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THE INAUGURAL AND 1997
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THE DEFINITIVE, CLASSIC 80/-



THE 1998 CHAMPION BEER
OF SCOTLAND

"YOU'RE DUE A DEUCHARS"



During my many years of editing this magazine I have seen many changes. The pub trade is now called 'The Beer Industry' to take in brewing into the same title. Most changes to this 'industry' have been to the detriment of us, the drinking public. Yet we have been blamed for all the ills of owners and managers. That we don't drink enough is the latest whinge. That we drink at home too much is another. The complaints about customers go on and on. This magazine and our campaign have attempted to stand up for the customer against a background of corporate management and vested interests.

For instance, how many times have you, as a customer, been consulted about anything? Brewery management take decisions about their business but their success depends on you and me. Our contrary opinions often enrage brewers and pub owners whose attitude is always 'We know best' and 'We owe it to our shareholders'. The only argument that holds any validity as far as I am concerned is about the availability of 'real ale' in the group's retail outlets. If a product has been properly promoted and poor sales lead to a decline in quality, I think it is absolutely right that the outlets in question take it out. If the demand is there, but if a company policy rejects it, then that is a different matter entirely.

Joe Public has just been blamed by the City and Big Brewers for the latest projected rationalization of breweries. It seems as if our beloved Whitbread is contemplating severing its 257 year brewing tradition. Overcapacity and shrinking profits from brewing are blamed. Of course if they had not 'rationalized' some of the best breweries in the country, then this situation need not have arisen. Some of the most attractive, tasty ales have been severely pruned by this most avaricious of predators. The City calls this 'increased efficiency' and they love it. Those drinks experts in the city wouldn't recognise a pint of decent beer if they tripped over it. The City says the money has gone out of beer making and that serving it in pubs - along with food - is more profitable. They would obviously welcome McDonalds lookalikes with bars - like Berni Inns?

Even our other old friend Allied Domecq plans to sell its pubs, which include the Firkin chain, to Whitbread, who are going to brew no beer. So who is going to supply this new beerless conglomerate? Step forward Bass, Courage or Scottish & Newcastle. Step backwards Young's, Fuller's and the like. And whither Boddingtons? Does anyone care? Philip Shaw, drinks analyst at West LB Panmure (Who?) says 'The industry is one of decline. It is becoming progressively

less attractive for investment purposes compared with pubs and other retail outlets.'

In my view this is absolute twaddle. Mr Shaw can say what he likes and hang the consequences for breweries and jobs in the sector. I believe the city undermined Marstons and now Mr Shaw appears to be rounding on our beloved independents who, he says, "muddle on with mixed results!"

Other commentators are not so sceptical and destructive. Many have been quoted in the FT recently as seeing plenty of opportunities in the 'industry'. Also, clearly, investors believe brewing has a profitable future.

So where does all this leave the customer? Like it or lump it seems to be the message from the City and the Big Boys. What about the smaller, better companies getting together with their loyal drinkers and working for a brighter future for all of us, customers, management and investors?

Chris Cobbold

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EXTRA SPECIAL BITTER



THREE WORDS YOU CAN BELIEVE IN.

