

The firkin



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

FREE

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 39 No 3 Autumn 2014

Bedford Beer and Cider Festival 8th-11th October



Bigger and Better This Year

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

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B&T IN FOCUS

KEMPSTON PUBS & CLUBS

BRANCH DIARY

MEET THE BREWER

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Chairman's Corner

The North Beds CAMRA AGM this year found us in a venue new to many of us – the Bedford International Athletic

Stadium. It isn't the first place most people would think of holding a CAMRA meeting, but the welcome was as warm as the weather. Once the bar was open the young man serving us was attentive to our needs. We had a decent attendance who also seemed to appreciate the beers that were on tap. Both came from the South-West, one either side of the Tamar. Comments suggested that Otter was a new brewery for many, while all had sampled Sharp's Doom Bar before. The Otter did not last the evening.

The reports indicated that the branch is basically "steady as she goes". We had increased the number of pubs we had visited as a branch and we look to visit even more in the coming year. In my remarks I commented that we need to cast the net as widely as possible to find all the pubs in our area that serve good quality real ale. This is important to make sure that the standard to warrant nomination for the *Good Beer Guide* rises rather than falls. It is encouraging that a high proportion of pubs and clubs (a number of which are converting to having a pub licence so it is easier for us to visit them) now serve real ale. We need to ensure that where it is served it is well kept.

Unfortunately, progress on our other two objectives for the year was not as positive. Increasing the number of places where real cider and/or perry is available all year is proving difficult, as is increasing the number of young members in the branch. Our young members' coordinator has had to step down because of the pressure of other

commitments, but an increased presence on social media could be helpful in boosting this sector of our membership. The elections brought no surprises with the officers all being re-elected. We lost Don Allan from the committee, as he stepped down, and welcomed a new member, David Dupont. We do need to seek out people who are willing to take over leadership of the branch within the next few years, as some of the office-holders who have served many years in various capacities are finding their energy waning.

Our guest speaker was Andy Shaw, who holds the Pubs and IT portfolios on the National Executive of CAMRA. He brought a chilling message as he projected what would happen to the pub estate if the current rate of closures continues to 2020. The burgeoning number of coffee shops on our high streets shows that people still want a drink while out. Many pubs now sell good quality coffee cheaper than some of the chains. But the custom of regulars visiting their local almost every night seems to be dying out.

We know pubs are no longer the sordid places some still envisage them as. When out in town why not pop in for a meal and/or a coffee, even if you think it's still too early to drink? Better still, if you have a doubting relative with you take them in and show them how welcoming and relaxing a pub can be? We all have a part to play in sustaining our community and town pubs. Without them England would change as communities stop gathering informally as they do in their local. That would make life poorer for all of us. Here is something undemanding, fun and worthwhile. It brings us pleasure, strengthens community and helps our hard-pressed landlords and landladies.

Roger Stokes

Bigger and Better for 2014: Bedford Beer and Cider Festival



The Bedford Beer and Cider Festival has been a fixture in October in the town's annual calendar for many years. This year it will be held in the Corn Exchange in St Paul's Square from Wednesday 8th to Saturday 11th October.

There will be several changes from the previous format, all designed to provide more space and a greater variety of drink and food to our customers. What won't change is the range of about 100 British cask ales, 40 real ciders and perries, mainly from local producers, and many draught and bottled foreign beers. Still absent will be keg or smoothflow beer and processed cider!

For the first time, we'll be using Number 13, the former Saracen's Head pub next door to the Corn Exchange, for our food service. This means that in addition to the pub favourite meals we've usually served at the Festival,

the regular Number 13 menu will also be available, to give a greater choice of snack-size and main meals.

Upstairs in the Howard Room, there will be our usual Foreign Beer Bar, with a greater variety of draught and





bottled beers than before, including draught beers from Bedford's twin town, Bamberg. Also in the Howard Room will be the Cider Bar, relocated from the main hall. And for the first time, there will be a Wine Bar, serving wines from vineyards in the East of England, including one vineyard in Bedfordshire. Seating and circulation space will still be available in the Howard Room and on the balcony.

In the main hall the relocation of the Cider Bar will free up more circulation space around the main beer bar, easing overcrowding during the busy evening periods. Less overcrowding means less overheating, making it



easier for our cask chillers to keep the cask beers at the perfect temperature for best possible condition throughout the week.

Pint and half-pint glasses will be available for £2.50, sale or return, and this year's logo (see p.7) shows the famous Cardington Hangers with a beer airship, the Beerliner, hovering above them!

Entertainment will of course be provided on Wednesday and Saturday evenings – on Wednesday the Ouse Valley Singles Club, a comedy band

Staff needed

The festival is run entirely by volunteers. Please consider doing a stint behind the bar! You will receive free beer and subsidised meals during your working session. To volunteer, go to www.northbedscamra.org.uk, for an online staffing form, or phone 01234 303221 and ask for a form to be posted to you.

Bigger and Better for 2014: Bedford Beer and Cider Festival



heavily influenced by 1950s skiffle, will be performing, and on Saturday Fishwife's Broadside, Bedford's acoustic punk folk rant pop octet, will headline.

The festival will be open from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Wednesday, and 12 noon to 11 p.m. Thursday to Saturday. Entry will cost £1 before 4 p.m., then £2 on Wednesday and Saturday, £3 on Thursday and £4 on Friday after 4 p.m.

CAMRA members get in free, so why not fill in the form on p.22 and join

CAMRA beforehand! Lifts (including one to and from Number 13) will be available for visitors with limited mobility, but no-one under 18 is admitted, and if you look young you may be asked for proof of your age.

The cloakroom will be run as before by Bedford Lions Club to raise funds for local charities. Smoking is not permitted inside the Corn Exchange or Number 13, but short pass-outs will be made available to smokers.

Public transport to central Bedford is quite good, but if you must come by car, please select a designated driver. Soft drinks will be available free of charge in the main hall and the Howard Room, and a wider choice for a charge in Number 13. The festival office will have bus and train timetables and taxi phone numbers available.

Fytton Rowland
Festival Organiser



Sponsor a cask

For just £50, your company name and logo will be posted up on a cask behind the bar throughout the festival. Phone 01234 344388 or visit www.northbedscamra.org.uk

37th BEDFORD BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

Corn Exchange, St Paul's Square, Bedford MK40 1SL

Wed 8th - Sat 11th October 2014

Open Wed 4-11, Thu-Sat 12-11



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More than 100 real ales + 40 ciders and perries Draught + bottled foreign beers • English wines

Admission before 4pm: £1

After 4pm: Wed £2, Thu £3, Fri £4, Sat £2

CAMRA members free

No tickets - pay at the door

NO ONE UNDER AGE 18 ADMITTED

ID may be required

Short street pass-outs for smokers

Wheelchair access to all floors

Entertainers

Wed eve: Ouse Valley Singles Club

Sat lunch: Bedford Morris Men

Sat eve: Fishwife's Broadside

CAMRA North Bedfordshire
www.northbedscamra.org.uk

Other features

- * Souvenir glasses £2.50 sale or return
- * Oversize glasses for a full 20 oz pint
- * Pint, half + third pint measures
- * Tasty food served in Number 13
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- * New Good Beer Guide 2015
- * Tombola and pub game



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2014



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Admission: £3 Wed – Fri, £4.50 Sat (CAMRA members free at all times)

Thursday night on stage: Swan Vesta Social Club

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Don't drink and drive. Use the train or bus. NO ONE UNDER THE AGE OF 18 CAN BE ADMITTED

stalbansbeerfestival.org.uk / realales@yahoo.com





Autumn beer festivals

St Albans Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 24 to Sat 27 September at Alban Arena, Civic Centre, St Albans AL1 3LD (rail stn 10 min). Open 11-11, admission Wed-Fri £3, Sat £4.50, CAMRA members free. Advance tickets available via website. Up to 300 real ales plus cider, perry, bottle-conditioned and foreign beers. Live music Thu eve and Sat lunch/eve. Frequent trains from Bedford and Flitwick. See advert in this issue. www.stalbansbeerfestival.com

37th Bedford Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 8 to Sat 11 October at Corn Exchange, St Paul's Square, Bedford MK40 1SL. Open Wed 4-11, Thu-Sat 12-11. Admission £1 before 4pm, then Wed £2, Thu £, Fri £4, Sat £2, CAMRA members free. **See pages 4 to 7.** www.northbedscamra.org.uk

Nottingham Robin Hood Beer Festival

Wed 8 to Sat 11 October in the grounds of Nottingham Castle NG1 6DH (rail stn short walk). Open Wed 6-11, Thu-Sat 11-11. Admission varies, advance ticket purchase through website recommended. Over 1,000 real ales, 200 real ciders, perries and country wines. Hot and cold food, live music on bandstand outside marquee. Regular trains from Bedford and Luton. www.beerfestival.nottinghamcamra.org

St Ives Booze on the Ouse Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 9 to Sat 11 October at Burgess Hall, Westwood Road, St Ives PE27 6WU. Open Thu 5-11, Fri 12-11, Sat 12-10. Admission Thu £2, Fri £1 before 5pm then £3, Sat £2 before 5pm then £1, CAMRA members free. No admission after 10.30 (Sat 9.30), families welcome until 8pm. About 70 real ales plus real cider, perry and bottled British and foreign beers. Tombola and CAMRA shop, food available all day, free soft drinks for drivers. www.huntscamra.org.uk/festival

21st Milton Keynes Concrete Pint Beer Festival

Wed 15 to Sat 18 October at The Buszy, Elder Gate, MK9 1LR (rail stn 200m, buses 100m). Open Wed 5-11, Thu-Sat 12-11 (Fri midnight). Admission £3 Thu/Fri after 5.30pm, CAMRA members free. Over 90 real ales, 20 ciders and perries, hot and cold food available all sessions. Live music Thu and Sat eves. Regular X5, 40 and C1 buses from Bedford. www.mkcamra.org.uk

16th Oxford Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 16 to Sat 18 October at Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates Oxford OX1 1BX. Open Thu 5-11, Fri 11-11, Sat 11-8. Admission £2, CAMRA members free. About 150 real ales, 50 real ciders, hot and cold food. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. www.oxfordcamra.org.uk

8th Cambridge Octoberfest

Fri 17 to Sat 18 October at University Social Club, Mill Lane Cambridge CB2 1RX (X5 bus 10 min). Open Fri 5-10.30, Sat 12-10.30. Admission £3, CAMRA members free. About 40 real ales including continental style specials plus draught German beers. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. www.cambridgebeerfestival.com

No Longer Brewing Just Around the Bend

Hopping Mad Brewery seemed to be one of the more successful of our local start-up microbreweries.

So it came as a shock earlier this year when we learned that it had ceased trading.

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Pub News

Horse & Groom, Clapham

Apologies to new landlord Budgie for not including this item in our last issue. A former coaching inn, the Horse & Groom offers a series of comfortable, divided seating areas and a dedicated games room in the roofed former coach yard. Greene King IPA, Abbot and a guest ale are available.



The pub offers business lunches, early evening dinners and Sunday roasts, and regular live bands, discos and karaoke. Families are welcome, with a children's play area and a large garden running to the banks of the Great Ouse. Call 01234 217502.

Daleys, Bedford Road, Kempston

This former members' club has new owners is now a pub open to all. New host David Clarke serves Upham Punter (4% abv) plus a guest ale sourced through Charles Wells. The main room shows its history as a club, with pool, snooker and skittles evident. Simple basket bar food is available throughout opening hours. Call 01234 851143.

Smiths Arms, Margetts Road, Kempston

This street corner local owned by Hop Inns is sometimes considered Kempston's answer to the Rovers Return, but with less drama! There is an unusual split-level bar,



with Young's bitter and a guest ale on handpump. Landlord Tomas Dequinney

also holds jazz and karaoke evenings about once a month. Call 01234 856428.

Three Cups, Newnham Street, Bedford

We understand the lease on this Greene King Local Hero pub was recently taken over by White Park brewery owner Alan Kelly. Manager Bev Burridge remains in day-to-day charge and the pub's Local Hero status continues, allowing Alan and Bev to offer guest ales from local microbreweries as well as regulars from Greene King. We wish the new partnership well and look forward to seeing more White Park beers on the bar! Call 01234 352153.

Cricketers Arms, Goldington Road, Bedford

It was a sad day for pub regulars and local CAMRA members when landlords Paul Davies and Stephanie Law quit at the end of July, after over 13 years serving top class real ales. Bedford's "Welsh Embassy" was the only pub in Bedford where you would always find Brains beers. The one-bar pub near the rugby ground drew fans on non-match days by regularly screening live matches included the Six Nations. Paul and Steph won the pub two CAMRA Pub of the Year awards and a regular entry in the national Good Beer Guide. We do not yet know what owners Punch Taverns plan for the pub but if it does reopen Paul and Stephanie will certainly be a hard act to follow. Best wishes to them both.



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Kevin's Silver Year



On 28th June, a large deputation of CAMRA members from the East, North and South Bedfordshire branches gathered at the Engineer's Arms in Henlow for the

presentation of the award for Bedfordshire County Pub of the Year 2014. The certificate was presented by John Goodlet, Chairman of East Beds branch, in whose area Henlow lies. We all wished landlord Kevin the best of the luck for the future

stages of the competition – last time he had the county award, three years ago, he finally reached he last four nationally. Maybe this is the year he'll go all the way and be the national winner!

If so it would be an appropriate year – Kevin is celebrating his 25th anniversary as licensee of the Engineer's. He took it as a Wells pub originally, bought it from Wells and made it into a free house, and now he sells the widest and most distinctive selection of cask ales for miles around. To celebrate, he held a ten-day party from 1st to 10th August, with entertainment most days and of course a great choice of ales. Many of them came from Staffordshire – Kevin was born, appropriately, in Burton-on-Trent – and Derbyshire, where he worked in the mines before his change of career. Drink a toast to a great publican!

Wootton Walkabout

The C1 bus dropped us off outside Wootton Village Hall, to walk to our first stop; The Fox & Duck. But it was shut, with a blackboard proclaiming a Karaoke night in November (last year). But we were not downhearted and turned back down the road to be welcomed at the Cock. The Cock was very pleasant and welcoming. The bar had games and pool, and the lounge gradually filled with folk from the drama group who were having a read-through that night. The beers (both golden and quite similar): Mr Grundy's 'Big Willy' (a WW1 tank in case you think me in dubious taste) at 4.3% abv and Church Brewery's 'Gold Testament' (do you see what they did there?) at 3.9% abv. Very well served and, of course, we tried both to compare them, being down a drink after the Fox & Duck!

John Martin joined us at the Cock as our sherpa and led us through Wootton to the

Chequers; a beautiful old black and white pub, now a thriving free house and restaurant since leaving Wells. In the little, low-beamed lounge bar, fair pints of Eagle Bitter, Woodford's Wherry and Adnams' Fat Sprat were on offer. After a pleasant visit we set off to walk round to the Legstraps (bistro'd up from the Rose and Crown, now called by what was always its nickname). Quick walkers arrived dry but the slower arrived damp due to a sharp shower. The Legstraps is now a pleasant restaurant-pub with an open bar area. Beers on sale were Sharps Doom Bar and Fullers London Pride, both acceptable pints.

Eventually we had to tear ourselves from our comfortable seats to catch the last bus back to Bedford. An unpromising start but in the end a pleasant evening.

Gary Mudd



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Our Summer Day Out in Grantham

For North Beds CAMRA's Summer day out, we visited breweries around Grantham. We stopped first at Oldershaws,



in the buildings of an old mushroom farm at Barkston Heath. The brewery was founded by Gary and Diane Oldershaw in 1996

and taken over by Kathy and Tim Britton in 2010. Kathy filled glasses from two pins set up in the cold room: Blonde Volupta at 5% abv (a golden beer with passion fruit notes from hops such as Citra) and Summerdaze at 4.7% abv (a light summery wheat beer with a lovely zesty orange kick). Some nibbles to stave off any pre-lunch hunger pangs were provided.

Colin Church (main brewer) and Gary Gooch showed us round. The brewery is a nine-barrel plant and has three fermenters, and three brews a week produce 42,000 gallons of beer a year. They now have 12 core beers with regular seasonals. They also produce specials in bottle for the St Pancras Grand Hotel and Café Football in Stratford, London.



Next we stopped at the famous Angel & Royal Hotel in Grantham for a good sandwich lunch, with Old-

ershaws on handpump. Gary Gooch had phoned ahead to ask them to open up the Angel Bar for us to see. This dates from the twelfth century and has a fine stone inglenook fireplace and ornate carvings.



We moved on next to Brewsters Brewery, west of Grantham. We met our second lady brewer (which brewster

means) in one day – this brewery was started in 1998 by Sarah Barton, and is well known for the quality of its beers, Hophead (3.4% abv) being the most famous. It is a ten-barrel brewery with six 12-barrel fermenters. Brewing takes place three or four times a week. A wet yeast is used and is renewed every six months.

Brewsters has a core of beers with regular specials – the Whimsicales range and Wick-ed Women, the latest being Brazilian Seductress, and are looking at the 'craft ale' market with a new American Pale Ale (5%). Pins of Stilton Porter (4.9% abv), a rich four-malt beer with English hops, and a new beer, Celeste (3.8% abv), lovely and soft on the palate; a good thirst quencher flavoured with Galaxy and Simcoe hops, were available for us to try, and we did our best. I also got a sneaky taste of the latest batch of Hophead out of the fermenter!



Then we travelled to 8Sail brewery at Heckington, near Sleaford. 8Sail is run by Tony Pygott and Steve Doane and was set up in 2010. It is a six-barrel brewery. We were treated to glasses of Blonde (4.0% abv), a tasty pale beer

made with a mix of pale and lager malts and European hops. 8Sail gets its name due to being in the old grain store of Heckington Mill, an eight-sail windmill recently given National Lottery funding and due to reopen as a Victorian working mill museum. Tony hopes to install a proper Victorian bar to sell beer in authentic historic glasses, which he collects. Steve gave us a quick tour of the brewhouse and then we were given a most interesting talk by Tony about drinking vessels. A few bottles heavier we rejoined the coach after we watched the manual level crossing at the station in action (one of very few left).

Continued on page 17

30 REAL ALES 20 REAL CIDERS 30 FRUIT WINES & MEADS 30 REAL ALES 20 REAL CIDERS 30 FRUIT WINES & MEADS 30 REAL ALES 20 REAL CIDERS 30 FRUIT WINES & MEADS 30 REAL ALES 20 REAL CIDERS 30 FRUIT WINES & MEADS

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Brewery in Focus: B&T

One of the people made redundant from Whitbread in Luton in 1982 was Martin Ayres. Martin and a friend, Mike Desquesnes, who had an interest in home brewing, decided together to start a microbrewery as they could foresee a growth in the real ale market with CAMRA's increasing market interest. They sought the help of an ex-Phipps Northampton head brewer, Bill Urquart, who is now viewed as one of the fathers of British microbrewing having founded Litchborough Brewery in 1975 in a barn at the side of his cottage.

A suitable site was found on an industrial unit in Shefford, Bedfordshire, where they are still, and with Bill's advice various brewery equipment (mill, mash tun, etc.) was obtained. Brewing commenced in August 1982 with Shefford Bitter one of the first brews. They decided upon the name Banks & Taylor, these being the maiden names of each of their mothers, as it flowed better than Desquesnes & Ayres. Banks & Taylor became B&T Brewery Ltd on a restructuring of the business in 1994.

The aim has always been to produce cask-conditioned ales using traditional methods and a combination of pale, crystal and roast and wheat malts along with Challenger, Goldings and Cascade whole hops which enables production of over 30 different beers, each with their own distinct character

and flavour. Seasonal specials are produced to commemorate the many different traditions, historical events and folklores of Bedfordshire. One of B&T's beers, Dragon Slayer, was created originally as a St George's Day special for Alison Taylor at the Bricklayers Arms in Luton and proved so popular that it is now part of the regular beer range.

Brewing four days a week on an 18-barrel plant is overseen by head brewer John Waters who has been with the brewery since 1985. Regular B&T beers include the following: Shefford Bitter, 3.8% abv, a pleasant, well-hopped session beer; Dragon Slayer, 4.5% abv, straw coloured beer, dry, malty and lightly hopped; Golden Fox, 4.1% abv, a golden, refreshing beer with fruity overtones; Edwin Taylor's Extra Stout, 4.5% abv, a pleasant stout with a strong roast malt flavour; and Black Dragon Mild, 4.3% abv, strong dark mild with pronounced roast flavours.

B&T have seven pubs in Shefford, Bedford, Ampthill, Hitchin, Dunstable, Cambridge and Rugby, which they supply together with over sixty other outlets.

John Flowers

This article first appeared in Beer in Bed(s), the newsletter of South Beds CAMRA branch, and is reproduced with permission.

Summer Day Out (continued)

We set off back south to the thirteenth-century Blue Cow Inn in South Witham. The brewery here is indeed micro, and only had room for six people at a time.



(Luckily there were 12 of us!) Simon Crathorn, the landlord since 2005 and brewer, talked us through his process, which now produces just one beer: Blue Cow Best Bitter (3.8% abv). This slightly tart English bitter was accompanied a very nice dinner of pub fare as we rounded off our day and returned happily home, arriving at 11 p.m.

Gary Mudd

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Pubbing and Clubbing in Kempston

In line with our new idea of running pub tours by public transport where possible, North Beds CAMRA held a Kempston tour in late June. Boarding the 7 p.m. bus from Bedford, I was dismayed to find only one other CAMRA member on it. I needn't have worried. Two others were already into their first pint when we arrived, others came by car, and a contingent of Kempston residents arrived, so a party of fourteen finally gathered at Daley's Social Club.



Soon to be Daley's Pub, we heard from new owner David Clark – he is applying for a pub licence. Its present name is appropriate

though, as it runs darts, pool and football teams and is clearly a social centre. A large bar with a traditional pub-like feel, it serves basic bar food. There was only one handpump, which was providing Upham Punter (4.0% abv) a conventional bitter, at a very reasonable £2.50 per pint. A second handpump was expected imminently.



A short walk down a side street brought us to the Smith's Arms, one of the houses put up by Charles Wells in the 1890s. Sold off by Wells five years ago, it is now an independent free house, but the only cask ale on was Young's Bitter (3.7%

abv) – though at the free trade price of £2.60, undercutting Wells tied houses. Different real ales are rotated, and the night before we could have had Doom Bar. The pub is of an unusual design, with a split-

level interior – entering at ground level, you have to go up four steps to the actual bar. A friendly welcome came from the new licensee, Tomas. Just a drinking pub, this, with no food.

Another short walk brought us to the Griffin, a Greene King house, which looked recently repainted and had 'Cask ales' painted up beside the door. We went in, hoping for GK IPA at least. Alas – no real ales any longer! Moving on hurriedly, we next visited the Constitutional Club. The one club member among our group was permitted to bring in 13 guests! The busiest venue of the evening, its large space was quite full, with many people eating. Wells Eagle and Young's London Gold were on handpump; I had the Gold, which was acceptable if a little too cold, and cost only £2.55.



A longer walk next, to the King William IV, a very old half-timbered pub, much extended. It's a Wells house with an emphasis on food. Four handpumps were in use, with Eagle and Bombardier accompanied by two guests – Cameron's Strongarm and Everard's Xingu, both 4.0% abv. The Xingu was a 'Brazilian style beer', in honour of the World Cup – very pale in colour and with little hoppy kick, effectively a cask lager. Strongarm, on the other hand, is a rich ruby beer with a lot of malty body. Having tried both guests, I left just in time to catch my last bus home.

A varied and interesting evening. From the bus, I spotted the Royal Oak, the Duke and the Mulberry Bush, so perhaps there are the makings of another Kempston tour!

Fytton Rowland

August Walkabout Time Again

As is now traditional, North Beds CAMRA had a stroll around Bedford visiting a few of the town pubs in the summer.



We met at the **Bear** in the High Street, a very old pub, extending a long way back from its narrow front-

age. Bagatelle, table football, fruit machines and pool are all available, but few customers other than our 15 were present at 7 p.m. on an August Thursday. It's a Greene King pub, and GK IPA was a very reasonable £2.80 per pint – whereas the guest, Doom Bar, was a whole pound a pint dearer! Both were in acceptable condition.

Next stop further down the High Street was the **Standard**, formerly the Hobgoblin. Although it's a free house, both beers were from St Austell on that evening: the commonly available Tribute, and Liquid Sunshine (3.9% abv). My Sunshine was the last, however, so those behind me in the queue had only Tribute. A big pub on several floors, it offers food and entertainment as well as beer.

Across the road then to the **Rose**, which offered Doom Bar again, Hobgoblin, Mars-ton's Pedigree and Cottage Brewing's Norman Conquest (5% abv) on handpumps. The Hobgoblin and the Norman Conquest did not long survive CAMRA's assault, but the Pedigree was an acceptable alternative.

On then to the **Embankment**, more of a restaurant and hotel than a pub, but a pleasant spot to sit outside on a summer evening looking out on to the river. It's a Wells house, and had Eagle and Bombardier on, together with St Austell Liquid Sunshine

again. The Bombardier was very average.



Keeping the best till last, we finished up at the **Castle**, with newish licensees Roland and Kay in charge. It's an old pub in a back street, which also does food and has four letting bedrooms. Another Wells house, the Castle impressively had seven handpumps in use, though none of them carried a true guest ale. Young's Bitter, Special and London Gold were accompanied by Eagle, Bombardier and draught Waggledance on the Wells label, and Courage Directors. I only had room for one, though, and chose Young's Bitter – not so widely available in Bedford. And so to bed...

Fytton Rowland

Timothy Taylor is the Champ

At the Great British Beer Festival in August, the winner of this year's Champion Beer of Britain Gold award was announced, and it was from a brewery established in Keighley in 1858: **Timothy Taylor's Boltmaker** (also the champion bitter). In second place with the Silver medal was **Oakham Brewery's Citra** (also the champion golden ale), and in third place with the bronze was **Salopian Brewery's Darwin's Origin**, also champion best bitter. The other category champions were: *Mild*, Bank Top Dark Mild; *Strong Bitter*, Church End Fallen Angel; *Speciality Beer*, Saltaire Triple Chocaholic; *Real Ale in a Bottle*, Marble Brewery's Chocolate Marble.

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

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

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 11 – Branch Meeting

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

Thursday 18 – Pub Tour

Details to be announced

OCTOBER

Wednesday 8 to Saturday 11 – Bedford Beer and Cider Festival

At the Corn Exchange, St Paul's Square, Bedford. See pages 4 to 7 for details

Thursday 23 – Brewery Tour

Details to be announced. Preference given to those who volunteered at the Festival.

NOVEMBER

Saturday 1 – All-Beds trip to London

Day trip for East, North and South Beds members. Details to be announced.

Thursday 13 – Branch Meeting

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

Thursday 20 – Pub tour

Details to be announced.

DECEMBER

Thursday 11 – Branch Christmas Social

Details to be announced

Other events may be added – see branch website for up-to-date information.

The Firkin

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

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Meet the Brewer

Beverley Burrige, manager of the Three Cups in Newnham Street, Bedford, has an interesting new venture – a local brewer visits the pub to talk about their brewery, and usually brings samples of their product to taste. These events will usually be on the first Thursday of each month. We arrived just as James Pickering of Gun Dog Ales (www.gundogales.co.uk) of Woodford Halse was setting up, and before long there were 15 of us present.



Bev had ensured that two Gun Dog brews, Jack's Spaniels (3.8% abv) and Bad To The Bone (4.5% abv), were available at the bar, and jugs of them were brought out to accompany the bottled samples that James had provided. Bev said the Three Cups is committed to sourcing at least 50% of their ales locally. It was evident from listening to James speak that he was an enthusiastic brewer, but that it was also a seven days a week job. He rarely leaves the brewery before 7 p.m. Gun Dog is a true craft brewery, staffed by James, his partner Sarah, and Steve who looks after sales and distribution. It has three fermenters, each one producing two barrels per week (making a total output of 24 firkins/week).

James sources his ingredients locally whenever possible, brewing a core range of four cask beers. Jack's Spaniels is a delightful amber ale made from 90% Maris Otter in the malt and Cascade hops with a light

head, fruity notes in the mouth with a biscuit taste at the finish. Sales of this ale have been so strong recently that the casks rarely stay long at the brewery!



We were given samples of the hops that James uses for his ales (Challenger, Kent Goldings, Styrian, Cascade and Galena) before sampling the Bad To The Bone. This was a darker Premium English Bitter, with a fruity taste in the mouth and a dry crisp finish with hop notes.



Finally, we tried the bottled beers. Jack's Spaniels and Bad To The Bone both appeared to have made the transition painlessly from cask to bottle, and we tried two other core beers, Booze Hound (4.2% abv), a dry copper IPA with a bitter finish, and Lord Barker (4.2% abv), a dark stout with chocolate notes and a crisp finish. James also introduced his two seasonal bottled beers, Hot Dog (3.9% abv), a pale summer ale and Chilly Dog (4.0% abv), a ruby winter ale.

Mike Mckechnie

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