (May) and *Colley's Dog* (June).

Forthcoming brews, alongside their core range, include the summer seasonal, *Fanny Ebbs Summer Ale*, a 3.9% highly refreshing blonde coloured ale, both crisp and dry on the palate with a citrus hop aroma imparted by Cascade and Saaz.

Monthly specials include:

Raunchy Reverend (June) at 4.1% abv. Fruity First Gold hops dominate this light coloured ale, however the use of a little Vienna malt does allow malt characters to come through.

Lady Lemon's Pale Ale (July) at 4.3% abv. Citrus hops provide a wonderfully invigorating taste to this special pale ale. This character is enhanced and complemented by the use of wheat, imparting a crisp maltiness.



VALE

For June, *Vale* are running an Oxford themed beer. Called *Endeavour*, the Morse link is obvious on the pump badge. This is a straw coloured beer at 4%, a great hoppy brew for the start of the summer. With this *Vale* have used the late addition of hops to enhance the fresh citrus and hop flavours.

Then in July they are creating *Bechstein's Best*. At 4.1% this golden bitter is named after a rare

breed of bat that has a colony near the *Vale Brewery* in Brill. Exactly where is apparently a secret! In 2010 a local wildlife volunteer group discovered the Bechstein's bat in a dense Buckinghamshire woodland. This protected species is one of Britain's rarest mammals but the beer is planned to be more widely available.

Another brewery open day is planned, keep an eye on their website or for immediate notification, new bottles, new *Vale* beers and other up to date information, why not become a friend of *Vale Brewery* on Facebook. When they reach 500 friends, they will select, at random, one lucky individual who will be awarded a free mixed case of *Vale* bottle conditioned beers. So why not sign up now!

And finally, those who attended the *Hop Pole* beer festival at Easter will have noticed a change to the back room, and an interesting set of additions. The *Vale* eight-barrel brew plant, including mash tun, copper and two fermenting vessels, are on the site. Watch this space!



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Normally, if I were to look to switch around a cocktail in an interesting way, any kind of vodka, much less a flavoured vodka, is not where I would turn. Normal vodka is the beige of cocktails, famous for adding nothing to a drink but its potential for intoxication. As for the other, the phrase 'flavoured vodka' invokes a technicolour nightmare, a rainbow of hypersaturated tones and cloyingly sweet tastes that would make Willy Wonka blush. Even a small amount of the common ones in a cocktail dominate the glass like a drunk Texan on the London Eye.

So I am very glad to say that the *Adnams North Cove* oak aged vodka is neither of those things. The taste and scent imparted by the oak aging process is nothing like the typical chemical-candy-apple shotgun-blast-to-the-mouth that flavoured vodkas normally come with. Even better, the oak flavour with its vanilla tones wraps itself around the sometimes elusive light organic sweetness of straight vodka. Those two qualities, the natural sweetness and the oak, work well, accentuate each other.

This is indeed a rarity, it's a bottle of vodka that has left me pleasantly pensive as to how to mix it. If it has a failing it's that it would be wasted on most of the typical vodka-based cocktails because they are rarely designed to accentuate the main spirit. That being said, after a bit of a ponder, I tried making a black Russian with it. I was afraid that the sweet *Kahlúa* would simply blot out the pale oak star with its cloying coffee darkness, but actually, the vanilla came through very nicely. Plus, because the vodka is not sweetened, it brought along that vanilla without requiring that typical toll of extra sweetness.

It is still however, a vodka, so don't go expecting a miracle. If you're looking for a truly deep woodland adventure filled with peat and smokiness in many layers, then you're better off going to the single malt cabinet and tip-toeing through the forest. But if you're looking for a way to bring the forest into your penthouse flat, this is a decent compromise. There is a reason why many spirits are aged in wooden casks and barrels, and by allowing vodka to follow a path typical of its perhaps more respected cocktail brethren, *Adnams* has shown that it is very much the combination of nature and nurture that produces a darling child.

R. Alexander

Adnams North Cove oak aged vodka (50% abv) is amber in colour, and has been aged in French and American oak barrels in the cellars of *Adnams Brewery*. This gentle maturation has imbued aromas of vanilla & coconut. Serve at room temperature over ice.

Adnams North Cove vodka comes from the 'Copper House' distillery created from their otherwise redundant old brewery. It is distilled from East Anglian malted barley, wheat and oats. *Adnams* master brewer, Fergus Fitzgerald, makes a beer 'wash' from these grains, which is fermented to around 6% abv without the addition of hops. The head distiller, John McCarthy, then takes this beer and puts it through a 'beer stripping' column which removes all the alcohols to create a 'low wine' (around 80 - 85% abv). The 'low wines' are subsequently distilled in their copper pot still and purified further in rectification columns to create a clean, pure spirit - their *Longshore* vodka. John reserves a portion of *Longshore* and runs it into a mixture of French and American oak barrels. Here, it is allowed to slowly mature deep within the brewery cellars in Southwold where the oak imparts its own special character into the spirit, imbuing it with warm, soft tones of vanilla, white chocolate and coconut.



One lucky reader can win a bottle of *Adnams North Cove* oak aged vodka, simply by answering the following four questions:-

- 1) What are the dates and venue of the Aylesbury Beer Festival this year?
- 2) What was the name of *Chiltern Brewery's* Royal Wedding ale?
- 3) How many copies of *Swan Supping* are printed for each issue?
- 4) What was the *Aylesbury Vale* and *Wycombe CAMRA* branch pub of the year in 2009?

Entries should be sent to the editor (email and snail mail details are given on page 22) and a draw to decide the winner will be made from the correct entries at the Branch Meeting to be held on Monday 20th of July at the William Robert Loosley, High Wycombe.

David Roe

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HOW FAR WOULD YOU TRAVEL FOR A BEER FESTIVAL?



Real ale and beer festivals go hand in hand and are extremely well supported throughout England. A great many deliberations have no doubt gone on for centuries as to whether English pubs and English brewed beer are the best in the world. I am in the camp that real ale brewed in England is undoubtedly the best, but then I suppose I am a little biased being a proud Brit.

Beer festivals don't just exist in England, but are held right across Europe. I was very fortunate to be in Rome along with my wife visiting friends when Rome's third annual beer festival was running. It was held at Villa Piccolomini during 15th – 17th April. The venue was a stone's throw from St Peter's Church in the Vatican.

I had been visiting an ex-employee from some 17 years ago and had had a wonderful day in Ostia, a small town on the coast which was a 30 minute drive from Rome. We had a wonderful seafood lunch accompanied by a delightful dry white wine from Frascati which is a region just outside Rome. My friend was kind enough to drop us off at the aforementioned Villa to meet up with our other friends with whom we were staying with during our visit to Rome.

Roberto, Marco and his fiancée, Ida, were eagerly waiting for us at the gates to the festival. It was held in the public gardens and the entrance fee was 8 euros. This gave you a red pouch to hold your souvenir glass and five tokens that you exchanged for your beer. Further tokens were available at one euro each and I really cannot remember just how many were purchased between us.

The beer was served in your souvenir glass at one token for 10cl and two tokens for 25cl. There were also copious amounts of food available ranging from hot dogs to pizzas and various other titbits to soak up the alcohol and there was also an exceptional live band that played most of the night.

The atmosphere was one of friendliness and joviality which on a warm beautiful evening looking through the arches of the gardens towards St Peter's Church was just paradise. It was something that, at the time, I didn't think could be bettered.

My wife, Jacqui, and I spent a wonderful three hours with our friends, drinking and discussing the virtues and flavour of Italy's finest ales. The

beers were mainly served from the cask and the strengths, albeit tended to be stronger than English beers, were between 3.2% ABV and almost 9% ABV. I hasten to add that I personally didn't go above 5% ABV.

The flavours were extremely diverse ranging from fruit flavours to smoky woody flavours. Most of the patrons at the various beer stations spoke a little English which was just as well as my Italian stopped at 'Bon Journo'. They were all very approachable and were delighted to speak to anyone who showed some interest in their ales, describing at great length the fermentation process and ingredients of their beer.

When we reluctantly left the festival there was really only one place to head, and that was the local restaurant for a pizza washed down with a couple of glasses of *Peroni*. What a great day and if you ever find yourself in Rome around the middle of April I recommend you pay a visit to Rome's beer



festival. There is still nothing like real English ale in my opinion. However, the friendliness and kindness shown to Jacqui and myself from our European cousins in Rome was what made the visit an extremely enjoyable and memorable one for both of us.

Tony Byrne



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COMBINING EXCESS CHOICE WITH CARDIAC EXERCISE

On Good Friday at about 11am I stepped over the 'grave' of the former **Half Moon** pub situated in Newlands, a site razed in the 1950s or 1960s for an open air car park, where there is now the Eden Centre and High Wycombe Bus station.

After buying a map to avoid getting lost as I usually do, I moved to Desborough Avenue. Well beyond the **Wendover Arms** I started wondering if I might be lost anyway, and yes, a friendly local sent me downhill again to Desborough Road to the **Half Moon** on the corner of Dashwood Avenue, where I arrived just in time to get the first (half) pint of the day at noon. Shortly afterwards, Tony, Eddie and Noj arrived too. Three ales were on offer: **Skinnners Betty Stogs** 4.0%, **Harveys Sussex Best Bitter** 4.0% and **Wells Bombardier** 4.3%. Personally I sampled halves of the **Skinnners** and the **Harveys**, both in excellent condition. The pub seems a great community pub with a pleasant modern outlook, a patio for the smokers, and something to eat.

We walked back to the town centre, passed the boarded up **Saracens Head** pub, to the **William Robert Loosley**, a **J.D. Wetherpoon's Lloyds No.1** bar. Choosing was a bit more difficult with six ales downstairs and another three upstairs. I went for a wheat beer, which appeared in very good condition, but not really my thing. Maybe I should have learned to stay with Belgian wheat beers. The seating next to the upstairs windows is lovely, I guess this must be a favourite spot for many to enjoy the winter sun in a cosy environment.

We had to move for our next stop, the **Hobgoblin**. On Queens Square we studied the details of the former **Hen & Chickens** pub, and mourned the demise of the nearby **Kings Head** and the pubs on Frogmore Gardens (e.g. the **Red Cow**).

At the **Hobgoblin** (long ago known as the **Three Tuns**), Dean, who with his partner Karen took over the tenancy of this **Enterprise Inns** pub earlier this year, told us there wasn't much ale at that time. They put in twelve pumps at their own expense, and are serving six ales (from six tuns now), three anchor ales on all the time and three guest ales from the selection of about 160 that **Enterprise Inns** has on offer plus any ale a **SIBA** brewery is prepared to deliver. During the Easter and Wedding bank holiday weeks the price was nice at £2.50 a pint, normally they charge about £3 plus except on Tuesday evenings when they have special offers for students.

The cherry tree in the beer garden was in full bloom with a splendour which would make many Japanese envious if it were not for the giant smoking shelter partially blocking the view. I tried a full **Wychood Hobgoblin** and a half of **Caledonian 80**, before we had to move on, a pub crawl is hard work! On the pumps were: **Brains Reverend James** 4.5%, **Wychood Hobgoblin** 4.5%, **St Austell Tribute** 4.2%, **Exmoor Gold** 4.5%, **Butcombe Bitter** 4.1% and **Caledonian 80** 4.1%.



On our way to the next stop, the **Bootlegger** opposite the railway station, we passed the **Scorpios Bar** which was closed and to let, not a pleasant sight. The **Bootlegger**, with over 300 bottled beers (mostly ales) for sale, is a paradise for anyone who needs to re-stock their home ale collection. I bought a **Dogfish Head Palo Santo Marron** 12% ABV, a brown ale aged in Paraguayan Palo Santo wood barrels of 10,000 gallons each. The beer proved well balanced and delicious, to be sipped,

not guzzled. The pub had also seven cask ales on offer: **Brains Reverend James** 4.5%, **Wychood Hot Chocolate** 3.9%, **Goffs Joustier** 4.0% and **Vale P&Q** 4.2% all on handpump and **Rebellion Mutiny** 4.5%, **Zebedee** 4.7% and **Mild** 3.5% all on gravity.

The barman explained the 'logic': usually three guest ales, plus three **Rebellion** ales and one from another local area brewery, in this case **Vale**. As an **Enterprise Inn** the pub is tied, but they have a deal which allows them to bring in any ale they like, be it at a premium price.

The ales on gravity have a nitrogen 'blanket' (and not carbon dioxide as we were made to believe earlier). Nitrogen itself doesn't make the beer 'fizzy' otherwise air would most surely do the same, as air contains 78% nitrogen (and 21 % oxygen plus 1% other stuff including 0.04% carbon dioxide). What this does do is prevent early oxidation, thus making the beer last longer. However, given that the carbon dioxide naturally produced by the beer also stays in the barrel, the system works just the same as a cask breather, and as such, with current **CAMRA** policies as they are, cannot be approved of. Personally I had one of these beers, and didn't find anything wrong with it taste-wise. The full pint **Mutiny** was in top condition, and the half pint of **Hot Chocolate** was spicy (chillies?) and chocolate, and absolutely delicious.

On to the next stop taking the shortcut right along the railway in the direction of the **Sausage Tree Pub & Restaurant** (a **Bootlegger** cousin) and then the underpass to Gordon Road towards the **Belle Vue**. This **Punch Taverns** tied pub had six ales on handpump: **Brakspear Bitter** 3.4%, **Greene King Abbot Ale** 5.0%, **Sharp's Doombar** 4.0% (conditioning), **Brains Milkwood** 4.3%, **Daleside Spring Frenzy** 3.4% and **Rudgate Viking** 3.8%.

Punch allows landlords that are **Cask Marque** accredited (**Punch** even pays for initial and first year accreditation) a selection of about 100 different ales. On top of that, if the pub sell over fifty barrels a year, they can join the **Punch** 'Fine Cask' scheme, a bimonthly selection of about 18 seasonal ales. And from June 2011 onwards they can also choose any ale a **SIBA** brewer is prepared to deliver. So it looks like some pubcos (at least the bigger ones **Enterprise** and **Punch**) are gradually and very slowly but slightly more wholeheartedly endorsing a landlord's freedom to get in the ales the punters want, be it still with some strings attached.

The **Belle Vue** also displayed a mouth-watering selection of single malts on offer. We were a few days early for the Paul Macavoy exposition in the Snug Gallery, and a day late for the Thursday pub quiz, which is usually packed (as I discovered about two weeks later).

From here our ways split, Tony, Eddie, Noj and Dave going back to the **Falcon** in town for a meal, whereas I went for a long stroll towards the **General Havelock** on Kingsmead. Studying the beer menu 45 minutes later showed this is definitely a **Fullers** pub, with five of their ales and an **Osset** guest: **Osset Yorkshire Blond** 3.9% (conditioning), **Gales Seafarers** 3.6% and **Spring Sprinter** 4.0%, **Fullers London Pride** 4.1%, **ESB** 5.5% and **Royal Wedding** 4.8%. I went for the **Spring Sprinter** and a choice of the food menu which was decisively short 'something and chips', with a burger as my choice of 'something'.

The pub was bustling with activity inside and outside with kids and OAPs of all ages enjoying the start of the Easter holidays and the lovely weather in the beer garden. In short 'the quintessential family pub', well worth the 45 minutes cardiac exercise getting there from High Wycombe station!

By this time I had lost my map instead of myself, so I had to ask for directions. Should have done that in the pub and certainly not with some vague probably third degree Oxbridge alumnus. Instead of just saying 'I haven't a clue', these guys are so terribly 'confident' that with a straight face they send you in any direction apart from the right one. Luckily some kids witnessed the exchange and put me right, otherwise I might have ended up in the **Jolly Cricketers** so after a healthy walk along the Rye park I arrived back at the town centre to wait for the next bus back to Aylesbury, arriving just in time to sample a few of the beers at the **Hop Pole** Easter beer festival.

At home, well into the next day, I had gained a few blisters from walking about for four hours: All in all, a good cardiac exercise combined with the pleasure of maybe one too many excellent beers. **Dutch Harry**

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The advertisement features three beer labels at the top, each with a cartoon character and a ribbon award. Below the labels is a large illustration of a parade with various characters in traditional attire. The text 'SKINNER'S' is prominently displayed in the background of the parade scene.

Left Label: TWICE SUPREME CHAMPION OF THE SOUTH WEST, SKINNER'S, CORNISH KNOCKER ALE, ABV 4.5%, GOLDEN ALE, RIBBON: SUPREME CHAMPION OF THE SOUTH WEST.

Middle Label: CAMRA CHAMPION, BEST BITTER OF GREAT BRITAIN, SKINNER'S, BETTY STOGGS, QUEEN OF CORNISH, ABV 4%, RIBBON: CAMRA CHAMPION.

Right Label: WINNER NATIONAL CHAMPION, SKINNER'S, HELIGAN HONEY, ABV 4-6% VOL, RIBBON: WINNER NATIONAL CHAMPION.

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You may think that you've had an IPA. It may have been called an IPA. Unfortunately you have probably been deceived. IPA is short for India Pale Ale; a souped-up pale ale designed for export to India in the 19th Century. To survive the long and often rough ocean journey, through extremes of hot and cold, the beer was brewed to a greater strength than normal; strengths of 6-7% ABV were common. In addition, the hop rate was dramatically increased (as hops act as a preservative), resulting in a beer that was more bitter than your average pale ale – and thus an ideal refresher for the hot climate of the sub-continent.

Interestingly the beer sold in India was not necessarily pale by today's definition – it was simply less dark than the then popular porter style. It was also never sold in India under the name IPA (it was just called pale ale or Burton ale) – the India prefix was only adopted when this new, strong, highly-hopped ale was subsequently sold in England. The most famous examples were those made by the **Bass** (remember them...?), **Allsopp**, and **Hodgson** breweries.

Somehow over the years the noble IPA style has become degraded in the UK. A beer described as an IPA now often denotes a product that is the most insipid offering from a brewery – such as **Greene King IPA** or **Caledonian Deuchers IPA**. Even our local **Rebellion IPA**, tasty though it is, is one of the brewer's weakest beers.

Fortunately help is at hand. For 'proper' IPAs have returned to us, with a little assistance from the craft brewers of the US. Strong, hoppy pale ales have been a mainstay of the US craft beer scene for many years, and for many US microbreweries an IPA will be their best-selling beer. These new world IPAs probably also bear little resemblance to the original UK-brewed IPAs – for one thing, they use American hops rather than British ones. Secondly, the beers tend to be late-hopped or dry hopped, meaning that hops are added near to or at the end of the boil to add aroma rather than bitterness. The result is a beer that is intensely flavoured, usually with the grapefruit and pine resin characteristic of American hops such as cascade, centennial and chinook.



These US IPAs have been so successful that beers like **Sierra Nevada Celebration Ale**, **Goose Island IPA** and **Victory Hop Wallop** have (with a fair degree of historical irony) been transported across the ocean to the UK, and are now fairly easy to obtain. British brewers have been quick to latch on to this new trend – and with the superb quality of British malt are quite often beating the Americans at their own adopted game! **Brewdog** have undoubtedly taken the lead with their widely available **Punk IPA**, but at

the recent Reading beer festival it was clear that dozens of other breweries are snapping at their heels. I'm glad to say that our local breweries have also stepped up to the mark.

At the end of last year, **Chiltern Brewery** released their 30th Anniversary Ale (6.1% ABV), ambitiously priced at £4.99 for a 375ml bottle wrapped in what must be very valuable paper. Fortunately I received it as a gift, so I can't really bemoan the price! It pours a pale ginger colour with a large, lasting off-white head – it's quite a looker! Aggressive initial carbonation soon declines to leave a pleasantly resinous, decadent mouthfeel (still with a nice mouth-coating tingle) that seems suitably luxurious for a 30th anniversary ale. The flavour is not quite up to the mouthfeel though – there's a farmyard taste at first with hints of pine and lemon coming through later, along with a vague herby mintiness. Nevertheless, it's a decent effort, and would probably make a good stepping stone for those wanting to try an IPA for the first time. I wish **Chiltern** all the best for the next 30 years!



Another local brewer, **Lovibonds** of Henley, have also entered the bottled IPA market with their 69 IPA (6.9% ABV) – available from the brewery itself and a few other local outlets. It's pale amber with a slight fizz and a half-hearted white head. Sweet pine dominates the flavour with a restrained citrus hop bitterness. It has a good resinous mouthfeel with some dryness in the finish. This is a superb, well balanced IPA, which left me wanting more!

I received a timely gift of a bottle of **Lakeland IPA** (5.5% ABV) from the **Bitter End** brewery in Cumbria just as I was about to write this article. What could I do but drink it...? This one was amber again and a little too fizzy at first. It smelled pleasantly of pine and flowers, but in the mouth it was creamy, almost cloying. There was a muted flavour of caramel and earth, with just a hint of tropical fruits, followed by a mouth-numbing dry and hoppy finish. It felt rather disappointing compared to the **Chiltern** and **Lovibonds** efforts.

No British modern IPA review could really be complete without mentioning **Brewdog**, whose devotion to extreme hopping (backed up by equally extreme marketing) has probably single-handedly helped this style take off in the UK. Personally I disliked hoppy beers until **Brewdog** showed me how they could be flavoursome without being excessively bitter – without them I would probably never be writing this article. Their **Hardcore IPA** (also sold through Tesco rebranded as **Finest American Double IPA**) is, at 9.2% ABV, clearly a notch or two up in intensity from the other IPAs in this review. It looks even more tempting than the **Chiltern** brew – an iridescent copper body, crowned with a creamy plume. The gloriously fresh floral, peach and honey aroma will grab your attention too. On sipping, the first thing you notice is the wonderful light and frothy mouthfeel, which then turns resinous and clings to the inside of your mouth. It tastes of sweet caramel at first, with flowers continuing to dominate, before a bitter pine, earth and grapefruit finish attacks the back of your tongue. It leaves your mouth wrinkled and dry



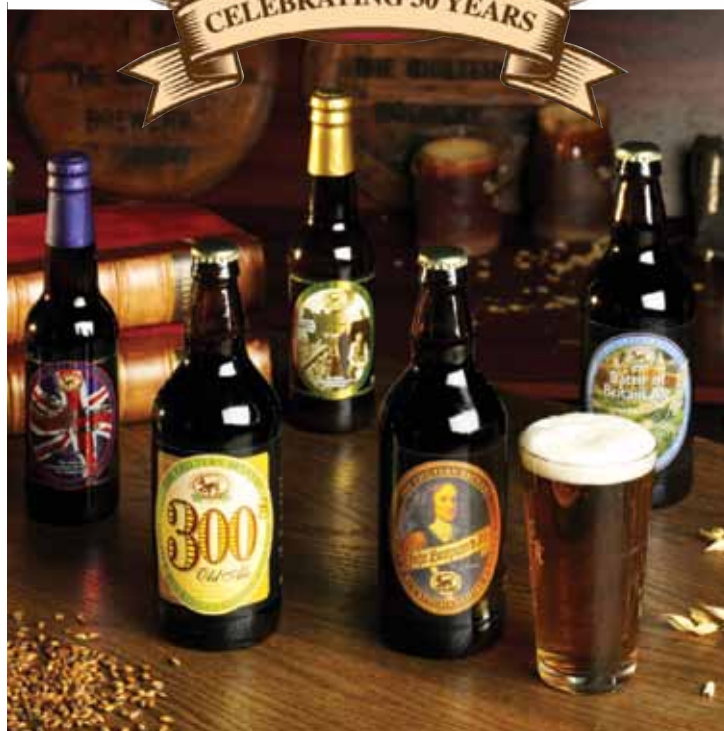
and dying for more, with the result that you drink it far more quickly than is wise for something of this strength - it does go down frighteningly easily! Imagine Heidi skipping through alpine meadows singing sweet lullabies, and then unexpectedly knocking you senseless with a hefty pine branch to the face and you'll get an idea of what this beer is like. Like most **Brewdog** beers it's confusing and challenging, yet ultimately wonderfully rewarding... but you'd probably want to try some less intense IPAs to begin with and work up to this one!



As someone who has traditionally loved minimally-hopped milds, I have been astonished by how quickly I have fallen in love with these new aromatic IPAs. It's not just the flavour (ok, it's mainly the flavour!) – there's also the sense of history, and the epic journeys of this most travelled of all beers to consider as you drink. If you're interested (and as a **CAMRA** member you jolly well ought to be!) Pete Brown's inspiring book 'Hops and Glory' gives a more knowledgeable, more amusing and, well, just plain better account of IPAs than I could ever dream of writing.

It's probably just as well I now enjoy the style, for real ales definitely seem to be becoming (on average) paler and more hoppy in recent years. Maybe we're about to see IPA becoming the traditional beer of Britain again – I for one hope so based on the examples I've tried. Happy (and hoppy) tasting to you all!

Anth Duffield



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A poster for 'THE BLACK BOY BEER FESTIVAL'. It features a large glass of beer on the left. The text includes 'Beer Festivals' in a circular logo, 'THE BLACK BOY', '38 Station Road | Chinnor | Tel: 01844 350426', 'BEER FESTIVAL', '4th June 2011', 'BBQ, BOUNCY SLIDE AND LIVE BAND', and a small logo for 'M.F.U. NEEDS YOU! THE BLACK BOY CHINNOR SATURDAY JUNE 4th'. The website 'drinkaware.co.uk' is at the bottom.

Branch Diary

Everybody welcome to all socials and meetings!

June

Thursday 2nd STOKENCHURCH SOCIAL

8.00pm Kings Arms, 8.30pm Royal Oak, 9.00pm Fleur de Lis, 9.30pm Four Horseshoes.

Wednesday 8th EVENING SOCIAL

7.30pm, Royal Standard of England, Forty Green (a mile or so summer's evening walk from Beaconsfield Station)

Wednesday 15th SOCIAL

8.30pm Bull and Butcher, Ludgershall, 9.15pm Seven Stars, Piddington.

Monday 20th BRANCH MEETING

8.00pm, Hop Pole, Aylesbury

Saturday 25th BLACK COUNTRY TRIP

Enjoy the best day of the year as we make our annual pilgrimage to one of the finest areas of the country for enjoying beer. Picking up from Aylesbury (9.45am), Princes Risborough, High Wycombe and Stokenchurch and returning before midnight. Tickets are £26 each and obtainable from the editor (contact details below). There are a limited number of seats available, so it is advisable to book as soon as possible.

Further details are given on page 3.

July

Saturday 2nd BEER FESTIVAL SOCIAL

Haddenham Beer Festival, 12 noon. Full details on page 9.

Saturday 9th REBELLION OPEN DAY

Rebellion Brewery, Marlow Bottom, in the afternoon, followed by Duke of Cambridge, Marlow later.

Wednesday 13th NAPHILL SOCIAL

7.30pm Wheel, 8.30pm Black Lion

Monday 18th July BRANCH MEETING,

7.30pm William Robert Loosley, High Wycombe

Wednesday 27th WENDOVER/WESTON TURVILLE SOCIAL

8.30pm Village Gate, 9.15pm Chequers, 10.00pm Chandos

August

Tuesday 2nd - Saturday 6th GBBF

The world's largest pub will be at the Great British Beer Festival, Earls Court, London

Thursday 4th GBBF BRANCH SOCIAL

5.30pm onwards, Earls Court, London



Planned Saturday August Bus/Pub Crawls

Arriva 60 bus trip to pubs north of Aylesbury Saturday 13th

Arriva 40 bus trip to Oxfordshire pubs Saturday 20th

Please note: These dates are yet to be confirmed!

October

Friday 28th/Saturday 29th AYLESBURY BEER FESTIVAL

Bucks County Council Sports & Social Club, Lower Road, Aylesbury (opposite the Ambulance Station). Please note - NEW VENUE!

Further details can be found on our website

www.swansupping.org.uk

CATCH UP DURING BRANCH SOCIALS:-

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Swan Supping

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Copy deadline for next issue, due out 1st June, is 14th July 2011.

Subscriptions :- *Swan Supping* is distributed to over 250 pubs in our area but if you would prefer to receive your copy by post we can mail it to you immediately it is published. All you have to do is send £1 for each edition you wish to receive to the Editor and leave the rest to us! This applies to single copies to UK addresses only.

We can mail overseas, but the price will vary depending on the country to which it is to be delivered. Remember that most issues of *Swan Supping* can be downloaded from our website (www.swansupping.org.uk).

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Acceptance of an advertisement in *Swan Supping* by a pub or its availability there does not guarantee CAMRA approval.

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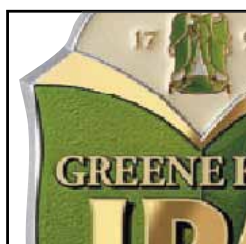
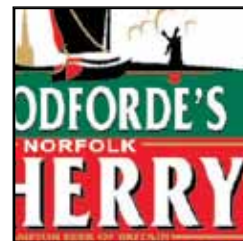
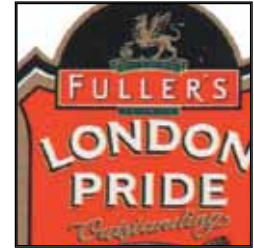
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