

Cricketers score a Winning Try

North Beds CAMRA's Pub of the Year



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Chairman's Corner



As my election as chairman was confirmed at a branch meeting in January, I will continue in office until our AGM in July. Many thanks to local members for their confidence in me to lead our local campaigning.

January and February are usually quiet months for the pub trade after a busy Christmas and New Year, but they are a busy time for CAMRA branches, with annual pub statistics to compile, an annual prices survey to complete and selection of the best local real ale pubs for the next Good Beer Guide. Nominating good pubs for the Guide is in truth recognising the publicans who keep the best real ale, because it is the skill and hard graft of those who keep the pubs and look after the beer that counts.

The nicest job of all for CAMRA members is awarding our Pub of the Year title, and for me as chairman to present the awards to the deserving licensees. This year we awarded Pub of the Year to the Cricketers Arms and a Most Improved Pub award to the Devonshire Arms, both in Bedford.

Real ale at the Devvy was already good enough to make it a Good Beer Guide entry for some years before the current tenants arrived, but they have made a significant mark on the atmosphere of the pub. Congratulations to the hard-working partners who have earned both awards..

Winter months can also be one of the worst times of year for pubs to close, with the doors locked and windows boarded almost as soon as the regulars have drunk in the New Year. However, Pub News in this issue tells of some welcome reopenings. But the pub trade is still under huge pressure from taxation, pub owners taking an excessive share of the income, and of course the current state of the economy, I hope I won't have to bemoan the loss of too many pubs in this Corner as the year goes on.

This issue includes features on LocAle and cider. We hope these will prove to be popular campaigns, with more cider and more local ales in our pubs by the end of 2012. Cheers!

Peter Argyle
Branch Chairman

Use the Bedfordshire Pub Guide!

CAMRA's online guide to Bedfordshire pubs is your guide to real ale pubs in the county. All pubs, hotel bars and sports ground bars open to the public in the county are listed, although full details and a photo are normally included only where real ale is sold. You can search the guide by town, village, postcode, pub name, or for those offering real cider. You can download details to plan visits or a local pub crawl. You can even compile and print out your own personal guide to a whole town or village.

And it's all free of charge!

You can also help us keep the guide up to date, whether you are a licensee, a pub regular or an

occasional visitor. Send your amendments to pubsofficer@northbedscamra.org.uk



www.bedspubs.org.uk

Cricketers Arms wins Pub of the Year

CAMRA's North Bedfordshire Branch Pub of the Year 2012 is the Cricketers Arms, Goldington Road, Bedford.

The Cricketers Arms, just outside the town centre near the Bedford Blues ground, has been a popular local for many years, especially among rugby fans. Licensees Paul Davis and Stephanie Law have also made the pub a favourite watering hole for real ale drinkers. It is a great example of how much committed, hard-working publicans can make of a modest pub, even a pub leased from Punch Taverns, one of the often criticised national pub chains.

The Cricketers opens every day at 5pm (Sunday 7pm), but also from 12 noon on Blues' home match days, or for Six Nations matches when the games are usually featured on TV. This is very much a rugby supporters' pub, but what would you expect of one run by a Welshman in exile? Food is no longer served, but there is Adnams Bitter and a clutch of guest real ales on the handpumps, often including beers from local microbreweries. The Cricketers was one of the first pubs in Bedford to join CAMRA's LocAle scheme for promoting locally brewed beers.

This is the second time Paul and Stephanie have earned CAMRA's local Pub of the Year title – the first was in 2007 – for consistent attention to beer quality and for running a popular, welcoming pub. The Cricketers is also enjoying its seventh successive appearance in CAMRA's best-selling, annual Good Beer Guide, a distinction shared by only 50 Bedfordshire pubs each year. But Pub of the Year is a title awarded to only one pub each year, the one that local CAMRA members think deserves it most. You cannot buy CAMRA awards – they are given only to the best pubs and to the hard-working people who run them.

The Cricketers Arms will now compete with the winners of similar awards in CAMRA's South and East Bedfordshire branches for the title of Bedfordshire Pub of the Year 2012. South Beds CAMRA has chosen the Albion in Amptill, a pub owned by Everards of Leicester but managed by the B&T



Brewery, but the East Beds CAMRA winner had not been confirmed as the Firkin went to press.

The Bedfordshire county winner will then be up against the best in the region to become the top pub of East Anglia. Last year the Engineers Arms in Henlow took the Bedfordshire title, followed by the East Anglia title, before ending up as one of the three losing finalists for the national Pub of the Year title. So CAMRA members have judged it one of the top four pubs in the whole country.

Devvie wins Most Improved Pub

Local CAMRA members have also awarded a Most Improved Pub title to the Devonshire Arms in Dudley Street, Bedford, a popular community pub close to the Embankment and Russell Park. Although the "Devvie" was already among the selected few listed in the Good Beer Guide when they took over in 2010, partners Martin Bartlett and Naomi Stanford have made big improvements and have attracted new customers from a wider area. Like the Cricketers Arms, the Devvie does not normally offer food, but there is always a choice of Wells & Young's and changing guest beers served in top condition.

North Bedfordshire CAMRA's Chairman, Peter Argyle, has recently presented framed certificates to both pubs. Congratulations to both of them!

Wells & Young's gets Younger...

...and McEwan. Bedford's big brewery has acquired the two historic Scottish beer brands from Heineken. They follow the Courage brand from the multinational to the ownership of the local family-owned brewer.

Scots need not fear, however; beer for the Scottish market will still be made at the Caledonian Brewery in Edinburgh, along with other brands such as Deuchars. No real ale has been produced in the last six years with the McEwan's and Younger's names on it. The Bedford production for the English and overseas markets will be of bottled, canned and keg beers. Already the Havelock Street packaging department are filling bottles and cans with Edinburgh-brewed beer, and local production of McEwan's Lager and pasteurised ales for keg, can and bottle has started. No-one wants Scottish customers to feel that their traditional beers are carrying false colours, however, so any reintroduced cask ales will be produced exclusively in Edinburgh.

The deal covers McEwan's 60/-, 70/- and 80/-, Export, Champion (in bottle), and Lager, and Younger's Tartan Special, Scotch Bitter and Best, together with some ales not currently made, such as 1749, XPA and No. 3. Both 1749 and No. 3 in cask form reappeared unexpectedly in the north-east of England last year – this is believed to have been a test-marketing exercise before the W&Y takeover was announced. These historic brands have been rescued from Heineken's neglect. And Wells & Young's have hinted that some historic cask ales may appear as seasonals soon.

A New Real Ale Pub

Well, a bar, anyway. The Modello Bar (formerly New York, New York) in St Peter's Street, Bedford, is now selling Fuller's ESB and St Austell Tribute regularly, though we haven't yet tried them out.

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, Claphill, 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.

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Pub News

Swan, Cranfield

Welcome to Nigel Mason and Lorraine Robertson, who recently arrived from Devon to take over this prominent Greene King pub in the village centre. They have moved from Devon where they ran restaurants for many years. Greene King IPA and Old Speckled Hen are served. Call 01234 750332.

Cock Inn, Wootton

Landlady Karen Ward was already a familiar face in the village, having moved from the Fox & Duck to take over this refurbished traditional community pub. Wells Eagle IPA and a guest beer are served, with pub lunches available on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, and a meat raffle on Sunday. There is an attractive garden behind, live music at weekends and a quiz on the first Sunday of the month. Call 01234 930034 or visit www.thecockinnpub.com



Royal George, Stagsden

This former Charles Wells house has re-opened as a free house with casual dining, with most of the

space taken up by tables and seating. The unusual bistro interior offers a view of the kitchen. Manager Debbie offers Greene King IPA and Sharp's Doom Bar on handpump. The current menu, available lunchtime and evening seven days a week, includes gourmet pizzas, jacket potatoes and a couple of daily specials, but there is a plan to expand the range. Most of the former garden has been used for housing, but there is still a small lawn at the rear and a patio with tables at the front. Call 01234 823299.

Falcon, Bletsoe

Welcome to Matthew Fletcher and family, who now run this old coaching inn on the A6. The bar is open all day every day from 12 noon, with Wells Eagle IPA, Bombardier and Courage Directors on the pumps, and a full food menu is available throughout the day until 9.30pm (7pm Sunday). The garden runs right down to the Ouse. The pub

has a lot of history, with a superb, oak-panelled restaurant that was once a local courtroom. Edward Fitzgerald stayed here while translating the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám. Call 01234 781222.

New Inn, Tavistock Street, Bedford

After reaching the conclusion that the former New Inn dead, and ripe for conversion to other purposes, we now see signs that it will shortly re-open as the Tavistock Bar. We do not know whether it will serve real ale.

Knife & Cleaver, Houghton Conquest

(by Gary Mudd)

After a long closure the Knife & Cleaver reopened at the end of January following purchase by Charles Wells and a thorough refit. Local people were not slow to investigate and a loyal following seems to have arisen already. At the official opening in February there was standing room only. Complimentary champagne flowed and excellent canapés were served with a string quartet playing to add further atmosphere!

Tenants Graham Rose and Terry Stewart managed to be everywhere at once, unflappable and smiling. They first ran a pub in a village near Diss, catering for their customers for parties, christenings and weddings. After a time in France they have come back to Bedfordshire. The pub has had a general makeover. The dining area has been reconstructed and an extension has been added to the side bar area. The restaurant has a high quality menu, but there is also a bar menu and families are catered for with high chairs and half-portions provided. Terry and Graham are not averse to folk coming in for just a drink or two. They have three hand-pumps, with Wells Eagle and Courage Directors and a guest, and reports on beer quality so far have been good.

They open for breakfast at 7 am every day, make good coffee and serve meals all day until 9.30pm (7 pm Sundays). There are nine en-suite rooms, two of which are wheelchair friendly, as is the pub. Obviously this is firstly an eating establishment, but don't be put off dropping in. Call 01234 930789 or visit www.theknifeandcleaver.com



Spring Beer Festivals

21st East Anglian Beer Festival

Wed 25 to Sat 28 April at the Apex, Charter Square, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3FD (bus stn 10 min). Open 12-11 daily. Featuring 87 real ales and ciders from independent brewers and cider makers in East Anglia. Use X5 bus to Cambridge, and then bus 11 (last return 5.00) or train on to Bury.
www.freewebs.com/westsuffolkcamra

12th Banbury Beer Festival

Thu 10 to Sat 12 May at the TA Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury OX16 7AN. Open Thu 5-11 (£1), Fri 12-12 (£2, after 5pm £4), Sat 11-9 (£3, after 5pm £1), CAMRA members free. More than 100 real ales, ciders and perries, about a third from the London area. Hot and cold food, access for disabled, live music Thu eve and Sat afternoon/eve. X5 bus Bedford-Oxford, then bus S4 (last return 5.45) or train to Banbury.
www.northoxfordshirecamra.org.uk

39th Cambridge Beer Festival

Mon 21 to Sat 26 May under canvas on Jesus Green (X5 bus 10 min). Open Mon 5-10.30, Tue-Fri 12-3, 5-10.30, Sat 12-10.30. Admission after 5pm £4, Sat £2.50 all day, CAMRA members free.

More than 200 real ales, 80-odd ciders and perries, foreign beers, country wines and meads. Free soft drinks for designated drivers. Traditional hot and cold food, including famous CAMRA cheese counter. Safe footwear essential. Regular X5 bus from Bedford, last return 11.05.

www.cambridgebeerfestival.com

Northamptonshire Beer Festival

Thu 24 to Sat 26 May at Delapré Abbey, Northampton. Open Thu 5-11, Fri/Sat 12-11. Admission Thu free, Fri/Sat £3, CAMRA members free. More than 300 real ales plus cider, Perry and country wines. Hourly 41 bus from Bedford, last return 7.20.

www.northantscamra.org.uk

9th Welland Valley Beer Festival

Fri 15 to Sun 17 June, hosted by over 10 pubs across the Welland Valley. Wide range of real ales and ciders, including many local breweries, traditional pub food including a barbecue, live entertainment and accommodation. Supported by, but no longer organised by local CAMRA branches. Official programme available from participating pubs or online. www.wellandvalleybeerfestival.co.uk

CAMRA LocAle

CAMRA LocAle is a scheme to promote locally brewed real ales. It started in Nottingham a few years ago after Greene King took over and closed Hardys & Hansons, but has since spread throughout the country. LocAle is about consumer choice, local jobs, supporting a sustainable environment, creating local distinctiveness and promoting local pubs. Selling beers from local breweries with shorter delivery runs helps reduce fuel usage, pollution and greenhouse gases. Promoting local breweries also helps maintain local beer styles and supports the local economy.

Pubs and clubs that regularly offer one or more locally brewed real ales are eligible to join the LocAle scheme. CAMRA will provide window stickers, pump clip crowners and drip mats free of charge. We promote LocAle pubs through our internet Bedfordshire Pub Guide (see page 3), and a list of the breweries included is published at www.northbedscamra.org.uk

North Beds CAMRA's LocAle currently includes 31 breweries sited within about 30 miles of Bedford, including the four Bedfordshire brewers: B&T, Potton, White Park and Wells & Young's

Eleven local pubs have so far been accredited to North Beds LocAle. They are: the Cricketers Arms, Devonshire Arms, Wellington Arms and White Horse in Bedford, the Plough at Bolnhurst, the Carpenters Arms at Cranfield, the Crown at Little Staughton, the Red Lion Hotel at Salford, the Bedford Arms at Soul-drop, the Chequers at Wootton and the Chequers at Yelden.

For more information, or to join the scheme, please contact Peter Argyle on 01234 822698 or email pubsofficer@northbedscamra.org.uk



The Cricketers Real Arms Real Ale Pub

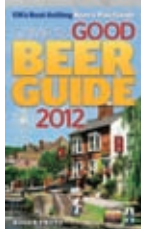
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Pubbing around North Bedfordshire

North Beds CAMRA started its winter activities with a Christmas Social at the **Devonshire Arms, Bedford**. Food was served in a (mercifully heated!) marquee, and on handpump were four Wells & Young's beers including Winter Warmer, plus a special treat for us, Potton Porter. A grand evening was had by all. The Devvie has been named our Most Improved Pub of 2012 (see p.4)

Then on 12th January we made our first minibus foray of 2012, to sample some pubs in the northernmost part of our area. First stop, the remote village of **Yelden**, where the **Chequers** has a reputation for real ale and real cider. Sadly, on our arrival we found that only one real ale was available – London Pride – so we moved swiftly on to **The Bedford Arms at Souldrop**, our branch's Pub of the Year for 2011, which didn't disappoint. The pub was full, but even so Fred and his staff made us welcome and served us quickly. An unusual feature was skittles on TV! (CCTV, it must be said, so that everyone in the pub could see what was going on at the alley in the corner.) As well as the regulars (Phipps Red Star from Grainstore, Black Sheep Bitter, and Greene King IPA) Fred had Cottage Brewery's Tornado as a guest beer, which turned out to be very palatable, and in good nick as expected.

Next stop – the **Fordham Arms at Sharnbrook**, familiar to the ex-Unilever staff amongst us, but new to me. A lovely old pub, with no TV or music,



Fordham Arms, Sharnbrook

just a lively buzz of conversation. They supplied Oakham's JHB – my favourite beer – Ringwood Best, Courage Best from Wells & Young's, and Greene King Abbot, all in good condition, though we were surprised to see sparklers on the JHB and Ringwood pumps. Then on to the **Bell at Odell**, an old favourite under new management. Another historic village pub, again without intrusive music or TV. It's a Greene King pub, and had IPA, Abbot and Ruddles County on, but no guest ale. There was a little delay in serving our party of 16, but the beer was good when it came.

Next stop – a late addition to the itinerary – **The Royal George at Stevington**. An unassuming little cottage on the outside, but a bit of a Tardis with plenty of space in oak-beamed rooms inside. Another free house where the only noise was the welcome sound of conversation, as it was well-filled. They served Wells Eagle IPA, Usher's 1824



Royal George, Stevington

(which most of our group tried and found excellent), and Robinson's Mr Scrooge, their Christmas special, which I had and found pleasant. Then a disappointment – the **Prince of Wales at Bromham** was shut at 10.45 pm despite advertising an 11 pm close.

After dropping off a couple of Bromham residents we therefore continued to our second **Bedford Arms** of the evening, the one in Bromham Road, **Bedford**, where we bade farewell to our friendly bus driver from Expresslines. Inside, we found the expected warm welcome despite the lateness of

the hour. In addition to the Wells & Young's regulars – Bombardier, Young's Bitter and Young's Special – we found Marston's Single Hop Wai-iti (a New Zealand hop) as the guest ale, which we all tried and judged good. After which we wended our contented way home.

In contrast to the bus trip, a cold, wet winter evening on 26th January didn't attract many CAMRA members to a walking tour of **Bedford town pubs**, and only ten turned up at the unusual



Toby Carvery

starting point of **Goldington Green**, though a couple more appeared later on. We visited the two modern chain pubs there: the **Toby Carvery** and the **Anchor** (a Hungry Horse). Both are mainly eating places but both serve real ale. In the Carvery, which was quiet, there is a bar area separate from the dining room. The Cask Marque is held, and the two cask ales on – Everard's Tiger and Young's Bitter – were indeed in good condition. Next door, the Anchor was busier, and drinkers share space with diners. It is still a local pub, though. It is a Greene King house and GK IPA and Old Speckled Hen were available; acceptable, but not in quite a sharp nick as next door's beers.

After a soaking on the walk to **Newnham Avenue**, we were glad to find a warm welcome from Nigel Anstead in the more familiar surroundings of the **White Horse**, including free sandwiches! Burns Night celebrations were in progress, with a Scottish band playing and a Scots-themed quiz, in which Team CAMRA scored 19/20. Bombardier, Eagle IPA and Everard's Tiger Gold were on the handpumps; the Tiger Gold was a new barrel, and very good it tasted.

We'd dried out a bit and the rain had stopped before we continued to the **Gordon Arms** in **Castle Road**. It wasn't busy at 10 pm, and the staff were friendly. Bombardier, Directors, Eagle IPA and Young's Bitter were accompanied this time by Elgood's Festive, which we mostly tried. It was good, with a hoppy and citrus flavour, and served at the correct temperature.



Gordon Arms, Castle Road

The final stop was the **Cricketers Arms** in **Goldington Road**, where Paul and Stephanie were their usual friendly selves. On offer were Tring Mansion Mild and Side Pocket for a Toad, Adnams Southwold Bitter, Brains Bitter and, unusually, St Peter's Best Bitter from the Suffolk brewery that sells most of its production in bottle. The Cricketers' excellent beers lured us into staying for the rest of opening time, abandoning any thoughts of a sixth pub of the evening. And the Cricketers is now our Pub of the Year 2012 (see p. 4).

Another full minibus-load headed for rural pubs in the south of our area on 2nd February, cheerful despite the very cold weather. First stop – the **Guinea** at **Moggerhanger**, where a new licensee took over last September. He declared himself well settled in now. This Wells house had Eagle and Directors on, and both tasted good to those who tried them. The guest was The Governor, made by J.W. Lees for Marco Pierre White – The Governor is the name of his dog. Most of us tried that and liked it. At 7.30 on a Thursday not many people were in apart from the CAMRA group, but the atmosphere was welcoming.



Five Bells, Cople

Next stop, the **Five Bells** at **Cople**, a Greene King house, and the only pub near Bedford that can be depended on to have mild available. GK Mild, of course. Also on were GK IPA and Olde Trip, another GK product commemorating the ancient

Continued overleaf

pub in Nottingham. The Five Bells is a lovely old village pub with low ceilings, oak beams and an open fire. Another welcoming licensee, too.

There followed a quick trip along the new A421 dual carriageway to the **Red Lion Hotel at Salford**, on our western boundary. This hotel, restaurant and pub had, as usual, Eagle and Bombardier on handpump and in good condition. The Red Lion dates back to the seventeenth century. The staff were friendly, a fire burned in the grate, and board games are available to borrow.



Carpenter's Arms, Cranfield

Starting back , next stop was at the **Carpenter's Arms in Cranfield**. The pub wasn't busy but the bar staff were welcoming. This is a Wells pub, but sometimes has guest beers on that aren't on their normal list – this evening it was Hopping Mad Brainstorm, which rapidly ran out under the CAMRA onslaught. The W&Y seasonal turned out to be Young's London Porter, new to me. Eagle and Courage Best were also on. There is a new cellarman here and he clearly knows his job.

Final stop – a former Wells pub now reopened as a free house, the **Chequers at Wootton**. Eagle still features, and the other cask ales available were Old Hooky and Concrete Cow Cock 'n' Bull. The new owners have swapped the rooms over, with the restaurant now in the former main bar. A lovely old village pub with a friendly staff, low beams, an open fire and well-kept beer. A happy band returned to Bedford following this February visit to five of our best country pubs.

Fytton Rowland

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Let's see more real cider!

Real cider is a long-established, traditional drink produced naturally from pressed apple juice. Unlike most beers, it is fermented, by naturally occurring yeast on the fruit, in a cask or similar container and served direct to the glass. Unlike processed cider, it is neither pasteurised nor artificially carbonated.

Real perry is produced and served in a similar way to cider, but is fermented from pears. Real cider and perry have both become popular in recent years outside their traditional homes in the West Country, the Welsh borders, Kent, Sussex and parts of Norfolk. More people are discovering for themselves the mellow and aromatic flavours of naturally produced real cider and perry. Visitors to our own Bedford Beer & Cider Festival last October had little difficulty getting through almost 400 gallons in four days.

Unfortunately, real cider faces a similar situation to real ale 30 years ago, with a diminishing number of outlets, even in its traditional home areas. Real perry is in an even worse situation, with fewer producers and the loss of many traditional perry pear orchards in recent decades. The best known UK ciders are fizzy keg products produced artificially rather than naturally, pasteurised, carbonated and served cold.

Local ciders

However, small cider and perry producers have started up in areas not usually associated with these drinks. Even in Bedfordshire, where the old farm cider tradition died out more than a century ago, four new producers have recently gone into business. The Harrold Calvados Society first produced its Lambasted Blue Spot Cider just over two years ago, and has been joined more recently by Elizabeth Evershed's small operation in nearby Odell. There are other new cider producers in Dunton near Biggleswade, in Luton and in Wolverton, Milton Keynes, where Virtual Orchard cider recently won CAMRA's national Champion Cider award.

Local outlets

If real cider and perry are so popular with the public, why is it so difficult to find them in local pubs, alongside real ales? Only eight pubs in North Bedfordshire currently offer real cider or perry all year round, so you may have to hunt hard to find them. The only major pub company to show much interest in real cider is JD Wetherspoon – you will find a choice of real cider and perry in Bedford's two Wetherspoon pubs. B&T's Wellington Arms and Charles Wells' Bedford Arms in Bedford both offer a choice of ciders or perry, but the other local outlets are all free houses – the Stone Jug at Clophill, the Royal George at Stevington, the Crown at Little Staughton and the Chequers at Yelden.

A few other local pubs and clubs offer real cider or perry occasionally as a seasonal guest or for pub festivals. If they sell well there, perhaps the pub landlord might consider offering them on a permanent basis. Cider started as a summer guest at the Royal George in Stevington, but sold so well that the landlord now offers both cider and perry all year round.



Real Cider Sold Here

CAMRA runs a scheme to promote pubs serving real cider.

A 'Real Cider Sold Here' window sticker and listing on a national website are awarded to those pubs

that regularly sell real cider or perry. Almost 800 pubs have now been accredited.

We want to encourage more local pubs to stock at least one real cider or perry, and to try locally produced ciders, as well as the better known brands from Herefordshire or the West Country. If your local pub or club makes at least one real cider or perry available throughout the year, please let us know. We will then invite the landlord to join CAMRA's cider promotion scheme. If you can't find a local pub that does, why not ask the landlord to give them a try?

Peter Argyle



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A CAMRA - man in the land of the great Red Stripe

After giving up the branch secretary role and therefore with time on my hands, I decided to try my hand at missionary work in the Caribbean! I arrived in Jamaica with high hopes and great expectations of an oasis of fine beer, but these were quickly dispelled as the first Jamaican 'Pub Crawl' got under way. Against a background of a veritable 'Beer Revolution' across the globe, all that Jamaica could offer – or all that I could find – was Red Stripe Lager, Kingston Lager or Heineken Lager, all of which taste exactly the same as each other to me – bland and uninspiring! I did find some Dragon stout, which was passable, and some Guinness Foreign Extra Stout, which I think if it ever saw the Emerald Isle, had left those shores a long time ago!

Faced with such a dearth of good beer (we really are spoiled in the UK) I had to take drastic measures – of rum! If there is one thing that Jamaicans can do well, it's rum.



My partner Helen and I took a trip around the Appleton's Distillery, about an hour's drive from Montego Bay, and it is an amazing place. A distillery certainly, but a working museum as well – the oldest rum distillery in the Caribbean, producing rum for more than 260 years and in a dazzling array of more than a dozen different types and

flavours. Just walking into the aging warehouse one can quickly become intoxicated by the air, as hundreds of barrels of rum slowly age and evaporate tiny amounts daily through the oak barrels. Staff are not allowed inside alone! What starts out as 1,000 barrels of rum on day one reduces through evaporation to less than 300 barrels after 30 years – no wonder the good stuff is so expensive.



There are demonstrations of how the sugar cane used to be crushed using a donkey, and there are huge tanks holding 10,000 gallons each of the famous rum by-product, molasses. The tour ends in a bar where all of the types of rum produced can be sampled. I managed to get through 13 different types before everything went hazy! Back in the hotel, we found another use for the free rum we had been given at the end of the tour – very useful as an anaesthetic when Helen put her hand on a 'sea egg', a spiny urchin while snorkelling.

Despite the disappointment of not finding any beer, I am still willing to return for more CAMRA-sponsored missionary work – must speak to the treasurer!

Ian Higgs

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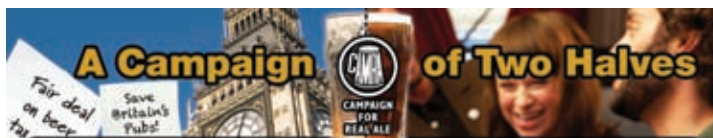
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Alternatively you can send a cheque payable to CAMRA Ltd with your completed form, visit www.camra.org.uk/joinus or call 01727 867201. All forms should be addressed to Membership Department, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 4LW.

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A Lakeland Weekend

In November we visited Cartmel in Cumbria (but formerly in Lancashire), and found it a picturesque village, with a historic priory church, a racecourse, four real ale pubs, and very nearly a brewery!

The Cartmel Unsworth's Yard Brewery is currently being fitted out; their brewery kit is coming from the Otter Brewery in Devon, which is upsizing. Meanwhile, Cartmel Peninsula Fine Ale, a 3.8% abv traditional ale in bottle, is contract-brewed for them by another Cumbrian brewery. Unsworth's Yard also contains a bakery and an excellent cheese shop, and nearby is the Red Pepper delicatessen and off-licence under the same ownership as the brewery. The Red Pepper sells a wide range of Cumbrian microbrewery bottled beers.

And the pubs? The Pig and Whistle, situated in the more workaday part of the village, is a Robinson's house. It wasn't open when I passed by, but through the window I could see four hand-pumps with pumpclips on them. It is a plain stone cottage, with two rooms – a small front bar, and another room laid out for meals. The locals' favourite, I'd guess.

In the touristy old village there are three pubs, all old-fashioned inns with oak beams, stone-flagged floors and open fires, and all serving excellent menus and local real ales. The King's Arms is an Enterprise Inn, being refurbished for a new licensee. The King's Arms serves Hawkshead beers, with two of the four handpumps in use when I called. I tried Hawkshead Bitter, a 3.7% session beer with high hoppiness, just as I like them, and they also had the stronger Hawkshead

Red. The landlady said she will add other Hawkshead brews as cask-ale demand builds up. Two doors away, the Royal Oak served two products from the Cross Bay Brewery in Morecambe – Sunset at 4.2% abv, and Dusk, a darker and stronger beer at 4.5%. I tried Sunset and found it rather less hoppy than the Hawkshead. To these two the Royal Oak added Coniston Bluebird, a session bitter from another local micro, and Black Sheep Bitter from that other county across the Pennines. Finally, the Cavendish Arms, probably the oldest pub of the four, situated inside the old monastery precinct, where we lunched. Another free house, it had a beer of its own, Cavendish Arms Ale, brewed for it by the Cumberland Brewery, a session bitter which I found a bit lacking in character; three other handpumps supplied Theakston's XB, Deuchars IPA, and (unusually) John Smith's Cask.



In the evening we dined at a well-known Cartmel restaurant, Rogan's, which I was pleased to find also served real ale on handpump. They again favoured Cross Bay beers; Dusk turned up again, and this time it was accompanied by Nightfall, a pale session bitter which I liked. One sees a certain theme in Cross Bay's beer names...

If you ever visit the Lake District, don't drive straight past 'Lancashire North of the Sands'; Cartmel is a delight, and well supplied with real ale and good food from locally-produced ingredients.

Peter Argyle



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

MARCH

Thursday 15 – Branch meeting

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

Friday 16 – Branch Visit to St Neots Beer Festival

Informal trip, travelling by X5 coach from Bedford Bus Station.

APRIL

Thursday 12 – Branch Visit to Tring Brewery

Leaving the Wellington Arms, Bedford, at 6.30 pm. Visit includes bus travel, brewery tour, free beer, and fish and chips supper. Bookings to Gary Mudd - £10 deposit required. Full price will be £30.

Thursday 26 – Community Pubs Month Social

Details to be announced

MAY

Thursday 10 – Branch Social

Details to be announced

Thursday 17 – Branch Meeting

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

JUNE

Thursday 7 – Branch Summer Day Out

Details to be announced

JULY

Thursday 5 – Branch Annual General Meeting and Buffet

Details to be announced

Thursday 19 – Branch Meeting

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

Book of Beer Knowledge

CAMRA's Book of Beer Knowledge – The essential source of pub trivia ammunition

CAMRA is pleased to announce the release of the second edition of its Book of Beer Knowledge, a pocket-sized compendium to load beer drinkers with the ultimate pub trivia before a trip to their local. Compiled by award-winning beer writer Jeff Evans, this must-have title for lovers of pub ammo contains more than 200 entries covering the serious, silly and the downright bizarre from the world of beer. Packed with beer facts, records, stats and anecdotes, CAMRA's Book of Beer Knowledge reveals everything from the smallest pub in Britain to how to say 'cheers' in 26 different languages.

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