

The Firkin

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch

Vol 36 No 4

Winter 2011 / 12



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

FREE

Winning Team at Silverstone



 *Season's Greetings to all our Readers* 

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

ENGINEERS – E ANGLIA PoTY

ANOTHER GREAT FESTIVAL

WINTER FESTIVALS

PUB NEWS

SILVERSTONE RACES AHEAD

CAMBRIDGE TRIP

ST PETER'S BREWERY BY BIKE

AUGUST WALKABOUT

2012 CAMRA MEMBERS WEEKEND

RETROSPECT: ORGANISING A FESTIVAL

GOOD BEER GUIDE 2012

The Campaign for Real Ale is a consumer organisation founded in 1971

Leased pub opportunities in your local area.



Prince of Wales

15 Addison Road, Steeple Claydon,
Buckingham MK18 2NP

- Spacious country pub in the affluent village of Steeple Claydon
- Community local with a strong sports emphasis and a number of established pub teams
- Separate dining room with 26 covers
- Beer garden with a large covered decked area



Stag Tavern

35 Brook Street, Stotford, Hitchin SG5 4LA

- Traditional village pub with a strong cask ale clientele
- Nestled in an existing and developing residential area
- Well established reputation with local community
- Dining room with 34 covers, a good sized catering kitchen and patio area

Find out more about running one of these pubs or similar pubs in the area by contacting **Vicky Brown on 0844 848 3264** or **Vicky.brown@punchtaverns.com**

PUNCH TAVERNS IPHONE APP (Powered by Find My pub)
is now on ITUNES and FREE to download



PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR PUBS



Chairman's Corner

We failed to elect a new branch chairman to succeed Don Allan at our branch AGM in July.

To ensure that the branch runs smoothly, I have offered to serve as interim chairman until we can persuade another member to take on the chair for two or three years. My position is subject to confirmation at the branch meeting in January.

I served previously as branch chairman more than 20 years ago and also as branch secretary and editor of this newsletter for many years. More recently I was elected branch pubs officer and will continue in this role until the next branch AGM. I have seen many CAMRA campaigns come and go, some won but others lost; many local pubs have closed, but occasionally – like the Victoria Arms in Wilden only recently – they can even reopen and seem the better for it. After 40 years campaigning, CAMRA still has an important part to play in ensuring that we can all enjoy good beer in decent pubs for years to come.

During more than 30 years as an active branch member, I have seen new local breweries open, with B&T and Potton now well established and

the merger of Charles Wells and Young's brewing interests just a few years ago. Sadly we heard only recently that the owners of the White Park Brewery in Cranfield have decided to sell the business, but we hope that a buyer will come forward to keep on brewing.

Since we added real cider and perry to the liquid delights at our annual Bedford festival more than 25 years ago, we have been pleased to see their steadily growing popularity. However, as they clearly sell well at CAMRA festivals, we are surprised that so few local pubs and pub companies show any interest. With the arrival of new local cider producers – Harrold, Evershed's in Odell, the award-winning Virtual Orchard in nearby Wolverton, and a prospective new producer near Biggleswade – we hope this will soon change. We and the other Bedfordshire branches are planning a new campaign in 2012 to get more real cider and perry into local pubs. That will be good news for cider lovers and good business for the pubs that offer it for sale.

Cheers!

Peter Argyle

Interim Branch Chairman

Beds has Regional Champion Pub!



Bedfordshire is classified in the Eastern Region for many purposes, in spite of the fact that Norwich and Ipswich are a long way from us and

London is so close. Perhaps it's because we are so far from the heart of our region that Beds doesn't often seem to win much in CAMRA's various competitions. This year we have something to cheer about. The well-loved Engineers Arms in Henlow is CAMRA's Eastern Region Pub of the Year, having seen off the contenders from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. The Engineers is just outside North Beds

CAMRA's area, into East Beds, but was a worthy winner of our all-Bedfordshire PoTY title back in the spring. Now we all wish Kevin Machin and his partner Claire luck in their quest to be the national champion pub of 2011!

CAMRA's Great British Pubs...

...is a new CAMRA book celebrating of the nation's favourite pastime! The best riverside pubs, country pubs, seaside pubs, sporting pubs, brewpubs, pub gardens... and much more!

Available from www.camra.or.uk or bookshops at £14.99 RRP in paperback.



Another Great Festival!

CAMRA's 34th Bedford Beer & Cider Festival in October was another success. Held again in Bedford Corn Exchange, the festival attracted over 6,000 visitors, and sold more than 18,000 pints of real ale, cider, perry and foreign beers between Wednesday and Saturday.

LocAle brews

The festival offered 115 real ales, 44 real ciders and perries, and a wide selection of draught and bottled foreign beers. Cask ales included local brews from 22 of the 31 breweries located within 30 miles of Bedford, supporting our LocAle campaign to promote locally brewed beers.

Other brews came from East Anglia or from far-flung breweries around the country. Although the festival had to close on Saturday with no opportunity to sell what was left during the following week, careful planning ensured that a reasonable choice of beers was maintained well into Saturday evening.

Cider and perry

The cider bar attracted a lot of interest once again, as befits a festival held during CAMRA's Cider and Perry Month. Locally produced cider and perry from the Harrold Calvados Society, the

newly established Evershed's in Odell and the award-winning Virtual Orchard in nearby Wolverton sold easily, with few brands from anywhere else left when the festival closed on Saturday evening.

Although real cider and its stablemate perry, made from pears, have become highly popular at Bedford festivals, it surprises us that they are still offered regularly by only a handful of Bedfordshire pubs. Pubs that offer real cider or perry all year round can now be listed on a national CAMRA website and are offered point-of-sale material to promote these excellent drinks.

Foreign beers sell well

Speciality draught and bottled beers from Belgium, Germany, the USA and other countries were served on a dedicated foreign beer bar upstairs. As usual they included several from the Bavarian city of Bamberg, notable for its distinctive smoked beers as well as for being twinned with Bedford!

The Corn Exchange in-house caterers did a great job for the seventh year running, serving several thousand hot and cold meals during the week. Feedback on the food and service was very positive, so many thanks to Tracey and her team from the festival organisers, staff and customers.

Entertainment

Local singer and satirist **Dr Busker**, a regular performer at this and other CAMRA festivals, helped launch the event on Wednesday evening with his sharp re-working of familiar songs. On Saturday evening, we enjoyed local rock and blues band **Lost 4 Words** while visitors emptied the final casks.



The **Bedford Morris Men**, supported by visiting dancers from Letchworth, demonstrated their skill to visitors on Saturday lunchtime. Morris dancers are known for their thirst and for having a keen nose for a decent pint!

Thanks to our sponsors

The organisers are grateful to **Wells & Young's Brewing Company** for sponsoring the souvenir glasses, and to local pubs and companies for sponsoring beer casks on the stillage. Thanks are also due to the Corn Exchange staff for their help and co-operation, and to the many local pubs and clubs that displayed posters promoting the festival.

This year's "medieval knight" logo was an original design by **Colin Lilley of M&L Engraving**, recalling the origin of the heraldic eagle that has been a symbol of Bedford for centuries. Colin is familiar to festival visitors as our regular engraver, but is also a talented designer. Many thanks for his valuable help.

The basement cloakroom was run once again by **Bedford Lions Club**. Thanks to our visitors for helping the Lions raise about £650 for local charities through the cloakroom and collection boxes.

And thanks to the helpers

Festivals like ours can only succeed with support from a dedicated team of unpaid volunteers donating their time and effort. Festival Organiser Lynne Ratnett paid tribute to everyone involved in planning, managing and staffing the event: "Organising this festival takes months of planning and needs enough CAMRA members and friends willing to give their time free behind the bars, glasses bar and the shop, spending chilly hours at the door, working as stewards or behind the scenes. Without all these volunteers, we just couldn't do it." Helpers included local and visiting CAMRA members and their friends, keen to take part in one of the town's most popular regular events. Colleagues from East Beds CAMRA ran the shop and tombola, while other staff came from distant parts of the country.

16TH CAMBRIDGE WINTER ALE FESTIVAL

Thursday 19th—Saturday 21st January 2012

Over 100 real ales, ciders and foreign beers.

Food available at all sessions.

Entry £2.50 at all sessions, except free Friday lunchtime

Free for card-carrying CAMRA, CURAS & USC members



Thursday 5PM–10:30PM

Friday 12PM–3PM

5PM–10:30PM

Saturday 12PM–10:30PM



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

University Social Club
Mill Lane, Cambridge

www.cambridgebeerfestival.com

[@cambeerfest](https://twitter.com/cambeerfest)



Winter Beer Festivals

Pig's Ear Beer & Cider Festival

Tue 6 to Sat 10 December at Round Chapel, Powerscroft Road, Hackney, London E5 0PU (served by eight bus routes and two rail lines). Open Tue-Thu 12-10.30, Fri-Sat 12-11, admission £4, CAMRA members £2. More than 200 real ales including festival specials, plus cider, bottled and foreign beers. From Kings Cross St Pancras, take the Victoria Line to Highbury & Islington then London Overground to Hackney Central.
www.pigsear.org.uk

16th Cambridge Winter Ale Festival

Thu 19 to Sat 21 January at University Social Club, Mill Lane (X5 bus 10 min). Open Thu 5-10.30, Fri 12-3, 5-10.30, Sat 12-10.30, admission £2.50, free Fri lunchtime and free to CAMRA members all times. About 100 real ales, emphasising traditional winter beers from local and national breweries, plus ciders and foreign beers. Regular X5 bus from Bedford including late evening return journeys. www.cambridgebeerfestival.com

National Winter Ales Festival

Wed 18 to Sat 21 January at Sheridan Suite, Oldham Road, Manchester M40 8EA. Open Wed 5-10.30, Thu-Sat 12-10.30, admission Wed/Thu £2, Fri-Sat £3 before 4.30, then £4, CAMRA members £1 off, free on Thursday. About 300 real ales, bottled beers, cider and perry. No advance tickets – pay at the door. Concessions for students, pensioners and servicemen/women. First Bus services from city centre at a £1 flat fare.
www.alefestival.org.uk/winterales

Derby Winter Beer Festival

Thu 19 to Sat 21 January 2012 at the Roundhouse, Pride Park (next to rail stn). Open Thu 5-10.30, Fri-Sat 12-10.30, admission £2.50, free Fri until 3pm and to CAMRA members all times. Regular trains from Bedford and Luton, possibly with a change of train at Leicester.
www.derbycamra.org.uk

29th Luton Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 16 to Sat 18 February 2012 at Hightown Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde St, Luton LU2 0JD (rail stn 10 min). Open Thu 5-11, Fri-Sat 12-11. Admission: Thu £2.50; Fri £2.50 12-6, £3.50 6-11; Sat £2.50 12-6, £1.50 6-11; CAMRA members free except Fri eve £1.50. More than 100 real ales, plus cider, foreign bottled beers and country wines. Hot and cold food all sessions, no under 18s

admitted. Frequent trains from Bedford and Flitwick.
www.sbedscamra.org.uk

London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 7 to Fri 9 March at Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, WC1H 9AU (opposite St. Pancras Stn). Check website for details nearer opening date. Frequent trains from Bedford, Flitwick and Luton.
www.camranorthlondon.org.uk

Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival

Fri 9 to Sat 10 March at Hitchin Town Hall, Brand St, Hitchin SG5 1HX (bus stn 5 min). Check website for details nearer opening date. Regular 71/72 buses from Bedford including a late evening return journey. www.northhertscamra.org.uk

St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival

Fri 16 to Sat 17 March at Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots PE19 6HB. Check website for details nearer opening date. Regular X5 bus from Bedford including late evening return journeys.
www.huntscamra.org.uk



The Bear

High Street, Bedford

One guest ale always available, plus Green King IPA, Guinness, and a range of ciders and lagers.

A varied and eclectic mix of music on the juke box.

Friendly staff and customers.

Pool table, Football table, and a large yard with smoking area to the rear.

Opening Hours:

12 - 12 Monday to Thursday

12 - 1am Friday & Saturday

7 - 11.30pm Sunday



Over 200 beers

including foreign beers plus cider and perry

WEDNESDAY 18TH JANUARY

5.00PM-10.30PM

ADMISSION **£2**

(£1 Discount for Concessions, NUS, OAP's & Forces, all with ID)

THURSDAY 19TH JANUARY

12.00-10.30PM

ADMISSION **£2**

(£1 Discount for Concessions, NUS, OAP's & Forces, all with ID)

FRIDAY 20TH JANUARY

12.00-10.30PM

ADMISSION

Until 4.30pm **£3** After 4.30pm **£5**

SATURDAY 21ST JANUARY

12.00-10.30PM

LIVE MUSIC- EVENING

THE UNKNOWN

ADMISSION

All Day **£4**

**SATURDAY NIGHT FANCY
DRESS (OPTIONAL)**

THEME: "THE 80's"
GREAT PRIZES

**Joint sponsors
of this advert**



Organised by



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

In Association with

CityLife
co.uk

CO-SPONSORED BY

**Manchester
Evening News**

18th-21st JANUARY

SHERIDAN SUITE, OLDHAM ROAD, MANCHESTER M40 8EA

• 15 mins walk or 5 mins bus ride from the city centre - £1 fare with First Bus



- £1 Discount for CAMRA members except Thursday **FREE** all day
- Pay on the door (Corporate Entertainment available in advance)
- Food Available All Sessions

Over 18's only except Saturday afternoon when families most welcome

For further information visit:
www.alefestival.org.uk



29th Luton Beer & Cider Festival

Hightown Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde St, Luton LU2 0JD

Thurs 16th - Sat 18th February 2012

About 100 real ales plus real ciders and perries
plus imported bottled beers and country wines

Opening times and admission prices		CAMRA Members	Non-CAMRA
Thursday	5pm-11pm	Free	£2.50
Friday	Noon-6pm	Free	£2.50
Friday	6pm-11pm	£1.50	£3.50
Saturday	Noon-6pm	Free	£2.50
Saturday	6pm-11pm	Free	£1.50

Three Halls
Live music from 8.30pm
in the Theatre Hall
(Main hall is music-free at all times)
Increased capacity
Plenty of beer!



Brought to you by:
South Bedfordshire
CAMRA in association
with Active Luton

act5ive
LUTON



No change in admission prices since 2010!

No admission to persons aged under 18. Proof of age may be required.
We reserve the right to refuse admission. Last admission 10.30pm.
All details correct at time of publishing and may be subject to change.

Visit: www.lutonbeerfestival.com for latest details



Oakham ales

www.oakhamales.com

Tel 01733 370500

2 Maxwell Road, Woodston, Peterborough. PE2 7JB

Pub News

Oakley Arms, Harrold

Welcome to former landlord Martin Clarke, who returned to this attractive old village inn in September. Wells Eagle IPA and Young's London Gold are joined by a guest ale on the pumps. The bars are open all day every day, with traditional pub meals available Wednesday through Sunday evening. There are regular theme food days and a monthly quiz night. Call 01234 720068.



Guinea, Moggerhanger

Shaun and Lisa Wilson, familiar to locals as landlords of the Greyhound in Haynes, took over this popular pub in August, but you are more likely to see manager Tom Moore behind the bar. Wells Eagle and Young's Special are usually available on the pumps. Call 01767 640388.



Crown, Little Staughton

Kevin and Maria Foscett are now offering bottle-conditioned beers from Draycott Brewery in Buckden, Cambs, within North Beds CAMRA's

LocAle scheme. The pub also offers draught B&T Shefford Bitter, Black Sheep Best Bitter and a couple of changing guest ales on handpump. Call 01234 376260 or visit www.thecrownstaughton.com

Five Bells, Cople

Eamonn Dowling now offers Greene King Abbot Ale as well as IPA and XX Dark Mild, and hopes to expand the range again soon with a seasonal guest beer. Call new phone number 01234 831330 or visit www.fivebellscope.com.



Victoria Arms

Swan Hotel, Bedford

Belated recognition of the Swan (next to Bedford Town Bridge) for re-introducing real ale to the front bar several months ago, with one of the new-style Wells Bombardier handpumps. Many readers may have visited the Swan's innovative Beer & Food Festival at the beginning of November. We hope to see many more.

www.bedfordswanhotel.co.uk

Flower Pot, Tavistock Street, Bedford

Apologies for giving an old phone number in our last issue – the correct number is 01234 296732.

Victoria Arms, Wilden

Good news from the Vic, which has reopened as a privately owned free house after refurbishment. New landlord Tony Lachacz offers Greene King IPA, Abbot and one or two guest ales. Doors close between 3 and 5 from Monday to Thursday, otherwise the pub is open all day with a late finish on Friday and Saturday. Traditional pub lunches are served daily, with evening meals every day except Sunday. Call 01234 772437.

Pubs still closed

Unfortunately, the news elsewhere is not so good. In recent weeks we have lost the Magpie in Harrold, likely to be converted to a private house, the Swan at Elstow with a similar likely fate, and the Paddington in Bedford. Opposition to replacing the former Bird in Hand in Brickhill, Bedford, with a Tesco Express earned good coverage in the local press, but it seems unlikely that locals will get their pub back. Meanwhile the move to convert the Royal Oak in Carlton to housing has gone to appeal after a well organised local campaign to save it helped persuade local planners to refuse permission. However, it can be a long haul even when the planning process has spoken, with the Five Bells in Riseley still closed after a vigorous local campaign and refusal of planning permission upheld at appeal.



Your one stop shop for the hire of 9gl and 12gl Barrel stillage, cooling, taps, bar units and hand pumps.

Photos and a very competitive price list available on the web site - www.beerfestivalequipment.co.uk

Contact:

john@beerfestivalequipment.co.uk

Tel: 07770 938300

Based near Bicester

THE CHEQUERS

71 Main Road, Little Gransden
Tel: 01767 677348

Bob and Wendy Mitchell invite you to try their unique unspoilt village local with its own special atmosphere

Home of Son of Sid Microbrewery



CAMRA East Anglian Pub of the Year 2008

DRINK MORE LOCALLY BREWED BEER



B&T BREWERY Ltd



B&T SHEFFORD ALES



The



Wellington Arms

40 Wellington Street, Bedford

BEDFORDSHIRE PUB OF THE YEAR 2008

01234 308033

Why not try our other award winning pubs:

The Albion

36 Dunstable Street, Ampthill

The Elm Tree

Orchard Street, Cambridge
01223 502632

The Globe

43 Winfield Road,
Dunstable
LU6 1LS
01582 512300



The Brewery Tap

14 Northbridge Street, Shefford
01462 628448

Silverstone Races Ahead!

On 27th October a minibus-load of North Beds CAMRA members set out on the annual "thank you for helping at the Beer Festival" brewery visit. This year we were headed for the Silverstone Brewery in Northants – which turned out to be a very small building on a farm. A gravity-fed 7.5 barrel brewery has been shoehorned in. The equipment mainly came second-



hand from a brewery in Spalding, but the fermenters were former dairy tanks from a farm, with warm water replacing the cooling ice in their jackets.

We were provided with Pitstop (3.8% abv), a session bitter which makes up 65% of production, intended to taste somewhere in between GK IPA and Black Sheep. Richard Field, the MD, then introduced Pauline Bacon, the sales director, and



Daniel Smith, the brewer and sole fulltime employee. Richard is MD of Weddell Swift, a meat products company. Pauline is licensee of the Bull & Butcher at Akeley – ironically, a tied Fuller's house, so she can't sell Silverstone beers there – but in a previous life had worked in sales for the Federation Brewery, in particular representing it to its most famous customer, the Houses of Parliament. Our second sample was Pole Position, a 4.1% bitter, a further brew of which was in

progress. Both this and Pitstop are traditional English bitters made with Maris Otter malt and Kentish Fuggles and Goldings hops. Silverstone doesn't make many beers, preferring to build up consumer support for their two regular products, but they do make a premium bitter, Chequered Flag (4.5%), quite frequently. The main constraint on production is their stock of casks; at busy times they have to hire more in.

They have been in production for three years, and with both Richard and Pauline due to retire from their day jobs next year, are looking to expand. But first they will need to find larger premises near Silverstone – the name is their greatest asset, and they don't want to move far from the motor-racing circuit, which brings them a lot of trade. Their normal sale is 35 firkins a week, but on British Grand Prix weekend they sold 155! To achieve that they had to stockpile beer over several weeks, storing casks in various farmers' fridges.



After the tour we reboarded the bus for the seven-mile ride to Pauline's pub near Buckingham, the area where all the brewery people actually live. The Bull and Butcher is a classic village pub, complete with exposed oak beams and an open fire in the grate, and provided us with an excellent lasagne supper, washed down with a couple of pints of (in my case) Fuller's Chiswick Bitter. London Pride was also available. Persuading CAMRA members to leave this haven for the trip home wasn't easy!

Fytton Rowland



Bedford's Premier Homebrew Centre

- comprehensive range of bitters
- wide selection of lagers
- excellent prices
- free advice and a happy smiling face

HELPLINE
01234 353856

15 Union Street, Bedford MK40 2SF

Opening Hours:

Tuesday to Saturday 9.30am to 5pm
Bank Holiday Saturdays 9.30am to 2pm



Tony and his staff look forward to
welcoming you to the

THREE CUPS

*5 well kept and conditioned real ales always
available, including a varying range of guest beers.*

A traditionally run pub with a
genuinely warm welcome.

A range of food available every Lunchtime plus
a Cheeseboard available all day everyday.

Quiz Night Every Tuesday

Jazz Jam on the 1st Wednesday of the month.

Free WiFi available.

The original "Village Pub in Town"

45 Newnham Street, Bedford

01234 352153

*Lovely
courtyard
garden*



*Annual Beer
and Cider
Festival*

THE DEVONSHIRE ARMS

A local community pub in the Castle
Road area of Bedford with
a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Serving a fine range of Quality
Cask Ales

- Eagle IPA, Young's London
Gold, Directors and Guest Ales.

Free Wi-Fi available

32 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TB Tel: 01234 359329
www.devonshirearmsbedford.co.uk

Great real ales at your local!



Visit www.hooky.co.uk to find your
nearest Hook Norton pub



Cambridge Trip September 2011



I got to the Welly at 6.50, just enough time for a rehydrating half before getting the minibus. Which left on time and soon arrived in Cambridge at the...

Hopbine – newly refurbished and reopened, according to the local CAMRA magazine, *Ale*. It has attractive decor, including stained glass over the bar and brass elephant heads supporting a bar rail. Four handpumps were all in use, and it takes part in LocAle. Food was available here, and a very good thing too - I had a sticky toffee pudding - well, I needed the carbohydrates; other people's burger and chips also looked excellent. Then there was a short walk to the...

Elm Tree – a Charles Wells pub! But leased by B&T, serving B&T, W&Y and guest ales. It's in a narrow end-terrace site, and was the most crowded of the pubs we visited, leading to a good but loud atmosphere. Around eight hand pumps, and lots of photos and memorabilia on the walls. A slightly gothic crowd, and lots of students. After this, we piled into the bus for a slightly longer trip to the...

Devonshire Arms – a mid-terrace Milton Brewery pub with an alley along one side. Eight handpumps, of which two were non-Milton beers, but we all stuck to the Milton. I had two which were both new to me: Tiki and Icarus. Tiki is a very pale, very aromatic IPA, and Icarus another

pale bitter but not nearly so hoppy. The front bar had bare floorboards and the rear room was larger, with seating backed in light-coloured pine, and a wood burning stove (not in use, which was good since a couple of people sat on it). Finally, we took another short walk to the...

Cambridge Blue – another mid-terrace. It was infested with bicycles, including one half-way across the door making entrance and exit a bit hazardous. Six hand pumps, and a range of European beers on draught, mostly German and Belgian. Large selection of bottled beers as well. Three kinds of pickled eggs (I did not try any). This was also the largest pub of the four, thanks to a modern extension and a pub garden with umbrellas and heat lamps.



[Editor's note: on 23 November, the BBC Radio 4 Today programme featured the Cambridge Blue as its choice of the ideal English pub!]

Favourite for food and a beer: Hopbine. Favourite for beer and a chat: Devonshire Arms (by a whisker). Best social atmosphere: Elm Tree. Broadest range of beers: Cambridge Blue. But I'll happily try any of them again!

John Rowland

R.I.P the Sow and Pigs

One of the Good Beer Guide deletions owing to closure of the pub noted in the October issue of CAMRA's national newspaper *What's Brewing* was the Sow and Pigs in Toddington.

An especially sad closure this, as the Sow and Pigs was the pub where Bedfordshire CAMRA (just one branch for the whole county then) was originally founded. Toddington has lost two of its seven real ale pubs in recent months. Let's hope the Sow and Pigs reopens under different ownership.

Brewery Trips By Bike

We recently rented a cottage in Flixton, Suffolk, and explored the local area by bike, discovering the brewery at St. Peter's Hall and three micro-breweries in nearby villages.



St. Peter's Hall produced its first brew in June 1996. It has a capacity of 300 barrels per week, and produces 35,000 bottles per week. Most of the beer produced is bottled. Their distinctive oval bottle is a copy of one dating from about 1770 produced for Thomas Gerrard, an innkeeper with a tidewater inn on the Delaware River in the USA. St. Peter's beers are brewed using local Suffolk malts and, in the main, Kentish hops, although they also use hops from New Zealand. The water is drawn from their own deep source within the chalk layer 100 metres below. They brew traditional beers – bitters, porters, stouts – as well as some more unusual beers, such as fruit beers and wheat beers. The beers have won numerous prizes in national and international competitions.

After the tour we tasted their Best Bitter (3.7%), Organic Ale (4.5%), IPA (5.5%), Old Style Porter (5.1%) and Cream Stout (6.5%). It's just as well we were cycling. We returned the next day in the car to pick up some bottles to take home, including Golden Ale (4.7%) and Ruby Red (4.3%). Because of their oval shaped bottle, the labelling machine sometimes makes a hash of labels. These wonky labelled bottles are available in the brewery shop at a 50% discount, so we bought a third case.

St. Peter's Brewery has only one pub – the Jerusalem Tavern in Clerkenwell – which they restored in 1996. It is named after the Priory of

St. John of Jerusalem, founded in 1140, and has close links with Samuel Johnson, William Hogarth, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick and Handel.

The Waveney Brewery at The Queens Head, Earsham, is a three-barrel microbrewery regularly producing a bitter and a mild and occasional seasonal beers. When we were there they had Lightweight (3.9%), a hoppy session bitter, East Coast Mild (3.8%) and a plum beer, Rocky Myrobalan (4.3%). Although they didn't do food when we visited, the landlord's wife took pity on us and provided us with some very welcome beef sandwiches.

Just by chance, a bike ride later in the week took us near the pub, so of course we went in again.

The Green Dragon, Bungay, is an eight-barrel microbrewery, which started up in 1991. I tried their Chaucer (3.6%), a pale session bitter and Bridge Street (4.5%), a chestnut chocolatey/malty bitter. Gold (4.4%) had just been taken off but they also had Strong Mild (5.5%) on tap. Although we had turned up unannounced, the brewer was quite happy to take us across the yard to show us round the brewery.

Grain Brewery, Alburgh, is currently a five-barrel micro-brewery, but they have plans to expand to 20-barrel capacity. Again we were made welcome, and the brewer, once he finished checking the gravity of his current brew, happily showed us around. I tried their Best Bitter (4.2%), an amber malty beer (a bit sweet for my taste) and Harvest Moon (4.5%), a pale hoppy beer with a hint of citrus. They have one brewery tap, The Plough in Norwich, for which they brew Tap Room Bitter (3.5%), a pale session bitter. They also do Oak (3.8%), a light amber beer which is a three-year CAMRA Norwich Beer Festival award winner.

So glad we took the bikes!

Terry Ferguson



Letter to the Editor

As ex-chair of North Beds CAMRA, I have been asked by several members why I stepped down from the Branch Chair, leaving it vacant. First, it is beneficial to the branch to change the chairperson on a regular basis, allowing new thoughts to help run the branch. I had for the last two years tried to find a vice-chair to take over, but as no-one was forthcoming I felt the only way forward was to force the issue. This allows me to commit more time to my other charitable and social causes. Another factor in my decision was that evening bus services outside Bedford Borough have been cut, and to attend meetings this I have to drive, arrange transport home, or pay for a taxi. On this subject, to attract the large number of members who live outside Bedford, the branch should consider holding meetings at times suitable for these members, by alternating venues, by changing times of day, or by meeting at weekends. If someone were to come forward at the 2012 AGM to become chair, I would be prepared to be the vice-chair.

I enjoyed my time as chair, which gave me an insight into the workings of CAMRA by representing the branch at regional meetings and county liaison meetings, thus getting to know CAMRA officials and other branch volunteers. Helping local brewers and getting to know the many different characters involved was particularly rewarding for me. I have made many friends by doing this work, which takes up a few hours each week. Many thanks to all who have helped me during this time. I am sure that we will regularly meet up.

I would like to see a letter page a regular feature in the Firkin, so if you have any thoughts on my comments or on any other subject, write to the Editor. It is your branch, and the officers and committee are always glad of any constructive comments from members.

Don Allan
(ex-Chairman, North Beds CAMRA)

(Editor's note – Peter Argyle has now become Interim Chairman, but we are still looking for a member to take over the chair for the next few years)

The Firkin

Published every three months by the North Bedfordshire Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. The Firkin is produced and distributed by volunteers to most pubs and clubs in Bedfordshire north of a line joining the M1, Clophill, Shefford and Tempsford. We welcome correspondence and any relevant features for publication. Views expressed here may not be those of the Editor, the Campaign for Real Ale, or its North Bedfordshire Branch.

Items for publication in the next issue should reach the Editor by the date at the foot of this page.

Edited by Fytton Rowland
73 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TA Tel 01234 303221
firkin@northbedscamra.org.uk
Printed by Portland Print, Kettering
Design and Layout by Tamoko Design Tel 0845 838 7581
©Campaign for Real Ale 2011

Trading Standards

If you complain to a licensee about short measure, lack of a visible price list or a misleading product promotion and do not get a satisfactory response, call Consumer Direct on 08454 040506, or contact an adviser through the website at www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

Contact us

Interim Chairman and Pubs Officer

Peter Argyle – 01234 822698
chairman@northbedscamra.org.uk
pubs@northbedscamra.org.uk

Newsletter and Secretary

Fytton Rowland – 01234 303221
secretary@northbedscamra.org.uk
firkin@northbedscamra.org.uk

Socials

Gary Mudd – 01234 741871 –
socials@northbedscamra.org.uk

Finance

Mike Benyon – treasurer@northbedscamra.org.uk

Membership

Neil Ratnett – 01234 344388
membership@northbedscamra.org.uk

Website

Alan Hawkins
webmaster@northbedscamra.org.uk

Cider Representative

John Cowell
ciderrep@northbedscamra.org.uk





THE 2ND HENLOW CIDER & COUNTRY WINE FESTIVAL

ENGINEERS ARMS, HIGH STREET, HENLOW, BEDS.
www.engineersarms.co.uk

**OVER 50 CIDERS AND PERRYS
& 12 COUNTRY WINES & MEADS
THURS 16TH FEB - SUN 19TH FEB 2012**

OPEN ALL DAY, EVERY DAY

**PLOUGHMANS SERVED THROUGHOUT THE DAY,
WITH THE BEST OF ENGLISH CHEESES & PORK PIES**

FOR FURTHER DETAILS CALL KEVIN OR CLAIRE ON 01462 812284

NEAREST TRAIN STATION:- ARLESEY (KINGS X - PETERBOROUGH)



**Live Premier League
Football & Rugby in HD**

SKY SPORTS HD ESPN HD

2 SCREENS, 2 GREAT GAMES IN HD AT ONCE!

*We are in the
Good Beer Guide
2011*



THE POLHILL ARMS

*Cask Ale
is our Speciality*

**Greene King IPA
Old Speckled Hen
Changing Guest Beers**

Great British Pub Food Served

**Large Family Play Garden
& Car Park**

T: 01234 771398

W: www.polhillarms.co.uk

Wilden Road, Renhold, Bedford, MK41 0JP

August Pub Walk 2011

On Thursday 11th August a group set out on a walk round a few Bedford town pubs. The idea was to assess the quality of some pubs that we visit less regularly, and to check on others mid-season.

We started at the Flower Pot. This pub is now under new management. We felt that the beer quality needed a little more TLC on this occasion. We moved on to the Bear, a pleasant local in the High Street. The beer was good, with Greene King IPA and Bateman's Autumn Leaf both very drinkable. The next stop was the Hobgoblin, recently refurbished and re-



Above: Flower Pot Right: The Bear

opened. Several ales from the Marston's/Refresh stable were on sale, but we thought that they were too warm.

Then to the Rose, which recently reintroduced real ale. Unfortunately they were cleaning the lines and only had B&T Dragonslayer on, so we moved on quickly to the Embankment. This was very busy with its excellent riverside setting and modern bar and restaurant. Most of the Wells and Young's



Hobgoblin

beers were o.k., but the Eagle IPA was not as good as the others. It is good that a gastropub like this with its focus on dining and wines sells real ale, but it should ensure that all the beers are up to the same standard.

We finished the evening at the Devonshire Arms where the licensees, Martin & Naomi, have created a wonderful, friendly local buzzing with conversation and excellently kept beers. Of the Wells & Young's range, Eagle IPA, Young's Gold and Courage Directors are the regular offerings, and a guest ale can also be tried..

I have since revisited the Rose and found their beers to be very acceptable. I have not yet got back to the others, but i would appreciate if anyone would give us some feedback if they visit. The Hobgoblin told us that they were awaiting a new cooler, so it would be nice to know if the beer temperature has improved.

Gary Mudd



CAMRA Members' Weekend & AGM

30th March - 1st April 2012, Torquay
Closing date for pre-registration via www.camra.org.uk is Thursday 1st March 2012.

The 2012 Members' Weekend and AGM will take place at the Riviera Centre in Torquay. There are a large number of good quality pubs in Torquay and the surrounding area, including Good Beer Guide pub, Hole in the Wall. The Weekend is where our members discuss our future policy and direction, and offers you the opportunity to socialise with friends, visit recommended pubs and go on organised trips.

PIG n FALCON New St St. Neots

Live Music
Wed, Fri +
Sat

14 + Real Ales
& Ciders
From £2.20 a Pint



BREWS TO DATE

701

Huntingdonshire CAMRA
Most Improved
Pub of the year
2010

20 Pig's Winter
Beer Festival
Ales & Ciders
25th - 30th Jan

Pig's Easter
Beer Festival
30 Ales &
Ciders
4th - 11th April

Pig's May
Cider Fest
12 Real Ales
+ 12 Real Ciders
Every Day
2nd - 9th May

Tel 07951 785678 - WWW.PIGNFALCON.CO.UK - PE19 1AE

THE AWARD WINNING TASTE OF LEICESTERSHIRE

Gold Medallist The Brewing
Industry International Award 2011*

Gold Medallist The British Bottlers'
Institute Competition 2011**



WWW.EVERARDS.CO.UK

*International Keg Ale Competition, Class 2 (ABV range 3.8%-4.7%)

** Category 'Ales 4.0-4.9% ABV'

So what exactly does a Festival Organiser do?

Well that's it for another year! Finally after the end of the 34th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival, I have emerged from the dream-like state that working for a week at the festival induced, blinking owl-like back into the real world of work and normal life.

The weeks leading up to the festival seemed full of the constant ebb and flow of emails and almost hourly checking of the Schedule of Actions. Even whilst on holiday I found myself searching for free wi-fi so that I could check what was going on. But as usual, members of the organising committee had everything under control. Of that I never had any doubts.

The banner over Silver Street was one tangible sign that it was going to take place. I wonder how many people actually look at it and think "that sounds like a good idea, maybe I will go along and see what's going on." I certainly found myself thinking that – before the realisation kicked in – I should know exactly what's going on, that's the role of the organiser.

On Sunday 2 October I found myself leaping out of bed (well that might be a slight exaggeration) and starting skipping my way to the Corn Exchange. I then had to unskip my way back home when I realised I had forgotten vital supplies. If I had turned up without tea bags, coffee, sugar, kettle, cups, spoons and a liberal supply of biscuits, I would have had a riot before even starting.

The transformation of the hall was in the early stages when I arrived. For the rest of the day, a constant stream of equipment was brought into the Corn Exchange. After the carpet and black plastic were put down the important task of putting up the stillage took place. All the scaffolding components were laid out roughly in the right position, just waiting to be put together. Thanks to Tim and helpers, this was done in a very short time. And do you know that so much fun was had

that it was decided to do it all over again. Only the second time round, we included the bits that had been left lying on the floor, looking very lost. The first small crisis was over and I was still the organiser. I hadn't been unceremoniously dragged from the Corn Exchange, never to darken the door again.

Over the next couple of days, the stillage gradually filled up with barrels – kils and firkins – I now know the difference, one is bigger than the other. The cider bar had lots of interestingly named ciders and perries, the shop was filled with lots of books, t-shirts and prizes for the tombola. And in the office the mystery that is badge production was revealed to the new office manager. The foreign beer bar was overflowing with – well lots of foreign beer. We had something that looked exactly like a beer festival, so that was reassuring.

For those of you who are wondering about the membership stand, no, it wasn't put up without the use of swear words. Although there is a new advertising campaign, the stand design is not new. This time it came with lights and despite the combined mental efforts of the organiser, office manager, H&S manager and ex-organiser to work out the method of attachment, I was forced to make an executive decision – we will have a light-free stand. The responsibility is not light! For the rest of the week, it was a constant struggle to keep the display intact, and the stand won!

There was another minor panic when the glasses were delivered later than in previous years and in two tranches. Luckily when they did arrive the consensus of opinion was that the logo looked excellent. Thanks again to Colin Lilley, the designer. After my suggestion that we try offering one-third pints was accepted by the committee, it was satisfying to see the glasses with the requisite markings.

Continued on page 20 >

Lunchtime on Wednesday and there are three hours to go. I did wonder where the cask labels were at that point but I didn't need to worry, a last-minute team effort made sure that the labels were put on, even on the right casks. A bit of excitement for the Wednesday, the BBC wanted to come and film at the festival. Before I could apply for my Equity card it turned out they were filming for a documentary about short measures – if you pay for a pint then that is what you should get. Then it was 3 p.m. and opening time – we opened the doors and in poured the hordes of thirsty guests for the Trade and Press Preview. Wednesday evening saw the re-appearance of Doctor Busker – the festival wouldn't be the same without their particular brand of entertainment and the familiar periodic refrain of 'More Beer, More Beer....'

For the next four days the hall was filled with staff filling glasses with beer and cider and customers doing their best to empty them before deciding what the next taste sensation would be. I was there every evening in order to carry out the ultimate organiser duty – control of the PA system to announce "Last Orders" and "Time". There are some who suggested that I could achieve the same effect without the need of a microphone – they won't be making that suggestion again!

Friday night was extremely busy. The noise of people enjoying themselves is very satisfying. There are times when there is very little room to move, but that doesn't deter people from drinking lots of beer and cider. I tour round the hall checking out how everyone is doing, trying to look important. Everyone else has a proper job, I feel a bit of a fraud. I consoled myself by trying beers with unusual names and keeping staff on the glasses counter from getting too thirsty. Well just my husband, Neil, the Glasses Manager, otherwise I won't hear the last of just how few beers he managed to try.

All too soon and it's Saturday and the evening is filled with some good music from Lost 4 Words. And then it is 11p.m. and I call "Time" for the last time. As soon as the last customers had been persuaded to drink up and leave, there was a surge

of activity to start on the process of dismantling things like the counters. As we have to have the Corn Exchange completely clear by the end of Sunday, it makes sense to get as much done on Saturday as possible.

Around midnight the catering staff appeared with lots of edible goodies. This gave us the opportunity to chat properly and take stock of the week's events. On a Saturday night lots of people would have either been tucked up in bed at that time or staggering round the pubs and clubs of Bedford, but instead we discussed the fun we'd had this year and how we couldn't wait for next year. The chance to give up the normal routine of working, eating, sleeping properly and generally having a life is one that shouldn't be missed. Having got to bed at about 1.30 a.m. on Sunday morning, I dragged myself out of bed after what seemed like minutes of sleep and went back to experience the hard work that is needed to remove all traces of the 34th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival. I even got the chance to lug around scaffolding poles and barrels. Now there's something to add to my CV.

I am so grateful to everyone who helped make the Festival a success. I would love to mention everyone by name but don't have the room. What is quite evident is the enormous amount of staggeringly hard work everyone puts in. And because of that, my job was made much easier. I enjoyed myself enormously and it seems that others did as well, judging by the comments. One enduring memory I have is the nightly orange tidal wave of stewards slowly making their way down the hall, gently persuading the stragglers that they really did want to go home – thanks guys!

Would I volunteer again ... YES/NO ... please circle the appropriate answer.

Lynne Ratnett

34th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival Organiser

Late Pub News

Old Mill, Newton Blossomville

This pub just outside our area now serves food and is open for bed & breakfast. It's a free house, serving Black Sheep Bitter plus rotating guests. The new phone number is 01234 881273.



Join CAMRA Today

Complete the Direct Debit form below and you will receive 15 months membership for the price of 12 and a fantastic discount on your membership subscription.

Alternatively you can send a cheque payable to CAMRA Ltd with your completed form, visit www.camra.org.uk/joinus or call 01727 867201. All forms should be addressed to Membership Department, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 4LW.

Your Details

Title _____ Surname _____

Forename(s) _____

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Email address _____

Tel No(s) _____

Partner's Details (if Joint Membership)

Title _____ Surname _____

Forename(s) _____

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) _____

	Direct Debit	Non DD
Single Membership (UK & EU)	£20 <input type="checkbox"/>	£22 <input type="checkbox"/>

Joint Membership (Partner at the same address)	£25 <input type="checkbox"/>	£27 <input type="checkbox"/>
--	------------------------------	------------------------------

For Young Member and concessionary rates please visit www.camra.org.uk or call **01727 867201**.

I wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association

I enclose a cheque for _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Applications will be processed within 21 days

12/10

**Campaigning for Pub Goers
& Beer Drinkers**

**Enjoying Real Ale
& Pubs**

Join CAMRA today – www.camra.org.uk/joinus



**Instruction to your Bank or
Building Society to pay by Direct Debit**
Please fill in the whole form using a ball point pen and send to:
Campaign for Real Ale Ltd, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4LW



**This Guarantee should be detached
and retained by the payer.**

The Direct Debit Guarantee

- This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay by Direct Debits.
- If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request.
- If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit by The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society.
- If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd asks you to.
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society Service User Number

To the Manager Bank or Building Society

Address _____

Postcode _____

Name(s) of Account Holder

Branch Sort Code

Bank or Building Society Account Number

Reference

9 2 6 1 2 9

FOR CAMRA OFFICIAL USE ONLY

This is not part of the instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Membership Number _____

Name _____

Postcode _____

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Campaign For Real Ale Limited Direct Debits from the account detailed on this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Campaign For Real Ale Limited and, if so will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s) _____

Date _____

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

Branch Diary



CAMRA North Beds Branch business meetings are normally held on the third Thursday of alternate months, e.g. January and March. Social and campaigning events are usually held on the second Thursday of each month.

Guests are welcome at social events, but members have priority on brewery visits. For latest information check *What's Brewing*, or visit the branch website at www.northbedscamra.org.uk

Unless otherwise stated, for all events further details can be obtained from, and bookings made with, Gary Mudd on 01234 741871 or e-mail socials@northbedscamra.org.uk

DECEMBER

Thursday 15 – Branch Christmas Social

At the Devonshire Arms, Dudley Street, Bedford, at 7.30 for 8.00 p.m. Book with Gary Mudd; payment of £5 (for the food) will be required.

JANUARY

Thursday 12 – Branch Minibus Tour to Rural North Beds Pubs

Minibus will leave the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford, at 7 p.m.

Thursday 19 – Branch meeting

Business Meeting at the Three Cups, Newnham Street, Bedford at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only. The meeting will commence with the election of the Branch Chairman.

Thursday 26 – Walking tour of Bedford Town Pubs

To be confirmed – Leaving from the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford at 7 p.m.

FEBRUARY

Thursday 2 – Branch Minibus Tour to Rural Pubs South of Bedford

Minibus will leave the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford, at 7 p.m.

Thursday 9 – Branch meeting

Additional Business Meeting at the Three Cups, Newnham Street, Bedford, 8 p.m.
CAMRA members only

Friday 17 – Branch Visit to Luton Beer Festival

To be confirmed – Probably travelling by train from Bedford and Flitwick stations.

MARCH

Monday 5 – First Meeting of the Committee to Organise the Bedford Beer and Cider Festival for 2012

To be confirmed – Details to be announced.

Thursday 8 – Branch Visit to St Neots Beer Festival

To be confirmed – Probably travelling by X5 coach from Bedford Bus Station.

Thursday 15 – Branch meeting

Business Meeting at the Three Cups, Newnham Street, Bedford, 8 p.m. CAMRA members only

APRIL

Thursday 12 – Branch Visit to Tring Brewery

Details to be announced.

Good Beer Guide 2012

The new edition of Britain's best-selling, independent guide to good beer and good pubs is on sale. Now in its 39th year, the Good Beer Guide is fully revised and updated, with details of more than 4,500 pubs across the country serving the best real ale.

From country inns to urban style bars and backstreet boozers, selected and reviewed every year by over 125,000 CAMRA members, this is your definitive guide to finding the perfect pint. Pubs cannot buy their way into this guide, they simply serve consistently good beer. Edited by Roger Protz. With the Good Beer Guide to hand, you're never far from a decent pint!

Available from all good bookshops or direct from CAMRA: phone 01727 867201 or visit www.camra.org.uk/shop. Price £12.99, CAMRA members £10, plus P&P. Also available as e-book in Kindle format and widely compatible ePub app for tablets and smart phones.

PENSIONS... **AAARRGH!!** **WHAT DO I DO?** **HAVE ANOTHER BEER!**

BUT (n it's a big but)...

The hangover of the beer will go tomorrow.
The hangover of not addressing your pension could be with you for
10, 20, 30 years... **literally to the day you die!**

Don't have a cloudy view.
Don't be gutted about your final income.
Don't get pension droop!

You can start to get rid of this hangover simply with an hour of clear,
independent advice. TAKE IT! It could mean
10, 20, 30 years of increased income....
that's no small beer! **Cheers!**



Alistair Cowie
Independent Financial Adviser
45/47 Mill Street, Bedford, MK40 3EU
01234 361100 / 07961 401997 / acowie@hiaint.com

HIA INTERNATIONAL (FINANCIAL SERVICES) LTD IS AUTHORISED
AND REGULATED BY THE FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

BORN AND BREWED IN BEDFORD

Official Beer of
BEDFORD
BLUES



Brewed in the heart of Bedford with the finest Red Tractor accredited malted barley and natural mineral water from our well, sunk by Charles Wells himself in 1904.

Wells Eagle guarantees a quality pint, every time.

Come and visit Eagle's nest!

To arrange a brewery tour, please contact
01234 272766 and ask for the Brewery
Tour Representative.



www.facebook.com/eaglebeer

BEDFORD'S BEER FOR THE BEDFORD BLUES

