

Orient's real ale oasis...



When not organising CAMRA campaigns or lobbying MPs on our behalf, **Jon Mail** combines his love of Leyton Orient with his love of real ale and suggests it might be the supporters club bar, rather than the action on the pitch which draws the crowds

THE East End of London remains something of a beer desert so the commitment of Leyton Orient Supporters Club to good beer is hugely welcome. Win, lose or draw a trip to the Orient is not complete without a post match pint in the supporters club.

It's a great example of how real ale can really work when done well and shows that football fans shouldn't have to put up with the terrible bars and bad lager when they support their teams.

The supporters club has only been in its new home for the last three years. The old club which was opened in 1978 was located in a refurbished cabin in the south east of the ground, with outside toilets. The site on which the supporters club was opened in 1978 was previously used as a "cage" to contain the football hooligans of the 1970's. Following the move of the supporters club and the redevelopment of the ground the corner of the ground is occupied by a block of flats, as are the other three corners of the ground.

In 2005 the supporters club moved into its current location in the newly built West Stand. The new location is roughly twice the size of the old premises, air conditioned and has a pleasant outside space. The club is well furnished throughout with large screens for watching major games. The move has enabled the club to grow in size which in turn means that it has been able to sell a wider choice of real ales and provide

more space for people to enjoy them.

The beers on sale are absolutely top quality thanks to the dedication and hard work of the volunteers who run the club so successfully. In eight years of enjoying a pint at the supporters club I have not come across a single pint that is of poor quality. On



'The club would have been busy this summer had England qualified...'

a busy match day the club can sell in excess of 700 pints of real ale. The choice and quality of the beers on offer mean that many confirmed lager drinkers will temporarily convert to real ale when visiting the club. The beer prices are also very reasonable at around £2.10 a pint compared to local pubs charging upwards of £2.80, many of



which do not serve any real ale. The club is a regular winner of the East London and City Club of the Year award and these awards are proudly displayed within the club.

Winning line up - Orient's supporters club bar

The range of beers on offer is exceptional. Mighty Oak Oscar Wilde Mild is a regular and there are five handpumps for changing guest beers. There is also a real cider on sale. The club opens on match days for members and guests.

A sign of the club's success is that it has more than 1,300 members when the team struggles to get above 4,000 for a

home game. The club also opens for major televised games and would certainly have been very busy this summer had England qualified for Euro 2008. The local CAMRA branch works with the club to put on regular beer festivals. The last festival saw more than 2,500 pints sold over three days with a total of 30 beers on offer.

A collection of Leyton Orient memorabilia is displayed around the club. Programmes from the days when Leyton Orient was able to play and beat the likes of Chelsea, West Ham and Manchester United adorn the walls. There are also press clippings covering the football club's history. The club also attracts celebrity supporters such as Julian Lloyd Webber and Bob Mills.

In recent years the supporters club has marked the sacrifices of the 41 members of the Orient team and staff who joined the 17th Battalion Middlesex Regiment (the Footballers' Battalion) during the First World War. The Orient team was the first football club to join up en masse, and the final game before the players went off to war attracted a crowd of over 20,000.

Orient may currently be playing League One football but when the club are finally promoted to a place in the premiership the supporters club bar will not be found wanting.

Up the O's.