

The central thrust of this pamphlet is that the transformation of the British pub currently underway, has not occurred because of some conscious desertion of its doors by the public, but is the result of some very careful planning by groups of retailers, marketing managers and accountants (backed up by designers) encamped in the higher echelons of the brewing trade. Far from being a conclusion of the 'consumer-led' revolution beloved of propagandists, this change is the child of a retail revolution which, for the consumer, constitutes only a re-arrangement of his or her individual powerlessness.

This article reached us from the heart of the brewing industry. It exposes machinations and manipulations which have been hidden from the public eye. It is an insider's account by someone recently retired after 30 years in the drink trade, and a welcome example of dissidence from within the citadels of free enterprise. An example which we hope will presage similar revelations from other sanctuaries of secrecy.

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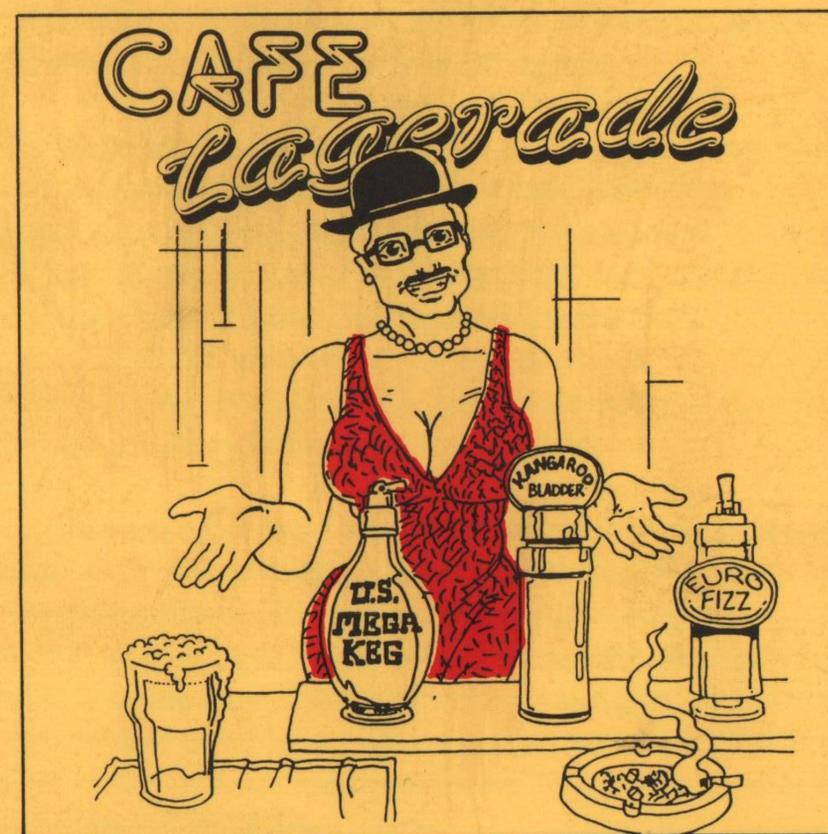
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# BEWARE THE BARMROID'S SMILE!

by  
Chris Thompson



The New Vulgarity in our pub culture

## **BEWARE THE BARMAID'S SMILE !**

**by Chris Thompson**

### **The Historical Context**

The British Isles are alone in the world in the bulk production of cask ale, and are the only countries where pubs exist. Even the cultural differences between the England-Wales axis and the Scotland-Ireland one are insignificant compared to the glaring differences between the British Isles and the rest of the world. Scotland and Ireland have more "bars". Scotland is unfortunately more orientated towards keg beer and lager. Ireland has its ubiquitous black stout. "Free" houses are more common in those countries than in England and Wales, where the pubs are owned by the breweries. Despite the loss of most of their cask beers, Scotland and Ireland have a long tradition of brewing them.

The question facing all of us who care for our unique cask ales, and our centuries old pub heritage, is: "ARE THEY SAFE IN THE HANDS OF THE BREWERIES ?"

All the indications are that the breweries are continuing to abdicate their responsibilities as custodians and protectors of this heritage, by their renewed assaults on the fabric and social life of the pub, and the sacrificing of our indigenous cask beers for foreign lagers.

Pubs are not redundant, like old cotton mills or tithe barns, but are a living tradition worth fighting to save, not only from British brewers, but also from those international brewing giants planning take-overs. Cask ales and the pubs they are drunk in must be defended, not for super-patriotic or xenophobic reasons but because the *social investment* by the customers in this cherished British institution, is about to be overwhelmed by the *economic investment* from the large financial institutions, which the major brewery conglomerates have become.

So, for anyone who cares about the condition of British ale and the future of the British pub, the current events in the brewing industry must give cause for much concern. These are: the accelerating change-over to lager from beer; the replacement of distinctive local cask ales by insipid national brand beers; the massive investment in altering pubs into US-style ice-cream parlours and pseudo-continental cafe bars; and the threat of more takeovers of major British ale brewers by international mega-brewers of lager, like Elders of Australia.

Nowhere can these goings-on be more depressing than for the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), which forced the breweries to listen to their customers and bring back "real" (that is, cask-conditioned) ale after a period in the '60s and '70s when most people believed it had been replaced for ever by "bright" (that is, brewery-conditioned) beer.

CAMRA's current malaise has essentially come about because many people regard it as a Campaign without a Cause, now that cask ale has been reintroduced into most parts of Britain with major exceptions like North East England, large parts of Scotland, and Ireland.

CAMRA has been frustrated by the failure of most of its recent efforts to stop the on-going takeovers of cask ale breweries which are then closed down by the new parent company.

However, there are signs that something is stirring. Many cask ales are bland and badly served, often warm, giving real ale a bad name and thus making it more easy for the breweries to push lager.

The talk is now of the need to "revitalise" cask ale, but it remains to be seen if CAMRA, for so long now mainly a society of drinking clubs, is capable of making an effective come-back to alert the country to the danger of cask ale being first of all marginalised, and eventually all but eliminated as a mass popular beverage.

### **The Enemy Within**

It is worth looking at the activities of "the enemy within". These are the brewery retailers, marketing personnel and accountants; the "bottom line" profit seekers.

In the heady climate of the present Retail Revolution, many breweries are now starting to think of themselves as a retail company with a chain of outlets, which just happens to own a brewery, instead of as a production company, whose brewery supplies and services its pubs.

This turn around in breweries' self perception has major consequences for anyone who values cask ale and the pub as social institutions.

At present the breweries' own cask beer is only one of several products contributing to "bottom line" profit, often well below the profit margins achieved by gaming machines, food, lager, wine, spirits and soft drinks.

Is it any wonder that these other products are being pushed to the detriment of the indigenous pub beverage - ale ?

Such is the profitability of the eardrum-wrecking gaming machines that some breweries have appointed "consultants" to advise on how to further maximise profits in that area. Legislation is surely required to bring all this to a halt and suggest to breweries that they build amusement arcades, instead of turning Britain's pubs into surrogate ones.

Food, as an end in itself, rather than as a prop to drinking, is another all-pervasive trend in pubs - the penetrating smells and the cutlery-strewn tables, leaving many customers wondering if they have entered a restaurant. It is a short step from this kind of food operation in pubs to families occupying every available drinking space to eat. Then come fun and games machines for children, thus creating even more irritation for the drinking adults.

The ridiculously high profit margins on kids' drinks make children in pubs a lucrative source of income.

One of the differences between humans and animals is that humans do not have to have their young in tow all the time. Escape from the all-consuming attention of children is an important and necessary release.

By all means let pubs have family facilities set aside in a separate area, but the pub proper must remain the domain of the adult; if only to highlight the need for adult behaviour while drinking.

With "bottom line" profit as the only goal a retail revolution is in full swing. However, that is not the same as a consumer led one. *In this scenario the consumer is led by the nose.*

Ignore the breweries' pusillanimous pleading that they are giving the consumer what they want. A multi-million pound marketing bonanza is ensuring that lager and other easy-to-handle "image" drinks are favoured at the expense of cask beer. *The pernicious purpose of the advertising is to have women and youth reject beer by tittillating their perception of its associated culture.*

Underlying this new advertising milieu is a long-standing major worry, causing the breweries much anxiety - that the "health lobby" will do to the alcohol industry what they are doing to the tobacco industry. Women and youths are just the people, in their eyes, for whom to package "health" along with their products. The trouble is, it is frenetic hedonism pretending to be health, e.g. so called slimming drinks (the average calorific content of both lager and bitter is the same). However, if this improves the breweries' image they will present themselves as part of the "caring society," passing off moralising as morality.

To complete the packaging of their products with a pretence of health concern, means matching their media advertising with an appropriate "venue" in which to consume them. Hence the coming of the cafe bars and the upmarket pubs, with their veneer of cleanliness and modernity, masquerading as the "contemporary style", despite the fact that almost without exception they are dressed up in a plethora of past architectural fashions, often incongruously filled with museum exhibits or sombre shelves of library books, and the whole lot garnished "with a bit of green".

The surroundings are as transient as the butterfly culture which alights on them. Reduced to theatre back-drops, they are removed like props, when the current theme show is over, making this the breweries' major contribution to eco-damage, as acres of timber, glass and metal are pulled out and wantonly destroyed, when whim and fancy dictates the next change; wealth accumulation bringing resource depletion.

These hostelrys are supposed, in the London market jargon, to give "added value", and thus legitimise the much higher prices charged.

### **User Friendly and Product Hostile**

In the paranoia derived from their obsessive pursuit of "bottom line" profit, the buzz-men and whizz-kids of the brewery retailing world perceive anyone who thwarts their aim of seducing people into their "user friendly" venues as "product hostile".

Among those high on the list are CAMRA, for their opposition to the proliferation of the highly profitable "lagerade"; conservationists who object to pubs being spoiled and ruined; magistrates and local authority officials who will not rubber-stamp their applications to alter pub premises; designers and builders who don't create the venues fast enough; company colleagues who question their actions; and most of all, members of the public who will not use these new offerings.

In other words a cross section of those who assert the need for some form of public morality, interest and control, to protect people from the blind forces of the market.

In their pursuit of *any kind* of retail profit the "bottom liners" refuse to be moved by the assertion that profits are not much use if cask ales and their indigenous pub environment, there to be enjoyed with the fruits of the profits, have instead been destroyed. Such is their hostility to the healthy tradition of the pub and ale.

The "bottom liners" will resist, or ignore, all attempts at hindering their objective of marginalising the traditional pub culture of which millions of people are a part. They will issue PR statements to sidetrack protest, but will carry on pursuing their goals, with no truck for customer demands or pressure group pleading. They have decided in what direction your pubs have to go and therefore reclaiming your pubs and beers from the "bottom liners" will be an extremely difficult task.

### **Changing Times**

The years which have elapsed since CAMRA's foundation in the '70s have seen several significant changes which have to be considered.

1. Women are now a major influence on what drinks are on offer in the pub.
2. The culture is more "lagerised" than ever before, making the argument no longer "Cask beer versus keg beer", but "Cask beer versus lager". A debate which was once about good and bad versions of the *same* product (ale) is now one about two *different* products (ale and lager).
3. The ongoing disappearance of those who were historically the large consumers of cask ale, drunk copiously as a reward for hard manual work; the industrial male workers in the shipyards, steelworks, docks and mines.

As the lager culture expands within the new peer group and socially exclusive drinking "venues", and a tide of European, American and Australian keg lagers and cheap wines begins to engulf us all, what is put seriously at risk is:

1. Intergenerational pub mixing with its healthy and necessary influence of adults over youths.
2. Different social, cultural and interest groups co-habiting within each pub.

### **Women**

The increased spending power of women which made them lucrative customer potential to be enticed into pubs in large number, both independently of men, or in tow but with their own separate buying ability, was the *long awaited* opportunity the brewers needed to improve their economic performance.

However, to achieve this financial upturn in their fortunes a spurious US and continental "cafe bar scene" with drinks thought to be acceptable to women and their pursuing male suitors, had to be eased into existence.

The process did not start with the breweries but with several entrepreneurs in the "medallion man" mould, hoping to exchange their Manta for something more expensive. The breweries very quickly caught on and overtook these gentlemen with their own massive programmes of capital investment in "up market" pubs.

This required a major rethink of breweries' strategy and the long term casualties will be the male associated cask beers and the male dominated traditional pub, both with their older and past generation overtones.

These new "drinking spots", specifically aimed at and styled in a way *it is assumed* that women want them, are now one of the main weapons in the deliberate assault on cask ale and pub culture, and in the brewery ad-man's mind thought to be a "sophisticated" alternative to it.

To achieve this, the vibrant dynamism of the world of real ale and real pubs is deliberately presented as a dinosaur in a male swamp.

The very existence of these new places once again points to that old debate of whether one needed to save pubs in order to preserve cask ale.

Historically, pubs and ales have always been linked. There was a short time (the '60s and '70s) in the long history of the pub when pubs were without cask ale, but paradoxically cask ale as a *mass popular drink* could not and cannot survive without the pub.

The excellent conservationist campaigns to protect their architectural qualities will save some pubs, but cask ale can only survive if the pub as a "public space" and a non-exclusive institution survives, in large numbers in its well proven historic form.

The most apposite television comments yet on the new "drinking spots" and their associated drinks, occurred this year, firstly in a BBC play set in Edinburgh when the character played by the actor Jimmy Nail says to a poncy waiter holding a glass of lager, "You can stick your ambience right up your fucking arse", and then proceeds to kick hell out of a tree (!) stuck in the middle of the pub; and secondly, in the BBC series TUTTI-FRUTTI, when Jazza sarcastically asks a woman in a Glasgow pub what she is drinking "A tin of fruit salad and what was it?".

## Youth Culture

It is the pursuit of any form of retail "opportunity", usually at the expense of profits from cask beers, that encourages breweries to change many of their pubs from places where ales, discreet games, and conversation were the accepted priorities, into peer groups venues and ice-cream parlours where consumption for its own sake, in social and generational ghettos, is the norm.

The "venue" especially as a young persons' peer group drinking establishment, is part of the culture of lager yobbery and lager snobbery; honed for the clone and the sloane - the treasure-house of the leisure pound.

Enter any of these job venues and the "Kev head" will be ordering a pint of lagerade, and his "handbag" will be on the receiving end of her half pint with lime or blackcurrant.

Visit many a snob venue and the yuppies and daahlings will be consuming generous quantities of bottled lagers.

Self-conceit is marketed by the media and lack of discrimination is the result. With more interest in money than morals they are lead by fashion, not by values. "Lager culture" is a reasonably useful label for high spending youth culture and its attendant ills. Greed masquerading as ambition; status judged by the level and style of consumption. Lager, however, is not the cause, only a potent symbol. It is marketed to appeal to those fortunates from the working class and from yuppydom, who have emerged better off despite the present economic ills and who want to parade their material advancement in expensive-looking drinking spots.

It is the *image* of lager, exuding its message, "Stay young; stay with the herd", which is so malign. Nevertheless it is the content and colour of the product which allows it to be used this way - uniformly banal in taste and texture, and brewed as a lowest common denominator bulk product. But then herds are all given the same bulk feed.

As those workers disappear whose large beer consumption went closely with an eye for a penny off the pint, the market has declined where the cost of beer is cheapest; public bars in deprived areas (associated with poverty) and expanded where the lager is more expensive (linked with success). Is it correct, therefore, for groups like CAMRA to over react, knee-jerk style, to beer prices in a climate where many people are not interested in penny-pinching - even though they well know they are being ripped off - because having more money gives them a source albeit misplaced of well being and pride?

A rethink is needed because cask ale is often deliberately projected by the press and brewery marketing as the drink associated with the poverty of a past age, and endless bleating about every price increase only reinforces CAMRA's link with it.

"Venues", with their sartorial clone mentality, are an ideal environment for the ill-mannered behaviour of the yob and the licensed hooligan of yuppydom. Whether the cars are registered P-suffix Escorts or E-prefix BMWs, the chances are that the owners inside are a lager mob of one kind or another. At best these places are poseurish, at worst they are gladiatorial, - certainly always narcissistic. When the lager lout says that beer is an old man's drink, the reply is to ask if they have ever thought of growing up.

Lager is candle to the moth for these people. It lubricates the louts as they lurch to the football ground for a punch-up. It bleaches the floor when it is thrown up on the continental holiday disco night.

How ironic that when these hooligans are being caged and corralled on the football terraces, the boot-boys of the brewery board rooms are creating large open spaces in their young persons' "venues", which are ready made stages for aggressive, arrogant and violent behaviour. They lack both social policing because there are no mature adult influences, and physical policing, since there are no individual rooms to split up large groups.

This has all come about because of a short-sighted police and magistrates' policy of demanding that pubs be opened up so that all areas can be supervised from the servery, instead of insisting that the breweries leave the pubs' individual rooms intact, and that the licensee supervises them by regularly and constantly doing the rounds.

"Venues", which are essentially pubs for herds rather than individuals and groups, can pack in large amounts of youngsters with indiscriminating palates - sartorial junkies looking for their next fashion fix in music and lager - which the breweries can feed. *This is the breweries' contribution to the continuing growth of one of the most disturbing phenomena of our present times - THE CHILD ADULT* (people, who are supposedly growing up, but continue an infantile clamour to gratify themselves with the products of consumerism).

In a society which espouses constant and immediate gratification (the infant psyche) at the expense of deferred gratification (the adult psyche), is it surprising that the numbers of people who exhibit their sibling and adolescent personality traits is increasing?

Putting it another way, while lager drinkers are by no means all immature, lager, nevertheless is a drink closely associated with immaturity; the youth who thinks he is a man, the women obsessed with her looks, those unable to distance themselves from the herd.

The breweries know this and exploit it for their financial gain within an advertising milieu which ensures, firstly that there is a never ending supply of new recruits, and, secondly, that many of those already hooked will stay hooked.

Pap products require pap minds! Turn the music up, flash the images on the banks of videos, and those with nothing to say are in the ascendancy. In mid-week there is an additional diet of witless games (wet-T-shirts) and manufactured fun. With some breweries hoping to target as many as 40% of their managed houses at young people, this is a horrendous prospect in its implications for the social and physical fabric of public houses.

Breweries will protest that they are not the only retailers who are manipulating the market, as if the fact that others do it justifies their actions, and absolves them. Ethics and the bleeping till never live happily together.

As for customer relations, the "bottom liners" are determined that the primary one will be with the till. This a national tragedy, given the quality and uniqueness of the social relations and person to person contact, in that very special institution which is the pub.

For the "bottom liners", however, profits are an end in themselves, not a means to an end, so the result is that pursuit of profit at any price ends up reducing the quality and choices in life, instead of enhancing them. Dividends will be paid to the shareholders, but they will be bequeathed a wasteland to spend them in.

### **Beware The Barmaid's Smile**

The current round of alterations are *qualitatively* different from what has gone before. The aim now is to have customers using pubs whose presence in them has been brought about by social engineering and cynical manipulation. The outcome will be drinking places which are parodies of pubs, where the genuine long established social interaction is constantly being subverted by an insidious directing of peoples' activities through well planned brewery strategies - the purpose of which is to get people to consume more of anything and everything *in a drinking place of the breweries' choosing*. This is change purporting to be progress.

It goes without saying that there is no customer consultation on these matters.

How is it happening ?

The technique of "customer placing" is known in the retail trade as *SEGMENTED MARKETING* - an invidious operation known also as "niche marketing", aimed at changing the healthy spontaneous diversity and differentiation in customers' use of pubs, to a more specialist use directed by the brewery strategists.

The breweries are relatively recent converts to this type of manipulation, which has a longer history among traders in High Street clothing multiples, and out-of-town supermarkets.

The purpose is to expand the breweries' control of the pub environment and reduce the areas of autonomous customer influence. Pushing pub games, sports and other clubs which are customer organised, out of large managed houses, ripe for development, into small tenancies on the margins of the brewery estate, is one example.

What makes the breweries use and perfecting of these techniques even more frightening, is the distribution, scale and number of their pubs in comparison to the much smaller numbers of outlets controlled by other retail chains. The breweries' penetration of the urban and rural environment is much more extensive, and their pubs have much more social significance than ordinary shops.

Most of the major national breweries are increasingly using these methods, and the smaller regional breweries will follow in order to compete.

It involves identifying the market potential in every location by socio-economic classification A to E, and by age profile, in order to segment each group by social class and age, and thereafter target them with the intention of manoeuvring each group into a particular drinking spot.

This is a nasty development aimed at changing the present customer mix, which has for so long been one of the most important and endearing features of the pub.

The breweries hope that by locking each pub into its own distinct market, where people "identify with their own kind" they will entice most of them away from the cask ale/traditional pub culture (less profitable) to an upmarket "lagerised" culture (highly profitable).

This is where segmented marketing is part of a long term strategy to move the business "on" or "up" or "over" (all euphemisms to downgrade and isolate cask ale to the fringes of the industry).

The reason is that "volume" drinks (the ones drunk in larger quantities by large numbers of people) which bring in high volume but lower margin profits, are bulk liquids with costly brewing, storing, handling, distribution, dispensing and serving charges.

Therefore removing one of them from the market has a strong appeal for the "bottom line" profit-chasers in the major companies, and lager, with its relatively higher profit margins, is the one they would prefer to keep while slowly ditching cask ale.

Pubs have, in the past, always *naturally* found their own social levels and mix. Apart from a very few at the upper-crust and down-and-out ends of the spectrum there has always been a strong healthy "democratic" mix in the vast majority of pubs.

We are witnessing an attempt at orchestrating a form of social *separation* into our pubs, for so long places where the desire for social *cohesion* has been a positive factor.

Add this to the drift towards "psychic privatisation" based on consumption as a fetish, by individuals whose only reason for being born is to buy, and the major breweries part in this unhealthy tendency is obvious.

As stated in an excellent recently read article - prior to the early 19th century when the pub started to change from a "house" to a "shop", the pre-19th century alehouse, tavern and inn were places where "familiarity" among customers, and between customers and landlord, was the norm.

However, as the article went on, during the 19th century "anonymity" (privacy in public) became a feature which added to the quality of pub drinking. "Privacy" (not to be confused with exclusivity) was another welcome addition to the culture of 19th century pubs.

Within both of these concepts in the use of public space, the customers and licensee observe the proprieties of the social occasion - keeping their distance, *if they choose to*.

These welcome features of pub society, combined with the community feel, and familiarity of the "local" have evolved in a satisfactory way up till now.

The essence of it all is that customers more or less know where they stand with the landlord or landlady.

Now dreadful changes are on the way in countless managed houses as the licensee is being pressurised by the brewery to milk the pub for all its worth. The pub environment is becoming an "offering", the licensee is being "packaged" and the staff "programmed" by training manuals. The result will be a pre-packed "welcome" with one word written all over it - *INSINCERE*. The sole purpose is to entice the customers to part with more money than they intended to - wishing you "a nice day" all the way to the till.

These insidious pleasantries and barmaids' smiles, dreamed up by "appearance technicians", result in a dishonest relationships between customers and staff - a one-sided manipulation by the brewery-sponsored actor/puppets.

All this points to the demise of the centuries-old role of the landlord and landlady as an approachable pair, leaving the customers to face a new breed of character who is somewhere between a jack-the-lad entrepreneur, and a puppet on a brewery string. Their role is slick presentation and gimmick-serving of a merchandise which is easily handled in as little time, and with as little expertise, as possible. Not for them the skills of nurturing and pulling cask ale. In a way their performance apes that of their customers who are more concerned with what they are seen to be drinking and how they drink it, than with the quality or otherwise of the drink.

One of the more unpleasant activities associated with breweries' attempts to shepherd the customers into the appropriate pen is the "pricing out" strategy (make it too expensive) and when that doesn't work, putting on "door control". Then you are met with the examining eyes of a "greeter".

This in effect changes the pub into a club - you are barred not for any misdemeanour, or threatening to commit one, but because you are the wrong age, or wrong social group, or wrong colour, or wearing the wrong style of clothes.

The reason the breweries can get away with this discrimination is the law, which allows licensees or their gorillas on the door, to prevent entry, or eject *without giving a reason*. The law used to eject the paralytic or the violent is acceptable - the reason is obvious. Campaigning for a change here could go some way to hinder the growth of these ghettos, if the licensee can be taken to court, when the excuses given for barring a person can be proved to be a cover for discriminating against a social or age group.

The segmentation of pubs and the "lagerisation" process are a joint strategy by the "bottom liners" to replace the traditional pub and cask ale, so long a positive and essential part of British culture, partly with some kind of cafe-restaurant society (certainly to be admired in other countries and to be enjoyed - lager excepted - on visits there, but with different kinds of qualities we are used to here) and partly with young persons' musack-infested, glitzy ice-cream parlours.

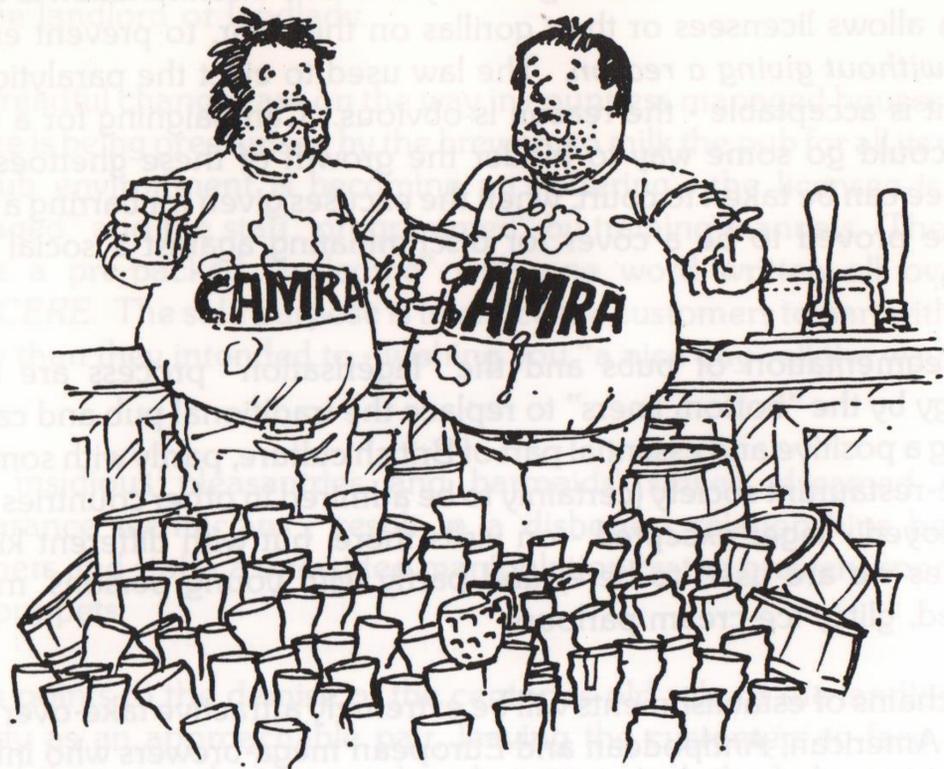
Such chains of establishments will be extremely attractive take-over bait to North American, Antipodean and European mega-brewers who inhabit a world of keg lager, distributed as monopolies and near monopolies, in countries with no history of public house culture.

By all means let's have grubby pubs changed for the better, bland cask ales replaced with quality ones, and the male chauvinist and racist elements removed from pub culture; but don't let the need to make these necessary changes become an opportunity for the "bottom liners" to kill off our pubs and cask beers completely.

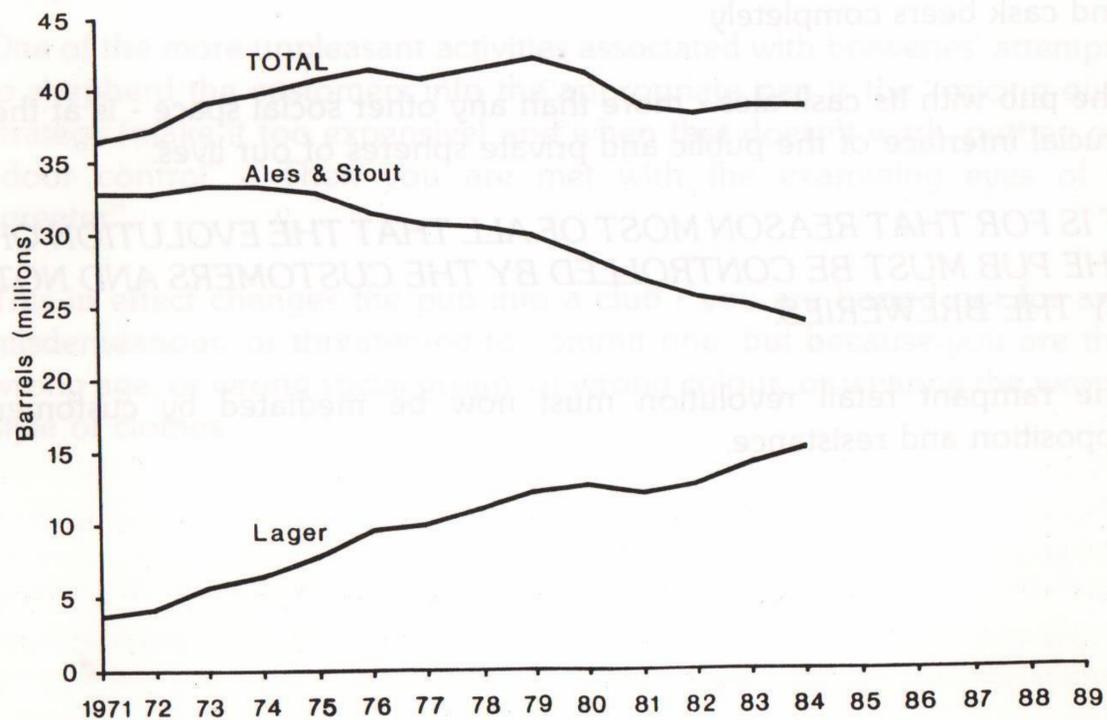
The pub with its cask ales - more than any other social space - is at the crucial interface of the public and private spheres of our lives.

**IT IS FOR THAT REASON MOST OF ALL THAT THE EVOLUTION OF THE PUB MUST BE CONTROLLED BY THE CUSTOMERS AND NOT BY THE BREWERIES.**

The rampant retail revolution must now be mediated by customer opposition and resistance.



"Well, it proves there's a public demand for ale, doesn't it?"



## Financial Pressures

In economic terms, one of the principal differences between the '60s and '70s, when cask ales were originally under threat, and now, is that the rationalisation going on then was mainly among British brewers, not international ones. The shake-out and merger-mania which eliminated many of Britain's great cask beer breweries was brought about by a management which still had commitments to British beers. Although thinned down, the industry was still open to arguments about cask beer versus keg beer, which CAMRA exploited to the full in its early campaigning days.

Britain was by then, well into an era of accountant-run brewery operations. These financial gurus and retailers are now fully in control in the major brewery empires, and the traditional brewery management which was orientated to beer production and pubs has been ousted from the board rooms.

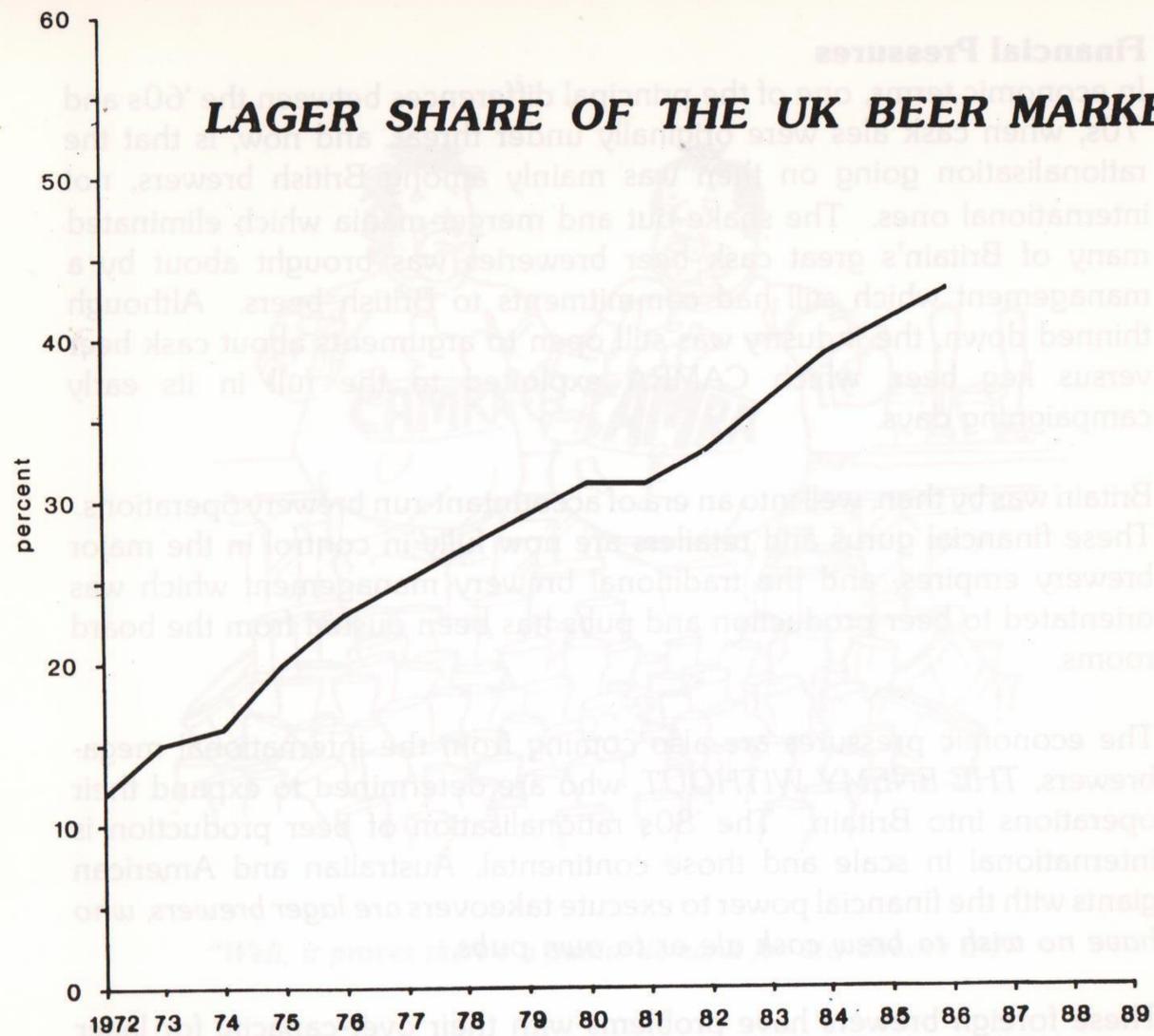
The economic pressures are also coming from the international mega-brewers, *THE ENEMY WITHOUT*, who are determined to expand their operations into Britain. The '80s rationalisation of beer production is international in scale and those continental, Australian and American giants with the financial power to execute takeovers are *lager brewers, who have no wish to brew cask ale or to own pubs.*

These foreign brewers have problems with their over-capacity for lager production and desperately need to find new outlets beyond their own national boundaries. Britain is therefore being flooded by international brewery capital, in the form of lager overspill.

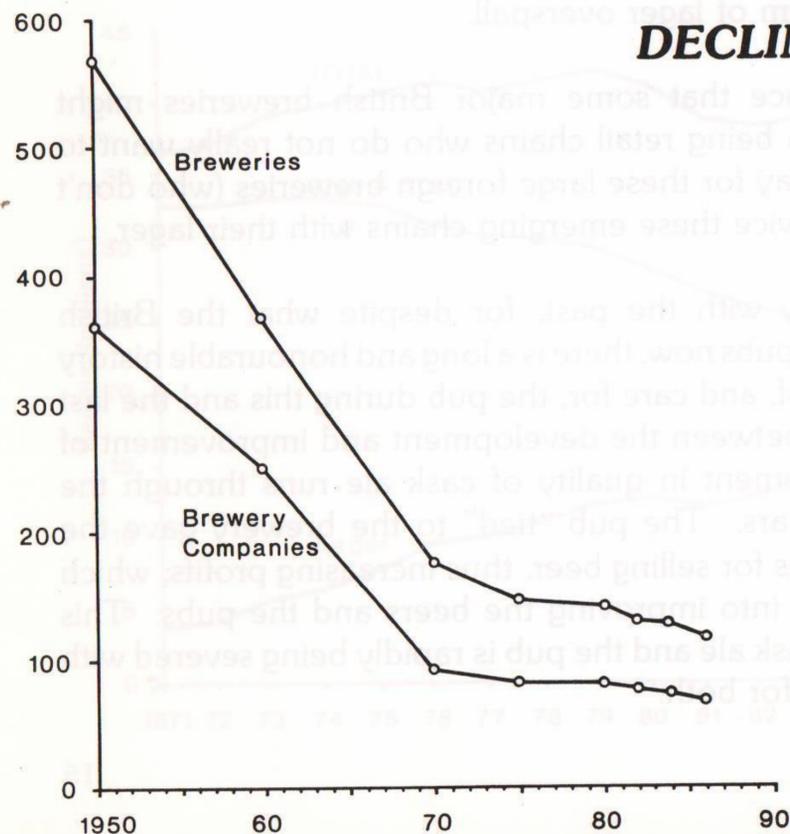
With the growing evidence that some major British breweries might eventually concentrate on being retail chains who do not really want to brew, this opens up the way for these large foreign breweries (who don't want a retail chain) to service these emerging chains with their lager.

All this contrasts strongly with the past, for despite what the British breweries are doing to our pubs now, there is a long and honourable history of brewery development of, and care for, the pub during this and the last century. Indeed the link between the development and improvement of the pub, and the improvement in quality of cask ale runs through the history of the last 150 years. The pub "tied" to the brewery gave the brewery guaranteed outlets for selling beer, thus increasing profits, which were then ploughed back into improving the beers and the pubs. This tandem development of cask ale and the pub is rapidly being severed with dangerous consequences for both.

## LAGER SHARE OF THE UK BEER MARKET



## DECLINE OF BEER CHOICE



## Takeovers And The Loss Of Choice

The process of elimination of traditional pubs and cask ales will accelerate if trends are allowed to continue.

One scenario for this is as follows:

The "retail outlets", the "units", the "profit centres" (a miasma of codewords for pubs) pursue higher profit margins, with a "portfolio of products" (marketing talk) which are *not* produced at their brewery, but are "bought in".

Lagers, with their national brand identikit tastes, can be brewed centrally at a mega-kegery and distributed by tanker/trunker anywhere; their longer "shelf-life" than cask beer being of some advantage here.

Cask beer, with its historic links to its locality, and its distinctive regional and local tastes, requires more local brewing plants and distribution centres - just the kind of overheads that any emergent chain of retail outlets will consider unloading.

As "buying in" increases, further rationalisations will follow, as the accountants and "bottom liners" opt to close, or off-load the brewery (with the aim of eliminating its beers) in order to concentrate on being nothing but a retail chain "buying in" everything.

If the monopolistic nightmare realises itself there will only be a few large lager breweries left to service a small number of huge retail chains.

The "tie" between the brewery and its pubs will have been broken, but for all the wrong reasons. The consequences of the break, which many are campaigning for, will not be what the campaigners intend - artisanal free houses with a large choice of cask ales. Instead they will be conspicuous in their uniformity, dispensing the same products from the monopolistic brewery.

Lager and the cafe-bar will dominate. Cask ale and the traditional pub will be at best banished to the fringe, at worst, on the road to extinction: not because they have outlived their usefulness to their customers, but because the breweries have deliberately undermined them.

It is these likely developments which make the British brewing industry very attractive to the foreign brewing giants.

Another possible scenario is for the international brewing sharks to get too hungry and attack their prey sooner rather than later. This would involve takeovers of major British brewing companies, to be followed by the "floating off" of the "tied" pub estate as a separate company, and the turning over of what's left of the brewing side after rationalisation, to lager brewing. Only lager would be available to the pubs from the re-constituted brewery. The pubs would probably be "let" or "leased" to the managers and tenants on an equity-tie or loan-tie system to ensure that the licensees took the brewery's lager.

**BY EITHER SCENARIO, OR BY A BIT OF BOTH, BRITAIN WILL BE BUDWEISERED, HEINEKENED AND FOSTERISED.**

### **Fighting Back**

Ale has to reclaim its rightful place and extol its virtue as the drink of mature adults and mature young people.

The reasons why women reject ale have to be identified and tackled. Rejecting the unfavourable image of female beer-drinking is women's justifiable reaction to male chauvinism. Advertising has exploited this chauvinism to reinforce the rejection.

The brewers' part in the ills and problems of the "lagerised" culture and its association with jobs and yuppies, violence and licensed misbehaviour, has to be publicised. Lager and other "image" drinks must be verbally labelled "For The Immature".

Magistrates' support could be sought over the issue of alterations which open up pubs for peer-group drinking and its attendant public disorder problems, as well as the matter of using doormen to unfairly debar people from entry, who have not, or are not likely to commit an offence.

Magistrates should also be recruited to the cause of preventing pubs from being destroyed by inappropriate alterations, and stopping the intrusion of an amusement arcade culture.

Despite these money-obsessed times there are still rays of hope in the economic jungle - football clubs and pubs spring easiest to mind, where there is a sense of "social investment" which is part of a "currency", not in thrall to pressures to reduce all human relations and values to ones of exchange and use.

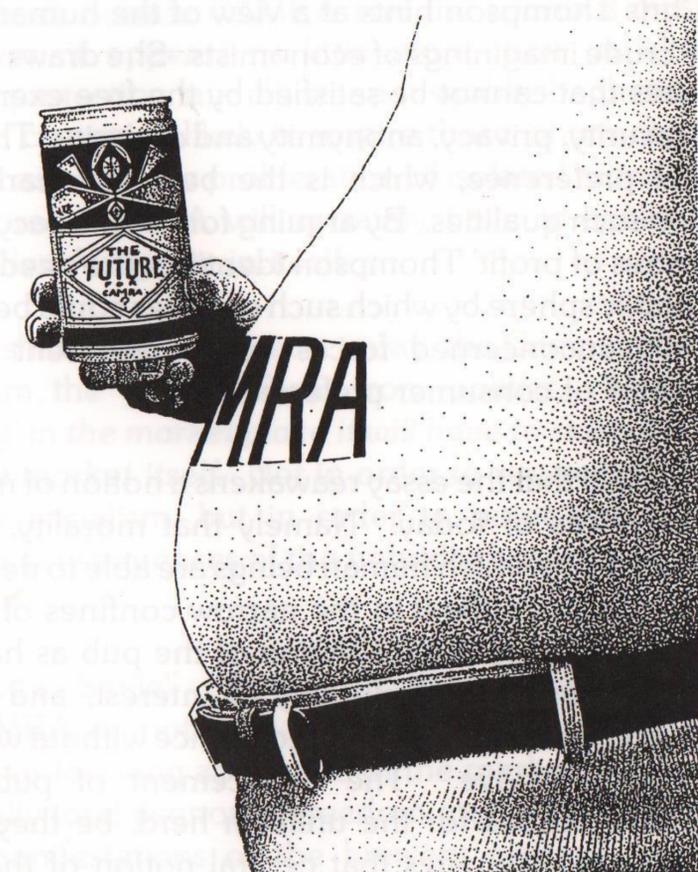
Pubs are well-nigh unique in having a long history of customer "social investment", which has constantly resisted breweries' attempts at turning them into absolute "profit centres", and it is this factor which can hopefully be used to prise pubs from the grip of the brewery retailers and return them to the customers.

### **Conclusion**

The guardian and safe home of cask ale is the traditional publican and pub. If they are exiled or banished to the wilderness, cask ale will be vulnerable and homeless with little chance of survival.

Such is the magnitude of an impending crisis over the long term survival of cask beer and the traditional pub, that it will take more than the membership of CAMRA to win the battle to save them.

It remains to be seen, however, if CAMRA can give the lead and mobilise the population to reclaim its pub and ales from the enemy within and the enemy without.



## Postface by Pelagian Press

'Beware the Barmaid's Smile !' gives the lie to the remarkable (and unearned) status the consumer has achieved today. In an age enthusiastic in its loss of respect for most institutions, the one which attracts almost universal indulgence is consumer sovereignty. Practically anything can be justified if it can be shown to have been in the name of consumer demand. But, as the preceding essay has shown, the consumer is not sovereign; and the assertion that they should be is not above suspicion.

The central thrust of this pamphlet is that the transformation of the British pub currently underway, has not occurred because of some conscious desertion of its doors by the public, but is the result of some very careful *planning* by groups of retailers, marketing managers and accountants (backed up by designers) encamped in the higher echelons of the brewing trade. Far from being a conclusion of the 'consumer-led' revolution beloved of propagandists, this change is the child of a retail revolution which, for the consumer, constitutes only a re-arrangement of his or her individual powerlessness. The stark fact is that the controllers of supply have an inbuilt advantage over the representatives of demand, in wealth, resources, and, in particular, access to the means of persuasion.

However, it is not simply the freedom of the consumer which is at stake here. Chris Thompson hints at a view of the human condition far subtler than the crude imaginings of economists. She draws our attention to needs and desires that cannot be satisfied by the free exercise of market forces, such as security, privacy, anonymity and diversity. The crude aggregates of individual preference, which is the best the market manages, cannot guarantee such qualities. By arguing for the primacy of 'social investment' over 'centres of profit' Thompson identifies the need for, and the threat to, a living public sphere by which such qualities could be protected against the necessarily unconcerned forces which represent the lowest common denominator of consumer preference.

It could be said that the essay reawakens a notion of morality long forgotten by the moralists of today. Namely that morality, if it is anything, is a principle of life by which human beings are able to deepen and extend their quality of life, not stifle it in the narrow confines of peer-group or class. Thompson points to the institution of the pub as having the potential to encourage diversity and plurality of interest, and which, consequently fosters the much-needed spirit of tolerance without which no cosmopolitan society could survive. The replacement of pubs by a selection of monoculture venues for the uniform herd, be they yobs or yuppies (or both), further encourages that central notion of the New Vulgarly: 'My spending, right or wrong !'

However, traditional pub culture, and its defenders in the Campaign for Real Ale, have a lot to answer for. Thanks to CAMRA's obsession with 'real ale' (rather than real life) the breweries were able to 'yuppify' certain London pubs under the banner of 'traditional cask ales'. And pub culture itself has extended little of the toleration upon which it depends to, for example, women on their own, or, in many areas, to different races and cultures. Again she indicates that it is precisely these hypocritical and unimaginative practices which have provided the 'lager culturalists' with much needed ammunition to discredit the traditional pub. As a result the cynical herding of people can pose as a modernising influence, slicing through the divisions of the past with the divisions of the present; peer-group and purchasing power.

All of which leads to an uncomfortable question "Is CAMRA up to the defence of cask ale and the pub under present circumstances?" If CAMRA remains the cosy pressure group it so patently is today, the answer has to be "No." Its habit of avoiding controversy coupled with its decline into drinking clubs without a cause renders it extremely vulnerable to events and processes far deeper than are dreamt of in its philosophy. For some in CAMRA it would appear that the strategy of the moment is to sink 15 pints of real ale a night in order to prove to the brewers that there is a 'real' demand for it. For those outside CAMRA and the spurious mystique it generates around beer, it appears as little more than an alternative marketing company protecting an elitist and snobbish ghetto of ale consumption; hardly a campaign likely to inspire those who recognise the dangers of the present as being the proliferation of isolated monocultures. To be an effective force CAMRA will certainly have to shake off this manifestation of the New Vulgarly in itself.

Unpalatable and unfashionable as it seems today, the Campaign will have to separate itself from the general flight from politics. *No longer a 'consumer's watchdog' in the market place it will have to start challenging the very nature of the market itself.* Not in order to resuscitate the long-dead corpse of state socialism, but in order to point out the moral, ecological and human consequences of the unbridled use of property and wealth.

'Beware the Barmaid's Smile!' points to the terrain upon which campaigners (in CAMRA or not) can fight. The first step is a myth-shattering exercise. For too long apologists of the market have got away with the myth that only total economic freedom guarantees diversity. In fact as the dreary manifestations of the brewery planners start to be experienced diversity is hardly on the agenda. As local brews succumb to ubiquitous 'image drinks', pubs give way to herding-grounds of peer-group

consumption, and landlords and landladies mutate into profit-driven sales representatives, variety is marginalised to the level of eccentricity. Nor can the claim that all this is progress and therefore unstoppable be allowed to escape criticism. *Change may be inevitable, the form it takes most certainly is not.* If one is really prepared to accept the view that individual aggrandisement is the only yardstick of what is desirable, then all concern about the world and its resources, society and its condition, buildings and their beauty become secondary, even though it is these qualities which make life worth living. The fact that a Jumbo Jet can get you to Peking within a day does not deny the attractions of a slow boat to China. And by the same token, the health lobby can be taken on. It is hard to avoid the impression that what one has gained in an extended life has been achieved at the expense of a life worth living. Is anxiety and narcissism a fair exchange for beer and fags ?

The second step is to reassess old customs; local pride, regional idiosyncrasy and popular tradition are not just the left luggage of the 'good old days' but represent real loyalties by which life is made more interesting and enjoyable. (The remarkable survival of long 'unviable' football clubs is testament to this).

An all-out assault on the culture of immediate gratification is in order. Although this enters the new ground of ethics, it is hard to deny that the ambitions of the breweries rest on a particular amoral subject, unconcerned with the effect of their actions on the future, the earth or other people. By inspiring a widening concern and by the use of imagination, the single-minded pursuit of the next fix of consumables can be undermined. Difficult as it may seem, this strategy is far more realistic than the present blind faith in the customer which some campaigners exhibit.

We hope this pamphlet opens a new phase in the resistance to the manipulations and seductions of the breweries. Many are bound to see inadequacies in, or have disagreements with the argument. It is important that these are revealed and expressed. Only the free-flow of argument and information can guarantee that the trends are truly identified and the different angles and concerns are recognised. It is a mark of the vulnerability of the breweries that their plans require secrecy for success, whereas the achievement of their frustration depend upon publicity. Nor should this pamphlet's revelations be regarded as specific to the brewing industry; in every conglomerate tendencies are alive to the opportunities of the present - opportunities which feed the monopolistic tendencies of the accumulator and starve the better side of humanity. For that reason this pamphlet recommends itself, not only to the CAMRA campaigner but to anyone who values the cosmopolitan over the uniform.

*But when you have lost your inns,  
drown your empty selves for you  
will have lost all England. (Belloc)*