

**SOCIETY for the PRESERVATION of BEERS
from the WOOD**

(Founded 1963)

The original beer consumer organisation

PINT in HAND

Number 156 * * * * * November 2020



Cross Keys, Thame (see page 18)

Very best wishes and good health to all SPBW members, their families and friends.



Founded 1963

PINT in HAND

- Pint in Hand is issued quarterly, in February, May, August and November. It is issued to all subscribing members and affiliated branches of SPBW.
- All members are invited to contribute articles on beer-related subjects for publication. Contributions for the February 2021 issue should reach the Editor by 25 January.
- The Editor or the National Executive Committee of SPBW does not necessarily share opinions expressed in Pint in Hand.

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Online shop: www.spbw.beer/online-shop

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/group.php?gid=110911458926369>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/spbw.uk>

Anyone reading this who is not already a member of SPBW might like to know that annual membership costs only £10. For information about SPBW and a membership application form, please email or send a stamped addressed envelope to the Membership Secretary as above or visit our website.

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OPENING TIME

As we plunge towards winter there seems to be no end to our discontent. The pub and brewery trade is being pushed further into trouble by the decrees of the Powers That Be. To be fair, it can't be easy when confronted by a deadly virus that can, apparently, discern between those simply drinking in a pub and those consuming a 'substantial meal.' The virus can also tell the time, it seems, as it is known to lurk in pubs waiting to infect those with the temerity to linger a moment beyond 10pm. But of course, it misses all the crowds subsequently turfed out onto the streets.

Flippancy aside, this is a very difficult time for publicans who rarely have an easy life at the best of times. I'm sure I don't need to tell any of you this, but remember that it is not the publicans and bar staff that decide we should wear masks and not share tables; so please be nice to them and be grateful that you can drink in a pub at all (and I appreciate that a lot of members are currently lumbered with Tier 3 Restrictions; as of today, 28 October, I'm still in Tier 2. I might have known it would all end in Tiers).

There have been inevitable calls for the Government to bail out the suffering pub and restaurant industry. Trouble is, sport and the arts are also struggling so there just isn't the cash to go round. All the more reason to support your local pub (and others).

As well as inhibiting our routine drinking habits, the Covid crisis makes it virtually impossible to plan ahead. The SPBW calendar for 2021 is virtually blank unless circumstances change sufficiently to allow events to be staged. As usual, we'll keep members informed via the regular channels.

I did wonder, when all this started, whether I would end up having to put out some rather slim volumes of PiH. Thankfully, this has proved not to be the case. Although there have been just about no events to report on, I'm ever so grateful to those who have contributed a range of interesting material. Keep it up!

Finally, it's that time of year when I wish seasonal greetings and best wishes (and very good health) for next year to all SPBW members and their families and friends; and to all publicans and brewers who take pride in their profession. Cheers to you all.

Roger

Articles on beer/pub related issues for Pint in Hand are always welcome! If sending articles by email it would be very helpful if they were in Arial plain 12pt, single spacing with no formatting! Pictures should be in JPEG format. If you are 'borrowing' material that has appeared in other publications, can you please credit the source. Thanks.

Some back issues of Pint in Hand are available:- issues 87-90; 92; 94-103; 106; 108; 112; 114; 117-119; 123-125; 127-131; 133-137; 139-155. These can be obtained from the Editor (details on page 2) in return for 10 second class stamps.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The NEC has been holding monthly meetings by Zoom. Although our usual meeting place, Ye Olde Mitre, reopened in September, it's not convenient for some of us to get there.

For many years, the NEC held its meetings at the Royal Oak in Borough. We were very sorry to hear of the death in August of John Porteous, who co-managed the pub with Frank Taylor for more than 20 years. John was in charge of catering and anyone who ate at the pub will testify to his skills in the kitchen. It's a real pity he had only about a year's retirement to enjoy.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2021 AGM of the NEC will be held on Saturday afternoon, 6 March, at a venue to be decided. All SPBW members are invited to attend this meeting.

Because of the obvious difficulty in planning future events, this date can only be regarded as provisional at the moment. We will issue any information via the usual channels should there be any developments.

The proposed EGM, mentioned in the previous two issues, has had to be postponed indefinitely.

SPBW WEBSITE

Without a permanent Webmaster (see next item) there have been assorted glitches with our website and much of the content had become out of date. All credit and thanks, therefore, to Aidan Kerrigan for his work on the site. There is still plenty to do, which is why we need a volunteer who can dedicate her/himself to the task.

NEC SITUATIONS VACANT

We are still looking for a permanent **Webmaster**. The post involves maintaining the SPBW's website and keeping it up to date. The postholder would not need to be based in the London area. Please contact Rob Shacklock if you are interested; chairman@spbw.beer. (It is possible that this post will shortly be filled but I can't confirm that at the time of going to press).

We will also need a permanent **Products Manager**. This post involved liaising with manufacturers and maintaining the Society's stock of products. If you are interested in this post please contact Patrick Deller for more information: spbwproducts.pd@gmail.com

A new post of **Events Coordinator** had been proposed but, given the ongoing situation, this has been deferred.

BRANCH AFFILIATION FEES

Following our review of membership fees, we have turned our attention to branch rates. As from 1 January 2021 these will increase to take account in rising costs. Branch contacts will be notified of these rates in the very near future. I hope you will appreciate the need for these increases.

ANNIVERSARY EVENT

Sunday 6 December will mark the 57th anniversary of the SPBW's founding. It has been customary to hold an organised gathering to celebrate these events but Covid restrictions unfortunately rule this out (barring unforeseen relaxing of the lockdown). We hope that members and branches will celebrate this landmark with a pint or two of something nice. We may try and hold some kind of Zoom social on the day; please contact John Rooth if you'd be interested in taking part.

The Rising Sun in Epsom was the Society's birthplace and it hosted our annual celebrations for many years. The pub has been closed for several months but was due to reopen on 31 October. The Ram Pub Co, which owns the Rising Sun is well aware of its links with SPBW and seems eager to maintain the connection. If any of you can get to the RS on 6 December, why not make yourself known to George & Ewa Gillette, the new management team. The Rising Sun is at 14 Heathcote Road, Epsom, Surrey KT18 5DX.

Here's hoping we can raise a glass together in 2021.

WOODFEST 3

Having had to abandon plans to hold this event in 2020 we are determined to go ahead next year – lockdown restrictions permitting of course. The intention is to go with the same venue – Turks' Head, St Margaret's, Twickenham - and time of the year - mid to end of May - although the date may inevitably have to change.

Aidan Kerrigan is again organising the event and is forming a committee. If you would like to help out in any way, please contact Aidan (email spbw.woodfest@gmail.com). We will formally request volunteers when we are able to confirm the date.

NATIONAL WEEKEND

In an ideal world this issue would carry a report of the 2020 National Weekend, scheduled for the Lake District in late September. Since the world is far from ideal right now, the event had to be cancelled (although a few from West Riding branch made the trip). Instead, let's have a look back at the history of these events.

The National Weekend was the brainchild of Nick Martin, founder of Central London branch among his accomplishments. Nick felt that there should be a way of bringing together members from all over the country. And so the first Weekend took place over the late May bank holiday weekend 1982, based in Devizes. Well over 30 members took part; in the early years, the idea was to block book a hotel or two so everyone was under the same roof. Some of us stayed at the Black Swan (pictured). Over time, this was relaxed so people could do their own thing. Needless



to say, that first Weekend included a visit to Wadworth brewery. At the time there were, in theory, 4 SPBW branches based in Wadworth pubs in the area. As it happened, only Coate branch, who were closely involved in planning, made their presence felt (the branch based at the Crown, Bishops Cannings, had recently folded after the landlord's wife ran off with a barmaid, or some such scandalous tale).

At any rate, the Weekend was declared a huge success. Nick was again at the

fore of planning the following year when Skipton in North Yorkshire was our destination. In the nearly 40 years since, we've taken the show to most parts of England as well as venturing 'abroad' to the Isle of Man and North Wales in recent years. Most popular venues have been Devizes and Norwich, with 3 Weekends apiece. Usually, we hope that local members and branches can do most of the donkey work regarding planning.

One of my favourite NWs was the 1988 event based in Dudley. It was organised by the local tourist board and involved visits to 4 breweries (including Hansons and Holdens on the Saturday morning!) as well as many of the classic pubs in the Black Country – oh, and a traditional maltings as well.

Between 1982 and now there has only been one blank year – 2001 where the disease of apathy was the culprit. Since then, the NW has become established as a key part of the SPBW calendar. Some 50 breweries have been graced with our presence and I'd rather not try to estimate how many pints have gone down eager SPBW throats (not least my own!) With usually 30 or so members convening from all around the UK, there's always a highly convivial atmosphere.

So, thanks to Nick for getting this impressive ball rolling. Let's hope we can get together again in 2021 and beyond.

If you have any particular memories of past National Weekends, why not share them with us? A full list of NWs, venues and breweries visited is on our website at:

<https://www.spbw.beer/events/national/>

THE WOOD BEER GUIDE

Understandably, the vast majority of breweries and pubs are focusing all their efforts on staying solvent during the punishing restrictions imposed by the continuing Covid 19 crisis. However, there are a few shafts of light in the gloom relating to beers from the wood. I hope they will bring some comfort and hope for the future.

Breweries

Three breweries have expressed an interest in using Ye Olde Mitre's wooden casks for their beers: Thames Side (Staines - possibly Black Swan Porter, 'Paint It Black' Black IPA, Mallard Mild or IPA 'Egyptian Goose'); Big Smoke (Esher); and Signal (West Croydon). Ye Olde Mitre, situated in a tiny seclude courtyard off London's Hatton Garden, is of course the normal venue for NEC monthly meetings.

September's What's Brewing contains an article by Roger Protz on Historic Beers From The Wood. This mentions that Wiper & True Brewery had established a barrel store, as a result of which they have launched two bftw made by mixed fermentation: The two beers are Narrow Sea, based on the Belgian saison style, and Hinterland, a 7.3 per cent IPA.

Eagles Crag Brewery, Todmorden will be releasing a new, limited edition beer called Regal Eagle, an 8.5% Imperial Stout that has been matured in an oak barrel for eight months. This beer is in bottle form and only 350 bottles are available, so get in quick!

Pubs

Brighton's Evening Star has obtained 4 wood pins, which have been re-furbished by Master Cooper Alastair Simms. Mark Hazell, Manager tells us:

'Beak brewery in Lewes just filled a couple of my pins with their India Porter. They'll serve one and we'll do the other on 31 October. It's their call on when we do it, but I'll let you know!'

The Lord Harrowby in Grantham was due to host a small beer festival from 10-13 September. They hoped to have 8-10 bftw from the total of 15 beers.

General

The newly-published Camra Good Beer Guide includes wood-aged beer in its list of defined beer styles. This is a first and indicates the growing interest in wood-aging in the brewing industry.

*Garry Wiles
Wood Liaison*

INFORMATION BY EMAIL

If you want to be kept informed of SPBW events and other news, please contact John at secretary@spbw.beer and he'll add you to his mailing list. We assure you that your email details will only be used for this system and will not be divulged to third parties.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The PiH time machine takes us back to the October 1980 Branch Newsletter. It appears that a few of the existing branches were quite active with others seemingly moribund. A number of mooted branches was listed, of which only Central London came into being. An anonymous writer was somewhat scathing about the lack of support from the NEC in manning the SPBW's stand at the GBBF (held under canvas at a fire-affected Alexander Palace) – well I helped out, but wasn't on the NEC at the time. There was plenty of content devoted to breweries, including a lengthy piece on Bass's Burton brewery by Geoff Austin. He does say that Bass's famous Burton Union system was threatened with closure. Indeed it was and only Marston's carries on this unique function. Campden Hill branch had spent a few days in East Anglia, visiting Tolly Cobbold brewery and also visiting Southwold where they were able to sample Norwich Castle bitter from Watney's, who were dipping their toes back in the real ale market. Another interesting initiative from Watney's was reported by the late 'Arry Hart. The old Albion Brewery in Whitechapel, formerly home to Mann, Crossman & Paulin and closed a year earlier, had hosted a Beer Festival. Admittedly all the beers were Watney's, but a couple were served by handpump. Best of all was a Festival Ale (1055og) served from a wooden cask.

In the days before digital photography and the like I tended to use any old illustration on the front cover. Hence PiH 36 in November 1990 featured an illustration of Kidd's Dartford Brewery, of which I know nothing. Times were hard back then and this was a thin, 16-page issue. Opening Time reported on what was then an unusual initiative – the introduction of one-third measured by the Tap & Spile chain. I was a bit scathing at the time but the idea has turned out to be popular, particularly at beer festivals. Almost 3 pages were devoted to a beer-related account of my recent trip to the Southern USA, rather less well-endowed with microbrews than nowadays. Elsewhere there was a report on the demise of Greenall Whitley, who had pulled out of brewing to concentrate on its tied estate. GW had already taken over and closed the likes of Shipstones, Simpkins and Wem breweries, their beers accordingly consigned to the dumper.

Finally, there was a tribute to the recently-deceased Founder Member, Dougie Chamberlain. It was his initiative that inspired the founding of the Society, 67 years ago!

Ten years on and the New Inn at Cropton, North Yorkshire graces the cover. No mention of this pub within, not even in Andy Whitley's lengthy ramblings. The New Inn is home to the Great Yorkshire brewery. My Editorial reports that Whitbread (remember them?), having sold off its brewing interests, had put up its 3,000 pubs for sale. Wonder what became of all them. Jason Lever (who I believe was a member of the now-defunct Grimsdyke branch) recounted a tour of the west country by his team of fives players. He did provide a brief description of this ancient game but thankfully concentrated on his team's extracurricular activities, namely a

fine selection of pubs and beers. There was quite a western theme to this issue as I wrote about pubs I had visited in a recent stay in Exmoor; and the late Mike Hall wrote about Campden Hill's visit to Stonehenge brewery which, unlike poor Mike, is still with us.

One pub I recall Mike being very keen on was the Bull at Horton Kirby in Kent. I had paid a visit and my photo graced the cover of PiH 116; the pub was also featured in the Perfect Pub Page; it is listed in the latest GBG. Another pretty good pub is the Dog & Bell in Deptford, which had been voted SPBW London Pub of the Year for the fourth time in ten years. Happy to say the pub is still going strong and indeed I ventured in just a couple of weeks ago. One of our long-standing overseas members, Wes Harry, wrote about the Singapore Artisan Beer Exhibition. Beers were supplied by home brewers as well as professionals and attendees could drink as much as they liked after paying an entry fee of about £15. There was another lengthy Andy Whitley report which might have been easier to read had not pages 2 and 19 not been reversed. Sorry about that.

MEMORIES FROM THE CAPE

This Covid thing currently prevents us from visiting England and enjoying the kids, our grandchildren growing up...and a pint or two. Although I am a dyed in the wool Setheffrican, I did have two lengthy spells in England in late 60s, early 70s and another couple of three years, a bit later. The first spell, my first ever to England, saw my introduction to the English pub and your bitter and in particular to the White Swan, Riverside, Twickenham, opposite the downstream end of Eel Pie Island. At that time, the Swan was more of a local club and was

"ruled" by a Cockney couple, Nobby and Alice Swift and the pub had a cracking atmosphere. The local community frequenting the Swan came from all walks: Heath Row baggage handlers, cabbies, a greengrocer, a tick tack man through accountants, solicitors, stockbrokers to the, then, Royal photographer. My introduction to the Swan spun off Twickenham YC, just upstream and I and a handful of other foreigners, were instantly "at home"...sort of adopted...so much so that it soon became this vagrant's permanent mailing address! The only downside at that time was the Swan was a Watney's pub, but I was introduced to mild and bitter, later gravitating to mild as the pennies became fewer. My first pint of M&B was one and ten pence with mild a bit cheaper and I was told that it would have been permitted during the US prohibition era!

The Swan, now more of a gastro pub, was, then, a darts and coal fire pub with a short menu comprising pickled eggs and cheese sandwiches only! An illustration of the community atmosphere was a collage of photos of Pig Night, covering all the walls, a pig being the prize for the pub's annual knock out darts championship. All proceeds, together with year round collections, were presented to the Guide Dog Association at their HQ in Leamington on an annual Swan coach outing, dropping in at any number of pubs along the way. Nobby and Alice are long gone and today the Swan is very different but it does retain some of its heritage.

Huck Endersby, Cape Town

MEET THE BRANCHES

There are more than 20 affiliated SPBW branches and their details are listed below. Our members are encouraged to join a local branch and get involved with its social activities. Most branches appreciate new members so you can expect a warm welcome.

If you don't have local branch, why not start one? John Dearing, Branch Liaison Officer (details, page 2), will be pleased to tell you what you need to know. One of our members who wants to get a branch going is Andy Tubb, who is based in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire; contact him at andrew.tubb1@btinternet.com. We also hope that a new branch will be formed in the Manchester area, when people are allowed to meet again.

BMAD: Meetings held first Friday of each month at the Burnt Mill Snooker & Social Club (CIU affiliated) in Harlow, Essex. Contact Tony Syrett on 07920 760553 or email tony.syrett@outlook.com.

BEDS & NORTH HERTS: Informal meetings are held on the 4th Friday of each month from 5pm at the Engineers Arms, High Street, Henlow, Bedfordshire SG16 6AA. Contact Kevin Machin on 07743 099783 or 01462 812284; email kevin.machin@engineersarms.co.uk.

CAMPDEN HILL: Meetings held first Monday of each month at Ye Olde Mitre (see NEC, page 4). Contact Aidan Kerrigan on 07777 696153; email campdenhillbranch@gmail.com.

CENTRAL LONDON: Meetings mostly take the form of pub evaluation walks on the 18th of each month. Contact Linda West, 70 Chalfont Road, Seer Green, Bucks HP9 2QP.

CHESAPEAKE BAY: Based around Baltimore, Maryland USA. Contact Greg Long, greg.s.long@gmail.com. Website: www.spbw.org.

CHESHIRE REAL ALE PEOPLE: Based in the Crewe/Nantwich area, meet informally each Monday in Crewe in the Borough Arms, Earle Street, then Hops, Prince Albert Street. Contact Colin Donald 01270 623376 or email colinsdonald@sky.com.

COAST OF LANCASHIRE ALE PRESERVATION SOCIETY (CoLAPS): meet first Monday of the month 7.30 at the Grasshopper micropub, Sandon Road, Hillside, Southport (close to Hillside rail station). Contact Andrew Firth 07449 918217, email grasshopperhillside@gmail.com.

COBRA-COW: Meet last Monday of the month at the Blythe Hill Tavern, 319 Stanstead Road, London SE23 1JB. Contact Richard Martin email richardmartin121@yahoo.co.uk.

COMMON & ALDBRICKHAM: Meetings usually at the Hop Leaf, Reading, on an ad hoc basis. Contact John Dearing 0118 958 0377, email john.dearing@gpwild.co.uk.

CROYDON REAL ALE PRESERVATION SOCIETY: Meet first Tuesday each month in the Green Dragon, High Street, Croydon CR0 1NA. Contact Pete McGill 07831 561296 or John Smith 020 7188 4844.

IGHTHAM COMMON: Based at the Old House pub, Ightham Common, Kent TN15 9EE. Contact Nicholas Boulter 01732 462111 or Mike Thomas, mikethomas987@gmail.com.

IPSWICH: Contact Phil, 01473 280822 or Iain 07707 465750 for information.

KINGSTON: meetings first Wednesday each month in the Willoughby Arms, 47 Willoughby Road KT2 6LN. Contact Mike Lapworth, email mike.lapworth@talk21.com; or www.spbwkingston.co.uk/diary.

NORFOLKSOAKS: Meetings first Thursday each month at 12.30 in the Fat Cat, 49 West End Street, Norwich. There are usually three pins of beers from the wood. More details at www.spbw.com/norfolk/about.html.

NORTHERN IRELAND: usually meet second Friday each month at the Bridge House (JDW), 35 Bedford Street, Belfast. Contact Michael Steven 02890 243963; email spbwni@yahoo.com.

NORTH EAST: Meetings held Saturdays at various locations across the northeast, to be decided at the previous meeting. Contact Rob Shacklock, 07512 257837, email robinshacklock@yahoo.co.uk or Alan Chaplin email alan.chaplins@gmail.com.

NORTH IRISH SEA: Based on the Isle of Man but also covers coastal areas of traditional Lancashire. Meets Friday evenings, usually in the Douglas area. Contact David Halliwell 07972 807934, email david.halliwell@manx.net. Twitter: SPBW NorthIrishsea@NorthIrishsea.

OLD FORD PILGRIMS: Based around the Eleanor Arms, 460 Old Ford Road, Bow; pilgrimages are usually to beer festivals. Contact Frankie at the pub, 07896 208707, email frankie707@gmail.com.

RACS: The Real Ale Club of Sawbridgeworth meets last Wednesday each month in various pubs in Sawbridgeworth, Herts. Contact Caroline Macy, email cj43@intosawbridgeworth.co.uk or visit the website www.racs.org.

ST FORBADIL: meet first Wednesday each month at the Bitter-Suite micropub, Lichfield. Contact Peter Evans, 07835 932798, email 256peterevans@gmail.com or Terry Ashton, frejia1@ntlworld.com.

SPECIAL BRANCH: Meets annually for a week on the inland waterways network and gathers informally at other times.

TYNE & WEAR: An offshoot of North East branch. Contact Rob Shacklock (as above).

WANTZ: Meetings on third Monday each month alternate between the Chesham Arms, Homerton and the Forest Tavern, by Forest Gate station. Contact Roger Jacobson (see page 2)

WEST OF ENGLAND: If you live in the Bristol area, please contact Mark Bonson, email westofenglandspbw@gmail.com.

WEST RIDING: Usually meets first Sunday each month in pubs in and around Leeds. Contact Janet Dyson, email spbw63@gmail.com.

YORK: Meet last Wednesday each month at the Three-Legged Mare, High Petergate, York. Contact Marcus Hodgson 07841 028040, email yorkspbw@yahoo.com.



BRANCHES IN ACTION

* **Cobra-Cow** branch have resumed having our monthly last Monday of the month social gatherings at the lovely Blythe Hill Tavern. We maintain a social bubble of 6 members, strange having to leave at 10 pm! We also have a zoom social once a week also on Monday. [RM]

* **Common & Aldbrickham** have had no formal branch events for obvious reasons. Two or three of us were able to attend the beer festival at the Royal British legion, Marlow, back in August. There is concern over our current 'spiritual home' the Hop Leaf, Reading, which has remained closed since the lockdown with Hopback Brewery pensioning off the bar staff and keeping a deafening silence over its future intentions for the pub. Happily, another of our all-time favourites, The Retreat, has been open although it is currently closed for four weeks for a refurbishment which we are told will maintain the ambience while improving such amenities as the toilets. A trip to the Bell, Aldworth before Christmas is a possibility, depending on the state of the 'body politic' at that time.

* **Kingston** branch has been very active since restrictions were eased - making up for lost time! July saw us cycle to the Bell in East Molesey (GK but with decent guests) as it has a very large garden and plenty of bike parking. A nice summer evening out and the pub was well set up for the new rules. Another cycle based social saw us at Woodies Bar in New Malden, again with a large open space available this was easy to organise.

Our branch meetings at the Willoughby, Kingston have taken place as scheduled, in the garden in August but inside for September and October. The October meeting was notable as a "last orders" bell was rung for the 10pm closing, the first time any of us have heard such a sound in that venue.

Early August also saw us visit (by cycle again) the Rifleman in Twickenham, the garden there is small but new tables were suitably laid out to maximise the use of space. This pub is now operated by Twickenham Fine Ales on a lease from the freeholder, and usually has three Twickenham beers plus Young's Ordinary.

Later in August we had a crawl around Surbiton, starting at the Lamb in Brighton Road which had an open-sided "marquee" divide into sections. Four interesting beers here served to the tables. The pub owner has an old Type 2 Volkswagen Ambulance from Germany parked outside. The Black Lion opposite was full of people watching football so we gave that a miss. We couldn't get into the JDW Coronation Hall, so advanced to the Victoria. This was very well run, with a host member of staff taking our details on a laptop PC and allocating us to a table. St Austell Proper Job was enjoyed here - full marks to Youngs Pub Company for the most customer-friendly experience of the evening.

A few members visited the Marlow RBL festival on the Friday of the Bank Holiday, travel was by a pretty empty train from Ealing Broadway. As usual some other SPBW drinkers were seen there, and beers were served to distanced tables in the very large function hall. The middle of September saw us visit the Rifleman, Twickenham again, and in late October the Lamb, Surbiton again. (DL)

* **Norfolksoaks** resumed their eccentric gatherings when the Fat Cat reopened. This esteemed pub has been announced as Camra's best pun in Norwich for 2020 so congratulations to Colin Keatley and his team.

* **North Irish Sea:** This quarter fortune has shone on the Isle of Man, where the pubs have been fully open with no restrictions right through until November; a very rare picture when looking at the whole of Europe. There have been no visits to the rest of the area, due to a need to quarantine on return making that impractical. The pub stock has remained largely intact, with about 4% losses, with one pub still set to return. Odin brewery beers have spectacularly become widespread on the Isle of Man, capitalising on the shortage of guest ale availability on the usual lists and the now sad demise of Hooded Ram brewery - its last off license ceasing trading in October. These haven't been covid related issues in the round.

Interestingly the pubs and bars have remained very busy, despite the lack of tourists, as locals, restricted from travel abroad, have been rediscovering outlets on their doorsteps. North Irish Sea branch has had many outings, and rarely has had the time to visit the less well frequented (for us) many clubs, and licensed cafe bars around the island - a genre that is now common. These include the Manx Legion and Peel Legion, a new Manx Cider outlet on the top of the TT racecourse mountain section, and yacht clubs and The Buffs club in Ramsey - officially The Royal Antediluvian order of the Buffaloes. The group started in 1822, almost 200 years ago, incidentally in The Harp Tavern, opposite Drury Lane Theatre.

The North Irish Sea branch in October launched a 31-day project, now nearing completion. To celebrate the value of the pub to the local community, we embarked on a 31 pub tour, one beer per day, contributing to 31 charities along the way, highlighting the superb efforts made in each pub to promote charities of all descriptions, both very local and national. The progress of the branch can be followed on Twitter @NorthIrishSea. Meanwhile we look to the next quarter with trepidation, as virus rates escalate in the nearby North West. Stay safe everyone, as we hopefully all sit the virus out and look forward to happier times. Best wishes for 2021. [DH]

* **St Forbadil** Forbadilians continue to visit their local hostelrys in the various towns and villages of Staffordshire, but we have pragmatically not met as a group at the Bitter Suite in Lichfield since the new pandemic restrictions came into force. Sadly too, the Heddin's Ford in Hednesford has postponed for the time being to form a second branch in the county.

* **Wantz** branch members managed to meet in our usual venues in August and September but new Covid pub regulations ruled out an October meeting. When we visited the Chesham Arms in August, the pub had only just reopened and there was a distinct lack of draught beer. That is until Joe, the friendly manager, took pity on us and cracked open a cask of Five Points Pale which had been due to go on the following day. Naturally, we took full advantage!

* **West Riding** Unfortunately the Branch remains in lockdown mode. We have no face to face contact so continue to have remote meetings on Zoom. On a personal note I came across Old Peculier in the Wood in Scholars Bar in Scarborough on my last visit. [JD]

AN AMBLE AROUND THE NORTH-WEST

In late August 2020, my wife and I headed up the M6 motorway for a week-long jolly in the North-West of England, mainly based in Cumbria, at the popular town of Ambleside. Our trek started with an overnight stay in the quaint and historic city of Lancaster, with its medieval Castle, plenty of good pubs, eateries and a well-established Lancaster brewery. We'd booked into **The Toll House Inn** (old Farmers Arms) on the site of the Corporation Toll House, which once collected levies from traders on their way to the city markets.

Once checked-in, we strolled up to the cities Castle, although the actual Castle site was closed to the public, the Castle Priory was accessible, an atmospheric church that served its host throughout the centuries. A short toddle down the cobbled streets found **The Sun Hotel & Inn** (*GBG 2020*), reputed to be the **Lancaster** brewery- tap in the city where stablemates *Amber* (3.7%) and *IPA* (4.2%) were gleefully dispatched, with the now mandatory Safe Social Distancing regulations immaculately observed. Two very fine ales indeed. A leisurely meander back across the city, I uncovered the newish **Accidental craft brewpub** in Bulk Street. Just two of their brews were on tap from eight on offer, *Spruce Saison* (7.4%), a beer that didn't taste its strength, and a *Chilli Stout* (8.0%) a liquor drinking-pace delicacy. In between these a rather tasty lime sour (2.8%) from the **Track brewery** in Manchester was imbibed, a drop that tasted stronger than its ABV tag and appropriately titled *Riddle Me This*.

For our evening meal we dined at 'our digs' restaurant, my sea bream dinner washed down with a pint of *Gold* (4.2%), another from the stable of **Lancaster** ales on show here. Saturday night a table for six was booked with friends at **The Water Witch**, a well-appointed canal-side public house conveniently adjacent to where we were staying. Local North-West ales were evident here with Morecambe's **Cross Bay Sunset** (4.2%), **Kirby Lonsdale Tiffin Gold** (3.6%), Bury's **Deeply Vale DV8** (4.8%), a tasty stout, were all partaken and I had to indulge in another impressive *IPA* from the nearby city brewery that served as a nightcap after today's liquid Inn-take!

After a hearty cooked breakfast on Sunday morning, we drove over the county line into Cumbria to the town of Kendal, where we perused around the mainly closed shops at lunchtime with a half of **Fell Crag Bitter** (3.8%), a pleasant biscuity tasting Bitter, from the **Ye Olde Fleece Inn** my only keepsake from the town. En-route to destination Ambleside, an essential pit-stop was executed at **The Watermill Inn** (*GBG 2020*) at Ings, home of the on-site **Windermere brewery** that offered several of their canine related ales on hand-pump. This former windmill is now a multi award winning inn and I gladly sampled three halves in the lounge bar before purchasing a mixed box of twelve 'Kennel Club' beers to accompany our return to Buckinghamshire, with my wife taking over the driving for the final leg of the journey to our holiday cottage abode.

The next day was the best weather-wise with bright and sunny conditions prevailing all day, so a ferryboat excursion across Lake Windermere was decided. The circa eleven miles were navigated under warm late summer sunshine, once docked at Bowness-on-Windermere we drifted into **The Driftwood** outdoor bistro to avoid the flocking lakeside tourists. My Cumberland sausage luncheon was adequately washed down by a *Steamer IPA* (5.7%) from the **Bowness Bay brewery** based in Kendal. When our return trip was completed and back on Ambleside terra firma, a ten-minute jaunt into the towns 'Honey-pot' uncovered the two *Good Beer Guide 2020* pubs namely **The Golden Rule** and **The Royal Oak**. The latter is a **Greene King** Local Hero pub located on the main drag around the town and although a reduced range of ales were on the bar wickets due to the dreaded c-word, I still found solace in my *Singletrack* (4.0%) from the county's **Kirby Lonsdale brewery**.



The Golden Rule has featured in the Beer Drinkers Bible since 1977 and is snuck in the back streets just off the town centre. A Robinson's tied house that champions their core ale range plus further seasonal and monthly specials. A true olde-worlde time-freeze pub from the 1960's, my Stockport brewed *Wizard* (3.7%) was magical. From the joyous azure skies and tropical sunshine of Monday, Tuesday was a stinker. Black overcast heavens gave birth to a variety of strengths of wind and rain that forced our hand to a visitation to the small town of Coniston, home of 'Bluebird'. **Coniston Bluebird** (3.6%) won Supreme Champion Beer of Britain in 1998. The towns Ruskin Bluebird museum was visited but it didn't involve the ex-Champion Bitter, but some 'Blue Speedboat' that crashed on Lake Coniston in the sixties! Still local history was researched and the fact is that the original wreckage is being restored to its former glory and expected back in Coniston at the museum very soon. The sixteenth century **Black Bull Inn & Hotel** (*GBG 2020*) acts as the **Coniston brewery** tap-house, with the brewery residing behind the pub. Both

Oliver's Light Ale (3.4%) and *Special Oatmeal Stout* (4.5%) were two of six or seven **Coniston** brews at the parade ring that were supped. There are two other GBG 2020 entrants in the town, **The Sun** and **The Yewdale Inn** which is directly opposite **The Black Bull**. The rain was the ultimate winner today as we beat a sodden retreat back to our Ambleside Retreat.

Wednesday was dry and sunny with overcast intervals for the northbound drive past Lakes Grasmere and Thirlmere to the pretty town of Keswick, when an attendance to the Derwent Pencil Museum was first on the agenda. Several bottled beer delights were obtained from The Spirit of Keswick (off-licence) before we sort refuge in The Wild Strawberry diner for lunch. At **Wainwrights** (GBG 2020) local brews **Fell Azacca Amarillo** (4.0%) and **Tirril Borrowdale Bitter** (4.2%) were sampled after which we headed due East to rendezvous with my Sister-in-Law, her husband and their daughter for tea, who were also holidaying at the same time in Cumbria, near Penrith. This turned out to be in the vicinity of Watermillock beside Ullswater and more importantly spitting distance from **The Brackenrigg Inn** (GBG 2020), brew-pub for the on-site **Brack 'N' Brew brewery**. Half a dozen of their products were on parade, *The Rambling BookKeeper* (4.1%), an inoffensive dark brown Bitter was encountered here. A popular outpost for both drinkers and travellers whilst in these troubled times. The drive back to Ambleside along the shores of Lake Ullswater was spectacular and totally worth the drive north on its own. Memorable!

Our last full day in Cumbria was spent A.M. in the South Cumbrian town of Ulverston taking in the Laurel & Hardy museum and window shopping in the town centre. The afternoon we had a 'Swan Song' around Ambleside descending on another of **Robinson's** tied public houses, **The Unicorn**, just off 'The Honeypot', a very friendly establishment reminiscent of a bygone age in the 80's when I first ventured into 'real ale drinking dens'. There is also a proper Real Ale off-licence in the town called **Beer Ambleside** where I chose to melt serious plastic for boxfuls of ale, mainly from Cumbria, but elsewhere in Britain too, for the return trek back to Bucks. In an analysis to my debut foray to the county of Cumbria, friendly natives, amazing scenery, changeable weather, great pubs and seemingly a brewery in every town or village. Roll on next year, fingers crossed!

Shepp (who took the photos)

GOLDEN OLDHAM

Oldham is a town more famous for being involved with cotton in the Industrial Revolution, being the home of the tubular bandage and the first test tube baby. But not according to my old man as apparently they brewed a cracking beer in the Town called O.B bitter. Alas Oldham Brewery is long gone but the town has gained its first micropub – the Cob & Coal - which opened August 2019 in Tommyfield Indoor Market.

The owner and licensee is Michelle Riley who was the Landlady in the Tandle Hill Tavern in Middleton, when it was awarded Manchester Evening News Pub of the Year as well as winning CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year more than once. After Michelle worked at the White Lion in Delph she worked for some years as the shift supervisor at JD Wetherspoons Regal Moon in Rochdale (one of the best 'Spoons for real ale in Greater Manchester, in my opinion!) and at the Shay Wake a couple of miles up the road in Shaw. Michelle says "that she has always wanted to run a free house, but the costs were very high, but luckily and with the new trend in micropubs popping up in market halls, she found a unit at Tommyfield Market which seemed to be a great opportunity to get started".



The unusual name of Cob & Coal refers to a custom, before Trick or Treat, or placing pumpkins on windowsills became popular, children in the North West of England would knock on doors to collect money for fireworks, or materials for a bonfire. They would sing a song and neighbours would give them loose change (often to shut them up!) or coal and wood for their bonfire. "It was called Cob-Coaling and the name is based on that". Michelle likes to be connected with tradition because she wants to run a very traditional pub". The pub is located at the rear of the market and consists of 3 units, knocked together. One is the cold room and cellar with the other two made up of the bar and the seating area.

Outside you could get a feeling it looks a bit like a German log cabin bar you see at the Christmas markets but inside you are met with cosy and comfortable bench seating and traditional decoration, but with a modern twist with Edison style electric lights in jars as well as Michelle's unusual collection of clocks and knick knacks. On the cask front there are 6 handpumps (beers mostly locally sourced), 8 real ciders, all cooled from the cellar. Lager will be Classic South German Helles and Dunkel from ABK (Aktienbrauerei Kaufbeuren - the oldest brewery (1308) in Swabia, South West Germany and at a more modest 4%, Flensburger Pilsner from North Germany near the Danish border. There is also a bottle bar with take outs and an emphasis on unusual and hard to find beer, such as English Trappist Brewery, Tynt Meadow.

Michelle has also launched a virtual pub on Facebook. The Isolation Inn offers DJs sets, speed dating and even a 'paint the face on a cat competition', all of which has helped to add a little cheer in this unhappy situation.

Michelle has just taken over the ill-fated Null and Void on Greaves Street and reopened it at the end of October as The Fox and Pine, an unusual name but apparently the Pine bit comes from the old name of Oldham Athletic (Pine Villa). With the success she has had with The Cob & Coal, let's hope Michelle can turn this new venture around.

The Cob and Coal is usually open from 11.00 to 17.00 Monday to Friday and 10 – 17.00 Saturday. It is currently closed due to Covid Tier3 restrictions but will reopen as soon as these are lifted.

Cob & Coal, Units 12-14 Tommyfield Market, Albion Street, Oldham OL1 3BG.

Simon Miller (who took the photos)

THAME GENTLEMEN PLEASE

The Cross Keys in the market town of Thame was originally a failing keg-only pub that most people from the area classed as a den of iniquity. This was until Peter and Trudi Lambert turned around the fortunes of the pub, making it into a must-visit if you love a traditional pub with real ales and cider. The pub has a welcoming atmosphere with a traditional bar, where you see the locals playing traditional games of cribbage and dominoes. The ceiling is adorned with pump clips from real ales the pub has once served and pub memorabilia all over the walls.

With nine hand pulls on offer (not all used throughout the year) and six ciders you are spoilt for choice but the pub also has its own brewery (Thame Brewery) which is situated in some old stables behind the pub. It's a one-barrel plant and they have produced some award-winning ales including Mr Splodge, a mild named after the family cat.

The pub has regular beer festivals, a monthly comedy night called the listening rooms, a book club, a camera club and even a crochet club. There is no food served except for some bar snacks which include a vast array of nuts, but you are welcomed to bring your own.

The Cross Keys has now been classed as an Asset of Value to the Community and has won numerous Camra awards. It has been in the top 16 of the National Pub of the Year final. It is also a worthy pub to scan on the Cask Marque trail app.

Also if your other half is a Midsomer Murder fan, Thame has been used in numerous locations for filming. So whilst they are out hunting for D.S Barnaby you can be indulging yourself in some fine real ale or cider.

The Cross Keys, East Street, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 3JS

Karl Freeman

HIGHLAND FLING

Recently, I travelled alone through the Scottish Highlands, with one of the highlights being a visit to the Speyside Cooperage at Craigellachie in Moray. A very erudite guide accompanied me through the exhibition halls, before visiting the viewing gallery, where several coopers were restoring and repairing casks. The firing and charring of casks was observed, as was the completion by the skilful sealing with a water reed or flag.



Favourite pub of the tour was the Plough Inn in the village of Rosemarkie, close to the Groam House Museum with its fine collection of Pictish carved stones. Inside the wood lined bar of this listed howff, built from the local red sandstone, is an ancient marriage stone lintel (dated 1691) over the fireplace. The affable, young landlord was justly proud of his beers, served on handpull from the local Cromarty brewery. The Atlantic Drift was an excellent hoppy beer, its full flavour belying its 3.5% strength.

A visit was also made to the Windswept brewery at the coastal town of Lossiemouth, where two former Tornado pilots from the nearby RAF station have opened a bar and shop at the front of their brewery. The Hurricane (4.5%) was especially moreish - a fruity IPA with a good bitter aftertaste. A case of 12 was bought to take back home.

A mention also to the Mosset Tavern in Forres, which served six handpulled beers from the town's Speyside brewery, as well as Cairngorm and Windswept. Situated next to the burn and pond, with friendly geese, ducks and swans, the Mosset hosts an annual beer festival.

The tavern is hoping to organise their next festival in April 2021, when over 80 ales will hopefully be available from 18 Scottish breweries. I feel another sojourn to the area next year could be pencilled into my diary.

Peter Evans (who took the photo)

SPREADING THE WORD

The SPBW publicity leaflet, incorporating a membership form, is available for members to distribute. If you can help with this, please contact Roger Jacobson (page 2) know and a bundle of leaflets will be sent. We're very grateful to members who help us in this way. *[If anyone is holding forms showing the old membership rate (£7 a year), these should now be binned.]*

SPBW PRODUCTS

We still have the standard range of products (all prices include P & P): Polo shirts £23; sweatshirts £16; baseball cap £10; acrylic hats £8; badges £4; cuff-links £6.50 pair; tie bars £7; WoodFest 2018 t-shirts £14; WF18 polo shirts £21.

Available in a range of sizes and colours.

All products can be ordered from Patrick Deller (18 Walpole Court, Hampton Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW2 5QH); email spbwproducts.pd@gmail.com.

You're recommended to contact Patrick before ordering to make sure the product you want is available.

Apologies that the online shop remains out of service but we'll put it right eventually.



*Will [I] and Colin Keatley of the award-winning Fat Cat in Norwich
(photo borrowed from Norwich Evening News)*