

Durham Drinker

spring 1999 issue 78

Free Newsletter of the Durham Branch of Camra

Vaux: the end of an era?



The future of one of the largest regional brewers in the United Kingdom hangs in the balance. Swallow Hotels announced in September 1998 that it was going to exit brewing to concentrate on its leisure interests, and was therefore seeking to sell the two breweries which it owned: Vaux in Sunderland and Wards in Sheffield.

Initial hopes of a management buyout (MBO) were high when Frank Nicholson, current managing director at Vaux Breweries, headed a bid valued in the region of £65 million. This was for the purchase of both breweries, 350 tenanted pubs, as well as several other items

including the loan book for the Free Trade business. The bid was backed by a venture capital group and a large national bank. It seemed that the protracted negotiations would be successful, until the Swallow Group board announced that the bid was not acceptable and that unless serious obstacles could be overcome the breweries would be closed in July 1999.

This rejection of the MBO led to the resignation of Sir Paul Nicholson from the board, and to increased local and national media interest in the

story. The MBO team then tabled two further bids which were immediately dismissed by the Swallow Board. Redundancy notices were issued in early April and all discussions with the MBO team were stopped.

CAMRA has been campaigning actively to save the breweries in Sunderland and Sheffield. Vaux

and Wards each brew 6 cask ales, and closure would mean the ending of 160 years of brewing heritage on Wearside. It would also lead to the dismissal of 600 employees. This is perhaps the single most important issue facing CAMRA branches in northern England for several years, and it is vital that all members do something to save

the breweries from annihilation. We urge you to take action by writing to your local MP. Write to Sunderland Council expressing dismay at their lack of commitment to a local industry, and contact local newspapers with letters of protest.

Durham CAMRA will support any bid which aims to preserve the brewing tradition of these viable sites, and views the proposed closure as nothing less than commercial vandalism. To lose Vaux would be to wrench the heart from North-Eastern beer culture, and must be avoided.



**20 REAL ALES
FREE ADMISSION
ALL WELCOME**



**OPEN MIDDAY
TIL CLOSING**

**WOODMAN INN, DURHAM CITY
MAY 6-9 INCLUSIVE**

Castle Eden Lives!

Good news from the frontline. Castle Eden Brewery was saved from closure when a consortium of local businessmen, led by head-brewer Jim Kerr, bought the threatened business from Whitbread. The deal means the continued brewing of Castle Eden Ale and Trophy Special in the North-East, as well as the introduction of a new beer: Nimmo's XXXX. This beer might be familiar to drinkers of pedigree, since it is brewed according to an old recipe which has been out of production for decades. Butterknowle also forms part of the Castle Eden portfolio, and ensures the survival of Banner, Conciliation and Ebenezer. Durham CAMRA is delighted with these developments, and we wish the new management team every success for the future.

What Price the Millennium?

As the end of this millennium approaches, it appears that the people who will really be celebrating are businessmen. Pubs and clubs are aiming to extort a hefty wedge of hard earned cash from it's punters. Come New Year's Eve 1999, anyone wishing to see in the new millennium in a pub may face charges of £20 or more just to get in. The justification of the industry is that staff will have to be paid more (probably triple time). Some national pub chains are also offering the added incentive that employees prepared to forego

celebrating will be rewarded with a slice of the evenings takings.

The more cynical view is that the industry simply wants to maximise its profit margins, and views its punters as a soft touch: people eager to party to the wee small hours with the help of a drink or ten, no matter what the cost. Durham CAMRA will applaud any publican who decides that it does not want to rip-off his or her customers, and keeps the entrance through the front doors as it always has been: free.

The Victoria Hotel

86 Hallgarth Street, Durham, DH1 3AS

tel: (0191) 386 5269

fax: (0191) 386 0465

- **Bed & Breakfast Accomodation, All Rooms En-Suite**
- **Private Car Park**
- **Tea & Coffee Always Available**
- **Friendly, atmospheric bar**
- **At least five cask ales**

Durham  **Pub of the Year 1998**

In Brief

PUB OF THE YEAR

Durham CAMRA has chosen the **Beamish Mary Inn** as our pub of the year 1999. This delightful real ale pub will now be put forward to the Regional Pub of the Year contest, from which it may then enter the National contest, a category it has won in the past.

HALF MOON

The **Half Moon** in central Durham still faces the threat of being converted into an **It's A Scream** alcoholic playarea for the young and cerebrally challenged. The plans put forward by Bass have cleared opposition from the local planning committee, but are facing mounting objections in the Magistrates Court. Durham CAMRA has added its name to the list of objectors who feel that the grafting of an **It's A Scream** onto the esteemed **Half Moon** is something to stop.

TAP AND SPILE

Century Inns, owners of the popular **Tap and Spile** real ale pubs, has recently been taken over by Enterprise Inns. It is to be hoped that the new management team will



continue to offer real ale drinkers the range of products that the **Tap and Spile** establishments always have. This is a situation that your local branch of CAMRA will be monitoring.

MINIMUM WAGE

It has been reported that several pubs in the region have been increasing beer prices by several pence a pint, with the justification that the introduction of a minimum wage in early April has significantly increased their overheads. Durham CAMRA would like you to inform us if you can confirm these reports, and also if you notice any changes in staffing levels and standards.

DURHAM BREWERY

Durham Brewery has recently begun bottling some of its own brews. Keep your eyes peeled for bottled **Sanctuary**.

GREY HORSE INN

The **Grey Horse Inn**, Consett, is now producing its own stout. This replaces Guinness, and is in addition to the other fine ales available at this brew pub.

Join CAMRA now!

Just fill in the form below and send, with a cheque (payable to CAMRA Ltd) to Membership Secretary, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St. Albans, Herts, AL1 4LW. Rates are: single £14, joint £17, OAP £8 (joint £11), overseas £18 (joint £21), under 26 £8 (joint £11)

Name

Address

Postcode

I wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association

I enclose a cheque for £

Signed

Date

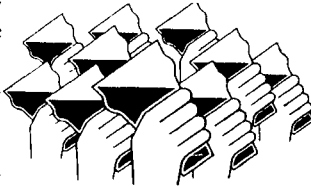
Protect Your Pleasure



Beer Festival On!

Good news discerning beer drinkers! Durham CAMRA is proud to announce the holding of another beer festival in a local pub. Many of you took the opportunity in the autumn to sample a wide variety of local and national real ales in Spennymoor, and this spring we invite you to try an equally impressive range of 20 real ales. Peter and Mary of the Woodman Inn, Gilesgate, Durham City have been kind enough to allow us to take over a section of their pub for the purpose of supplying you with a canny choice of ale. Entrance is free, so all you have to pay for is the cost of the ale you drink. The

**Britain's
Independent Brewers
produce 1100 real ales..**



**Which ones have
you tried?
BACK BRITAIN'S
INDEPENDENT
BREWERS**

bar will be open from midday to closing time (that's 11pm on all days except Sunday, when the bar will close at 10.30pm), and all are welcome. The festival takes place on the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th of May, 1999. You can also join CAMRA during the event, and help us preserve the threatened beer culture of north-east England. Feel free to approach any of the committee members with matters that you believe we should be paying more attention to (closure or run-down of an esteemed local, increased beer prices, decreased real ale choice in your local and so on) and we shall investigate. We look forward to meeting you in early May.....

Durham Drinker

The Durham Drinker is the official newsletter of the Durham Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale. The views contained in this document do not necessarily represent those of the national organisation of the Campaign for Real Ale. Every attempt is made to ensure the accuracy of our information. However, if you have any complaint regarding the content of this newsletter then please write to the address given below. The editorial board of the Durham Drinker welcomes thoughtful criticism of it's output, and is open to suggestions for future articles or improvements. Advertising rates are available on request. Address for communications: William Weir, c/o Dept. of Mathematics, Univ. of Durham, DH1 3LE.

Peter and Mary welcome you to

The Woodman Inn

23 Gilesgate, Durham City

(0191) 386 7500

**Friendly Local Pub close to City Centre
4 Quality Cask Beers Always Available**

**Hosts of Durham CAMRA Beer
Festival, May 6th-9th incl.**