



CAMRA

Chelmsford & Mid-Essex Branch

Pub News

November 2009 –The Big Banger edition

by Nigel Sadler - Pub Liaison Officer

I hope you all had a good October and the ladies avoided the ghosties on Halloween and none of you chaps were caught by the ghoulies either!

We are well and truly into Autumn now and the weather seems to be changing for the worst. Time for our landlords/ladies to get the log fires ready and perhaps a few winter warmers to enjoy in front of them.

The first week of this month will obviously see a fair few Guy Fawkes night celebrations and although I don't have time to list all of them I would just single out the Roundtable event being held at Admirals Park on Saturday 7th (Check local press for details). The chaps from the Roundtable often come and help staff our Summer Beer Festival so we reciprocate and help out at their firework display. We could still do with a few more volunteers for this so please come along around 5.30pm next Saturday and bring your waterproofs and a torch.

Also next Saturday afternoon somewhere around 5.30pm will be the presentation of the East Anglian Pub of the Year at the Wheatsheaf in Writtle. All are welcome to attend but those that know it will be aware it might be a little cramped inside!

As you know we also made the award for "Most Improved Pub of the Year" to the White Horse in Townfield Street. A good dozen or so of us turned up on 21st October and here's a pic of Cam and Chris being presented with their award.



PUB NEWS

The Windmill Inn, Chatham Green – Elaine and Peter have organised a couple of events for this month. On Friday 13th November there will be a magical evening with magician Wayne Trice. Table magic plus cabaret which promises to be night not to be missed, book early to avoid disappointment. Then on Monday 23rd November from 6pm a Diva night. A chance for the ladies, and some of us men no doubt, to stock up on those special Christmas pressies or just treat yourself. There will be a fantastic selection of shoes, boots, handbags & jewellery.

The White Hart, Margaretting Tye – Will be holding their Winter Beer Festival between 27th to 29th November and will feature at least 30 real ales and ciders. Open from midday to 11pm each day.

The Beehive, Great Baddow – This GK house is now under new management and I hope to have more news shortly.

The Cuckoo, Radley Green – Has now re-opened and is proving to be a big hit already as a gastro pub. The emphasis is very much on the food here and whilst there are two ales on offer, currently Abbot and GK IPA there is unfortunately little room to stand and have a pint. The menu is excellent and ranges from Thai red curry to roast local partridge. There's even a special Ladies Lunch menu at £8.95 which includes a free glass of wine.

The Leather Bottle, Pleshey – Jackie and Eddie have now completed the sale of this wonderful pub and I understand that they will be leaving it in December. We wish them well in the future. Let's hope the new landlord will continue to run it in the same manner.

BREWERY BITS

Mighty Oak are first on the list this month with "**FIREWALL**" at 4.0% A.B.V. This promises to be a full flavoured, thirst quenching amber coloured session bitter with a biscuity maltiness, moderate bitterness and citrus hop aroma and finish.

Nethergate will be offering "Stinger" throughout November which is a somewhat deceptive ale drinking well above its ABV and with strong blackcurrant/citrus notes.

Meanwhile things are on the up at Brentwood Brewing Co. They've won 2 awards at the recent SIBA East of England Competition: Gold for "**Lumberjack**" in the strong ales and a silver for "**Chockwork Orange**" in the Speciality Beers section. "**Chestnut Stout**" is now available and is a smooth, well rounded easy drinking stout with a touch of roast chestnut at the back end and for the fearless there's "**Volcano**", a dark and very bitter ale with a short finish, a hint of liquorice and dry hopped with Cascade.

NEWS FROM HQ

As you may well know CAMRA has criticised the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) for failing to protect consumers by taking no action following the consumer group's super-complaint submitted in July and has called on the Government to refer unfair tie arrangements in the pub sector to the Competition Commission.

In this morning's response to CAMRA's super-complaint, the OFT has said that consumers benefit from a good deal of competition and choice in the pubs sector, but CAMRA has challenged this at a time when prices are rising and seven pubs are closing every day.

CAMRA's super-complaint followed the hard-hitting report from the parliamentary

and Enterprise Select Committee (BEC) which called for urgent action to re-balance the relationship between pub-owning companies and their lessees in the interest of consumers.

Mike Benner, CAMRA's Chief Executive said, "We do not accept that there is sufficient competition between pubs or adequate consumer benefit from competition and choice within this sector. The OFT decision fails to address the legitimate concerns raised both in our super-complaint and the BEC report and does nothing to address the imbalance in the landlord/ lessee partnership which is leading to higher prices, less choice and weak investment in pubs."

Mr Benner added, "It is difficult to see how the OFT can argue that competition is working well in the pubs sector when demand is falling, yet prices are rising. Urgent action is now required by Government to stem the flow of pub closures, build a sustainable future and ensure that consumers get a fair share of the benefit from tied agreements as demanded by competition law."

Mike Benner said, "There simply cannot be effective competition between all pubs when many pub landlords are placed at a huge disadvantage, by paying wholesale beer prices that can be around 50p a pint greater than their free of tie competitors."

The OFT has found that higher prices exist for some products in tied pubs, but claims that these are marginal, with a pint of lager costing drinkers 8p more in a tied pub compared to a free house. CAMRA, however, claims that this fails to fully consider that higher prices in tied pubs lead to artificially higher prices in other local pubs through lack of effective price competition and contends that today's cash-strapped drinkers would not regard an 8p premium as marginal.

CAMRA is urging Lord Mandelson to overrule the OFT by referring anti-competitive and unfair tie arrangements of the large pub operating companies to the Competition Commission for an urgent investigation. In taking this decision Lord Mandelson will help secure a sustainable future for Britain's pubs and a fair deal for Britain's 14 million pub-goers.

CAMRA is also calling on the Government to take immediate legislative steps to protect pub landlords and therefore consumers from unfair and anti-competitive contract terms.

CAMRA has called for a policy framework to support community pubs which benefit society following the publication of 'Pubs and Places' by the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) in March.

Dr. Rick Muir, author of 'Pubs and Places', said, "Pubs play a key role in community life by providing a friendly and safe environment for people to socialise with friends, family and their wider community. The positive social contribution of many pubs is under threat as a result of high rents and high tied beer prices imposed unfairly by large pub owning companies. Pub landlords are rightly very concerned that unfair tie arrangements are having a serious impact on their ability to compete by reducing prices and improving facilities. The relationship between large pub owning companies and pub landlords needs urgent rebalancing and both the Government and Competition Authorities have their roles to play. In addition a new Government policy framework is required to support, incentivise and reward well-run community pubs."

In calling for referral to the Competition Commission, The BEC report stated the disappointment of the Select Committee that the OFT has previously failed to act on this matter and had refused to acknowledge the current problems in the market. The report said, on the point that the market is working, that "if pubcos push too hard and are too greedy they will fail. But on the way bad companies will inflict real damage on their direct customers, the lessees, and on their indirect customers, ordinary drinkers."

Mr. Benner added, "The Business and Enterprise Select Committee have been proven correct in the view they expressed early this year that an OFT investigation would not be satisfactory and that the Government should now assume responsibility

Keep your eyes open for the next issue in December!

For further news on pubs and breweries visit: www.tap-room.com

Please email me with any news/items for inclusion in future issues. (nigsad@yahoo.co.uk)