

FACE OF CHEAM MARCH 2005

WELCOME

Hello once again. Welcome to my first 2005 newsletter. Hope you have all settled into the New Year very well. First news from Cheam is that the 'Famous' Academy pub is boarded up with a for sale sign on it. Never a popular venue it served its purpose as a quiet pub for a pint that wasn't too far from the High Street. Also used to be the most local venue with Bar Billiards. Quite reasonably priced too for a Carlsberg and always had a few bitters like Brakespear. Hopefully the new owners will keep it as a pub although the future looks unclear.

Travelling around is getting more expensive with bus fares in the area going up to a mammoth £1.20 and a travelcard to £6.00. Let's hope that this is the last price increase for a while. At least a bus pass and a 2-6 travelcard remain excellent value in comparison. Finally in the welcome section, there was a deliberate mistake in my last newsletter by myself referring to a Charlatans & Ron Wood charity gig in the pub section but not mentioning it in the music bit. This is corrected this month.

PUBS

Just before the year closed, Dan & I, gave out our personal pub awards of the year. There were several categories, which I'll go through here (omitting the Doctors own choices, as I cannot remember them!). The first was pub/bar for best choice. Being a lager drinker I had to give this to Southampton's Avondale House which had a choice of eight premium lagers and two non-premium including the fantastic Cobra. The next was for atmosphere/clientele. A tricky one, I decided on the metal/goth pub in Soho, the Intrepid Fox, which shows even the strangest looking people can be friendly. The best new/refitted pub/bar went to Bar Sia in Wimbledon. Before it was a smoky dingy theatre Young's bar. Now it's quite trendy but maintaining its small intimate atmosphere and pub roots. The Barmaid of the year undoubtedly went to the tall Blonde with fake tits in Bar Bluu in Newport IOW. Matt & I still amuse ourselves about her to this day. Hopefully if we go this year she'll be there attempting to retain this award. Finally we have the prestigious best bar and best pubs awards. Best Pub went to the Exhibit in Balham. Some may find it a little pretentious but I think that's the point. Fantastic fishtank to look at and great atmosphere. May well have to try the restaurant upstairs soon. Best pub went to the always spectacular Brewery Tap in Wimbledon Village. Run by a bearded bloke resembling Nic Hoskins' Dad, it always has one or two tasty barmaids together with fine ales and great atmosphere.

This year, not only am I still counting the number of pubs/bars, it will be the first year I will be giving them ratings. Not as complex as Dan's system, I have settled for five categories. (Atmosphere, Choice, Price, Barmaid & Quality of drink) All marked out of ten added up so you get a percentage. Should be interesting to see what comes out on top.

Anyway back to 2005 and 98 pubs have been done so far. Dan has written up the first crawl of the year (Tooting / Colliers Wood) so onto my Northampton trip. Some run of the mill and dreadful pubs done in the town centre, I stopped off at the Old Black Lion directly opposite the station. As I entered, a family left leaving me the only

customer. On tap was Kronenburg and although a Fosters handle a paper note had Crest written over the logo. I asked the barman for half a lager and he explained to me that Crest was a bootleg Fosters he's trying to shift! Very dodgy and fairly awful place. The Foundary Tavern also scored lowly, losing on atmosphere, as I was initially short-changed. Northampton is not a place I would recommend for good crawling, unlike Newcastle. A good mix of good and bad was done here. The cheapest pint of the year being £1.33 in the Black Garter. (not on offer either – it's their standard price!!). Dobsons Bar where Matt Oliver and myself will testament that it's never too early to pull is always good and an early leader in the ratings stake was The Mushroom Bar. Basement place with lush lighting, it reminded me of a club that would appear in Only Fools And Horses. Fantastic looking barmaid too, think it was a bit of a Brucie bonus going around 5.30. Was open late and I think it wouldn't maintain a laid-back ambient atmosphere at around ten, more packed to the Rafters with booming disco which would spoil it. Birmingham has been revisited this year. The tasty barmaid is still working in The Yard of Ale, this time wearing lycra trousers and a half cut vest top showing a stomach tattoo. Reckon it's bleached blonde rather than natural though. A bit of a rant regarding the Loaf Bar where as it was before seven a half of Carling costs the same as a pint. Huh? Birmingham has a smoke free pub called the Shakespeare. Although clean air it lacked something you can't quite put your finger upon. One of the best in that area was The Hill, an ex-Firkin on Bennetts Hill. A cute barmaid, cheap Amstel on draught and a big screen showing the one day cricket. Shame I had to leave for the football.

Ewell has been done maybe a tad prematurely, but is always worth a trip. The Star is always good with Hofbrau, the Wheatsheaf was a pleasant surprise with an attractive barmaid who one of the old punters reckoned was a ringer for Ginger Rogers, and the Spring just works on all levels. Coors on tap, young barmaids, nice clientele yadda yadda yadda! Finally a highlight of a recent Balham to Clapham Crawl was the Duke of Devonshire Young's pub. Extended so now pretty big, it resembles a typical seventies boozier but with a young Balhamite crowd all having a good time. May make it a regular alongside the Exhibit for nights out to the Swan / Balham stop off before tubing to London.

Obviously some local pubs done too for the first time this year. The England – Wales rugby game was on but more attention paid to Villa Arsenal at the Wimbledon Walkabout where Matt saw quote: 'the most gorgeous woman he has seen'. Mighty fine she was too despite drinking Red Wine. However low points in the Walkabout besides being a chain was the all male barstaff. The Alexandra in Wimbledon remains the typical inoffensive Young's pub but who besides myself just adding it to the tally drinks in Edwards in Wimbledon during the afternoon remains a mystery with so many places like this nearby.

Out of Pubs in Sutton, both Bar Room Bar and Café Mango remain popular as do their respective barmaids and although without the latter the Nonsuch Arms remains one of the better drinking establishments in the area. Finally in the words of Dr Sharr regarding the young barmaid in the Prince of Wales, Cheam, 'she'd not that pretty but the fact it's all on display!'. I actually think she is quite nice in my opinion.

The Chandos remains a cheap London pub with it being £1-90 a pint of Ayingerbrau with the upstairs remaining the better option if staying for a while. O'Neills remains one of the better chains with the one in Covent Garden being quite welcoming.

MUSIC

Always a slow start at the beginning of the year gig wise. Myself, Mr & Mrs Giles saw 2005 in with St Etienne at Shepherds Bush. Fronted by the lovely Sarah Cracknell, there was even a version of Auld Lang Syne!

Omitted from the last letter was The Charlatans and Ron Wood supported by Babyshambles. The controversial Pete Doherty turned up for Babyshambles who were quite impressive. Although how much of him being 'out of it' is real or not is debatable. In between bands I choked at the chance of pulling Denise Van Outen by using the line that never works. "You're Denise Van Outen" I said at the bar. Never likely to be on a winner. The Charlatans and Ron Wood did a good mixture of Charlies and Faces stuff with North Country Boy and Stay With Me done twice. Ended with the obligatory Sproston Green at 11.45pm!

Only gig this year has been a Slade tribute at Sutton United. Quite good evening fuelled by alcohol, worth the £8 to get in.

I'm eagerly anticipating the return of the Farm & the Happy Mondays on Easter Saturday at Brixton and with lots of others planned hopefully this will be a good year for live music.

SULPHUR

Once again nothing much to report. A rumour is that we may support Now Is The Winter on their 20th anniversary gig as Paul mentioned to my brother that I may not want to book up for U2 because of this possibility. At £65 it was unlikely. No formal approach has been made yet so I suppose I really should try to get to the Prince much more often than my recent form. Rumours of band turmoil with Matt thinking Pancake Day is more important remain unfounded!

HELLO GOOD EVENING WELCOME & GOODBYE

With 98 pubs done so far it appears that 750 may not be out of the question. A trip to Cardiff awaits next month as well as the return of Metal with Judas Priest, Quire Boys and Thunder on the gig front.

Keep rollin'

Rich (The Face Of Cheam)