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OPENING TIMES

ST. NEOTS & DISTRICT



BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Issue No 72

BI-MONTHLY CIRCULATION 1,000 COPIES

Breweries unfair to tenants

A recent march by 3,000 pub tenants, when they lobbied the Tory Party conference in Blackpool, brought publicity to and highlighted the anger felt by members of the N.L.V.A.

Tenants feel that the Government has misinterpreted the MMC report on beer supply.

Long Lease Dilemma

Instead of breaking the power of the big brewers, the Government has given them a loophole to switch tenants to long leases to avoid giving them security under the Landlord and Tenant Act.

So the long lease was dreamt up by Grand Metropolitan, and taken up with enthusiasm by the rest of the national pub owners and brewers. In some cases, the leases include absurd barellage targets with heavy shortfall penalties.

Tenants Homeless

Tenants who refuse to accept

leases are given notice to quit and find themselves on the streets after years of loyal service, with no job and no home.

Road To Bankruptcy

Repairs to pubs, with costs running into thousands of pounds, presently the responsibility of the brewery, will become the problem of the new leaseholder. So it is not surprising that many existing tenants are refusing to sign new leases as they see them as 'the quick road to bankruptcy'.

Grim Outlook

The outlook is grim for tenants and consumers, with many pubs being turned over to management, we will see a new breed of publican created, who has no long-term interest in the pub trade, but who sees the lease as a quick route to a fast profit. Logic and experience suggest that on the contrary, leases in the hands of the inexperienced and short-sighted will lead to bankruptcies and wholesale closure of pubs.

Pub Deterioration

Also as we all know, it takes experience to know how to handle given situations that can arise in pubs, and the inexperienced manager will not be up to it. Certainly, some licensing benches have already

expressed concern about the quality of applicants coming up before them. A pub is as welcoming as its host, who use their own individual skills, enterprise and personality to make a pub what it is, good or bad. Can a short-term manager do that?

Beer Quality Will Suffer

We also know that it takes experience and tender loving care to serve a quality pint of real ale. Will the pub with a rapid turnover of managers be able to maintain that?

Beer Prices Will Rise

Where tenants do sign extortionate lease agreements, they will be forced to raise his prices - above any of the now regular brewery increases - even higher as the only way of meeting their increased costs. Indeed, on your pub travels, you may have seen a petition urging you to support the N.L.V.A. in its fight against the £2.00 pint. This is the prospect that awaits you, unless action is taken by the Government to force brewers and pub owning companies to face up to the economic realities of public house trading in 1991.

Tenants Fight Is Our Fight, Too

CAMRA and the general drinking public must fight

against 'the tidal wave of change, sweeping over the British pub'. The National breweries have often been wrong, muddle headed, perverse and greedy in their practices. Now they are adding cruelty and vindictiveness to this, by throwing good hardworking people out of their jobs and homes, if they refuse to sign unreasonable new leases.

We must now stand up and be counted, together with tenants in their hour of need. We must add our voice to theirs and march and lobby with them.

When I drink locally in St. Neots and surrounding area, publicans frequently tell me their tale of woe. So this is a local problem as well as a national one.

No Pubs, No Beer

For what is at stake now is the very future, the survival of the British pub. If pubs close or fall into the hands of people keen to make a swift buck, then everything CAMRA has fought for in the past 21 years will wither on the vine.

Without pubs there can be no good ale. Think on that and join the fight.

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CAMERONS SAVED?

A management buy-out bid of £15m in a rescue attempt to save the Brent Walker owned Camerons Lion brewery in Hartlepool looks like succeeding.

Brent Walker, has had to raise £100 million to stave off a massive cash crisis, which has seen George Walker forced to resign from the empire he has built up over the years. The Banks that bailed out Brent Walker have insisted that they sell off assets to cut debts.

Two years ago, Brent Walker closed its other Brewery, Tolly Cobbold of Ipswich. This of course was later allowed to be bought by senior management, and is now brewing again.

Management of Camerons have been granted permission to mount a bid for the brewery and 106 pubs.

However, this small tied estate would raise doubts about the long term viability of the management buy-out option. For the brewery can produce 300,000 barrels of beer a year and is unlikely to be viable with such a small tied estate.

It could only survive if it took on substantial brewing contracts from other companies, and was able to sell its own traditional bitter and Strongarm brands to both the free trade and as guest beers to national pubs.

PUBMASTER TO BE SET UP

Brent Walker Inns will herein be known as Pubmaster Ltd and will concentrate on pub retailing and betting shops. They hope to enlarge their existing estate from 1,119 to 2,000 pubs in the next two years.

The expansion will come by leasing blocks of pubs from national brewers, with Allied being the main source.

Tenants would be able to buy from a list of preferred beers made up of national and regional companies with which BW has supply deals. Prime candidates would be Courage, Whitbread, Bass and Greene King.

It remains to be seen whether Pubmaster will take beer from Hartlepool if the buy-out succeeds.

Currently, BW takes about 20,000 barrels a year from the Tolly brewery in Ipswich and there is no reason why they should not enter into a similar agreement to take Cameron's.

Brent Walker has been engaged in frantic talks with several brewers in an attempt to off-load Camerons.

Vaux are reportedly interested in purchasing Camerons, and if successful would close the 140 year old Lion Brewery in Hartlepool. With the Camerons beers being brewed at Sunderland. However local opposition to the closure is very strong in an area already badly hit by unemployment.

The Camerons management team would keep the brewery and 400 jobs. The brewery closure would mean the loss of one of the North-East's finest beers.

We can't say that the Camerons available in our area was always at its best. This was due to the lengthy and complicated distribution chain involved.

With Brent Walker being a southern based company, local management in Hartlepool felt that they were a pain in the backside to them. Beers were shipped from Hartlepool to Ipswich, then in local cases to James Paine in St. Neots before being despatched to the pubs.

This meant that beers were getting old even before landlords opened the casks. At its best Camerons is a good beer and well worth preserving.

The BW pubs in our area have a very uncertain immediate future, with some already up for sale. Those that remain under the Pubmaster banner have uncertainty regarding the ale they will be selling, with most at the moment selling the Tolly beers.

However, with BW's future on a knife edge at this present time anything could happen.

USHERS SAVED

We are pleased to hear that Ushers brewery has been saved from closure.

The brewery in Trowbridge, Wilts has been sold along with a substantial pub estate, following the Courage/Grand Met deal. The buyers for a sum of £68m, are a consortium led by Roger North, former managing director of Grand Met's brewing division, a figure of 433 pubs has been agreed, meaning they will be a significant regional brewer.

The consortium will concentrate on cask ale brewing to supply their tied estate and new brands will be introduced, with the old Founders premium ale being revived some time in the new year. This was previously available in our area in

Grand Met pubs but was phased out in 1987.

Courage will supply the new estate with a range of beers including lagers, as they are not produced at Trowbridge. In return the consortium will undertake some contract brewing for Courage enabling Ushers to make full use of its 400,000 barrels a year capacity. It has already been revealed that the Manns brands will be brewed at Ushers under licence.

The brewery being saved is good news, as it was feared it would be closed as surplus to Courage requirements. Following on to the Cains (Higsons) and Tolly rebirths, at least we have some good news.

HARTLEYS CLOSED

Hartleys Brewery in Ulverston, Cumbria is due to be closed, by its owners, Robinsons of Stockport. Production of mild and the three bitters will be switched to the Stockport brewery, but it is doubtful whether all four beers in the current range will survive.

The brewery, which was taken over by Robinsons in 1982, supplies cask ale to all its 58 pubs, and Robinsons say that "Hartleys products will continue to be supplied".

Ulverston Council is opposed to the closure of the brewery as it is in a conservation area. The council will attempt to have it "listed" by the DOE.

SPRINGFIELD STOPS BREWING

Bass have closed their Springfield Brewery in Wolverhampton, ending more than 100 years of brewing on the site.

The closure went ahead despite protest marches and a rally supported by local MPs and councillors, and the handing over of a 3,000-signature protest petition. Cost efficiency and economies of scale are the reasons given for the closure. But the closure of Springfield will save the giant little money.

With national brands like Draught Bass and Stones and more recently Worthington Bitter from Cardiff, receiving promotional spend, the future of Springfield was always looking insecure.

The cask version of Springfield Bitter, while it lasts, will be transferred

to the Highgate Brewery in Walsall. Charrington IPA, also brewed in Wolverhampton, has been switched to the Mitchells and Butlers plant in Birmingham. Certainly as years of experience have told drinkers, attempts to match brew elsewhere have mostly proved unsuccessful and this could prove the end of the famous Springfield Bitter. Charringtons IPA has already become a bland beer, being previously moved from its Mile End, London origins, so a move in its case might improve it.

REDRUTH DOOMED?

Devenish have fought off the Boddingtons takeover bid, after only 46% of shares were obtained.

Unfortunately, as soon as the bid had lapsed, Devenish shareholders voted to sign a deal with Whitbread, who will now brew the draught and Steam Beer range.

The Redruth brewery will be sold to a third party or closed.

HANSON'S TO CLOSE

Hanson's Brewery in Dudley will close early next year. Owners Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries are shifting production of Hanson's Mild to Banks's Wolverhampton Brewery. Reasons given are the usual "Rising costs" at Dudley combined with "more efficient plant" at Wolverhampton.

As usual it is planned to match brew, but as usual local drinkers will spot the difference and it is inevitable that Hanson's real ales will vanish completely within a few years.

W & D claim that Hanson's 150 pubs will retain their identity and not be re-badged in Banks's style. The safety of the brewery has been in doubt since the introduction of a new beer called Hanson's Black Country Bitter that was brewed in Wolverhampton. Soon after its introduction five years ago Hanson's Bitter was phased out leaving Hanson's with only its famous mild.

TETLEY IN DANISH MERGER

Allied-Lyons is to merge its brewing and wholesaling operations in a joint venture with Carlsberg. The new company will be called Carlsberg-Tetley.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PRINCE OF WALES, HILTON

No.2

In the second in our series of features, spotlighting one of the pubs in our branch area, we this time choose The Prince of Wales Free House at Hilton.

For those of you who don't know it, Hilton is situated on the B1040 St.Ives - Potton Road with the Prince of Wales being the only pub remaining in the village, whereas there used to be five, if you count the Old Woolpack.

Mine hosts at this very friendly Free House are Robin and Judith Doughty, who purchased the pub in July 1986.

Robin, originally from Leamington Spa, Warwickshire and formerly a "Sales and Marketing" person says he has been into real ale for the past 25 years, "hence the current waistline problems" - his words, not mine. Judith, hails from Pill, near Bristol, hence her affectionate (?) nickname, "The Pillock" - again, his words, not mine.

Further Extensions

As for the pub, the original building dates back to roughly 120 years ago, but since then has undergone four extensions to reach its present size. Indeed, further work is currently being carried out on another extension. This is

on the first floor of the pub, where four en suite letting bedrooms are being added.

Caters for most tastes

The pub is unusual for a Free House, in that it retains its public bar, alongside the comfortable main, lounge bar, therefore catering for most tastes.

The public bar has the usual attractions of pool table, darts - with both summer and winter teams, juke box, gaming machine, crib and dominoes. Also the pub is the H.Q. for the local football team.

The larger lounge has a log fire in winter months and very quiet background music.

The pub has no separate restaurant facility but still serves excellent food.

homemade pies, fish, basket meals and ploughmans, whilst not forgetting the notorious (pew) Chilli con Carne. Robin busies himself in the kitchen and can often be seen parading in his apron! In the evening the pub becomes very much the village local, with both regulars and because of its position a good passing trade of custom. Foodwise, the same menu is available, but with the addition of starters.

Patio Meals

At the rear of the pub can be found a patio area, with seating for 30. In the summer months, regular friday night barbecues are a feature, also being held on Bank Holidays and sunday lunchtime sessions.

Now, the most important part, the beers.

- they are Bass, Adnams Bitter, and Banks and Taylor Shefford Bitter, which though from a local brewer is not widely available in our branch area.

Regular Guest Beers

Also featured is a regular guest beer, which are usually on for two to three week sessions. Strangers to the pub will probably only notice the three handpumps in the lounge - the name of the guest beer is chalked up on the wall at the right of the bar, and is pulled from a handpump in the public bar - but it travels well enough!

Opening Times are:

Mon 6-11 (No food)
Tues-Fri 11-2.30 & 6-11
Sat 11-11
Sun 12-3 & 7-10.30
(No food in Evening)
Contact the pub on 0480 830257 for any further details.

All in all a smashing village pub, made so by its convivial host and good beer, which after all is what a pub's all about, and worth calling into if you're passing by. Tell the landlord where the recommendation came from!

You read in our last newsletter that our spotlight pub is chosen from our GBG entries, but if your pub's interesting enough we will consider it. It's no good landlords complaining they haven't been featured if they cannot spare the time to contact the editor.



The Prince is very much a pub that serves food, rather than another pub/restaurant. The lunchtime trade is biased towards food with the menu ranging from steaks and grills, to

Always in excellent condition - as befits the pub being featured in the last four CAMRA Good Beer Guides, including the 1992 edition (out now price £6.99, ask at the pub or contact the editor)

SESSION BITTER SALES ON THE INCREASE

A recent article in The Publican - The Business Newspaper for Publicans highlights the unexpected rise in popularity of session bitters (beers of up to 1040 OG - ABV 4%) as consumers demand cask conditioned ales.

It shows that no section of the brewing industry should be taken for granted with lager and then premium bitters receiving most of the promotional back-up.

The consumer led demand for cask conditioned real ale session bitters is the most unexpected of them all.

At CAMRA's recent AGM, Miles Templeman, Whitbread Managing Director said " Sales of his group's cask beers had grown by 40 per cent in the past 6 months".

Nearly all that growth would have been in the session bitter sector, with beers like Boddingtons, Flowers IPA and cask Trophy taking the honours.

Such is the speed of change that Templeman predicts that traditional beer sales will overtake keg beer by the mid-1990's.

All the major brewers report the same amazing turnaround: that keg beer sales are diminishing fast.

Real ale, under promoted and even neglected by some major brewers for years, is proving there is life after dead kegs.

Boddingtons, backed by advertising expenditure has given Whitbread a nationally known session bitter to rival their competitors.

Allied have Tetleys, sales of which are rising by 3% per year, and the keg version expected to all but disappear.

being made available and heavily advertised - and may have stolen the sales thunder accordingly.

As regards, the smaller regional brewers, they may not all profit from the boom. Only a handful of companies with brands that developed a certain mystique in the early eighties, are witnessing growth.

Adnams, from Suffolk are a case in point, reaping benefits from both the Free Trade and its 'guest beer' spot in many tied pubs.

Quality and reliability,

the wilderness. It is also more than doubling its total sponsorship and promotions budget. The move is a bullish one, given the unsettled state of the regional industry, with breweries closing, merging, or being acquired by national brewers.

Greene King Product manager Kevin Collins says " the campaign is aimed at 25 to 30-year olds who drink more than one type of beer. These are discerning people, weaned on lager, who are now drinking bitter as part of their repertoire". Lets hope he's right.

However, their justification comes with IPA sales up by 7 per cent, to become one of the leading session bitter brands in the South-east and still showing unstoppable growth.

Other regionals, like Batemans, Brakspear, Eldridge Pope and Youngs are all doing well in the session bitter sales. In the current recession this can only be a good sign, with real ale taking its fair share of a smaller market, away from keg beer and lager sales.

So let's have a session!

"CASK BEER SALES TO OVERTAKE KEG BY THE MID 1990's"

Bass, of course with Draught Bass as their premium beer, brand leader are starting to push Worthington Best Bitter (as reported in our last newsletter) to fill the void in their national portfolio. Stones Bitter, already more widely available in a keg form could turn out to be a better bet nationally.

Courage, with John Smiths have already trodden that path - with a cask version of a nationally known keg beer

now being the basis of their success after years of having the reputation for not travelling. The problem was solved by same day deliveries, in temperature controlled vehicles.

Locally, Greene King have invested heavily in quality control and are doubling its advertising spend on IPA to £1.1m - witness the latest round of TV advertising, can't say I like the ads, but it is good to see real ale promoted after all the time in

RAYMENTS - A SUCCESS

As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter in our article on session bitters, they are proving of increasing popularity with the drinking public and indeed Greene King say that their new brew, Rayment's Special Bitter (OG 1038-42) is increasingly being used as a session bitter.

The sweetness of Rayment's is of particular appeal to drinkers in the South-East of the country, one of Greene King's target areas for the new bitter.

Already more than 450

outlets sell Rayment's with some 50 per cent of outlets being in the free trade.

Apparently lager drinkers are turning towards the bitter, as they like the flavour as well as the alcoholic content. As reported elsewhere it certainly doesn't seem to be hitting the sales of Greene King's usual session bitter IPA, which is enjoying a sales boom.

It could also be that Abbot drinkers are drinking Rayment's at lunchtime, before turning to their regular tippie in the evening.

JOIN CAMRA NOW

Just fill in the form below and send, with a cheque for £10 (payable to CAMRA Ltd) to CAMRA, 34 Alma Road, St Albans, Herts. AL1 3BW.

APPLICATION FORM

NAME

ADDRESS

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..... POST CODE

I wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association. I enclose a cheque for £10 (£14 if overseas).

Signed Date