

OPENING TIMES

ST. NEOTS & DISTRICT



BRANCH NEWSLETTER

ISSUE NO 59

BI-MONTHLY
CIRCULATION 800
COPIES

FREE

JUNE/JULY 1985

Local Pub News

Ne. at the Royal Oak in Hail Weston are Hugh and Bonnie Callacher, who previously lived near Girton in Cambridge and are running their first pub. They have taken over from Grahame and Carol Fisher who have left after nine successful years at the pub, which they achieved a Good Beer Guide listing. They have now moved to the clubhouse bar at the newly opened £1 million Wyboston Lakes complex near St. Neots. The luxury clubhouse is at the centre of 320 acres of lakes and greenery which is open to the general public. Real ales available are Greene King Abbot and I.P.A. plus an alternating choice of Springfield bitter or Bass on handpump.

After a long closure the former Plough at Abbotsley has re-opened as the Jolly Abbot Free House. The new owners are Malcolm and Sheila Brownlie, who have given the 200 year old inn a £1,000 facelift. While the facade has been retained, the interior has been practically rebuilt, with a new extension for a restaurant area. The Brownlies intend to run the pub in a similar way to the George and Dragon at Elsworth which they already run. The change of name is intended to emphasise how different the new Free House is to the James Paine pub it was previously. Day to day running of the pub will be in the hands of manager Christopher Starnes. Real ales available are Tolly Original, Tolly Bitter, Greene King Abbot and James Paine XXX, which are served by electric pumps installed in the wall at the rear of the bar.

The two-star Grange Hotel at Brampton has changed hands again, for the second time in a matter of weeks. Bill and Kate Bingham who only recently took over have left and the new incumbent is Jesus Fernandez who was formerly manager of the Pike and Eel at Needingworth.

Steve Roberts, landlord of the Waggon and Horses at Steeple Morden will now serve his Greene King ales by gravity upon request.

The George Hotel at Buckden is for sale, owner Robert Jenkins wishing to sell the old A1 coaching hotel after about 15 months to pursue other business interests.

The White Hart at Godmanchester is now under new management with John and Terrie Watson taking over behind the pumps at the Manns pub.

The former Cuddles/Greenacres pub on Longsands estate in St. Neots has finally re-opened after yet another period of long closure. The pub has been sold freehold to Bill Beard and Carole Woodhall - who is known to locals from her days working for three different tenants at the pub, plus as a landlady at the Wheatsheaf in Eaton Socon. Bill and Carole each have more than 20 years experience of the licensed trade, and have definite ideas on how they intend to run their pub. The disco image has gone and now it is a family clientele they want to attract, with singalongs a weekend feature and good food. There is a very good choice of real ales served on handpump, with Charles Wells Eagle, Bass Charrington I.P.A., Whitbreads Flowers and Wethereds being available.

The Cannon, New Street, St. Neots a Charles Wells house has just completed its interior refurbishments. New toilets have been installed, with both the two bars having been decorated. The previously dull lounge is now a pleasant drinking area, with the real ales being brought through from the public bar handpumps.

Chris and Pat Williams have just taken over the Windmill at Somersham, a Greene King house. It is their first pub, with the couple originating from Harpenden.

National News

Watneys have decided to withdraw Bullards Mild, one of the real ales from the Norwich Brewery which closed in April. The decision is blamed on falling demand over the last six months, it being only 0.3 per cent of total sales. However, CAMRA sees the axing of the beer being put down directly to the fact that the brewery closure meant the beer had obviously to be brewed outside East Anglia and was a victim of rationalisation. The worry is that other local real ales will be lost and that cask bitters supplied to all the various regions will be 'rationalised'. Bullards name will survive with Bullards Old which has been revived and could apparently have sold twice the amount produced this Christmas and should be more readily available next.

Everards of Leicester have come under criticism regarding their new Everards Bitter (O.G. 1035) which is brewed for them by Whitbread. The new beer which replaced Beacon (O.G. 1033) has been a complete failure according to a CAMRA survey of Everards landlords. With Everards having now officially opened their new plant in Leicester, news comes in of a scheme to save their old brewery in Burton-on-Trent. It is planned to turn the Victorian brewhouse into a national working museum. East Staffordshire District Council have launched an appeal for £½ million to buy, repair and develop the Tiger Brewery built in 1884. The cornerstone of the design is a five year contract from Everards to brew Tiger (O.G. 1041) and Old Original (O.G. 1050). With Tiger being generally available in the Free Trade in our area, this is good news for the local drinker. As well as opening the way for the Everards Bitter to be brewed at Burton it could see the advent of a new strong ale or ordinary bitter to appear in the future, possibly aimed at the Free Trade.

Just down the road in Burton-on-Trent, we hear that the historic Bass No 2 brewery is to be demolished. Permission was given to demolish this statutory listed grade II building provided that the entrance gates and piers are retained in what will now be a car park. Also one set of the Burton Unions is to be transferred to the Bass Museum.

Mansfield Brewery have agreed terms to buy North Country Breweries of Hull for £42million. The deal is pending on Office of Fair Trading approval, which if given would probably result in the closure of the brewery in Hull. Nothing has yet been said about the future of the tied estate of 200 pubs, or the beers that will go on sale.

Budget Hits

Drinkers Again

The recent budget saw a tax increase of 1½ pence per pint on average, bringing tax on a pint to about 28p per pint. 'This would seem unfair to more than 30 million beer drinkers in Britain who have had excessive tax increases in every budget since 1979' comments the Brewers Society Chairman Mr E. Boddington. He should have added that the brewers own price increases have often been equally unfair to drinkers.

Licensing

Laws

Further news on Flexible hours in pubs is that we hear the Brewers themselves are to step up their campaign for a relaxation of the licensing laws in England and Wales. With pub trade and beer sales being badly hit both by the recession and changes in drinking habits, largely associated with the growth of alternative entertainments, both in and outside the home. Brewers now feel that pubs need to be upgraded and that more flexible hours are essential if they are to attract new customers and win a bigger share of the growing eating-out market. May 21st saw the publication of a report on drinking habits and licensing laws in Scotland, where restrictions have been eased since 1976. The verdict there of police, publicans and public is favourable. Also a Government committee has been formed to investigate restrictions on the tourist industry - which includes pub hours. The committee will make its report by August. All this shows a growing awareness amongst those in the House for a need of more flexible hours - and the demand for them.

A report published by a firm of drinks analysts Buckmaster and Moore, has predicted that flexible pub opening hours could increase nationwide pub turnover by 12%. More liberal pub hours would enable pubs to compete on more equal terms with the clubs and off-licences, and that the brewing industry could benefit with extra profit of up to £300million, which in the current recession could obviously only be a good thing.

Major CAMRA Campaign Launched



Lion Ales

With Scottish and Newcastle Breweries tabling a £91million takeover bid for Matthew Brown of Blackburn, a major CAMRA campaign has been launched to KEEP MATTHEW BROWN INDEPENDENT. The main worry is the future of the seven breweries Scottish and Newcastle would control if they were to succeed. Scottish and Newcastle themselves currently have plants at Edinburgh, Newcastle and Manchester, whilst Matthew Brown have Blackburn, Workington and the two Theakston breweries at Masham and Carlisle, which they themselves gained last year. It would seem certain that Scottish and Newcastle would close some of these if successful in their bid, which would add 550 Matthew Brown tied houses to the existing 1500 owned by Scottish and Newcastle. The takeover bid, which has now been referred to the Monopolies Commission, has been rejected by Matthew Brown themselves. However, the decision would rest with their 4,000 shareholders if the investigation approves the bid. CAMRA has sent a personal appeal to all shareholders requesting them not to sell. Also posters and petitions have been sent to each of Browns tied houses, plus a range of bages and leaflets have been produced. It is feared that victory for Scottish and Newcastle would mean the go-ahead for a new round of 1960's style of Big Six takeovers. This meant the closure of scores of local brewers and the loss of hundreds of beers, which in turn led to the intense local monopolies we still endure today, such as Watneys in East Anglia. We simply cannot and must not have a further reduction in choice. The battle for Matthew Brown will heighten with a CAMRA protest march and rally on Saturday

June 22 in Edinburgh. Matthew Brown have declared that they will fight tooth and nail and a Matthew Brown Preservation Society has been formed. 'Keep Matthew Brown Independent' banners have been hung outside many of their tied estate houses and 'Not For Sale' boards adorn their drays. Browns also feel that they will go from strength to strength as an independent, while Scottish and Newcastle are structurally weak and have an

unsound strategy. In fact the Lion brewers have just announced a 14 per cent rise in pre-tax profits for the first half of the 1984-5 year. CAMRA in Hull are also running campaign against the Mansfield Brewery takeover of their local brewery-North Country, where they fear for their local ales, although neither of the two breweries has a great reputation for cask beers. Yet more news of a takeover bid comes with the offer by Boddingtons of Manchester for Higsons of Liverpool.



THEAKSTON

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ALES

150 years of tradition

KEG BUSTER

BY BILL TIDY

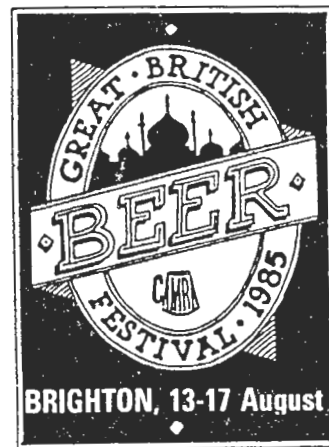


James Paine

Our local brewery James Paine have moved into the wholesaling business with the purchase of London beer wholesalers Robert Porters for a reported £500,000 from Gibbs Mew of Salisbury. The previous owners have long been dissatisfied with Porter's performance, as the company had continuously lost money. Paines feel that they are not taking a risk with their new acquisition, as they believe Porters have turned the corner under its new management. Porters have been sole export bottlers for Paines since 1884 and will also continue to be sole agent for Bulldog bottled Guinness in the south-east. Although Paines beers will continue to be handled by Manifold in London to continue the existing distribution agreement, the purchase can only assist the sales of the St. Neots brewed products in the highly competitive Free Trade in the London area, with all the long time contacts Porters have made.

At the same time Paines have confirmed that they are negotiating to sell off yet another of their tied estate. This time the Queen Victoria in Cambridge Street St. Neots is to go. It is understood that it will continue to sell Paines beers and will be developed in to a wine-bar style establishment. Paines have denied rumours that another of their pubs The Bell at Sawtry is to be sold. Indeed the end of May saw a change of management with Cyril Garbutt leaving.

Paines have gained an additional local outlet, with the opening of the new pub in the new shopping precinct on the old Cross Keys site in St. Neots High Street. The lease here is being taken on by Mrs Margaret Corke. The new pub is certainly smaller than the old pub and is built in pseudo wine bar style and although being quite pleasant with its outdoor patio drinking area, has no real ale available. Paines did tell us however that they would be prepared to supply this on probable gravity dispense if the landlady requested.



INFORMATION - CAN YOU HELP?

The editor sends out a plea for information. The St. Neots CAMRA area stretches over an area boundary that is approximately - Ramsey in the North - Bassingbourn in the South - Longstowe in the East - Old Weston in the West. So landlords and customers if you have any real ale related news then contact the editor who will be delighted to hear from you.

Future Meetings

Wednesday 12th June - Crawl of St Neots starting Kings Head, South Street - 8.00p.m.

Wednesday 26th June - Golden Knight, Sapley Square, Huntingdon - 8.00p.m.

Wednesday 10th July - Half Moon, Kimbolton - 8.00p.m.

Wednesday 24th July - 8.00 - 9.30p.m. - Fox, Catworth. 9.30p.m. onwards - Mermaid, Ellington.



Keep
Matthew Brown
Independent

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