

Drinking in London

As in the past, London has, probably, the best selection of beers, overall, than any other city in the UK, but that's because it's so big. The bad side is that it's also, likely, the most expensive beer in the UK. But, you have to take the good with the bad, and there's nothing to do about that. A pint of beer is going to run between 2 and 3 pounds. Actually, I've not quite spent 3 pounds for a pint of beer yet, but I did pay about 2 pounds 90 for a pint of Dark Star at The George a year ago. **(2007 update...we paid 3 pounds for a pint of Adnams at The Nagshead).**

There are over 7000 pubs in greater London. Not all serve good beer. Here are some beers to avoid...

Bass Ale – You might have to make your own decision about Bass. You see it around, but not as often as you used to (part of Coors most likely fazing it out). Not bad, but certainly not the beer it used to be.

Courage – Actually not that bad, but there are better beers to drink. (But not much of it is found anymore as the original brewery closed, and only the name remains.)

Flowers – Ick!

John Smiths – Don't confuse with Sam Smiths.

Theakstons – These include **Theakston's**, **Theakstons's Best**, **Theakstons XB**, etc.

Boddingtons – Some word that Whitbread is improving this beer back toward what it used to be, but as long as it comes through that damn sprinkler (making it “the cream of Manchester”), don't bother.

Green King IPA – Hardly an IPA and hardly a good beer. I'm seeing this more and more in London these days.

Tetley's – Not much to it, but not horrible.

And for god's sake, don't drink any *Caffrey's!*

So, what's to drink? London currently has more breweries than any time in the past 40 or so years. Now, most of them are quite small and you won't likely see their beer unless you go to the source, but there are two large regional breweries in London whose beers you will see, Fullers and Youngs. In general any Fullers or Youngs pubs are worth stopping into for a beer. The beer is good and the brewers make sure the pubs are also nice. Following is a run down of the beers I typically drink when in London which should be “not hard” to find, particularly if you go into the pubs I'm recommending. There are lots of Weatherspoon Pubs in London. Usually they have “Moon” somewhere in their name, but not always. These pubs have a pretty fair selection of beer (sometimes Hopback Summer Lightning) and reliable food. The Hogshead chain is still around, but some are better than others. At the Hogshead near Covent Garden, last time I was there they had Deuchars IPA (which is a fantastic bitter made up in Edinburgh)!

Fullers:

Chiswick Bitter – Their session beer, but it is dry hopped (If a Fullers' pub serves this, the pub is usually a pretty good pub, as Fullers only seems to provide this to their better pubs.)

London Pride – Most commonly seen, and my least favorite of the three, but still good
ESB – Extra Special Bitter...Ymmmmm!

Youngs:

Ordinary – This is an under appreciated beer. Got a lot going on for a session beer

Special - Recently reformulated recipe, making the beer stronger. I liked it more before, but I understand people complained when they reduced the alcohol years ago!

Harvey's:

Sussex Bitter – Nice hoppy bitter with lots of flavor. Any Harvey's beer is worth drinking, but this is the one you usually see (White Horse, Market Porter)

Oakham:

JHB – One of my favorites, and a recent Champion Beer of Britain. What we call “Jolly Hoppy Bitter” (actually Jeffrey Hudson Bitter). Austerely pale, paler than Budweiser but with a bright, crisp, hop character. Who says there are no hops in British beer! (White Horse)

Taylor:

Landlord – Becoming more frequently found, used to be found only at festivals. A classic British bitter and past Champion beer. Excellent session bitter. (Blackfriar) (It can also be found at “The Dog & Duck” in Soho, Frith St, W1.)

Sam Smiths

Old Brewery Bitter – Not as good as it used to be but the only cask conditioned Sam Smiths beer available now. (Actually, I think it is now all nitro beer.)

Adnams:

Bitter – Pretty common around London. Good session bitter with a bit of a sulfery, salty taste. The brewery is right on the English Channel in East Anglia. (Blackfriar)

Broadside – Adnam's best bitter. Can be very good. (White Horse)

Marstons:

Pedigree – Used to see it around more often than you do now. When it's on, it's fantastic, but it's funky brewing methods leaves it victim to not being properly kept. Not properly kept, which is usual, makes it an average beer.

Badger (Hall and Woodhouse):

Several of the Badger pubs in London now. All their beers are pretty good (**Badger Best, IPA, and Tanglefoot**).

Rooster:

Yankee – You don't often see Rooster beers around, but they are good and unique. Lots of American hops in their beers. Rooster is always on at The White Horse.

Hopback:

Summer Lightning – A beer to look for and not terribly uncommon in some of the free-er of the Free Houses. Pale and hoppy.

Shepherd Neame:

Spitfire: Lots of Shepherd Neame pubs around these days. Their beers tend to be average, but I like Spitfire.

Caledonian:

Deuchars IPA – Another beer worth seeking out. Can be found in some Hogshead and Weatherspoon pubs. Recent past Champion Beer of Britain.

Wells:

Bombardier – Making a comeback in London. We used to see it a lot, but then it disappeared. Pretty good best bitter.

Pubs

1. **The Market Porter**, Southwark, 9 Stoney St. SE1, 148 3-A, District Line (Mansion House). Free House, 8 Real Ales (Anything that looks interesting). In Southwark, across Southwark Bridge and around the corner from The Anchor, also not far from The Globe Theater and the new Tate Gallery. Recently refurbished, still a pretty good selection of beer, with a dark kind of ambiance. The selection of beer is constantly changing. Note the variety of pump clips hanging over the beer to see which beers have been on their list. They serve an excellent lunch and don't forget to stop at the cheese shop across the street toward the Anchor. **(The Anchor - Courage, The George - Whitbread)**
2. **The White Horse on Parsons Green**, Parsons Green SW6, 91 1-J, District Line (Parsons Green). Bass, 5 Real Ales, Oakham JHB or anything that looks interesting. This pub has gone from being a yuppie hangout in the late 80's to a beer lovers paradise in the 90's. The good selection of excellently served real ale (possibly the best kept in London) is only one attraction. The pub has several foreign imports on draft and serves Trappist beers in bottles for a pretty reasonable price. The White Horse has become practically the only pub left in London to regularly find interesting beers and hosts beer festivals, including the Strong Ale Festival on the last Saturday in November. Large pub, gets crowded in the evenings. Very good Sunday brunch (opens at 11:00, but no alcohol served until Noon). Ask, at the bar, for a cellarman to give you a cellar tour. *(The Duke of Cumberland - Parsons Green - Youngs)*
3. **The Lamb**, Holborn, 94 Lambs Conduit St, WC1, 140 4-D, Piccadilly/Central Line (Russell Square/Holborn), Youngs, 3 Real Ales (Plus Seasonals), Youngs Special or Winter Warmer. To Quote Andy "Ornate Edwardian pub with elegant atmosphere". I think it's more comfortable than Andy. Lots of small tables fronting couches along the walls, large C-shaped bar with "Snob Screens" over the top. A nice place to

drink and very well served Youngs beers. (**The Princess Louise – Sam Smiths, The Citie of Yorke - Sam Smiths**)

4. **The Wenlock Arms**, Hoxton, 26 Wenlock Road, N1, 62 2-C, Northern Line (Old Street). Free House, 5 Real Ales, 1 Cask Cider, sometimes 1 Cask Perry, Pittfield Bitter or anything that looks interesting. This is your typical neighborhood local, except it is very Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) friendly, and also has LaTrappe Dubbel on draft. It looks a bit worn, but the selection of ales is excellent and always changing. No way to predict what they will have on, except they are one of two pubs to nearly always have the Pitfield beers on (the brewery is about 4 blocks away). Really a locals pub, but still quite friendly. If you are there at closing Saturday, you will likely get involved in a lock-in (drinking after hours). (**No Great Pubs Nearby, but not a far walk to The Beer Shop and their associated brewery Pitfield at 14 Pitfield St. in Hoxton**)
5. **The Blackfriar**, Blackfriar Bridge, 174 Queen Victoria St. EC4, 141 9-J, District Line (Blackfriars). Nicholson's Pub, 4 Real Ales, Timothy Taylor Landlord. Very ornate interior is the signature of this pub. Usually a good beer selection and good food for lunch. Interesting corner exterior. Marbled drinking lounge. Gets crowded inside after work, but on nice days there is a drinking area outside. (**The Founders Arms - Youngs**)
6. **The Star**, Belgravia, Belgrave Mews West, SW1, 145 6-G, Piccadilly Line, (Knightsbridge) . Fuller Smith and Turner, 3 Real Ales, Fullers ESB. Very nice alley pub in very fashionable Belgravia, not far from Harrods. Exceptionally well served Fullers beers (even the brewery recommends the pub), the ESB being outstanding. Very comfortable pub with two fireplaces and an old crust crowd with decent evening meals. (**The Nags Head - Free House, The Turks Head - 10 Motcomb St – Bass**)
7. **The Royal Oak**, Borough, 44 Tabard St. SE 1, 148 5-A, District Line (Mansion House), Harvey's, 5 Real Ales (All of Harvey's Ales are very good, but since it's hard to find Mild or Porter in pubs, go for one of those). The only Harvey's tied pub in London. Clean, quiet, good food throughout the day, and a wide variety of Harvey's ales. Might seem a bit sterile inside with it's wood floors with Oriental Carpet, but the lack of "Fruit Machines" and music make it a great place to enjoy the beer and food. Note: This pub is only open weekdays. (**The George - Whitbread, The Market Porter – Free House**).
8. **Ye Olde Mitre**, Holborn, Ely Place EC4, 141 6-H, Central Line (Chancery Lane). Taylor Walker, 3 Real Ales, Adnams Bitter. Small alley way pub, looks like a small library inside with bar separating two lounges. Kind of hard to find, but comfortable and rarely crowded. For some pub history, ask the barman, he's always glad to accommodate. It's enough off the beaten path that you won't find tourists, just regular London businessmen usually quaffing a pint before catching British Rail home for the evening (and probably their own local). (**The Lamb – Youngs**)

9. **The Argyll Arms**, Oxford Circus, 18 Argyll St, W1, 139 8-M, Central Line, Oxford Circus. It's a pretty pub with an OK beer selection last time I was there. Not listed in the good beer guide, but we had some beer geek friends with us when we were there last month, and they said the Argyll Arms was their favorite. Right off the Oxford Circus High Street.
10. **Cittie of York**. Holborn, 22 High Holborn, WC1, Central Line (Chancery Lane). Samuel Smith, 1 Real Ale (Old Brewery Bitter). One of the few remaining Samuel Smith pubs in London to offer any Real Ale. Large drinking space with small booths surrounding. Most impressive feature are the large casks lined up over the bar. An impressive pub that can get crowded at night. (**The Lamb - Youngs, The Princess Louise – Samuel Smith**)
11. **The Princess Louise**, Holborn, 208 High Holborn WC1, Piccadilly Line (Holborn). Samuel Smith, Sam Smiths Old Brewery Bitter. Very ornate Victorian style pub. A lot has changed with this pub in the past few years. It's now a Sam Smith's pub which means only one real ale. CAMRA's national inventory along with its mens room (gents) which is listed separately. (**The Lamb - Youngs, The Cittie of Yorke - Sam Smiths**)
12. **The George**, Southwark, Off 77 Borough High St. SE1, District Line (Mansion House) then across Southwark Bridge - 148 A3. Whitbread, not sure how many beers are there now, but last spring they had an interesting selection, but expensive!). Very old pub in an alley off Borough High Street. One of the few pubs on the last trip that had an expanded beer list. Large drinking area outside, the pub is in an old carriage house with at least five drinking rooms and three bars. Also a small bar at a window serving beer outside. Great historical ambiance, but somewhat popular with tourists especially in the summer. Beer here runs on the expensive side. A pub on CAMRA's national inventory. The point here is that if you visit the Market Porter (highly recommended, you may as well walk over to The George. The place is OLD! (**The Anchor - Courage, The Market Porter - Free House**)
13. **The Bricklayers Arms**, Putney, 32 Waterman Street, SW15, District Line (Putney Bridge) Across Putney Bridge. Timothy Taylor, Any of them. Newly converted pub that carries all of the Timothy Taylor beers, and they all are excellent. Quiet pub, no food at lunchtime. Worth the walk into Putney.