

# The firkin



**CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE**

**FREE**

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 38 No 4 Winter 2013-2014

## **Mother Earth Brewery, Flagstaff, AZ**



**CHAIRMAN'S CORNER**

**CHAMPION BEERS  
OF BRITAIN**

**BEER FESTIVAL  
RETROSPECTIVE**

**WINTER BEER FESTIVALS**

**PUB NEWS**

**COPPER KETTLE BREWERY**

**AN AUGUST WALKABOUT**

**PUBS TO THE SOUTH**

**BRANCH DIARY**

**ALE IN THE USA**

**APPRENTICE ORGANISER**

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

# PIG n HOG - St Neots

## Pig n Falcon



New Street, PE19 1AE  
Mon-Thu 10-late  
Fri/Sat 11-2.30am  
Sun 11-late

## Hog & Partridge



Russell Street, PE19 1BA  
Tue-Wed 6-11  
Thu 6-12; Fri 4-12  
Sat 12-12; Sun 12-11

**Live Music Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun**

**Min 8 real ales plus 6 real ciders,  
bottled foreign beers.**

**Potbelly Best £2.50/pt**

**Hunts CAMRA LocAle / Mild & Dark  
Ales / Cider Pub of the Year 2013**



**John Nunn - Hunts CAMRA Pub Champion 2013**



**Tapas Thu, Fri & Sat**

**Min 4 real ales plus 4 real ciders,  
draught foreign and craft beers.**

**Tapas - 'two for one' on Thursday**

**Hunts CAMRA Most Improved  
Town Pub 2013**

**PIG n HOG Winter Festival - 23rd Jan - 3rd Feb**

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Fine Wines*



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Serving an increased range of  
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**CAMRA North Beds Pub of the Year 2013**

**[www.devonshirearmsbedford.co.uk](http://www.devonshirearmsbedford.co.uk)**

**32 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TB Tel: 01234 359329**



## Chairman's Corner

**P**ubs need punters, people who buy what they are selling. Unfortunately some people have an outdated image of them as places which are sordid, sawdust on the floor and smoke in the air. As we know the reality is very different. Obviously the smoke-filled rooms have gone, but I have never seen a British pub floor covered in sawdust either.

They are selling an increasing range of drinks, including tea and coffee, so there should be something for every palate. Many also serve food so there's a chance for a meal at a reasonable price, with no preparation or clearing up afterwards and each person choosing what they want. What better way to take a break from all the rushing around than sitting down to talk and plan over food and drink?

Of course pubs generally offer something most of us don't have at home – the height and space for an attractive display of Christ-

mas decorations. They really do need height (so you don't bang into them) and space so they don't look crowded or merely a token display. All in all the coming weeks are a good time to drink up the atmosphere in your local, and to demonstrate to those who don't yet realise it that pubs are now somewhere respectable for all sections of society.

Elsewhere in this issue there's an account of the annual Bedford Beer and Cider Festival. This was an opportunity to widen our experience of beers from all round the country and beyond. There will be more opportunities in the coming months as more pubs have their own mini Beer Festivals when they have a range of beers out of tie. If you see one advertised, support it and the pub by giving more beers a try. And of course our CAMRA comrades in adjacent branches have their festivals too – try Luton's in February and St Neots' in March!

*Roger Stokes, Branch Chairman.*

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## It's Champion up North!

**T**he Champion Beers of Britain for 2013 were announced at the Great British Beer Festival at Olympia during August. The overall **Champion** was **1872 Porter** from the **Elland Brewery** in Yorkshire, which had been named as the **Winter Beer of Britain** at the National Winter Beer Festival in January 2013 – a fearsome 6.5% abv, to be drunk with respect!

In **second place** – from much nearer to home – was **Buntingford Brewery's Twitchell**, also named **Champion Bitter**, a 3.8% abv session bitter. In **third place**, from far away in the Highlands of Scotland,

came **Fyne Brewery's Jarl**, also **Champion Golden Ale**, another 3.8% abv brew.

The **Champions** of the other categories were as follows. **Mild: Great Orme Brewery's Welsh Black**, from Glan Conwy, 4% abv. **Best Bitter: Mordue Brewery's Workie Ticket**, from North Shields, 4.5% abv. **Strong Bitter: Beeston Brewery's On the Huh**, from Norfolk, 5% abv. **Speciality Beer: Growler Brewery's Umbel Magna**, from Essex, a coriander-flavoured beer at 5% abv. **Real Ale in a Bottle: Worthington White Shield**, from Burton-on Trent, 5.6% abv.

# New Improved Festival, Now with More Music!



**F**or the 36<sup>th</sup> time, CAMRA opened its annual Bedford Beer & Cider Festival for four days in October. On offer – 100 different cask ales, over 40 draught ciders and perries, and numerous foreign beers on draught in bottle.

The Bedford public flocked in to enjoy these delights, and as usual they were entertained by singers on the Wednesday and Saturday evenings and by the Bedford



Morris Men on Saturday lunchtime. On Wednesday evening the ever-popular Dr Busker returned, having not performed last year, only to create some controversy in the local press. Festival-



goers know what to expect from Dr B! And on Saturday evening, Kelly-Jo Hodgkin, well-known in the Bedford club scene, sang the blues for us.



But this time there was more. On the Friday, Steve Beeston, lecturer on the Performance Course at Bedford College,



brought some of the budding musicians from the course to perform music in a variety of styles to entertain the after-

noon clientele. The talent of these young performers was very clear, and we are grateful to Steve for suggesting this idea to us. We'll be inviting them again!

Then on Saturday afternoon, two South Beds CAMRA members offered to give us an hour of trad jazz, and so we were entertained by Honky (on trumpet) and Plunky (on banjo). The best things in life are often spontaneous.

Another gratifying change at this festival was the number of brand new volunteers who arrived to volunteer to work behind the bars – for once, we weren't short-handed during the busiest period on Friday evening. Grateful thanks to these new friends – we hope you enjoyed being rushed off your feet, and please come back next year! And join CAMRA if you're not members already...

Many visitors who attend different CAMRA festivals around the country commented that the food at the Bedford festival is the best at any local CAMRA festival. I agree. So, many thanks once again to Sunil, Tracey and the rest of the Corn Exchange catering team for the great meals they provided to festival staff and visitors alike. For future years, remember that you need not leave the Corn Exchange to eat – why split up your day at the festival when there is a fine choice of meals available in the Howard



## Festival (cont.)

Room? To make matters even better, you can get a continental beer right there in the room to go with your meal!

And how about the beers? There is no such thing as bad beer – it's just that some beers are better than others. Old favourites like Oakham JHB, Hop Back Summer Lightning, and Exmoor Gold sold out fast. But some newcomers proved popular too – the Copper Kettle Brewery in Rushden, sent us three beers which all sold well: UXB, at 3.9% abv, Bencroft Best Bitter, at 4.1% abv, and a ginger-flavoured one-off brew which all sold before I had a chance to try it. But for me, as a former East Midlander, Ay Up sent by the Dancing Duck Brewery in Derby was the favourite. It is a 3.9% abv session bitter of just the floral, hoppy kind I like best. Ay Up me Duck!

*Fytton Rowland*

## What has Greene King got against Pub Signs?

If you look at a few of the photos in this issue you may see a strange plague creeping across Greene King pubs in the Bedford area. It is apparently a new company house style. The name of the pub is in very plain sans-serif capital letters. And that's it. The Fox and Hounds has no hunt in full cry. The Bull still has a statue of a bull high up over the front door – maybe it would have cost too much to take it down? Compare the Ship, which still carries GK's old style. The proper pub sign with its ship in full sail remains. Why does GK think its pubs are enhanced by this puritanical plainness? Pub signs are a British tradition, after all!

*Fytton Rowland*

# The Firkin

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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 shown at the foot of this page.

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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](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk)

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# Winter beer festivals

## 18<sup>th</sup> Cambridge Winter Ale Festival

Thu 23 to Sat 25 January at University Social Club, Mill Lane CB2 1RX (X5 bus 10 min). Check website for opening hours and admission prices. Free to CAMRA members all times. About 100 real ales including winter beers from local and national breweries, plus ciders and foreign beers. Regular X5 bus from Bedford.

[www.cambridgebeerfestival.com](http://www.cambridgebeerfestival.com)

## National Winter Ales Festival

Wed 19 to Sat 22 February at the Roundhouse, Pride Park, Derby DE24 8JE.. Open Wed 5-10.30, Thu-Sat 12-10.30, admission Wed/Thu £2, Fri £3 before 4.30, Fri eve/Sat £5. Concessionary rates available, CAMRA members free Wed/Thu, £1 off Fri/Sat. Wide range of UK and foreign draught beers, bottled beers, cider and perry. No advance tickets – pay at the door. Food all day. Regular trains from Bedford and Luton.

[www.nwaf.org.uk](http://www.nwaf.org.uk)

## 31<sup>st</sup> Luton Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 20 to Sat 22 February at Hightown Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde St, LU2 0JD (rail stn 10 min). See advert on this page. Frequent trains from Bedford and Flitwick.

## 30<sup>th</sup> London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 12 to Fri 14 March at Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, WC1H 9AU (St. Pancras Stn 5 min). Over 150 real ales, cider, perry and foreign beers, food all sessions. Frequent trains from Bedford, Flitwick and Luton. Check website for opening hours, admission prices and beer list nearer the date.

## St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival

Thu 13 to Sat 15 March at Priory Centre, Priory Lane, PE19 6HB. Check website for details nearer date. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. [www.huntscamra.org.uk/festival](http://www.huntscamra.org.uk/festival)

# 31<sup>st</sup> LUTON BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

Thu 20<sup>th</sup> to Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2014

Hightown Community Sports & Arts Centre,  
York Street, Luton LU2 0JD

Just a short walk along High Town Road from Luton rail station

Open from midday to 11pm every day

• 100 real ales including  
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breweries

• Real ciders and perries

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Free entry for CAMRA members to all  
sessions

Non-members: £3 Thu & Fri; £2 Sat

Three halls

Live music Fri & Sat eves (Theatre Hall  
only)



Visit: [www.lutonbeerfestival.com](http://www.lutonbeerfestival.com) for updates  
or phone: 07917 645222

12th - 14th  
March  
2014

# LONDON DRINKER

Beer & Cider Festival

**Camden Centre, Bidborough St, WC1H 9AU**  
(Nearest tube King's Cross St. Pancras)

Wednesday	12th March	12 - 3	5 - 10.30pm
Thursday	13th March	12 - 3	5 - 10.30pm
Friday	14th March	12 -	10.30pm

Admission free Wednesday & Thursday lunchtimes, £3.50 at other times, £2.50 for CAMRA members. Last admission 10pm

Over 150 ciders, perries, imported beers and real ales including many London beers  
Home cooked food all sessions

For more details see [www.camranorthlondon.org.uk](http://www.camranorthlondon.org.uk) Follow us on Twitter: @LDbeerfest and Facebook

**350+ REAL ALES, CIDERS, PERRIES, CONTINENTAL BEERS and MEAD**

# NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL

2014

**LIVE MUSIC**  
details TBC

@WinterAlesFest

CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival

**The Roundhouse, Pride Park, Derby DE24 8JE**  
by the Pride Park exit from the Railway Station

**Weds 19th Feb - Sat 22nd Feb**

For more details see [nwaf.org.uk](http://nwaf.org.uk)

# Olde England

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**Bearded People Very Welcome!!!**

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**[www.TheOldeEngland.com](http://www.TheOldeEngland.com)**

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 Pub of the  
 Year  
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**CAMRA  
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 Year 2008**

# Oakley Arms



**Martin & Zoe offer a  
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 all Old and New  
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**3 Real Ales and  
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**Food served 12–2.30 and  
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**Serving a selection of cask ales, fine wines,  
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**Sunday roasts (only £6.95), court yard garden,  
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## WHAT'S ON

**Thurs 19th Dec - Live Music J37 Duo from 9pm**

**Tues 31st Dec - New Year's Eve Party**

**Thurs 9th Jan - Castle Pie Night from 6.30pm**

**Check out our new website for regular events  
 and more details.**

**17 Newnham Street,  
 Bedford, MK40 3JR.  
 Tel: 01234 353295**

**www.castlebedford.co.uk**



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# Pub News

## Swan with Two Nicks, Sharnbrook

Welcome to Martyn, Elaine and Guy, now running the refurbished pub on the High Street. Regular beers are Wells Eagle IPA and Bombardier, with up to two guest ales. A selection of award-winning wines is also available. A menu of home-cooked meals uses locally sourced ingredients where possible. A courtyard and a patio garden are open to drinkers. Opening hours: 12-3 and 6-11 (5-11 on Friday and Saturday) and 12-6 on Sunday. Call 01234 781585 or visit [www.swanwith2nicks.co.uk](http://www.swanwith2nicks.co.uk)

## St Johns Arms, Melchbourne



Welcome to Will & Jane, who now run this former gamekeeper's lodge just outside the village. Greene King IPA and Abbot and Sharp's Doom Bar are usually available, and sometimes a guest ale. Food is served throughout the week, with a breakfast available from 9am at weekends. Sunday roast is served from 1 to 5pm. During the week the pub opens at 4pm (3pm Friday), but it closes at 5pm on Sunday. Pool and skittles are played in the smaller public bar. The pub has been popular with bikers for many years. Call 01234 708238.

## Oakley Arms, Harrold

Welcome to Martin and Zoe, new arrivals at

this 400-year-old village inn with a bar and large lounge. Regular beers are Wells Eagle IPA and Courage Directors, joined occasionally by a guest ale. Food is limited to bar snacks, but a Chinese take-away may move into part of the premises. There is live music twice a month on Friday or Saturday evenings and a pub quiz once a month. Children are welcome until 8pm in the pub and large garden. Street parking nearby is not usually difficult. The pub opens all day from 12 noon. Call the new number 01234 721499 or visit

[www.oakleyarmsharrold.co.uk](http://www.oakleyarmsharrold.co.uk)

## Standard, High Street, Bedford



The former Hobgoblin re-opened as a free house with a new name in September. The interior has works of art distributed here and there. Regular beers are St Austell Tribute and Adnams Southwold Bitter, but there are usually guest ales, often local ones – Hop-ping Mad Brainstorm was on when we called. It includes a large ground-floor lounge, a smaller room upstairs and a partly

# Pub News (continued)

covered roof terrace that also provides a smoking area. It's open every day from 12 noon until late. Lunches are served until 3pm, with a regular hog roast on Sunday. There is entertainment from 8pm, with a nightclub on Friday and Saturday. Students are offered discounts to students on Monday, Friday and Saturday. The Standard is owned by a local businessman and run by Elaine Lawson, who is keen to build a reputation for real ales. Call 01234 269285 or visit [www.thestandardbedford.co.uk](http://www.thestandardbedford.co.uk)

## Five Bells, Riseley



The long struggle by villagers to save and re-open the Five Bells sadly came to an unsuccessful end when the developer who bought the premises from Greene King finally obtained permission to use the building and grounds for new housing. However, well done to the campaigners for continuing the fight for four years and demonstrating to the borough council that local people do care about pubs.

## Royal Oak, Carlton

We have received much better news about the Royal Oak, which Charles Wells has now sold to local business people who intend to refurbish and re-open it as a free house. Congratulations to the Royal Oak Campaign Group for never giving up their struggle to save this pub.



Royal Oak, Carlton

## Cock, Pavenham

Good news too for the Cock, where many readers will have seen "for sale" boards recently. Punch Taverns has now sold the pub to a Bedford businessman who wants to keep it open. The same tenants remain in charge. Call 01234 822834 or visit [www.thecockatpavenham.co.uk](http://www.thecockatpavenham.co.uk)



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# Pot Calling the Kettle Copper

Just over a year ago, three ex-servicemen founded a new brewery on Bencroft Grange Farm in the outskirts of Rushden, a few hundred yards outside Bedfordshire. In an enlightened move, the Royal British Legion gave financial help to the start-up, as part of their scheme to help ex-service people to found their own businesses. One of the three founders has moved on, but Pete and Vince have had a good first year. At the moment all their brewing work is done in the evenings and at weekends, since they have other jobs, but who knows what the future may hold?



Copper Kettle's UXB, a chestnut session bitter at 3.6% abv, and Bencroft Best Bitter at 4.1% abv had gone down well at Bedford Beer and Cider Festival, along with a one-off speciality ginger-flavoured ale. So it was appropriate that our 'reward trip', offered as a thank-you to those who volunteered at the festival, visited Copper Kettle this year. There had been some concern as to how thirty people would fit into the brewery – and the answer was, snugly! Pins of Cornucopia, a dark-gold 4% abv session ale, and of Ned Kelly Stout (4.5% abv) were on offer, and we made short work of them – both were excellent of their kind.

Pete welcomed us with the news that we were the first tour group to visit, ahead of their 'home' branch of CAMRA, Northants.

He then introduced us to their plant, a 3.5-barrel one acquired second-hand, which they used to produce their beers in twelve-firkin batches. Currently they sell about six firkins per week, brewing at weekends only. He and Vince (who unfortunately was not able to be there) are the only employees, though a serving service friend of his was also present to take photos of this historic first visit!



After the tour, we then moved on to the justly famed Rushden Historical Transport Society, the town's well-known real-ale venue housed in the former railway station. It was pretty full for a Thursday evening, and our group thirty made it just as snug as the brewery had been! Half a dozen hand-pumps were in use in the station bar, one of which was serving Copper Kettle's UXB. I tried Salopian Brewery's Golden Thread (5% abv) which I'd missed at our festival – it sold out too soon. John had Pheasant Plucker (careful how you pronounce that one after a few pints) from the Church End Brewery. To ease the overcrowding, our buffet supper was served in a railway carriage at the platform outside – something that hasn't happened previously on any of North Beds CAMRA's brewery tours! An excellent evening and a just reward for all our volunteers' efforts.

*Fytton Rowland*



## NEW FOR 2013

**MOONGAZER 4.3 ABV  
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or call 01442 890721

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## The Three Cups - Local Hero Pub

*Eight Real Ales, four from  
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*Home made food from  
locally sourced ingredients*



Regularly changing beers from Hopping Mad, Copper Kettle, White Park, Potton, Nobby's and Tring.

Third pint measures available.

Opening Times: Mon-Thu 11-11; Fri & Sat 11-midnight; Sun 12-11.

Traditional pub food including home made Scotch Eggs and Bedford Clangers. Recently refurbished garden.



Food served: Sun-Thu 12-3, 6-9; Fri & Sat 12-3.

## Beer Festival 14th to 15th September

45 Newnham Street, Bedford, MK40 3JR

01234 352153

# CAMRA Summer Stroll

On a less summery evening than some, a small band from N Beds CAMRA met for our Bedford Summer Stroll.



We met at the **Fox & Hounds** on Goldington Road. This pub had not been visited for some time and reports were that

the new landlord was enthusiastic to promote real ale. The pub is a large open-plan venue with plenty of space for pool and other games and the usual Sport TV, as well as plenty of comfortable seating and tables. Only one ale was on (Greene King IPA) and the bar staff said they had three (with Abbot and Old Speckled Hen) only at the weekend. It has to be said that the IPA was not at its best. *(On a later visit I found GK Festival Ale on handpump as well as IPA. Ed.)*

We set off for the ten-minute walk to The **Cricketers**. As to be expected the welcome was warm and the beer excellent, deserving of its CAMRA awards, including North Beds Pub of the Year in 2012.



We continued around the corner, down St Cuthbert's Street, to the **Ship**, again a pub that has not had an offi-

cial visit for some time. The back bar was busy and we were served efficiently. The guest ale ran out and so we had the choice of Greene King IPA, Abbot or the Landlord's new sales booster: a mystery ale. If you

guessed correctly you got a free pint next time (I think). The landlord said that it wasn't a Greene King beer, but a few of us felt that might not be quite true, and that it tasted like one of their other brewery names, most likely Kimberley 'Old Trip' but we didn't get to verify it! Beers were OK but we passed on to Newnham Street and the **Castle**, another familiar pub under new management. The new landlord was very welcoming and friendly and his Eagle and Bombardier very good as was his guest, Holt's Humdinger. We hope this well-known Bedford pub will soon be able to regain its status as one of the best pubs in town.

We finished our evening just down the road at **The Three Cups**. This pub has been made open plan, with one bar facing you as



you enter. The beers are presented well with information boards above the bar over each handpump so you can choose your beer as you approach or wait to be served. The pub stocks Greene King ales with guests from local micro-breweries. Beers have usually been well kept here but on our visit we did find two in not so

good condition (Red's Staughton Bitter and Hopping Mad's Balmy Days). Our comments were taken on board and the beers exchanged with no problem. There can always be the occasional quality issue. So we did all finish with an acceptable pint and, all in all, happy.

Gary Mudd

# The Victoria Arms



23 High Street, Wilden,  
MK44 2PB, 01234 772437

Cask Ales - four hand pumps with  
one pump dedicated to ales from  
local breweries, including  
Buntingford, Hopping Mad,  
Potbelly and Potton

Real cider - two real ciders and a  
perry available, from Westons and  
Gwynt Y Ddraig

Opening Times:  
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12noon-12.30am Saturday, 12noon-  
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# Go South, Young Man!

For our September bus trip, we headed south from Bedford to pubs we hadn't visited for a while – one we hadn't visited ever, because it had only just opened.



First stop, the **Bull** in London Road. Pubs are scarce in south Bedford, so the Bull is important. It's a Greene King

house, an interwar suburban pub, with one large L-shaped bar – sport on TV, a pool table, a fruit machine and darts, on hand-pump GK IPA, GK's Festival American Pale Ale (3.8% abv) and Everard's Tiger (4.2%). I had the Festival, which was in fair condition but served a bit too cold. Not many beyond our party of 14 were in. The bar staff were pleasant but the landlord wasn't present.

Next stop was the **Chimney Corner** at Kempston Hardwick, on the Ampthill Road. This was a Wells house until sold to the father of the present licensee. Father ran it rather eccentrically, opening when he felt like it, but son has more regular habits and has built up the restaurant trade. The two bars still have separate street doors – the small public bar is now the pool room. The saloon is now the bar and dining area. On handpump were Lancaster Bomber (4.4% abv) and Shepherd Neame Whitstable Bay (3.9% abv), a pale bitter. I had Whitstable, which was well kept, but not distinctive. The landlord and landlady were very friendly.



Third stop, the **Chequers** at Houghton Conquest. A Victorian pub, much extended into a dining

pub, belonging to Emery Inns. It was still comfortably full of diners at 8.30 p.m. Its handpumps provided Doom Bar (4.0% abv), Adnams Southwold (3.7% abv) and Young's Bitter (3.7% abv). The place was welcomingly warm and the staff were pleasant. I had Doom Bar – satisfactory.

We next visited the **Bell** in Marston Moretaine, a Victorian pub but a bit lacking in character. 'The last pub in the village.' Their beer delivery had been delayed by a day and only Ringwood Best (3.8% abv) was available in cask – the Wadworth's 6X had run out. We all had the Ringwood, which was pleasant, but the priciest pint of the evening at £3.75. The pub does a limited

food menu, and wasn't very busy.



Next stop, the new **Brewer's Fayre** near the Marsh Leys A421 interchange. This new

district is the only one of the large housing developments around Bedford to have a pub – in New Cardington, Wixams, Great Denham and Woodlands Park, no pub. We had wondered what the attitude to a large group of non-eating drinkers would be – but the welcome was friendly, the service quick, and the cask ale well kept. London Pride and Spitfire were on – most had the Pride but I went for the Spitfire, which I enjoyed. You can't expect much individual character in a chain pub, but this was a pleasant surprise.

A stop at a proper pub was now in order, so we stopped at the **Half Moon** in Kempston, an old-style local. Only Eagle IPA was on handpump, and as expected it was in good condition. Finally we went to the **Bedford Arms**, where a few had a final drink.

# Branch Diary



CAMRA North Beds Branch business meetings are normally held on the second Thursday of alternate months, e.g. January and March. Social and campaigning events are usually held on the third 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](http://www.northbedscamra.org.uk)

Unless otherwise noted, details can be obtained from, and bookings made with, Gary Mudd on 01234 741871 or e-mail [socials@northbedscamra.org.uk](mailto:socials@northbedscamra.org.uk)

## DECEMBER

### Thursday 12 – Christmas Social

At the Pilgrim's Progress, 42 Midland Road, Bedford, 7.30 p.m. for 8 p.m.

## JANUARY

### Thursday 9 – Branch Meeting

Business meeting at Bedford Rowing Club, Duckmill Lane, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

### Thursday 16 – Rural Pub Tour 1

Minibus tour leaving the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford at 7 p.m.

### Thursday 23 – Rural Pub Tour 2

Minibus tour leaving the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford at 7 p.m.

### Thursday 30 – Walking tour of Bedford town pubs

Meet at the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford, at 7 p.m.

## FEBRUARY

### Thursday 6 – Branch Meeting

Business meeting at Bedford Rowing Club, Duckmill Lane, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

### Friday 21 – Branch visit to Luton Beer and Cider Festival

See p. 6 for details of the festival, and website for details of the N Beds CAMRA branch visit.

## MARCH

### Thursday 13 – Branch Meeting

Business meeting at Bedford Rowing Club, Duckmill Lane, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

### Friday 14 – Branch visit to St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival

See [www.huntscamra.org.uk](http://www.huntscamra.org.uk) for details of the festival, and N Beds CAMRA website for details of our branch visit.

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7 - 11.30pm Sunday

# American Jaunt of a Chairman

**S**ome allege that Americans drink their beer ice-cold so they don't taste it. But the craft ale market might be educating them. On a trip to North America, craft beer was generally not throat-numbingly cold, but served closer to the Cask Marque range of 10 -14°C, cold enough to be refreshing, but the taste can be appreciated.

There was little choice near my hotel in Oklahoma – the only draft on offer was Blue Moon (5.4% abv), with a half-slice of orange, supposedly to accentuate the taste. You could have fooled me. At Elk City (home of the Route 66 Museum), I couldn't find a bar within walking distance.

The hotel in Albuquerque had a bar but Marble Brewery Red was unfortunately not on. Wildflower Wheat (5.6% abv) was acceptable but too cold to get any subtlety. Odell IPA was an eye-opener. At 7% abv and 60 International Bittering Units (IBU), it is closer to the ale that was shipped to India than the session beers I am used to (about half the strength and half the IBU). Malt offered late sweetness, but it was not balanced.

At the Grand Canyon I had more variety, starting with the Grand Canyon Amber (5.4% abv, 21 IBU), unremarkable, while the Wheat Beer (4.2% abv, 13.5 IBU) had depth and nuances of flavour. Killian's Red (4.9% abv, 14 IBU) was good but not to my taste.

Having dropped the car at Flagstaff, I was able to do at least part of the city's Ale Trail before catching the train. Lumberyard Red (5.8% abv, 50 IBU) and IPA (6.1% abv, 90 IBU) were worth drinking. The tap room at Mother Road (see front cover) was a fenced area in the brewing hall, so the Roadside (5.0% abv, 27 IBU) was fresh. Bear Republic Racer IPA (7% abv, 75 IBU) and Stone IPA (6.9% abv, 77 IBU) gave a good night's sleep.

Seattle brought Kells IPA (6.2% abv), which was typically American in style, while their Irish Lager (4.5% abv) showed great depth of

flavour. The Irish Red (4.5% abv) and Manny's Pale Ale (5.2% abv, 38 IBU) were also drinkable. In Vancouver, delights included Driftwood's Belgian-style Witbier (5% abv), and Granville Island's Pale Ale (5% abv, 18 IBU) and Lager (5% abv, 19 IBU). Big Rock's IPA (5.5% abv) offered a pleasant end to my West Coast journey.

The trip east offered only Fort Garry's bottled beer. Both the Pale and the Dark Ale come in at 5% abv, the latter being well-rounded and would make a good real ale. Toronto brought new experiences, initially the interesting combination of flavours in St Ambrose Oatmeal Stout (5% abv), while the 3 Brewers offers a broad range of beers to sample. They range from the White (4.7% abv, 18 IBU) through Blonde (5.2% abv, 24 IBU), IPA (6% abv, 60 IBU) and Amber (6.2% abv, 26 IBU) to Brown (4.8% abv, 27 IBU). Additionally there is a Beer of the Month and a Beer of the Season – 12cl glasses are available in their sampling bats. If you know what you want the alternative is the litre-sized varlet!

Back in the USA, Rochester has a number of local breweries, but finding their beers is a matter of chance. Rohrbach's Railway Street IPA (6.5% abv) is described as having 'an overload of hops' – I would agree with that. Their 7% abv Scotch Ale went down smoothly. Great Lakes Fitzgerald Porter (5.8% abv, 37 IBU) proved an excellent example of the style, while Three Heads Brewing's The Kind IPA (6.8% abv, 76 IBU) belied that IBU rating with good balance and a floral finish.

Boston is home to Samuel Adams Lager, widely available. At 4.9% abv and 30 IBU, it is drinkable with more flavour than the common lagers in the UK. Harpoon is the other major local brewer and their IPA (5.9% abv, 42 IBU) is another one I would like to try as real ale. I think a lot of US ales would taste even better cask-conditioned!

*Roger Stokes*



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# Confessions of an Apprentice Festival Organiser

**T**he 36<sup>th</sup> Bedford Beer and Cider Festival had a new Festival Organiser this year – your Editor. I was in Australia when I got appointed to the position, which shows what happens when you go off on a long holiday... I was apprehensive as the festival dates approached. I was certain I'd forgotten something, as indeed I had, and that my mistakes would cause the collapse of the Festival, which they didn't.

On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September, I visited the Corn Exchange to make sure all was ready for us. 'You will make sure the pallet truck is charged up ready for us to use on Sunday', I said. 'Ah', said the Corn Exchange staff, 'it's broken down and gone for repair. Won't be back for a week.' Hmm – lots of heavy pallets arriving from CAMRA HQ on Sunday, and nothing to pick them up with... A trip to HSS Hire solved that one – just one pallet truck was available, albeit in Dunstable. 'It'll be delivered on Saturday', said Ian at HSS. It was – thanks, Ian, for helping me out.

Sunday inevitably arrived. At first things went well – unlike last year, all the major deliveries arrived nice and early. But then we found that although I'd bought waterproof plastic sheeting, I'd forgotten to get the tape to stick it together. Fortunately Screwfix is open on Sundays, to buy duct tape. The scaffolding for the stillage went up double-quick because several real scaffolders turned up – but after they'd left we found that the stillage was one bay shorter than it should be, so not all the casks would fit on. But the stalwart Tim Anstead managed to find some extra scaffold poles and put them up for us – saved again, thanks so much, Tim!

We had a donated laptop to use in the Festival office. But its keyboard didn't work properly. Another alarm, solved by a £5.99 USB keyboard from PC World, fortunately also open on Sundays.

On Monday morning the beers started to arrive. Up they went on to the stillage. 'Where are the chocks?' said Geoff. Indeed, where were they? I consulted my order form sent into the CAMRA warehouse months earlier. Aargh – I forgot to order chocks. Leap into car, drive to warehouse in St Albans. They could spare us one box of chocks. Back to Bedford again. 'Not enough chocks', said Geoff. Off I went to all my favourite pubs to scrounge chocks. I got some, though still not enough. But Paul Davies of the Cricketers said he had an electric chop saw. Off to Wickes for a length of 4 x 2, back to the Cricketers, where Paul cut 30 chocks from it. Another star who deserves many heartfelt thanks! Now the casks, stabilised by chocks, could finally be tapped. All 100 of them – er, not quite. We stayed till 7 p.m. and one last brewery hadn't delivered – not named, to protect the guilty.

Tuesday. The bar counters arrived on time and we got them put together. But where were the foreign beers – coming from a different importer this year? Finally about 5 p.m. they showed up. All components of a festival were now in place. Except of course that one last brewery's two beers. That brewery finally turned up too. But with only one beer – the other hadn't come out right. Quick phone call to another brewer – a new one, Malt the Brewer, based in Buckinghamshire. Could they supply 18 gallons at short notice? They could, and it came on Wednesday. More people needing my thanks – sorry, Malt, that it wasn't possible to get you into the printed programme.

Wednesday at 4 p.m., as St Paul's clock struck I flung open the doors to find a longish queue waiting. We'd made it! We had a Festival in spite of the tyro organiser. The story continues on page 4.

*Fytton Rowland*

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