

Jollyboys DROITWICH event (Thursday 27th April 2017)

The “wich” in Droitwich, I was always told, implied some association with salt but I read recently that that is all tosh! Droitwich Spa, to give it its full title was, however, famous for brine extraction since Roman times and subsequently the supposed health benefits of saline baths and treatments led, with the coming of the railway, to significant growth in the town to the benefit particularly of one man, John Corbett, the “Salt King”, whose name – or more likely his arms, a black crow - you might come across as you wander around the town. There are some old and crooked buildings but a lot of the town centre has been replaced by concrete boxes and the road system is equally unimaginative with lots of truncated bits that used to be through access routes.

As for the railway it was initially the Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton, with later junction connections to the Midland route over the Lickey. It remains, unusually in this day and age, still very much wedded to semaphore signalling and several different signal arm designs are visible from the platforms for signalling anoraks.

Having painted a poor picture of the town itself, my initial partial recce on a dark, wet, November evening was equally dire but, having been back again yesterday in Spring sunshine, all is not as bad as it first seemed and there are, I think, enough worthwhile pubs offering an interesting selection of ales, so lets get started!

Unfortunately there is no Wetherspoons so Jollyboys need to make a choice of filling up earlier on their journey or taking pot luck with cafes in Droitwich itself. I noted 3 which might fit the bill – the Sandwyche Station very close to the railway, the Spinning Wheel in St Andrews Street, (which does also serve one REAL ALE – Purity Brewing’s Ubu), and Bullock’s in the High Street which has THREE levels of breakfast quantities – normal, large and enormous – but only Estrella Damm Spanish Lager (Charles Wells) on Draught, or 500ml bottles of Wadworth’s 6X.

Those that have come early for breakfast or because of train connections should then aim for the first venue – the furthest from the station – the **Freemasons Arms**, which does, in theory, open at 1000 (Banks’ Mild & Amber plus Ringwood Boondoggle).. *However, as there are two arrivals at the station timed for 1100, I suggest that we all aim for that arrival time and foregather at the up-side entrance and then all stroll over to get to this first venue about 1120. Leave 1150.*

That should bring us – left and back to cross the main road when possible and then continue and turn right into the High Street - to the **Talbot** (4 Craddocks brews plus guests – Tiny Rebel Cwtch & Salopian Hop Twister on recce) arriving about noon. Pie-minister food selection is available for anyone still, or already, hungry. Leave 1230.

If there is anyone burning to try Black Tap Brewery, Morning Glory, they can drop into the **Star & Garter** almost next door, but that’s the only hand pump they have. (There is also a very welcoming **Working Men’s Club** with a wide drinks selection but NO cask ales) We continue along to the **Hop Pole** on the opposite side of the road (Wye Valley Butty Bach & HPA, Malvern Hills Black Pear (no, it’s ale not perry), plus one or two guests). Also does what appeared to be relatively cheap (under a fiver) but popular food in a rambling set of rooms.

We will also have passed the **Cock Inn**, supposedly the oldest pub in the town. I did try it (they had Marston's Pedigree, Ringwood Mauler, and Banks Amber) but wasn't impressed by the limited intelligence of the barman and his mate, who were the only ones there, discussing politics and how Winston Churchill was the last Liberal Democrat prime minister(!), plus how, if you got 1060 Euros for £1000 you were sixty quid better off(!). I wished I had checked my change carefully! I thought for a minute or two that I had stepped through some space/time portal but, as they were both Facebooking whilst holding this inane conversation I just mulled over the failings of the Worcestershire educational system. Up to you if you want to try it for the craic?

Unless we have taken in any of these options we should have arrived at the **Hop Pole** about 1240 so, assuming that some might want to eat there, suggest leaving at about 1330. Turn right then left and walk down to cross the canal and River Salwarpe to the **Gardeners Arms** (Navigation New Dawn Pale , Windsor & Eton Guardsman, plus Spitfire and Hooky). Leave when you've had enough!

Trains

As you will see above I am suggesting that we all aim to get to Droitwich at 1100. I shall be on the 2S32, 1052 from Worcester Shrub Hill, having come down from Goring via Oxford. The up train is the 2V16 from Dorridge to Worcester Foregate Street, having come from Birmingham Moor Street at 1009, Snow Hill at 1013 and Smethwick Galton Bridge at 1022.

Earlier arrivals are the 1019 from New Street (dep 0929) which might be better suited to those travelling from London or the North via that station, the 1029 arrival from Moor Street/Snow Hill/Galton Bridge, and the 1032 arrival from Hereford (dep 0939), which all give time for a Bacon Sandwich or two..

BUT please check your own plans carefully!