

cask ale



Club Mirror editor, Matt Moggridge, enjoying a pint of Club Bitter

Ward's and John Smith's cask.

Andrew and his father had been CAMRA members since 1976, so they knew a thing or two about real ale. Brewing proper started in 1991, a week before Andrew's father died. "You've just got to carry on," Andrew said, explaining how he put two or three different varieties in front of the members before allowing them to decide that Club Bitter was their favourite. "It's now mark 35 and we brew other varieties too," he said, referencing the 4.6 per cent Bengal Tiger and One-Eyed Jack (4 per cent), not forgetting The Old Dark Attic, a bitter style ale that most regard as a mild (3.9 per cent). There are two World Cup brews in production too: Three Lions, a pale brew with a 4 per cent abv; and Spirit of 66, a darker, hoppy brew with at 3.9 per cent abv.

The Concertina Brewery brews 135 gallons of beer per brew, per week; that's 1,080 pints. Beer not sold in the club is sold to pubs via wholesalers.

We took a look around the cellar, risking life and limb on the steel ladder to get to what might be called the engine room of the club's beer output. Andrew explained how the club had been 'badly screwed' by NPower following a set-price deal spanning five years. The problem was that the power company failed to tell the club that the deal had expired, leaving a huge debt and an emergency tariff almost 400 per cent higher than what the club used to pay.

For this reason, the club cools its beers in modified domestic refrigerators. Compared with traditional wall-mounted cellar cooling systems, the running costs are dramatically less. "We could get 88 fridges in here," said Andrew, causing me to wonder whether it was possible, as it looked pretty cramped down there.

NPower was paid off and the club has since switched to Eon because it is charging less than NPower. The use of domestic refrigerators to cool the beer remains.

As for the club, Andrew said that the last time he looked there were 550 members, but said it could easily be half that in reality. With the exception of Wednesday nights (which is dead, according to Andrew) there is something going on at the club most evenings. Friday, Saturday and Tuesday nights are the best with the latter being Ladies Night, run by Andrew's mother, who is now 80. Monday night is given over to ladies' darts and pool.

After a pint of Bengal Tiger and a few photographs, it was time for *Club Mirror* to head north. Standing on Mexborough station in the rain, it was heartening to recall Andrew's parting words. "Things have stabilised now and if they don't get any worse, we'll carry on," he said. ■

