

30p



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

LONDON DRINKER



THE VICTORIA, Woolwich Road, Charlton, SE7
(circa 1993)

Photo: Eric Martin

THE ROYAL OAK

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FRED and DIANA TAYLOR WELCOME YOU TO

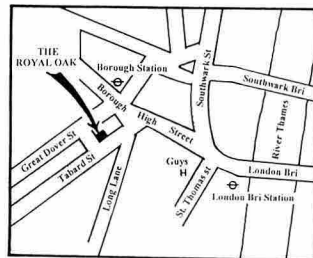
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For once I am not going to lead off on my usual tirade against the Tadcaster despoilers, Samuel Smith, despite news that they have taken over another two free houses in central London and have already removed all the real ale from one of them. This month we have an article from a guest writer, Ted Bruning who has said all that is necessary. I do not want anybody to think that my dislike of their practices is becoming a fixation.

Instead I shall give a little thought to the Budget, returned to its traditional Spring timing by the new(-ish) Labour Government. You, dear readers, have the advantage on me as by the time this edition of London Drinker hits the streets the Budget will be old news. Because of our deadlines, as I write this it will be next Tuesday.

So will Gordon Brown cut the duty on beer? Do bears s**t on a number nine bus?

I believe the Chancellor nailed his colours to the mast with the penny on a pint (i.e. two pence on a pint by the time it reached you and me) in his interim budget, which came into force on 1st January despite the best efforts of (and perhaps a little publicity seeking by) Shepherd Neame. I do not believe that any politician these days is brave enough to take the risk of trying the advice of those experts who say that cutting duty will increase the legitimate trade and bring in the same amount of duty.

And let's not forget the "Anything You Like is Bad for You" lobby who try to tell me that if the beer in my local goes down a few pence a pint I shall be dead from cirrhosis within the year. We may regard them as ridiculous, interfering busybodies (and with good reason) but the fact remains that they are powerful to an extent far outweighing their numbers. They seem to have their say throughout the life of the Parliament while we who put them there only get our chance to tell these unnecessary do-gooders to bugger off once every five years or so.

So there you have it then; my prediction is that Mr. Brown will probably say that there will be no increase in the rate of duty on alcohol this year (Sorry - this time; we've already had an increase this year) and we will all be expected to be very grateful. I don't think we shall. Of course, I may be wrong (I wish); if I am I shall put an apology to the Chancellor in next months London Drinker, but I don't expect that will be necessary.

Now, who else can I upset? Oh yes, I see that the next idea of the Government is to cut the "drink-drive" blood alcohol limit from 80 to 50millilitres per 100milligrammes. I do not propose to get into any discussions about whether the level of the limit (existing or proposed) is

right; what I do want to question, though is whether the limit needs changing or enforcing. My local newspaper each week contains any number of reports from the courts of drivers who have been involved in accidents or have been stopped for some other offence while driving with an excess of alcohol in their blood. What we do not hear, however, is how many accidents are caused by people driving with blood alcohol levels between 50 and 80 mg/100ml. Is it a case of whatever level the limit, there will be a minority (We hope!) of homicidal maniacs who ignore it.

There is a very similar case with vehicle noise emissions - especially motorcycles. Yes we all know that there are noisy motorcycles around, mostly with illegally modified exhaust systems; the noise emission limit has been made more stringent on several occasions but these machines remain noisy . . . and they remain on the roads. The problem here is not that the limit is too lenient; it is that it is simply not enforced.

Andy Pirson

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