

Real Ale Afloat..... On Tuesday we went straight down to Tame Valley junction and turned on to the Walsall canal in pursuit of one of our main objectives of the week, Highgate Mild. We found it in the 'New Navigation', next to Walsall Top Lock - handpumped Highgate Mild and Springfield Bitter, and a back room to take the kids in - we were in Mecca. They are very proud of their beer in Walsall, the only brewery in the country producing nothing but mild, nothing but real ale, and so were rather offended when after a couple of pints of Highgate, we asked to try some Springfield! In the afternoon, we meandered through the Black Country along the Wyrely and Essington Canal, past Burchills Junction, Sneyd Junction, Wednesfield Junction, seeing hardly a soul until we reached Horsely Fields Junction near Wolverhampton and joined the Birmingham main line. Wherever we looked we saw real ale pubs - Banks's, M & B, Hansons and some Ansell's. At Deepfields Junction we turned on to the Wednesbury Oak loop to tie up at the 'Boat' at Bilston, a Hansons pub selling mild and bitter by electric pump. This friendly pub also has a back room for families, where one entire wall has been made into a blackboard. For our last stop of the day we retraced our route to the main line and went through Cosely Tunnel to tie up at the 'Bush' by Factory Junction in Tipton, a Banks's pub selling mild and bitter. ....to be concluded in next month's 'Pint Taken.' D. Booth.

### The Litchborough Brewery

Bill Urquhart, the founder of the Litchborough Brewery, started his career in the brewing industry with Youngers in 1934. He moved to John Calder & Co. of Alloa, and in 1946 joined Trumans. Three years later he joined Tolleymache and in 1956 he joined East Anglian Brewery as second brewer. The Head Brewer was due to retire soon after, but before that happened they were taken over by Steward & Pattersons/Bullards, and he became under brewer at Norwich. In 1964 he applied for the Head Brewer's job at Phipps/NBC, Northampton and was offered the second brewer's position which he took, taking over the head brewer's job for the last eighteen months before Watneys closed down the brewery in 1974. He has been a member of the Institute of Brewing since 1951 and has been awarded the Diploma of the Institute of Brewing, which is the highest honour in the brewing industry.

Watneys had the chance to purchase a large piece of land at the back of the Northampton Brewery in order to expand in 1966/7, but they delayed their decision and then Carlsberg came along and made an offer for the whole site, which was eventually agreed, and the Watney Brewery closed in May 1974. A lot of the staff transferred to Carlsberg, but Bill was given the sack. He then set about building a brewery of his own, converting the barn, which he used as a garage. The bulk of the brewing equipment is in the middle section of the building, small rooms on either side being used for storage. Polypins are stacked everywhere, due to the minimum order of 300 required by the suppliers.

He started brewing Northamptonshire bitter in July 1974 with two fermenting vessels of 108 gallons capacity each. Due to lack of space he didn't mash, but used malt extract from Paines. This year he took on a junior partner, Frank Kenna, and this has enabled him to start mashing from malt, with a noticeable improvement in the quality of the beer. Most of the beer is filtered at the brewery, not carbonated, and sold in kegs to the pubs, where it is served by CO2 pressure, but three pubs take Northamptonshire Bitter in cask conditioned form. He has two 180 gallon fermenting vessels and one of 270 gallons and brews 180 gallons at least twice a week. Bevingtons off-licences in Northampton take orders for casks - only pins and firkins are used, mostly bought from Watneys. Casks are also available from the brewery in both fined and bright versions, but due to losses and late return of casks, purchasing of polypins is preferred.

In the summer of 1976 he noticed a drop in sales of the beer in favour of lager, so within months he introduced Litchbrau, which sold in most of the outlets, though now only two pubs take it.

Both the Fighting Cocks at Corby Glen in Lincolnshire and the John Thompson at Ingleby in Derbyshire have consulted Bill before brewing on their premises, and he has helped them in obtaining plant.

The new fermenting vessels have made it possible to expand production by 50% at Litchborough, so they are eager to obtain new outlets. They will deliver to pubs, clubs, etc. within ten to fifteen miles from the brewery, and of course beer may be collected from the brewery.

The only cask-conditioned Northamptonshire Bitter in Northamptonshire is at the Crossroads at Weedon.

\*\*\*\*\* Darts players - See Dave Henty who is trying to raise a CAMRA team.

The Befuddled Ruddles Muddle. Ruddles latest explanation for the sale of their 37 tied houses is that their huge boom in sales resulted in correspondingly greater production and brewery effluent, which the local water authority could not, and refused to, cope with any longer. This therefore forced Ruddles to cut back their proposed increase in output, leaving them with insufficient revenue to repay the loans they had raised for their expansion!