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12p

LONDON DRINKER

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

5th Anniversary Issue



The Castle, Surbiton - see page 17.

Photo: John Elliott

BRANCH DIARY

If your branch is not mentioned below please ring the branch contact. Events for March of which we have been notified are as follows. Branches please send details of events to Andy Pirson.

EAST LONDON & CITY: Sat 3 (7.30) Dalston Dawdle (joint with North London Branch). Start THREE COMPASSES, 99 Dalston Lane, E8 - Tue 6 (7.45 sharp) Special General Meeting and Annual General Meeting (please bring your CAMRA membership card). WINDMILL, Tabernacle Street, EC2 - Thu 8 (8.00) Joint Social with N. London Branch. SWAN, 73 Clapton Common, E5 - Tue 13 (8.00) Social. CALIFORNIA, 12 Albert Road, E 16 - Wed 14 (8.00) League Darts and Social. FISH & RING, 141A White Horse Road, E1 - Tue 20 (8.00) Committee Meeting. WHITE HORSE, 48 White Horse Road, E1 - Thu 22 (8.00) Social. BOLEYN TAVERN, 1 Barking Road, E6 - Tue 27 (8.00) Social. LADY DIANA, 95 Forest Road, E8 - Wed 28 (8.00) League Darts and Social. FISH & RING, 141A White Horse Road, E1 - Thu 29 (5.30) City Social. YE OLDE CHESHIRE CHEESE, Wine Office Court, 145 Fleet Street, EC4 - Sunday lunchtimes in March. Sunday Slurp. FISH & RING, 141A White Horse Road, E1.

KINGSTON & LEATHERHEAD: Sun 4 (12.00) Lunchtime Drink. MAYPOLE, 2 Hook Road, Surbiton - Thu 8 (8.30) Branch Meeting. STONELEIGH INN, The Broadway, Stoneleigh - Thu 22 (8.00) Pre-Beer Festival Pub Crawl of Esher. Start WHITE LION, 110 High Street - Fri to Sun 6 to 8 April Beer Festival. SANDOWN PARK RACECOURSE, Esher. (Fri & Sat lunchtime & evening sessions; Sun lunchtime session.)

RICHMOND & HOUNSLOW: Wed 14 (8.30) Committee Meeting. POPES GROTTO Cross Deep, Twickenham - Mon 19 (8.30) Branch Meeting. SOUTH WESTERN HOTEL, Whitton Road, Hounslow (corner of Whitton Dene) - Thu 29 (8.30) Social. WINDMILL, Windmill Road, Hampton Hill. Mon 16 April (8.30) Branch AGM. RED COW, Sheen Road, Richmond.

SOUTH EAST LONDON: Mon 5 (8.00) Open Committee Meeting. MAN OF KENT, 2 Nunhead Green, SE15 - Mon 12 (8.00) Branch Meeting. QUEEN VICTORIA, 118 Wellington Street, SE18 - Wed 21 (8.00) Social. EARL OF CHATHAM, 15 Thomas Street, SE18.

SOUTH WEST LONDON: Thu 8 (8.30) Branch AGM. SPREAD EAGLE (Back Room) Wandsworth High Street, SW18 - Tue 13 (7.30) CAMRA Curry Night. Meet at TOOTING TAVERN, 196, Tooting High Street, SW17 for 8.30 at Sree Krishna South Indian Restaurant - Fri 23 (8.00 till late) Cobbold's Birthday Binge. PRINCE OF WALES, 270 Cavendish Road, SW12. Featuring Best Bucket Bitter!

WEST LONDON: Tue 6 (8.00) Pub of the Month Social. BRITANNIA, 1 Allen Street, W8 (off Kensington High Street) - Thu 15 Branch Meeting. WHITE HORSE, 1 Parsons Green, SW6.

WEST MIDDLESEX: Tue 6 (8.30) Games evening. WHITE HORSE, Middle Road, Harrow - Tue 13 Out of the Area Social. CROWN, Aberdeen Place, NW8 (Optional early start at Marylebone Station, 7.30) - Sat 17 St. Patrick's Day Coach Trip to OXFORD in the evening. Phone for details - Wed 21 (8.30) Branch Meeting. EALING LAWN TENNIS CLUB, Daniel Road, W5 (off Creffield Road - Brakspears on gravity) - Tue 27 Open Committee Meeting and Social. RED LION, High Street, Harlington.

April edition available end of March. Copy should reach editors by 5th March. Closing date for May edition 2nd April.

BRANCH CONTACTS

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I suppose we must all have heard one of the basic principles of defence, that you should know who your enemies are and I like most of us have, at some time, found ourselves in circumstances where it has been rather difficult to tell. I believe that the Campaign for Real Ale could very easily find itself facing such a dilemma at the moment. Back in the old days the least of our problems was probably knowing who our enemies were; when we got a bit tired of having a go at Grotneys there was always Twitbreads (among others) waiting in the wings. Even when Watneys started reintroducing cask conditioned beers it wasn't long before they came up with the misleading 'County' manual air compressor to dispense it. However, things have changed recently.

Last month we published an article by Roger Warhurst about the improvement in the availability of real beer in Greater London during 1983. The statistics presented by the brewery showed that the big surprise of the year was Watneys with a dramatic 33% increase in the number of their pubs selling the proper stuff raising them from ninth place to fifth in the list of terms of the proportion of their pubs selling real beer. Particularly significant was the fact that they pushed Fullers back into sixth place. Almost as significant is the fact that they passed Charrington as the brewer with the greatest number of tied houses selling real beer in the capital.

In contrast Fullers, whom we have long regarded as friends and supporters of the cause, showed a mere 7% increase in their pubs selling beer through handpumps bringing their proportion of real pubs up to 64% compared with 65% for Watneys. (In my own branch area the difference is more marked with real beer being available in 79% of Watneys pubs compared with 68% for Fullers.)

So does this mean that Watneys have suddenly become the good boys (with prospects of getting even better) while Fullers sit back on their laurels (ESB having been voted the

Strong Beer of the Year at the Great British Beer Festival) while they stagnate in terms of conversions to real beer. Of course Fullers will be quick to explain that a large proportion of their houses are tenanted and that the landlords have the choice of whether to have handpumps installed or not; and to give Fullers their due most, if not all, of their managed pubs (run through subsidiary company, Griffin Catering Ltd.) where the brewery makes the decision - and pays for the handpumps - sell real ale.

Okay, so it would seem that we have, on the face of it, a new friend in Watneys. Let me refer you back through your heap of back numbers of London Drinker to October 1983 where you will find another article by the prolific Mr. Warhurst. In this he makes some interesting comparisons between beer prices against their original gravities - about the only way to compare value for money. While the prices used are no longer fully up to date I believe that they still reflect quite accurately the relative pricing policies of the various breweries. From this article it is possible to discern that, measured against beer strength, Watneys' prices are consistently higher than Fullers' across their real beer range. The difference is around 3% in the ordinary and premium bitter classifications while in the strong beer range Watneys' offering - Ruddles County - is a hefty 25% dearer than Fullers ESB when the difference in original gravities is taken into consideration.

Of course, none of this takes into account Youngs 100% of whose pubs sell real beer and whose prices appear consistently lower than any other brewers trading on any scale in London.

Some information I do not currently have to hand is how Watneys' (and other brewers') real beers compare for price with their fizzy offerings on an equal gravity basis. It would be interesting to know whether they treat all their customers alike or are screwing their real beer customers by offering the beer they demand but at premium price as their pricing of Ruddles County, and latterly Hammertons Porter would suggest. Any information, anybody?

Andy Pirson.

P.S. Since writing this I have just discovered that Youngs have had a general price increase of about four pence a pint. Even this significant increase, however, does not bring Youngs' Ordinary up to the price of Websters' Yorkshire Bitter. It is though, temporarily I suspect, dearer than Courage Best Bitter.

P.P.S. Come to our 2nd Capital Beer Night (see advert on page 16) - see you there!

