

OPENING TIMES

ST. NEOTS & DISTRICT



BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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Inside this newsletter you will find a special centre spread article on the takeover and closure of our local James Paine Brewery, illustrated with views of the brewery. These could become a thing of the past if plans for development of the site are given the go ahead. Many thanks to local branch chairman Geoff Parsons for the photography.



James Paine Brewery Facade

For the Best Disco Sounds
ORDALE ROADSHOW
28 London Road, Sandy.
Tel: 0767 80797
0480 219991

MORE ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP...HELP US, PLEASE

Your local CAMRA branch is still in need of more members to get involved with its activities. Listed on the back page are the branch meetings for the near future ... try and make it. If you can't but would still like to help, then the editor would like to hear from anybody who can supply him with any up to date news on what's happening in our local pubs - Landlord changes, new beers etc.

TOLLY TAKE OVER JAMES PAINE



As has been widely reported in the local press, Tolly Cobbold of Ipswich have taken a majority shareholding in our local James Paine Brewery. The news came as no surprise to the local CAMRA Branch, having been prophesied in previous newsletters. Brewing has now ceased at St. Neots - with unconfirmed rumours flying about for months. The James Paine range of draught beers - Mild, XXX Bitter and EG are now being brewed at Ipswich. We are told that the beers are being 'matched' (though flavours inevitably change with the brewing location) but with modifications on existing brews rather than original recipes.

It is a sad day for St. Neots that we no longer have our own brewery in the town but the complete lack of public re-action to the closure speaks for itself on the inconsistent beer quality over the last few years. It remains to be seen whether Tolly need the three James Paine beers in their portfolio when they have four cask beers of their own to market, five if Old Strong (their winter warmer) makes a re-appearance. So with the remaining six pubs staying under the James Paine banner, selling beers under the two brewery names, then local drinkers can expect an upsurge in the consistency of quality.

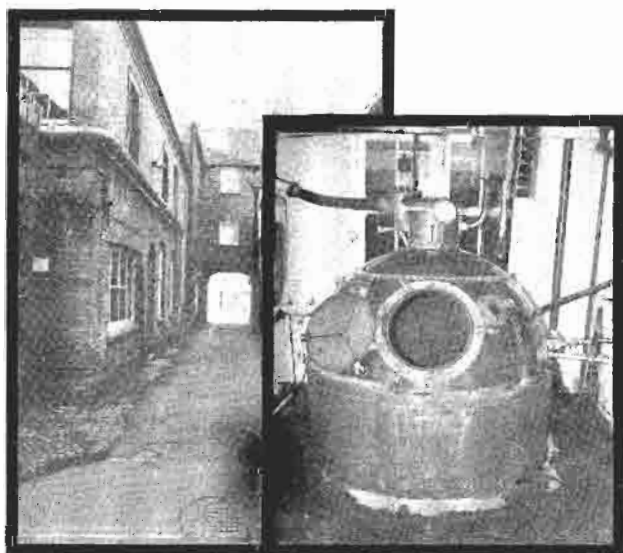
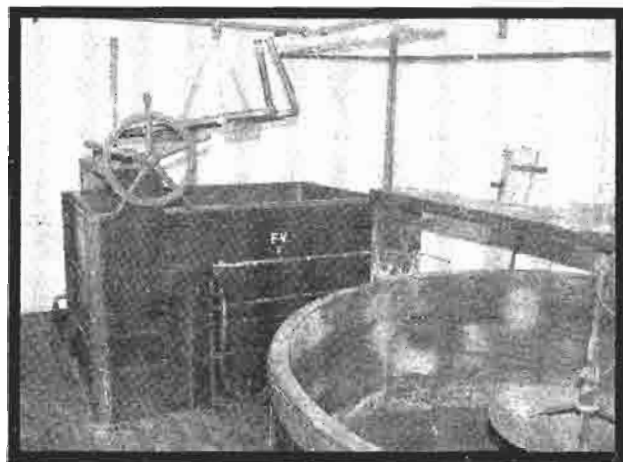


The takeover news came as inevitable to the local CAMRA branch members, who had expressed exactly these fears to brewery representatives over the years and had them vehemently denied. James Paine had been selling off their pubs for several years since the consortium had taken the brewery over and were privately accused of asset stripping by the local CAMRA branch. The tied estate now numbers but six pubs - when it was once over 20, the income received not appearing to be spent on major refurbishment of the brewery site - but enough to maintain it until selling date. The tied arrangement in pubs sold as 'freehouses' are now expiring and therefore local outlets receding. A reciprocal arrangement with Tolly was undertaken with Tolly beers appearing in our local James Paine houses and Paines beers appearing in Tolly pubs in Cambridge and elsewhere. CAMRA has previously expressed fears in newsletters and to the Brewery that the pubs were being hived off to be followed by the brewery itself,



which was of course denied.

The next question is what is going to happen to the site? Plans have been submitted for the redevelopment as shops and flats. This causes grave concern as the facade is a Grade II listed building, the main interior brewhouse walls are also listed and the building as a whole is a fine example of a Victorian Tower Brewery and should be preserved at all costs. Bearing in mind the Brewery's 150 year association with the town surely the developers can come up with a scheme that will keep the external fabric of the building intact. The site only has its high commercial property value if planning permission is granted. Therefore, perhaps the site could be utilised as a tourist attraction as a brewery museum/town museum for which there is a local need. Also a pub could be incorporated - not we hasten to add on the lines of the Cross Keys development which did nothing to retain its previous character. Another alternative would be to sell the site as a brewery to a small brewery, but that of course would never happen in these days of fierce competition.



What's happening at Watneys?

The recent take-over of Rutland Brewers Ruddles by Grand Metropolitan parent company of Watneys has led to their revered 'County' becoming much more widely available in the St. Neots CAMRA branch area, through Manns and Chef and Brewer houses. Both The Market Inn and The Falcon in Huntingdon, The Harrier in Brampton and The Cock at Hemingford now take the beer. Also, freehouses seem to be stocking County more widely now, recent sightings including The Ferryboat, Holywell and The Jolly Abbot, Abbotsley. This is all to the good for the confirmed County fan, but, nationally (almost national in England at least) the now wide availability of County seems to be pushing other Watney Group real ales off the bar, just in fact as CAMRA said it would if Watneys and Ruddles come under the same ownership. Locally names lost over the small number of years since Watneys re-introduced real ale have included Stag, Manns IPA, Manns Traditional Bitter (no outlets known by this author) and the excellent Ushers Founders (itself and its brewery, Ushers, now under threat from Watneys rationalisation) Indeed it would seem that, in the provinces at least, Grand Metropolitan's brewing arm is intent on having just two real ales, County and Websters Yorkshire Bitter (the latter sold in keg form in many outlets), so local fans of Wilsons** look out! County fans may ponder all this as they sip their pints and beer drinkers generally reflect as yet another CAMRA prediction comes true.

Paul Hackett

STOP PRESS

Since this article was formulated we hear that £5 million has been invested on expanding Ruddles, Oakham brewery, with another £1 million earmarked for advertising their beers. Apart from the pre-mentioned County, Ruddles Best Bitter (O.G.1037) is to be made available in Watney Mann and Truman houses. This will replace the less popular Wilsons Original** which now looks to have a limited future

FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 28th October

St. Neots Crawl Starting at Old Falcon Market Square 8.15pm and re-assembling at The Cannon, New Street 9.45pm.

Wednesday 11th November

Houghton and Wyton
Three Horseshoes 8.15pm then
Three Jolly Butchers 9.45pm onwards.

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LES LAWRENCE

Many branch members, past and present, will be saddened to hear of the death of Les Lawrence, formerly landlord of The Lord John Russell in St. Neots. Les had kept the The Lord John for many years, and prior to that The Fleur-De-Lys in St. Albans. Under his tenancy The Lord John was a highly regarded pub, often featuring in the national Good Beer Guide. Les was also very helpful in obtaining licences for the branch during the days of the Riverside festival. Our sincere condolences go to his wife Nan, and family.