

The newsletter of the Solihull & District branch  
of CAMRA - the Campaign for Real Ale

www.solihullcamra.org.uk

free

# Solihull Drinker

Issue No: 47

Winter 2008

## You drank us dry!

### Tenth Beer Festival Success

Our 10th festival proved to be our most successful to date at the British Legion, Solihull. Having run out of beer by 8.30pm on the Saturday last year we upped the order this year but still ran out by 9pm!



Proof that the early bloke catches the beer

This was due to attendance being up by over 20% compared to last year. Indeed, Saturday lunchtime attendance was up by 100%!

First beer to run out was O'Hanlons Yellow Hammer, followed by the Champion Beer of Britain 2008 Triple fff Alton's Pride, whilst Beer of the Festival

was Bob's Chardonnayle, followed by Pictish Liberty and Thornbridge Jaipur.



Revellers enjoying themselves (we know who you are!)



It's a hard job, but somebody's got to do it—the Morris Men were in the right place to cool down with our beer choices after their session!

Our entertainments, the White Hart Morris Men on Saturday lunchtime, and Blues Basement on Saturday evening, proved a great hit too.

11 new members were signed up and we raised £183 for Diabetes UK from returned beer tokens.

Festival Organiser Steve Dyson said, "The bar staff worked really hard

over the weekend to serve people as quickly as possible and they all give their time for free".

Thanks to Steve, all the CAMRA staff, the Solihull Royal British Legion, and to all who attended, for making this our best ever festival.

Watch this space for news of next year's!



The festival at its height

**Inside: Don't miss the Dates for your Diary**



# THE BULL'S HEAD

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(Sundays 12 to 3pm for lunch - no evening meals)  
TELEPHONE RESERVATIONS WELCOME**

***Leaves are falling fast from the trees, but the logs are on the fires at The  
Bull's Head, and some great real ales are waiting for you to sup them.  
Never mind that it's Winter soon, your welcome is always warm here!***

## AGM report

The 2007/8 AGM was held at The Red Lion, Shirley on Monday 3rd November. Preceded by a brief Branch meeting, the main purpose of the AGM was to agree the annual reports and accounts, for the existing Committee members to provide reports on how their role had gone over the last year and highlight any events or happenings of special significance; and for the Committee posts to be offered to the assembled members. The latter was of particular importance since the Secretary had previously stepped down, leaving his role to be temporarily divided between several people; the Chairman announced that he also was stepping down, and we had not had a Press and Publicity officer for some time. The meeting reached a satisfactory conclusion with all the vacant posts being applied for.

The Committee now consists of: new Chairman: Carl Wright; new Secretary: Allan Duffy; new Membership Secretary: Bob Jackson; new Press and Publicity Officer (shared): Chris and Jeanette Lloyd. Committee posts remaining the same are: Treasurer: Brenda Duffy; Webmaster: Kevin Clarke; Pubs Officer: Robert Cawte; and Newsletter Editor: Julia Hammonds. Branch Young Members' contact, Ian Edwards, also remains in post.

Thanks to all for their continuing commitment to keeping Solihull & District CAMRA going; to those who kindly volunteered to take on posts; and a big thank you to the outgoing members for their hard work and dedication during their term of office.

## Local Pubs Week

CAMRA's Community Pubs Week—now renamed Local Pubs Week—will be taking place again during 2009. With so many pubs closing nowadays—estimated at 36 across the country per week—it is vital that our remaining pubs are backed and supported for providing services to their communities, be they rural or urban outlets. 'The Pub is the Hub' has never been truer in these difficult times, because as more and more are lost, we also lose a vital part of our communities, and once gone, it is unlikely they will return.

This branch will again be running our Perfect Pint Puller competition in the Solihull and District area, very popular last year and eventually won following a wonderful display of expertise by Sophie Clark from The White Lion, Hampton in Arden. Do you think you could do better, Bar Staff?? If so, ask your publican for information and encourage your regulars to support you by filling a voting slip, available next year. Don't forget that the aims are: a warm welcome, efficient service with a smile, a full pint in a clean glass, together with knowledge on the choice of drinks at your pub. The judges—who will be visiting the pubs whose bar staff are entered for the competition—will be looking for all of the above as their criteria; with a certificate, presentation, and prize for the winner.

This time we will also be offering an award of a framed certificate to the pub in our area judged to have done the most to support Local Pubs Week. The week in question is up to the pub to decide upon, depending on their preference and other commitments. More information will be available on our website, [www.solihullcamra.org.uk](http://www.solihullcamra.org.uk) or by contacting one of the Committee officers, at the beginning of 2009.

We look forward to seeing how inventive publicans—and pub-goers—can be!!

Julia Hammonds, Newsletter Editor

## Hail to the Ale! - local Beer, Pub & Brewery news

### Most Improved Pub of the Year



Chairman Roger Dipple presents James with the well-deserved award

Our MIPY award this year went to The Assembly Rooms in Solihull. Opened in February 2008, the manager, James, and his staff have put every effort into serving their customers and have a great wide-ranging choice of real ales to select from, with seasonal specials available. They also hold beer festivals, when extra real ales are put on

tap. Well-kept beers are the order of the day and the pub has gone from strength to strength since its opening. We wish James and his team all the best for the forthcoming year.



CAMRA members celebrating the presentation

### The Nags' Head, Hockley Heath

It is understood that the building application connected with the above has been postponed - somewhat of a reprieve. The pub is understood to be still open, and long may it stay so.

### Tom 'O The Wood, Rowington

The Tom 'O the Wood has re-opened—now managed by James Brooks, it is currently featuring Purity's Gold. James is keen for real ale lovers to visit and explore what the pub has to offer, although plenty of alternatives are available for non-beer drinkers. In a pleasant location beside the Grand Union Canal on Finwood Road, popular with locals, walkers and those enjoying the countryside alike, the pub is well worth a visit.



### The Bluebell, Henley in Arden

The Bluebell has recently achieved Cask Marque accreditation, with the assessor giving full marks for all three beers. At the time of going to print, they had Black Sheep Ale (3.8%), Wye Valley HPA (4.0%) and Purity UBU (4.5%) on sale. This well-deserved accreditation joins various awards gained by the pub including winners, Newcomer of the Year, The Publican Awards 2008; winners, Dining Pub of the Year, Warwickshire Life Food & Drink Awards 2008; winners, Best Dining Pub/Inn, Coventry & Warwickshire Food & Drink Awards 2008; and finalists, National Gastropub of the Year, The Publican Food & Drink Awards 2008. We wish them all the best for 2009.

More information can be found on their website [www.bluebellhenley.co.uk](http://www.bluebellhenley.co.uk)

## **JD Wetherspoons**

JD Wetherspoons pubs, including The Assembly Rooms and The White Swan in Solihull town centre, will be holding a festive celebration over the Christmas period, with no fewer than 16 winter real ales on offer. These will include Batemans Rosy Nosey, Cotleigh Red Nose Reinbeer, Jennings Redbreast and Green King Abbot Reserve. Full details are available on the JD Wetherspoons' website <http://www.jdwetherspoon.co.uk> or in the house magazine available at all JD Wetherspoon pubs. Their special offer to new members joining CAMRA at a JD Wetherspoons pub of £20 worth of vouchers to use over the next year is still running—a good opportunity for you to buy that present for the hard-to-please person in your life!

## **Enterprise Inns**

Enterprise Inns, based in Shirley, are apparently planning to sell off around 200 of their pubs. It is not yet known whether any pubs in the Solihull and District area will be affected. We will do our best to keep you informed of progress (or perhaps 'regress' would be more appropriate).

## **CAMRA announces early success for 'LocAle'**

The original 'LocAle' concept was created in 2007 by CAMRA's Nottingham branch. Following its success with around 80 pubs in Nottingham signing up to the scheme, CAMRA decided to build upon the growing consumer demand for local produce and an awareness of 'green' issues by converting 'LocAle' into a national campaign.

The idea of 'LocAle' is to encourage pubs to stock at least one locally-produced real ale with the aim to improve the local economy and knowledge for pub goers about which beers are brewed locally. It may also give business the edge over sections of the off-trade selling beer way below cost price.

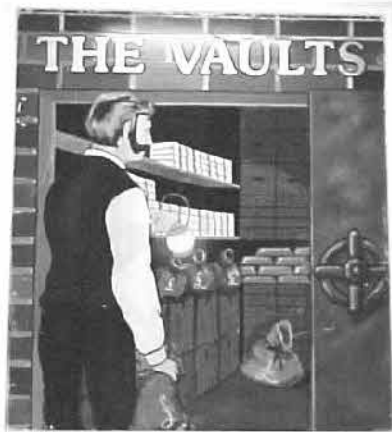
Each participating CAMRA branch can decide upon their exact definition of a locally-produced real ale, as long as it falls between a 20-30 mile radius. This measurement is usually based on the shortest driving distance between a pub and its nearest brewery. However, others such as the CAMRA South Hertfordshire branch have sought to incorporate their county's best producers by classifying all Hertfordshire brewers as 'local'.

The publicity material includes window stickers, leaflets and posters to show which pubs have officially signed up to the scheme, and pump-clip crowners are displayed at the bar to help inform consumers which beers have been brewed within the local area.

But as many branches have reported, the ability of some pubs in joining the scheme has been hindered by their relationship to a pub company. Both the Grantham and Newark branches of CAMRA noted how tied pubs in their areas, although enthusiastic about the scheme, could not sign up due to either a restricted beer portfolio or a simple inability to commit themselves because of external pressures. Nevertheless, there have been branches, which, in some cases, have signed up almost 20% of their local pubs.

Over 20 CAMRA branches have been able to launch 'LocAle' schemes since July, and Solihull and District Branch want to encourage the pubs in their area to participate in this scheme wherever possible. If you are interested, get in touch with us!

**Nick and Gwen welcome you to**



**The Real Ale venue in Knowle**

- ◆ Six hand-pumped beers including regulars Ansell's Mild, Greene King IPA, Tetley Bitter, Wadworth 6X; and two guest beers
- ◆ Real cider from Weston's
- ◆ Food available lunchtimes Monday - Saturday

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2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, & 2008**

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Nick, Gwen and our great staff look forward to welcoming you.

**CAMRA Good Beer Guide listed since 1993**



***The Vaults, St John's Close, Knowle.  
Tel: 01564 773656***

### Wye Valley Brewery marches on!



The Wye Valley Brewery is head and shoulders above many other breweries thanks to the awards and plaudits it has won of late. In September, in the International Beer Challenge 2008, Dorothy Goodbody Country Ale was listed in the top 50 beers. In October, Dorothy Goodbody Golden Ale was chosen by Tyrells as part of the Ale and Cheese flavour of their new winter potato chip; the brewery's 2008 limited edition beer Best 4x4 won a top award at the 2008 Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) Brewing Business Awards; at the Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival they were awarded Producer of the Year at the awards dinner on the Friday evening, and over the weekend festival The Hairy Bikers decided that Dorothy



Goodbodys Wholesome Stout was a very good beer and visited the Wye Valley Brewery stand to pull some pints for themselves. In November the Hairy Bikers turned up again when the brewery were winners of the Large Food and Drink Producer category in the Flavours of Herefordshire Award Scheme, in addition being supplier of top class beers to many of the other winners. As this magazine goes to print, Dorothy Goodbodys Wholesome Stout will be available on the CAMRA stand at the BBC Good Food Show at the NEC. Dorothy Goodbodys

Wholesome Stout was awarded CAMRA Champion Bottle-Conditioned Beer of Britain 2008

### Neil raises a glass to real British ales

Men Behaving Badly actor Neil Morrissey said he wants to put the Britishness back into beer as he celebrated the launch of his new real ale in October. Morrissey Fox Blonde Ale is the brainchild of Morrissey and restaurateur Richard Fox. The pair claim they want to educate lager and alcopop drinkers about the wonders of real ale. Relentlessly plugging his tippie, Neil said at the bash at London's Quo Vadis: "As the Pub Landlord, Al Murray always talks about lager for the gents and wine for the ladies but lager is not British. We are trying to create a great British product which can hopefully take ale away from its old-fashioned, fuddy-duddy image. It's not so bad for you, either. Alcopops are drinks that are green, blue or pink. That can't be good for you, can it? I certainly wouldn't want to drink anything blue". The beer, which is brewed at their own micro-brewery, is described as "light and refreshing with a full body and flowery nose" and has an ABV of 4.2%. It is available on draught at their pub, Ye Olde Punch Bowl Inn, Marton-cum-Grafton, North Yorkshire and has also been seen at a couple of pubs in the Solihull branch area, namely the Drum & Monkey in Dorridge and the Woodman in Solihull. It is also available in a bottled version at leading supermarkets.

The Solihull Drinker is the newsletter of the Solihull & District Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

**All contributions, comments and enquiries should be sent to Julia Hammonds:  
The Editor, Solihull Drinker, c/o 4, Kendrick Close, Solihull, B92 0QD  
or e-mail [julia.hammonds@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:julia.hammonds@blueyonder.co.uk)**

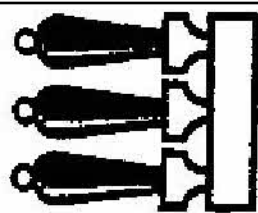
The Editor reserves the right to amend or shorten any contributions in the Solihull Drinker, but will always honour the spirit of the contribution.

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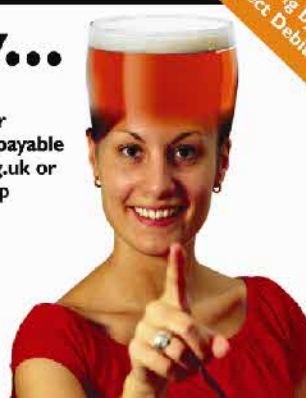


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Complete the Direct Debit form below and you will receive three months membership free and a fantastic discount on your membership subscription. Alternatively you can send a cheque payable to CAMRA Ltd with your completed form, visit [www.camra.org.uk](http://www.camra.org.uk) or call 01727 867201. All forms should be addressed to Membership Secretary, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 4LW.

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I enclose a cheque for .....

Signed ..... Date .....

Applications will be processed within 21 days



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# Dates For Your Diary

## Branch Meetings

Monday 1st December	The Lyndon, Olton
Monday 4th January 2009	The Assembly Rooms, Solihull
Monday 4th February	The Drawbridge, Haslucks Green
Monday 4th March	The Reservoir, Earlswood

(NB. All Branch meetings start at 8.30pm except where noted otherwise)

## Committee Meetings

Monday 8th December	Sharman's Cross, Sharman's Cross (8.30pm).
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*Members may attend Committee meetings but only participate if invited to do so by the Committee.*

## Socials

Thursday 11th December	Christmas Pub Crawl—meet in The Town House, Solihull town centre, 7.30pm
Saturday 13th December	Regional Meeting, The Red Lion, Knowle 12.00-3.00pm, followed by an optional Knowle/Solihull pub crawl

***For more details, visit our website: [www.solihullcamra.org.uk](http://www.solihullcamra.org.uk), or contact Secretary Allan Duffy on 01564 200 431.***

## Membership Matters

Greetings from your new Membership Secretary. I am very pleased to have taken on this role, and look forward to communicating with you each issue to share information about our Branch's membership.

Are you a local CAMRA member and would like to be more involved with the branch? Although all the committee posts are now filled for this year you could still come along to our meetings (details on [www.solihullcamra.org.uk](http://www.solihullcamra.org.uk)) and see for yourself how we do things and even join us on one of our many socials.

We are keen that more members get involved with the Branch to keep it going and help it to grow and build on its successes.

So if you feel you would like to become involved, and perhaps know someone else interested in real ale, then let me know on 0121 705 8743.

Bob Jackson, Membership Secretary

# The White Lion

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## November Social

### Stratford Crawl, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2008     Sixteen Beers but no Bars

There have been almost no pubs under Stratford upon Avon in the Good Beer Guide in the past few years but this crawl showed that not only does Stratford have some cracking pubs but a decent range of beers as well.

Some of the "Olde-Worlde Pubs" have had their interiors ripped out and converted to restaurants (or at best gastropubs) but there are still plenty retaining traditional bars and fittings. The Old Thatch Tavern is a good example with plenty of old-looking woodwork and flagged floors. There are normally three beers on but only Old Hookey and Purity UBU today, Hobgoblin being temporarily off. The food was excellent. **Two** beers so far.



The One Elm is quite unlike the Thatch Tavern: modern and wine bar-ish but none the worse for that. There's a pleasing ambiance, squashy leather settees and Purity Gold and UBU and London Pride. Not counting the duplicate that's **four**.



The Dirty Duck has a largely unspoilt interior with lots of ancient-looking oak but now sadly, owned by Greene King and having a rather predictable beer range. We sat outside, in shirt-sleeves, which is not bad for November, and would not have been wise in August. Greene King IPA and Speckled Hen accompanied Ridley's Witchfinder, a welcome black beer even though there's no such brewery as Ridley's: Greene King bought and closed it in 2005. The food was reported good. Anyway that's **seven**.

The Windmill is another old pub and lists landlords going back to the eighteenth century. Greene King strikes again and Ruddles County (another bogus beer, albeit delicious, and not as we remembered the original), Flowers Original and GK IPA make it **ten**.

Back up the road a few yards to the Falcon, which is a traditional hotel with large and comfortable bar and lounge. A special treat for us here with Purity's new addition to their range; Mad Goose, and very nice too. This, not counting the UBU, makes it **eleven**.



Two "community" pubs followed, the Cross Keys and the Queens Head directly opposite each other. After we had drunk the Cross Keys out of beer (only Hookey but very good for all that) we sampled Everards Tiger, Wells and Youngs Bombardier, Adnam's Bitter and Broadside in the Queens Head to bring the total to **sixteen**.

I'm reluctant to report on the Wetherspoons Golden Bee, (listed in the 2009 GBG) because of the way the beers are presented on the hand pumps: you know, pump clips not turned round, "coming soon" and so on. Not to mention the poor service by the sometimes bad-tempered staff. On a good day you could add another ten beers.

Any of the pubs with their beer ranges would be greatly welcomed in Solihull and one wonders if Stratford CAMRA members aren't just being anti-Greene King when they fail to vote them into the guide.

Bob Jackson

**ADRIAN AND THE COMMITTEE WARMLY WELCOME YOU TO**

# **The Rowington Club**

**On Rowington Green, Rowington, Warwickshire CV35 7BD**

**Telephone: 01564 782087**

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(full membership: £10.00 per annum)

**Christmas Events this Year:**

Christmas Eve	Disco: free to all but sorry no children on this occasion
New Year's Eve	Band 'The Emulsions' will play 2009 in: 8pm start. Free to club members, £10.00 to non-members—evening includes a buffet and glass of bubbly. Children welcome until 9.00pm

**\*Four real ales on over the festive period!!\***

Saturday evening events a speciality: phone the Club for details of who's on - all who come will be welcome.

Plenty more events planned for 2009.

**For full details of all events, please ring Adrian at  
The Rowington Club, and he will be only too pleased  
to talk to you about a wonderful time out.**

# *The Golden Acres*

**Joint Solihull & District CAMRA Most Improved Pub of the Year 2005**



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Children Welcome  
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**Darts: Tuesdays and Thursdays**

**Karaoke: Every Thursday**

**Regular entertainment Saturdays**

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**Mondays-Saturdays (except Tuesdays) 5.00-11.30pm  
Sundays: Eat-in 5.00-10.30pm Take-away 5.00-11.30pm**

## Off Our Patch

### A Trans-Pennine Rail Ale Trip and the Best Laid Plans...Part 1

I had been badgering my long-suffering wife to join me on a trip to Stalybridge to sample the delights of the Station Buffet Bar. I also wanted to travel on the Stockport – Stalybridge railway line, which had been under threat of closure for many years but has so far avoided this by the operation of a 'parliamentary' train service. This is the minimum service required to be run in order to prevent formal closure of a railway line. The service on this route only runs one day a week in one direction only, on Saturday mornings. A plan was devised to achieve both aims and, with the promise of a good pub lunch thrown in, my wife relented. We would travel to Stalybridge, enjoy a pint in the Station Buffet Bar, go on to Dewsbury and have lunch in the West Riding Refreshment Rooms with our son and then come back at leisure via Manchester with, possibly, a stop at Huddersfield.

Saturday 27 September was warm, bright and sunny as we boarded the 09:48 train from Birmingham New Street station for the journey to Stockport. The train called at Reddish South and Denton before joining the main trans-Pennine route between Manchester and Leeds at Guide Bridge, calling there also before running the final few miles to Stalybridge.

The Station Buffet Bar at Stalybridge is a legend in its own right among beer drinkers. It has been a regular entry in the Good Beer Guide, consistently stocks a fine range of real ales from around the country and, in so doing, has gained a strong following of real ale drinkers from near and far. The Buffet, with its original conservatory, present station by the Manchester, London & North Western Railways, is a typical example of a typical example of there are four rooms, each individual area is also fittingly decorated with railway-related relics, including station name signs. The beer range is continually changing and, since 1996, over 6,600 different cask beers have been stocked. Many of the beers served are from micro-breweries, sometimes featuring rare brews.



The Station Buffet Bar

bridge, located on Platform 1, is a real ale aficionado's dream and has been in the Beer Guide for many years. It is a well-kept real ale pub, serving a strong following of real ales from near and far. The Buffet dates from the opening of the Sheffield & Lincoln and the on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1885. The building is a late Victorian splendour and is well-kept and visually furnished. The bar

There are regularly around eight real ales on at any one time. On the day of our visit, the choice was Coach House *Postlethwaite*, Elland Brewery *Lights Out*, Bank Top *Bikes, Trikes & Beer*, Station House *Lammastide Wheat Beer*, Flowers *IPA*, Timothy Taylor *Landlord* and a real cider too, Countryman *Farm Scrumpy*! Another beer was in the pipeline, which turned out to be Phoenix *Mild*. I elected to sample the Bank Top, a 3.6% pale bitter with a really refreshing taste and a slightly floral aroma, and found it to be in very good condition. A small group of enthusiasts, who had been on our train from Stockport, tried the *Postlethwaite*. One of them noticed that the conservatory door was boarded up—Sylvia, the landlady, informed him that the conservatory had actually been demolished because it was leaking badly, and is to be rebuilt in its original style as it is a listed building.

The Buffet is also famous for its Black Peas: a traditional, simple but highly nutritional Lancashire dish, dried peas soaked overnight then boiled, traditionally eaten from a cup with salt and vinegar. In some places they were associated with the Sunday before Palm Sunday, known as 'Carlin' Sunday. In Lancashire they were traditionally eaten around Bonfire/Halloween night. They are also used in pigeon food and make a good carp bait.

Following a short break and a very enjoyable pint at Stalybridge, it was time to depart for our intended lunch stop at Dewsbury with our son joining us on the way. Having visited Dewsbury with me on a previous occasion and witnessed huge plates of keenly-priced, tasty-looking home-cooked food appearing from the kitchen, he confirmed the venue to be a good choice.

Chris Lloyd

To be continued...

## The Annual Trip — Liverpool, September 2008

Solihull CAMRA explores Merseyside and its surroundings

When the summer is almost over CAMRA Solihull members look forward to their annual long weekend away. This year we visited the European City of Culture, Liverpool. Still very much a building site, we nevertheless had a great weekend and, as usual, we started on Thursday.

We arrived in Liverpool not long after lunchtime opening. We could not get into our hotel, the Premier Inn on Albert Dock, until 2pm so we had to resign ourselves to visiting a pub or two as you do!

What better pub to visit close to the station than the Crown Hotel on Lime Street. The beer was quite uninspiring having Adnams Explorer; Tetley Bitter and Taylor Landlord, but the decorative friezes outside and the Art Nouveau interior together with the stunning plaster ceiling made it an apt start to our tour of the city.



The usual suspects outside The Crown

A short walk took us to an entirely different style of pub. The Globe, Cases Street butts right up against the shopping centre, but what a gem it is. Its history is interesting. It was built in 1888 and hosted the inaugural meeting of the Liverpool Branch of CAMRA in 1974. It is an exceptionally comfortable but small pub with a long front bar and small snug at the back and was full of friendly people all over 50 at the time of our visit. As to the beer, Tetley Bitter; Copper Dragon 1826; Black Sheep Bitter; Hydes Bells and Whistles and Cains Bitter.

After a quick one here we made our way to the hotel, dropped our luggage and made our way to the Baltic Fleet, some five minutes from the hotel.

The Baltic Fleet built in the mid nineteenth century is home to Wapping Brewery, Liverpool's only micro brewery. Standing opposite Wapping Dock it was undergoing refurbishment at the time of our visit. Whilst awaiting a brewery tour we tried a beer or two. Wapping Bitter, Gary's Festival Ale and Summer Ale were on. Unfortunately only the Festival Ale was in good condition. The other two seemed a little tired. After a bite to eat we were ready to visit the brewery housed in the cellar. If you suffer from claustrophobia then don't visit this brewery. All the equipment is a really tight fit and when brewing is in full swing it must be unbearably hot. Simon Holt was our tour guide. The pub started brewing



in 2002 and has brewed over 50 different beers during that time. Indeed the brewery seems to be becoming the official brewery for the Royal Navy having brewed beers for HMS Albion and the aircraft carrier Ark Royal. Stan Shaw the Head Brewer is also planning to brew a lager using English hops soon which should be interesting. Our stay was all too short as Simon had to rush us along a little as he had some deliveries to make in the 'brewery dray'.

And so on to our next port of call, the White Star in Rainford Gardens, tucked in a warren of small streets near Matthew Street. It is a fine Victorian pub with an excellent tiled exterior and sporting memorabilia from the era of Ocean Liners including the fated Titanic



which was owned by the White Star Line. As to the beers behind the bar a fine array of hand pumps offered us Bowland's Sawley Tempted, Gold and Nicky Nook; Wychwood Hobgoblin; Draught Bass and Deuchar's IPA. I tried the Bowland Gold a superb clean, hoppy beer. It was agreed amongst us all however, that all the beers were in good condition. By the way until recently the pub had a superb six foot Bass mirror which had hung on the back wall of the pub for over 100 years until recently when it was accidentally smashed by a regular. I bet he wished at the time that the floor would open up!

Moving onwards we headed for Doctor Duncan's in St. John Lane opposite St Georges Hall. So called after Liverpool's first Medical

Officer of Health the pub has been refurbished by Cains and serves most of their beers. It has an island bar with a bland lounge but just round the corner is a stunning room with tiles, a decorative ceiling and a mosaic floor which really smacks you in the face as you enter, well worth seeking out. Up through the hand pumps was pulled Cains Mild [absolutely beautiful!], Bitter, Formidable Ale and IPA.



Now reasonably well oiled, we headed for the Ship and Mitre in Dale Street. Once the brewery tap of Bents Brewery it was rebuilt in the 1930's in the Art Deco style with many exterior features still visible at first floor level and with tiling of the era. It also happens to stock a wide range of beers, both from the UK and Europe. To delight our taste buds was All Gates Purity, Matrix and Pursuit of Hoppiness; Hornbeam Horns and Heroes and Black Coral Stout; Phoenix Wobbly Bob; Titanic Lookout; Hawkshead Bitter; Sharps Cornish Coaster; Copper Dragon Challenger IPA; Oakham JHB; Hydes Jekyll's Gold and Lees Brewers Dark. Very much a drinkers pub I only had time to try a couple of beers, Pursuit of Hoppiness and Black Coral Stout which were in excellent condition, but like all pubs serving many beers some others were a little wanting.

Our next pub, the Poste House, is a pub which is easy to miss. Surrounded by modern apartments, it is a typical unassuming Victorian local. Unfortunately the beer quality was not so good when we visited. Theakstons Grouse Beater tasted like pear drops and the Jennings Cumberland failed to impress us so we did not linger long as the evening was wearing on and the Lion in Moorfields beckoned us.

This beautiful compact pub is on CAMRA's National Inventory of heritage pubs and is Grade 2 listed. Of note is the tiling, woodwork and the stained glass dome which is complimented by a fine range of beers on handpump. Arundel Castle; RCH Blackawton Bitter; Clarks No Angel; Brewsters Marquis Bitter; Deuchars IPA; Young's Bitter and Banks and Taylors Shefford Bitter were available. The pub is named after a railway engine called the Lion, which ran on the nearby Liverpool to Manchester Railway at the same time as Stephenson's Rocket. It featured in the film "The Titfield Thunderbolt" and is on display in the local museum.



The Lion's stunning interior

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With the night coming to an end we hit our penultimate pub, the Thomas Rigby's, another Grade 2 listed building. Thomas Rigby was a dealer in wine and spirits in the 1830's. Rumour has it that Horatio Nelson visited the pub in the 1790's but this has never been substantiated. Today, it is owned by Okells from the Isle of Man and on handpump was Okells Bitter, Dr. Okells IPA and Maclir; All Gates Bright Blades; Caledonian Marching Orders and XPA and Greene King Hardy and Hanson's Olde Trip all in reasonable condition.

And so to our last pub of the night and immediately behind Thomas Rigby's was The Lady of Mann. Named after a packet ship plying between Liverpool and the Isle of Man, this pub too is owned by Okells. Woodforde Wherry; Brains Merlin Oak and Okells Bitter were served behind the bar. But bed was calling us and so we made our way back to the hotel. Tomorrow, Southport.

Steve Dyson

## **Rowington Club Beer Festival: August 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> 2008**

Organising the festival this year must have seemed a very risky business because of the daily rain or showers in the weeks leading up to it. By some miracle, however, all was well and alfresco drinking was very much OK for all three festival days.



The live music was excellent and so was the food. Generous portions of pork, complete with crackling, were to be had and by mid-afternoon the pig was showing more bones than meat.

Some entertainment was afforded to our merry group of cyclists by the appearance of the ciders issuing from the bar. The Cheddar Valley was a bright, luminous orange which we were sure would glow in the dark, the Thatcher's Medium, as a vet's specimen, would have caused the animal to be put down, and the Bibbenden's almost as clear as water and similar in taste. The latter was considered only to be suitable for filling cyclists' water bottles for the journey home. We were unable to try the Cheddar Valley, which ran out soon after our arrival in spite of there having being 6 kegs in all. This great consumption was apparently caused by cider drinkers from the Bluebell Cider House!

The range of beers had been carefully to avoid very strong ones (on advice that last year cycling after a few pints of Old Tom was a bit tricky) so lighter, more summery beers prevailed. Still, there was plenty of choice, with beers from 3.4% to 4.5% and from very pale to brown. A consensus suggested that the best ones were the Wren's Nest and Beijing Gold and no beers that we didn't like. They were all in good condition and at just the right temperature, and well priced, including the ciders, all at £2.40.



For those interested in such things, the full list was as follows: Church End Brewery Poachers Pocket 3.4% and What the Fox's hat 4.2%; Brakspear Brewery Bitter 3.4%; Bateman's Brewery Summer Swallow 3.9%; Abbeydale Brewery Damnation 4.5%; Holden's Brewery Lord Oxford 4.5%; Acorn Brewery Ginger Nuts 4.2%; Howard Town Brewery Wren's Nest 4.2%; Longdendale (a light beer); Osset Brewery Beijing Gold 4.0%; Robinson's Brewery Olympic Gold 4.0%; Greene King Brewery Ruddles Best 3.7%; plus ciders Cheddar Valley 6%, Thatcher's Medium 6% and Bibbenden 8%.

Adrian said that the Saturday had broken all records. This is fast becoming an established annual event!

Bob Jackson

## **J.D. Wetherspoon**

### **Now two Wetherspoon's pubs in Solihull Town Centre offer you a choice of casual drinking or wining and dining.**

Over the last 10 years, JD Wetherspoon has won over 50 national and regional awards, acknowledging excellence in all aspects of the business; and they are consistently in the top 100 employers. Cask Marque has awarded 650 of their pubs with their accreditation so you can be sure of the perfect pint. They offer carefully chosen menus, with leaflets available to explain where all their produce comes from; and have an award winning children's' menu which combines quality, healthy goodness and value with organic options.

The White Swan, opened on March 2004, and now The Assembly Rooms, opened in February 2008, are proud to serve Solihull town centre in their separate establishments. As you can see from the above, quality produce and excellent service is a watchword, and we do hope that you will take the time to visit us at any time during the day or night during our extensive opening hours. You will be sure of a warm welcome.

**The Assembly Rooms**, 21 Poplar Road, Solihull, B91 3AD

**Phone:** 0121 711 6990

**Opening times:** Sun—Wed: 9.00am—1.00am; Thurs—Sat: 9.00am—2.00am

Next to an exit from Mell Square shopping centre and car park, The Assembly Rooms is ideally situated for a shopping trip break, and our opening hours should suit everyone.

Lloyds No.1 bars have pleasant background music; at the weekends, in busy towns, the party continues into the evenings – many with live DJs getting you in the mood for a great night out! We restrict music to the upper floor, leaving downstairs visitors to enjoy a more peaceful visit. With 15 hand-pumps, we are proud that we can offer discerning drinkers a wide range of real ales plus other drinks to enhance their visit.

For any queries: contact James, the manager, or one of his staff on 0121 711 6990.

#### **A Message from the Managers**

A big thank you from James and Dawn, who would like thank both staff and visitors for the success of their last beer festival.

**The White Swan**, 32–34 Station Road, Solihull, B91 3SB

**Phone:** 0121 711 5180

**Opening times:** Sun—Thurs: 9am—midnight; Fri/Sat: 9am—1am

The White Swan was an old coaching inn at the corner of Station Road, which became a private residence known as Silhill House in the 1820s. 'Silhill' was once a popular variation of 'Solihull'. Demolished around 1926, it was replaced by the present Tudor-style shops. Solihull's transformation from a sleepy market town to a Metropolitan Borough dates from the opening of the railway in 1852. The White Swan is enjoying its popularity within the town and is hoping to run a mini-beer festival in the near future.

**For more details of forthcoming events at the above pubs, including Christmas and New Year specials' drinks and offers, visit <http://www.jdwetherspoon.co.uk>.**



Wye Valley Brewery  
Herefordshire  
[www.wyevalleybrewery.co.uk](http://www.wyevalleybrewery.co.uk)