

## Barnsley Town Centre Survey – 3

Date 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007

**Pubs Visited:** Gatehouse, Room, Groggers Rest, Dirty O' Dwyers, Walkabout, Assembly, Lucorum, Courthouse.

The 4th of April saw the survey team on the town again. This time our start point was the **Gatehouse** and a chance to have a real ale to set us off on the right foot. Summer Pale Ale (4.1% ABV) from Barnsley's own Acorn Brewery was a fine benchmark for the evening.

Next call was the nearby **Room** where two halves of Guinness cost a very reasonable £1.75. It went down quickly too as the noise level was excessive even by Barnsley standards. The décor seemed a bit tired but that is no surprise for a bar as busy as this one.

The **Groggers Rest** offered a complete contrast. No loud noise and a different sort of layout with the booths offering a chance for a group to have a conversation and settle for a spell, which we did. No real ale so it was Guinness again and it struck me that a pub like this would do better as a real ale outlet than most of its town centre competitors. Not a fashionable pub perhaps but it's well placed and seems to have its own niche in the town centre market. Skipping the chance to embarrass ourselves at the karaoke we moved on.

Up the Arcade and into **O'Dwyers** which was fine and gave us the opportunity to catch up on the progress of that night's football on telly. No real ale and Guinness at £2.90 a pint wasn't enough to keep us and we had more pubs to visit so it was into **Walkabout**. It was my first time in this Aussie chain pub so it was all a novelty. Very busy and with football and cricket on screen at every angle. A stylish place no doubt but lacking in real ale. Guinness was £2.10 a pint, reasonable for the town centre, but we had hoped perhaps to be able to sample the Australian Coopers cask conditioned ale in bottles. Unfortunately the best we could get was an expensive bottle of Victoria Bitter for £2.70 – OK but that's about it. My lasting impression was the mini-TV screens above the urinals in the Gents – what an innovation! Anywhere else you'd be guaranteed to miss a goal if you nipped out to syphon the python, as I've heard Aussies say.

The **Assembly** (now the White Bear after refurbishment) was a lot quieter by comparison but a tidy place and not without its merits in the town centre scheme of things. What to drink was becoming a problem in the continued absence of the real ale. Budveiser at £2.80 a pint seemed about the rarest offering but, having sampled the genuine Czech Budvar, the American version is a poor alternative in my view. Why brew a beer to be served so cold it has no real flavour? On a trip to the USA some years ago I was encouraged by the growth of small, real ale breweries – even in the mid-West. At that time there seemed to be a competition between the large US brewers to brew a beer with no taste at all and it seemed to be working. Not a recipe for long term success I'd suggest and only sustainable with masses of advertising and correspondingly high prices as a result. Mind you I am biased.

**Lucorum** appears to be developing a reputation as the place for new and upcoming bands to be seen and such was the case this evening. We chose to avoid the crush and sat outside to view the reconstruction of the Civic Hall, in days gone by the venue for many major CAMRA beer festivals. Sadly I don't think it will ever host a festival for up to 3000 people over a weekend again. They were festivals that could empty the town centre pubs – happy days. As for Lucorum, it was Guinness again although a pint of Kronenbourg 1664 Blanc was passed around for novelty value – not bad for a gassed wheat beer. Quite a citrus tang to it if you like that sort of thing.

Last call was to the **Courthouse**, which wasn't a planned stop but some of us hadn't been in for a while as it had got a bit run down and beer range and quality had suffered. What a pleasant surprise to find it spick and span after a change of ownership to Weir Inns, part of the John Weir Group, a new pub owning company. In charge was a familiar face from the days when beer quality was good and the Theakston's range on offer this night came up to scratch. A pint of 4.5% Theakston XB just rounded the night off on a suitable real ale note.

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