

6 DRINKING

BAR-SPY

The Coach and Horses
82 Thorpe Rd



Don't spare the horses to get here

The Coach and Horses

82 Thorpe Road

Norwich

(01603) 477077

www.thecoachthorperoad.co.uk

Real ales: Guest ales plus Chalk Hill Brewery ales, including Brewery Tap, Dreadnaught, Old Tackle and Flintknappers Mild

As befitting a pub that's been repeatedly listed in both the CAMRA Good Beer Guides and the Good Pub Guide, this is one of Norwich's real ale treasure houses.

Situated on Thorpe Road, five minutes walk from the station, it doesn't in truth look much from the outside.

Indeed without expert management over the years it could easily be just another struggling boozier, relying on workers from the offices next door and Royal Mail sorting office opposite.

Step inside though and you very quickly realise your in the hands of people who know what they're doing.

Not only are the surroundings and the selection of ales enviable, but they've also managed to create that most elusive of things — a proper pub atmosphere.

It helps that the rear of the premises is also



home to the Chalk Hill Brewery, whose award winning ales flow freely through the hand pumps.

Set up almost 15 years ago, and run by the former Reindeer brew-pub owner, Bill Thomas and his partners Dave Blake and Tiny Little, it has scooped many real ale gongs over the years, including the coveted Best Bitter crown at the Norwich Real Ale Festival in 2000.

Love of beer therefore flows, quite literally, through the place.

But its appeal is more than this — despite being in a bit of a no-mans land, surrounded by offices rather than homes; the place has a real lively community feel.

They have strong links with Norwich Rugby Club — the pub is one of the best places in Norwich to watch big games on TV — and their own cricket team, who only lost two out of 15 games last season. In addition they host occasional live music and other events, rather than relying on the ordinary pub paraphernalia to woo punters and create atmosphere — they boast of being a pool, juke box and fruit machine free zone.

The interior is dominated by a large traditional L-shaped wood and mirror-backed bar, which links areas in the front bay windows and a light airy area at the back.

Redecorations are currently a work in progress, but the décor is all wooden floors, red and cream paintwork and framed nostalgic photos.

The tables are large encouraging that community feel and handy if you're also eating. They do an extensive menu of home-made traditional British fare, with specials boards — one for meat, another fish — at the front and back.

As well as Chalk Hill brews, they've permanently got a rotating selection of interesting seasonal ales, but despite the pub's real ale criteria they're not snobs about it. The wine list is excellent too, and mainstream tipples like Stella Artois, Guinness and Kronenberg 1666 are given prominent bar-top positions.

The pub — then named the Yarmouth Coach — dates back to 1811 when it was on the route of three regular coaches. But it's doubtful whether it's enjoyed a better period in its history than right now — and I'll drink to that. Long may it continue.

SIMON PARKIN

- Disabled access: Yes (with toilet)
- Sky Sports: Yes
- Garden: No
- Music: Regular live music
- Food: Yes

Beer: ★★★★★

Wines: ★★★★★

Atmosphere: ★★★★★

Family: ★★