

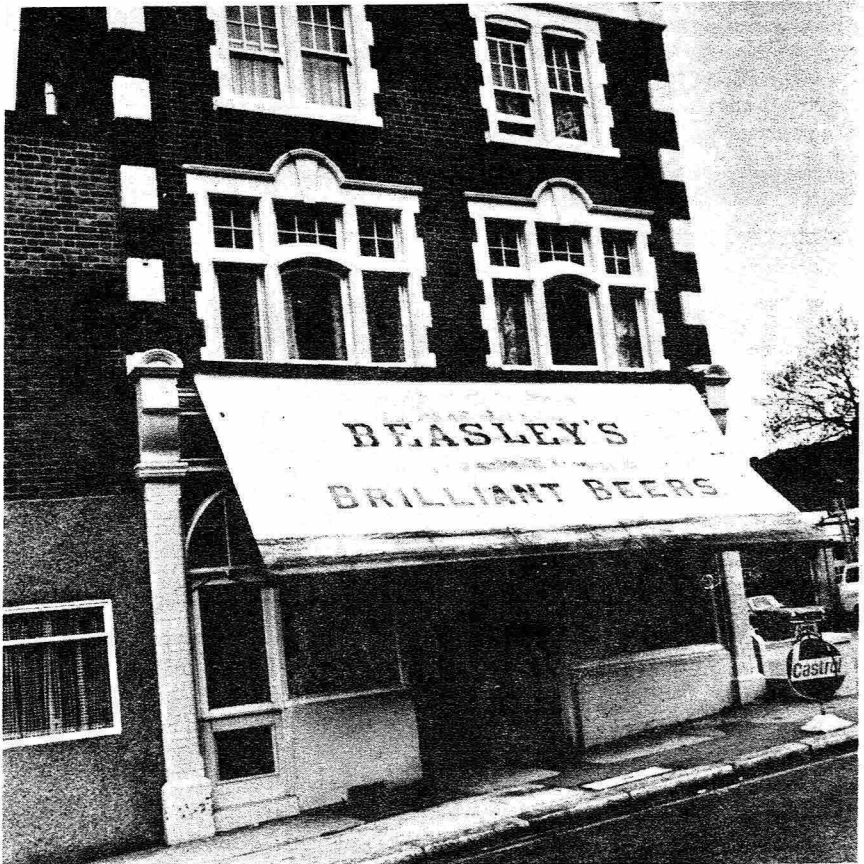
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TOP

LONDON DRINKER

Produced by the London branches of the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd



Original Beasley's blind at the "Village Blacksmith", Woolwich.

The **Bitter Experience**

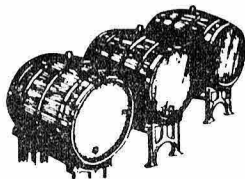
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THE BITE AT THE BACK OF THE THROAT

by LAURIE BISHOP

Do you remember the advert for Whitbread Tankard which ended up with the words that form the title of my article this month? I think I've got it right and the idea was that Tankard, the wonderful new keg beer from Luton etc., could grab your taste buds and shake them alive or some other such nonsense. Brewers up and down the country are now faced with a different sort of bite and, as I have said before, it's the bite of the recession.

This time around, however, I'm not going to attack the big brewers. That has been done in the past in this and many other columns. In a way it is not entirely the national brewer's fault (collectively) that they are stuck with all this spare capacity brewing plant and nobody wanting to drink it. This recession was created by world forces and the present government has, quite deliberately, set out not to relieve the economic burden but to try and burn out the problem. Whether this is the right thing to do is not for me to say and I will leave it to the political commentators to discuss it.

Where we in this country have lost out with our national drink is in permitting the Common Market to increase the duty on beer to bring it in line with wine. As I see it, the Europeans are saying that our beer is a cheaper drink relatively than the wine sold in Britain & we should increase the price of beer to, as it were, reduce the differential. Now I don't know about you but I think a much more sensible idea would be to reduce the price of wine. But of course that sort of thing, a price reduction, would not go down at all well in the Palace of Westminster.

All this is bad enough but as far as the British beer drinker is concerned to have a raging recession going on as you fork out proportionately even more for your pint is not perhaps the best way of celebrating the election of Francois Mitterand. The fact that the brewers, probably one of the most conservative (not to say Conservative) industrial groups in the country, are only now beginning to complain bitterly to the government about lost profits

and squeezing the industry is perhaps ironic but not to be laughed at too loudly (Certainly not by Tory politicians for the brewers were one of the biggest contributors to Conservative party funds prior to the 1979 election.

Recessionia

Down here in the affluent south east we do not have things like 4p off a pint of Youngs but we do get a Recession Ale from the Canterbury brewery (although this is not available in London or certainly not to any wide extent). We also get a half price evening at the WELLINGTON opposite Waterloo station on Tuesdays. This is such an excellent pub that you would have thought they would have been packing them in without recourse to such publicity. Mind you its quite a good ploy because only one beer is an offer at half price and it's a different one each time. I understand that some people have gone in and found the beer sold out so they have a (full price) pint of something else. Good for business I should think.

The latest attempts by Courage to improve attendance at their pubs is something like a grand prize draw (I think, I've not been in a Courage pub in ages and only see the details as we drive past). What will Courage come up with next? dolly bird with every ten pints of Directors (by which time you wouldn't be able to do anything with her)? A ticket to watch England play football with every eight pints of Hofmeister (one foolish idea deserves another)?

I see that the ROSE & CROWN opposite the LWT building on the South Bank has now got Fremlins Tusker on handpump. I fear that I shall not be drinking in there though. Tusker is too strong for me to have anything more than a couple of pints at lunchtime and there is now masses of choice around Waterloo with Charles Wells, Taylor Walker, Young's, Ruddle's, Greene King, Shepherd Neame, Arkell's, Wethered's, Bass, Brakspear and other lesser brews too numerous to mention.

