

NEWS AND BREWS

*Autumn
2013*

FREE

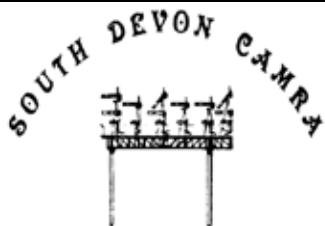
Free Magazine of

The South Devon Branch of

THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE



*Hunter's Brewery awarded
Certificate of Achievement—see Page 6*



**South Devon
CAMRA**

*Supporting Real Ale
in the South West*



Welcome to *NEWS AND BREWS*

43rd EDITION

Autumn 2013

A couple of recent newspaper items have interested me. In one, (The Telegraph) Heineken, who run a pubco under the name Star Pubs and Bars attack Vince Cable's push to reform the pub industry, claiming proposed government legislation to be anti-competitive. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills propose to create a powerful organisation with the ability to fine large pub companies found guilty of abusing their tenants by over-charging for beer and rent, and to enforce a code of conduct backed up by the law. Large pubcos are those with more than 500 inns, and Heineken claims that smaller pubcos will have an unfair advantage and that there is no evidence that below 500 pubs, it's a different market. These large tenanted pub groups, with more than 500 inns, comprise of nine companies: Enterprise Inns, Punch Taverns, Star, Greene King, Admiral, Marstons, Wellington, Trust Inns and Spirit.

I would agree that this legislation is unfair, in that legislation should be aimed at all pubcos. I am aware of a regional pub company with around 90 pubs, which (in addition to inflated rents) charges its landlords 45% to 60% above the normal wholesale prices. However the pubco does not pay normal wholesale prices themselves and it is known they negotiate heavy discounts directly with the brewers to allow the brewers the privilege of being made available to the pubco's tenants. I have been shown some figures and Wadworth's Henrys IPA is £ 60 wholesale and £ 98 from the pubco. A 63% mark-up.

In the second, the Western Morning News reported the closure of the Drewe Arms in Drewsteignton after 400 years of trading, including 75 years that Auntie Mabel held the licence until she died at the age of 99 in the mid 1990's. Enterprise, the owners, have such draconian rent and beer mark-ups that the departing publicans calculate they need a turnover of £ 6,500 per week to break even.

The sooner the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills gets their legislation together and puts a stop to these iniquities the better.

Cheers, Tina Hemmings



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Pub News

The Open Arms In Chillington reopened in August. The new landlord has worked in pubs in Salcombe. Otter Ale was being served when we called.

The Tally Ho Littlehempston is the subject of a money raising project to purchase and reopen it. Shares are for sale at £1,000 or £250.00. See the website www.tallyhoinn.co.uk for details of how to own your own pub.

The Queens Arms in Brixham recently served its 200th different ale in the 20 months it has been open. There is a distinct possibility that the 250th may be served at the first beer festival from 6th to 8th December. When we last called in, St Austell's Brut Cask Lager 7.5abv was drinking very well.

The Blue Anchor, Teignmouth, changed hands in early June and continues to provide an interesting range of well-kept and competitively priced real ales, together with a regularly changing guest cider. An extra hand-pull has been installed to increase the current offering to seven ales and one cider; at least one LocAle is usually available.

The Skipper Inn in Brixham recently held a beer festival to coincide with Cowtown Carnival. Exotic brews such as Black Hole Brewery- Cosmic and Super Nova, Kelham Island- Riders on the Storm were among the ales on the beer list.

Pub News from Paignton Henry's Bar - Many guest beers from the Ex moor range have been appearing over the recent months. This has proved very popular so one of the Ex moor range will be available more regularly to complement the Dartmoor IPA and Sharps Doombar.

The Waterside Inn - John and Chris retire in November after 13 years solid service. This year the pub made it into the Good Beer Guide, a good accolade for the successful licencees, and we wish them all the best for the future.

The Cork and Bottle - The new manager ,Steve, improved its image and real ale sales started to rise rapidly. So much, in fact, that Enterprise have moved him to Cardiff to another ailing pub. A newer manager, John, has now taken over.

The Devonport Arms - has recently been awarded the Cask Marque. Dave, the landlord, held a very successful beer festival with nine local real ales and two ciders. This traditional-style pub is hidden away in a residential part of town and continues to thrive due to beer quality and Dave's enthusiasm.

Brewery News

At Bridgetown Brewery, their new beer Cheeky Blond 4.5% is being very well received, and they have taken on a new member of staff. George came to do some work experience from school and now wants to pursue a career in brewing. Shark Island Stout will be available from the beginning of October to coincide with their Beer Festival 4th – 6th of October.

Hunters of Ipplepen has brewed a new pale ale called Mary Rose 1545 especially for the Maritime Museum at Portsmouth using a brand new variety of hop. Reports from initial tastings are very complimentary .

Platform 5 brewery at the Railway, Newton Abbot, is brewing two new beers. Their portfolio includes Western Gold and Wheeltappers. The Black Tor Brewery (formerly Gidleys) is now under new management and is brewing Pride and Dartmoor Pale Ale. Both new beers have flown out when they were on sale at The Ship Inn, Kingswear. Honour, at 5.1%, is the next brew planned.



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www.manorinngalmpton.co.uk



Roy David Edward Wheeler 1938-2013

Roy Wheeler, the landlord of the Crown and Sceptre, St Marychurch, Torquay, has recently died suddenly, but peacefully. Roy came to the Crown and Sceptre in the early 1970s having previously been a landlord at the Catford Ram, a Young's pub in London. His continual promotion of real ale helped CAMRA get going in South Devon, in its early days.

Over the years we have had many meetings at the Crown and he was always welcoming, if a bit grumpy. The Crown and Sceptre became a Good Beer Guide entry from 1976, and clocked up over 30 consecutive years in the Guide, also being awarded South Devon CAMRA Pub of the Year. The pub is always full of life, lively conversation and often hosts live music and sessions.

Roy always served real ale; he was always behind the bar and always delighted his customers by telling them the truth even if it hurt. He certainly told me some truths. It is fitting that he was serving real ale until the end, and we would like to send our sincere condolences to his wife Heather, who has always helped him at the Crown and Sceptre, and the rest of his family.

Roger Adams

Hunter's Brewery wins recognition



In the spring, Hunter's Brewery of Ipplepen won the Society of Independent Brewers Supreme Champion Beer of the Tucker's Maltings Festival with their draught ale Royal Hunt. Paul Walker, the brewer, said he was overwhelmed by this accolade from the Brewers of the West of England and it showed how far his brewery had come in such a short time. To celebrate this event the South Devon Branch of CAMRA awarded the brewery a Certificate of Achievement and it was presented to Paul at the Diesel Society's beer festival at Staverton station by Ian Packham, former S. Devon CAMRA Regional Director, who has recently been elected to CAMRA's National Executive.

Anthony Woodwark

Wednesday Walk-Abouters

Renamed for our July outing because, being solely in Torquay, as much walking was done as bussing. The local nature boosted numbers, too, as 6 of us met up at the Crown and Sceptre in St. Marychurch, with its bar ceiling adorned with chamber pots and baseball caps. On offer were good Tribute, Courage Best, and Cock Hop from Red Rock - so named because of an infusion of the wrong hops into an existing brew, creating a whole new beer - a cock-up that became a Cock Hop.

Walking down to the bottom of the precinct, we called into Molloy's to sample the two beers from the new Platform 5 brewery in Newton Abbot. The general consensus was that we preferred the Gold to the Best.

A walk onto Babbacombe Downs then took us to The Buccaneer, a St. Austell pub offering Proper Job and H.S.D. which accompanied our lunchtime snacks as we sat outside making the most of the nice day.

The party then split, some taking the coastal path, and others the road, as we reconvened at The Kents, just off the main road at Wellswood. We were met here by two more colleagues, who were already enjoying good Tribute, Doom Bar, and Jail Ale. Down the hill towards the harbour, our final stop of the day was the Hole in the Wall, where we rounded off with various well-kept beers, along with welcome filled rolls they'd kindly laid on for us.

Peter O'Nions

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South West Cider and Perry Awards

The judging for the South West cider and perry of the year took place at the Plymouth Beer Festival in July. The winners will go forward to be considered for the National Championship at the Reading beer festival in May 2014. Surprisingly, in 2013 the South West was not represented at all in any of the winning categories. Let's hope that these year's S.W. winners have better luck.

The winners were as follows:

Ciders

- 1) Sanford Orchards' Dry Vintage
- 2) Perry Brothers' Sweet
- 3) Riches' Medium

Perries

- 1) Moore's Medium
- 2) Hartland's Sweet
- 3) Minchew's Dry

Bob Southwell

Abbfest - 10 years on

This September will see the 10th Abbfest Beer and Food Festival. Abbfest was set up to promote beer, cider and food from local suppliers in a family-friendly environment while raising money for local charities and good causes. Some of you may well remember the first Abbfest held at the Abbotskerswell Cricket Club. We had about 40 real ales and half a dozen ciders, all from Devon, set up in the cricket pavilion with a marquee on the field. No-one knew what to expect. Would many people come? Would we run out of beer? Well, many people did come and fortunately we did not run out of beer. We even made a modest 'profit' which we were able to give away to local charities.

This encouraged us to repeat the event the following year, and more people came and more money was raised. It soon became evident that the Cricket Club was not going to be large enough to hold the festival if numbers kept increasing. We were fortunate that after three years, Fermoy's Garden Centre, which had been involved with sponsorship of the festival, agreed to let us hold the next festival in a field just beyond their car park, with the kind permission of Jack Isaacs, the local farmer.

This now seems to have become our permanent site. Each year, we try to improve on the last, experimenting with different layouts for the food and beer tents, the stages for the cookery demonstrations during the day and bands in the evening.

This year, the festival which runs from Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd September, looks set to have over 150 different real ales from 32 Devon Breweries plus 25 different ciders from local producers. There will be a large selection of food stalls and craft stalls on the Saturday, again all locally based, while on the Sunday, there will be a Flea Market and our own version of the Antiques Road Show with free valuations given by experts from Bearnese, Hampton and Littlewood of Exeter.

Musical entertainment will be provided by 'Go Tell Alice', 'Raspberry Fish', 'Audius Maximus', 'Men Behaving Tradly' and 'Nick the Fish'. There will also be entertainment for children including pony rides and Elfic's Juggling Show.

We usually invite a celebrity to officially open the festival on the Saturday morning, and in the past we have had Radio Devon's Judy Spiers and Strictly star Ann Widdecombe. This year Edwina Currie will be doing the honours before our celebrity chefs (Michael Caines MBE and Anton Piotrowski, co-winner of MasterChef the Professionals last year) take to the stage to demonstrate their culinary skills.

Over the past ten years Abbfest has raised over £100,000, with help from our visitors and thanks to our sponsors and we hope to keep up this tradition this year. For details of entrance fees and bus routes see the website www.abbfest.org.

David Lockley

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M.A.S.T

In June, for one month only, the Midweek Marauders became the Midweek Ale Searching Troupe. New name, same core personnel of four, departing Paignton on the Kingswear bus bound for the South Hams. After crossing the river to Dartmouth, we had 50 minutes to kill before our bus, so naturally we headed for the nearest pub. That this happened to be the G.B.G - listed Royal Castle Hotel was a bonus, and we were soon ensconced in the panelled, beamed bar adorned with everything from a model galleon to an old-fashioned, long-handled bed-warmer, sipping halves of Doom Bar, Otter Amber, and Jail Ale. Leaving here, we headed for the tiny and atmospheric Cherub, which is Dartmouth's oldest building and, arguably, its oldest pub (although The Seven Stars opposite will dispute this). Either way, the Eddystone, Proper Job, and Splendid Tackle were all drinking very well - as would be expected from another G.B.G - listed pub.

Back at the bus stop, the bus arrived late and departed again empty, having overheated on this baking hot day. The wait until the next bus enabled a visit to The Dolphin, for halves of Tribute and Bridgetown Whaler.

Fortunately, the next bus arrived both on time and in rude health, and a change of plan soon saw us head past our intended destination of Slapton, to Stokenham. Here, we first walked up to The Tradesmans Arms, a thatched pub set back off the main road. Baguettes eaten in the seating area opposite fortified us for the rest of the afternoon, and were accompanied by Tribute, and Otter Bitter and Ale. Back round the corner, there was just time to try Otter Bitter and Head, and Branoc from Branscombe Vale, in The Church House. On arrival in Kingsbridge, our final destination of the day, we headed for The King of Prussia, where Old Golden Hen and Bass prepared us for the walk up the hill to The Kings Arms, a smart town-centre pub with the bonus of being able to try any three of its four ales in 1/3 pint glasses in lieu of a pint. To this end, we rounded off the day with various combinations of well-kept Skinners Lushingtons and Betty Stogs, Teignworthy Reel Ale and Bays Topsail.

Peter O'Nions

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SimmoSpoons Tour

Finding ourselves in Watford, having spent a great day out at the Warner Bros Studios and the Harry Potter Museum, we decided to extend our trip to take in Peterborough as two of the three brothers that make up the Simmonds Trio have pubs there. The eldest, Chris, is landlord of The Queen's Arms in Brixham and prior to him taking over the Brixham pub, had worked with his brothers to run a couple of pubs in Peterborough; Stuart and Andy still do. There have been a stream of people doing the SimmoSpoons Tour visiting Brixham from Peterborough and we thought we would do the tour in reverse.

On arrival in Peterborough, we made our way to The Ploughman, an estate pub that has been fighting (and has recently won) a battle with Tesco who own the land and wanted to close the pub down. This is a vibrant pub with lots of community involvement, and like all the Simmonds brothers' pubs, has a great real ale ideology. Andy, the youngest brother was elsewhere, helping at a beer festival, but his partner gave us a great welcome. We tried three of the six ales available, Humpty Dumpty Ale, Comet from Star Brewing Company (my favourite) and Woodforde's Nelsons Revenge. A short cab ride to The Dragon and again we were enthusiastically greeted by Stuart, the middle brother. This, a Wells pub with six hand-pumps and a great guest selection, was full of people, no mean feat considering its vast size. There was live music and we enjoyed the ambience whilst drinking Portobello Pale Ale, Elland Beyond the Pale and Thwaites Wainwrights.

Stuart offered to show us the real ale scene in Peterborough the next day, and little did we know we were in for such a treat. We started at The Solstice which was holding a beer festival in their smart courtyard.

.....continued



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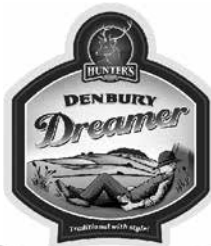


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SimmoSpoons ...continued

Affinity were all appreciated. A short walk to the Conservative Club and Oakham's JHB and Hunter's Crackshot were drinking well. Hunter's beers are very popular in the city, and many local free houses stock them.

Next to Oakham's Brewery Tap, an attractive large open plan building with an industrial theme, where the whole Oakham range was available. All were in great condition and I was able to taste two of my favourites (Scarlet Macaw and Inferno) back-to-back, to make a crucial decision on which I preferred. George went for Citra and Special.

On the side of the river Nene, Charters is a Dutch barge converted into a bar. They normally have 12 ales, including many Oakham brews. Our choice there was Dark Mild and Scarlet Macaw, then a short walk along the river to our final stop, The Palmerstone's Arms. The ale here was served straight out the barrel, and the cellar was visible through a big glass wall behind the bar. Castle Rock Preservation and Salamander's Mudpuppy were our picks.

After this we called it a day and went back to The Dragon for a beer!
Then onto The Ploughman where we enjoyed an evening of good beer and a lively band.

A visit to Brixham's Queen's Arms on returning home completed the SimmoSpoons tour. Teignworthy Golden Sands and Exe Valley Dobs were our selection out of the six on hand-pump.

The real ale pubs in Peterborough are great, and we missed several on our visit. To catch up, we plan to go to some more of them when we visit the Peterborough CAMRA Beer Festival in August.

Tina Hemmings

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Regional Pub of the Year—Judging notes.

This annual task is seized upon with great relish by many members of South Devon CAMRA. In essence, after every branch of CAMRA has submitted their candidate for the southern half of the South-West Regional Pub of the Year, these are then judged by the other South West branches to find the region's overall winner. This pub then goes forward to compete in a regional head to head. A difficult job of course, but someone has to do it. Judging is surprisingly difficult, as each branch's nomination is worthy of being the Pub of the Year and only a few points generally separate each candidate.

The main judging criteria are Quality of Beer (most important); Atmosphere/Style/Décor; Service and Welcome; Community Focus; Sympathy with CAMRA aims and Good Value.

The candidates for our consideration this year are:

- * Butterleigh Inn, Butterleigh (Exeter/East Devon)
- * Ship & Pilot, Ilfracombe (North Devon)
- * Crossways Inn, West Huntspill (Somerset)
- * Star Inn, Crowlas (Cornwall)
- * Fortescue Hotel, Plymouth (Plymouth)

We set off one evening to visit the Butterleigh Inn, where we had a table booked for an evening meal. We were to be guided by one of our number, Colin, who hails from the swampy end of the South Hams, way down at the back end of Slapton. Now others in our group may have been gullible and trusted him when he stated assuredly: "I know where I'm going. I know the place well, having been there recently". Well, call me cynical, but Colin has trouble finding his own local (Slapton's Queen's Arms) so I decided to play safe and take my map book of Devon, which features every lane in the county. After much aimless wandering around Cullompton and its environs (& the table reservation time fast approaching), I brought the map into play & 10 minutes later we arrived in Butterleigh and located the Butterleigh Inn. This turned out to be a true village pub, a real joy to be in. It is traditionally furnished and a very clean environment. The landlady and staff were all pleasant, helpful and friendly. There was a small selection of beers, being 3 different beers available (however I think every CAMRA member joins with me in believing that a small selection of beers kept in good condition, far outweighs a large number of beers that could be poor). I had Wadworth's Henry's IPA, an excellent beer served in superb condition and at just the right temperature. There was a varied menu, with the food being well presented and tasty. Altogether it was a village pub worth visiting.

The next foray was to North Devon and thence Somerset. We journeyed up (again in a 2-car convoy), but this time the lead car was driven by John, a new member to our Group. Well, after a long but uneventful trip, we arrived in Ilfracombe and located the Ship & Pilot pub, down by the harbour and (fortunately) close by a car park. What a pub! This is a typical harbour-side pub, with a very warm welcome. There was a superb range of real ales, ciders and a perry, all kept in superb condition; an extremely friendly and helpful landlord, obviously proud of his beers. I had Wizard Brewery's Druids Fluid, which was excellent, a lovely colour and served at the right temperature and tasting great; also very reasonably priced. Before we left we tried Bass on stillage; we all agreed that this was the most perfect Bass we'd ever tasted. No food served here, but one can order food from the cafe next door. Again, an extremely clean pub, well decorated with much evidence..cont

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What's On

Branch Meetings and Social Events

Date	Time	Purpose	Location
10 Sept 2013	20:00	Branch Meeting	The Queens Arms, Brixham.
Late Sept 2013	TBA	Mid-week Social.	Teign Valley details TBA.
? Oct 2013	20:00	Branch Meeting	The George Inn, Blackawton
12 Nov 2013	20:00	Branch Meeting	Paignton Conservative Club
16 Nov 2013	TBA	Group Trip	Crewkerne, Honiton & Axminster
14 December	12:00	Christmas Social	Teign Cellars Newton Abbot.

Beer Festivals

7-8 September – Somerset CAMRA Beer Festival, Minehead Station, Minehead

14 September – South Hams Brewery Beer Festival, Stokeley Farm Shop, Stokenham, Kingsbridge TQ7 2SE. 20 ales, 4 from South Hams Brewery and some local ciders. Live entertainment with Filthy Gorgeous. www.stokeleyfarmshop.co.uk Hopefully 20 ales, of which 4 will be South Hams Brewery, Eddystone, Devon Pride, XSB and Wild Blonde.

20-22 September – Abbfest 10th Anniversary Festival, Fermoy's Garden Centre, Ipplepen

27 Sept– 6 Oct– The Blue Anchor, Teignmouth. Beer & Cider Festival with 30 Ales and Ciders available.

4-6 October– Minerva Inn Beer Festival. 24 ales (national and local) 6+ ciders. Looe St, nr The Barbican, Plymouth. www.minervainn.co.uk

6-8 December - Brixham, Queens Arms 2nd Birthday weekend and 1st Queens Arms Winter Festival. 20 plus ales, real cider and live entertainment.

Judging notes....2

... *continuation*... of interaction with local groups (both youth and adults). It has all the appearance of a well-liked and popular pub, with a keen landlord.

After leaving Ilfracombe, guided by Simon the Sat-Nav, we eventually (via a very torturous route) arrived at the Crossways Inn. Now most people would have just driven due east, along the A39, but not Simon, not this day! I would stress at this point that I don't trust Sat-Navs and this particular one was being operated by an ex-Royal Navy Commander, who used to *drive* one of Her Majesty's ships for a living, therefore having a propensity for wandering about aimlessly. It might work at sea, but not North Devon! Anyway 5 hours and 2 refuelling stops later – I'm sure I saw a sign saying "Welcome to Dorset" – (alright, I admit it, if I've been told once not to exaggerate, I've been told a million times), we arrived at the Crossways Inn. This was a busy food-orientated roadhouse pub, having absolutely immaculate toilets, according to one of our group – Tony the Toilet Tester. This might seem odd, but we all agree that if an establishment's toilets are clean, then so is the rest! They had 6 real ales on, all in good condition. They also offered a beer tapas, where one could have a platter containing a pint made up of 1/3rds, so enabling one to try more beers (always a good idea). I therefore had Cheddar's Gorge Best, Hop Back's Summer Lightning, Hop Back's Entire Stout, Otter's Seville (yes, you could taste the Oranges), RCH's PG Steam and St Austell's Trelawney. The food was excellent and also to be recommended, with a varied choice. The landlord was extremely helpful and engaging in conversation with his patrons. Crossways Inn is certainly an establishment to be recommended, both for the beer and the food.

Our final day-out was to Cornwall and for this, the decision was made to go by rail. We set off early one morning (well, 08.35am is early for me!), picking up half the group at Totnes. For this excursion we invited 2 other CAMRA members, one of whom writes regularly for News & Brews, Peter O'Nions, known as The Bard of Brixham (well, I think that's what it said on the poster featuring his photograph – it could actually have been 'Barred, of Brixham'). We eventually arrived in Penzance 2 hours 45 minutes later and immediately boarded a bus to Crowlas. This village is situated mid-way between St Erth & Penzance, but we chose Penzance to operate from as there are more pubs there to visit! Shortly we were in the Star Inn and sampling the beers. There were 3 beers on by Penzance Brewing Company (brewed by the landlord, on site) and the choice was between their Brison's Bitter, Crowlas Bitter and (in my view the best of all) Potion No.9. This is a pleasant establishment, a spacious roadside village pub; tasteful decor with a touch of faded glory, containing different, varied, yet comfortable rooms. The toilets were again immaculate. No food, but like the Ship & Pilot, it therefore enables the landlord of a small establishment to concentrate on the beer quality. After an hour or so we caught the return bus back to Penzance and had lunch at The Tremenheere, the local Weatherspoons. Replete after our repast, we toured around Penzance looking for, and trying, other hostelries of renown (in the Good Beer Guide), before catching the 4.00pm train to Plymouth.

Two hours later, we arrived in Plymouth & proceeded to walk the short trip to Mutley Plain and The Fortescue. Walking past the terraced houses, it might have been the stagnant aroma of stale, rotten food or the broken glass and rubbish strewn about the area that gave this area away as a centre of student accommodation! I always like going to The Fortescue, ...*cont*...

Judging notes ...3

...cont...it being a busy city centre Bohemian establishment, with a mixed clientele and events to suit all tastes. As usual, we had a very warm welcome; there was also a 10% discount to card-carrying CAMRA members. There is a long, through bar and this evening they featured 8 real ales. We tried Timothy Taylor's Landlord, Hunter's Albion, South Hams' Wild Blonde and Wychwood's Hobgoblin. This pub does not do food (except Sunday), but as a plethora of takeaways abound nearby, they allow purchased meals to be consumed on the premises. This we did and after another hour or so we walked back to the station to catch our final train, returning to Newton Abbot at approximately 8.30pm. It was a long 12 hour day, but most enjoyable.

So, which Pub of the Year won? Well that is not known yet. All we have done is to supply our views and the order in which we placed them to the Regional Director of the South West Branches. Our results were closely similar, but not our entire group agreed on the same order of preference. Other South Devon CAMRA members who evaluate these pubs will also have had different views, with different outcomes. The winning Pub of the Year will therefore achieve it on one main factor – consistency. It is no good being almost perfect one day, and then serve poor beer the next.

What of our own Pub of the Year, The Pig's Nose at East Prawle? Well that has been assessed by members of the other branches in the South West and will be stacked up against the other candidates. The overall result of the South West area (both southern and northern branches) will be announced in due course by the Regional Director, and go forward to compete nationally. It is good to think that we played our part and helped contribute to that position.

Peter Lister.

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GRUMPY OLD MAN PRAISES SIMPLICITY

Having been to Greece recently it was obvious that over there, eating and drinking in bars was a very straightforward and uncomplicated experience. Layout and structure were always simple with ouzo, wine and a limited range of beers on offer. Once upon a time going to the pub in this country was a similar experience and you knew exactly what to expect. Pubs had sensible names like the Red Lion and there were generally at least two bars including a public and a saloon. The beers would be mild, bitter and sometimes a special or old in winter, with a limited range of bottle beers; usually brown or light ale plus a very small number of soft drinks. Often the only food was likely to be the Smith's crisps with the twist of salt.

Enter stage right Watneys. I can recall vividly, the treatment given to one of its pubs when the outside was monstrously covered completely in diagonal red and black stripes, and was just about the epitome of all bad taste and garishness imaginable. At least they kept the Coach and Horses name, but with a complete disregard for history as it had obviously once been a proud coaching inn on the route to London. That is the point of pub names in that they do mean something in historical terms which is more than you can say for Slug and Lettuce or Spacesuit and Monkey or the Elephant and Kangaroo. They are all manufactured names that ignore history having been dreamt up by a marketing department and in the case of the latter the animals are not even to be found on the same continent! If I thought that the outside of the Coach and Horses was bad enough then the inside was arguably worse. It was the first themed pub I had encountered and was done out as an Alpine scene with mountains painted on the walls and ceilings, a waterfall and stream crossed by little bridges and overall was just crass. It did not take long for some likely lads to realise that a packet of soap powder in the waterfall would close the pub! Other themed pubs followed, including one near to Heathrow Airport done out as the cockpit of an aeroplane equipped with all the controls. Another had a massive air balloon complete with basket and ropes.

Fortunately, these themes have disappeared, but others have followed including Irish themed pubs. Let's be clear they are about as Irish as Joseph Stalin. Obviously, they are all given an Irish name like Finnegan's and decked out with shamrocks, leprechauns, enormous and very silly over-sized green hats and anything else to give the impression of Irishness. One had a signpost with an arm pointing to Cork at 450 miles. I would have added an additional arm pointing to the exit being only 20 yards! It is of course a classical piece of stereotyping to portray the Irish as fun loving, but I have met many a miserable Irish person and what about fun lovers in Italy or Spain and why do they not get their own themed bars. The 'Irish thing' culminates in St. Patrick's night which is an enormously important cultural occasion for them, but has been hijacked by the marketing people to sell more Guinness and to 'manufacture' fun by wearing those stupid oversized green hats. To cap it all last time I passed an Irish pub they were drinking that well known Irish beverage called Budweiser!

Pubs started to have their interior walls knocked out and we saw the appearance of the one bar pub. They then proceeded to break up space by adding nooks and crannies to create the image of separate bar areas. There is definitely an *irony* in there somewhere. You can now enter these pubs and you will be faced with a variety of 'clutter'. Top of the list is the chalk menu board which is often the first thing you see and can be very dominating posing the question as to whether this is a pub or a restaurant. Food has moved on a lot in pubs and I have seen reference to kangaroo, ostrich, crocodile and recently bison; I foresee endangered species such as polar bear or panda on the menu in the near future. All of this is a far cry from the solitary packet of crisps of ancient yore. (Incidentally, they did provide some amusement as you were left guessing whether there would be any salt twists at all or several or, and worse still, one twist with damp salt which could hardly be shaken over the crisps).

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....GRUMPY....CONTINUED

...cont...To add to the clutter there is usually an area for cutlery, sauces and napkins etc.but not one for children who now seem to get everywhere and are largely responsible for the pervading smell of chips. There are also the table menus which are often so big as to almost hide anybody sitting opposite. I had promised not to say anything more about menus, but I can't resist. A Greek menu described a Greek Salad as feta cheese, tomatoes, olives, onions and cucumber which was simplicity in itself. I nearly called over the waiter to tell him that he was missing a trick or two and what he really meant was ' feta from specially bred and hand reared goats from the luxuriant slopes of Mount Olympus accompanied by succulent handpicked....' That I am afraid to say would be very close to the British equivalent.

Some pubs now create their own individuality with collections of ties, postcards, horse brasses, banknotes, stuffed birds or aquaria. In addition there are always notices advertising quiz night, karaoke, live music or up-coming sporting events. The South Devon mid-week group recently encountered a pub with 3 televisions all featuring a different sport. You could have sat in the middle of the room and watched golf whilst listening to tennis with your left ear and horse racing with your right! There was a trend not so long ago for pubs to crowd in bookshelves and their associated books. Did anybody actually read more than the titles? I very much doubt it as the titles clearly displayed their origin from house clearance. I remember a time when I actually perused the titles but decided against picking up a copy of *Handy Tips for Plastering and Wall Papering* or the programme for the *Daily Mail's Ideal Home Exhibition for 1959*. Is there any space left? Yes actually, for fruit machines, juke boxes and even cash machines which probably reflect the cost of buying a round these days!

I have not yet mentioned the proliferation of different types of drink. In my very early days lager and cider were unknown, but now feature in a ' T ' font dispensing several keg varieties and being heavily branded and are relatively expensive. Ignoring what we might think about the quality, or price of these products, have you noticed how that ' T ' font always seems to get in the way and is effectively dead bar area for serving let alone seeing the bar staff behind them to attract their attention for service! Similarly, brown and light ale have given away to many other bottled beers from various parts of the world or made under licence in the UK. On a recent visit to a pub a true cornucopia of United Nations' beers were available from India, Singapore, China, Australia, Poland, Germany, the USA and Turkey. Why do they all seem to taste of slightly alcoholic washing up liquid? The word insipid really comes in to its own. A friend of mine once described these beers as ' inoffensive ' which is probably about right in that they are designed to capture the essence of ordinariness and the common denominator for the mystical average drinker to maximise sales. Then there are the numerous cocktail style drinks with their vivid colours such as orange and turquoise and with their intense sweetness that would put you in the fast lane to diabetes. In addition there are shots. Now, if we want to be serious about controlling alcohol excesses we really need to get to grips with these drinks. As far as I can tell their sole purpose is to induce intoxication for why else would you pour down your throat in seconds something that you don't bother with the nicety of tasting first! If I could have been fast forwarded to 2013 from my early pub days there is a real possibility of shock and confusion at the plethora of choices involved. I am not a strong believer in too much choice or in free will as I see it manipulated by the world of advertising and large corporations to inject their values into our psyche. A meeting between an American President and his Russian opposite number summed it up exactly. American President. " In the USA we believe in choice " . Russian reply " I agree, as it is always useful to be able to choose between 57 flavours of crisps " . He was right; choice has to be meaningful and not mere confusion or obfuscation. Bring back the simplicity of earlier days.

Bob Southwell

AKA The Grumpy Old Man

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