

30p



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


LONDON DRINKER



THE HOGSHEAD, DRURY LANE, WC2

Photo by: Simon Fyffe

MacGregor • Fishing Tackle • Old Thumper • Skull Splitter • Tally Ho! • Dolphin • Lionheart • Old Growler • Golden Promise • Farmers Glory • Twelve Bore Bitter • Old Wardour • Old Wobolin • Hobgoblin • Old Hooky • Lifeboat Ale • Old Tom • Owd Rodger • Dragonhead Stout • March Hare • Red

THE

BOATERS INN

REAL ALE FESTIVAL

Friday 13 March-Saturday 28 March

Real Ales On The Riverside
featuring more than 80 ales with 25
different available at any one time

*Opening Celebration
6 pm Friday 13 March*

The Festival includes:
Ale Trail, Mystery Ales and Free Raffle

Opening hours:

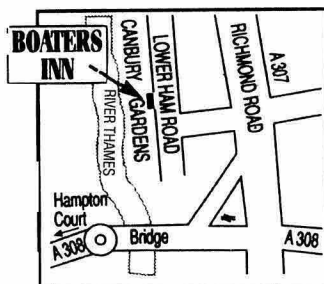
Mon-Sat 11am-11pm; Sun 12 noon-10.30pm

Food available: 12.00-2.30, 7.00-9.30

THE BOATERS INN

Canbury Gardens
Lower Ham Road
Kingston-upon-Thames
Surrey

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Britain's regional breweries are under threat. There is nothing new in that statement but unfortunately it is not becoming any less true as time goes on. Last summer, Gibbs Mew of Salisbury became the latest of quite a long list of regionals to withdraw from brewing altogether to concentrate on the area of their market where they saw the profits coming from - retailing. The 1998 Good Beer Guide records that the beers are being brewed by Ushers of Trowbridge while their chain of pubs continues to grow. Clearly they were being quite successful - successful enough to be the target for a predator. And sure enough, along came a predator in the form of Enterprise Inns who took control on 3rd February for a payment of £48million.

This leads me to speculate that they would have been more secure had they kept brewing. Without the brewery they became just another bunch of pubs - just what Enterprise wanted. While they had a brewery this represented an asset that might have valued the company higher than a predator may have wanted to pay for the number of pubs involved.

And what of the ex-Gibbs Mew pubs; will they still get "Gibbs Mew" beers? For the time being they probably will, but in the long run I very much doubt whether Enterprise will be interested in special trading agreements to supply a particular section of their estate. Prepare to say goodbye to Gibbs Mew beers - even in their contracted-out form.

When the Beer Orders came into force in 1990 we all rejoiced (well, some of us did) that pubs would be able to stock a cask beer of their own choice. I seem to recall commenting at the time that the Orders were very badly drafted in one particular, and very obvious, respect. You will no doubt recall that they granted this right to tenants of breweries owing more than 2,000 pubs.

Let me repeat that with a little emphasis. The Beer Orders give the right to stock a cask beer of their choice to tenants of BREWERIES owning more than 2,000 pubs. Now we all get the message don't we. Well we should if we drink in one of the 4,300 or so pubs owned, for example, by the Grand Pub Company. Do you get guest beers in Grand Pub Company pubs? You tell me; and as a clue - are the Grand Pub Company a brewer? I don't think you have to work very hard to sort out that the answer to both those questions will be the same.

Oh sure! The pubs will probably carry beers from a range of brewers but do not expect to see much from outside the ranges of the Big Three of Bass, Whitbread and Scottish Courage. (Do you remember those heady days when we had a

Big Six to worry about?) You may even see "guest beers" in the pubs but rest assured (if that is an appropriate term) that they will not be guest beers as the Campaign for Real Ale views them - or even as the Beer Orders view them!

Still, we should not feel too sorry for the owners of Gibbs Mew; after all they got £48million out of the deal. That's equivalent to about six exclusive Saturday jackpot wins in the National; Lottery - I'd be happy with one. No, the people to feel sorry for are the people who have enjoyed drinking Gibbs Mew beers in their 300 or so pubs who from now on can expect such wonderful and exclusive ales as Courage Best, Theakston's XB, Hancock's HB or Worthington Best Bitter. Now there's nothing wrong (some may say) with those beers but they hardly have a great scarcity value do they? I know that I, for one, do not look forward to another pint of Courage with the same interest as I regarded a pint of Gibbs' Deacon.

Andy Pirson

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