

ALES & TALES

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE IN
STOURBRIDGE & HALESOWEN AND DUDLEY & SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE



Campaign
for
Real Ale

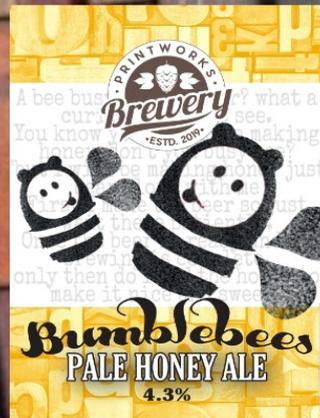
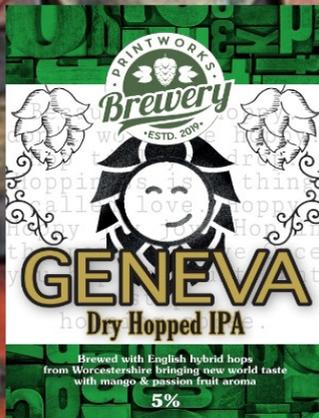
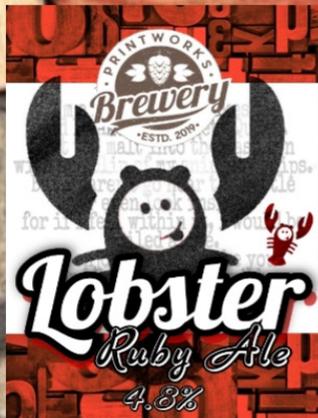
ISSUE 45
SPRING 2022

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Membership

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WELCOME BACK

Welcome to another issue of Ales and Tales! Before we go any further, please allow me to welcome the new Chair of Dudley and South Staffs CAMRA, Stuart Betts. Best of luck in your new role! Stuart is also keeping a watching brief on the Editorial side of Ales and Tales for D&SS while a permanent volunteer to take on the role is found. I'm sure we would all also like to thank outgoing Chair Ryan Hunt for his outstanding contribution to CAMRA in this part of the West Midlands and wish him all the best in his new home.

In terms of the magazine itself, we're not yet firing on all cylinders and taking each issue at a time. Times remain uncertain for many pubs, however I think we are lucky that we appear to have lost very few pubs in our areas during the pandemic. That said, only the pubs themselves know how close they are to survival. As I write this a further easing of restrictions are taking place which hopefully is good news for pubs, although many people are still wary of going out which is understandable in many cases.

The Campaign has also seen a drop in membership for a variety of reasons. Our newly resumed branch meetings are not as well attended as they were, perhaps in line with the overall number of members. Many of the membership benefits to the consumer have been lost, prompting those to question their subscription. For example, many beer festivals have not gone ahead since the start of Pandemic, so it was great to see the return of Dudley Winter Ales Fayre in November 2021. It was an excellent event as usual, and this year included a wooden cask from local brewery and barrel aging specialists 'Cult of Oak'. See front cover and separate article for more details. So, back to membership benefits. Many of our

members are inactive in terms of their physical involvement however I know they will be supporting their local pubs and breweries by providing patronage. Those of us who are active members are still here keeping beer and brewery information up to date on our internal systems, in the hope that makes beer scoring a lot easier, which in turn helps us with our knowledge of our branch pubs.

Many would argue that the Campaign for Real Ale has already been won. That could be said to be true, but there is still the potential for variation in the quality of cask beer at the point of dispense. That said, lots of members enjoy beer in whatever format it is presented for sale, myself included. Two new 'bottles shops' have opened recently in Stourbridge, Hop Vault and Haul! Both have slightly different offerings but both now offer beer on tap to drink on the premises. They will hopefully go some way to attract more people to our town and in turn to traditional pubs as well.

These modern venues demonstrate that beer is popular amongst many sectors of society and probably have a more diverse reach than CAMRA does. Speaking of which, the Campaign recently launched a drive to increase understanding of why those who are not middle aged, white and male are under-represented within its membership. Although the consultation will have probably finished by the time you are reading this, I hope you have taken the time to respond, particularly if you don't fall into the above categories. If you have a keen interest in different pubs and different beers please do join us at a branch meeting, or even a branch social which is of course less formal. All are welcome and I would hope your local branch would be friendly and welcoming.

Tim Cadwell

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MEET THE BREWER: CULT OF OAK



Of Oak brewery based in Netherton which came on stream in 2021:

How did you get into beer?

My life has been wonderfully intertwined with booze. Whether that be buying cases after school of Fullers ESB from an off-licence in Highgate Village, North London, age 13 (don't worry I won't name and grass them up) or exploring all manner of wonderful wines, spirits and liqueurs across Europe. I've always had an interest in good food and drink, this passion has led to me being involved in pretty much every aspect of the trade.

I've run tasting events as a beer sommelier for the previous nine years, I've worked for breweries in the UK and Belgium, including the prestigious Brasserie Fantôme and the cult hit Landlocked in Derbyshire. I was part of the team at Cotteridge Wines when they won their first three industry awards. I ran Bottle Shed in Acocks Green, then helped open the Hop Garden in Harborne and the various years of volunteering with CAMRA and Stourbridge Beer Festival. Last but not least, I worked behind the bar at the glorious Waggon of old, Halesowen.

A little over two years ago, I opened Roberto's Bar And Tasting Club, Digbeth, and the brewery

In the latest series of articles profiling breweries on our patch, Pete Clarkson interviewed local beer aficionado Roberto Ross on Cult

Of Oak brewery based in Netherton which came on stream in 2021:



and barrel project, Cult Of Oak, in Netherton, Dudley.

Past Brewery Experience?

Good question, I think my earliest involvement with recipe creation and brewing was Sadler's Sweet Leaf, way back in 2015. After that came a host of Landlocked (Derbyshire) and Urban Huntsman (Warwickshire) beers. After that came my adventures in "Lambic-Land" then, a short while later, I started my involvement with the mystical and enchanted Brasserie Fantôme. Highlights were collaborative brews with Burning Sky (East Sussex), Eik & Tid (Oslo, Norway), Extraomnes (Lombardia, Italy), Fermentery Form (Philadelphia, USA and Toccalmatto (Emilia-Romagna, Italy). Noting how different brewers from all over the world do things, their interests, passions, their understanding of different ingredients and beer styles is a wonderful thing to be a part of. Not to forget, learning from the master himself, Dany, at Fantôme. Dany is a true original, a real pioneer, we're talking over 30 years of brewing utter classics, nearly every microbrewery you can think of is younger than that.



Why is it so interesting?

Brewing can be many things, but brewing is a lot of science and an inexact one at that... and I ain't no scientist! Therefore, it's as close to magic as I can get. Cooking and magic!



Why a bar in Brum?

Why not? The honest answer is I was looking for a venue to open, I saw that Clink (the bar previously on the site) was closing, and with some structural alterations internally, I could see it as being a nice cosy place. I adore the close community we've built there. Especially over the last couple of years most of the world has experienced.

USP of Cult Of Oak?

Honestly, I'm striving to create something spectacular. A brewery completely removed from accountants worrying about the cost of things, deadlines, or trying to appeal to everyone. It's absolutely not your standard microbrewery. At the beginning I wrote a five-point manifesto, I labelled them the Commandments of Cult Of Oak:

1. Traditional, time-honoured methods will be used, always.
2. The highest-grade of ingredients will be sought, nothing artificial used, ever.
3. Quality beer is slow beer, nothing will be rushed, beers aging in oak barrels are ready when they're ready.
4. Small batches are created on purpose to keep the standard as high as possible. Nothing will ever be mass-produced.
5. Wild yeasts and bacteria are our friends and allies, and they shall be welcomed and respected.

I think that sums up a lot of what we do.

Why the name?

Conjuring up as much of my experience from working with European brewers and blenders as possible, for me, brewing and fermenting with old oak barrels, instead of modern stainless steel, encouraging wild yeasts, bacteria, and the almost supernatural, spontaneous fermentation, instead of precise inoculation, evokes something that needs a lifetime of devotion. Just the planning and caring of all the oak we use in the brewery is a full-time job in itself. So, the name became Cult Of Oak, it's more than a brewery, it's a complete mindset.

Its Following?

I'm incredibly happy with how Cult Of Oak has been received worldwide. We have customers and fans from America to Japan, from Scandinavia to Malaysia. I love seeing my beers get checked-in on Untappd in many different countries. I'm also blown away at how with every bottle release, sell out in minutes, and sometimes seconds, crashing websites in their wake. I can only hope that my beers are always so well received, it's an absolute honour.

Plans for your beers?

In our first year, we had 2 oak barrels, and released 2 beers. In our second year we had 9 barrels and released 7 beers from our stable and collaborated on another 4, of which 3 have been released so far. For our third year we already have beers aging away in 15 barrels, but I want that to have increased that to 25 by the time we reach the end of this year. I believe 25 barrels to be the critical mass needed to provide a release every month. I'm particularly looking forward to the release of what we have aging in our Olorosso barrel this year, along with a red wine barrel flanders-style with wild raspberries and other foraged fruits. Not to mention some huge stouts and barley wines also...

Personal favourite beer?

Of all time? Hardest question for me this one, the beers I always come back to are probably: Drie Fonteinen Schaarbeekse Kriek, De Ranke XX Bitter and Fantome Classic Saison.

Prost!!

Thank you to Mathew Sparks for the front cover photo!

Pete Clarkson

PUB NEWS

DUDLEY & SOUTH STAFFS

BELL INN

614 High St, Kingswinford, DY6 8AJ

The Bell Inn reopened at Christmas and has 2 changing beers on cask.

OLD COURT HOUSE

57 Lower Church Lane, Tipton, DY4 7PG

This pub sadly closed on 21st December 2021.

THREE CROWNS

63 High Street, Brierley Hill DY5 3AB

This traditional high street pub has closed for refurb in January.

STOURBRIDGE & HALESOWEN

HAUL

St Giles House, Stourbridge DY8 1TA

HAUL! is a bottle shop and cozy taproom selling the best independent craft beer from all around the world. Based in Lower High Street, Stourbridge HAUL! is run by husband and wife team, Hannah & Paul Tunnicliffe. Opening as a bottle shop in August 2020 during the middle of the first lockdown, HAUL! now has 12 draft tap lines, a local gin selection and wines supplied by local neighbours Nicholls & Perks. Hannah & Paul have a big love for Belgian and continental beers and aim to grow this collection along with hard-to-find lines from modern, sought-after international breweries. HAUL! is open until 8pm weekdays/10pm Fridays and Saturdays and has an online store offering nationwide delivery at haul-beer.com

THE HOP VAULT

9 Market St, Stourbridge DY8 1AB

The tap room is now open. 12 craft taps, three cask pulls, wine and cider. They will be running regular events so keep a watch on their

Facebook page. There is a regular bottle share club which is free to attend and runs on the first Thursday of the month.

THE QUEENS HEAD

111 Enville St, Stourbridge DY8 3TQ

There's an Open Mic every Friday from 8pm and first Tuesday of the month there is a Folk music Jam, hosted by black country legend Tony Barrett 2 - 5pm come play, sing or enjoy. Then every Tuesday night a Darts competition from 7.30pm All welcome, the winner scores a gallon of beer! £1 entry. Sunday night is quiz night! £1 in, maximum 6 in a team. Cash & prizes to be won. Whoop! The Skittle alley/function room is free to hire for party's or just a night out. Food can be arranged at reasonable rates. Children now welcome til 7pm, in the garden and supervised in the skittle alley.

THE SWAN

278 Long Lane, Halesowen B62 9J

Is now home to new licensees, Phil & Eva Hardingham. They come from the Vine in Wednesfield, another CAMRA award-winning pub, and welcome new and old customers to the Swan with open arms. The pub is shortly to be given a Spring-clean and there's usually an excellent range of beers on offer.

THE HANDLE BAR

95 A High Street, Cradley Heath, B64 5HE

As it's early in the year lots of pubs haven't planned their social events yet, but the guys at Fixed Wheel and the Handle Bar will continue to hold monthly events – just check their social media for confirmations.

WINDSOR CASTLE

7 Stourbridge Rd, Lye, Stourbridge DY9 7BS

Once a month they will be dedicating one night to their epic homemade pies! Their most popular dish on the menu - A proper pie made with a

shortcrust pastry bottom & top with the most flavoursome fillings. A menu packed full of new & exciting homemade pie creations for you to choose from. Varieties include our rich steak & Printworks ale gravy, Steak & Stilton, Printworks beer baked ham with chicken & leeks, Leek & Potato, Rabbit & Crayfish... The list goes on plus they will be making new speciality pies for that one special night! All served with your choice of the creamiest homemade mashed potato or their famous hand cut twice cooked chips & lashings of our rich homemade Printworks ale gravy. Not to be missed!

SOMERS SPORTS & SOCIAL CLUB

2 Grange Hill, Halesowen B62 0JH

Have been extremely busy planning this year's events. They have a newly refurbished function room to make use of... take a look at this list of events.

BLACK COUNTY ALES

Have recently opened a number of pubs in the region:

Uxbridge Arms

Church Street, Chasetown opened on the 26th August 2021

Bridge Inn

Moss Grove, Kingswinford opened on the 2nd September 2021

Horse & Jockey

Market Street, Penkridge opened on the 13th January 2022

All 3 pubs have been extremely well received by new and established customers to our renowned variety of real ales and ciders.

The Prince of Wales

Cambridge Street, Birmingham city centre was purchased & immediately opened to the public in the run up to Christmas.

It was closed mid-January 2022 closed for a major refurbishment and will open mid to late March 2022.

Somers Sports & Social Club Events Calendar 2022

January Friday 21st  Gin Tasting	February Friday 18th  Cheese & Wine Evening	March Sunday 27th  Mother's Day Lunch
April Saturday 10th Bank Holiday -  Live Music Sunday 17th  Easter Craft Fayre	May Monday 2nd/ Saturday 30th  Bank Holiday Open Day Live Music & Food	June Thursday 2nd/Friday 3rd/ Saturday 4th  Queen's Platinum Jubilee Party - Live Music & Food Sunday 19th  Fathers Day Lunch
August Sunday 28th  Bank Holiday Open Day Live Music & Food	September Friday 23rd  Macmillan Coffee Morning	October Friday 28th  Halloween Party
November Friday 11th  Gin Tasting Friday 18th  Cheese & Wine Evening Saturday 26th  Christmas Craft Fayre	December Saturday 3rd  Christmas Craft Fayre Saturday 31st  New Year's Eve Party	Additional Dates Subscriptions Due Friday 1st April World Cup - Drinks promotion & Food Saturday 21st November - Sunday 18th December

February - December 1st Friday of each month, Live Music upstairs. (Tribute live bands and Solo artists)
 (As soon as the weather is nice, outside BBQ's & Live Music as much as weather allows)

Dates to be confirmed for the following

Board game Evening, Bings, Cinema evening for old movies, Cocktail Making, Food Festival, Themed Quiz, Comedy Night, Children's Disco.



BREWERY NEWS

STOURBRIDGE & HALESOWEN

CRADDOCK'S BREWERY

107 Worcester St, Stourbridge DY8 1AX

Craddock's have been introducing monthly specials since the summer. It began with Riptide, a 4.2% New England IPA with a hoppy, fruity profile, then Lemon Drop, a vegan friendly 4.5% IPA, which was more citrusy. This was followed by Smooth Sailing, a 4.2% hazy oatmeal IPA, again vegan friendly. A new rye beer is coming out as the next special, and the brewery expects to bring out a brand new beer every month, hopefully including new keg beers. A Craddock's lager was also introduced towards the end of 2021 which has been selling well. Capra, a 5% strong bitter had made a reappearance after a long absence, and the popular Cast Iron Stout is back this winter. Saxon Gold, Crazy Sheep and Troll continue to be available among the regular beers.

PRINTWORKS

Windsor Castle 7 Stourbridge Rd, Lye, Stourbridge DY9 7BS

Are planning their spring seasonal special which is very exciting! With the super feedback & demand for its return after Christmas they have brewed the Letterpress Stout 6.6% Chocolate, Vanilla & Marshmallow! It's a special one and the most fun to brew! Moorish stout with organic cocoa, vanilla pods & buckets of marshmallows. The complex variety of malts used in this brew gives the deep richness in colour & roasted chocolate notes. Vanilla pods add to the body with touch of sweetness from the marshmallows to balance.



Also, they have developed a new recipe coming soon for their brand new Steam Punk IPA. This will be out in the spring!

BLACK COUNTRY ALES

69 Third Ave, Pensnett Trading Estate, Kingswinford DY6 7FD

The brewery team had their work cut out during December to ensure that we could keep up with the demand of our pubs. Robin Shields our brewer even hatched a plan to try & double brew in 1 day! All in our small brewery. And it worked!

Starting at 6.30am Robin would brew the 1st one & then Matt Pearson, assistant brewer would start the 2nd around 4.00pm & finally finish around midnight!

We managed to achieve 8 brews in 1 week. A great effort by all the brewery team.

The 11th Real Ale Trail 2022 will this year run from the 1st March – 31st May 2022.

This year there will be 42 pubs included in the Trail with 6 NEW pubs included for the 1st time.

They are:

- Bridge Inn**, Kingswinford
- Harp**, Albrighton
- Horse & Jockey**, Penkridge
- Prince of Wales**, Birmingham
- Railway Tavern**, Newport
- Uxbridge Arms**, Chasetown

Customers collect stamps from ANY 25 of our 42 pubs by purchasing a drink & claim their 2022 polo shirt & a case of BCA beers delivered to the BCA pub of their choice.

BEAT BREWERY

Unit 9, Old Forge Trading Estate, Dudley Rd, Lye, Stourbridge DY9 8EL

The new larger taproom at Beat Ales has been going from strength to strength over the past few weeks, including successful Christmas & New Year functions. Live music takes place at

the taproom every fortnight on Saturday's. The taproom is also available for private hire and is currently open on Fridays 1600-2300 and Saturdays 1400-2300. For January, Thursdays are closed, but replaced by Sundays from 1200-1600.

On the brewery side, Christmas saw the return of Twist & Stout, a coffee milk stout, available for the first time in draught/cask form. Previously, it was only available in bottled form, due to Covid lockdowns. Britpop Bitter, a 4% red ale is also still available, along with Papa Loves Mango, a 4.2% ale with fresh mango and orange zest. The taproom also regularly features guest keg craft beers from other breweries, including Porterhouse & Thornbridge. Recently, Beat ales have been seen in Black Country Ales' pubs, and Beat is now a regular supplier to several Wetherspoons outlets.

The main addition is now the availability of brewery tours when pre-booked on Saturdays. Visitors will be offered a tour of the brewery, with one of the brewers explaining the brewing process, followed by tasting of 4 beers and a snack – all for £15 a head.

GREEN DUCK

Gainsborough Trading Estate, Rufford Rd, Stourbridge DY9 7ND

Are spending January improving the infrastructure with a new floor and all the fun maintenance jobs!

Taproom will be hosting the Superbowl in Feb, and the 6 nations culminating in super Saturday and a spring beer festival. They plan to feature local music at the end of every month, alongside street food. As they have been extremely busy making lots of tasty beer its best to scour the socials on Facebook, as they start planning the taproom for the year.

DUDLEY & SOUTH STAFFS

TOLL END BREWERY

Waggon and Horses, Toll End Road, Tipton, DY4 0ET.

Following the retirement of their original Brewer, Gary, and the dreaded lockdowns. Toll End are brewing again. Charlie Blackout Stout, Retribution and Power Station are in production. Together with a new beer. Which is almost ready to be released. Keith tells us that despite all the doom and gloom of the past few months. The Waggon is still going strong and looking forward to the spring and summer in the beer garden

OLDE SWAN

Ma Pardoes, 85-89 Halesowen Road, Netherton, DY2 9PY.

Dark Swan, a 5.9% Strong Mild is an addition on the taps at Ma Pardoes. Get it while you can.

DAVENPORTS BREWERY

11 New St, Smethwick, B66 2AJ.

Davenport's launched its "Beer at Home" website before Christmas which has been very successful. They are also making a big investment in a new, state of the art brew kit. They have acquired a new pub in the centre of Birmingham and have launched a continental lager in their own pubs and will be making it available to the free trade very soon.





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BRANCH DIARIES

STOURBRIDGE & HALESOWEN

FEBRUARY

Thursday 24th February 8.00pm

Clubs Marking Social Meet Snooks, Long Lane Halesowen B62 9JZ at 8.00pm, then Coombs Wood Sports & Social Club, Stewarts Rd, Halesowen B62 8ND followed by Halesowen Athletic Club 189 Manor Way, Halesowen B62 8RW and Somers Club 2 Grange Hill, Halesowen B62 0JH

MARCH

Wednesday 9th March 8.00pm

Branch Meeting Beat Brewery, Unit 9, Old Forge Trading Estate, Dudley Rd, Lye, Stourbridge DY9 8EL

Thursday 24th March 8.00pm

Amblecote Marking Social Meet Starving Rascal 1 Brettell Ln, Amblecote, Stourbridge DY8 4BN, then Swan, Robin Hood, Red Lion and Maverick.

APRIL

Wednesday 13th April 8.00pm

Branch Meeting Swan, Long Lane Halesowen B62 9JY

Thursday 28th April 8.00pm

Stourbridge Marking Social Meet Plough & Harrow, 107 Worcester St, Stourbridge DY8 1AX then Waggon & Horses, Duke William, Royal Exchange and Queens Head.

DUDLEY & SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE

FEBRUARY

Friday 18th February 7.00pm

Marking Social, Lower Gornal 7pm Starting at The Fountain

MARCH

Monday 21st March 8.00pm

Branch Meeting, Bear Tavern, 498 Bearwood Rd Bearwood B66 4HB

APRIL

Monday 25th April 8.00pm

Branch Meeting, Vine Inn, 10 Delph Rd Brierley Hill DY5 2TN

BRANCH AGM

Monday 23rd May 7.30pm

White Lion, 104 Bilston St Sedgley DY3 1JF

DUDLEY WINTER ALES FAYRE 2021 (DWAF21)

Dudley & South Staffs Branch along with members from other local branches (& Cambridge) held one of only three beer festivals last year in the West Midlands Region. After almost 2 years off the branch forged forward. With the help and understanding of Dudley Town Hall and Public Health Dudley we set about organising and hold the best and safest festival has we possibly could.

We are living in strange times, the beer selection team went far and wide to find new and exciting beers, something difficult as lots of breweries had decreased the beer offerings. Health & Safety was page after page of Covid-19 control and prevention. We changed the room layout slightly to increase the seating and improve space.

So, anyone who has attended a beer festival as a paying customer does not realise just how much work, time and effort goes in to setting up a bar for a few days of serving. Stillage, Cooling, sourcing the list is long, it is not all about trying good beer (but it helps).

We had hoops to jump though from the get-go but none bigger than finding the day before set up that the Stillage had been stolen. Luckily, a quick Sunday morning phone

call to our Regional Director Cy resulted in us being able to borrow a stillage from Bromsgrove.

For the first time ever, we sold online Tickets though our website which seems to work well, contactless payments again seemed to be welcomed. Overall, we had some really kind words and emails about DWAF21, some constructive suggestions on what could be improved. Both are really valuable to us. We are all volunteers that bring different ideas and skills to help run a long running beer festival with the soul aim of celebrating and enjoying real ale.

The first time in a few years the beer of the festival was not a local beer but one from Cornwall, Treen Mariner, the first beer to sell out was once again Batham's XXX. Our new sponsor was Red Pub Company & of course Bains Wines in Netherton continued to sponsor the Tokens.

Hopefully, this year brings loads more beer festivals and return to normality for us all. Stay safe



Karl Denning

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[camra.org.uk/
10reasons](http://camra.org.uk/10reasons)



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Campaign
for
Real Ale

*Price for paying by Direct Debit and correct at 1 July 2021. Concessionary rates available. Please visit camra.org.uk/membership-rates
†Joint members receive £40 worth of vouchers.

BEER STYLES - TABLE BEER?

WHAT IS IT??

Theoretically, any beer could be a "Table Beer." From the sound of things, the qualifications are pretty straightforward. It has to be a beer and you have to put it on a table. Table beer. Done. That was a great article. Glad you took the time to read it!

REALITY

Nothing is so straightforward. Historically, a Table Beer was a beer for everyone at the table, most prominent in Belgium and France. Dating from medieval times, this was the English equivalent of 'Small Beer'- beer that was very low in gravity- traditionally less than 1%- that all members of the family could enjoy after toiling in the fields. Yes, that's right, EVERYBODY, including the kids. That's rather like today the kids drinking beer with their 16th century meatloaf.

Table Beer (or *bière de table*) varied widely in colour, but probably tasted something like soaking Wheaties in water and then squeezing out all of that absorbed liquid

WHY DRINK TABLE BEERS TODAY?

Well, Table Beers have undergone a massive resurgence in the past few years. People often want to try something that is packed with flavour but isn't so heady in alcohol. Given that I am writing this in January, people often resolve to give up or abstain from alcohol for a certain period of time. However, we should be promoting TRYanuary and Table Beers are a perfect way to do this.

WHAT DO THEY TASTE LIKE?

These days, Table Beer is a bit different. The alcohol percentage has gradually climbed, from the sub-one percent to somewhere between two and four, most commonly between 2.8%-3.5%. You might be thinking, '*wait, this is just one of those low-alcohol session beers*'. That assertion is not wrong but modern table beers vary in style but are artisan products and lots of British breweries now make them but in terms of style,

modern table beers tend to be heavily hopped, imparting dry, hoppy and sweet flavours and are invariably hazy. Other associated flavours are stone-fruit and peach. Lots of artisan brewers now do Table Beers as a staple of their ranges as demand for them has increased (most famously, Kernel, based in London, are pioneers in this field as they produces a 3% Table Beer which is often hopped differently to impart different flavour profiles.

Although Table Beers are made from the first runnings of a brew (that is the wort run off from the mash before sparging has started). Such beer are the ideal "I am currently sitting in a chair on a porch/deck/balcony/patio and have no intention of moving," beer or 'I will have a quick one' in the pub type. Locally, Fixed Wheel have produced a Table Beer both in cask and Key Keg form in recent years.

However, styles can diversify. For example, some breweries are interpreting Table Beers in different ways. For example, Small Beer in London have started brewing weak versions of IPA, Porter and Pale Ales and we are now seeing the emergence of Seltzer Beers, beers made with soda water and real fruit, typically 2%-3%, such as those produced by Unbarred in Brighton and more recently Cloudwater from Manchester.

To finish, a Table Beer is whatever you (and the brewer) want it to be in its broadest sense these days. You often see 'session' now applied to differing beer styles to make a more quaffable or crushable version of the style.

But really, Table Beer is just an excuse to pull another from the fridge and hand it to a friend or simply to savour high quality and flavourful products after a hard day at work. It is about sharing the experience of drinking in the same way our Belgian friends did so many years ago. At the picnic table, in the dining room or in the bar.

Prost!

Pete Clarkson

IPSWICH 2 WEEKENDS IN SUFFOLK

Ipswich might be one of those towns you may only decide to visit if your football team is playing away, or you have relatives there. I'm not being flippant. It is 3 hours by car and almost as long on the bus and train from Dudley. I may not have thought of Ipswich as a destination for beer either if I hadn't won a prize to brew a beer there.

More than 12 months ago I entered a beer into a home brew competition at Briarbank Brewery in the town. In fact, it was one of the only home brew competitions running due to lockdown. I thought it would be nice to have a jolly down to Ipswich on Judging Day. Only to later find this would be impossible due to travel restrictions and instead watched a zoom of the results to find out I had come a very creditable second. Pleasant news followed when the winner was disqualified for being a registered brewery in a homebrew competition. Bumped up to first place I was duly interviewed by BBC Radio Suffolk and thought it would be just a matter of weeks before I could travel down and claim my prize of a brew day and the opportunity to see my beer in bottles and on cask in their bar. I was of course very wrong and so it took a year to organise a suitable date to go and brew.

A lot of things can happen in 12 months. As my home brew obsession had started to outgrow the house and my Wife's patience, I built a brew house in my back garden with a view to turn my hobby into a business on a super nano scale, when money and time allow. I'm also a cheeky so and so and when I asked Briarbank Brewery if I could claim my beer as a collaboration brew, they were very happy to make it happen.

Before setting off for Ipswich I of course contacted Ipswich & East Suffolk CAMRA who gave me a comprehensive list of venues to visit. 3 full days in Ipswich. It looked at first glance

as though I would have more than enough establishments to try. It seemed only right I should follow their advice. I had a free day before brew day so spent it wisely on a fact-finding journey.



In October what better way to start a session than at an Oktoberfest at Three Wise Monkeys on Lloyd's Avenue. A modern airy craft establishment with a Gin Bar downstairs. Their offerings were good, a balanced mix of cask, craft, keg and key keg. Oktoberfest offerings were solid and a 4-beer tasting flight for £7 was an easy way to make my way through the card. Due to Oktoberfest, their only cask beer was Colchester Brewery No.1. An excellent copper coloured ale. The Hacker Pschorr Oktoberfest Marzen was particularly good too. A 7-minute walk to the Spread Eagle on Fore Street also proved a delight. A wonky Tudor pub which dates to 1510. Open fire and burger and pizza menu. The burger had was excellent. Beer offerings are from Grain Brewery from Harlesdon. About 30 miles from Ipswich. A wide mix of cask and keg on offer. Very nice they were too. Redwood and Slate were my favourites.



Following the advice of Ipswich and South Suffolk CAMRA I moved on to The Thomas Wolsey on St Peter's St. Glass fronted and quite bright inside. Sadly, this large bench seated pub was undersubscribed. The beer offerings (Adnams and Crouch Vale) were well kept. If a little uninspired. Particularly compared to the earlier pubs. I didn't hang around and instead made my way to my last visit of the day. The Arcade St Tavern is a small fronted bar that once inside is tardis like. It serves only 2 cask beers but is a craft enthusiasts dream. With beers from local brewery Burnt Mill. With a supporting cast from Verdant, Boxcar, Lost and Grounded and Tiny Rebel to name a few. If you visit as a group, then I would recommend you book a table. I found it easy to find a seat on my own, but they allow table bookings which can be infuriating if you turn up only to find the pub half empty but most of the tables reserved from 9pm. As much as I would have liked to have stayed late. I had to be up to brew the next day.



After an early morning walk around Ipswich Marina. I met Rob Pyke at Briarbank and after doughing in, he took me on a quick tour of their premises. The brewery is a former post war Lloyds Bank. With the taproom on the first floor. But it forms one side if a courtyard with sister business Isaacs on the Quay. A rather nice restaurant and café. The buildings are an old maltings which still have all their originality. Old beams, ventilated floor and herringbone brickwork. The rest of the brew day went well. We headed up to the taproom and set about trying all of Rob's beers. Briar Bitter, Samuel Harvey VC, Suffolk Haze and Mocha Porter were my favourites. After some very nice food it was time to head off to bed.

Ready for my last day of exploring Ipswich. After a wholesome breakfast of Eggs Benedict (a first for me) I wandered over to Christchurch Park in the town to get my steps in before lunch. There is a museum in the Mansion there, and I took the opportunity to look around a Marvel comic exhibition. Luckily my next pub visit was only across the road at The Woolpack. The snug in The Woolpack is at the front of the building and consists of a short bar with 4 hand pulls, 2 bar stools and a windowsill bench. There is one door and to access the rest of the pub you must leave and come back in again. Beers were from Exeter, Adnams, Youngs and Sharps. They were all fresh and well kept. Their food smelled gorgeous too. With Beef or Veggie Chilli Nachos seeming the popular choice. I could have stopped longer but the weather looked like it was turning, and I had a list to complete. 10 minutes' walk took me to The Grand Old Duke of York on Woodbridge Road. Not surprisingly it is halfway up a hill. A large single roomed bar with mixed seating. Wolf Brewery Battle of Britain and The Mighty Oaks Oscar Wilde Mild (a former Supreme Champion Beer of Britain). Both were ok but not great. Next I moved on to Dove St Tap. Which is a CAMRA favourite. Woodfordes Wherry, Cromwell Best and Abbot Ale. Hit and miss was the way it was described

to me by more than one local. This proved to be the case. They have a brewery opposite. But sadly none of their beers were on tap. Another 10-minute walk to one of those places I wish there were more of. The Fat Cat Tap is a non-descript frontage of a pub with an unfussy interior filled with old enamel signs on the walls. There were just 2 handpulls on the bar. Neither of which had pump clips on. I asked if they had any cask ale and was promptly told to look up. There above me was a list of a dozen or so beers available. I ordered an Adnams Mosaic. Off the barman went into the back and returned with my beer. It was then I could see through a window that the beers were all on a rack in the cellar room. Rather like a beer festival. I asked how much cask beer they sold in a week? "We sell a minimum of 20 casks a week!" he said. Good man I thought. The beers were in good condition too. North Ridings Ekuanot and Roosters First World Problems quickly followed. They also do a variety of sausage rolls and scotch eggs which are good value. I kept thinking "What a great pub this is!" The weather had well and truly changed by now. But it was time to leave all the same. Quite a walk back to my hotel. So that was it. The next day I was back up the A14 and home. Luckily I had to return to collect a cask ready for the Dudley Winter Ales Fayre. Another weekend soon followed.

Rob contacted me when the beer was racked and ready and together with my friend Karl, we returned to Ipswich to be presented with a Firkin of it to deliver to the festival. Rob was again a generous host, and we had a lovely day in the taproom at Briarbank. Before leaving Dudley, I stopped off at The Beacon Hotel and collected an 18-pint box of Dark Ruby Mild. Which I presented to Rob as a gift when we arrived. Very nice it was to be drinking Black Country beer in Suffolk. Rob enjoyed it too. Then on to trying our beer. A hazy America Pale Ale. Rob had of course made a good job of the dry hopping and it tasted very hoppy and fresh. It was a special moment. To see people

buying my winning beer in the bar. Karl was also impressed with Rob's dark beers. Neither of us were surprised when he won gold again with SIBA for his Mocha Porter.

Karl and I had a nice weekend visiting some of the pubs I had visited again, and we returned both saying we would visit Ipswich again in the future. The collaboration beer, "Water, seeds, flowers, fungus" went down well at the Dudley Winter Ales Fayre too.



Stuart Betts

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WHY NOT PLAN A VISIT TO CHESTER?

We had a trip to Chester and stopping in a very handy Premier Inn, which was ideal as it was adjacent to the bus stop! The next thing we knew we were being dropped off by a conveniently situated Wetherspoons. There was Colwyn Bay on at the bar so I ordered a pint so we could sit down and plan our next stop and where we were going to eat. There's a lot to fit in two days....



We got off to a good start choosing Colwyn Bay's Beachcomber as it was in fantastic condition. Our plan was to go to the indoor market, Beer Heroes and The Cavern of the Curious Gnome. The Indoor Market was fantastic. I swiftly ordered a third of Polly's, a beer called Little Petal, which was fruity and hoppy. We then made a bee line to Beer Heroes and ordered a Glass

house beer called Silent Flight which was gorgeous. Spoilt for choice we started on the canned offerings. Floret by Polly's was my next choice, it went down well with a cob.



We had a wander around the German Market and made our way to the Cavern of the Curious Gnome. After climbing the stairs to our surprise, we had to climb another set of



old stairs until we could finally sit ourselves on the toad stools. We were greeted with a Tap take over by Turning Point, it's an understatement to say that this was a happy coincidence as we were able to try some stunning beers. These included: Cosmic Flux, Gravediggers Bourbon, Wavelength, all were fantastic and really kept well. These tap takeovers do really allow the drinker to get a taste of breweries style.

I did have a small break from the beer as I couldn't resist a glass of wine with my reliable Wetherspoons meal. It was gigantic burger turning up with a pig in blanket, you can tell it was Christmas time!

The next morning we made our way to Chester town centre. We walked the Roman Walls, stopped off to take a



walk around the Cathedral, it's not all about drinking we like a bit of culture too. We then found the Boot Inn a Samuel Smiths pub and phones were not allowed, whatever did we do before we got the world in our hands on a tiny screen? I had the Samuel Smiths Cider, quite nice with a massive hit of apples.

We made our way back to the Roman Walls and came across the Clock Tower. This Clock was impressive, and a random person asked if we wanted a photo, a nice memento of our trip. We then went to Brewhouse Kitchen, and to be fair they had some keg and

cask beer to choose from. We then went to the Gainsborough Museum and saw many Roman artefacts. We really enjoyed our time in Chester and would love to return.

Tanya Rhead

Here at our Ales and Tales we love to hear about your trips and the beers you find. Hopefully it gives you some inspiration for a beery trip out to a new destination. We've not heard of the Curious Gnome so we are adding that to our must do list!



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DR EAMING OF MEAD



Mead? What is mead? Who knows what it is? Does it conjure up visions of medieval banquets or village carnivals where ruddy faced peasants quaff mead out of leather tankards?

Well stereotypes aside, mead is an ancient drink which is fermented honey water and sometimes with various fruits, spices, grains, or hops. The alcoholic content ranges from about 3.5% to more than 18%. The defining characteristic of mead is that the majority of the beverage's fermentable sugar is derived from honey. It may be still, carbonated, or naturally sparkling; dry, semi-sweet, or sweet. It was popularly drunk throughout Europe, Asia or Africa in ancient and medieval times and nowadays, it is classified as a form of wine made from honey and usually around 12%. It has certainly impassioned Jordan Lunn.

Jordan is well known as Owner of West Midlands Distillery and Dr.Eamers Emporium on The Waterfront. When I heard, he had started to brew Mead commercially. I had to find out more about it. 63 Meadery, founded in 2021, is based in Rowley Regis and is a particular passion for Jordan who, as I recently discovered when I met him, has several strings to his bow.

"I am best known for Gin, however I cut my teeth mainly making Whisky (Poitin) and Beer with my uncle and Grandad." "Growing up Mead was easily accessible. I had little money and although the raw ingredient (Honey) is expensive. You need very little else. Other than a Demi John and yeast. I started off using bread yeast as it is cheap and readily available, but not the best for controlling fermentation.

Mead has always been a passion of mine to make as it has always been relatively hard to get hold of, especially a good one which isn't just neutral spirit and honey.

As my distilling business has grown, I have had access to better equipment and learnt far better

techniques. Honey is challenging to ferment, as it doesn't have the nutrients that the yeast needs to thrive. This results in off flavours that must be aged out. This takes forever to get the Mead tasting right. Fast forward to today however and we now use staggered nutrient additions and predominantly Champagne yeasts. This means we get the best out of the yeast during fermentation. Without the off flavours.

We now use the time that would have been used to age out the off flavours to good use. By laying the Meads in wooden casks to add distinctive characters to the Mead. As we age our spirits in wood. We can then reuse a barrel that previously housed Rum or Whisky to then mature Mead."

There is a host of traditionally fermented honey products that Jordan is pioneeringly experimenting with:

- Pyments (fermenting Honey and Wine Grapes together)
- Cysers (fermenting Honey and Cider Apples)
- Melomels (Honey and Fruit)
- Hydromels (session Meads) and Braggots ((Honey and Beer)

This, of course opens a whole new area for Jordan but importantly we get to taste bang up to date versions of brews that have lain virtually dormant for centuries.

The first of these, Psychedelic Honeybee, a 12% Braggot, using traditional Malts, Belgian Strong Ale Yeast and Organic Wildflower Honey was released at the



end of last year and is sold exclusively at Dr.Eamers on the Waterfront. Several more releases are planned for this year from their Barrel Aging Program as well as a new Braggot Ale, which will be made available locally.

We look forward to seeing and sampling new releases throughout 2022.

Stuart Betts & Pete Clarkson

HITCHMOUGH'S LOST PUBS

Here is a photograph of another mystery pub. Can you identify it?



The solution to last issue's lost pub is the Wharf in Old Hill. Originally a farm, it became a pub in the 1850s called the Sportsman, later the Sportsman and Railway. Its address in the 1881 census was Slack Hillock and in 1891 Gorsty Hill Road but in more recent times Station Road. The name was changed to Wharf when Premier Midland Ales acquired it in 1985.

The pub closed in 2005, was damaged by fire in 2006 and by 2009 had been demolished.



2007

Being near the canal several inquests held at the pub related to drownings. There were also some connected with deaths at Old Hill railway station.

In 1897 the licensee, Henry James, was charged with being drunk on his own licensed premises. Another publican, who had been drinking in the Sportsman, reported James to the police. A doctor stated that James had been to his surgery later that evening and that he was not drunk. Nonetheless, James was fined 10s. At the licensing meeting later that year Henry James applied for his licence to be renewed which it was, he promising to keep his house in a proper manner in the future. Nothing further has been found about him until January 1901 when he was fined £5 10s for permitting drunkenness and serving a drunken person. By the 1901 census Henry James had left the pub.

In the 20th century the Sportsman was bought by George Harris, known as Abner Harris, who had been a professional footballer. In 1923, aged 45, he was killed in an accident at a scrapyard when a crane hit him and fractured his skull. His widow, Rose Hannah, took over as licensee until 1968.

Dudley Chronicle 14/6/1923

THE LATE MR. GEORGE HARRIS.

The funeral of Mr. George Harris, better known as "Abner" Harris, the Old Hill cricketer, and former West Bromwich Albion, Aston Villa, Coventry City, and Stafford Rangers' footballer, who met his death under such tragic circumstances on June 4th, took place at Halesowen Parish Church on Thursday last week, in the presence of a large number of friends and sympathisers. There were many floral tributes of respect. Deceased, as a member of the Old Hill Cricket Club second team, played against West Bromwich Dartmouth as recently as Saturday week.

The latest edition of the Rowley Regis file is now available for download.

Hitchmough's Black Country Pubs
longpull.co.uk

BEER THROUGH PURPLE TINTED GLASSES

A BRIEF ROUND-UP OF PUBS AND BEER IN PORTHMADOG, NORTH WALES

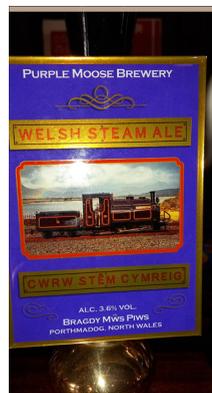
It's an understatement to say that 2021 has been difficult for our pubs and Porthmadog has suffered as much as anywhere. As soon as the pubs in Wales were allowed to open fully, staff shortages and regular closures due to COVID outbreaks added to the problem of dealing with the high influx of summer visitors. Generally the pubs have adopted a cautious approach and cut right back on the range of beers offered but there are still plenty of traditional ales around.

The beer scene in Porthmadog is dominated by the town brewery, **Purple Moose**. Established in 2005, they have built a strong reputation, extending their markets well into England.

The brewery tap is **The Australia** which was completely refurbished when they took over this old pub. The artwork adorning the walls contains a mixture of history, legend and brewing information and there is a welcoming wood fire in winter. The Australia stocks the full range of beers, including a changing seasonal brew and craft beers on the 'T' bar. Photo shows the Christmas brew, Merry XMoose. There is generally a cider on handpull and Hallet's on the 'T' bar.



Purple Moose also has a brewery shop near to the Australia, stocking the full range of their beers including one of the seasonal specials, High Hop, in cans. They also sell a wide variety of Welsh beers, ciders and spirits, together with lots of Purple Moose merchandise.



A regular entry in the Good Beer Guide, **Spoooner's Bar** is located at the terminus of the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Steam Railways. The current bar layout includes a row of 6 handpulls with another 2 offering Purple Moose. Again the effect of COVID on trade has resulted in a cautious approach going forward. Up until recently, Spooner's always offered Dark Side of the Moose but there has only been one Purple Moose beer on draught in 2021, under the railway's own badge, Welsh Steam Ale.

The main row of 6 handpulls is dominated by the Marston's range of beers but Spooner's have always managed to showcase various Welsh beers. Last summer, only 2 draught beers were available from the main run of handpumps. The current layout shown in the photo will be changing as, at the time of writing, the bar was



undergoing a total refit. Watch this space for an update!



Bar layout at Spooner's at end 2021

However, there has generally been one beer on offer from the excellent Llŷn Brewery. Based at Nefyn on the North Llŷn coast, the brewery appears to have prospered during lockdown, being able to offer bottled beers and then opening an outdoor area at the brewery, as soon as restrictions allowed, using a festival van and table service.



The Station Inn on the mainline railway platform generally offers at least two draught beers, usually from Purple Moose and Wye Valley. The Station boasts a pleasant garden, a lovely place to enjoy a beer as soon as COVID regulations allowed out door service.



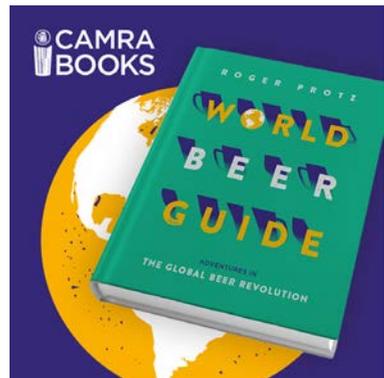
The other hostelry offering real ale is **The Royal Sportsman Hotel** which has also been a regular entry in GBG.



Other establishments in the town offering traditional beer at the time of writing (and according to WhatPub) include **The Ship** and the **Pen Cei** bistro bar.

2021 has proved challenging to say the least and this has led to the need to adapt to the circumstances and tread carefully to build up in the future. However, there is a feeling of hope that 2022 will bring change for the better.

Joy Stevens



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SWEET SWEET BEER

When it comes to traditional beers. We often think of the German purity Law telling us that 4 ingredients are just enough to make the perfect pint. That means anything else should be treated with suspicion. Some additions are viewed as accepted variables. But others, like sugar, are often frowned upon. In fact, sugar is often seen as the preserve of low quality, “penny pinching” brewers as just a cheap way to add alcohol to beer. But sugar is an integral part of brewing and intrinsic in some of our most traditional beers. Sucrose is often used by Belgian brewers to add ABV to beers such as Tripels, without making them undrinkably heavy. Glucose has been used in some of our most popular bitters. It compliments fermentable malt sugars and helps initiate yeast growth to prevent any lag in fermentation and is also used as a priming sugar in secondary fermentation of casks. Lactose or milk sugar is of course the non-fermentable sugar that is used to sweeten and add a silky feel to stouts. But apart from Lactose, most simple sugars are almost 100% fermentable. So, if you, like many Midlander’s like your real ale on the sweet side. It isn’t due to the simple sugars added to the brew. It is more likely the yeast strain used and its inability to transform all the different sugars into alcohol. Thus, leaving nice, sweet notes for us to enjoy.

Traditional UK real ale brewing, respected around the world, has embraced sugar usage for over a century. Its not just about simple sugars like sucrose though. Belgian brewers use Candi Sugar. While British brewers embrace Invert Sugar for their brews. What are these suspicious products, and how are they made?

The reality of the two sugar types boils down to the pH (acid vs alkaline) during the process from plain old sucrose which is extracted from either cane or beet.

Golden syrup is an Invert Sugar. It is produced using an acidic process to create that sweet, sticky, golden liquid. Its flavour descriptors may be caramels, which can progress through to toffee, chocolate, coffee and roasty.

Conversely, in production of Candi Sugars the use of Amino Acids in an alkaline process favours Maillard reactions with flavour descriptions like bread, biscuit, sweet, fruity and toasty.

Sugar refining also produces Molasses. Not used from beet though as this is seen as being too earthy in flavour. But Cane Molasses is heavy, dark and has very flavourful components. In addition to the descriptors of the parent sugar it also has flavours including liquorice and deep roast. Not bad for almost a waste product of the refining process.

In practice, partially refined cane sugar, or darker sugars that have been created by the addition of a small amount of molasses are the likely starting point for darker brewing sugars. But that’s the thing about sugars in brewing, neither the sugar refiners nor the brewers seem keen to open up on what confects their sweet success.

What we do know is that sugars bring flavour components that differ from those in malts. They lighten body and darken beers. They do most certainly bolster the ABV in Belgian beers, without making them undrinkably heavy. But seemingly sugar isn’t a commodity to reduce cost. The revelation of course is that around a quarter of all grain wort in beer I just...sugar!

Tim Lane & Stuart Betts

BEER DAYS OUT

Bewdley is an historic market town on the banks of the River Severn in north Worcestershire. In the 14th century, it was known as *Beaulieu* (beautiful place), and has many historic buildings and structures, including St Anne's Church (1748) and Bewdley river bridge (1798). Formerly a bustling river port, with its quayside, it's now a popular destination for tourists and visitors. Now that lock-down is over, we thought it'd be a good place to sample some local beers.

We arrived at Bewdley on the Severn Valley Railway. Turning right out of the railway station, we walked under the viaduct and followed the path to the **Great Western**. Dating back to the 1840's and formerly known as The Rifleman, it was originally a home-brew pub. It has a range of 5 draught beers and 2 draught ciders, including beers from the local Bewdley Brewery, Holdens (Dudley) and Moreland, and the pork pies are delicious! We sampled Bewdley Brewery's 2857, named after one of the steam locomotives on the Severn Valley Railway, which recently celebrated its centenary.



Continuing towards the town centre, we reached the **Black Boy Inn**, originally a 15th century coaching inn named after its Royalist connections in the Civil War. It was formerly

BEERS AND BARS IN BEWDLEY

the Black Boy Hotel, and has reopened after a major refurbishment in 2018. It has a cosy bar and full-service restaurant, and offers a range of 5 draught beers, including Wye Valley HPA & Butty Bach, Bewdley Worcestershire Way, St Austell Tribute and Timothy Taylor's Landlord.

Crossing the river bridge, we immediately turned right along Severnside North, passing the Cock & Magpie (Marstons) to visit the **Mug House**, one of 71 pubs recorded in the town in 1841. It's a friendly pub, spotted by its colourful hanging baskets, which welcomes locals and visitors alike to its cosy bars and outside courtyard. A great range of beers, with a bar menu, fine restaurant and delicious al fresco dining and overnight accommodation. Regular beers include those from the Bewdley Brewery, along with Purity.



Mug House in the 1850s

We then retraced our steps along Severnside North and followed the river along Severnside South. Turning right into Lax Lane, we soon found the old Victorian school building, now

housing the **Bewdley Brewery**. The brewery shop is open from Mondays-Saturdays, with the brewery bar serving 2-3 draught beers on Thursdays-Sundays and Bank Holidays. The cosy taproom is adorned with old railwayana and breweriana items, and hops, and the staff are friendly and knowledgeable. We sampled an excellent glass of William Mucklow Dark Mild in the courtyard outside.



The welcoming taproom at Bewdley brewery

Continuing up Lax Lane, on the corner with High Street, we found **The Packhorse**, dating from the 15th century. Formerly one of Mad O' Rourke's "Little" pubs, it has a fine food menu, including renowned Sunday lunches, served in the cosy bar or restaurant. It also offers some excellent ales, usually from Hobsons (Cleobury Mortimer) and Wye Valley, from which we sampled Hobsons Twisted Spire.

Continuing along High Street, we soon came to the top of Load Street and St Anne's church. On the corner with Dog Lane we spotted the busy Horn & Trumpet (usually Wye Valley, Three Tuns & Ludlow Gold beers), and turned right down Load Street. Then a quick visit to the local Wetherspoon's pub (**The George**), which is also a hotel, offering the familiar selection of Wetherspoon's food and drinks, often including

some local beers. A couple of doors away was our final pub, the **Real Ale Tavern**. Originally a bank, dating from the 1760's, it was converted into a pub by Black Country Ales in 2017. It offers not only its own beers (Fireside, BFG & Pig on the Wall) but also 7 guest beers and 2 draught ciders. The old bank safe is still in place in the rear part of the bar! We sampled Black Country Chain Ale and Castle Combe Pendulum, along with a couple of excellent local pork pies. And if you wish to take home some bottled beers, a few doors away, **Tipplers** craft beer shop is highly recommended, with over 400 bottled beers to choose from, along with craft cans, wines and spirits.



So Bewdley is certainly to be recommended for a good day out, not only to sample the delights of this historic riverside town, but also for the wide variety of bars and beers. We returned home on the last train of the day from Bewdley station.



PUB COMPANIES

WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO

Pub and Club Campaigns Committee feels that many members would find it helpful to have more information about the companies that control many of our pubs. This is the first in a series of articles that will provide the facts on pub company practices and operations, explaining in particular how their business models work and what this means for both licensees and, ultimately, us as customers. The aim is to let the facts speak for themselves so that members can make up their own minds about the positive or negative effects of these practices on our pubs and the folk who run them.

1. A POTTED HISTORY OF THE PUBCO

Fifty years ago, when CAMRA was formed, the pub landscape looked very different. For a start, there were many more of them – some 75000 against around 47500 now. The majority of pubs (52000 or so) were owned by breweries. The 89 small and regional breweries had 13800 of them and the rest were in the hands of the ‘Big Six’ – Bass Charrington, Allied, Whitbread, Scottish & Newcastle, Watney/Grand Metropolitan and Courage/Imperial.

Most of the other 23000 pubs were free houses (in name anyway – many tied their beer supplies to a big brewer in return for loans and discounts). Companies that just owned pubs were few and far between – the likes of Sir John Fitzgerald in the north-east and Heavitree in the south west (though they tied themselves to Bass).

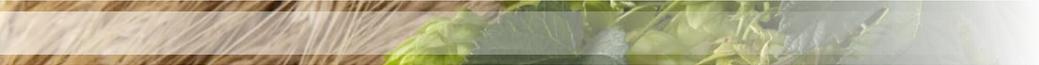
Just about every pub-owning brewery rigorously imposed a supply tie on its own products. As late as the mid-1980s, I remember a Greene King Director recoiling in horror at my suggestion that they allow a few guest beers in their pubs. As a result, new breweries found outlets hard to

come by and we customers were hardly spoilt for choice, as a glance at a Good Beer Guide of that era will reveal.

Then, in 1989, along came the Beer Orders. The story of this epochal legislation (for better or worse) is superbly told in Laura Hadland’s recent Fifty Years of CAMRA book but, in essence, the government acknowledged the stranglehold on the industry exercised by the Big Six and, among other things, capped their pub ownership at 2000.

By now, because of closures and sell-offs, the Big Six owned fewer pubs between them but the Orders still meant around 11000 pubs coming onto the market. We, of course, dreamed of a new golden age of multi-handpumped free houses galore, but the reality was sadly different. Companies were quickly established, usually with close links to the Big Six, to Hoover up these pubs in big batches then negotiate supply deals, invariably with the company who previously owned the place. Enterprise Inns, for instance, started off with the purchase of 368 pubs from Bass, and that’s where they bought the beer from.

In the years that followed, wheeling and dealing saw companies variously grow, collapse, merge, acquire, dispose – it was very difficult to keep up with who owned what. Some companies concentrated on managed pubs, some on tenancies, a few on a mixed model. Behemoths emerged – by 2004, Punch Taverns and Enterprise each owned more than 8000 pubs, though both had accumulated so much debt that they ran into trouble come the financial crash and subsequently retrenched. We’ll have a closer look at the current pub company scene in the next article.



A brief history of Punch Taverns illustrates the volatility surrounding pubcos from the 1990s onwards. Punch formed in 1997, purchasing a tranche of pubs from Bass. Two years later, they bought Inn Business (mostly former Whitbread pubs) and then the rump of the Allied estate. The managed pubs were spun off into a separate division called Spirit. In 2003, they acquired their 3100-strong rival Pubmaster plus a couple of smaller companies. Next, Scottish & Newcastle's managed pubs were snapped up and added to Spirit. By 2011 the impact of the crash was being felt, calling for a 'strategic review'. Spirit was demerged and, in 2015, sold to Greene King. Come 2016, a takeover bid totalling £403m (plus the taking on of a billion pounds of debt) was accepted; 1900 pubs went to Heineken with the remaining 1300 residing with Patron Capital, though the Punch brand has been retained.

In the meantime, the treatment of their tenants by many of the Pubcos had become a major issue and, after years of campaigning, the Government was persuaded, in 2014, to announce a statutory Pubs Code aimed at regulating their practices and ensuring fair treatment for tenants. We'll return to the Code in a future article. In this context, though, it needs mentioning that the currently accepted definition of a pub company embraces breweries that own pubs – and nowadays most such companies have separate management structures for their pub and brewing operations.

Final comments. Pub companies are here to stay. There is nothing wrong with the basic model and, indeed, there are some excellent companies (mostly smaller ones) who treat their licensees well and clearly see their pubs as more than just property assets. It would, though, be difficult to argue that the ways in which some companies operate raise many issues around their custodianship of what aren't just piles of bricks-and-mortar but, in most cases, precious and valued community assets. We'll examine those issues in due course.

2. THE CURRENT PUB COMPANY SCENE

A pub company is simply a company that owns pubs and there are literally hundreds of them, many with only a handful or even just one pub. We'll concentrate here, though, on the bigger companies who, between them, own over half the country's pubs.

STONEGATE

Founded in 2010 with the purchase of 333 pubs from Mitchells & Butlers, Stonegate grew quite slowly over the next ten years, making a series of acquisitions including brands like Slug & Lettuce, Walkabout and Be At One, until its pub numbers totalled 765. All the pubs were managed houses. A seismic change came in 2020 when Ei Group was bought for £1.27bn, making Stonegate the largest pub company in the UK with 1,270 managed pubs and, as a result of the Ei purchase, 3,200 leased and tenanted businesses.

Ei itself had been founded, as Enterprise Inns, in 1991, initially with 333 pubs from Bass. The company built up its estate, gaining 2,200 pubs in batches by buying them from other companies or taking them over. In 2002, 1,864 pubs were bought from Whitbread and in 2004, 4,054 from Unique. By this time, it owned nearly 10,000 pubs and was in the FTSE 100 list of top companies. However, it was loaded with debt and the 2008 financial crash required a good deal of retrenchment. Ei also started building up its managed estate, including pubs on retail agreements under the Craft Union brand (we'll look at this operating model in the next article). By the time of the sale, it was down to fewer than 4,000 pubs.

PUNCH TAVERNS

The first article included a brief history of Punch to illustrate the volatility around pubco development. In summary, it grew quickly to around 8,000 pubs, suffered under the crash,



sold a lot of pubs including its managed division and was taken over in 2016. 1,900 pubs went to Heineken and 1,300 to Patron Capital, who retain the Punch brand. At takeover time, all pubs were leased or tenanted but it's also now pushing retail agreements (which it calls Management Partnerships). Some pubs were sold but in June 2021 it announced the purchase of Youngs' tenanted division, bringing the current total to 1,282.

ADMIRAL TAVERNS

Admiral was founded in 2003 by two families and grew quickly to 2,300 pubs by 2007. Many of these were 'bottom end' houses disposed of by other pub companies. The financial crash had the usual consequences for over-extended businesses and numbers were down to 1,700 by 2011 and continued to fall. By 2017 it was in the hands of Cerberus Capital Management who sold up to a joint venture by Magners cider-makers C&C Group and estate investor Proprium Capital Partners, by which time there were 845 pubs. The acquisition trail was hit in 2019 with 137 pubs coming from Marstons and 150 from Heineken. The big one arrived in July 2021 when Admiral bought 674 Hawthorn pubs from property firm New River taking the estate to over 1,500.

Admiral's pubs are all tenanted or leased and tend to be wet-led community operations. It has a relatively good reputation in the trade though there's certainly no aversion to flogging off pubs as 'development opportunities'.

STAR Pubs & Bars

In 1995, Scottish & Newcastle, one of the original 'Big Six' breweries, bought another of them, Courage, making the combined group Britain's biggest brewer. By 2011, the pub arm, then known as S&N Pub Co, had 1,500 tenanted pubs and 600 in management. Come 2008, Scottish Courage was gobbled up by

international brewer Heineken and the pub business rebranded as Star Pubs & Bars. Many pubs were sold but then, in 2017, as previously mentioned, 1,900 were snapped up from Punch. Again there were disposals and the estate currently stands at 2,500.

Star vigorously promote their retail agreement scheme, Just Add Talent. In 2020, it was fined £2m for breaches of the Pubs Code (which we'll cover in a later article)

GREENE KING

In 1995, Greene King was a long-established family brewer with 900 pubs, nearly all in East Anglia and the South-East. It then embarked on a ferocious acquisition trail, swallowing up many breweries (the likes of Morlands, Belhaven, Morrells and Hardy & Hanson) and other pub companies. GK itself is now owned by a billionaire Hong Kong property developer. It has some 3,100 pubs, restaurants and hotels, of which 1,200 are tenanted or leased. Its strategy seems to be to move in the managed direction and the 'Pub Ready' retail agreements are pushed hard. GK was once renowned for not letting other people's beers in its pubs but now have a more enlightened attitude.

MARSTON'S

The company was known as Wolverhampton & Dudley until 2007 when it rebranded as Marston's, one of the many breweries it had taken over in recent years. At that time, 2,500 pubs were owned but the total is now down to 1,400. The tenanted estate, in particular, has been reduced through sales such as 200 to New River in 2013 and 137 to Admiral in 2019. In late 2020, the company took on the running of 156 Brains pubs in Wales. Also that year, Marston's merged its brewing operations with Carlsberg but this does not directly affect the pub business.

MITCHELLS AND BUTLERS

Formed originally out of the old Bass estate, M&B have 1,650 pubs and restaurants. The multitudinous brands include Ember Inns, Toby Carveries, Nicholsons and All Bar One – as can be seen, the emphasis is on food. Pubs are mostly managed though around 50 are on a lease arrangement.

J D WETHERSPOON

Since opening its first pub in 1979, 'Spoons has expanded to 925 pubs and 50 hotels, all managed. Plans for 18 new pubs are in the pipeline.

WELLINGTON

Owned by the billionaire Reuben Brothers, the company leases all its 850 pubs on a free of tie basis.

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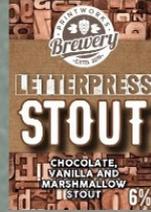


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