

Channel Draught

Issue 1 November 1999



Whither Real Ale in White Cliffs Country?

Channel Draught is Published and © 1999 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!



Cask Corner

A warm welcome to the first ever edition of *Channel Draught*, the periodic news letter of the Deal, Dover, Sandwich and District branch of CAMRA.

Our aim is to keep you informed of both local and major national issues, where to find the best beer locally (see our Desert Island Ales or Channel Hopper sections) and how to arrange a quality pub crawl.

We hope you find it informative and entertaining and if you have any comments, suggestions or views let us know (see the contacts section).

Don't forget our big event of our year in February – The 7th White Cliffs Winter Ales Festival . Plus we have many social events throughout the year and it would be good to see you at one of our monthly branch meetings. The diary includes the date of all events and meetings.

Happy drinking – *Cheers!*
Wayne Butler (Editor)

The 10th Guide to

KENT Pubs



Over 1900 pubs surveyed, including 1500 Real Ale pubs.

Information includes:

- 👍 Mild, Stout & Porter
- 👍 Cider & Perry
- 👍 Pubs with Accommodation
- 👍 Disabled Access
- 👍 Town maps

and lots more

Available now to CAMRA members at Branch meetings or via the editor for £4.50 (cover price £4.95)

The Diary

Forthcoming Events:

- 4 Dec Presentation, 1200hrs
Doris's **The Red Lion**,
Snargate Romney Marsh
- 20 Dec 1999 **Branch Xmas Meal**,
Blakes.
- 4/5 Feb 2000 7th **White Cliffs Winter
Ales Festival**, Dover
Town Hall.

Branch Meetings (All start at 8pm):

- 15 November **Blakes**, Dover
- 13 December **Endeavour**, Dover
- 17 Jan 2000 tba

Contacts

If you have any queries about CAMRA in White Cliffs Country then please contact the Chairman Martin Atkins on (01304) 821199 during office hours.

For membership enquiries, call CAMRA HQ in St Albans on 01727 867201 or come to one of the Branch Meetings (dates above).

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Local News

The Kent Pub Guide 1999 gives a full list of all pubs selling Real Ale and around 75 % do so but since it was produced earlier this year there have been a fair number of changes.

Of all those listed the local CAMRA Branch selected the **Alma** at Deal as its **Pub of the Year** and a presentation was made a few weeks back. It is a genuine Free House which sells a constantly changing selection of ales from small breweries located around the country.

Meanwhile in Dover, at least three pubs have gone back to Real Ale recently and are selling the stuff at reasonable prices (unlike some I could mention.....)

The **Cherry Tree** has Benskins Bitter which comes from Burton-on-Trent, but the **Sportsman** opposite is currently closed. Over in Tower Hamlets the **Dew Drop** now sports a pair of handpumps. Just around the corner the **Battle of Britain** has reopened after a year-long closure. Here the house beer is 'EKB' – the initials stand for 'East Kent Brewery' but the beer actually comes from Ipswich.

The brewer of EKB is **Tolly Cobbold** which was rescued from closure several years ago and got some valuable publicity when it appeared on the "Troubleshooter" TV programme presented by former ICI tycoon Sir John Harvey Jones – he whose ties are second only to Countdown's Richard Whiteley. If you ever see "Tollyshooter" beer then give it a try.

By a curious twist of fate it is not the first time that Tolly has produced a "local" beer. Older drinkers might remember Charrington Crown which was made by guess who ?

The past few years have seen numerous pubs change hands and amongst the latest are the **Fox** (Temple Ewell) and the **White Horse** – both are owned by **Whitbread** and leased to tenants. Some blame the "Duty Frees" for closures but the fact is that social and working patterns have changed drastically over as many years as anyone cares to remember and it is all too easy just to drop into the armchair and grab the TV remote control.

Over the years the price of beer has risen at a higher rate than most other consumer goods and although part of this is due to our high-duty regime the main culprits are the brewers and pub-owning chains who are actually proud of the fact that they have forced up prices. They speak of "premium products", i.e. those which can soak up millions in advertising budgets all of which has to be paid for by.....guess who ?

Larger pubs tend to be managed giving direct control to the brewery. In the case of tenanted pubs, their solution to maintaining profits is easy ! Either sell off/close down or stick up the rent and hope the tenant gives up. Thankfully many tenants are tenacious and continue to run good houses despite all the odds. Most of our pubs get their beer from just one or two suppliers but there is a lot to be said for concentrating on quality rather than quantity – better one first-class brew than six mediocre ones !

Dave Routh



National News

White Cliffs Country may be tucked away in the bottom right hand corner of the map and as in many localities it would be all too easy to ignore the big picture. However there are major changes underway in the brewing industry and at least some of these will affect **your** pint.

Sadly the days when every decent-sized town had at least one family-owned brewery have long since gone. Most of those in East Kent were taken over by Whitbread – one notable exception was Thompson’s in Walmer which went to Charringtons (now Bass).

The major breweries are really only interested in brand names. When they close a local brewery they may cling onto the name for a bit but they soon lose the plot and go back to push the same big names, i.e. the ones you see on the telly. The whole idea of a family-run brewery selling within its own local area has virtually disappeared. Those that have survived, indeed prospered, have had to “go national” or concentrate on niche markets.



Brewing capacity is still well above demand and there is more money to be made from running pubs than actually brewing the stuff. Even more money can be made from property sales and a prime-site brewery located in a city centre is an obvious target for redevelopment. So it is at the moment, and there will be more to follow. During September, Courage closed its Real Ale plant in Bristol (having previously pulled out of Reading and London) with the beers now brewed in Yorkshire. Inevitably the brews change character – often for the worse !

One sad case is Morlands, based in Abingdon, Oxon. This brewery rose to fame with its “Old Speckled Hen” bitter which uses the MG sports car logo, complete with octagonal badge and the strength (5.2%) is advertised as “our famous 5.2”. A few years ago it was subject to a hostile take-over bid from East Anglian brewers Greene King and only just survived. Since then it has taken over and closed down the once-famous Ruddles brewery which rose to fame thanks to its distribution via Sainsbury’s, Travellers’ Fare (remember BR’s catering arm?) and Student Union bars. Ruddles rightly celebrated “independence” of its home county of Rutland and for its trouble it no longer exists except in name only. Now the MG wheel has turned on Morland. Greene King are taking over and the Abingdon plant is due to close next year.



Much has been written in the press about two big take-overs. Whitbread is pulling out of brewing to concentrate on retailing and tried to take over around 3500 pubs from Allied Domecq (aka Firkin, Scruffy Murphy, etc). Instead the pubs are going to giant operator Punch Taverns who in turn are selling on several hundred of these to Bass. All of this has yet to be ratified by HM Government but already the Firkin chain has ceased brewing and will now sell other beers instead. The other is Marstons of Burton-on-Trent – however their brewhouse appears to be safe and still produces its flagship “Pedigree” beer which has its own, now unique, brewing process and can be enjoyed in several local pubs, especially those supplied by Whitbread.



OK (I hear your ask) what about our local brew? Well, since Whitbread (ex-Fremlins) shut down at Faversham we are left with Shepherd Neame as the only major brewer in the Hop County. “Sheps” has expanded steadily over many years and has developed its own brands, perhaps the best-known being Spitfire which from being a commemorative brew to benefit the RAF benevolent charity has grown into one of the country’s leading Real Ales being distributed through major players like Wetherspoons and Tesco’s. The Court Street site has recently been overhauled and handles a wide variety of products quite apart from the obvious names.

A few weeks ago Sheps made a bid to take over a smaller rival brewery, King & Barnes who are based in Horsham, West Sussex. K & B has its own range of beers and some are occasionally available through Whitbread. However its main contribution is its commitment to the production of bottle brews including the splendid White Shield Worthington which is distributed through Bass (Charrington) outlets. What makes this brew different from almost all the rest is that it is “bottle conditioned” so that there is a sediment at the bottom. It has to be poured carefully – otherwise you get a lovely cloudy yeasty taste which does you good but don’t look too pretty. Sheps bottled version of Spitfire used to be made like that but now it is as crystal clear as any other brew.

The directors of K & B have turned down Sheps bid offer and as yet we await further developments. In the meantime Sheps beers can be sampled in Calais. **Yes**, the town which is twinned with Dover was once subject to the English crown and now boasts an “English Pub” selling Spitfire and Bishops Finger – the “Lighthouse” by the Holiday Inn markets itself of a little bit of England in France. However be prepared to pay French prices !



Dave Routh – Area Organiser East Kent

Desert Island Ales

Three ales you can usually find in (or near!) White Cliffs Country that you would take away with you – given the chance!

This issue, Martin Atkins (Branch Chairman) selects his Desert Island Ales.



<u>Ale</u>	<u>Brewer</u>	<u>Pub</u>
ESB	Fullers	<i>Ship</i> , Middle Street, Deal
Bombadier	Charles Wells	<i>Blakes</i> , Castle Street, Dover
Master Brew	Shepherd Neame	<i>Princess Royal</i> , The Harbour, Folkestone

The Channel Hopper

If you enjoy hopping across the Channel, there is no reason why you can't enjoy a great beer in good surroundings over there. To this avail, it is imperative that anyone visiting Boulogne should make their way up to the Old Town and visit *The Vole Hole*, which is opposite the Basilique (Domed Church) at 52 Rue de Lille.

This must be one of the smallest bars in Europe – you would be lucky to fit more than 20 people inside. It is English-run, by Roger Young, but frequented by many French locals as it has a great atmosphere. The beer on offer (other than 1664) is L'Angelus from the Brasserie D'Annouvellin. This is a classic regional beer, very rarely found on draught and very moreish. It has a fresh citrus taste and is often compared to Champagne as it tastes and looks considerably weaker than it really is (7% ABV!).

So next time you dash across on the SeaCat to Boulogne, you know where to go!

Wayne Butler



A Crawl Around Dover

For a leisurely stroll around town a good place to kick-off is outside the old Town Hall. The *Prince Albert* (Whitbread) offers up to six brews, mainly medium strength, including favourites like *Flowers* and *Pedigree*. It also offers the only “real” cider in town – *Stonehouse* appears pricey but is deceptively strong! If you are keen on an early start then turn up at 10 am.

The *Golden Lion* is being smartened up but the beer is already consistently good, especially *Pedigree* which is favourite here. Next, dodge the York Street traffic and try the *Mogul* (above Nu-Age) which is a genuine family-owned Free House. Normally one Real Ale at a time – this changes every few days and can come from almost anywhere in the country and usually from small local breweries.

Then down to the *Flotilla & Firkin*. As per *National News* the future range of beers remains to be seen and the legendary *Dogbolter* will be sadly missed but quality should be as good as ever. The *Lord Nelson* (Shepherd Neame) has recently been given a “sporting” theme and now has the distinctive *Spitfire* as well as *Master Brew*.

The *Eight Bells* (Wetherspoons) remains controversial with its aggressive marketing and cut prices. Two guest Ales feature and, along with the regular range, they tend to be served cooler than elsewhere. From there cross (booze-free?) Pencester Gardens and along the river bank to the *Park Inn* (Ladywell). This is very much up-market by local standards with the accent on food, but there six beers on handpumps, albeit at premium prices.

Finally head towards Charlton Green for the *Louis Armstrong*. *Draught Bass* is the house bitter here but weekends see a guest ale (or two) which neatly coincides with music nights – see list of gigs in the window. Note that the pub closes on Sunday afternoons then reopens later for the Jazz Evening. Otherwise all of our recommendations are open all day every day.

Next Issue - Deal and Sandwich!

**Next Festival -
Dover Town Hall
4th and 5th Feb 2000!
Details next issue**

