

## Intervention in the Modern UK Brewing Industry

John Spicer, Chris Thurman, John Walters  
and Simon Ward

In 1989 the Thatcher Government, famously pro-business and fervently opposed to vested interests and barriers to the operation of market forces, passed legislation that would radically change the nature of brewing and pub retailing, and which, indeed, constituted the most far-reaching intervention in private industry seen in post-nationalisation Britain. Beginning with the great brewery mergers of the 1950s and 1960s, and then the series of early official attempts to regulate and reform the industry, this book covers the circumstances leading to the 1986–89 Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry, including the agitation for change – by no means discouraged by the Office of Fair Trading – on the part of one major brewer and the Campaign for Real Ale. It describes the parliamentary revolt and potential clash with European law that forced the Government to dilute the Commission's recommendations; the major brewers' rejection of the new business model that had been imposed on them; and the resulting disintegration of the industry and acquisition of most of it by foreign companies. Finally, the authors assess the damaging repercussions for consumers and pub licensees, and attempt to draw lessons from this landmark event.

In their research the authors interviewed over 60 individuals who were intimately involved in the affair, including two members of the MMC panel that investigated the brewers, former senior industry executives, civil servants, regulators, lawyers, academics, the (then) junior Minister who conducted the post-Report negotiations, licensees' and consumers' representatives, and licensees themselves. Archived material and Hansard reports of Parliamentary proceedings were studied and copious amounts of official documents were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. The book includes a foreword by Anthony Hilton.

**John Spicer** has been associated with the drinks industry for most of his career, first at Whitbread and then in the City, where for nearly a decade he was rated the number one drinks sector analyst. In 1993 he served as Special Adviser to the Parliamentary Agriculture Select Committee during its inquiry into the Beer Orders, and in 2001 as an expert witness in a trial concerning the beer tie.

**Chris Thurman** joined the Brewers' Society in 1970 to establish a department responsible for economics and statistics, and was closely involved in the Price Commission, Monopolies and Mergers Commission and other official inquiries into the brewing industry. He received the MBE for services to the brewing industry in 1991 and retired in 1999.

**John Walters** was a stockbroker specialising in the drinks and pubs industries for much of the period covered by this book, namely, from 1970 until his retirement in 2002. Before the City's 'Big Bang' he was a Member of the Stock Exchange, and at the time of his retirement was a Fellow of the Securities Institute and an Associate of the Society of Investment Professionals. He has subsequently written two editions, for a City readership, of a 'Directory of UK Brewing and Pub Companies'.

**Simon Ward** has spent virtually his whole working life in the drinks and leisure industry, chiefly with Whitbread, where he was variously Strategy Director, Public Affairs Director and a member of the Executive Committee. Subsequently he was Director of Public Affairs for the pub company, Mitchells & Butlers. He has extensive experience of working with Whitehall, Westminster and the UK and EU competition authorities.

November 2011

Hardback

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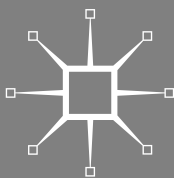
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