

# BOLTON BEER BREAKS



Campaign for Real Ale  
Bolton Branch

## CAMPAIGNING FOR REAL ALE, PUBS AND DRINKERS' RIGHTS

*"Not drunk is he who from the floor can rise again and drink some more" - Old English field sobriety test*

### WHO WE ARE

Welcome to the relaunch of the newsletter produced by the Bolton branch of the Campaign for Real Ale. CAMRA campaigns for real ale, real pubs and consumer rights. We are an independent, voluntary organisation with over 100,000 members and have been described as the most successful consumer group in Europe. CAMRA promotes good-quality real ale and pubs, as well as acting as the consumer's champion in relation to the UK and European beer and drinks industry.

### In this issue

- What is a Traditional Ale
- A paean to a past pub: The Commercial Hotel
- Pub Survey: A tour around the real ale hostelries of Darcy Lever
- A guide to some of the best places to drink beer in Bruges
- News of the 2012 Great British Beer Festival

## I am a cider drinker

Having married a lifelong, gold-card carrying, meeting attending, member of CAMRA it was inevitable that eventually I would join too! Our best man was a stalwart of local, national and international beer festivals after all.

And so it was on a cold Saturday in February 2010 that we went along to Fleetwood's beer festival and on the way there we discussed the likelihood of me joining this sacred society, as we entered the venue I signed up, free entry to the festival, coupons towards a couple of pints as a new member and three months free membership seemed too good to pass up!

I accompanied my card carrying husband to the next branch meeting, where I discovered a group of highly motivated, ale fuelled CAMRA members more than happy to share their enthusiasm for real ale.... how disappointed they all were when I told them that I don't like beer, don't like the smell and don't like the taste! I drink cider! A year later sat in the front bar at "The Dog and Partridge" the (then) branch chairman asked me if I'd be interested in becoming the branch Cider officer, I had spent a considerable amount of time trying to convince the

other branch members that it is a perfectly acceptable to drink, it isn't a dirty word and it isn't just fruit juice! I couldn't really say no, at this point as far as I was aware I was the only attending branch member who actually drank this wonderful beverage made from whole fruit and water (the yeast coming from the fruits skins). At the meeting where my position became official I

discovered that there are actually three of us who regularly drank cider! In the beer break we hastily made the decision of which pub we saw fit to elect our branches Cider pub of the year. A decision which in all honesty didn't take that long...10 seconds or so! A pub in Bolton that sells good cider at an acceptable, un-refrigerated temperature [Real cider should be served at Room or cellar temperature not chilled or served over ice. Ed], a selection of ciders and perries was also an important factor in our decision. While there are a number of pubs that sell one or two a particular public house immediately came to mind, one where there are a number of options

available depending on your palette, the staff are friendly and can advise on which one would best suite your taste buds. Unanimously we de-



Man & Scythe, Churchgate

clared that "Ye Olde Man and Scythe" would be our "Cider pub of the year." Some months later having visited the "Cider pub of the year" for the other branches in Greater Manchester, and the votes tallied I was pleased to inform (the late) John Jewitt that his pub had received recognition for his many years work of selling cider to the masses, bringing real cider to the people of Bolton that it now held the title of Regional Cider Pub of the Year. I think the news may have even brought a tear to his eyes, I know he bought me a drink! So, here we are, at voting time again, will "Ye Olde Man and Scythe" retain it's title in Bolton and if it does, will it also hold on to it's title of Regional Cider Pub of the Year.



Real ale is defined by CAMRA as "beer brewed from traditional ingredients, matured by secondary fermentation in the container from which it is dispensed, and served without the use of extraneous carbon dioxide"

There are currently 8.6 million regular drinkers of real ale in the country - That's 31 per cent of all beer drinkers

Despite having a reputation for strength, real ales come in many forms. At the lower end are the Milds, which have strengths of around 3.5 per cent. At the higher are the powerful Old Ales and Winter Warmers, whose strengths can reach as high as 10 or 11 per cent.

Although traditionally associated with older men the number of 18 to 24-year-old real ale drinkers grew by 17 per cent last year

## What is a Traditional Ale

*“the term ‘traditional’ should demonstrably be used to describe a recipe, fundamental formulation or processing method for a product that has existed for a significant period.”*

What can we do?:

- contact the local Trading Standards Department
- visit the pub and discuss with the licensee the reasons for the use of the word "traditional" or similar terms - was it his/her choice or has the idea come from the brewery/pub company?
- suggest that if the pub wants to promote "traditional ales", it stocks some ales that most people would consider to be "traditional"
- suggest they try some cask ale from a local brewery
- publicise the issue in the branch newsletter
- consider contacting the local paper

### PAEAN TO A PAST PUB

#### THE COMMERCIAL HOTEL

The Commercial was an imposing pub situated on Victoria Square in Bolton town centre. At the end of its life it was a Greenhall Whitley house, having previously been a part of the Magee Marshall estate.

The exact date of construction is unclear, but it seems likely there was an alehouse on the site in the late 1790s, and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a base for various societies and political organisations.

The pub was demolished in November 1972, having closed the previous April. The closure and subsequent demolition was unpopular locally, but business interests won out. The site was to become the home of Mothercare (1974), and is currently occupied by a bank.



Early in November 2011, I noticed that the outside of The Victoria on Market Street in Westhoughton had been repainted. A new board by the door advertised, among other things, "Traditional Ales". Thinking they may have reintroduced Cask Ale, I went in, only to find the usual array of keg taps on the bar. I asked which were the "Traditional Ales", and was told, "They're all traditional."

Having tried unsuccessfully to find a definition of "Traditional Ales", I contacted the Bolton Trading Standards Department. Their reply quoted guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency:

**“the term ‘traditional’ should demonstrably be used to describe a recipe, fundamental formulation or processing method for a product that has existed for a significant period. The ingredients and process used should have been available, substantially unchanged, for that same period. It is within consumer expectations for the product to have been made in a factory” and “As a general rule, (a significant period) should be taken to be of the order of 1 generation / 25 years, which would be in line with Regulation (EC) No 509/2006 of 20 March 2006 on Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs as Traditional Specialities Guaranteed, that introduced a legal definition of the term “traditional”, specifically for the purpose of the regulation. This definition requires a period of 25 years for production/recipe for a traditional food that is registered under the Scheme”.**

They concluded that if this definition was followed, then any beers which have been produced since 1986 can be described as traditional and the method of delivery would not appear to form a consideration of the acceptability of the use of the term. I had a look at the Food Standards Agency guidance (available online at [www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/markcritguidance.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/markcritguidance.pdf)) for myself and

found the following information: “They (the manufacturer) must ensure that the term does not imply a composition or production

*method that would not be regarded as “traditional” by the average consumer and should consider whether the term “original recipe” or similar expression may be more appropriate. There should be evidence to substantiate the use of*



*the word for the particular product”.*

I'm sure I'm not the only "average consumer" that does not regard keg beer as "traditional".

I then contacted CAMRA to see if there was an official viewpoint on whether a pub should advertise traditional ales even though they have no cask beer. The reply, from Ian Loe, agreed that the average person would expect to be able to buy beer served from either a hand pump or by gravity in a pub using the term "traditional". CAMRA would therefore regard the use of term in this case to be misleading. When the issue was discussed at the next Bolton Branch Meeting, it became apparent that other members had come across similar instances of misleading use of terms such as "traditional". It was suggested a campaign against such usage could be carried out both within the Branch and the Region. It was decided to make the issue an item for discussion at the next Bolton Branch Committee Meeting and also the Regional Meeting in January 2012.

At the Regional Meeting, all the Branches agreed to adopt the issue as the basis for a campaign. Members should bring any other instances which they come across of the misleading use of the word "traditional" to the attention of their branch officials. Alison Whitaker  
Bolton Branch

#### Articles for inclusion

If you have anything that you wish to include in future editions then please submit to the editor -

[editor@boltoncamra.org.uk](mailto:editor@boltoncamra.org.uk)



Follow us on Twitter - [@BoltonCAMRA](https://twitter.com/BoltonCAMRA)

Or see our website - [www.boltoncamra.org.uk](http://www.boltoncamra.org.uk)



## Darcy Lever Pub Survey

On a cold, wet and very windy Wednesday night in early December, a small band gathered on Bolton bus station; the bus (536), however, turned up on time, and after a ten minute journey we arrived at the top of Darcy Lever; the alighting stop, right outside the **Levers Arms**.

The Levers is quite a large pub, open-planned, but with three distinct areas, and

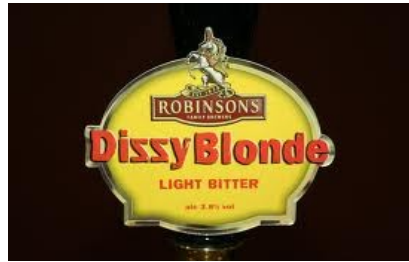
very much a community feel. Usually there are two Hopstar ales (JC & guest) avail-

able, retailing at £1.85 a pint; however, this evening only *Autumn Leaves* was on tap, and sadly, it was barely drinkable: time for a short wander down the hill.

This brought us to the **Farmers Arms**, which is rather one large open-planned room with a small lower section in one corner for the pool table, but does boast an ice-cream parlour at the opposite end of the room. Of the three hand-pumps, for up to three rotating guest beers, again



only one was clipped: Robinson's *Dizzy*



*Blonde* £2.35 a pint. The beer was palatable, without being close to form; and so it was, with disappointment, that we strolled a little further down the hill.

The **Volunteer** (an often GBG entry in recent years) is a Holt's house, with central bar and distinct areas either side, that serves only the standard bitter £1.90. The beer was fine, though it seems increasingly difficult to find it served on good form anywhere, so we lingered a little longer.

On our longest walk of the night, we checked out the **Lever Bridge**, which though having a hand-pump on the bar, hasn't seemed to bother using it for many a-year;

Up the steep hill, the other side of Darcy Lever, and within 15, or so, minutes

reached the **Ukrainian Club**, which generally offers a choice of two Bank Top ales. On this particular evening, we were presented with Bank Top *Pavilion* and Crouch Vale *Yakima Gold*,



£2.25 a pint. Both beers were sampled (and re-sampled) and found to be on very good form (justifying its selection as branch Club of the Year 2011).

In conclusion: the Darcy Lever pubs, serving real ale, can be good to visit and offer real choice; we possibly hit on a more difficult night at this time of year.



Support Your *Real Local*

*BlackBeered*

*"The beer was fine, though it seems increasingly difficult to find it served on good form anywhere"*

## Beer Breaks in Bruges

Greetings, dear reader, and welcome to my first report on beer trips around Europe.

I begin, predictably I'm afraid, with one of the continent's great tourist attractions, the irresistible, picturesque city of Bruges in west Belgium. Apologies to those who already know the city well: what follows may to you seem hackneyed and banal.

However, my main purpose is to introduce others to the city and its myriad beery delights.

You can of course get there by flying to Brussels, or grind your way by car down to the channel tunnel or go on the ferry from Hull to Zeebrugge, but I find it easier, pleasanter and more relaxing to go by train: "let the train take the strain" as the old slogan used to say.

A Virgin Pendolino will, God willing, whisk you to London Euston. After that you might be in need of refreshment before the short stroll down Euston Road to the Eurostar terminal at St. Pancras. You could nip into the Euston Tap, a recent,

very ingenious conversion in the front forecourt, or else there's a Fuller's pub "The Doric Arch" just to one side. Alternatively you could drop into another Fuller's pub "The Euston Flyer" halfway to St. Pancras down the Euston Rd. or wait till you get to St. Pancras itself and relax over a pint in "The Betjeman Arms" before boarding your Eurostar.

On the Eurostar you glide quietly and peacefully to Brussels Midi in two hours, but for various reasons I now prefer to get off at Lille Europe station (journey time 1 hour 22 minutes) and then walk across to Lille Flanders station, (a ten minute stroll) where you can get trains to Bruges via Kortrijk. In fact, on my most recent trip I broke my journey in Lille, staying at a cheap but perfectly adequate hotel right outside Lille Flanders station.

Talking of hotels, in Bruges for well over twenty years I've always stayed at 't keizershof an immacu-

late, very well run little hotel only a short stroll from the railway station across the duel carriageway. Hilde and Stefaan, who have run the hotel for twenty-four years are a charming, friendly and obliging couple and of course speak fluent English. The rooms don't have TV, WC or shower but are spick and span and cheap. The hotel is in the Lonely Planet guide, I believe, and is deservedly popular with tourists so you always need to book in advance (t: 0032 50 33 8728).

As for Bruges beer and pubs, which is the main point of this article, I cannot do justice to all those which deserve a mention so instead I'll concentrate on just three of my favourites.

First port of call should undoubtedly be the "De Garre" (left) in the centre, but hidden down a little ginnel which runs off the street linking the Markt and the Burg, the two main



## Bruges Beer guide (cont.)

central squares. It's originally a sixteenth century building, beautifully restored and opened as a pub in 1984 with exposed brick walls and a wooden-beamed roof. With 119 bottled beers on the beer "menu" plus three beers on tap and classical music playing quietly in the background it really is a paradise for beer lovers. Free tables are like gold though, especially at weekends so if there's no room downstairs or upstairs come back a bit later – but go there, you absolutely must!

A ten minute walk from the "De Garre" in a north-easterly direction over the main canal will bring you to Blekesstraat, where stands the Vlissinghe, the city's oldest pub, built in 1515. Inside it's a step back in time: wooden beamed ceiling with im-



pressive chandeliers, (see above) wood panelling, round the walls and its most striking feature a coal burning stove in front of a grand fireplace. There is piped music but it's not obtrusive. They have three beers on tap including the local Brugse Zot Blond plus just 21 bottled beers, which you can also enjoy sitting outside in their quiet beer garden on a nice warm summer's day.

Finally, but most importantly, I take you, dear reader, to "de Halve Maan" (Half Moon) brewery on a quiet square called Walplein. It's had its ups and downs over the years and at one time it ceased brewing altogether. Now it's very much on the tourist trail because they do frequent brewery tours, which means that their large drinking room is fairly full and absolutely heaving at weekends. You really should drink there, though, because it's the only place in Bruges where their two

tap beers are served unfiltered. These are Brugse Zot Blond and Brugse Zot Bruin, both about 7% in strength, I think, and are available as bottle conditioned beers to take away in a gift pack. Zot incidentally means "fool" hence the jester on the bottle label. The other bottled beers available are Straffe Hendrik (9% but not as more-ish as when it was an outstandingly hoppy 6.5% a few years back) and a Quadrupel at a whacking 10%!

If time and space allowed, I would write about the the Gambrinus in Philipstockstraat just off the Markt and the Brugs Beertje (Little Bear) in Kemelstraat. The latter is famed throughout the beer-drinking world which means that inside you'll often find young Americans talking to the whole room and sometimes a smug little in-group hogging the barstools but it is a real gem of a pub with good helpful service.

As for Belgian beers, how on earth do you choose from a beer menu of over a hundred bottles? For glorious full-bodied beers (all bottle-conditioned, of course) I tend to go for Hommel Bier and the Kapittel beers from the Van Eecke brewery in Watou or the Sint Bernardus beers, also from Watou, but to break myself in gently for an evening session I often start with a very quaffable 5% de Koninck from Antwerp. As for Trappist beers, Orval is always fine but nowadays I go for the Rochefort beers. Twenty years ago Chimay beers were also wonderful but I fear the brewery now has sacrificed quality for quantity!



Back here in Lancashire to do some pre-

liminary research on Belgian beers call in at Byrne's wine shop when you're next in Clitheroe, The Crescent at Salford or the Taps in Lytham. The Bank Top Brewery Tap has Belgian beers too.

Now, a few final points about Bruges:

The de Garre and the Vlissinghe do simple snacks, I recommend the wonderful pâté at the former and the fresh soup of the day at the latter. The Halve Maan brewery does fuller meals.

Get a street map from the tourist office on the t'Zand Square. There are so many quiet lanes and medieval nooks and crannies to explore.

There are no language problems; by and large Bruges people speak English just as well as we do! Just remember that on a beer menu "van 't vat" refers to beers on tap and "op fles" to their bottled beers.

Buy the latest edition of CAMRA's "Good Beer Guide-Belgium" by Tim Webb, it's been my Belgian beer bible and vademecum for two decades now and I owe it a lot.

There's lots to see in Bruges, picturesque canals, wonderful old Flemish buildings, great Gothic brick churches with soaring towers – all stunning and magical when floodlit at night.

Finally, bear in mind Tim Webb's words about Bruges, "to avoid the crowds, think rain, February, weekday and evening."

Have a great trip and happy drinking!

Richard Blagg



## GREAT BRITISH BEER FESTIVAL.

Olympia London 7-11 August 2012

Britain's Biggest Pub opens its doors for a five day festival on Tuesday 7th August. There will be over 800 different real ales, ciders and foreign beers for the expected 50,000 crowd to try.

This fun event is not all about the beer though. There are a variety of different foods from around the world and music to enjoy.

Tickets are now on sale and can be ordered by visiting [gbbf.org.uk](http://gbbf.org.uk) or by calling 0844 412 4640