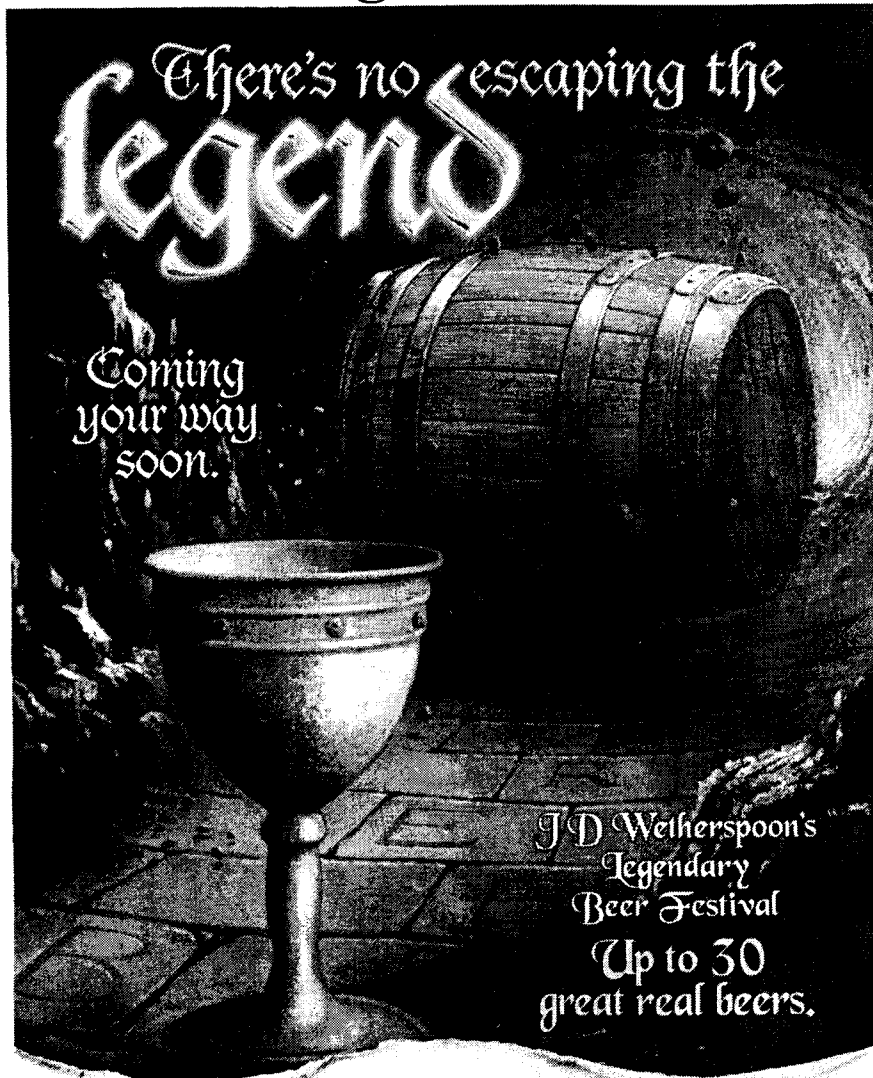


At The Eight Bells Dover



WED 31 OCT - SUN 4 NOV

Start it all off with a party on the 31st.

Central London dates: Mon 29 Oct - Fri 2 Nov



Subject to availability for a limited time. Participating breweries.

Visit our Web site: www.jdwetherspoon.co.uk

Printed at Adams The Printers, Dour Street, Dover

Channel Draught

The Newsletter of the Deal Dover Sandwich & District
branch of the Campaign for Real Ale

Issue 9 Autumn 2001



Branch Diary

Branch Meetings

(All start at 8pm unless otherwise stated):

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| 15 October | Green Berry , Walmer |
| 19 November | Royal Oak , Capel-le-Ferne |
| 17 December | The Mogul , Dover |

The branch *normally* meets on the third Monday of each month. Please consult 'What's Brewing' to confirm venues if travelling.

Forthcoming Events & Festivals

(Please check before travelling)

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 12-13 October | Gravesend Beer Festival
Fleetway Sports Ground
11am-10.30pm |
| 17 November | Kent Pub of the Year presentation
Shipwrights Arms
Oare Creek, Faversham
Midday onwards |
| 1-2 February 2002 | White Cliffs Festival of Winter Ales
Maison Dieu (Town Hall) Dover
Full details next issue or
www.topsy.demon.co.uk/dds_camra |



Channel Draught is Published and © 2001 by the Deal Dover Sandwich & District Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale. The Branch supports the campaign to retain Real Ale in pubs in White Cliffs Country. Please drink sensibly!

In this Issue



Welcome to the Autumn 2001 issue of *Channel Draught*. This issue appears back on schedule after a couple of late ones. The next issue, by the way, should be out before Christmas.

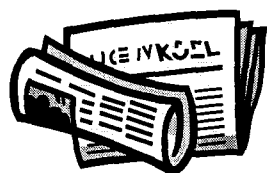
New to *Channel Draught* this issue is the Folkestone news. Whilst Marsh Mash, the CAMRA publication that usually covers Folkestone and Shepway, is not being published, *Channel Draught* will plug the gap and provide news and info for Dover's nearest major town. I'd like to welcome any readers in Folkestone who are seeing *Channel Draught* for the first time!

Anyway, there is the usual mix of articles. Please don't forget that if you've any comments about *Channel Draught*, you can always write (address on page 41). Please make sure you specify if you don't want your letter published!

Topsy
Editor

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The Local News

Always something going on, so here's the latest. The Editorial team thank all our spies everywhere.

Dover

Stories about the **Eagle** abound, some of them bearing resemblance to each other but nothing concrete yet. Believe all or nothing that you hear! Speaking of concrete, we await the builders whenever they may appear (and they should know what's going on – if you want to find out a re-opening date just ask the navvies when they are due off site). Local builder Frank Harvey is known to have been interested in the site (he owns the rest of that corner!) but we are not yet sure whether he has pursued it.

Meanwhile the builders are very much in evidence at the **Renaissance** (ex-Alma). Here the landlord (Peter) reckons he can still get the place up and running by December, thanks due to builder Gary McClung apparently. Peter has been known to take the odd refreshment break in the Mogul which can only give us due grounds for optimism vis-à-vis his eventual beer policy.

At the **Mogul**, Frank & Charlie still ring the changes every week including regular appearances of a dark mild. The latest one is as dark as most but double the strength - Sarah Hughes Ruby @ 6% ABV is a potent reminder of our own offerings in the Town Hall. With all six stillions in regular use (two or three on sale and the rest conditioning and settling down) one of the former handpumps has been re-installed. Timothy Taylor's Landlord was duly cellared and pulled up to the bar and very good it was too. As our branch Pub of the Year it now sports another certificate of appreciation to follow the two from last year. More on the actual presentation on page 22.

The **Flotilla & Firkin** still trades under the "Firkin Brewery" tag. Despite Punch Taverns' boss Hugh Osmond's attempt to do for his pub chain what Gerald Ratner

THE YEW TREE INN

Barfreestone, Dover
TEL: 01304 831619



Open Tues-Thurs 6-11pm Fri/Sat 12 noon - 11.00 pm
Sunday 12 noon - 10.30 pm. Closed Monday.

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Open for lunch 12-2 and dinner 7-9
Opening hours 11-3 6-11 Mon to Sat
12-4 & 7-11 Sunday

Sunday Roasts 2 courses £6.50 Please book

Small parties catered for

New play area. Children welcome

did for his knick-knack shops the student-oriented theme continues although landlord Dan tells us that "rebranding" is due any time now. Will Punch spend more on changing the décor than Allied did four years ago? Beers remain as Bass, Pedigree & Tetley Cask. Sadly too many ex-Firkins, especially the Bass-owned ones, have dropped real ale altogether. Indeed, some of Bass ones in London have swapped one "tired" (not our word but the marketing wallahs') theme for another as O'Neills "Plastic Paddy" bars. Overall it is a sad epitaph to David Bruce's original enterprise that hardly any Firkins remain in the GBG, ours being an honourable exception.

The **Louis Armstrong** continues to offer a beer from Cottage, Burton Bridge or Rother Valley in rotation with occasional variation which included Young's Special during September. Meanwhile Draught Bass remains the house bitter.

The **White Horse** reopened just as the printers were finishing our last issue. As with the other ex-Whitbread pubs it is now part of the Laurel chain which still takes ex-Whitbread beers from Interbrew. London Pride, Master Brew and Greene King Abbot Ale are the regular beers although others from the same supplier can appear.

Also ex-Whitbread, the **Britannia** is now selling Pedigree which may alternate with Castle Eden Ale. The management here say that these two sell better than other choices (such as Flowers OB or Wadworth 6X). No longer on sale is keg Hoegaarten which was believed to be Dover's most expensive pint at £3.64.

The **Boar's Head** duly changed hands, now owned by Tom Percival and run by Chris Page. Still two beers, recently including Young's Special which makes a welcome return to the area.

At the **Endeavour**, Shep's Summer Goldings finally replaced Early Bird with Late Red following on for the autumn. The winter offering *should* be Bishop's Finger which is increasingly seen as a seasonal beer (yet still hard to find) after the final version of Porter was axed. Wait and see!

The **Castle**, once a Real Ale magnet (thanks to Opal & Richard), has been fizz-only since Alehouse Company took over but now sells Greene King IPA on handpump as an alternative to the heavily-promoted but bodiless Boddies smoothflow. However the same GK IPA is no longer on at the **Prince of Orange** due to slow sales.

Cullin's Yard, which gets its beers from Adnams, now has one with a nautical theme. Regatta is much lighter than Broadside and is a good hot-weather quencher,



Gary and Beverley Virtue
would like to welcome you all to



THE CROWN INN
at Finglesham

16th Century Freehouse & Restaurant

Full Restaurant and Snack Menu
Available 7 days a week - lunchtime & evenings
Families Welcome
Five Real Ales
Including Theakstons Old Peculier
and Charles Wells Bombardier

Situated off Eastry Bypass and A258 Deal/Sandwich Road
Tel 01304 612555


and also to

THE PARK INN


Ladywell, Dover

Victorian Freehouse & Restaurant
Manager - Kevin Fulton

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Restaurant and Snack Menu available all day
5 en-suite letting rooms
Live Entertainment
Six Real Ales
including Old Speckled Hen and Ruddles County



See us at www.theparkinnatdover.co.uk
Tel 01304 203300

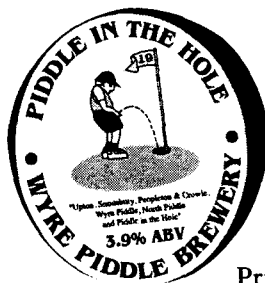


and lighter on the pocket too @ £2.40 a pint.

The **Prince Albert** has restored Tolly Cobbold EKB to the bar but at a knock-down price of just 99p! It is a very light-bodied and quaffable pale ale but the advertising still grates. Forget hop fields and oast houses and think Orwell – not the 1984 writer but the river which flows past the brewery on the quayside at Ipswich. Quite why the local wholesaler and the brewer seek to mask the beer's true origins is unclear but it is symptomatic of the current state of an industry which prides image above all else. For those used to lightweight keg beers and switching to cask beers, EKB is a good "starter for ten".

And so to the **Eight Bells**. An autumnal collection of up to 54 beers to work through including a good number of seasonals. Prices have been dropped by 10p which brings these into line with the regular brands which usually include both GK Abbot and Summer Lightning. The in-house magazine advertises a Halloween/Guy Fawkes celebration, with some spooky micro-brews promised.

Temple Ewell & River



At **The Fox**, the aptly named autumnal offering from Fullers is Red Fox @ 4.3%, although Badger Tanglefoot may be available when you read this. The guest pump was recently occupied by Piddle in the Hole 3.9%. Yes there really is a place called Wyre Piddle.

Nearby at **Pickwicks**, the range varies slightly but London Pride and Flowers OB are regulars.

Deal & Walmer

In the last issue we speculated about the **Chequers** (Sandown). Sure enough the beer is from Adnams and there is a management link with Cullin's Yard (q.v.) - thanks to Richard Crocker for confirming that.

Rural & Villages

At St.Margarets Bay, the new owners of the **Coastguard** do Flowers IPA. When we visited, there were a number of company reps calling in which ought to be a good sign that they mean business. Try walking up to the four pubs in St.Margarets-at-Cliffe and you will see why DDC recognised the Bay as a separate community deserving its own pub. More ales are promised.

PICKWICKS

London Road, Kearsney
Telephone 01304 822016

11am-11pm, Sundays 12pm-10.30pm

Four Real Ales, currently inc. Abbot Ale

Flowers Original, London Pride & Greene King IPA*

Large Car Park at rear & Beer Garden

Food available daily

Families welcome to 8pm

Sorry no dogs

* Ales are Subject to availability



THE LYDDEN BELL

Winner - White Cliffs Tourism Association Pub of the Year 2000

Canterbury Road, Lydden

Telephone 01304 830296

12-3pm & 6-11pm Sundays 12-4pm & 7-10.30pm

Join us for a theme night! Booking essential! Please phone!

Sunday "Weekend Recovery" with drinks promotions

Monday "Eat all pay ½"

Tuesday Curry & Ale - cask ales £1.50

Wednesday Steak Special

Thursday Tex Mex

Friday Fish night



Up to five Real Ales! Including*

Charles Wells Bombardier, Greene King IPA,

Greene King Abbot Ale, Courage Directors

* Ales are Subject to availability

Francis & Catherine welcome you to both of our pubs

The **Chequers** (Hougham) is still shut although the lease is on offer.

THE ROYAL OAK



CAPEL-LE-FERNE

01303 244787

Selection of 3 Ales

Friendly atmosphere

Food available

G.B.G. entry since 1990

Normal business continues at the four pubs in Capel-le-Ferne. The **White Cliffs Inn** is fizz-only but the **Valiant Sailor** has continued with London Pride.

The **Royal Oak** switches between known and trusted regional beers like Brakspear and seasonal, or "one-off", brews which may or may not show up in list at the back of the 2002 Good Beer Guide. As at the Boar's Head (see previous pages), Young's Special is a recent offering.

Guest beers have reappeared at the **Lighthouse** on Old Dover

Road - Broadside or Tanglefoot were alongside the usual Greene King IPA and Abbot Ale during a recent weekend. At a time of pubs closures, this reopening was actually a return to its original purpose to that of a 19th Century ale and wine victualling house which gave its name to Winehouse Lane leading to it from the main road.

The **Crown** (Finglesham) ran a beer festival over the August Bank Holiday weekend when the weather behaved as usual for a bank hol, i.e. variously wet and dry. Among the beers on offer was Downpour, appropriately. Owner Gary Virtue, who also has Dover's Park Inn, has been talking to a well-known beer agency and is currently stocking Bombardier, Landlord, Master Brew and Old Peculier.

A long stroll past Lydden Circuit takes you to the **Endeavour** at Wootton which normally has an ale or two, recently Adnams or Batemans. However on our most recent visit there was none - just a turned-round pump clip for Tolly EKB. The bar staff were otherwise occupied at the time (1pm on a Friday) so we didn't get to ask.

At the **Jackdaw** (Denton), change of ownership (Whitbread to Laurel) has had no immediate effect on subscription to the Kentish Fare promotion. Beers are usually from Ales of Kent and from Flagship, the latter under either its own nautical names or rebadged under other names for the pub, e.g. Hurricane @ 4.4%. See the blackboard for names and strengths. Your roving reporters approved of Fuzzy Duck @ 5.6% from Ales of Kent, in style a cross between premium bitter and porter.

The Admiral Penn Free House

**This tastefully Dutch Style decorated Pub
Can be found on the Seafront of Deal**

**While enjoying your Traditional Real English Ales
Bass , London Pride and Guest ale**

**There are also
Heineken , Amstel and Grolsch Lagers**

**Specials are Dutch Kopstoot and Jagermeister
*Cold from the fridge***

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Art, Linda and Natalie
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Fax: 00 44 (01304) 381460

EMAIL ADDRESS

ADMIRAL.PENN@VIRGIN.NET

79 BEACH STREET

DEAL

KENT CT14 6JA

UNITED KINGDOM

The **Three Bells** (Swingfield) is closed. Will it reopen? Please let us know of any developments – too many villages are losing their only pub.

Whitbread retain the **Duke of York** (Guston) and the **Plough** (Church Hougham) which they categorised as restaurants which happen to sell beer – the Plough does it better than most with three or four, typically Pedigree, Brains & Flowers.

The **Plough** (Ripple) has a new manager working for the same owner. It is still the only local outlet for Fullers ESB and also has London Pride and Spitfire.

The **Kings Head** (Kingsdown) is in the process of changing hands and will be owned by the same team as the Clyffe in St Margarets. We wish Andy and Brenda a happy retirement. No major changes are in the offing at the Kings Head, we are promised that the Bass remains with a Kentish ale (probably Swale) alongside.

Dave Routh & Paul Turvey



THE LIGHTHOUSE INN & RESTAURANT

Open Saturday 11-11 (no food 3-5). Sunday 12-10
Monday-Friday 11-3 Lunch, 6-11 evening
Christmas bookings now being taken

- | | |
|--|--|
| * Extensive bar snacks and a la carte menu | * Large comfortable bar area |
| * 40 seater main restaurant | * 30 seater family dining area with separate indoor play area. |
| * Separate 30 seater restaurant | * Spacious patio and garden area |
| * Business lunches and functions catered for | * Ample parking |

Old Dover Road, Capel Le Ferne.
Tel 01303 223300



Folkestone News

New to **Channel Draught**, this section will continue until the Ashford, Folkestone & Romney Marsh branch restart their own newsletter, **Marsh Mash**. For enquiries about CAMRA in the Shepway area, contact Anne Powell on Ashford (01233) 502519. Pub reports are welcome to the normal **Channel Draught** address.

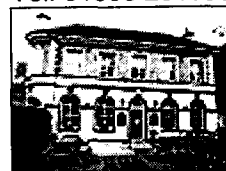
The Guildhall (Pubmaster) is one of several local pubs to have had Young's Special on recently. It made an interesting contrast to GK Abbot and Carlsberg Tetley's "Ind Coupe Burton Ale".

At Chambers cellar bar the beers are kept in a temperature-controlled back room

and are served straight from the tap or via the two remaining handpumps. This certainly worked during the hot weather and the bar itself can be very warm especially at busy times. The three stillions behind the bar have being used mainly for display but are available for use. Expect London Pride and Rother Valley Level Best. We tried Ringwood Old Thumper @ 5.8% - hardly a summer quencher but what the hell. Handy for buses just around the street corner.

THE GUILDHALL

42 The Bayle, Folkestone
Tel. 01303 251393



Stuart and Gilly welcome you to our traditional family run pub.

Four Real Ales
Good Pub Food.

Open 12 Noon - 11pm Mon-Sat
12 Noon - 10:30pm Sunday

Wetherspoons follows the company line - guest beers change weekly with normally two or three together. As at Dover (Eight Bells, q.v.), Hop Back Summer Lightning has become a regular offering, and all the same offers apply. Only the atmosphere is (totally!) different.

Scruffy Murphy's became Fitzgeralds. Now called "The Zoo" - what customer base have they identified? John Aspinall would not have been amused! Nor are we - same old disused handpump from mock-Irish days.

Jimmy Godden has opened Fat Sams at his site at bottom of the Old High Street. Not suitable for Real Ale and none offered that we know of. Down in Enbrook Valley between Cheriton and Sandgate, The Jester was previously reported as closed but is now advertising in the press (any Real Ale? - reports please).

The Black Bull has had a refit (again). There were promises of Real Ales in a pub which used to do Ind Coope Burton Ale and more recently Marstons Pedigree. Good news first. Six handpumps. Bad News. One Beer. Tetley Cask on three pumps - other three idle. Enough said.

Rescue is provided by the Lifeboat which carries four or live beers at a time. On our last visit we saw Bass and London Pride but drank two occasional brews from Burton Bridge. (No, we didn't write down the names. The man with the pen went on strike and the man with paper came out in sympathy.)

Despite reports of (temporary?) closure, Master Brew is now being served by Jan Pedersen who ran CAMRA in Folkestone almost single-handed in the early 1980s. Sheps owned (still own?) the house next door and did once have plans to knock the tiny back bar into it. One to watch.

No Real Ale at (amongst others): Harbour Inn, Brewery Tap, Oddfellows Arms, Royal George, Thistle & Shamrock, Jetty's Bar, East Cliff Pavilion, East Cliff Tavern, Red Cow. Others need visiting, including Park Inn Hotel (which has been advertising in the press and the ex-Whitbread locals now with various owners. Reports to Channel Draught or to the local CAMRA branch (Ashford, Folkestone & Romney Marsh).

Dave Routh & John Pitcher

BEACHES RESTAURANT

47 Beach Street Deal Kent CT14 6HY

Telephone for bookings: 01304 374843

Deal's Newest Eating Venue

Situated opposite Deal Pier

Newly refurbished restaurants offering a good range of home cooking -

ALL DAY BREAKFASTS not for the faint hearted with tea/coffee and orange juice only £3.50

Daily Lunches - OAP specials - Sunday lunches

Evening Extravaganza 3 Courses & Half Bottle wine
£12.95 per person (Fri-Sats only) Bookings Essential

Two Restaurants - 1 non smoking - Small function room with bar **Bookings taken for Small Groups & Dinner Parties. Also Outside Catering. Buffets from £3 per person. Parties Weddings Christenings etc**

For details contact Kathy (Restaurant Manager)
on Deal 01304 374 843



The Beery Boaters up the Erewash.

The Albion, in Burton-upon-Trent is Marston's brewery tap. Marston's brewery is on the side of the Trent and Mersey Canal and opposite Shobnall Basin, the home of Jannel Cruisers, from whom the Beery Boaters had hired Winnebago, a 63ft narrow boat equipped with a sliding sun-roof (never needed on a Beery Boaters cruise) and (I kid ye not) a four-poster bed! So it was in the Albion on Saturday 22nd September that the six of us assembled for a couple of pints of Pedigree before joining our boat. It had to be Pedigree. This was the only Marston's beer that we encountered during the week. In all of the Marston's houses the ordinary bitter was Banks'. I was told that, following the take-over by Wolverhampton and Dudley, only Marston's tenanted pubs can get ordinary Marston's bitter. I suspect that the Mercian and Merrie Monk milds have gone for ever and that the Marston's bitter will soon follow suit.

Having boarded our floating residence, we moved it just outside the basin and tied up again. Unbeknown to me when I booked the boat (honest!), our weekend of departure coincided with CAMRA's Burton-on-Trent Beer Festival! So we locked up and departed for the town hall. Whilst waiting for the evening session to open we partook of an aperitif or two at the Roebuck, with several Real Ales on tap, and the Devonshire Arms, a Burton Bridge pub and the local Pub of the Year 2000. Then to the festival.

Suffice it to say that we enjoyed ourselves, but it made us realise how lucky our branch is in the venue for the White Cliffs Festival in that we have all week to let the beers attain tip-top condition and that we have one hall for the beer and another for entertainment. At Burton everything was crowded into one hall and you had to suffer the music whether you liked it or not! More Marstons at the Oak and Ivy on the way back to the boat.

Sunday morning dawned fine, and we set off at 0700 down the canal towards it's confluence with the River Trent. Autumn was late in arriving this year, and although the bankside hedges were laden with berries, very few leaves were falling from the trees. Neither were there any signs of mushrooms to supplement our diet. Shardlow was to be our evening's venue. We arrived at Swarkestone at a convenient time for a mid day break, moored above the lock and opposite the junction with the defunct (but perhaps not for long) Derby Canal and walked the short distance to the Crewe and Harpur Arms on the bank of the Trent.

A small obelisk in the beer garden denotes that this was as far south as Bonnie Prince Charlie got in his brave and laudable attempt to recapture the throne of England for the Stuart dynasty.

It is tempting to imagine that the Highlanders, after a few sips of the local brew, decamped and streamed back north for a wee dram and a couple of cans of Tenants lager before their nemesis at Cullodden where, incidentally, many more Scots fought on the English side than on theirs. However, there is nothing wrong with the beer at the Crewe and Harpur nowadays. There is a large emphasis on food, but the pub is big and has enough bars to keep the drinkers and eaters apart.

The afternoon was enlivened by an incident at Weston Lock. A small wooden cruiser followed us into the lock. When the water started to be let out it appeared that the small wooden cruiser was a bit over wide and that the lock sloped inwards slightly. In a contest between a steel narrow boat and a small wooden cruiser there is only one outcome! The small wooden cruiser developed a sharp list and emitted loud groaning and creaking noises. Quickly the crew dropped the bottom paddles and started to refill the lock, but not before the lady on the cruiser had rapidly abandoned ship and the dog had fallen into the lock! Fortunately everything came out well. The dog was rescued and the cruiser backed out of the lock, leaving us to continue on our way to Shardlow. Shortly after we had moored up there the cruiser came chugging past, proving that it was still watertight.

Although there are several pubs in Shardlow, we stayed in the Malt Shovel (conveniently, our boat was moored outside) all evening drinking Pedigree and Banks' bitter and playing dominoes. The Malt Shovel is an attractive pub and is opposite the site of Zacharia Smith's Brewery Maltings, hence the name.

The Trent and Mersey Canal joins the Trent just below Shardlow, so we took to the wide river for a short while on Monday. A couple of miles down-river is a sort of watery cross-roads, with the River Soar (and the route to Leicester and the South) coming in from the right, and the Erewash Canal going off to the left. To the left we went, ascended the entrance lock and moored to take on water. We noted that the canalside Steamboat Inn, adorned with a funnel and ships ventilators, promised guest Real Ales.

Then away through Long Eaton and on to Sandiacre, where we had our first Hardy's and Hansons beer at the Red Lion. Their new beer, 'Trip to Jerusalem' was appreciated, as well as the mild and bitter. On again, climbing gently towards the Peak District through occasional (and very hard to operate) locks and occasional rain. At Ilkeston the Gallows Inn stands by one lock we called in for a quick pint of Courage Directors before proceeding.

We reached our destination, Great Northern Basin at Langley Mill, just before dusk. This is the current head of navigation but once linked three canals; the Erewash, the Cromford and the Nottingham. The Great Northern Arms pub is by a truncated arm off the basin which was once the top bit of the Nottingham Canal.

The bottom bit is still in water in Nottingham, and we would encounter it later. The Cromford Canal (of which Great Northern Basin is actually a part), went on to the Cromford and High Peak Railway, which would carry goods onwards over the Peak to Bugsworth Basin on the Upper Peak Forest Canal and hence to the northern industrial towns. More Hardy's and Hansons in the Great Northern that evening with more solid sustenance from one of the nearby take-aways later.

Tuesday dawned sunny, and remained so all day. Back to the Red Lion at Sandiacre for a more prolonged session. We tried a pub entitled 'The Old Ale House' at Long Eaton, but were somewhat disappointed, so we pressed on to the Steamboat at Trent Lock.

A good choice. When I first heard of the Steamboat it brewed it's own beer. I am told that it was cloudy and tasted 'odd', but the brewer said that was what Real Ale should look and taste like. He went out of business! The pub closed, and re-opened just selling Theakstons. Now it is run by a very enthusiastic lady who extends a genuine welcome to drinkers and boaters. Pedigree is the regular beer with a guest or two, often from small breweries. Everard's Tiger was on at the time, but we were promised Shardlow bitter if we returned on Thursday. The food is good as well!

The next day started slightly foggy. We had several miles of River Trent to negotiate towards Nottingham, and once on the river the fog was really thick. A glance at the map showed that all of the weirs and other nasties were on our right hand bank, so we posted a bow lookout and crept down the left hand side. We had time for a cup of tea before the gas ran out. We had suspected a slight gas leak; our suspicions were proved. The sun emerged as we left the river and moored above Beeston Lock. We phoned the boatyard to arrange for a fitter to come and fix the leak and bring new gas bottles, and departed for the Victoria Hotel.

What a superb pub! Very many guest beers and very many malt whiskies if you are that way inclined. Chris Excell from Ashford joined us briefly. He had recommended this pub to us in the first place. Thanks, Chris! The fitter had come and fixed things while we had been away, and so we proceeded down the Beeston Cut towards Nottingham.

Just after the Boots complex and the John Player factory the Beeston Cut becomes the Nottingham Canal. Between Great Northern Basin and here the canal is mostly obliterated, and it is difficult to see where the Beeston Cut joined it, but it is in water through Nottingham and joins the Trent just after the city centre. We turned just before the junction and made our way back to tie up on the other side of Castle Lock. Then to Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem, and as it was raining we stayed there.



Thursday, and with the promise of Shardlow Bitter at the Steamboat we set off with enthusiasm. Back on the Trent we appreciated how wide the river is, now being able to see both banks! The odd shower or two didn't dampen our spirits. Water was taken on (at a very slow tap) at Cranfleet Lock, and we moored on the river near the Steamboat just after mid-day.

And Shardlow Bitter we had, and plenty of it, not leaving until late in the afternoon as we only had to get to Shardlow for the evening. Then more Pedigree and Bank's bitter at the Malt Shovel, also Shardlow mild at the Navigation.

Friday. Back up the Trent and Mersey Canal towards Burton in bright sunshine, although wet weather was promised. Lunchtime was at Willington, with Pedigree at the Green Dragon (and very nice Pedigree it was), and more Pedigree at the Rising Sun. On to Burton and tied up for the last night at Horninglow Basin, the place to moor if you want to visit the Bass Museum. Unfortunately we were too late, so, avoiding the Navigation with it's Karaoke session, we spent the evening at the next pub, the Victoria. Pedigree again, but the Pedigree up there seems a far different Pedigree to that which we get down here!

And far too soon, Saturday. The last mile and last lock back to the boatyard under threatening skies. Moor up, off load into the cars and away south just as the heavens opened.

Jim Green



The Mogul

Chapel Place, Dover Tel. 01304 205072

Award winning Pub.

*Constantly changing range of
Real Ales, Mild & Real Cider.*

*Sandwiches & Ploughmans
available daily.*

Dover CAMRA Pub of the Year 2001

Kent Pub of the Year 2000



THE GUILDHALL

Situated in a peaceful location on the historic Bayle in Folkestone, this friendly pub offers a fine selection of well-kept real ales. Landlords Stuart and Gilly Gresswell have had plenty of practice; before taking over the Guildhall early last year they ran the Sportsman's Bar for eleven years, and before that the Raglan for another eleven years. Both pubs were CAMRA-listed when the Gresswells were in charge.

Along with Bass and Greene King IPA there are two rotating real ale selections such as Young's Special, Adnams Broadside, Ind Coope Burton Ale, and Courage Directors. All are guaranteed to be in excellent condition thanks to Stuart, who is a real ale lover himself. The food is superb as well; Gilly's macaroni cheese is the best around, and her curries and Sunday roasts are local favourites.

Although the attractive garden out front beckons on pleasant days, the best place to be is inside the pub, where patrons can chat with Stuart and Gilly and their sons Tommy and Ian. The entire family impart a warm, friendly, and amusing atmosphere where locals and visitors alike are made to feel welcome. This is pub entertainment at its finest.

JC Mitchell



Winkles with Wings!

Regular readers of *Channel Draught* will no doubt be aware of the sterling work carried out by the Golden Lion Winkle Club, under the guiding hands of Rab and Teresa.

One stalwart winkler, Kevin, (who recently underwent a complete head shave to raise funds for the club!) frequently books flights with Ryanair via the net, and while doing so one day was asked what a winkle club was? Kevin duly explained and nothing more was said at the time.

Imagine then Kevin's surprise when his phone rang and he found Ryanair's PR dept on the other end! The outcome of this was that the winkle club now has a discounted account with the airline which means that in March next year, 15 Winkle Club members are flying to Scotland and back for the day for a total well short of £100 !!

The best, however, was yet to come. Ryanair have also donated £500 to club funds and will be presenting the cheque at the Golden Lion very soon. Their press team will be on hand and the pub club will feature in the airline's 'in flight' magazine.

The club has earmarked the money as *part* of their continuing support of the local Aspen Unit which is based at Whitfield Primary School, and which helps children between the ages of 3 and 11 who sadly have severe learning abilities.

Over the last few years the Golden Lion has raised thousands of pounds, all of which is spent on either local children and their special needs, or the elderly. The Harbour School in Elms Vale and a junior five-a-side team in Aycliffe being just two of the organisations that the club has helped.

So its well done Ryanair, well done the Golden Lion winklers, it's gold stars all round! Watch this space for more details and a photo once the handover has taken place.

Yours as ever,

The Winkler



CHAMPION ALES AT A CHAMPION PUB

Listed at the end of this short, but beautifully written feature, you will find a list of all the winning ales as judged at the recent Great British Beer Festival. However, rather than read about them some of us were lucky enough to drink them all (yes all of them!) at the Mogul recently.

Charlie and Frank had them on from Thursday 16th August until they ran out (about noon on the 18th August!) this was followed by a weekend of Kentish Ales and Morris dancing!

Sunday afternoon (the 19th) found the Woodchurch Morrismen dancing the Morris at the bottom of the hill in the car-park next to 'Nuage ', so our thanks go to Jimmy Gleason who kindly allowed the use of this area.

All this frivolity was to celebrate Charlie and Frank winning the Deal, Dover and Sandwich branch of CAMRA's award 'Pub of the Year,' again, the second year running! Needless to say much ale was drunk and several people were struck by Summer Lightning, while others were struck by large pieces of wood wielded by oddly dressed folk who kept dancing in circles and Charlie needed counselling when the JHB ran out!

All in all it was darn fine day and a great time was had by all, as ever is the case in this fine ale house, so congratulations to Charlie and Frank on their second winning of this award, and our commiserations that they came second this year in the regional contest, having won it last year.

The list of Champion Ales is as follows –

MILD -	Brains Dark.
BITTER -	Oakham's JHB.
BEST BITTER -	RCH's Pitchfork.
STRONG BITTER -	Hopback's Summer Lightning.
SPECIALITY BITTER	Oakham's White Dwarf.



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GOLD MEDAL - Oakham's Jeffery Hudson's Bitter.
SILVER MEDAL - Hopback's Summer Lightning.
BRONZE MEDAL - Brain's Dark Mild.

Phil Wyborn - Brown.



Top, the presentation.
Right, Charlie Franklin

Below, the Woodchurch
Morrismen



A Morning With Shepherd Neame's Brewers

Reproduced below are my letter to the Faversham Gazette & Times and a reply from Shepherd Neame.

© Faversham Times
23 May 2001

It is simply a matter of taste

I read the letter from K Dimberly (*Faversham Times*, 2 May) with interest. He comments on the "duller" taste of Shepherd Neame's Master Brew bitter. To my taste, all of Shepherd Neame's beers, not just the Master Brew, seem to lack the excellent character and taste they formerly offered and they are now uniformly bland with a slightly unpleasant "backtaste".

As Shepherd Neame expands, is this part of an effort to make its products blander? Is it a move to appeal to a mass market which might have been put off by that erstwhile taste of Kent hops?

Perhaps the company is using cheaper ingredients to offset high government taxes on alcohol, or could it be the change of taste is a result of ultra modern brewing methods which affect the taste of beer? I have stopped drinking Shepherd Neame's beers, but perhaps someone would let me know if they ever again regain their former splendid qualities.

*Roger Maples,
Elms Vale Road,
Dover*

© Faversham Times
6 June 2001

Beer comment is welcome

It's encouraging that your reader Mr Marples cares so much about his local brewery and its beers (*Faversham Times*, 23 May). Beer is an acquired taste and our palates change through the years. A youthful taste for lager, for example, often matures in time to an appreciation of the more subtle complexities of cask conditioned ale. I can assure Mr Marples that the traditional ingredients and recipes we use haven't changed, the brewing process remains unchanged and any "ultra modern brewing methods" have been introduced for the sole purpose of ensuring the taste

of the individual beer brands remains consistent. At Shepherd Neame, a rigorously-selected panel tastes our beers every week to check for taste "drift" before they are allowed to leave the brewery. I would like to invite anybody who has any comments about the taste of our beers to write to me at the brewery. I would also like to invite Mr Marples to Faversham to join our tasting panel in order to see – and taste – for himself the measures we employ to guarantee the quality and consistency of Shepherd Neame's traditional ales.

*Ian Dixon,
Production director
Shepherd Neame,
Faversham.*

I accepted Ian Dixon's invitation. On Thursday 12th July I met Ian Dixon (Production Director), Julian Heatherington (Head Brewer) and Mark Dobner (Quality Control Brewer). We were joined by the Senior Brewer (ex Ushers of Trowbridge) and the brewer in charge of the tasting panel.

Before meeting this assemblage of brewing erudition, I was welcomed by Keith Thomas, of the Brewery's Public Relations company, who rather shamefacedly admitted to being a lager drinker! He explained that we would be shown the production process by Mark Dobner, together with Stephen Rayner, a gentleman of the press, and attendant photographer. After having my photograph taken in front of a steaming mash tun whilst clutching a glass of, but not drinking, bottled Master Brew the photographer thankfully departed.

It became clear to me that Shepherd Neame were genuinely concerned by the strong conception amongst many of their drinkers that there had been a change of taste in the beers and especially so in the Master Brew bitter. I was assured, more than once, that the recipe had not been changed for many a year.

We saw the two types of malt, crystal and pale ale malt, that are used in the cask beers together with up to 20% torrified wheat (which resembles little sugar puffs). Both Target and Golding Kentish hops are used in a pelletized form. The other ingredients are, together with water and yeast, glucose (a brewing sugar), powdered Zinc and Calcium. The last two are only added in small amounts. We ascended steps to a walkway near to roof level and looked across a scene reminiscent of an oil refinery. We could see dozens of tall thin metal silos that were conical fermenters. After fermentation, the beer is put through a 'centrifuge' which is similar in operation to a spin drier. It rough filters, removing solids from the beer.

After visiting the racking plant where the casks are filled with beer and a little finings (to make the beer 'drop bright') we were taken to the hospitality bar. Ian Dixon and the three other brewers joined us. I explained that I had not tasted any of Shepherd Neame's beers for approximately two years as, to my taste, they had become unpleasant and I did not enjoy them. My hosts replied that they hoped to change my views. We were all then given a form of the type used by the tasting panel. It included many characteristics that one could tick if thought to be present in the sample. Mentioned were headings such as sweetness, acidity, sulphur, citrus and even sweetcorn together with other characteristics that one would hope not to find in one's pint.

After a talk on tasting we had our first sample; Master Brew. After much sniffing by us all, and frantic scribbling on our tasters' notes, we were asked for our opinions on aromas. I had expected to detect hops but was surprised to find an overwhelming toffee/caramel sweet aroma. After a similar (oral, rather than nasal!) procedure we again proclaimed our findings. I was again surprised.

The unpleasant backtaste that I had once found so off-putting was no longer evident and the predominant taste was of hops. However the hoppy taste was aggressive and harsh instead of a strong bitter flowery hoppy taste and not as pleasant as I would have hoped for.

The next sample was an un-named beer and we were asked for our opinions with special regard to the aroma. This was very sulphurous, the same could be detected in the taste. Both Stephen Rayner, the journalist, who is a devotee of Shepherd Neame and I were amazed to discover that this was a different batch of Master Brew. This did illustrate the point that one brew using similar ingredients can vary from the next. Obviously, the taste and aroma does change with time but this example did emphasize the complexity of the brewing process as even the brewer remarked upon the singularity of this brew.

The next and last sample was Best Bitter. The aroma was again sweet/toffeyish. The taste however was much less hoppy and very much sweeter with a slightly fruity taste. Had I purchased a pint of this beer in a public house, I wouldn't order a second one. This was not to my taste at all. The Best Bitter is the same beer as Master Brew, excepting that it has been fermented longer to convert more of its sugars into alcohol. The aftertaste was distinctly unpleasant.

It was fast approaching the time of my return train and I had to turn down Ian Dixon's kind offer of luncheon but he did prevail upon me to have one 'for the road'. In the interests of research I requested a pint of Bishops Finger as this used the same recipe as the two other beers I had just sampled and this would have made an interesting comparison. My hosts were honest enough to concede that the beer was not in perfect condition as it was nearing the end of the cask and the bar had been closed for two days. If only all landlords showed such candidness I am sure sales of draught beer would increase.

My choice was therefore the one other cask beer that I had not tasted, i.e. Spitfire. This is a beer that has met with much success nationally, with supermarkets taking the pasteurised bottled version and Wetherspoons the cask version. This beer was more 'rounded' Master Brew with more body but still had an aggressive hoppyness and again had that unpleasant aftertaste.

Mark Dobner took note of my comments. Whether he does anything about them is another matter. He did agree that the aftertaste could be better and that perhaps the bitterness was a little harsh, he suggested that a little more Calcium would help the aftertaste and an increase of Goldings hops with a reduction of the Target hops might reduce any harshness.

Keith Thomas, our public relations taster was pleased to be able to eschew the cask beers and choose lager. Each to their own.

The beers that I tasted were well kept, as one would expect, and were in perfect condition. In fairness they had not travelled very far. It was admitted that a small number of publicans had trouble in keeping cask beers in good condition and for this reason Shepherd Neame promoted the use of a blanket of Carbon Dioxide on their beers where a quick turnover was not expected. They further conceded that it was used quite unnecessarily in some houses and they are trying to educate tenants and managers accordingly.

It was mentioned by more than one of the brewers that brewing is an art form and this was made thus by so many imponderables, such as changes in climactic conditions, affecting quality of hops and malt, changes in fertilisers, increases of farmers' yields etc, and also, no doubt, interventions by those expensive compulsive legislators and interferers in everyday pleasures. *[I think Roger is referring to the EU – editor]*

In conclusion; have Shepherd Neame convinced me?

Well, not quite, but I do wish Shepherd Neame well in their endeavours to re-create the beers that many of us once so assiduously sought, should this be their aim.

Roger Marples.



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Beer critic Roger goes on a fact-finding tour

Report by Stephen Rayner

IT ALL started when a couple of people wrote to the editor suggesting that Shepherd Neame's beer was ... well ... not what it used to be.

That was enough. Sheps, Britain's oldest brewer, had a turnover last year of £58.5 million. It brews 54.72 million pints a year from its HQ in Court Street, Faversham. It wins prizes as far away as Chicago for its brews. And the chairman, Robert Neame, is High Sheriff of Kent.

But two politely critical letters in the *Evening Times* were beyond the pale — and Shepherd Neame's spin-doctors went into action. One of the letter-writers was cordially invited for a brewery tour, accompanied by a representative of the *Faversham Times* beer-testing staff.

Restaurant Roger Marples, from Dover, was visiting a friend in Faversham when he first saw our letters page and thought he should add his two-penn orth.

Roger, who has the complexion and figure of a man who likes his ale, was disappointed in the modern taste of Sheps, he said. He thought it was harsher than the taste of his youth — but was prepared to be proved wrong.

And that's what Sheps staff attempted. After a long, technical but nevertheless fascinating tour of the brewery by Mark Dobner, we settled down to taste. Faversham's famous elixir.

The proof: Roger takes a sip. EKG4045/34

Descriptions of the beers in taste and aroma: include fruitily estery (banana, pear, apple), lemon, lime, spicy, floral, tulip, caramel, sugar, honey and even sweetcorn — and all those are as well as plain "hoppy".

Mr Marples was impressed with the tour — and paid tribute to the dedication of the staff, managers and company.

But the beer? He stuck to his guns. Some, particularly the Masterbrew, he liked. The best bitter he still found too sweet and slightly harsh.

Oh well, there's no accounting for taste.



Is that better? Roger Marples and Mark Dobner prepare to down a pint together. EKG4045/27a

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THE ALMA

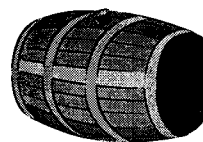
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Brewery News

Interbrew Settles for Half Measure

Belgian giant Interbrew, best known for its Stella Artois, has had to agree to a compromise with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) after last year's successive take-overs of the brewing interests of both Whitbread and Bass.

The combined Operation gave Interbrew nine UK breweries (plus three from Bass in the Czech republic) which between them supplied about 40% of the domestic market, and through distribution arrangements gave it a technical monopoly position. Such high domination is not unusual, and is even normal, in other EU countries including Interbrew in Belgium. That, and the fact that it was largely a UK issue, determined that the EU Commission need not intervene and instead gave the green light to our DTI to come to its own conclusions.

After a full year of arguments the outcome is much as expected. Interbrew had set itself a fall-back strategy in case of the Bass deal being blocked and had already made its targets of high-profile brands known.

The Great British Compromise allows the Bass deal to stand but with substantial disposals of much of its former assets in the form of breweries and beer brands. Of greatest interest to the Real Ale drinker is the future of Britain's one-time flagship beer, Draught Bass. Interbrew had promised to spend over £1m in badly needed promotion in an attempt to revive its fortunes following many years of lack-lustre support from Bass itself. It had also hinted at improving the quality as well as the image of a beer which, although perfectly palatable in good condition, had been turned from the archetypal Burton Pale Ale into just another run-of-the-mill national brand. In so doing Bass had allowed the stronger and more aggressive regional brewers to take the initiative and promote new or existing beers in the vitally important mid-range premium bitter market.

Interbrew keeps the Bass brand and its famous red triangle badge, with the former brewer now being called "Six Continents"(!). However the Burton-on-Trent brewery is to be sold along with those at Alton (Hants), Tadcaster (Yorks) and Cape Hill

(Birmingham). Its own ex-Whitbread breweries at Magor (S.Wales) and Strangeways (Manchester) remain plus the ex-Bass ones in Belfast and Glasgow. Thus Bass will either have to move out or be contract-brewed.

The likely scenario is that Bass would remain a Burton beer, being brewed by whoever buys the combined Bass/Carlsberg Tetley brewery but any announcement about this is some way off. The only other major plant in town is Wolves' Marston brewery - otherwise Bass becomes an exile just like many other beers

For the record, Interbrew keeps the Tennents brands but has to dispose of Caffreys, Grolsch & Carling; also Worthington, which used to have a *range* of mainly lower-strength cask ales but this has dwindled to just one low-volume bitter with the name being transferred to a smoothflow nitro-keg brand. Flowers and Boddingtons remain at Strangeways from Whitbread's final days but continental rivalry means that Heineken has to go.

From the outset, CAMRA gave a guarded welcome to Interbrew. With the outcome decided, Dave Goodwin (chairman) and Mike Benner (campaigns) will be talking to interbrew about its plans from Draught Bass. What chance of a return to its former glory as Britain's best-loved ale?

Wolves Escape capture

Another long-running saga has come to an end, at least for now. Wolverhampton & Dudley has fought off a hostile take-over mounted by pub chain Pubmaster, but only just! Pubmaster secured 46% of Wolves' shares and thus fails at this attempt - but it will surely return as others have done before.

Back in 1980s, Blackburn-based Matthew Brown had bought Theakston of Masham (N.Yorks) but was itself stalked by Scottish & Newcastle which wanted Brown's pubs and Theakston's beers. After a failed and much-publicised attempt it tried again and won. Blackburn's Lion Brewery closed and Theakston became a national brand with most of this increased production moving to Tyneside.

One of the earliest promoters of Real Ale was Ruddles of Rutland. Having sold its pubs to concentrate on brewing it was taken over and its name has become a case of "pass the parcel". Morland of Abingdon (Oxon) with its cramped, high-value town-centre plant bought and closed Ruddle's strategically placed industrial site. It hardly had time to change the taste of the beers than it was itself subject to hostile predators. Campaigners swallowed their pride (and their much altered Ruddles County) and defended Morland but Greene King bought out and closed down Abingdon. Needless to say the beers changed again!

None of this would bode well for Wolves, but for its strong marketing position with a swathe of pubs across Middle England. However its Mansfield plant looks doomed with Hartlepool being sold to the makers of Nimmo's ales who are expanding out of the Castle Eden Brewery which would itself close.

Already the whispers in the City have started. Wolves and Greene King to merge? Like so many likely stories, instantly denied

Fuller's Earth

An unwelcome surprise has been a profits warning from the brewer of London Pride. Likely to drop £2m on last year they say. Just as well that last year was a particularly good one. Expect at least a few (mainly London) pubs to go but spending on London Pride continues - already one of the country's best-selling Real Ales and a serious contender for the top slot. This certainly brings the moves at Wolves (Marstons) and Interbrew (Bass) into focus and with Tetley becoming a confused mix of nitro-keg, cans and cask who knows? Mind you, Shepherd Neame (Spitfire), Greene King (Abbot) and Charles Wells (Bombardier) are the serious competition now.

Kentish Pride

Swale, now operating from their new brewery at Graft Green, have been written to by Fullers about the name of Kentish Pride.

Apparently, this is going to confuse a lot of drinkers in London!

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LARGE CAR PARK

As a result, and rather than risk expensive legal action, Swale have changed the name of Kentish Pride to Kentish Best. Production is now in full swing and Swale Ales are appearing in the area again. We hope to have more news about Swale next issue.

Dave Routh

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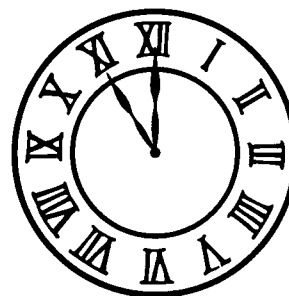
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LAST KNOCKINGS

Congratulations to the Mogul, Dover, for being voted Branch Pub of the Year for the second year running, and hard luck on narrowly missing out as the East Kent choice as well. However it's no discredit, as at least two of the competition's four other finalists are top rate establishments. Two, the Swan at Withersham, and the Brown Jug at Dumpton I have never visited, but the other two; the Ship Centurion at Whitstable and the eventual winner the Shipwrights Arms at Hollow Shore on Oare Creek are both excellent, although very different. The Ship Centurion's busy town centre site contrasts markedly with the Shipwrights isolated marshland setting on the edge of the Swale. A personal favourite for many years, it makes an excellent lunchtime destination for fine winter days after walking out across the fields from Faversham.

Shepherd Neame, whose presence in these pages is not unknown, have once again managed to draw attention to themselves. This time, however, not from the quality of their ale but for the price they charge for it. A pint of Late Red, their very palatable autumn ale, bought recently at the Bear in Faversham, cost the princely sum of £2.40. A price level not unknown nowadays, but not usually associated with a traditional town centre local, and one which I believe is a manager house and therefore directly under Shepherd Neame's control. To make matters more bizarre Spitfire was being offered on an adjacent handpump at the special price of (from memory) £1.69 (or was it £1.59?). This being some 30% cheaper for a beer of similar, if not identical strength. Goldings (Sheps' summer ale) has also been seen at £2.40 a pint. Perhaps Shepherd Neame should look at their own pricing policy before complaining about the volume of beer brought into this country from the Continent.

It's nice to know that the modern brewing industry still retains some of the courtesies of more leisured times. Recently one of our branch members having come across Hofbrau Weissbier in one of their houses, wrote to Halls & Woodhouse asking about its availability. By way of reply he received two bottles of the said beer, two glasses and two drip mats, plus a letter personally from Mark Woodhouse. Very heartening and very different from some of the larger parts of the industry.

Staying with Hall & Woodhouse, the absorption of King & Barnes appears to have been completed, at least on the ale front. Much of the K&B range has disappeared, including the superb Festive but you can still find Sussex ale at many bars in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Now brewed at Blandford Forum, several people have commented that it seems a more substantial and improved brew, although whether the locals around Horsham would agree I don't know. However, improved or otherwise the opinion was expressed that if a brew is changed or moved to a different brewery, its name should perhaps be laid to rest. Replace it by all means but give it a name that is new and distinguishly different.

A recent trip to the Burton area found large quantities of excellent Marstons Pedigree, but not one sign of Marstons Bitter, it's ordinary strength companion ale, with similar but distinctly different flavours. You may remember that after a vociferous campaign, Wolverhampton & Dudley reversed their decision to axe it and agreed to maintain supplies. However cynics amongst us suspected that this was just the start of a slow strangulation, and that given a few years, 'lack of demand' would give W&D the excuse to get rid of it, exactly what they had always intended to do. Conversely we came across several outlets (and considerable promotion) for Bank's bitter, in an area not traditionally part of their territory. One local told us that Marstons Bitter was available but only via Marstons tenanted pubs – not exactly a great vote of confidence from the management.

"Old Wort"

Local Information

If you have a dispute concerning ale bought in Dover, Deal or Sandwich, please bring it to the attention of Martin Atkins (see Page 33). You may want to take the matter up yourself and we advise you to contact any (or all) of the following:

Trading Standards Office (East Kent)	01843 223380
Trading Standards Office (Mid Kent)	01303 850294

Gwyn Prosser MP (Dover)	01304 214484
Dr. Steven Ladyman MP (Thanet South)	01843 852696
Michael Howard QC MP (Shepway)	01303 253524

Useful numbers

Dover Tourist Info	01304 205108
Folk. Tourist Info	01303 258594

National Bus Line	0870 6082608
National Train Line	08457 484950

Dover Taxis:	
A1	01304 202000
A2B	01304 225588
Arrow	01304 203333
Central	01304 240441
Club Travel	01304 201915
Heritage	01304 204420
Star	01304 228822
Victory	01304 228888

Sandwich Taxi:	
AM Cars	01304 614209

Kent Police	01304 240055
both ring at Maidstone	01303 850055

Stagecoach Buses	0870 2433711
Dover Office	01304 240024

Folkestone Taxis:	
Channel Cars	01303 246564
Chris's Taxis	01303 226490
Folk. Black Cabs	01303 220366
Folk. Taxi	01303 252000
Premier Cars	01303 279900

Deal Taxis:	
Deal Cars	01304 366000
Jacks Cars	01304 372299
AI Cars	01304 363636
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Beer critic Roger goes on a fact-finding tour

Report by Stephen Rayner

IT ALL started when a couple of people wrote to the editor suggesting that Shepherd Neame's beer was ... well ... not what it used to be.

That was enough. Sheps, Britain's oldest brewer, had a turnover last year of £58.5 million. It brews 54.72 million pints a year from its HQ in Court Street, Faversham. It wins prizes as far away as Chicago for its brews. And the chairman, Robert Neame, is High Sheriff of Kent.

But two politely critical letters in the *Faversham Times* were beyond the pale — and Shepherd Neame's spin-doctors spun into action. One of the letter-writers was cordially invited for a brewery tour, accompanied by a representative of the *Faversham Times'* beer-tasting staff.

Restaurateur Roger Marples, from Dover, was visiting a friend in Faversham when he first saw our letters page and thought he should add his two-penn'orth. Roger, who has the complexion and figure of a man who likes his ale, was disappointed in the modern taste of Sheps, he said. He thought it was harsher than the taste of his youth — but was prepared to be proved wrong.

And that's what Sheps staff attempted. After a long, technical but nevertheless fascinating tour of the brewery by Mark Dobner, we settled down to taste Faversham's famous elixir.

It's a tough job — but somebody's got to do it. And indeed, somebody does do it at Court Street regularly. A tasting panel sits in judgment on all the beers — not only from the brewery's technical staff, but also from other departments.

Mr Dobner, brewer and quality assurance manager, said: "There are so many scientific ways of making beer the right way — but it must taste right in the pubs and clubs. The art of great brewing is to understand that and make sure it happens."

Panelists are asked to mark



The proof: Roger takes a sip. EKG4045/34

the beers in taste and aroma: Descriptions include fruity/estery (bananas/pear-drops); lemon, lime, spicy floral, toffee, caramel, sugar, honey and even sweetcorn — and all those are as well as plain "hoppy".

Mr Marples was unimpressed with the tour — and paid tribute to the dedication of the staff, managers and company.

But the beer? He stuck to his guns. Some, particularly the Masterbrew, he liked. The best bitter he still found too sweet and slightly harsh.

Oh well, there's no accounting for taste.



Is that better? Roger Marples and Mark Dobner prepare to down a pint together. EKG4045/27a