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THE LONDON DRINKER

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~SPECIAL PULL OUT SUPPLEMENT
TO REAL BEER IN LONDON

COURAGE PULL OUT THE PLUG

AS CONSISTENTLY forecast by CAMRA and just as consistently denied by Courage, the Horselydown Brewery in Southwark is to close. Brewing is to stop in March and bottling some time after. 700 people will lose their jobs.

This move has been seen as reflecting the national economic crisis and the decline in beer sales - over 10% down on 1979. CAMRA would, however, point to the vast new Courage plant near Reading with

its extra capacity.

At present, Reading turns out only processed beer. The only Courage breweries apart from Horselydown who produce a drinkable pint are in Bristol and Plymouth. So from where is London and the South East going to get its real draught beer?

Whatever happens, this appears to be the most retrograde step taken by a major brewer since the John Smith arm of Courage withdrew its draught beer in the mid-1970's.

SIMON RETURNS

WE ARE GLAD that our forebodings about Simon's Tower Bridge Brewery last month were unfounded. They did stop brewing for a short time, but the beer should be back in the pubs by the time you read this.

Another local brewer who ran into a spot of trouble was David Bruce. The hot weather in August proved too much for the bitter he brews at the GOOSE & FIRKIN, and he had to get in supplies of Martlet bitter.

MORE REAL CLUBS

LAST MONTH we asked what the Liberals were doing, and now we hear that the Liberal Club in Church Road, Walthamstow serves Greene King Abbot and Rayment's BBA. Back on the rugby front, the Raynes Park Rugby Club can be added to the list as serving Sam Smith's OBB.

The Chats Palace Community Centre in Brooksby's Walk, Homerton, serves Everard's Tiger and Old Original, Abbot and BBA. Abbot is also available at the Leyton House Club, Major Road, Leyton.

LONDON DRINKER

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THE NEXT TEN YEARS?

The Campaign For Real Ale is ten years old. It has made an enormous impact on the British beer, breweries and drinkers. How should it tackle the future? LAURIE BISHOP looks at the London scene and asks a number of questions.

IT IS GENERALLY thought nowadays that London's real ale scene has improved out of all recognition; so much so, that some question whether there is any need for CAMRA to continue its fight along the original lines. In 1970, the Big-Six brewers were busy taking handpumps out of all their Central London pubs, if they had not already done so. DD, Red, Tavern, Tartan, E, Tankard were the rage. Apart from the odd Whitbread, Ind Coope, Courage or Younger's pub selling draught bitter or mild there was only Charrington, with quite a lot of IPA and Crown still available, and most, but by no means all, Young's pubs offered their full range to cater for the real beer enthusiast. Fuller's had very, very few pubs selling real ale and Watney's had long since disappeared.

In 1980 the situation is different. Real ale is not hard to find and many of the big-six brewers are putting handpumps and cask beer back into their pubs, and into the free trade, at a significant pace. Free houses tend to sell at least one, and normally two or more real ales. There is no longer the need to search London with a fine tooth-comb in the quest for a decent pint of real ale.

CAMRA has, in the main, brought all of this about. It has guided the beer drinker in his demand for the choice of drinking real beer. Unfortunately the position is never quite as clear as it seems at first glance.

Prices

Real ale is now a trendy drink. So much so that real ale normally costs above 45p a pint in most pubs in Central London. Almost on a par with a pint of lager. The differential with keg beer has been reversed. 10 years ago keg beer was 4-5d a pint more expensive than draught and this was explained away by the higher advertising and production costs.

Nowadays real beer is 2-3p a pint more expensive than keg. Why? Because the brewers can get away with it. They claim that transport costs are greater and yet keg beers are often brought on the same length of journey. They, especially the bigger brewers, are supposed to be flexible enough to be able to brew all sorts of beers. The bigger brewers have said that takeovers were in the public interest because the bigger concerns would be able to produce beer for the consumer more cheaply. This is not reflected in the price that we have to pay at the bar. is it?

The big brewers have more industrial problems than smaller companies (remember the recent Courage strike?) All these mergers were supposed to be in the public interest and successive governments have condoned these mergers. There is no sign whatsoever that the public has benefitted in any way. The trend has been for sheer greed as big profits have to be followed by even bigger profits in the next financial year.

CAMRA has failed to do anything about this trend. The spiralling price of a pint of draught beer ought to concern everyone and yet nobody seems to care. Some tend to say that a pint of beer is better value today than twenty years ago and it is true that the average worker earns (in monetary terms) his pint quicker now than in 1960. But that is true of many items and the lust for huge

profits is encouraged by government (who of course get a rake-off in the form of duty) and the industry generally.

Most Big-Six Brewers now produce real ale but the promotion it is given is minimal compared with their keg and lager beers. Many of their real ales are overpriced. Courage had the cheek to lower the gravity of their Directors bitter recently and then claim that they could not lower the price accordingly, (even though Courage pay less duty to the government) because it would interfere with their pricing structure. I challenge Courage to repeat this statement and say why they find it impossible to reduce the price of Directors.

The question is, on prices as on other matters, should CAMRA soften its attitude to the big brewers still further?

Lager

CAMRA has failed to arrest the trend, particularly amongst younger people, towards lager. Nearly all lager in this country is rubbish. It is weak, it uses inferior materials and it is too expensive. It is not brewed in the way that lager should be brewed. Should CAMRA spend more time on educating the drinking public, especially young people, as to what lager and beer are all about? Or should CAMRA try to appease the brewers by defining an acceptable form of lager?

A quality lager is brewed using pale malted barley, seedless hops and bottom fermenting yeasts. It is stored for periods of weeks and sometimes months to improve its strength and flavour and is served under strictly limited and controlled conditions of top-pressure dispense which do not ruin its palate.

This is not necessarily a beer which CAMRA should condemn, indeed it should, tacitly welcome increased choice for the beer drinker. But should CAMRA concern itself with this

sort of thing when there is so much else to be done? If lager is expensive when it is brewed using cheap materials, fermented with ale-type yeasts and not stored for any great length of time, then how much more will lagers which meet the proper definition cost to the drinker?

Mild

The consumption of mild ale in London has declined as a result of general drinking trends, which CAMRA has so far failed to reverse. Mild is difficult to keep well because it is low in alcohol and hops (both act as preservatives which is why well hopped strong ales keep so well). Whitbread, Charrington, Courage and Fuller's have all stopped serving draught mild in their London pubs and compared with ten years ago, Ind Coope offer very little. Young's are reducing their outlets for mild and none of the new breweries that have recently started up in London brew mild ale. Watney's and Scottish and Newcastle did not offer draught mild even ten years ago.

The future for mild in London looks bleak but it is reported that Young's have noted a slight upturn in trade in their mild recently. This may be because, at the last round of price increases there was no increase in the price of Young's mild. Even after the recent budget it still costs only 33p a pint in many public bars, making it the cheapest regularly available pint in the capital. Perhaps there is, after all these years when it seemed that it was dying a slow lingering death, hope for Young's mild. What do you think CAMRA's attitude to mild ale should be? In the case of Young's Best Malt Ale (as their mild is known) should CAMRA campaign for a beer that is significantly cheaper than bitter or should it allow brewers to phase out cheap drinks which also give them less return per capital outlay?

