

## OBITUARY

### *David Clarke, Hook Norton Brewery*

David Clarke, aged 63, of the Hook Norton Brewery, died peacefully on 28th September in the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford

Hook Norton has been a remarkable brewery in recent years by any standards. It has been described as a 'Victorian Pagoda' and a 'Working Museum'; titles given with enormous fondness for the kinds of values embodied in the brewery. Here is a brewery in a classic building, with machinery driven by a 100 year old steam engine, with local deliveries made by horse drawn dray and, most important of all, run by five generations of the Clarke family. The success of the brewery since the 1970s is all due to one remarkable man, an unflamboyant figure who was, nonetheless, one of the great names of the British 'Beerage'.

David Clarke was born in January 1941, the great grandson of John Harris, who started the Hook Norton Brewery in 1849. He was educated at Rynaby School, Banbury, before becoming a boarder at Overthorpe Hall. He then passed the common entrance exam for Bloxham School where he studied geography, history and the sciences and became a keen rugby player. He left school in 1958 and decided to make brewing his career. He took up a pupillage at Burtonwood Brewery in 1959 and gained all round knowledge of brewing. In April 1960 he returned to Hook Norton where his father was Head Brewer. He became Second Brewer and the Bottling Manager, with bottling all done by hand. The low point for the brewery was 1973 when 8,500 barrels were brewed, and the Gilchrist family, owners of Burtonwood Brewery, stepped in with a supportive cash injection. This and the rise in popularity of real ale meant that by 1990 the output had risen to 20,000 barrels, and the keg beer equipment that had been purchased was never used. In 1981 David became Managing Director, although his father was still active until his death in 1982. When he took over, the estate numbered 28 pubs, but has grown since then to 45.

David married in 1970 Paula Green from Sibford Gower. James was born in 1971, and in 1974 came Victoria, who tragically died of leukaemia at the age of twelve. Since then the family have raised large sums of money for the Leukaemia Research Fund. In the family tradition, David was, for many years, a retained fireman and was awarded the British Empire Medal for his efforts. He sponsored the Hook Norton Brass Band, was President of the Football Club, and supported the local [Hook Norton] History Society. His hobbies included gardening, shooting, salmon fishing and collecting old vehicles, including his much-loved 1952 Dennis. In 1999 he welcomed the Princess Royal to open the Brewery Visitor Centre in celebration of the brewery's 150th anniversary.

This is a shortened version of the obituary that appeared in *Beer on Tap*, The Newsletter of North Oxon CAMRA Branch, 19, Winter 2004, edited by Geoff Clifford, to whom we are grateful for permission to reprint it here.