

Beware Of The Tickers

Ah the joy of British Beer. The foaming pint amidst jovial company, served by a comely wench or a stout fellow surrounded by oak beams and horse brasses. Thank goodness for the revival of Real Ale, brewed by artisans with names to fire the imagination. Old Spot, Bishops Tipple, Lancaster Bomber, Wagglance, and Dorothy Goodbods Wholesome Stout all celebrate the great traditions of this country of ours. Where better to assuage the palate than the wondrous event known as the Beer Festival?

But wait! A heinous band of tramps and vagabonds have invaded our splendid institution. I speak, in hushed tones, of "the Tickers".

Whatever the weather, these creatures are easily recognised. They gather on railway station platforms clad in 1970's anoraks and stained corduroy trousers carrying strange bags of the type seen on landfill sites. They mutter in low voices, occasionally grimacing in a constipated fashion at an observation by a fellow member of their ilk, momentarily displaying a graveyard of decaying yellow teeth, and letting forth a deadly blast of halitosis.

Following a somewhat imprudent investment in the 3.45 at Kempton, I found myself in penury and accepting a position as a bar steward at a beer festival run by a splendid landlord and sundry and jocular banter filled the air. There was a particular beer that had proven very popular and I had to momentarily journey into the cellar to change a barrel. It was on my return that I noticed the boisterous melee had subtly changed to an incomprehensible fog with an odour akin to a Dickensian chirpologists waiting room.

The Tickers had arrived.

A row of them were gathered by the bar squinting at the clips on the beer pumps. Why do folk who wear glasses always put them over the top of their head to read? Is there an invisible third eye just above the forehead? Or is it a secret symbol of recognition for a cult with a penchant for indulging in unmentionable practices? In the Tickers case it is probably a way to grease the screws holding the jam jar type lenses in place.

I digress.

"I want half of Mouldy Leaf and half of Weasel Spit."

"When's Bog Brush Porter coming on?"

"Them rolls are dear."

"It's not as good as Dudley."

"I had some of that in Scunthorpe last week."

Their collective manners made me wonder if I'd got any bacon left in the fridge. But what was this? From the depths of some of the bags appeared small sample bottles that they caressed lovingly before delving once more into the abyss and producing labels. Tatty notebooks and bookies pens were then laid upon the tables.

The ritual was about to begin.

A glass of beer was raised aloft betwixt finger and thumb and gazed at with wonder before a small sip was taken. A crouching motion followed whereby notes were furtively scribbled in a hieroglyphic form that even the enigma code could not decipher.

A small funnel emerged from the bag.

Now I pride myself on being broad minded, but at this stage I was ready to run. Sleepless nights exploring Google has taught me there are some things I really don't want to see, especially ones involving strange men, funnels, and beer. However, I was custodian of the bar, so I bravely stood my ground, mentally singing "Men of Harlech" and waiting for something nasty to appear over the hill.

The beer was once more held up to the light, then, with slow deliberate movements, a few drops were transferred to the sample bottles that were sealed, labelled and packed away. The drinking vessel was summarily pushed aside; still over half full, and the Ticker turned

his attention to the bar.

This procedure was repeated in various parts of the room during the afternoon, but as the shadows grew longer, and the odour grew stronger, I sensed the rumbling of discontent in the air.

I could hear them whispering.

"It's got it in here," one said, waving a beer list.

"I only came here for that."

"That's the one he started brewing last week isn't it?"

"Yeh. He couldn't make Warwick, so he said it would be here."

"I'll go and ask."

One of them shambled to the bar.

"When's the Wrestlers Truss coming on?" he shouted with the expected decorum.

"Oh that was finished before you arrived," I said, with barely disguised glee.

The room fell silent and eyes glared at me with total venom. Then, after gathering their meagre belongings, they drifted away for another year, loudly mourning their missed opportunity and vowing never to set foot in the place again (Oh please!).

I gathered up the remaining glasses, and totally disinfected the room before normal service was resumed with the real imbibers and myself thoroughly enjoying the remainder of the festival.

Today, as I sit here on the railway station platform, I look back and smile at the experience, as I eagerly anticipate my trip to a beer festival in Cardiff. There's a couple of new beers there I want to try. Now, where's my notebook?

Brockton

Important information for the compilation of the Good Beer Guide

This is the time of year when all good CAMRA members' thoughts turn to Good Beer Guides and its compilation. The new 2009 edition should be available at the SVR Festival, which is another good reason for coming along. However most of the pubs in the GBG will have copies to sell. But now is the time to think seriously about the 2010 GBG. Between August and the 16th of November consideration must be given to who is going to be in the GBG. All those pubs in the 2009 edition will go forward to the final voting in February 2009 at nominations night.

Members can nominate other pubs they think worthy, and there surely will be. The one constant rule over the nominations, whether it is a current entry in the GBG or a new prospect, is they must have five visits between August and November. 16th A visit, of course, is defined as a quality report, and I'm afraid only one visit is accredited even if more than person files a report on the same day. It goes without saying the aggregate of the visits must be above our quality score of +2.

Unfortunately Shropshire as a whole only has 51 entries in the GBG, and we have to share with our Shrewsbury neighbours, which means we get 25 or 26 entries- we alternate each year. If nothing else changed we would have to lose one or add one each year! At the last unofficial count there were more than 400 pubs on our patch, so competition is pretty fierce.

Can I ask every member to submit at least the 8 reports we have included in this mailing. It would make a tremendous difference to the database. You have about 3 months to do it. You can send them by post or email to Tony Waters, or if you know any of the committee or their haunts- The Cock and The White Hart spring to mind, you can leave them there. Any way, whatever you do, enjoy your pint and remember as a CAMRA member you are contributing to the most worthwhile cause of keeping real ale high up in the national conscience. Cheers.