

# The Joint **Cowdale Real Ale and Pubs Society** and the **Society for the Exploration of Beers, Inns and Taverns** Exploration of Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire 23-26 January 2003

## The Prologue

*For several years now, IF and Loan have been exploring pubs in Manchester, Salford, Sheffield, Derby and their environs. So it was thought that it would be a good idea to explore some pubs around Loan's home territory, Shroton, in North Dorset. The date was set, arrangements made and this is the diary of the adventure. The story is titled...*

## A Session Too Far!

**I**t all begins with IF driving down one very fine Thursday to the weekend's Star Base that looks remarkably like Loan's house, arriving about teatime. The plan is to visit several pubs, make new and renew old friendships with both people and pubs and generally have a good time.

Having had a refreshing cup of tea or two, a glass of wine to accompany the excellent steak and chips laid on by Wildernis Catering, Loan and IF set off on the initial trip. So we begin

### Session 1 – Thursday Evening, 23 January 2003

The first pub is a Good Beer Guide (GBG) pub, the **Plough at Manston, Dorset**.



*Loan gets proceedings underway in the Plough at Manston*

This single roomed pub lies in the heart of North Dorset. A screen divides the one room into a public and lounge area, both with a hint of dining about them. The weekend gets off to a terrific start as the

beers on here are Sharp's Cornish Coaster (3.6), Palmers IPA (4.2) and Hop Back Crop Circle (4.2). The Crop Circle is advertised on a handpump, but it is actually dispensed from a barrel on stillage behind the bar. We order two Cornish Coasters and we kop our first beer of the weekend. *Luvvly jubbly*.

As it is quite late, we move on to what will become for the weekend the Command and Control Centre (CCC) the **Saxon Inn at Child Okeford, Dorset**. This pub is Loan's local. Alan and Margaret run it, but Margaret is not too well so we wont see her until Sunday night and Alan mans the pumps.

We chat to the locals and tell them what the weekend is all about. They all think it is a jolly good wheeze. We promise to debrief them each night, as this will be our final port of call each day.



*Loan pulls a pint of his own beer!*

As usual, the Saxon is welcoming and friendly. The beers on offer tonight are Butcombe (4.0), Wickwar Brand Oak Bitter (4.0 and more generally known as LOAN to its mates) and Ringwood Best (3.8). This is the first of many times we will see Ringwood beers, and Best in particular, this weekend.



*IF pulls a pint or three at the Saxon Inn*

To get the weekend off to a working start, we both pull pints from the pumps. Working up a thirst it's called.

The Ringwood and the Wickwar are on fine form as we consider our options for the next day. It's getting late now and we are both tired. So we bid everyone goodnight and head for Star Base and a good nights sleep to set ourselves up for the next day's travels.

We awake to a fine morning and, following bacon sandwiches courtesy of Wldernis Catering, we set off on...

## Session 2 – Friday Morning and Afternoon, 24 January 2003

The Warbird takes us along the road south and gets us to the Dorset town of Dorchester, where a sad sight greets us. Once, the Exhibition Hotel was in the vanguard of the real ale movement in Eldridge Pope's estate. Now it is closed and up for sale. We are both stunned. Still, onwards and upwards past the Hall & Woodhouse pub, the White Hart, and to our first pub of the day.

We enter **Tom Brown's**; home of the Goldfinch Brewery, to find that little has changed in the intervening years. Only a column at the corner of the bar has disappeared, giving a more open pub. Otherwise, the décor, the flooring and most of all, the jukebox, are all as we remember.



*Tom Brown's Beers as studied by...  
...IF*



First beer of the day is Tom Brown's Bitter (4.0). This slips down easily as we talk to the current manager and Alan, the brewer. We talk of brewing capacity and beer availability; how the plant is brewing to capacity and that the range has settled on the Bitter, Flashmans Clout (4.5) and Midnight Blinder (5.0). One great thing about Alan's beers is that you can try the Blinder at 5.0 and follow it with a Bitter at 4.0 and still taste it. Very good and tasty beers.

Loan buys his Dorchester Beerex ticket and we move on up the High Street and pass what is a small piece of brewery history. Firstly, there is the Pale Ale Brewery, sitting next to what used to be the Three Mariners. Opposite was the site of the Phoenix Brewery, both long since closed.



On to the next pub, the **Blue Raddle**. This pub is on its third incarnation to our certain knowledge. Previously the Gun, a Devenish pub, it became the Country Gentleman under the Cannon Inns regime. Another 2003 GBG pub, it is narrow but goes back a long way through two drinking areas to a food servery at the very back. It is dark and not particularly welcoming in its atmosphere, but IF has Otter Ale (3.5) while Loan takes on board an orange juice. Yes, that is right, an orange juice. See the photo below for proof!



*Loan and his orange juice at the Blue Raddle*

Leaving the Blue Raddle we go once again into the grey, dismal day that is Dorchester. The Warbird quickly takes us northward for a few miles and we turn right off the A37 to find our way to **Chetnole** and its pub, the **Chetnole Inn**.





*The Chetnole Inn at Chetnole*

Another 2003 GBG pub, this two bar pub is an excellent village local with four beers and a traditional cider, all on handpump. On offer today are Branscombe Vale Branoc (3.8), Butcombe Bitter (4.0), Palmers IPA (4.0) and Otter Ale (4.5). Both Loan and IF go for the Branscombe Vale Branoc as it is a kop.

Loan asks if he can take a picture of the bar "Why?" comes the slightly aggressive answer from the Landlord. Loan explains the point of the weekend and every thing is hunky dory.



*The controversial photograph of the Bar at The Chetnole Inn*

The Landlord and two locals move out of the way to allow Loan to take a picture of IF at the bar and then talks to the Landlord about beer festivals at the Chetnole Inn. The Landlord says he refuses to call them beers festivals as he only puts on about a dozen ales in the pub. Beer Festivals, he says are at least forty beers and are held outdoors in a marquee. However, he will be doing something this Easter. Loan makes a mental note and it is time to move on.

The Warbird engages impulse drive as it negotiates small country lanes as it finds its way to the **White Hart, Yetminster**. Another 2003 GBG, the White Hart is considerably bigger and busier than the Chetnole Inn. There are at least a dozen retirees in the bar having their morning pints and eating. The

pleasant barmaid serves us with Greene King IPA and Butcombe Bitter and we head for the corner to sit and watch the comings and goings at the pub.



*The White Hart, Yetminster*

The pub is long and quite dark, while at the back of the pub is a bright poolroom. A bit of a traditional country local, this ex-Bass house retains much of its rural charm though there is some thought that it's a bit false and twee.

It is now time for a look at the navigation charts and lay in the shortest course to the next pub. Neither Loan nor IF have been there before.

A quick look at the chart reveals that by following yellow and white roads, we can be there in a few minutes. Doing a good impersonation of the RAC rally-leading car, Loan drives while IF navigates and before very long we pull up in the car park of the **Mason's Arms, Lower Odcombe, Somerset**.



As we walk to the pub a chap washing out barrels says good afternoon and IF starts to talk to him about steam cleaners and barrels. Within minutes, we are shown around the brewery. The Landlord, Alan, is also head brewer. He is very proud of his brewery and beers and rightly so. We head off into the pub to sample his wares. We are met by five handpumps; two dispensing the home brew Lower (4.0) and Higher (4.5), while the other three have Butcombe Bitter, Blindman's Brewery Mine (4.2) and Otter Bright (4.3).





*Five handpumps at the Mason's Arms, Lower Odcombe*

The pub itself is a low level stone under thatch building. The bar is L-shaped which is reached by climbing a few steep steps from the car park. There is an old, large stone fireplace in which three chaps are sat drinking cider.

We both go for the Lower to start with. It is an extremely tasty pint. A definite contender for beer of the weekend, even at this early stage. We move on up through the gravities, only omitting the Butcombe. All the beers are in good fettle. We have a chat with Roy, a local; a very interesting discussion with the Landlady, Mary, about the Greatest Briton (Mary went for Elizabeth the First while the rest went with IK Brunel). Loan asks about the hop plants surrounding the bar. He used to have some but an alien force, unknown to the Universe, destroyed them. Mary says, "Help yourself." Soon a handful of hop seeds are in Loan's jacket pocket. Mary has to go to pick the children up so Alan takes over the bar. We carry on chatting about beers, pubs, ...



*Loan, IF and Alan at the Mason's Arms. An alien life force destroyed the Hops in Loans garden...fresh stocks are taken from those around the bar!*

All too soon it is closing time. We bid farewell, offer Roy a lift to Yeovil to save him the three-mile walk and then head off towards Yeovil and Star Base for a rest and to prepare for session 3, Friday night.

### Session 3 – Friday Evening, 24 January 2003

Now it has to be said that Friday night doesn't go according to plan as both Loan and IF decided to have a few ZZdds which means that tea is later than planned. However it was well worth it. Wildernis Catering produces a magnificent meal of Sausage and Mash with peas and Henderson's Relish gravy. It goes down a storm with the troops and fortifies us for the (now shortened) evening session.

We take the Warbird up into uncharted galaxies as we search for the **Fox and Hounds** at **East Knoyle** in Wiltshire. We find it eventually. The beers on offer are Youngs Best and Special. The barmaid doesn't even look at us as she asks what we want, pulls the pints and puts them on the bar. At least we get a "thank you" as the beer voucher is handed over, but nothing else. A big slob of a bloke (the landlord?) occupies the bar and refuses to move as IF tries to reach the beer.

Enough said about the pub save that we shan't be going back. So we head for CCC again, both to be in a friendly pub and to debrief the troops on today's exploits.

### Session 4 – Saturday Morning and Afternoon, 25 January 2003

Today gets off to a flying start as Wildernis Catering provides the second of the three breakfast traditions – the sausage sandwich. Today will also be different since we will have travelling companions in the form of Mark (one of Loan's oldest school friends) and his wife, Rita.

Here is the background to the day. Last New Year's Eve, Mark challenged Loan to take him to 52 new pubs in Dorset during 2003. As Mark lives out of the country for stretches at a time, this will be difficult to reach but, as ever, Loan rises to the task. Today is the first real time to hit some of the 52 pubs. We will in fact be going to three counties but for the purposes of the log, all of today's pubs are in Dorset. Hope that makes sense...



*IF with travelling companions Rita and Mark*



11:30 We board the Warbird and set off for our first destination~The **Forester** at **Donhead St Andrew**, Wiltshire... er... Dorset. We arrive at this village pub to find the beers on offer are Adnams Bitter, Draught Bass, Wadworth 6X (or 6 Times as Rita calls it) and Ringwood Best, all on handpump.



*The Forester, Donhead St Andrew, Dorset*

The pub sits at right angles to the road and is another long low narrow building though as it is built on a slope, the front is rather taller than the back. We all try the Adnams, which isn't too bad. And so it is off to the next pub.

The **South Western** in **Tisbury**, Wiltshire... er... Dorset. The pub is right outside Tisbury station which explains the name. When the Tisbury Brewery started in 1980, the pub was the Brewery Tap. Alas, the Brewery has long gone and today's beers are Young's Bitter and Fullers London Pride. A third handpump is not in use.



*The South Western, Tisbury . One time brewery tap*

The pub itself has a very well worn, old friendly jacket appearance. The sun, shining through the windows makes for a foggy (smoky?) interior. We go to the bar and order the Youngs. Rita opts for a coffee. We make our way to one of the drinking areas and take our seats at a plain wooden table. Sitting on the green vinyl seating, we talk and watch. The Landlady is concerned that we are cold and so she switches the fire on. It is not cold we say, but she insists. Rita's coffee arrives.

To the back of the pub is another room. It might be cold in there though; the gloom hasn't penetrated

that far. The bar is busy with lots of people of the more mature variety, all talking happily. It is obvious that most are locals by the way they interact.

It is soon time to move on. The next stop is not a pub..."Not a pub!" we hear you say. No, not a pub, rather a closed Brewery, proclaiming The Tisbury Brewery, Thomas Archibald Proprietor. Sadly it is now a housing development. We suppose that living in a defunct brewery can only be bettered by living in a functioning one.

The Warbird engages Warp Factor 1 and we head off to the **Compasses** at **Chicks Grove**, also in Wiltshire...er...Dorset.

Parking on the opposite side of the road to the pub, we face a long, low, L-shaped thatched building. We enter the pub. A plaque by the door confirms that the pub is in Wiltshire...er... Dorset. IF and Loan hide the evidence.



*The Compasses at Chicks Grove. Green Welly has her back to the camera*

The pub is dark and gloomy inside. It looks like it was a stable or cattle stall at one time. There is an open area immediately inside the door where wooden tables wait to seat diners. Then the bar; 4 handpumps again, this time dispensing Wadworth 6 Times and Chicks Grove Churl, a 3.6% pub badged beer (Waddies IPA methinks?), Ringwood Best and Bass. We opt for the Waddies. We go and sit at a table and think about eating. It is too early we decide and so we go back to talking about beer and pubs.



IF decides to go and take a picture of the bar and handpumps. "How sad," is heard to come from a Green Welly brigade lady sat at the bar, "A man taking picture of the handpumps." IF responds "Not sad, but a collector of rural artefact history."



*The photograph that launched a conversation. The pumps at the Compasses, Chicksgrove*

Green Welly sees the sense in the idea and we fall headlong into a conversation about beer and pubs in the locality. After a while, the remaining explorers come to join in the discussion. We are given some local pub recommendations and we say our goodbyes and head out into the bright sun, back to the Warbird and move on to the next pub.



*IF & Loan outside The Compasses*

A short trip brings us to the **Talbot** at **Barwick St John**.



*The Talbot, Barwick St John*

This one-time Badger pub is a long, low-level thatched pub which fronts right onto the road. On entering the pub, we are met by a pub quite full of Saturday lunchtime drinkers and diners. The bar has several tables, all of which are occupied. At the end of the room is a huge brick fireplace, which has been knocked through so that we can see a more spacious eating area beyond.



*Lunch is taken at The Talbot*

The beers on offer are Ringwood Best, Wadworth 6 Times, Draught Bass and Greene King Morland Old Speckled Hen. It is here that we take a light repast.

Loan asks the Landlord if we are in Dorset. He replies no. Dorset starts just down the road, but since he is Dorset born and bred, then we are in Dorset. Good, another Dorset pub gets knocked off the challenge!

We then move on to the star pub of the day. The **Horseshoe** at **Ebbesbourne Wakes**. As a pub, words cannot do justice to describe it so let the pictures tell the story. What they do not show, however is that we get there at ten to three and ask the Landlord (just off to feed his ducks) if the pub is still open. "If you just want a drink, yes." he says. We walk in and find this rural gem with no less than four beers on gravity dispense behind the bar.



*The Horseshoe, Ebbesbourne Wakes*



We have a chat with the Landlord and Landlady (second generation in the family to run the pub) and some locals about pubs that used to be near here, beer and pubs, pubs and beer. You know the sort of thing don't you!



*Beers on stillage behind the bar at the Horseshoe*



*The Crew at the bar of The Horseshoe*

We stay in the Horseshoe for about 40 minutes where foundations are set for the *Somerset, Dorset & Wilts Drinking Society*. With animals needing feeding, we leave and set course for Star Base.

But not so fast as to ensure that we can't knock another Dorset pub off. Our course takes us through the Saxon hilltop town of **Shaftesbury**. Or Shaaaaaaasbury as it is sometimes known. Here we stop at the **Ship Inn**, the second highest pub in the County; the highest, the Kings Arms lies about twenty yards up the road.

The Ship presents us with a standard Badger pub with the beers being Badger Best, Tanglefoot and Hall & Woodhouse King & Barnes Festive Ale at 5.3%. Between us, we try all three, though Rita opts for coffee again.

*The Ship Inn at Shaaaaaasbury*



And so we end up back at Star Base. It is teatime by now and Rita and Mark make tracks for their home while Loan and IF get down to some serious ZZdds for a couple of hours before Wildernis Catering comes up trumps again with its famous chilli as yet another marvellous meal to set us up for the night.

### Session 5 – Saturday Night 25 January 2003

Leaving Star Base once again, Loan and IF head out to the **Museum at Farnham**. Apart from saying that the beers on offer were Ridley's Old Bob, Ringwood Best and Young's Special, a more unfriendly pub you could not wish to find. That's all. Won't waste any more of your time.

Quickly heading to the known galaxy of **Tarrant Monkton**, we find the ford flooded by the recent rain. We drive the long way round and it is proved to be a good decision.

Loan is greeted by the bar staff and Landlady at the **Langton Arms** like a long lost friend. The Landlady even tells Loan that she followed him home yesterday from Sherborne!

While all this is going on, The Hop Back GFB (3.6) and Langton Arms Bitter (Hop Back Best Bitter we suspect) (4.0) are knocked back together with a Hop Back Crop Circle at 4.2. Not tried were the Robinson's Best Bitter and Ringwood Porter.



*Loan props up the bar at the Langton Arms*



The bar is comfortably full with people drinking and eating while outside the river is in full flood. Will we get marooned? Unfortunately not and so after Loan finished his chat with the staff and Landlady, we head back to CCC to debrief them on the day's explorations. While there, we sample all three beers again, Butcombe Bitter, Wickwar BOB and the Ringwood Best.

A fairly late night ensues and eventually we get back to Star Base and after a quick dram, we get to sleep.

### Session 6 - Sunday Morning, 26 January 2003

The day dawns grey and miserable. However, Wildernis Catering comes up trumps again and with a full English Breakfast consisting of fried bread, egg, sausages, black pudding, bacon, baked beans and mushrooms. Well fed, we set off for the final daytime trip

The first stop is the **Digby Tap, Sherborne**.



*The Digby Tap Sherborne*

This pub was a favourite haunt of IF's when he lived in Dorset, so sentimental old Loan takes him back for a dip into the past. This extract from IF's notebook describes the place; "It seems bigger than I remember it. Certainly the Brewery memorabilia is worth coming to see on its own. Most of it is local: Anglo Ales, Shepton Mallett, Oakhill, Wadworth, Hancock etc. Tin plate signs adorn the walls, along with posters, beer fonts and photographs."

There has been one physical change in fourteen years – the piano has gone! Otherwise, it is much as remembered. The Landlord tells us that the next big project is to re-floor the extension with reclaimed flagstones to make it fit in with the rest of the pub.

Oh yes, and the beer range is as impressive as ever with Sharp's Cornish Jack (3.8, £1.80) Teignworthy Spring Tide (4.3, £1.95) Neap Tide (3.8, £1.80) with Ringwood Best bringing up the rear.



*Tinplate Brewery memorabilia at the Digby Tap*



*Loan takes a rest at the Digby Tap*

Could definitely go there again!

However, onward and upward. The Warbird takes us to **Sandford Orcas**, where, as it is a Sunday, the **Mitre** pub is entered.

The Greene King IPA (steep at £2.10 a pint?) Abbot and Charles Wells Bombardier are served on handpump in the pub's small cosy bar which is heated by a coal fire that warms lots of steaming bodies, just back from a sponsored walk. More walkers, people that is, not crisps, are found in the large dining area, with its huge fireplace and stove next to the bar, where a number of folks are taking a very nice looking lunch. There is also a separate dining room as well, but we don't go in there.

Loan meets a couple of known regulars and after a brief chat, the next pub is heard to call.





*The Mitre Sandford Orcas*

Into the Warbird again and we are off further into Somerset and land at the **Red Lion, South Cadbury**.

This corner pub welcomes dogs and children as well as pub and beer explorers. Passing through the door, a family room is on the right while the bar is off to the left. Two chaps are sat at the bar, underneath the scrolled iron decoration, watching the FA Cup Fourth Round on the telly – Man Utd against West Ham, final score 6 – 0 if you are interested, while the landlord proffers his choice of beers. There are two handpumps on the bar; one for Oakhill Best Bitter and the other for Mendip Gold. However, when the order is placed, the beer is fetched from the rear room where gravity dispense rules the roost.

The pub itself is rather 1950s time warp. Vinyl chairs and seating, formica tables and red carpets and lino combine with the gloom to ensure that this



*The Red Lion, South Cadbury. A setting for an Ealing Comedy?*

pub could still be used for an Ealing Comedy film today. And long may it remain so! So few of these real pubs live on today.

All too soon it is time to move on. The Warbird is fired up again and the **Queens Arms at Corton Denham** is soon reached. This large roadside pub is not particularly busy this grotty lunchtime, but as time marches on, several of Loan's drinking partners drift in, some we saw earlier from the Mitre. We all have a beer or three.



*Folks roll into the Queens Arms, Corton Denham, Sunday lunchtime. IF has the Chair of the Bar* The Cotleigh Tawny, Goff's Mordred and the Ridley's Old Bob (no relation apparently) are drunk in turn and all declared to be fine. By now, the weather is deteriorating and the Warbird heads back to CCC where on this particular Sunday afternoon a further couple of pints of Butcombe complete and excellent lunchtime trip.

Back at Star Base, a short ZZdds session is interrupted by a magnificent roast meal courtesy of Wildernis Catering and is followed by yet more ZZdds.

Eventually, ZZdds time is over and the final session is looming.

### **Session 7 -Sunday Night, 26 January 2003**

Both Loan and IF are somewhat tired, but someone has to do it and so on this dark January, wet night, the Warbird leaves Star Base for the last time on this trip. Destination is the Crown Inn at Ibberton, way up in the hills. The only beer on offer here is Hall & Woodhouse King & Barnes Bitter (3.5) on handpump. The landlord treats Loan as a long lost son and talk about golf, other people who he has not seen for a while and that another beer was on at lunchtime but it had now run out!

Deciding to move nearer CCC and Star Base, the Warbird heads across the plains of North Dorset only to be greeted by a car on its roof blocking the roadway. This causes a delay of half an hour or so but after a tractor is used to right the car, the Royal Oak at Okeford Fitzpaine is soon reached.

We are both definitely wilting as the Ringwood Best is attacked in the busy bar. Youngsters are drinking funny coloured liquid out of bottles and in one bar a card school is very active. Robinson's Best Bitter is also on (twice now in two days at different pubs). The Ringwood is soon finished off and so the Warbird makes it's penultimate journey, once again to CCC, the Saxon Inn.



Tonight, the Wickwar BOB has gone and so Butcombe Bitter is taken instead.

Here, on a dark, cold January evening we sit by the fire and talk over the events of the past few days. Both agree it has been well worth doing. New friends made, old acquaintances renewed, new pubs, new beers....but both agree it has been very tiring and that perhaps it might have been a good idea to have stayed home tonight. Perhaps Sunday night was



***Loan and IF...a session too far!***

At least it is until next time!

## ***POST SCRIPT***

It is usual on these trips to give various awards for a number of categories. Sometimes just the bare statistics do. This special trip however deserves both.

## **the Statistics**

Pubs visited - 14

GBG Pubs visited - 12

Total Pubs visits - 17

Beers drunk - Too many

New Beers drunk – not enough

New Breweries visited - 1

## ***Awards for Excellence***

### ***The Chairmen's Award for Best Pub:***

*Saxon Inn, Child Okeford*

### ***The Chairmen's Award for Best Beer –***

*Masons Arms Odcombe Lower*

### ***The Explorer's Award for Barperson of the Weekend***

*Mary at the Masons Arms, Lower Odcombe*

**And now the**

## **Awards for Crapiness**

The Tossers Award for The Worst Pub - The Museum, Farnham

The Watney's Red Barrel Award for Worst Beer -

Youngs Special at the Fox & Hounds, East Knoyle (it left a sour taste in the mouth)

The Worst Barperson – the barmaid at the Fox & Hounds, East Knoyle

Slob of the Weekend – The Slob at the bar of the Fox & Hounds, East Knoyle