

Barnsley Town Centre Survey 1 of 4

Date 7th February 2007

Pubs visited: Chambers, Chennells, Ticket Office, Shakespeare, Soviet Bar, Retro, Corner Pin, Macey's, Joseph Bramah.

It's years since I'd attempted a survey of the licensed premises in town and I was curious to see what had changed. On my last outing I found illegal glasses, short measures and a lack of price lists on display – all serious matters and with high prices it seemed the town centre drinker wasn't getting a fair deal. The only publicity my write up attracted was an adverse comment about a sticky carpet in one establishment. Perhaps we get the pubs and bars we deserve if we don't take an interest.

So on a cold night in February the CAMRA stalwarts set forth on stage one of the quest. One point to make straight off is that it is impossible to get round all of the town centre outlets in one night. I'm led to believe that Barnsley has the second highest concentration of town centre licensed premises in the country and I can believe it.

First call was the **Chambers** in Peel Square which had a handpull with a Theakstons Bitter pump clip on display. My request for a pint resulted in an offer of a smoothflow beer as the real Theakstons wasn't available. So why have the pump clip on display then! Disappointing so we left just as soon as the gang had assembled.

Across the road the **Bodegas** was closed so our next call was **Chennells** and a price offer of £2 a pint for draught beers (no real ale again unfortunately). Given the choice of a half of Guinness for £1.35 or a pint for £2 we opted for a pint and a spare half glass – problem solved and a tactic we used throughout the evening. Nice atmosphere but we were on a mission and couldn't linger. The **Ticket Office** next door was another disappointment. No real ale again and despite there being ample staff available no-one had the time to sort out the flooded urinal and wet floor in the Gents or remove the broken glass from the cubicle. The pub's price list was sited behind the bar where it was impossible to read. Another swift half of Guinness and onwards as soon as possible.

Along Wellington St. to the **Shakespeare** and yet more Guinness, this time in a half glass with no measure line or crown marking to denote a brim measure – illegal I believe. Someone said the Gents had a blow up sheep dispenser, so on that confusing note we moved on.

The **Soviet Bar** seemed to offer a different experience and was clean and had friendly bar staff. The offer of two for one Beck's and shots of vodka was taken up. A chat with the bar manager revealed that the initial stocks of interesting imported beers and vodkas had failed so Beck's and Smirnoff appear to be the punters choice. Not a bad spot all things considered. **Retro** too was OK if nothing special and again the midweek bottle and pint offers were in force. We gave **Funny Girls** a miss as we couldn't figure out exactly what was on offer. Back along the street to the **Corner Pin** and as expected no real ale. £3.10 for a bottle of Beck's wasn't an attractive proposition but I did try a Goldschlager liqueur out of curiosity and toasted the 21 year old birthday boy who seemed to be enjoying them in significant numbers ... enough to put me out of action for a week. Good luck to him – 21 is a landmark and mine put me off Barley Wine and Whiskey for a long, long time.

Macey's across Peel Square didn't seem to offer anything special and by now the Guinness and Beck's had lost any appeal they may have had. So round the corner to **Joseph Bramah** for a final reviving pint of proper beer. I personally hold the view that J.D.Wetherspoons outlets are a bit too formulaic at times and could become the McDonalds of the licensed trade. While they continue to serve real ale I'll give them the benefit of the doubt and pint of 5.2% Saltaire was a good way to end the night's adventures.

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