

# OPENING TIMES

ST. NEOTS & DISTRICT



BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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## LOCAL NEWS

**The Crown, Eaton Socon** a Good Beer Guide Listed pub has undergone interior refurbishment. An extension to the pub has been built to enlarge the restaurant area and at the same time giving more bar space and a larger drinking area. There is also the possibility of an extra hand pump, not to add to the pubs already impressive range of beers - Tetleys, always being on, plus at least five guest beers in the daily changing range - but to make the serving of the beers more efficient.

**The Cambridgeshire Hunter, Eynesbury, St. Neots** a Charles Wells house has now installed handpumps, with Eagle and Bombardier available. This follows the pub being turned over to a managed house following the retirement of a previous long serving tenant.

The conversion to real ale means that all the Charles Wells pubs in St. Neots are now selling Real Ale.

The others being:  
**The Bell, Eaton Socon.**

**The Wheatsheaf, Eaton Socon.**

**The Angel, Cambridge Street, St. Neots.**

**The Woolpack, Church Street, St. Neots.**

**The Globe, Huntingdon Street, St. Neots.**

**The Cannon, New Street, St. Neots.**

**The Golden Ball, Market Square, St. Neots.**

**The Old Falcon, Market Square, St. Neots.**

**The White Horse at Kimbolton** a former Whitbread house is now a Free House, selling predominantly Greene King beers. The handpumped beers available being Greene King IPA and Abbot.

New landlords at **the Spread Eagle at Croxton** are Will and Lesley Hughes.

**The John Russell** in Russell Street a former Paines pub now owned by Brent Walker is up for sale. There is some conjecture here that Greene King may be interested in buying this pub, and in turn close down the Blue Ball, which is only 100 yards up the road. The

Blue Ball (a keg only pub) is in need of some refurbishment, whereas the Lord John has been gutted and redecorated in its time as a Paines pub in the not too distant past.

We shall see!

Two St. Neots pubs are currently closed, one being **The Cockney Pride** Free House on Longsands Estate. Its long term future as a pub must be uncertain as we understand only a fairly short lease is available on the site.

The other closed establishment is of course **The Queen Victoria** in Cambridge Street, the former Tolly pub again now owned by Brent Walker. This has been closed for some time since the last landlord departed and its future looks uncertain.

**The Waggon and Horses, Eaton Socon** is now selling the 'new' Tolly Original and bitter being brewed at the reborn Ipswich brewery.

**The Woolpack, Church Street, St. Neots** a Charles Wells pub has undergone interior refurbishment and

extensions. This gives a bigger games room at the rear of the pub, this in itself making the drinking area larger and more comfortable.

Also for cheap lunchtime snacks this is the pub to be in.

Tony and Joyce Lusby have taken over over **The Royal Oak at Hail Weston**. The couple, from Letchworth are running their first pub, after 'many years trading at the other side of the bar' according to Tony. The pub is now open all day and every day.

**The Nelson's Head, St. Ives** has now been re-opened after interior refurbishment had meant temporary closure. We are glad to report that 'The Steps' as it is known locally, now has real ales to complement its new decor. Licencees Jack and Pam Lee are now pulling pints of Abbot and IPA by handpump.

Charles Wells house. **The Crown and Cushion, Great Gransden** has added Mansfield mild to its range of real ales.

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# WHITBREAD FACE BOYCOTT AFTER BREWERY CLOSURE

**Ten thousand people on Merseyside have pledged to boycott Whitbread beers now that their local brewery Higsons is closed.**

Whitbread closed Higsons, Liverpool brewery and transferred the brewing to Sheffield.

At the same time of course Whitbread closed Fremfils in Faversham and transferred the brewing of that product to its Cheltenham site.

This meant in both cases that the beers bear no resemblance to the original brews.

These closures lead of course to the much publicised CAMRA ban on Whitbread beers and products, including the renowned Boddingtons pubs would start if they refuse to stock independent brewers beers.

Although you may think it not a difficult job to stop drinking Whitbread's dubious beers, for some people on Merseyside,

particularly in the Wirral, there is very little alternative to Whitbread, apart from Greenhalls (see article).

In an unparalleled fit of generosity, Whitbread announced that they would consider selling the Higsons brewery site, but with no question of selling the Higsons brand name.

This in turn led to GB Breweries - a company linked to Hull-based Hughes Food, purchasing it for a sum thought to be in the region of £2 million.

GB Breweries first said that they would produce only canned beer and lager, but consultant John Harrison now says that draught beer production could resume once the ancient racking equipment was reconditioned.

GB hope that GB will stand for Good Beer back in

## Greenhalls to close breweries

After months of speculation Greenhall Whitley have announced that they are to dispose of their two breweries - Greenhalls in Warrington and Shipstones in Nottingham. They propose to leave brewing to concentrate on running their pubs. This would obviously put the futures of both breweries in doubt, especially Shipstones.

Certainly, as is usually the case, beer brands would be lost or brewed elsewhere, losing their identity and flavour. After closing Wem Brewery - Salop, Davenport's - Birmingham Brewery and Simpkins - Black Country, Greenhalls rationalisation programme is sounding the death knell for many fine ales.

Labatts are an obvious buyer for at least one of the breweries, but it has been suggested that Wolverhampton & Dudley might want Shipstones for its capacity. If they did buy, would the full portfolio of ales continue, given Banks's stated aim of fewer, stronger brands?

Liverpool.

However, with a general dearth of Free Trade outlets on Merseyside combined with few licencees wishing to take advantage of post MMC freedom, the prospect of heavy local sales seem remote.

The new 'Higsons' beers from Sheffield have come in for heavy criticism with both bitter and mild being described as bland and boring. The bitter is a particular sad loss as it was one of the 50 CAMRA Beers Of The Year for 1990. It is now a typical Whitbread Sheffield brew, with an unpleasant astringency and there is no follow-up taste and negligible aftertaste. Indeed local campaigners claim that there is a 50% drop in sales since the beer was brewed at Sheffield.

Higsons produced quality real ales among the

most distinctive in Britain. These have been enjoyed on Merseyside for generations and that there aren't enough CAMRA members on Merseyside to alone account for the drop in sales. Local drinkers are turning against the new beer - in force.

As for the Faversham closure, it would have seemed that with the Channel Tunnel just around the corner, and the growing popularity of British Beers in Europe, a brewery based in Kent within striking distance of the continent would have been ideally placed to exploit this market.

Not Whitbread though, the 200 year old brewery closed with a loss of 162 jobs.

Perhaps the anti-Whitbread pledge will indicate to them that they have finally gone too far.

## ST. NEOTS PUB GETS 10 YEAR CERTIFICATE

The Wheatsheaf, St. Neots have won the Greene King Quiz league for 1989/90 at the Coin Exchange, Bury St. Edmunds. Local branch chairman Steve Leader was part of the successful four man team.

The Wheatsheaf has been a Good Beer Guide entry for the period 1989-1990 and was presented with a ten year certificate by the local CAMRA branch.

Pictured are mine hosts Ann and Tony Tuck together with local CAMRA branch member Geoff Parsons.



The present Wheatsheaf was built about 1905 to replace an old low-roomed house of the early 16th century. The earliest reference is in 1738 and in 1788 Samuel Warwick was landlord.

# MONOPOLIES AND MERGERS COMMISSION REPORT UPDATE

Since the report on the supply of beer became law in 1989, the effect has been that the Big Six National Brewers - Bass, Allied, Watney Truman, Courage, Whitbread and Scottish and Newcastle are falling into three distinct categories regarding their policies.

1) **Brewers** - Companies who sell all their pubs to concentrate on brewing alone.

2) **Retailers** - Companies who sell all their breweries and run large pub chains and sell beer.

3) **Companies** - who wish to carry on as both brewers and retailers either with less than 2,000 pubs or with more (in which case the release of tie and 'guest' beer clauses will apply). This newsletter attempts to inform you of

some of the changes happening locally and nationally which are affecting the changing range of beers available in your local.

**Courage and Watney Truman** have both clearly shown their intentions through the pubs for breweries swap deal which has now been given the Government go-ahead. Courage will receive the Grand Met breweries - Watney, Truman, Websters, Wilsons, Ruddles and Ushers. In return Grand Met will have a 50 per cent stake in a pub owning company called **Inntrepreneur Estates (IEL)**. Courage (Elders) will control the other 50 per cent. Under the deal Courage will supply beer to both Grand Met retail outlets and to Inntrepreneur for a period of seven years. Breweries and pubs are certain to close as a result of the deal.

The immediate future of **Ushers of Trowbridge** is in doubt as it will be put up for sale.

The long term viability of **Websters of Halifax** will be scrutinised as it would be unlikely that Elders with John Smiths Brewery could need two predominantly ale breweries in Yorkshire. Similarly, although the brand image of **Ruddles** may be strong, it would be decided to switch production from Oakham Brewery to Courage or John Smiths.

The two groups would own 6,950 outlets through IEL. Grand Met retailing would retain 1,700 managed pubs. Therefore, both companies would have to dispense of 1,500 pubs and IEL would have to run 1,600 pubs free of tie under the new regulations for national brewers.

Also, the new group cannot by law own more than 25% of the pubs in any petty sessional division. So it is thought about 1,700 outlets nationwide would have to be sold or change hands.

Another aspect is that the large pub-owning 'free chain' created would wield very strong bulk buying power when the seven year agreement runs out. However, this would almost certainly be from the cheapest source i.e. **A NATIONAL BREWER** therefore, most 'free houses' within the chain will be offering the same breweries ales.

**Scottish and Newcastle** have of course sold off enough pubs to fall below the 2,000 limit, it being a travesty of justice that they are not regarded as a national brewer even though they probably tie more 'free houses' with loans than are in their tied estate. They indeed blame the projected closure of Matthew Brown's Blackburn brewery, on the MMC report. **CAMRA** however sees it as an act of vandalism reneging on promises made in 1985 to keep the brewery open - how often has that happened?

**Allied/Bass/Whitbread** are all likely to remain as brewers/retailers.

Remember that while a lot of the prementioned appears to paint a gloomy picture, **CAMRA** will be working hard to persuade the government to tighten up its legislation and nationally fight against closures and rationalisation programmes. As a consumer you can help by choosing a beer from the independents.

If you consume a pint of big six ale then ask yourself if you wish to help companies like Whitbread destroy what's left of Britain's great brewing traditions and heritage.

## GUEST BEERS

As we now know from May of last year, tenants of a brewery owning more than 2,000 pubs had the right to buy in one real ale of their choice - outside their tie, to supplement their standard range.

Locally, **Charles Wells** have conceived 'The Great British Beer Club' with a view to promoting real ales from half a dozen leading regional independents. The club is sponsored by Brewers who will each stock and deliver real ales from the portfolio to national brewery tenants and free houses within their own trading area. Current beers in the portfolio include Charles Wells Eagle and Bombardier, Mansfield Riding Bitter, Brakspear Special, Wadworth 6X, Fullers ESB and Arkells BBB.

Wells and other sponsors hope landlords will be attracted to join in the club by the advantage of ordering guest beers from just one source. Apart from offers - such as point of sale, promotion, brewery products, cellarman training and free loan of a beer engine - prizes in a competition planned for a successful sales will include Life Membership of CAMRA.

Wells are expanding their cool store facilities to keep the guest beer stock in first class condition. They also intend to widen their net for potential Club members outside their traditional trading area.

All this would seem as a positive step towards

improving customer choice and making independent brewers' beers available in the national brewery chains.

Elsewhere **Greene King** have announced that they will focus their sales solely on the nationals.

For the small and micro breweries the best method would seem to form co-operatives to sell guest beers to tied pubs in their areas. Members of the **Small Independent Brewers Association (SIBA)** should band together to have a pricing structure every bit as competitive as the nationals, with the added bonus of being brewers of better quality local ales.

The Giants of the Industry are seemingly out to strangle the May Day Beer revolution at birth. Allied, Bass, Courage and Whitbread have all produced lists of preferred guest beers that they are attempting to foist on their publicans.

In some cases the beers are produced by the giants themselves, not even by independents - Whitbread's 23-strong list includes just two genuine guest beers, from Marstons and Brakspears.

Both Bass and Courage have said that tenants who go to brewers not on their lists will be refused permission to put 'foreign' beers through existing dispense equipment. Also, tenants who have offered to buy their own beer engines have been told that they cannot put them on the bar.

This of course is entirely against the spirit of the legislation and is of doubtful legality anyway.

So we would ask you where possible to request and

drink the independent ales where you see them in one of the nationals pubs.

You will find it good value for money and invariably more palatable than the big six brews. If you find an independents beer available in a big six pub then choose it!

CAMRA has spent 15 years



campaigning for a guest beer and now we have it, so lets make sure there is a great demand!

Another way of helping, is next time you are in a National brewers pub and there is not a 'Guest' beer available or if there is, it happens to be another one of their beers not normally available in the area, then offer the landlord a few choices of your own as potential guest beers. After all the customer is always right.

### Your new rights as a publican.

Any publican unsure of his new rights regarding guest beers may be interested to know that CAMRA have produced a leaflet outlining these. Copies may be obtained from CAMRA HQ or by contacting the editor.

Tenants of breweries of less than 2,000 pubs, or tenants of a non-brewing company may not have had their tie arrangement changed. However, as their competitors can now stock a guest beer, it may be beneficial if they also do so.

Britain's  
Independent Brewers  
produce 450 real ales...



Which ones have  
you tried?

**BACK BRITAIN'S  
INDEPENDENT  
BREWERS**

# Greene King purchase 87 pubs from Allied

Greene King completed a £15.25 million deal to buy 87 pubs from Ind Coope who are part of the Allied Breweries group. Eighty-five of the pubs come from Friary Meux and Benskins, with just the two from Taylor Walker. The houses geographically widespread are in Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Oxfordshire. The nearest to our area probably being the Plough at Gt.Shelford.

The acquisition will give Greene King an estate of nearly 840 pubs which while giving them a much

better spread of pubs in the South-East, leaves them still well under the tied estate figure of 2,000 as specified in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the brewing industry.

The chairman of the Allied tenants organisation was quoted as saying "the 87 pubs sold to Greene King were the lucky ones, as they were the ones with a

certain future".

Ind Coope already stock Greene King IPA and under this deal, the area of availability will be expanded to cover countries South of the Thames. In reciprocation the 87 pubs will continue to sell some obscure lager brewed by Allied.



## TOLLY RE-BIRTH

Tolly Cobbold are brewing again, after a years closure by its owner Brent Walker. The brewery has been sold to the local management, who plan to produce 25,000 - 30,000 barrels of beer a year. The good news is that it will be in a cask

conditioned form. Part of the site will be turned into a brewery museum and work has now begun on getting the brewery back into working order. The buyout was helped by the support of the Tolly Cobbold Action group which was organised by local CAMRA members and raised 3,000 signatures condemning the brewery closure.

Also the Ipswich Council has placed a preservation order on the brewery, making it impossible to redevelop the site.

Under the terms of the deal between Tolly and Brent Walker, the Ipswich brewery will supply cask beer to the entire Brent Walker tied estate in East

Anglia and North East England. The East Anglian pubs will continue to be called Tolly Cobbold. Brent Walker will also keep the brand names, but the new company will have the option to buy them after three years. Brent Walker will control around 10% of Tolly Cobbold Brewery shares and will have a representative on the board.

As in the case of Higsons there has been strong consumer resistance to beers brewed elsewhere (in this case Hartlepool) and shipped in.

In return Tolly will take lager and bottled beers

and will use Paines of St.Neots to sell cask beers to the free trade. They will brew mild, bitter, Original bitter and Old Strong in winter, with the original Tolly recipes being used and the yeast strain being returned from Hartlepool.

Locally in Ipswich there is great enthusiasm for the restart, with Tolly Cobbold having great roots in the community. So it seems appropriate that they should concentrate on producing good tasty local ales. We applaud the new owners for their courage in putting their faith in a sound future for a real ale brewers in Ipswich.

More good news was that Tolly have appointed Chris Gregson (currently head at Jennings of Cumbria) as head brewer to re-launch their cask conditioned ales.

**Brent Walker closed Tolly "in order to cope with the changing market conditions in the 1990's".**

The emergence of concerns like Brent Walker, where the expanded Camerons Brewery has been submerged into a huge company with serious and diverse retailing ambitions, means a new era has begun in British Brewing.

Brent Walker argue that the closure of Tolly Cobbold and the increase of capacity in Hartlepool to half a million barrels a year, means greater choice for the consumer. This is the same mentality which describes Websters Yorkshire Bitter as a regional beer.

Of course national real ale brands are not a bad thing in principle, and may increase the availability of real ale, but in the end quality will suffer. Indeed, what sort of increase in choice is it that enables us to drink six national brands in even more pubs?