

The firkin



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

FREE

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch

Vol 37 No 2

Summer 2012

County Pub of the Year in Ampthill

In This Issue

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

ALBION IS PoTY

STOP THE ESCALATOR

IS YOUNG'S STILL A BREWERY?

TRING VISIT

PUB NEWS

***BEDFORD BEER AND
CIDER FESTIVAL 2012***

OTHER 2012 FESTIVALS

WHITE PARK REBORN

RAMBLING TO PUBS

OLYMPIC BEER FUN

A CURATE'S PINT

PUBS LESS VISITED

MILDLY DISAPPOINTING

BRANCH DIARY

WORLD'S BEST BEERS BOOK

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

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to follow**



Chairman's Corner

Spring heralds the arrival of the pub festival season, with more pubs trying out the

occasional beer fest to attract customers through the door. Sometimes there seems to be one on our patch every weekend! We promote neighbouring CAMRA festivals in the Firkin and on our branch website, and we will gladly publicise pub festivals too, if licensees tell us about them in good time. Please let us know about your festival so we can support it.

This is also the time of year when we start planning the Bedford Beer & Cider Festival in October. It is too early to tell you what beer and cider we will have this year, but the hard graft has begun and the festival will again bring a ray of autumn sunshine to the town centre. A few members plan the event, but many are needed to work behind the bars, the glasses counter and at the door. If you would like to help at the festival, please complete the online staffing form on our website.

In May we said farewell to Jan and Lynne Zielinski at the Fox & Hounds in Riseley after 13 years first managing, then renting and finally leasing this popular village pub. Their hard work helped make the pub one of the most successful in the Charles

Wells estate, earning 13 successive entries in CAMRA's national Good Beer Guide. We wish them well in their retirement and hope the Fox & Hounds will remain as successful as before.

Owner Alan Kelly has found a general manager to run the White Park brewery in Cranfield. Several months after the business was put up for sale, Sandy Burton has now taken over day-to-day management with a skilled brewer operating the 4-barrel plant. Three of us from North Beds CAMRA recently visited the brewery to meet them and discuss their plans for the future (see page 11). We wish White Park every success and look forward to seeing its beers appear more often in local pubs.

CAMRA has launched a national petition to oppose the Treasury's "duty escalator", by which beer duty increases by two percent above inflation every year. In the tough current climate for breweries and the pub industry, CAMRA believes the escalator should be dropped (see p. 4). If the new e-petition attracts 100,000 signatures, CAMRA can press for a high-profile parliamentary debate on beer duty before next year's Budget. If you think beer duty is already too high, visit www.saveyourpint.co.uk and sign the e-petition today!

Peter Argyle, Branch Chairman

Albion at Ampthill is Bedfordshire's Pub of the Year

The Cricketers in Goldington Road, Bedford is North Beds CAMRA's Pub of the Year for 2012. But CAMRA has three branches in the county, so our champion pub had to go head-to-head with those chosen by South Beds CAMRA and East Beds CAMRA to find the county-wide Pub of the Year.

In 2011, the county champion was the Engineers Arms at Henlow, which eventually got through to the final four in the UK-wide competition. CAMRA's National Pub of the Year eventually turned out to be the Bridge End Inn at Ruabon, the first-ever Welsh winner of the national title. But every year sees a new start in CAMRA's world.

This year the East Beds contender was the Engineers Arms again, and South Beds' choice was the **Albion at Ampthill**. And the Albion has got the decision as **Bedfordshire Pub of the Year for 2012**.

The Albion is a recent addition to the estate of pubs run by B&T of Shefford, all specialist real ale houses with multiple handpumps selling B&T and guest ales, and ciders. The Albion has quickly become a fine example of the B&T model, is always busy with a diverse clientele, and keeps its beer well. Best of all, other pubs in Ampthill now sell a wider range of real ales than before, showing that the Albion has led to a general improvement of pubs in the town.

Stop the Escalator - We Want to Get Off!

Sign the e-petition now

In this year's budget the Chancellor increased beer duty by a further 5%, following the practice of increasing all alcohol taxes by an above-inflation percentage (the Escalator). As a result over one-third of the price of your pint is made up of taxes. There has been a 42% increase in beer duty since 2008. These crippling beer tax increases continue to threaten the future of traditional pubs. Britain's national pub closure rate now stands at twelve pubs per week. Rural pubs are closing at a rate of four per week, which is serious, but the heaviest loss is in suburban pubs, at eight per week. People have difficulty in affording inflation-busting price increases in these difficult times, CAMRA believes that the escalator should be scrapped, for the sake of local communities in danger of losing their pubs, and of those who work in pubs and breweries, in danger of losing their jobs.

In association with the Small Independent Brewers' Association, the British Beer and Pub Association, the *Morning Advertiser* and

Wetherspoons, CAMRA has launched an e-petition on the government's direct.gov site, calling for the abolition of the escalator. Any petition on this site that attracts over 100,000 signatures in a year has to be debated in Parliament.

Launched just a few weeks ago, CAMRA's e-petition had topped 40,000 signatures in early May. If every CAMRA member signs, we'll top the 100,000 easily; if every real ale drinker, member or not, signs, we'll hit the target several times over. So sign now!

Go to <http://www.saveyourpint.co.uk> or <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/29664> and follow the simple instructions on the page.



Is Young's an 'Independent Family Brewer'?

The parliamentary All-Party Save the Pub Group has written to the Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB) calling for Young's to be expelled from the organisation. Young and Co plc, the MPs point out, is not a brewer and not family-owned. Since they sold their share of the Havelock Street brewery in Bedford back to Charles Wells Ltd – which is a family-owned brewer – last year, Young's doesn't own any share of any brewery. It is a plc, and the last member of the Young family involved in the management, John Young, died six years ago. Like other ex-breweries that are now pubcos only, Young's plc has a financial interest in maximising its returns on its property portfolio, and as this portfolio is mostly in London, pub closures for

redevelopment of their sites are inevitably resulting. IFBB's mission is to protect "the unique heritage of family brewing companies in Britain". The chair of the All-Party group, Lib Dem MP Greg Mulholland, has written to the chair of IFBB asking for Young's to be thrown out. And who is the chair of IFBB? Paul Wells, chair of both Charles Wells Ltd and Wells & Young's Brewing Company – who brew Young's beers in Bedford under contract to the erstwhile joint owners of the Bedford brewery, Young & Co plc!

Correction

In our Spring 2012 issue, p.17 carried an article entitled *A Lakeland Weekend*. Peter Argyle was credited as author of this article, but it was in fact by Fytton Rowland!

Tring Brewery Trip



The Thursday after Easter saw a full bus heading off from the Wellington Arms for the Spring brewery trip. The route to Tring is inevitably cross-country and we were thankful for the prominent sign atop the brewery to assure us that we had arrived safely. Legs stretched, we were warmly welcomed with a choice of three ales, all in excellent condition. They were the seasonal *Bring me Sunshine* (4.2%), and *Jack O'Legs* (4.2%) and *Colley's Dog* (5.2%) from their permanent range.

Suitably armed, we were invited through the door to the brewhouse. Its size seems admirably suited to their current rate of production, the move from their original cramped premises several years ago having allowed a significant increase. The scale of the upsizing was clear in comparing the size of their original brewing vessel with the current ones. Though the brewery is conveniently compact, there is still significant scope for further growth in output in response to demand.

It was encouraging to hear that they are planning to source all their light malt locally, as well as concentrating their deliveries on the local area. More far-flung outlets are served through regional drop points and beer swaps with other brewers. In that way a wider population can appreciate their fine products and the artwork on their distinctive triangular pump-clips.



An engaging talk was brought to an end by the arrival of the fish & chip supper. That still left reasonable time to sample more of their beer while continuing discussion in the attractive reception area and shop. We were told that the supermarket just across the road helps boost their trade by attracting customers. It may

even be that in some cases the offer of a chance to stock up with beer is an inducement to help with the regular grocery shop!

After plenty of convivial chat across the barrel-tables it was time for last orders to be called, purchases gathered up and the journey back to Bedford.

Roger Stokes



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Pub News

Tavistock Pub & Dining, Tavistock Street, Bedford

The former New Inn has been reborn as the Tavistock, a family-run pub and carvery with a modern, bistro-style layout. The bar is open all day from 8am and serves Wells Eagle and Bombardier on handpump. Breakfast is available until 11.30, then an extensive menu of pub meals, carvery and a buffet from 12 noon to 9.30pm. Call 01234 219595 or visit www.thetavistockpub.co.uk

Modello Bar & Kitchen, St Peter's Street, Bedford

The former New York, New York nightclub re-opened as another bistro-style urban pub in February 2012. It opens all day from 9am for food and drink (10am on Sunday), offering two real ales on handpump, Fuller's ESB and St Austell Tribute. There is a small patio with tables at the front and a compact rear garden with a heated area for smokers. Call 01234 343455 or visit www.modellobedford.co.uk

Legstraps, Wootton

Formerly the Rose & Crown, but always known locally as the Legstraps, this pub in Keeley Lane has been completely renovated and re-opened as a comfortable, welcoming free house. New landlord Matt Wigglesworth serves Young's Bitter, Adnams Bitter and guest beers on the handpumps, and offers meals at lunchtime and evenings from Wednesday to Sunday. The pub currently closes on Monday and Tuesday, but that may change in July. The elegant restaurant has an interesting menu with a daily fish special, and a modest function room which will accommodate 10 diners. Call 01234 854112 or visit www.thelegstraps.co.uk

Fox & Hounds, Riseley

Farewell and best wishes to Jan and Lynne Zielinski, who retired early in May after 13 years making this popular pub a local success story. We



believe they are about to sail the world before settling into retirement in France. The business continues much as before under provisional manager Vanessa Thompson, offering Wells Eagle IPA and Bombardier, and a menu of creative dishes available lunchtime and evening, with a roast lunch on Sunday. The Fox & Hounds is an interesting old building created from two 16th-century cottages and boasting a priest's hiding hole and resident ghosts. Call 01234 708240 or visit www.foxandhoundsriseley.co.uk

Carpenters Arms, Cranfield

Regulars have launched a campaign to save this popular, Good Beer Guide-listed village local after owner Charles Wells decided the pub did not fit the company's business plan. Popular landlord James Shanks was given notice and the Carps will close on 8th June, following a beer festival over the Diamond Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend. As we go to press, the pubco has not revealed whether it has received offers, but to make sure it remains a pub the campaigners are considering forming a community enterprise company to buy the freehold. To pledge support for the campaign, or to enquire about becoming a shareholder in the proposed new enterprise, visit the campaign website at www.cranfieldcarps.co.uk



Royal Oak, Carlton

Meanwhile, there may be light at the end of the tunnel for the village campaign to re-open the Royal Oak. Bedford Borough

Council refused an earlier planning application to convert the building into a private house and the would-be developer subsequently withdrew interest. A new proposal to renovate and re-open the pub with small cottages built on part of the large garden is under consideration. The campaigners believe it may be a fair compromise to retain the pub and are discussing details with the developer, but the full plans have yet to be revealed.

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Next Bedford Beerfest Coming Soon!



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CAMRA's 35th Bedford Beer & Cider Festival will be held once again at the Corn Exchange in St Paul's Square from Wednesday 3rd to Saturday 6th October.

Local CAMRA members have run a festival in the town every autumn since 1978.

Over 100 real ales

This year's festival will be similar to last year, with 110 different real ales, 40 brands of real cider and perry, and a range of draught and bottled beers from Belgium and other European countries. Even though only a handful of Bedfordshire pubs sell real cider or perry, the growing popularity of these traditional fermented fruit drinks has earned "Cider" a regular place in the festival's title. The festival will offer a broad selection from around the country, but with as many as possible from local brewers and cider producers. The full beer and cider lists will be printed in a free souvenir programme given to visitors on arrival and posted on the branch website in September.

Help required

The festival is run entirely by volunteers – working behind the bars, the shop or the glasses counter, admitting visitors at the door or acting as stewards. There are also jobs to do behind the scenes, helping set up and dismantle the bars and stillage. Local CAMRA members and their friends are particularly welcome to help – no experience necessary! Although we cannot afford to pay you, helpers get a generous ration of free beer or cider of their choice, and share the pleasure of helping run one of the most popular events in Bedford. To volunteer, please complete the online staffing form at www.northbedscamra.org.uk/bedford-festival.htm

Sponsor a cask of beer!

Promote your business by sponsoring a cask of real ale at Bedford Beer & Cider Festival. For just £50, your company name and slogan will be posted above the beer stillage throughout the festival. For further details, visit www.northbedscamra.org.uk/bedfordfestival.htm or use the QR code.





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Summer Beer Festivals

29th Rugby Beer & Cider Festival

Fri 15 to Sat 16 June at Thornfield Bowling Club, Hillmorton Road CV22 5LJ. Admission Fri 3-11 (£2), Sat 11-11 (£1), CAMRA members free, children welcome until 8pm. More than 50 real ales including LocAle breweries, plus range of cider, perry and foreign beers. Good food, auction Sat afternoon, live music from 8.30 Sat eve. X5 bus to MK Central station, then train to Rugby.

www.rugbybeerfestival.com

9th Welland Valley Beer Festival

Fri 15 to Sun 17 June, hosted by over ten 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. Special buses from Market Harborough station meet East Midlands trains from Bedford. www.wellandvalleybeerfestival.co.uk

5th Gibberd Garden Beer Festival

Sat 16 to Sun 17 June at The Gibberd Garden, Marsh Lane, near Harlow CM17 0NA (Harlow Mill stn 15 min walk). Open 12-8, last admission 7pm, admission £4, concessions incl CAMRA members £3. More than 30 real ales and ciders, plus full access to the wonderful gardens. Free children's entertainment and treasure hunt Sunday. X5 bus to Cambridge then train to Harlow Mill.

www.heb-camra.org.uk/gg

35th Derby City Charter Summer Beer Festival

Wed 11 to Sun 15 July at Assembly Rooms, Market Place DE1 3AH (rail stn 10 min). Open Wed 6.30-11, Thu-Sat 11-11, Sun 12-2. Admission charges vary, lower before 5.30pm, CAMRA members always free. More than 150 real ales including LocAle breweries – full beer list and admission details online. Live music eves. East Midlands trains from Bedford and Luton. www.derbycamra.org.uk

4th Bishops Stortford Beer Festival

Thu 26 to Sat 28 July at British Legion Club, Windhill, Bishops Stortford CM23 2NG. Open Thu 5-11, Fri/Sat 12-11, admission free. More than 45



real ales plus real cider, live music Sat eve. X5 bus to Cambridge then train to Bishops Stortford.

www.heb-camra.org.uk/bsbf

Great British Beer Festival 2012

Tue 7 to Sat 11 August, London Olympia Exhibition Centre, Hammersmith Road, Kensington W14 8UX Open Tue 5-10.30, Wed-Fri 12-10.30, Sat 11-7. More than 800 real ales, ciders, perries and foreign beers. Traditional pub games, live music, hot and cold food from around the world, tutored beer tastings. For advance tickets and tutored tasting tickets, call 0844 4124640 or visit www.seetickets.com/gbbf. Kensington Olympia station adjoins; try the X5 bus to Milton Keynes then hourly direct trains from MK Central. For full information and admission prices, visit www.gbbf.org.uk

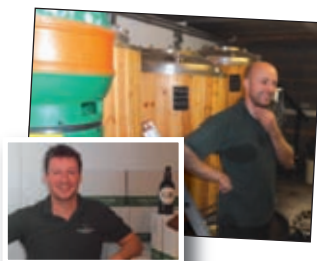
35th Peterborough Beer Festival

Tue 21 to Sat 25 August, under canvas on the Embankment, Bishops Road, Peterborough PE1 1EF (city centre 10 min). Open Tue 5.30-11, Wed-Thu 12-3, 5.30-11, Fri-Sat 11-11. Admission before 3pm £1, after 3pm Wed-Thu £4, Fri-Sat £5; CAMRA members after 3pm £2. Commemorative glasses £3 refundable. Full details online, including beer and cider list. X5 bus to St Neots station, then train to Peterborough. www.real-ale.org.uk

White Park Reborn!

There are three breweries in North Beds CAMRA's area, and the smallest is White Park, one of Alan Kelly's enterprises, situated on Perry Hill Farm at Cranfield. Last year Alan wanted to sell the brewery as a going concern, but in fact something rather different has happened. A new General Manager, Sandy Burton, has been appointed, taking charge of sales, marketing and the website. Alan Kelly is now a hands-off owner, but Peter Kelly is the brewer. A contract to supply bottle-conditioned beers to one of the major supermarket chains has been secured, and casks are supplied to Wetherspoons and a number of local free-trade outlets. A chiller room has been installed and other improvements made to the four-barrel brewing plant – though bottling is still a very labour-intensive affair, with Sandy and Peter putting in long hours in a very confined space on bottling days. Brewing day is Tuesday, when two brews are made to conserve energy. Currently these are usually Kellyhopper, a strong bitter at 4.8% abv, and GB, a strong, malty dark ale at 5%, which the off-trade favours. Also in the portfolio are session beers like Cranfield

Bitter and Bedford Best, often preferred by the pubs. Spent grain goes directly to feed the cattle on Perry Hill Farm, an efficient arrangement that helps to produce excellent beef.



Sandy and Peter invited Don Allan, CAMRA Brewery Liaison Officer for White Park, Peter Argyle, North Beds CAMRA's chairman, and Fytton Rowland, Firkin editor, to a brewing day recently. The brewery is small – larger premises may eventually be required – but more conveniently laid out than it used to be, and we watched Peter doing the crossover between the Kellyhopper brew and that of GB. Crisp's Extra Pale malt and Goldings hops are generally used. We were pleased to find this local brewery prospering again, and a taste of GB helped to show us why they are doing well. We wish White Park well in its new incarnation; may its ales be found in many local pubs soon!

Ramblers Welcome!

Ramblers like to start and end their walks at pubs. So CAMRA and the Ramblers have teamed up to raise awareness of pubs locally which will 'Welcome Ramblers'. The initiative is supported by CAMRA branches in Herts, Beds, Bucks, Berks, Middlesex and Oxfordshire, where there are more than 12,000 Ramblers' members. Numbers taking part in the walks can vary from just a handful to up to about 40.

This initiative will promote pubs to Ramblers members. By agreeing to display a window sticker or a poster, as well as use Ramblers beer mats, the licensee can get a recommendation on the website <http://www.ramblers.org.uk> and members will consider using it as a start and end point when organising their walks. Ramblers will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the welcome they have received at each pub, and any comments will be posted online.

Generally, groups welcome the opportunity to use a pub car park to gather in. They then walk and return later for a drink and sometimes a meal. Often meals are ordered in advance, so that chefs can organise the dishes before the group returns. Muddy boots are left at the door or in the car, so there is no mess. Hopefully just extra custom for the pub.



The Ramblers are always on the lookout for new members. Why not join today? All readers of this newsletter qualify for a 20% discount on the normal joining fee. All you have to do is go to www.ramblers.org.uk/offer and use the code U12V2W. So why not combine a passion for pubs with a will to walk?

*Sam Newby-Ricci, Northern Home Counties
Marketing Officer ramblersnhc@ramblers.org.uk*

**Three
Cups**

**Dog and
Badger**

Tring

Celebrating London Pubs and Beer



Over 60% of visitors to Britain say that they will visit a pub when they are here. CAMRA believes that we should be proud of our British heritage and show visitors to London for the Olympics what great beer and pubs we have in the Capital. CAMRA's London branches are therefore running a campaign to showcase what we have on offer this Olympic summer. We hope to raise the profile of British beer and pubs during the summer, starting in the first week in July featuring the Ealing Beer Festival, and including the Great British Beer Festival in the first week in August at Olympia.

The website www.londoncityofbeer.org.uk will list all the activities involving beer across London, whether a brewery open day, an event in a pub or a guided tour around some of London's historic

pubs. Pubs and breweries across the Capital are being encouraged to get involved to create one great month of celebration.

In addition, the London branches of CAMRA are producing a special edition of their *London Drinker* magazine, *A Visitors' Guide to London*, featuring pubs that appeal to a wide variety of visitors, including heritage pubs, pubs with entertainment, pubs near markets and pubs with good food, to name just a few of the categories. There will also be mention of pubs selling real cider. This will be available on the website, in selected London pubs and other outlets, or pre-ordered by sending a cheque for £1.50 (includes postage) made payable to CAMRA London, to Stan Tompkins, 52 Rabbs Mill House, Chiltern View Road, Uxbridge UB8 2PD.

A Curate's Pint

Review of Beer is Proof God Loves Us, by Charles W. Bamforth, Published by Pearson Education, 2011

Charles Bamforth is a world expert on brewing – Anheuser-Busch Professor of Malting and Brewing Sciences at the University of California at Davis, with much published scholarly research. Don't be fooled, though; he is a working-class lad from Up Holland, near Wigan in Lancashire! He previously worked at Bass and at the Brewing Research Foundation in the UK. His book is an interesting ramble through his life in brewing in Britain and the USA.

But a ramble it is. It lacks structure, being a stream of consciousness: it isn't arranged chronologically, geographically or thematically. The only structure it does have is an annoying one – more than a quarter of the text is in endnotes, so one has to keep hopping to and fro between the main text and the endnotes to get the full story on any topic. But Bamforth is hugely

knowledgeable about the science and technology of brewing, the history and structure of the brewing industry around the world and its economics. And he is amusing about his personal history, especially his efforts on the sports field.

My grouse is that, although the book was written in 2010, he appears unaware that the decline of cask beer in Britain has been halted recently, and assumes that it continues. And I find it unbelievable that an Englishman, even an expatriate, can write about the history of British brewing over the last forty years and not mention CAMRA at all!

So, a curate's pint, good in parts. And the title? It's a misquote from Benjamin Franklin, who said the same thing about wine. But, Bamforth argues, Franklin obviously meant to say beer, didn't he?

Fytton Rowland

Some Pubs Less Visited

Royal Oak at Roxton



North Beds CAMRA are trying to visit the pubs in our area that we haven't looked at for a while. The first group were looked at on 8th March, in the north-east of our patch. First stop, the **Royal Oak at Roxton**. This ex-Wells pub still sells Wells & Young's beers – at our visit, Directors on gravity and Eagle and Young's London Porter on handpump. The licensee, formerly at the Gate at Harrowden, leases the pub. A pleasant village pub, at our visit it didn't do food, but plans for an extension were posted up, and the new building will be a restaurant.

Next stop, another old pub now extended and converted to mostly food – the **Crown at Wyboston**, situated a couple of yards inside our boundary, just off the A1 (on its old course, in fact), and now a Chef & Brewer house. It was very busy, presumably with diners from the Premier Inn next door. On handpump we found Courage Best plus Marston's Single Hop East Kent Goldings, a very pleasant brew.

The **Plough at Bolnhurst**, next, was more familiar. A restaurant nowadays, but it still caters for those wanting a drink in an attractive bar with exposed beams and an open fire, and keeps its beer well. Adnams Southwold Bitter was on along with two LocAles – Hopping Mad Hopnotch and Potbelly Best. I hadn't tried Hopnotch before – it turned out to be a very acceptable session bitter. On to the **Victoria Arms at Wilden**, a pub saved from closure by a local campaign. Formerly a Greene King property, it still sells their beers – IPA, Abbot and Old Speckled Hen were on at our visit. For reopening it had been completely refurbished in a

contemporary style – with the effect that the removal of soft furnishings had made it extremely noisy.

The next stop was at the **Horse & Jockey at Ravensden**, also refurbished lately, in 'heritage colours', and also now mainly a restaurant. But like the Plough, it welcomes drinkers with a bar area, shared with those awaiting their tables. A free house, it offered St Austell Trelawney (less familiar than Tribute), Adnams Bitter (which had run out), and Cottage Brewery Norman Conquest MM on handpump. Finally for the evening, the **Polhill Arms at Renhold**, an old-fashioned pub with darts and skittles. Even here, though, the carpet had been removed from the main bar, altering the acoustics, and the lighting was now quite bright. This Greene King house had IPA, Old Speckled Hen and – a welcome sight – XX Mild on handpump.



During April, CAMRA's Community Pubs Month, a different minibus-load of members set forth to check out some pubs in the south of our area that we hadn't been to lately. First stop was the **Bell at Cotton End**, a historic thatched pub, recently refurbished in a sensitive way. The smallish front bar has bare floorboards, while the carpeted back room caters both for diners and for games players (darts and skittles). Lots of photos from the airship era at nearby RAF Cardington hang on the walls. The friendly landlady of this free house sticks with her regular beers on the three handpumps – Greene King IPA, Shepherd Neame Spitfire and St Austell Tribute. We mostly tried the Tribute and found it well kept if a little new.

Victoria Arms



The adjoining village of **Wilstead** has two pubs directly across the street from each other – classically, one Charles Wells and one Greene King house. Both are quite large pubs with between-the-wars architecture. The **Red Lion** is the Wells one, and it was quite busy on a wet Thursday evening. On its two handpumps it has Eagle and a guest, which on this occasion was Wells's April seasonal, the newly revived McEwan's 80/- . We all had the 80/- and found it very palatable with a nutty flavour. The pub is well equipped to serve this large village, and has a children's play area in the garden as well as a smokers' shelter. Across the road, the **Woolpack** provided Greene King IPA and Olde Trip plus two guests, Black Sheep's Golden Sheep and Nottingham Brewery's Legend. Like its competitor the Woolpack was busy – meals are served in the back room – and both guest beers were in good condition.

Red Lion




Next stop was an old favourite, the **Stone Jug at Clophill**. A classic old, small village pub in Back Street, this free house generally has interesting brews on, and is usually crowded. On this occasion, the handpumps provided Hopping Mad Fruitcase, B&T Shefford Bitter and Buntingford Britannia from LocAle breweries, plus Nethergate Azzalord and Sharp's Doom Bar from further afield. I had Britannia and found it to my liking – a very bitter bitter.

Last village visited was **Houghton Conquest**, where two of the pubs now belong to Wells. Quite a contrast: the **Royal Oak** is a village local, while the **Knife & Cleaver** was for years very much a gastropub. We found the Royal Oak pretty deserted, and only Eagle was on handpump – albeit well kept. A recent renovation has left the interior rather featureless. The Knife & Cleaver in its new Wells incarnation is still an eating pub but with fewer gourmet pretensions than before – high-quality pub fare is now the theme – and now positively welcomes drinkers, including the locals. On handpump there were Eagle and Director's from Wells and Young's, plus Joseph Holt IPA as the guest. We proceeded to drink the Holt dry, and it was replaced on the guest pump by another Manchester beer, Hyde's Berry Good Ale. The latter, with a very strong infusion of blackberries, was not really to my taste as I like my beer to taste of beer! Nonetheless, a warm welcome from new licensees made this a very enjoyable final stop.

Fytton Rowland

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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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Mildly Disappointing



May being CAMRA's Mild

Month, we had hoped to take a Bedford town walk to visit pubs selling mild. But researches showed few milds available. So the

select band who turned up at the **Wellington Arms** enjoyed the two milds on there – B&T Black Dragon and Rudgate Ruby Mild – before setting out anyway. First stop, the newly opened **Tavistock Bar**, formerly the New Inn (see Pub News, p. 6). Much building work had gone on over many months – the building has been extended and the interior transformed. The decor is now modern, with flooring a mix of polished floorboards and stone slabs. It is predominantly an eating pub, with a carvery as the centrepiece, though drinkers are welcome. Its regular real ales are Bombardier and Eagle, which both seemed o.k. Next stop, an old-fashioned Wells pub – the **Foresters Arms** in Union Street. Both Eagle and Directors were on handpump. We received a warm welcome and sat in the cosy back bar; I found the Directors very acceptable. Then on to yet another Wells pub, the **Ship in Bromham Road**, a very pleasant local, but sadly with only Eagle on handpump, as is usual there. A swift game of pool, then on to the nearby pub that probably explains why the Ship doesn't compete on real ale – the **Bedford Arms**, where real ale is consistently good in both choice and quality. The guest ale on our arrival was Buntingford Marynka, an interesting beer made with Polish hops. On hearing that we were CAMRA, the landlady put another guest on – Ringwood Bold Forester – which we sampled to finish off a mixed evening on a high note.

Fytton Rowland

A New Brewery Almost on our Patch!

Huntingdonshire CAMRA Branch reports: 'Beers from Huntingdonshire's newest brewery, the Red Brewery in Great Staughton, will begin appearing in local pubs in May.' Great Staughton is of course just over the county boundary from Little Staughton, Bedfordshire.



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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

JULY

Thursday 5 - Branch Annual General Meeting

At the Ent Shed, the Gordon Arms, Castle Road, Bedford, at 8 p.m. (room available from 7 p.m.) CAMRA members only.

Cancellation of Trips

Recently a brewery trip planned for June had to be cancelled because too few members had booked to cover the cost of the bus. This was very disappointing to those who had booked. If you see an attractive future trip, either in the Branch

Thursday 19 – Branch meeting

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

AUGUST

Thursday 9 – Social

Details to be announced.

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 13 – Social

Details to be announced.

Thursday 20 – Branch meeting

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

OCTOBER

Wednesday 3 to Saturday 6 – 35th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival

Details on page 8.

Saturday 13 – CAMRA Bedfordshire Branches Joint London Day Trip

Details to be announced.

Diary here or on the N Beds CAMRA website, please book for it! Remember, non-members of CAMRA are welcome on social trips. We try to run an attractive programme of pub and brewery visits, but relatively few can be done using public transport, and bus hire has become expensive. So we always need to fill the bus.

World's Best Beers - 1000 Unmissable Brews from Portland to Prague

By Ben McFarland, Published by Jacqui Small, an imprint of Aurum Press, 2009

This book, which I was recently given, is written by the British Beer Writer of the Year for 2004 and 2006. Its coverage is indeed international, listing breweries in many countries with short entries, while a few get 'featured' treatment.

The choice can be eccentric – for Japan he 'features' a brewery run by an expatriate

American while omitting Kirin altogether. In the UK he lists most of the breweries you might expect. But there's no entry for B&T, and while something called 'Young's Brewery, Bedford' gets in, its entry bewailing the move from London, there is no mention of Charles Wells. Do I detect an anti-Bedfordshire bias?

Fytton Rowland

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