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LONDON



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DRINKER

ROMFORD
GOES
FIZZ

STOP PRESS: As we were putting the final touches to this issue, the last brew of real ale was taking place at the Romford Brewery. All real Allied beers in the London area will now come from Burton, and we look forward to vast and overdue improvements.

Vol 8

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

No 2

BRANCH DIARY

If your branch is not mentioned, please ring the branch contact. Dates for March of which we have been notified are as follows. Branches please send information to Andy Pirson.

EAST LONDON & CITY: Sat 1 (8.00) E9 ELAC Crawl. Start ROYAL STANDARD, 84 Victoria Park Road — Tue 4 (8.00) ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. WINDMILL, 27 Tabernacle Street, EC2 — Sat 8 (8.00) E1 Crawl. Start THOMAS NEALE, Watney Market — Mon 10 (5.30) City Social. ANGEL, 14 Crosswall, EC3 — Tue 11 (8.00) Committee Meeting. WHITE HORSE, Whitehorse Road, E1 — Tue 18 (8.00) GBG 1987 Selection Meeting. APPROACH TAVERN, 47 Approach Road, E2 — Fri 21 (6.00) City Crawl. Start CHISWELL STREET VAULTS, Chiswell Street; CROWN TAVERN (7.00), 43 Clerkenwell Green; SEKFORDE ARMS (8.00), 34 Sekforde Street — Mon 24 (8.00) Social. LARKSHALL, Larkshall Road, E4 — Tue 25 Crouch Vale Brewery Trip.

ENFIELD & BARNET: Tue 4 (9.00) Social. RED LION, Red Lion Hill, N2 — Wed 12 (8.30) Branch Meeting. FALCON, 115 South Street, Ponders End, Enfield — Tue 20 (9.00) Social. SALISBURY ARMS, Hoppers Road, Winchmore Hill, N21 — Wed 26 (9.00) Social. OLD RED LION, Great North Road, Barnet — Thur 3 Apr. (9.00) Social. TWO BREWERS, Silver Street, N18.

KINGSTON & LEATHERHEAD: Sun 2 (12.00) Social. RED LION, Thames Ditton — Mon 3 (8.30) Committee Meeting/Social. DUKE OF WELLINGTON, Kingston Road, New Malden — Thur 6 (8.30) Branch Meeting. DUKES HEAD, Leatherhead — Wed 19 (8.30) Social. NEW INN, East Molesey — Sun 6 Apr. (12.00) Social. SIR ROBERT PEEL, Hampden Road, Kingston — Mon 7 (8.30) Committee Meeting/Social. VICTORIA, Victoria Street, Surbiton — Thur (8.30) Branch Meeting. PLOUGH, Stoke D'Abernon.

RICHMOND & HOUNSLOW: Thur 6 (8.30) Committee Meeting. QUEEN VICTORIA, 121 Bath Road, Hounslow — Mon 17 (8.30) Branch Meeting. COACH & HORSES, 183 London Road, Isleworth — Tue 25 (8.30) Social. HOGARTH, Broad Street, Teddington.

SOUTH EAST LONDON: Mon 3 (8.00) Committee Meeting. SHIP, 39 St. Marychurch Street, SE16 — Mon 10 (8.00) Branch Meeting. DUKE OF EDINBURGH, 81 Malpas Road, SE4 — Thur 20 (8.00) Social. ROYAL GEORGE, 2 Blisset Street, SE10.

SOUTH WEST LONDON: Thur 13 (8.30) ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. BREWERY TAP (Upstairs room), Wandsworth High Street, SW18. Please make every effort to attend; 1987 GBG short listing at meeting — Sat 22 Mortlake & Sheen Crawl. Meet RAILWAY, Sheen Lane, SW14 (near Mortlake B.R.) (12.00); HARE & HOUNDS (1.00) South Circular Road. Evening Session DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, Balham High Road, SW12 for Cobbold's Birthday Binge (Free Food)

WEST LONDON: Thur 20 (8.00) ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WHITE HORSE, 1 Parsons Green SW6. Old and new members welcome — Wed 5 (8.00) Chelsea Crawl. Start CROWN, Dovehouse Street, SW3; PRINCESS OF WALES (9.00), Dovehouse Street; BLENHEIM, Cale Street (10.00) Sun 23 (12.00) Sunday Social. BRITANNIA TAP, Warwick Road, W14.

Deadline for April Edition 1st March. Material for May edition to arrive by 1st April. Please be sure to send all diary material to Andy Pirson.

LONDON DRINKER is published by the London Branches of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale Limited.

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EDITORIAL

Three articles from the Brewers' Society Journal which are well worth quoting are reproduced below.

This month, on Tuesday 18th March, we shall know whether Chancellor Lawson intends to flay beer drinkers yet again. For there is no doubt that that is what he and his predecessors have been doing since 1979.

In March 1985, the Budget imposed the sixth successive tax increase on beer. It is a sequence unparalleled in British history and is already worthy of a place in the Guinness Book of Records.

In the balmy days before May 1979, beer duty stood at 7p a pint. Today, duty is over 18p. And to that must be added VAT at over 9p. A total tax of 27 to 28p a pint. For the stronger brews it is even more.

By a curious quirk of the fiscal system, the beer drinker is double taxed for VAT is levied on the excise duty element. Samuel Johnson, who called excise 'a hateful tax' would certainly have found strong words of condemnation. But today, ever increasing tax burdens seem just to be accepted as part of the inevitable. Everything is going up, so why not beer?

It is certainly true that inflation has been an ever-present factor in economic life for several decades. Since this Government took office in 1979, the Retail Price Index (RPI) has risen by 70 per cent. In the same period, beer duty has been raised by 142 per cent. Or more than double the rate of increase in the RPI. That in itself is unjust.

There is an argument that if the Government has to find extra revenue, better to derive it from life's pleasures, rather than necessities. There is a whole philosophical debate here. How necessary are some of those pleasures? But leaving that aside, there is a more specific question. Why have Britain's 40 million beer drinkers been singled out for this uniquely severe treatment? Why is it that only the pint is hammered?

In the six years since 1979, the duty on spirits has risen by 51 per cent and the duty on wine has gone up by only 38 per cent. The beer drinker's rate of duty increase has been nearly three times that of the spirit drinker and nearly four times that of the wine drinker. That is a measure of the problem. Another is that whilst beer duty has leapt ahead of the RPI, spirits and wine duty increases have been well below it. The effect is that these excessive duty rises have caused the real price of beer to go up.

Beer is Britain's most popular alcohol beverage. It is the ordinary man's drink. About 30 million pints are downed every day – more than 80 per cent, or 8 out of 10 being drunk in a pub or a club. Though



both spirits and wines are also consumed across the spectrum of socio-economic categories, they tend to be drunk most by the wealthier end of the population. Thus, those who can least afford it are most penalised. And the argument can be taken further, for the pub and club are the essential social centres for the vast majority of the community. These swingeing tax increases price the pint out of reach of many who have no other pleasures than their occasional visit to the local. And therein is another injustice.

And then about overall price.

With the price of an average pint of bitter varying considerably around the country from 63p to 86p and with the latest round of increases, it is beginning to approach the £1 mark. Indeed some premium draught beers are already priced over £1 in some areas, the question of whether this is a physiological barrier will be raised again. The brewers will no doubt comment that similar concern was raised when the price reached 50p and there was no noticeable adverse consumer reaction. Also two of the products that are selling at prices just below or indeed over £1, Stella Artois Draught lager in some Whitbread pubs and Ruddles County, being sold through Watney houses, are currently both achieving sizeable volume gains and of course the growth of ordinary draught lagers have not been affected by their premium price. Also research in the past has shown that price is certainly not the most important factor as to why people visit public houses; the landlord, location, atmosphere and condition of the pub coming higher-up the list of priorities. Against this however is the fear that as the price rises the round system will come under pressure. Whereas, say a group of four people would normally drink four pints each, if they start splitting the cost of a round their consumption could theoretically halve. Another consequence of higher draught beer prices is that it could further fuel the move towards drinking at home.

And lastly

The brewers themselves are not totally blameless for the significant rise in prices as they have sought to maintain or improve margins during the

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