

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

www.solihullcamra.org.uk



Solihull Drinker

Issue No: 43

Winter 2007

25 Silver Years

Local CAMRA Members celebrate 25 years of progress

Members of Solihull & District Campaign for Real Ale celebrated their Silver Anniversary recently. Members gathered at the Red Lion, Knowle, where their very first meeting was held, on Saturday 13th October, to look back on 25 years of progress, and look forward to future challenges.

Past Chairs reflected on the origins and past achievements of the branch, and a slide show of past socials and festivals brought memories flooding back. Members were also able to see England beat the French at Rugby. All attendees took home a bottle of the commemorative Solihull Silver Shield, winner of 'Beer of the Festival' at our recent festival and brewed at Tunnel Brewery with the help of members Kevin Clark and Robert Cawte.

25 years ago a small group of dedicated CAMRA members decided to form a local branch to support local pubs and promote real ale in the area. Since then membership has grown to 315 and choice of real ale in the Borough has improved.

"The popularity of our annual festival and those run by Wetherspoons and Ember Inns is testament to the demand for variety and choice in beers" said current Chairman Roger Dipple. "Bernies, the Real Ale Off-Licence in Cranmore Boulevard that has been an oasis for discerning drinkers over the last 25 years, can often see a 9 gallon cask drained by eager customers in around 2 hours". Brian and Dave Queenborough, the Father and Son team who run Bernies were presented with a plaque to mark their 25 years in the Good Beer Guide and service to the cause.

Solihull CAMRA supports the efforts of Ember Inns in promoting beer variety and choice through their Cask Fresh promotion which is running currently. Jody Bett, Ember Inn's manager at the Red Lion in Knowle, commented: "The Red Lion is proud to be supporting Solihull & District CAMRA in their silver anniversary. Since they held their very first meeting in our pub, we have had lots of Solihull and Knowle CAMRA members drink in the Red Lion and, as a strong ale pub, we are great supporters in their efforts to promote real ale in the UK. It is also rather fitting that CAMRA's celebrations coincide with our Cask Fresh Ale Festival, which runs from Friday 12 October to Sunday 25 November, and celebrates the heritage and diversity of real ale."

Members of CAMRA are looking forward to the future with a new local pub guide planned and who knows, maybe the opening of a new micro-brewery within the area!



Chairmen from left—right: Current chairman Roger Dipple; Ray Cooke; Dave Hobbs; Brenda Duffy; Steve Dyson Clive Deacon; and the first of all: Malcolm Glass

Catch up with CAMRA news at www.solihullcamra.org.uk

Inside: Don't miss the Dates for your Diary



THE BULL'S HEAD

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Pub and Brewery Watch

Bernies gets another award

They already have the accolade of being among the founder members of the Solihull and District branch of CAMRA, but with also being in the Good Beer Guide continuously for 25 years, it was time for Brian and Dave Queenborough to take a bow for their dedication to real ales over the past quarter-century. They were jointly presented with an award at the 25th Anniversary celebrations of the branch at the Red Lion, Knowle. Their service to real ale fans in the West Midlands has been most appreciated and their efforts in this area cannot be praised too highly!



Golden Acres

The lounge at the Golden Acres, Damson Wood is currently closed for refurbishment, though the public bar with its choice of 3 real ales is still open. Landlord Simon is doing as much work as possible himself and, as often is the case, it is taking longer than envisaged.

Beer Tasting

CAMRA is looking for volunteers to join its beer tasting panels. These were set up in the late 1980s to compile tasting notes for the GBG and select finalists for Champion Beer of Britain competitions. Contact CAMRA HQ if interested. If you want to try different styles of beer then Mike Walsh at Tunnel brewery, where award winning Solihull Silver Shield was brewed, runs a 10 week tasting course on Thursday evenings. Location is the Lord Nelson Inn in Ansley and the next course starts in the new year. Each session covers approx. 12 different beers.

Severn Valley Railway Beer Festival

The need to pick up the branch's 2008 GBG order was the perfect excuse for a visit to the 13th Severn Valley Railway festival run by Bridgnorth CAMRA over the 3 days of 13th to 15th September. Located in marquees at Severn Valley Railway's Bridgnorth station there were up to 50 real ales plus cider on perry listed. Sitting outside late Thursday afternoon with a half of GBBF champion beer Hobson's mild was very relaxing. It was just unfortunate that no trains were running to Bridgnorth due to the flood damage to the track.

Birmingham Beer Festival

Over the same dates as Bridgnorth, and also with Hobson's mild available, Birmingham CAMRA held their annual beer festival at Aston University's Students Guild. 90 plus real ales were on offer along with a good selection of cider and perry and an imported beer stall. My personal favourite of those tried was Revival by Moor of Somerset

The White Swan , Henley in Arden

The White Swan is hosting a new folk club on the third Wednesday of every month commencing Wed Nov 21st. The December session will be on December 12th because of Christmas. The club will be hosted by local musicians who will encourage others to join them in 'open session' (£1.00 entrance will be charged for the open session).

The Annual Trip — Exeter, September 2007

Solihull CAMRA explores Exeter and the Exe Estuary

Autumn soon rolls around in our CAMRA calendar and thoughts turn to the “weekend away”. Organised by brothers Kevin and Gordon Clarke, Exeter was to be our base this year. Stalwarts of these excursions know full well that in fact the weekend starts on Thursday and so there we were on the train to Exeter leaving Birmingham at just after 10am.

Rendezvous time was about 1pm at our digs, the Great Western Hotel, just opposite Exeter St. David's Station. It is a large hotel with 35 rooms, ideally suited to a large party. It isn't exactly luxurious, but was more than adequate for our needs. Not only a convenient place to stay, the Hotel has also won the Exeter & District Pub Of The Year award from the local branch of CAMRA twice in the past few years and is well known for having about nine real ales available in the Loco Bar. It was to here we congregated after signing into our rooms and, well: we had a drink of course. The menu was quite extensive, sporting Archers Drunken Punch and Road Hog; Branscombe Vale Branoc; Draught Bass; Cottage Breast Bitter; Fullers London Pride; O'Hanlons Royal Oak and Yellowhammer and Princetown Jail Ale. All were in good condition apart from the Drunken Punch and the Cottage Breast Bitter, which were coming to the end of the barrel and were a little flat [no jokes please, we did them all already]. The O'Hanlon beers were particular favourites, especially the Yellowhammer.

Once we were all gathered and ready we made tracks to our first port of call on the Exeter pub-crawl. The Imperial Hotel is a Wetherspoons pub less than 100 yards from the Great Western. Kevin and Gordon's plan was for us to wait here until 5.30pm for a few stragglers before setting off in earnest for the pub-crawl... and what a place!



Acquired by Wetherspoons in 1994, it is set in its own grounds with extensive outside seating. This is a massive place with a conservatory the size of most pubs! Its grounds derive from a building built in 1810 and it became a hotel in the 1920's. The conservatory was originally an Orangery, which had previously been part of Streatham House and is reputed to be designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. One can well believe that with all the decorative ironware on show. Of great interest too was the bank of hand pumps. Exmoor Gold; Hidden Brewery Hidden Pint; Greene King Abbott Ale and Hooker Number 2; Marstons Pedigree; O'Hanlons Firefly; Sharps Atlantic IPA and Special Ale; Skinners Betty Stogs; York Nugget and for the cider drinkers Old Rosie Cloudy Scrumpy weighing in at 7.3% ... what a way to start the day. Suitably encumbered with beer we retired to the garden to enjoy the warm and sunny climate of Exeter, only punctuated by a wander to the bar for refills. Although all the beers were in good condition the Firefly proved a particular favourite. I am led to believe Julia (editor) enjoyed the cider. As the afternoon wore on we ordered a bite to eat to fortify us for the coming evening and at 5.30 spot on we were on our way.



It is as well to mention here that our guide Kevin had been to university in Exeter and knew the best pubs to visit [is this what we pay our taxes for] and the way to them. We started at the GBG listed Brook Green Tavern, a real back street local near the football ground and the farthest one from our digs. The pub, which has been traced back to the late 1870's, is a Punch house that takes its beers from the Society of Independent Brewers lists. Filling the hand pumps at the time of our visit were RCH East Street Cream; St. Austell Tribute; Shepherd Neame Spitfire; Skinners Cornish Knocker and Teignworthy Real Ale. Not all the beers were sampled but those we did try were in good condition.

Although out of town, it is well worth a visit and was not too far from our next port of call, the Old Firehouse.

Originally the fire station of the West of England Fire Insurance Company, it was opened in 1834. Becoming derelict it was refurbished and opened as a pub in 1986. It really is a rabbit warren of a pub. There are three floors and a small courtyard and the lighting inside is a little dim, but what a gem. This was to prove the best pub in Exeter beer-wise. Four beers were on offer, Red Rock Red Rock, Teignworthy Beachcomber and Port Stout and Warrior Brewery's Golden Wolf, all in superb condition ... we could have stayed forever, but the night was yet young.



We next visited the John Gandy in the city centre, arriving there via the smallest street in Exeter. The pub is in the style of a wine bar, noisy and with an upstairs balcony. The beer is served through unusual fonts: a glass viewing slot allows you to see the beer being drawn up the font, vertically. Two beers were available here, Archers Away Day and Red Rock Back Beach. The Red Rock was in good condition but the Archers didn't go down a storm. Shame.

Our next pub, the Well House is located on Cathedral Yard. The Well House looks right out over the cathedral. It is actually part of the Royal Clarence Hotel and dates back to the 15th century. Like the John Gandy it is wine-bar-ish but has an interesting if gruesome exhibit: down in the cellar area and next to the well [hence its name] is a glass case containing a corpse, supposedly a victim of the Black Death although experts think it is the body of an Anglo Saxon. Once we had taken a look at this we turned to the beers. The pub has its own house beer brewed by Otter, called Wellhouse. Supporting cast was Cottage Golden Seahawk; Sharps Doom Bar and O'Hanlons Yellowhammer, all in good condition. A cider was also available, Broadoak Moonshine at 8.4%! A small taster revealed this to be pure rocket fuel! (the editor can confirm that—oh yes).



Mid-evening our minds turned to a bite to eat, so we headed to the reliably cheap and cheerful Wetherspoon's, the Georges Meeting House, a converted Presbyterian church built in 1760. Even though it was early evening we struggled for seats but managed to order a meal whilst having a go at the beer range which consisted of Red Rock Humber Mild; Blackawton Headstrong; Hidden Hidden Quest; Courage Best Bitter and Marstons Pedigree. We tried a couple of the more interesting to find them in good condition, but the place was too packed so on we went.

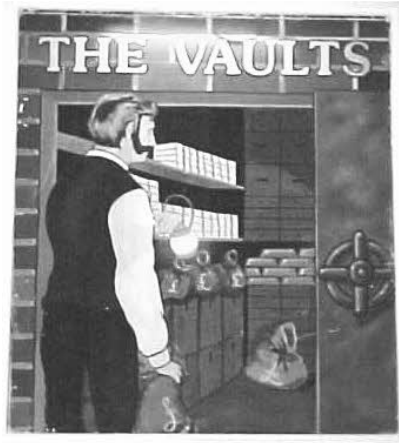
We moved on to a much more sedate pub, the City Gates Hotel near Ironbridge... no, not the one in Shropshire but near an iron bridge that bridges a valley in Exeter. Formerly a coaching inn known as the Crown and Sceptre, it is now a Youngs' house with a lovely garden/patio yard at the back complete with classical sculptures and a pool. Behind the bar was Youngs Bitter, Special and Waggledance and Wells Bombardier. The Bombardier was in first rate condition.

On the way back (opposite the Great Western) is the Jolly Porter which we tried but left it out as Deuchars IPA was the best of the bunch. So, we moved on back to the Great Western, but what a disappointment. When we left earlier in the day some of the beers were running out but on our arrival back no new ones had been put on. Time to hit the hay, a big day ahead of us tomorrow.

Steve Dyson

(The story continues in the next issue...)

Nick and Gwen welcome you to



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2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006

Our beer range can't be bettered in the area—come and see for yourself what we have to offer and why locals vote us a really great pub!

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide listed since 1993



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I enclose a cheque for

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Dates For Your Diary

Socials

Saturday 8th December Xmas Pub Crawl—meet The Anchor Inn, Digbeth, 1pm
Saturday 29th December Regional Presentations & Social, Barton Arms, 12.00
Sunday 13th January 2008 Wetherspoons Crawl—meet at the White Swan, Solihull
February 16th—23rd Community Pubs Week—details TBC

Branch Meetings

Monday 7th January 2008 The Oak, Hockley Heath
Monday 4th February Bulls Head, Barston (tbc)
Monday 3rd March Black Swan, Henley (tbc)

(NB. All Branch meetings start at 8.30pm except where noted otherwise—check our website for up to date information)

For meetings/socials yet to be confirmed or if more details are needed, visit our website: www.SolihullCamra.org.uk, or contact Branch Secretary Steve Wood on 0121 704 5258.

Forthcoming Beer Festivals

16th—18th November 2007 The Oak, Hockley Heath
3rd—5th January 2008 Derby Winter Beer Festival
16th—19th January National Winter Ales Festival, Manchester
14th—16th February Liverpool Beer Festival

Membership Matters

We are now up to about 315 members in our Branch: not bad, but it would be nice to increase this, since every new membership means a little bit more money for CAMRA HQ to fight the good fight for our beers — especially campaigning for a fair pint and to help preserve our pubs and their heritage.

Maybe a present from you to a friend or relative this year could help to tip the balance: CAMRA membership for a year a year is available via their website

<http://www.camra.org.uk>

I'd like to wish all of you reading this a wonderful Christmas, and hope you enjoy whatever ale you choose to try over the festive season.

Carl Wright

Ray Dyke

“The Man who Can”

Tel. 0121 742 3763

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- Paintwork washed
- Window cleaning scrims (with tuition)



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damage these areas.

Bird baths and bird tables

Gardening tools (free demonstrations)

Garden shears, knives and mower blades sharpened

Bait traps for vermin

Dog kennels and hutches

Rabbit and guinea pig runs

Knee pads for garden work

Fruit pickers

Mechanical

Car cleaning

Checking for wear and damage

Oil and fluid level checks

Tyre checks for pressure, wear and damage (ex-mechanic).

Bicycles—many second-hand models for sale

Bicycle repairs

undertaken



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Ray Dyke

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Old Solihull Pub Names (Update)

Our indefatigable historian Steve Wood is at it again—sit tight for further information
about pubs you may never have known existed.....

ABRAHAM DARBY Elmdon

The original bar at Birmingham Airport, it was the AVIATOR BAR when the new airport opened in 1984. After a spell as the SHAKESPEARE it was renamed the ABRAHAM DARBY in 1999 before closing in 2007 (shortly after the new Wetherspoons outlet, the DRAGON-FLY, opened opposite – probably not a coincidence).

BAR CASA Solihull

Part of the Touchwood development which opened in 2001. It became a SLUG & LETTUCE in 2007.

BAR CENSSA Solihull

Located in an old Poplar Road building which used to be the Town Hall until the 1960s. It saw a number of uses over the next 30 years before becoming a bar in 2000. The pub has recently closed and been bought by Wetherspoons. It is due to open in 2008 as the ASSEMBLY ROOMS.

COCK INN Elmdon

A half-timbered building on the north side of the Coventry road dating back to at least 1672 when the landlord was a Francis Hobby. It was still operating in 1874, when the landlord was Charles Harvey.

OLD ROYAL OAK Hockley Heath

Once run by the Great-Grandfather of current Solihull CAMRA Chairman, Roger Dipple, the original ROYAL OAK was sited closer to the road before being demolished in the 1950s to make way for the current building. After a brief spell as a Greek restaurant bar called the TAVERNA, it reverted back to its original name in 1996. In 2006 it became a French-style food shop & restaurant called ORO THE MARKET PLACE, however in 2007 it was sold again at which point it was renamed simply the OAK.

RAILWAY TAVERN Dorridge

On the corner of Longford Close and Knowle Wood Road. Later the Midland Idiot Asylum, now a private house.

SHELLY FARM Monkspath

Old farmhouse buildings restored and opened as a pub in the 1980s. In 2007 it was re-branded as simply the FARM.

WAYFARER Hockley Heath

Now the NAGS HEAD.

WHITE LION Bentley Heath

Known to exist in 1861, the pub currently on this site is called the DRUM & MONKEY. Explanations for the change of name usually relate to the blasting powder carriers working on the construction of the nearby railway - the powder monkeys. However another reason has recently come to light. The gable end had been un-whitewashed for many years when weather streaks on the gable made the shape of a monkey apparently playing a drum. The interpretation of the weathering led to the renaming of the pub about 1930.

Steve Wood

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(full membership: £10.00 per annum)

Forthcoming Events

(No booking necessary, usual entry fees apply unless stated otherwise)

13th December: Senior Citizens' Party

(with Bingo and Elvis impersonator.)

21st December: Christmas Turkey Draw for 4 turkeys

24th December: 8.00pm—12..am: Adults Christmas Party

(Disco. Karaoke, Christmas Lucky Draw.)

There will be plenty of entertainment going on in the Winter months of 2008, so either ring the Club for details, or just turn up — all who come will be welcome.

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

The Golden Acres

Rowood Drive
Damsonwood, Solihull
Tel. 0121 704 9002

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

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plus a
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cider



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a regular
feature

Children
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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

Most Improved Pub of the Year

Customer turned Publican scoops award!

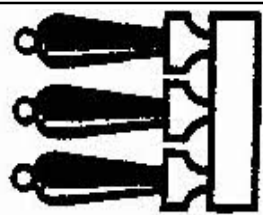
Tim Platt of Hampton-in-Arden complained about the way his local was being run, and was eventually barred from the pub. When the opportunity came up, he and John Thorne took over management of the pub, and 18 months later they have won a local CAMRA award for 'Most Improved Pub' and also gained the prestigious Cask Marque status.

Local CAMRA Chairman Roger Dipple, in presenting the award to Tim and John on Thursday 22nd November commented 'The best kind of Landlord is one who understands things from a customer's viewpoint. We always get positive feedback from members who visit the NEC and stay at the pub. The range and quality of real ales has improved, the food is still excellent and it is once again the heart of its community'.



John, Sophie and Tim accepting the award

The White Lion is a 17th Century Grade 2 listed pub, licensed since 1838.



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* CAMRA GOOD BEER GUIDE
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The Word on the Street...

Harry Porter speaks...the hops that went into Pilgrim Father and Son

The Jackson Two gave not only of their hops, but the sweat off their brow, when they decided to help brew a special beer in collaboration with the Church End Brewery. Here is their report...!

5:30am: a pleasant morning though dark. Karl had already cycled up the hill to the Church End brewery, but he is no ordinary mortal, he is a brewer and takes early starts in his stride. Bob and Ken are drinkers and do not. They were there as trainees for the day, brewing with green hops grown in their gardens. It was very courageous of Karl to let two green brewers into the brewery.

The Jacksons were to learn that brewing is not only about blending ingredients to produce the finest ale. The secret is not to electrocute yourself with the cleaning hose on the transformer and not to inadvertently loop the hose under a tap, making an expensive and worty flood. Under thoughtful supervision all was well. The trainees executed all the stages of brewing from mixing the mash to pitching the yeast and had great fun in the process.

Rarely has a beer been brewed with such enthusiasm or such fresh ingredients: Bob was picking the last Pilgrim hops from the bine as the mash was underway.

Doing the work gives an entirely different impression from the brewery tours that CAMRA members enjoy. One sees a continuous process rather than the individual stages of mashing, boiling, cooling and fermenting. One learns that the focus of the plant is the underback, through which the wort recirculates before and after boiling. It is here that samples are adjusted for temperature and specific gravity recorded and modified.

The hardest jobs are digging out the spent malt from the mash tun and the hops from copper. Bob made short work of the heavy spade work in the mash tun, poor Ken fared less well in the copper. After boiling it was as hot as Hades and twice as humid. With increasing frequency, he abandoned his shovel to flop out of the hatch like a freshly steamed mole. Dave, Allen and Chris had contributed additional hops from their gardens. It is a good thing the recipe required no more, otherwise Ken would have been too weakened to climb out afterwards and would have had no alternative but to remain to add body to successive superior ales.

He said: "If ever I complain of the price of a pint, remind me of the inside of that copper."

The resulting beer is to be called Pilgrim Father & Son. It promises to be a zesty and fragrant session bitter. In all modesty, possibly the best thing you have ever tasted. Look out for it at Solihull Beer Festival, the Brewery Tap at Ridge Lane and other quality outlets this Autumn.

Harry Porter

Fancy a Beer at the German Market??

If anyone's heading into Birmingham for the annual Frankfurt Market (which runs until 23 December) and fancies following up one of the traditional German beers with a British ale, the Briar Rose on Bennetts Hill is currently offering five lines by Titanic (ranging from Anchor at 4.1% to Cap'n Smith at 5.3%, and including a stout), all at £1.99 (which I believe drops to #1.79 on a Wednesday).

Crawl of the tiles

Oxford CAMRA, led by original Solihull Drinker editor Matt Bullock, recently made a foray into Birmingham and a number of Solihull members joined them for what was very much a crawl of the tiles. Starting point was the Grade II, CAMRA National Inventory of pub interiors listed Bartons Arms in Newtown. Easily reached by the number 51 bus from opposite Moor St station, the interior has been restored to its original splendour by Oakham Ales. While some of us admired both the beer and the Minton tiles others fortified themselves for the crawl ahead with Thai curry.

Next stopping point was the Black Eagle in Hockley, located very close to Soho, Benson Road Metro station. The Black Eagle is a multi roomed traditional pub retaining many of its original features, including Minton tiles. All beers tried were in excellent form. The Batham Bitter on offer was ignored as the next stop was to be the Church Inn on Great Hampton St, but unfortunately this proved to be closed despite the Good Beer Guide 2008 stating otherwise.

The only solution was to move to the next scheduled pub, the Lamp Tavern in Highgate. A pub well known for being the only regular outlet for Stanway beers in Birmingham, it was good to see it hadn't changed in the years since last visited. From the Lamp it was a short walk to the Anchor in Digbeth, another Grade II listed, CAMRA National Inventory listed pub. Like the Black Eagle it has won the accolade of Birmingham CAMRA pub of the year on a number of occasions. Well known for its beers festivals and number of guest beers the Anchor did not disappoint.

Having fortified ourselves with the Anchor's great value food and played pool with varying degrees of success we moved up Bradford Street to the White Swan, also listed in the CAMRA National Inventory. It was from here that the Solihull contingent left to make their way home, but not before admiring the original tiling in the hallway. Oxford CAMRA still had more pubs to visit, with at least the Old Joint Stock, Old Contemptibles and Wellington on their list.

All in all a great day, with superb pubs and excellent beer in all pubs. All pubs visited are in the 2008 Good Beer Guide and all travel was either by bus or foot, with a Day Saver costing a mere £3.00. Many thanks to Matt Bullock and Oxford CAMRA.

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:
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The Editor reserves the right to amend or shorten any contributions in the Solihull Drinker,
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The 44th edition of *Solihull Drinker* will be
published on Monday 3rd March, 2008.

Copy deadline for advertising and
contributions will be Sunday 24th
February, 2008