

Draught Copy



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Free Magazine

By Maidstone & Mid-Kent
CAMRA
incorporating Gravesend &
Darent Valley, Bexley &
West Kent Branches

Spring 2022

No. 200

Website: www.mmk.camra.org.uk

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/mmkcamra](https://twitter.com/mmkcamra)

200 and still going strong.

We are pleased to welcome you to the 200th edition of Draught Copy.

The newsletter began in August 1976, as a monthly publication, produced by the Maidstone and Mid Kent branch of CAMRA. It has since expanded to incorporate news from Gravesend & Darent Valley, Bexley & West Kent Branches and has, at times, covered Medway branch too.

Initially printed as either 2 or 4 sides of A4, it moved to an A5 booklet in 1990 (Edition 80) and increased, at its peak, to 52 pages with a current circulation of 3,500 copies.

Whilst the technological age has allowed us to take Draught Copy online, we have ensured that we focus on keeping it on the bar, in pubs and clubs. We have remained constant in our aims and objectives, the main one of which, is to champion the cause of the real ale drinker in Kent. We will continue to fight for good beer, good breweries and good pubs.

Here is to the next 200 issues. Cheers!

DRAUGHT COPY

Draught Copy is the magazine of the Maidstone and Mid-Kent branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, also incorporating news from Bexley, Gravesend & Darent Valley and West Kent branches of CAMRA. It is published quarterly, in March, June, September and December and has a circulation of 3,500 copies. Opinions expressed are those of the author of the article, and need not represent those of CAMRA or its officials.

If you find a pub selling short measure, allowing smoking in the premises, or other illegal things in pubs, please have a quiet word with the landlord in the first instance. However, if you need to complain about a licensed premises in your area, report the problem to Trading Standards by contacting Citizens Advice, who will pass the details to your local Trading Standards service: Call the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline on 03454 04 05 06 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm). We should demand the very highest standards of service in our pubs.

Advertising rates:: £85 / £50 / £30 for a full / half / quarter page respectively

Editor and Correspondence: *DraughtCopy.Editor@mmk.camra.org.uk*

Advertising: *DraughtCopy.Advertising@mmk.camra.org.uk*

The copy date for the next issue is 21st April 2022.

For further information about all pubs mentioned in this publication (or indeed anywhere in the UK), please refer to CAMRA's national pub database: *www.whatpub.com*

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Our social diary changes faster than we can print it, so to keep up-to-date we suggest you use the below QR codes to access the branch meetings on our websites.



Bexley



**Gravesend and
Darent Valley**



**Maidstone
and Mid-Kent**



West Kent

MUSKET
BREWERY



"There's more in the barrel"



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Musket Brewery is a family owned, Maidstone-based Micro Brewery located at Loddington Farm, Linton, brewing premium REAL ALE at realistic prices. The Musket brewers are **CAMRA** members, who provide these carefully brewed ales for your enjoyment.



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Forename(s)

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Date

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Campaign
for
Real Ale

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Bexley Beer Festival 2022

We are into planning for this festival, of course restrictions and alike may force us to cancel or limit numbers so please watch the Bexley Website for updates:

https://bexley.camra.org.uk/beer_festival.html

Of course, we will still need volunteers, again see website.

We stayed with the same logo as the cancelled 2020 beer festival, which was supporting the VE day 75th anniversary, partly because the glasses have already been printed, and we still wanted to remember the celebration.

See the advert opposite.

Andy Wheeler, Peter Trout (Beer Festival Organisers)



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CAMPAIGN
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FESTIVAL 2022

15th Bexley Beer Festival

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War Memorial Club House

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Thursday 5th May 2022 2pm - 11pm

Friday 6th May 2022 11am - 11pm

Saturday 7th May 2022 11am - 8pm

CAMRA members and under 26s (with proof of ID) FREE
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Updates available nearer the date on bexley.camra.org.uk



twitter.com/bexleycamra

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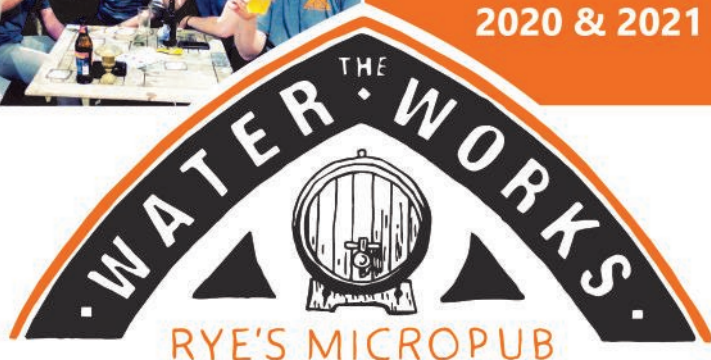


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2020 & 2021**



and we're in the
**Good Beer Guide
2020 & 2021**



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email: gdvcamra@yahoo.co.uk www.gdv.camra.org.uk

Ken Baines has provided an update on the pubs in Wrotham. The **Rose & Crown** has recommenced food sales on Friday evenings (fish) and Sunday lunchtimes (roasts, both meat and vegetarian). Bookings are essential for each day. The pub was completely redecorated inside and out towards the end of 2021 and hosts quiz nights on Thursdays. 'Beers on handpump are *Shepherd Neame Master Brew*, *Whitstable Bay Pale Ale* and *Spitfire* , alongside a *Shepherd Neame guest beer*. The **George and Dragon** had new licensees and a refurbishment in September 2019 and serves two real ales. It also does food. The **Bull** has also been redecorated recently and continues to serve its usual beers as well as offering food and beds.

Up the hill at Vigo the **Villager**, which was improved before the pandemic, was recently selling *St Austell Proper Job*, *Musket Muzzleloader* and *Cellar Head IPA*, with a *Tonbridge* beer due. At least one real ale from a brewery in Kent will be on sale.

Over at the **Plough** at Basted, landlord Ben has taken on an assistant so things can't be too bad there. The **Black Horse** at Borough Green often has two varying real ales on but no settled management at this time. The **George & Dragon** at Ightham now has full Shepherd Neame signage. *Master Brew* and *Whitstable Bay Pale Ale* are regular beers with an occasional extra and there is a heavy emphasis on food.

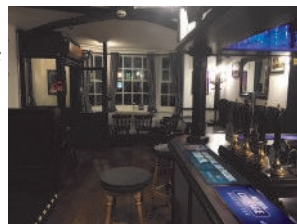


The **Rising Sun** at Twitton reopened in April this year under new management. Recently four real ales were on offer including *St Austell Tribute* and beers from *Larkins* and *Musket*. Food is now sold, including Thai meals on Thursdays.



Both the **Cotton Mill** at Swanley and the **Chequers** at Crockenhill had problems with Covid around Christmas, with the latter having to close for a time. Both have recovered now and stock interesting beers, with *Southwark Potters Fields Porter* noteworthy at the **Chequers**.

Dartford has a new micropub, the **Growler**. At the time of writing only key keg beers were sold but the intention is to add a cask beer or two in due course. Keith Rice reported that the **Wat Tyler** had been sympathetically renovated during lockdown and is now under new management. Beers on sale were *Fuller's London Pride*, *Wells Bombardier* and *Theakston Old Peculier*.





The sports ground at New Ash Green has a community-owned pub, the **Pavilion**. There are three bars set on two floors, along with an extensive outdoor drinking area that adjoins the sports field. Food is available except on Mondays and Tuesdays and *Sharp's Doom Bar* and *St Austell Tribute* were on sale recently. You have to know where to look but the **Black Lion** at Hartley is actually open though the bar is round the back and the front portion is not used. A recent report didn't mention real ale though. Currently there is none at the **Railway** at Longfield either as it is closed following a fire and in need of new management,

The **Sun** and the **Wheatsheaf** in Swanscombe were both closed last year, leaving only one survivor in a place which not too long ago had nine pubs. The **Sun** has since reopened but had no real ale when visited. On the other hand the **Rising Sun** had *Adnams Ghost Ship*, *Courage Directors* and *St Austell Tribute* and *Proper Job*. The landlord will be celebrating 35 years at the pub in August. In the same area another recent closure is the **Darnley Arms** in Gravesend.



The **Green Man** at Hodsoll Street is still burnt out and it seems the owners, Stonegate Inns, may decide to sell the site. A local group is interested in buying it with the intention of having it rebuilt. Not far away, the long-closed Ship at Green Street Green is now being advertised for sale.

As I write this little appears to have happened at the **Amazon & Tiger** in Harvel. However the campaign group set up to try to buy the pub and reopen is still active and have raised a number of issues with Gravesham Council. One would seem to be the legality of the continued occupation of the building and provision of accommodation without the operation of its main business, a public house, and without planning permission for a change of use. It seems that after over two months the council had failed to produce any sort of response to their letter and they are considering how to escalate the matter.

As the last issue was being prepared we heard that John Brooks had passed away on October 22 at the age of 87. He had been on the branch committee as far back as the seventies and was regularly to be found in the bar at Dartford Working Men's Club almost till the end.



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Contact: John Mills 01732 840603 or email pubs.officer@mmk.camra.org.uk

For more information on these pubs, see CAMRA's online pub database whatpub.com

Little Gem, Aylesford – Has been welcomed by the many visitors who have returned to this well-loved pub since its reopening. There are now much improved facilities but otherwise very much as people remember it. The *Goachers Fine Light Ale* is on handpump and various other Goachers beers are served by gravity dispense. Open daily from midday.

F: TheLittleGemAylesford



Queens Inn, Hawkhurst – As it is close to the bus stop this is a much appreciated break whilst waiting for the next bus. Continues to provide excellent beer, *Harveys Sussex Best* and often has guests from Long Man and Old Dairy. Food is available from midday.

thequeensinnhawkhurst.co.uk F: TheQueensInnHawkhurst

Wings, Headcorn – Handy when visiting the airfield or just in the area this outlet is currently closed for the winter but is expected to re-open around Easter with new owners.

Knoxbridge Inn, Knoxbridge – Unfortunately this excellent pub and restaurant has closed and its future is unknown at present.

Armoury, Linton – This brewery tap is closed Mon & Tue but now open on evenings with mobile catering offering Curry on Wed and Fajitas on Fridays. On other days the kitchen provides pizzas. At least three Musket beers are available from gravity dispense. The brewery is open Mon-Fri from 9 until 5.

musketbrewery.co.uk/ F: musketbrewery



Bar 6, Maidstone – Has closed and now taken over by the owners of Alim-Et, the well-known and much appreciated restaurant in Larkfield. This should prove an asset to the facilities in town.



Drakes, Maidstone – Now open from midday (3pm Mon) and have food available in evenings and also Fri & Sat lunchtimes. A large marquee at the rear is good for get-togethers. The bar has *Harveys Sussex Best*, *St Austell Proper Job* and *Tribute*. Music acts feature regularly Fri & Sat with Jam nights on Tuesdays. F: drakescorkandcask

Made Inn, Maidstone – Musicians are often booked to appear here and a quiz on Sundays. Beer is available on up to 22 of the 30 taps with cider on the remainder and one beer on a handpump. A delivery service is available in the Maidstone area.

madeinnco.co.uk/ F: tmimaidstone



Stilebridge, Marden – Interesting high quality food is available in this stylishly revitalised pub/restaurant run by people from The Poet in Matfield. Our reporters found the beer to be provided from Gun and Long Man breweries, both favourites with our reporters.

thestilebridge.com F: TheStileBridge



Queens Head, Sutton Valence – Has a well-fitted barn at the rear which is used for weddings. The kitchen is open from Wed-Sun. If the front steps look daunting there is a door at the side. It continues to provide good beer, namely *Young's London Original*, *Goacher's Fine Light Ale* and *Black Sheep Best Bitter*.

thequeenshead-pub.co.uk F: TheQueensHeadSV

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Beer Garden open all year round!

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DRAUGHT COPY THROUGH THE ISSUES.

Issue 10: March 1977: CAMRA National Executive pay a visit:

'Of course, there's no demand for mild' observed James Lynch as yet more pints of Dark were set up. It was a filthy Friday night, yet the Seven Grays was packed solid. James and his colleagues from CAMRA's National Executive were in Town for the weekend, and what better place to kick off than the only pub between Swanley and Snargate which serves Courage Dark Mild traditionally. It was in super nick. That's why we drank 30 gallons of it.

For Saturday night's coach trip we made the Smarden Bell the first port of call, and the first drop of Fremlin's for our visitors. The hour passed too quickly and grabbing bottles of Bob Lucks' cider for later appreciation, we piled back into the coach for the short journey to Lenham. We had a lot of trouble getting them out of the Dog & Bear. It's amazing how quickly people can become Shepherd Neame addicts.

We reached the Ringlestone Inn more or less on time - thanks mainly to the skill of the driver in getting the 45-seater down lanes a yard narrower than the coach - and washed down an excellent shepherd's pie with pints of Fremlins.

Twelve hours later we were all in West Malling - very much an impromptu arrangement but the Shep's addicts were well satisfied with the beer at the Joiners, while the rest of the posse moseyed down to the Bull. Every one of them missed the 1.56 from West Malling Station.

It'll be a long time before we have such an enjoyable weekend again. Our thanks to the pubs for laying on such good beer, to the members in Kent for turning out in force, to the N.E. for giving us a good excuse for organising it all.

Issue 20: January 1978: Shepherd Neame Stock Ale:

Stock Ale, Shepherd Neame's dark winter brew, suddenly appeared at several pubs in the MMK area just before Christmas. No advertising or publicity was needed, the

sight of a cask or polypin on the bar was enough to stir interest, and even after the novelty had worn off, the beer is selling well. Just ask Bill at the Joiner's or Jeff at the Royal Albion!

Issue 50: October 1982: Former Branch Chair takes on his own pub:

Dave Takes Over KENT ARMS

YET ANOTHER LOCAL CAMRA MEMBER has finished up behind bars! Not in the custodial sense of the word, but behind the bar of a pub.

Following in the footsteps of former branch chairman, Dave Rayner, committee member, DAVE FROST can now be found pulling the pints behind the counter of his own pub. After several years of running the "THREE BREWERS", a mock pub in the garden of his Weaving Street home, the scene of many a barbeque featuring the famous "NIGHT OWL" disco, Dave and his parents have taken over the running of a real pub.

The pub in question is the KENT ARMS, at Fowle Hall, Laddingford - near Yalding. At present the Kent Arms only serves the keg John Smiths, but by the time these pages are published Dave hopes to have SHEPHERD NEAME BITTER on offer, dispensed of course by hand pump, with the possibility of other real ales to follow.

We haven't been down there yet, but hear that it is a pleasant unspoilt country inn. We therefore look forward to having a social down there. In the meantime on behalf of the branch and the readers of DRAUGHT COPY we wish Dave and his family every success in their new venture.

Issue 100:
Spring 1995:
Wetherspoon
looks at
Maidstone:

WETHERSPOONS FOR MAIDSTONE?

Rapidly expanding free house chain J.D.Wetherspoon have applied for planning permission to turn the 19th century former Royal Insurance building at the top of Maidstone High Street into a pub. If permission is granted, as Maidstone council planners will be recommending to councillors, the pub could be open by the end of the year, involving a £1 million refit.

Whitbread, Shepherd Neame and Bass have indicated that they will oppose the license application, as will Maidstone Licensed Victuallers Association, as they are a trade protection body. Wetherspoons licenses are challenged by brewers as a matter of course all over the country, but Wetherspoons always seem to win in the end.

Instead of trying to stifle any competition, brewers would do well to examine why Wetherspoons pubs are so successful. Being open all day, having sizeable no-smoking areas, serving food all day, having no music or excessively noisy games machines, giving a fresh glass for every drink, polite and attentive service could all be reasons for this.

Whilst their beer range has been criticised by CAMRA for being boring, they do feature a weekly guest beer from a micro-brewery at £1.60 a pint, and have beer festivals at least twice a year. The last one featured 40 beers all at £1.40 a pint, and their every day price list starts at 99p a pint, although this sometimes reduces to 89p or even 79p!

Many town centre pubs have closed in recent years, to be turned into shops, or demolished for new developments, so we should welcome any reversal of this trend. Rather than emptying other pubs, it will attract people who would not normally go into a pub, because they are usually too smoky or noisy, or stop serving food at two o'clock on the dot.

Greene King is piloting a premium chilled cask beer called *St Edmunds*. The new cask brand has been created alongside a new beer engine which will allow customers to choose how their beer is poured when they order. The taps are at bar level to make more of a feature and give customers the choice of either having a pint with a tight creamy head, or a pint with a looser, fizzier head.



The new chilled beer, served between six and eight degrees, is being rolled out across 100 selected pubs in south east England over a three month trial period. *Greene King* managing director Justin Adams said the new product aimed to reinvigorate the declining cask ale market by creating an ale with a "fresh, crisp finish" and "provide a great consumer experience by giving more theatre. To date, cask beer drinkers in

the north of England prefer their beer one way while those in the south like it differently. We wanted people to have a choice while still being able to enjoy the fantastic flavour of a quality cask beer, wherever they are."

Issue 150:
Spring 2008:
Greene King
offers beer
how you want it:

Rifle Volunteers



Alex and Polly welcome customers old and new to the Rifle Volunteers.

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Desert Island Beers don't necessarily need to be your favourite beers of all time, but those which have some special significance to you.

Colin Mann (Spring 1999 – No. 115):

My selection, in some ways, charts my real ale heritage and travels and, has tried to whittle down hundreds of beers sampled over the years to a mere eight, some more established brews remain uppermost in the mind. As an A-level student, way back when, real ale couldn't be found in my local village, and it was only upon arrival in Leicester, and falling in with the 'right crowd' that I was truly able to appreciate the range and quality of beers that were worth campaigning for.

1) Hardy and Hansons: Kimberley Best Bitter (OG 1039, ABV 3.9%), A class above most of the other bitters available in the East Midlands during my students days. Worth the bus fare into Leicester city centre! Its bitter hoppiness suited my pallet and my student pocket.

2) Hop Back: Summer Lightning (OG 1049, ABV 5.0%). Deliciously refreshing, but deceptively strong. A trip to the Hop Back brewery in Downton confirmed an early liking for this deservedly popular beer. As it is available in bottle-conditioned form, perhaps I'll take a crate to my island!

3) Ind Coope: Burton Ale (OG 1047, ABV 4.8%). Back in the 1970's, the newly-converted national brewers had jumped on to the real ale bandwagon, and were falling over themselves to produce lucrative premium beers. Burton could have turned out to be a big marketing hype, but has proved to be a classic beer and very much a treat for me when budgets were limited.

4) Harvey's: Sussex Best Bitter (OG 1040, ABV 4.0%) &

5) Young's: Special Bitter (OG 1046, ABV 4.6%) I've grouped these two together, as I first supped them in the same lunchtime, back in 1975, my first Easter holidays back from college. Not readily available in the Midlands, I chanced upon a Kent free house serving both. The Harvey's still tastes as good as it did all those years ago, but I must admit that Young's 'Ordinary' Bitter is my more regular choice nowadays, having returned to form after a lack-lustre spell. Special earns its place because of its early influence on my drinking, especially when I started working in London.

6) Marston's: Pedigree (OG 1043, ABV 4.5%). Not long after my arrival in Leicester, I had the chance to go on a brewery trip to Marston's, which boosted my growing knowledge and appreciation of real ale. The Union brewing system was quite an eye-opener. Another pint that merited the trip into Leicester when a change from the freely-available Everard's Beacon or Tiger was called for.

7) Leatherbritches: Steamin' Billy Mild (ABV 3.8%). I agonised quite a lot over which mild to include. Banks' Hanson's Mild, Bateman's Dark Mild and Harvey's Sussex XX Mild all laid claim to inclusion, but a winter Maidstone branch trip to London pubs was rounded off in style with this mild, and it well warrants inclusion.

8) Shepherd Neame: Original Porter (OG 1052, ABV 5.2%). Shepherd Neame have come in for a lot of stick recently, with some beers criticised for lacking in character. The arrival of Porter each winter adds some welcome variety to the range and its malty character certainly distinguishes it from other beers.

Well that's my eight selections. Not too many rare gems among them, but representative of beers both generally available over the years, as well as the surprise additions. Close to making the trip were Ruddles County (the Holy Grail of real ale enthusiasts in the '70's and not too difficult to find in Leicestershire at the time, and increasingly available elsewhere in subsequent years), Cheriton Pots Ale, Cotleigh Tawny, Exmoor Gold, Woodforde's Wherry and the late Fremlin's Tusker, which was worth coming back to Kent for!

John Williams (Spring 1992 – No. 89):

This is not a list of my favourite beers, but, in the same vein as Desert Island Discs, each one has been chosen for its ability to stir memories:

1) Donnington SPA. In 1970 I was on a course at Evesham and I met a member of the S.P.B.W (The Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood). We hunted out, these beautiful Cotswold pubs selling this equally beautiful real beer.

2) Harveys Old Ale. Living in Bexhill, I went looking for local breweries. I found Harveys. I couldn't wait for winter to come, for this rich dark beer.

3) Young's Ordinary Bitter. Working in Shepherds Bush as CAMRA started, we discovered Young's. Lunchtimes / evenings saw the 'ordinary' slipping down, and in 1975 I completed the 'Young's 135' tour, drinking whenever 'a pint of ordinary'.

4) Fuller's ESB. What a delightful balance of hops, malt, sweetness, body, etc. I used to visit a local free house in Ninfield, Sussex. The guv'nor said "I would really like to get Fuller's ESB in, but we're outside the trading area". I said "no problem, I'll collect it – I only work a couple of miles from the brewery". 2 years and 3 cars later, I was still acting as a brewer's dray, but quality checking at 2am was worth it, though.

5) Grays Bitter: This Chelmsford Brewery closed in about 1974. I went with workmates on a cold wet February day, 6 months before it closed, for a visit. We stayed in the cellar tasting area, unable to stop drinking this light quaffing Essex ale.

6) Holts Bitter. This bitter beer brings back memories of weekend trips to Manchester. I'm sure I covered the cost of the trips on the money saved on beer.

7) Goacher's Light. When I returned to England at the end of 1984, I quickly realised that I couldn't commute two hours each way daily. I'm sure Phil Goacher's wonderful ales drew me to Maidstone. The ability of this beer to disappear down the throat attests to its quality.

8) Courage Imperial Russian Stout. The finest bottled beer. A host of memories just looking at the bottles, from the 60's, 70's and 80's in my collection.

Chris Webb (Spring 1996 – No. 106):

When the editor asked me for my choice of real ales to enrich my life on a desert

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island I jumped at the chance, recalling happy moments now past, when all seemed right with the world and the beer at that particular moment in time was perfection itself. So perfect that I committed it to memory as a beer to seek out and enjoy whenever possible. Unfortunately reality comes along and slaps you in the face when the joy of finding that long sought-after beer is rent upon tasting the warm, oxidised, poorly-kept beer that bears no resemblance to that pint of memory. Here then are my desert island beer, robust true brewed quality products, sadly the first of which is now just a memory:

1) Fremlins: Tusker. A strong Kentish ale, dark in colour. It should have been a 'classic', but suffered from indifferent promotion by the late Faversham brewery, and poor cellarmanship at many of the few outlets it could be found in, but when it was good, it was very good. I am pleased to find that whenever I mention Tusker, those who sampled it, remember it and concur with my views.

2) Batemans: Mild. A chewy, yeasty exceptionally dark mild packed with flavour. Dark ales are among my favourite; this one recalls pleasant memories of a CAMRA branch weekend visit to Batemans brewery in Lincolnshire.

3) Woodforde's Wherry Best. At long last the beer has now received the acclaim it justly deserves. I tried my first pint at a Norwich free house some years ago whilst on a holiday in Norfolk. Its fresh, slightly home-brewed taste only adds to its appeal.

4) Harveys Porter. A classic beer style that only relatively recently been revived. Many brewers have produced versions which attempt to emulate this lost brew, but I reckon Harveys have got it just about right.

5) Goacher's Maidstone Light. Phil and Debbie Goacher established their brewery a few years after I moved to Kent from my native Surrey. I hated this beer when I first tried it during those early days, but I feel that was due to poor cellarmanship and not a fault in the beer. Maidstone Light is a classic hoppy Kentish-style beer consistently good. I've drunk it so often that to me it is synonymous with this county.

6) Fuller's Hock. After a few pints of Fuller's delicious high-gravity ESB, this flavoursome mild affords a chance to see the session out. Withdrawn after poor sales some years ago, it has now returned, but is only available as a season brew. Incidentally, Fuller's chose the name Hock (from the Anglo-Saxon for harvest) to commemorate the farmland that used to adjoin the Chiswick brewery.

7) Palmers Tally-ho! If you are visiting Dorset, be sure to try this beer at the delightful Three Horseshoes Inn at Burton Bradstock. That's where I tasted it and was captivated from that instant. Strong, dark and malty and definitely more-ish!

8) Ridley's IPA. A fine hoppy bitter, at its best when sampled at the brewery. Unfortunately I was driving the CAMRA minibus and could only drink a half pint! Perhaps, like the forbidden fruit, that is why it tasted so good.

9) King and Barnes Old Ale: This is the beer that got me hooked on real ale, and is therefore responsible for the rambling article you are now reading. The K & B Old, however, speaks for itself.

A POTTED HISTORY OF THE PUBCo

Fifty years ago, when CAMRA formed, the pub landscape looked very different. For a start, there were many more of them – some 75000 against around 47500 now. The majority of pubs (52000 or so) were owned by breweries. The 89 small and regional breweries had 13800 of them and the rest were in the hands of the ‘Big Six’ – Bass Charrington, Allied, Whitbread, Scottish & Newcastle, Watney/Grand Metropolitan and Courage/Imperial.

Most of the other 23000 pubs were free houses (in name anyway – many tied their beer supplies to a big brewer in return for loans and discounts). Companies that just owned pubs were rare – the likes of Sir John Fitzgerald in the north-east and Heavitree in the south-west (though they tied themselves to Bass).

Just about every pub-owning brewery rigorously imposed a supply tie on its own products. As late as the mid-1980s, I remember a Greene King Director recoiling in horror at my suggestion that they allow a few guest beers in their pubs. As a result, new breweries found outlets hard to come by and we customers were hardly spoilt for choice, as a glance at a Good Beer Guide of that era will reveal.

Then, in 1989, along came the Beer Orders. The story of this epochal legislation (for better or worse) is superbly told in Laura Hadland’s recent *Fifty Years of CAMRA* book but, in essence, the government acknowledged the stranglehold on the industry exercised by the Big Six and, among other things, capped their pub ownership at 2000.

By now, because of closures and sell-offs, the Big Six owned fewer pubs between them but the Orders still meant around 11000 pubs coming onto the market. We, of course, dreamed of a new golden age of multi-handpumped free houses galore, but the reality was sadly different. Companies were quickly established, usually with close links to the Big Six, to Hoover up these pubs in big batches then negotiate supply deals, invariably with the company who previously owned the place. Enterprise Inns, for instance, started with the purchase of 368 pubs from Bass, and that is where they bought the beer from.

In the years that followed, wheeling and dealing saw companies grow, collapse, merge, acquire, dispose – it was very difficult to keep up with

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who owned what. Some companies concentrated on managed pubs, some on tenancies, a few on a mixed model. Behemoths emerged – by 2004, Punch Taverns and Enterprise each owned more than 8000 pubs, though both had accumulated so much debt that they ran into trouble come the financial crash and subsequently retrenched. We will have a closer look at the current pub company scene in the next edition.

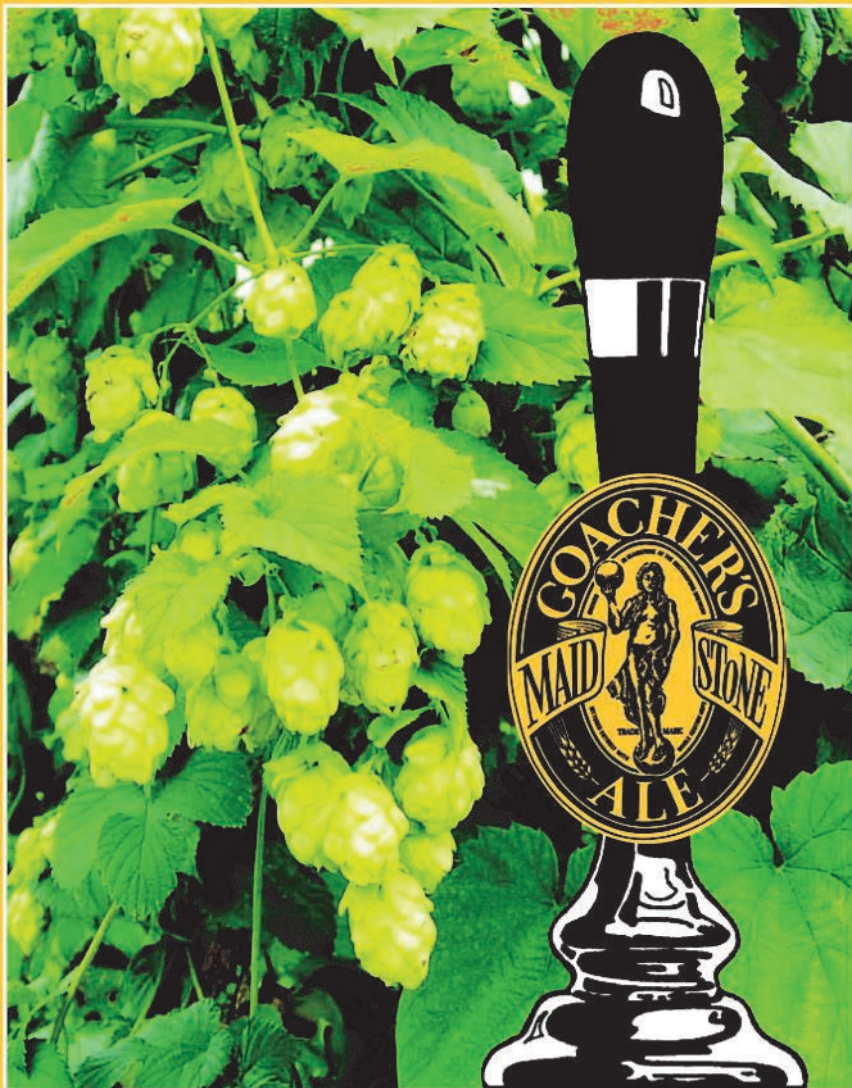
A brief history of Punch Taverns illustrates the volatility surrounding PubCos from the 1990s onwards. Punch formed in 1997, purchasing a tranche of pubs from Bass. Two years later, they bought Inn Business (mostly former Whitbread pubs) and then the rump of the Allied estate. The managed pubs were spun off into a separate division called Spirit. In 2003, they acquired their 3100-strong rival Pubmaster plus a couple of smaller companies. Next, Scottish & Newcastle's managed pubs were snapped up and added to Spirit. By 2011 the impact of the crash was being felt, calling for a 'strategic review'. Spirit was demerged and, in 2015, sold to Greene King. Come 2016, a takeover bid totalling £403m (plus the taking on of a billion pounds of debt) was accepted; 1900 pubs went to Heineken with the remaining 1300 residing with Patron Capital, though the Punch brand has been retained.

In the meantime, the treatment of their tenants by many of the PubCos had become a major issue and, after years of campaigning, the Government was persuaded, in 2014, to announce a statutory Pubs Code aimed at regulating their practices and ensuring fair treatment for tenants. We will return to the Code in a future article. In this context, though, it needs mentioning that the currently accepted definition of a pub company embraces breweries that own pubs – and nowadays most such companies have separate management structures for their pub and brewing operations.

Final comments. Pub companies are here to stay, there is nothing wrong with the basic model. There are some excellent companies who treat their licensees well and clearly see their pubs as more than just property assets. It would, though, be difficult to argue that the ways in which some companies operate, raise many issues around their custodianship of what aren't just piles of bricks-and-mortar but, in most cases, precious and valued community assets. We will examine those issues in due course.

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