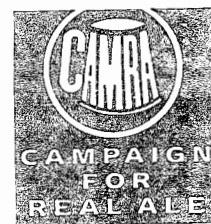


OPENING TIMES



BRANCH NEWSLETTER

BI-MONTHLY CIRCULATION 1,500 COPIES

Issue No 92 May/June 1997

**17th
'BOOZE ON
THE OUSE'
September
18th - 21st**

CAMRA SAVES GUEST BEER

We have now set the date for the 17th 'Booze on the Ouse' Beer Festival which as usual will be held at The Burgess Hall, St.Ivo Centre, St. Ives. The festival dates are Thursday 18th September to Sunday 21st September.

We are currently selecting our beers from the large range available and will give some details of these in our next newsletter.

The formula will be much the same as in previous years with over 60 real ales available and the popular, foreign beer stand returning. Live entertainment will be provided on Saturday night and Sunday lunchtime and children will be welcome until 8.00pm.

A major CAMRA campaign has headed off a threat to the British Guest Beer Law. This shows that CAMRA is a powerful, effective and credible champion of the British Beer Drinker.

Last August the European Commission had complained that the British Guest Beer Law discriminated against foreign imports and that it would take legal action. The Guest Beer has to be cask conditioned, such as a British real ale. The guest beer law introduced in 1989 as part of the UK Government's Beer Regulations. Tenants of brewing companies with more than 2,000 pubs were allowed to purchase one beer from an alternative source, but it had to be a cask-conditioned beer.

CAMRA was concerned that opening the Guest Beer to any type of beer would simply allow a few well known lagers to swamp the market. Hundreds of small brewers

would lose crucial business, and thousands of pubs would offer less choice. Worse still, a legal challenge might have ended the Guest Beer altogether. This was a serious threat to our smallest and most vulnerable brewers.

CAMRA launched a high profile campaign winning national and local TV, radio and newspaper coverage. British MP's and MEP's gave enormous support, as did the British Government and Opposition of the time. The Commission have, broadly speaking accepted Britain's case.

Of course CAMRA did not win on it's own, but the case showed the need for CAMRA, a powerful campaigning consumer body to protect traditional beer. Too many drinkers assume that their favourite beers and their favourite pubs are safe. Help protect your pleasure now and join CAMRA.



The Prince of Wales

'That nice pub at Hilton'

(01480) 830257



NETHERGATE IPA OAKHAM JHB GUEST BEERS GOOD FOOD ACCOMMODATION

MAKE YOURS MILD

by Ted Bruning

WHEN did you last order a pint of cask mild? When did you last even see a pint of cask mild for that matter? The truth is that mild-dark, sweet, sometimes malty, sometimes roasty, sometimes thin, sometimes watery - is pretty much a dead duck.

Nationally, it accounts for well under five per cent of the beer market. In its old heartlands - the Midlands, the North-West, East Anglia it is rapidly losing sales. Elsewhere, it is pretty well extinct. Never a month goes by but another once-famous mild is withdrawn for falling sales.

It's hardly surprising, really: just ask yourself what you think of (assuming you think of anything at all) when you consider dark mild. Weakness? Insipidity? Industrial Workers? Flat Caps? Whippets? Socialism? Its image belongs to the working classes of yesterday - two of the most deeply unfashionable concepts that can be imagined.

It's a shame, really, because mild has a fascinating story to tell, and taken on their own merits, many surviving brands of mild make very good drinking. At bottom, the term mild simply denotes an ale that's less hoppy than bitter. Often the loss of hop character is compensated for by the use of the darker, richer crystal and chocolate malts and even roasted barley, which accounts for the darkness of most milds.

But there are light milds as well - indeed, the biggest selling brand, Bank's Ale, is one such; McMullen's AK is another; and in Scotland and the West Country there are traditionally only light milds, known in Scotland as 60/- ales; in the West Country as Boy's Bitter, and in the

North-East as Scotch Ale.

Milds today tend to be a good bit weaker than bitters - around 3.0 - 3.2% abv, as opposed to 3.6% and upwards for bitter. This is usually said to be because the thirsty badly-paid farmhands and factory workers of old who mainly drank mild needed something cheap which they could down in heroic quantities without getting too drunk.

Actually, this view isn't necessarily true. Mike Powell-Evans, the head brewer at Adnams, reckons that mild evolved in the 1870's at about the same alcoholic strength as the more bitter Burton ales, but in response to a demand for something sweeter, the working classes of the time possessed of a very sweet tooth.

The brewers only started reducing the gravity in response to temperance pressures in the 1890's, and did so for good when malt rationing came in during World War I.

Cheap and nutritious, mild suited the economic climate of the 1920's and '30's very well; but as prosperity returned in the 1950's, so mild's star began to wane. It was still a big seller in the Midlands of the 1970's, where and when I started drinking, and my first foray into the wonderful world of beer was via mild - an initiation I shared with countless others.

In my little town you could buy milds from Marston's, Wem, Banks's, Hanson's, Ansell's, M & B, and Whitbread. Sometimes I had it mixed with barley wine, a drink my father used to call Old and Filthy - as indeed it was. But the problem with mild was not only one of image: that could always be corrected. It was a question of attitude. Brewers regarded it as a value-for-money commodity, which they had to water down and adulterate with cheap additives, especially caramel, to make a profit on it. Publicans regarded the mild cask as a suitable receptacle for slops of all

descriptions. Consumers eventually came to treat it with the same lack of respect; and so it slowly died out.

The tragedy is that many milds are so good. XXD for instance, is the best cask ale Greene King brews, but it is confined to a couple of hundred pubs around Bury St. Edmunds and sells only 2,000 barrels a year. If Greene King didn't happen to have a test-rig on which they can brew small quantities economically, they probably wouldn't brew XXD at all. A well-brewed mild can be full of rich, dense flavours: it can be sweet, it can be estery, it can be deliciously roasty, and it need not be weak and wishy-washy. At 3.5%, a good dark mild is a drink with guts as well as real flavour.

Is there a way back for mild, though? Well, probably not into the mainstream, no. But brewing short runs of high-quality milds is still a paying proposition for many of the smaller brewers; and occasionally putting a good mild on the guest hand-pump - or even having the odd festival of mild, with four or five brands from different parts of the country - has worked for many pubs.

Many brewers these days also produce strong milds; Mike Powell-Evans, for instance, describes both his brewery's Old Ale at 4.1% abv and even Tally Ho at 6.4% abv as strong milds. The Sarah Hughes Brewery of Sedgley, West Midlands, brews its Dark Ruby Mild to six per cent alcohol. Coach House of Warrington produces Gunpowder Mild at 3.9% abv; while Enville of Stourbridge has a low gravity Mild at 3.8% abv and a high gravity mild at 4.2% abv.

These stronger milds have a niche of their own; but the more workaday milds also have a place, especially now they are so rare. If you see one, try it; drink it critically, thoughtfully, ruminatively. I hope you won't be disappointed.

CAMRA - A NEED FOR CHANGE

At the recent CAMRA AGM, Chairman John Cryne spelt out a message of a change in the drinks market that CAMRA needs to respond to.

He said that "despite CAMRA's membership hitting an all time high of 50,000 not everything in the garden was rosy".

"There is a view that having done things a certain way for 25 years then it must be the right way. Wrong - if we fail to recognise the changing world beyond our cloisters then we are in danger of being left behind.

We cannot go around preaching a message that Smooth Flow (a method of dispense) is the devil incarnate and, by definition, that anyone who drinks it worships at Satan's altar.

There are people who will only drink

100 per cent real ale 100 per cent of the time but they are not a majority - there is a far higher number of drinkers for whom real ale is just one option among many and it a range that includes Smooth Flow" .

He went on to say that " attitudes such as keg is bad , cask is good had their place 25 years ago - but not now. We need something different, that reflects today's conditions. We find ourselves in the position that only a limited number of pubs meet all our criteria. When the Good Beer Guide started it was a struggle to find 1,000 or 2,000 actually selling real ale".

"By the year 2,000 we may struggle to find 2,000 that can jump all the hurdles* we have set".

"CAMRA was in danger of getting out of touch", he warned. "And make no mistake, once we have become out of touch then our relevance ceases to be"

"We have to understand the role various dispense mechanisms play in supporting the market we have

been partly instrumental in creating. And I include within this appraisal what some would portray as the devil's device itself, the aspirator or cask breather".

"We have crafted a market for guest beers. Like it or not, we have crafted a market for beer exhibition pubs, we have crafted a more sophisticated consumer who is not happy going into a pub and seeing just a mild and bitter".

"We have created the 'in-house' guest beers - the regional independents who produce seasonal ales which they need to sell in their own pubs. And in many cases all they are doing is spreading cask ale consumption over a wider portfolio - overall sales are not rising but to maintain choice, variety and the consumer's interest the number of beers available on the bar counter are".

John said CAMRA had survived for 26 years because it had the ability to adjust to changing climates in order to stay relevant to the consumer and he felt that we may now be on the threshold for further adaptation and there was a need for CAMRA not to be blinkered when it comes to considering whatever possibilities there might be.

*Certainly at local branch level there is much debate over CAMRA's national policies and at St. Neots Branch we would welcome comment from publicans and drinkers on the the contentious issues of the Cask Breather, Swan Necks, Sparkler and Smooth Flow. We would also welcome comment from CAMRA members who do not attend our socials and meetings on what changes they would like to see affecting how our Branch operates that would attract them to come along. Write to the editor , address on the back page.

BRANCH DIARY

All are welcome to attend our socials and meetings, which are held usually every other Tuesday at different pubs throughout our branch area.

Tuesday June 10th - Meeting - **Blue Bll, St.Neots** 8.30pm

Tuesday 24th June - Social - **Walkabout, Huntingdon** - Start **George** 8.30pm, then **Market Inn** 9.15pm and **Bridge Hotel** 10.00pm

Tuesday 1st July - Open Committee Meeting - **Nelson's Head, St.Ives.** 8.30pm

Tuesday 12th August - **Blue Ball, St.Neots** - Beer Festival Meeting

Tuesday 19th August - Trip to Peterborough Beer Festival

For further details contact:
Roy Endersby (Chairman) on 01480 473364

**GREENE KING -
The St. Neots
view**

A recent letter in What's Brewing (The CAMRA Newsletter) from The Chairman of Peterborough CAMRA Branch strongly criticised the quality of Greene King's Beers and reported that his branch had passed an AGM motion not to put any Greene King pubs in the Good Beer Guide. They queried how other East Anglian Branches found the beers so good that they included Greene King pubs in their entries.

Similarly North Bed CAMRA Branch don't want Charles Wells pubs included because of that brewery's policy of using the sparkler and cask breather on their beers in their tied houses.

We as a branch have always judged each pub on its own merits and will continue to do so, if we feel that a pub sells beer of excellent quality and is worthy of a GBG entry we have always put it in no matter whom the brewery is.

LOCAL NEWS

The Prince of Wales at Hilton is currently serving Elgoods Black Dog Mild and Highgate Dark to complement its regular Nethergate IPA and Oakham JHB.

The Three Horseshoes at Gravelly has added Fenland Best Bitter from the new Fenland Brewery at Chatteris to its range.

Charlie and Audrey Marigold have left The Millers Arms, Eaton Socon

to move on to pastures new at The Plough, High Street, Gt. Shelford . Incoming tenants in this Good Beer Guide listed pub are James Ashton and Eileen Reynolds.

The Eight Bells at Abbotsley has bid goodbye to Kim and Sandra Geer and said hello to Peter and Gill Gunn who were formerly at The Swan, East Dereham, Suffolk.

**LABOUR GOVERNMENT TO
GUARANTEE A FULL PINT?**

Now that the Labour Party has swept to power following the General Election we look to them to fulfil their pre-election pledge to eliminate short measure when served beer, by the mandatory introduction of lined, oversized glasses.

CAMRA believes the new Parliament should thoroughly review our licensing laws, rather than make minor modifications here and there. Even the police believe it is time for reform.

Planning law should be changed, to eliminate the dangerous loophole, by which many changes of use for pubs do not require planning permission and thereby help preserve our heritage.

JOIN CAMRA NOW

Just fill in the form below and send your remittance (Payable to CAMRA) to
The Membership Secretary, CAMRA,
230, Hatfield Road, St. Albans, Herts, AL1 4LW
Rates are Single £14, Joint £17 (at same address)
Student/OAP/Unemployed/Disabled £8
Joint OAP £11 (at same address)
For Life/Overseas rates please ask for details

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE

I/We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

I enclose a cheque for

Signed.....

Date.....