

# The Firkin



**CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE**

**FREE**

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 39 No 4 Winter 2014/2015

## ***A New Brewery Opens in Beds!***



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ARMS**

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

# The Search for Great Pubs is Over...



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music  
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family  
wine

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K C Y T I N U M M O C W  
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E L S T N E V E K Y E U



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Eaton Socon  
St Neots  
PE19 8EL

TEL: 01480 470 853



The Vine  
33 High Street  
Buckden  
St Neots  
PE19 5XA

TEL: 01480 810 367



The Rose & Crown  
99 High Street  
Somersham  
St Neots  
PE28 3EE

TEL: 01487 843 539



The Eight Bells  
High Street  
Abbotsley  
St Neots  
PE19 6UJ

TEL: 01767 677 305



The White Horse  
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Broom  
Biggleswade  
SG18 9NN

TEL: 01767 313 425



The Kings Arms  
27 London Road  
Sandy  
Bedfordshire  
SG19 1HA

TEL: 01767 680 276



# Chairman's Corner

"One man's meat is another man's poison." A familiar observation that is used in many different contexts to indicate differing prefer-

ences. Conversations at the Bedford Beer and Cider Festival indicated that this certainly applies to beer. One customer might regard a particular brew as well-balanced and interesting while another might well ask for their glass of it to be poured away.

Each brewer wants to offer something just that little bit different to tempt us to come back for another pint because we have enjoyed their offering so much. There is no such thing as the perfect pint. At one time of year, or day of the week, we may opt for one style, and go for a different one at another time. What matters above all that the beer

has been kept well and is in good condition.

If you are a CAMRA member, do you contribute to encouraging the quality of beer by submitting scores on the CAMRA National Beer Scoring System? You may think any scores are ignored, but the truth is that the Branch Pubs Officer has access to them, and this information can then inform decisions about which pubs should be considered for the Good Beer Guide as reliably offering good quality beer in good condition.

Of course the best place to enjoy a nice pint is in a pub, and here again we have many different types of pub from the quiet backstreet local to the bright lights of a large bar. We take our pick as to where we like to drink as they cater for different markets. Whatever your preference for types of pub for how you feel at a particular time there is a simple message "use it or lose it".

*Roger Stokes*

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



# No Longer a Novice Festival Organiser's Report

**T**hose readers who can remember back as far as last Winter's Firkin will know that in 2013 I was new to the



job of Festival Organiser, with some interesting (!) results. This year, in my second festival as organiser, things

went more smoothly, not only because of my experience, but because the invaluable John Martin was back helping. Huge thanks, John.

We'd made changes, not all of them uncontroversial. The Corn Exchange could not justify catering in the Howard Room upstairs and said that meals would be served in Number 13 next door. This meant that we needed more attractions in the Howard



Room. The foreign beer bar had always been there; we moved the cider bar there, added a wine bar

for the first time, and invited an outside chocolate-and-beer pairing company to set up a stall too. We then had more circulating space and some more chairs in the main hall. There was room for tables and chairs in the Howard Room, and on the balcony too – sufficient seating, given that the diners were in Number 13.

The downside? All the scaffolding and bar counters for the cider and wine bars had to be manhandled up the stairs, and down

again at the end of the festival – they were too long to go into the lifts. A number of very tired OAPs resulted. And on the first day of the festival the number of people finding their way up to the Howard Room was, shall we say, disappointing? Or shall we say almost none? This was despite lots of signage and frequent announcements, as well as the festival programme telling people about delights available upstairs.

Things can only get better, as the song goes, and they did. On Thursday and Friday, the word had gone around on the grapevine, and numbers drinking foreign beer, cider, perry and even our experiment, English wine, had perked up a lot. On Friday and Saturday evenings the Howard Room was positively buzzing. We had 47 ciders and ten perries, along with nine wines from Warden Abbey Vineyard (in North Bedfordshire), Chilford Hundred and Elysian Fields (both in Cambridgeshire).



The foreign beer bar sold out of draught beer – including Bamberg's famous Schlenkerla Rauchbier – and had more bottles,

including some from the Ukraine.

But what of the main hall? The construction of the stillage and bar counters went smoothly, in contrast with 2013, and all but one of the breweries and cider makers delivered their products in time. Minus that one brewery, we had 123 different cask ales. The very first beer to sell out was Narrow Gauge, the golden session bitter from the Leighton Buzzard Brewery. A most gratifying result for the newest brewery represented! Appropriately, our post-festival



thank-you trip for our festival volunteers went to Leighton Buzzard (see page 11).

We had new evening entertainers this year – the Ouse Valley Singles Club on the Wednesday and Fishwife's Broadside on the Saturday – and the Bedford Morris Men danced on the Saturday afternoon. Perhaps these attractions raised our Saturday numbers – almost as many passed through the doors on Saturday as on Friday, though of course Friday is 'peakier' with heavy attendance between about 7 and 10 p.m.

Overall, another successful festival enjoyed by thousands of Bedfordians. Despite my early fears, the wine bar (which had been the project of my immediate predecessor, Lynne Ratnett, and myself following a suggestion from our Chairman, Roger Stokes) was a success and seems likely to be repeated. The chocolate vendors sold a lot of chilli chocolate and other interesting flavours, though I remain to be convinced about combining chocolate and beer... The beer itself stayed in good condition throughout owing to the valiant efforts of our cellar and cooling teams, and sold well right up until late on Saturday.

And of course, all our volunteers (over a hundred of them altogether) deserve enormous thanks. It couldn't happen without you, folks. So – if you like real ale and haven't volunteered at the festival up to now, why not work next year? You'll enjoy it, you'll get free beer and reduced price meals And CAMRA will be most grateful to you for helping!

*Fytton Rowland*

# The Firkin

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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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## Trading Standards

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

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# Winter beer festivals

## 19th Cambridge Winter Ale Festival

Thu 22 to Sat 24 January at University Social Club, Mill Lane CB2 1RX (X5 bus 10 min). Check website for hours and prices. Free to CAMRA members all times. About 100 real ales including a wide range of winter beers from local and national brewers, plus ciders and foreign beers. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. [www.cambridgebeerfestival.com](http://www.cambridgebeerfestival.com)

## National Winter Ales Festival

Wed 11 to Sat 14 February at the Roundhouse, Pride Park, Derby DE24 8JE. Open Wed 5-10.30, Thu-Sat 12-10.30. Check website for admission charges and concessions. No advance tickets – pay at the door. Wide range of UK and foreign draught beers, bottled beers, cider and perry, food available all day. Regular trains from Bedford and Luton. [www.nwaf.org.uk](http://www.nwaf.org.uk)

## 32nd Luton Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 19 to Sat 21 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.

## 31st London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 11 to Fri 13 March at Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, WC1H 9AU (St. Pancras Stn 5 min). Open Wed-Thu 12-3, 5-10.30, Fri 12-10.30, admission Wed-Thu lunch free, otherwise £3.50, CAMRA members £1 off. Wheelchair access, pay at the door. Over 150 real ales, cider, perry and foreign beers, food available in all sessions. Frequent trains from Bedford, Flitwick and Luton. [www.northlondon.camra.org.uk](http://www.northlondon.camra.org.uk)

## St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival

Thu 12 to Sat 14 March at Priory Centre, Priory Lane, PE19 6HB. Check website for details nearer date. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. [www.hunts.camra.org.uk](http://www.hunts.camra.org.uk)

# 32<sup>ND</sup> LUTON BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

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Email: [secretary@southbeds.camra.org.uk](mailto:secretary@southbeds.camra.org.uk) or phone: 07917 645222

No under 18s allowed except on Saturday before 6pm and only if accompanied by a responsible adult. No under 18s allowed in the bar halls at any time. Proof of age may be required. We reserve the right to refuse admission. Last admission at 10:30pm. All details correct at the time of publishing and may be subject to change.

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11	12	13	14
FEBRUARY			

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# Pub News

## Bell, Odell



Welcome to Nicholas & Victoria Warriner, who recently took over this handsome, thatched pub-restaurant near the Great Ouse.

Sympathetic refurbishment and a series of linked but distinct seating areas help retain a traditional village pub atmosphere, with a central drinking area and dining rooms on either side. Four regular Greene King beers are joined by a guest beer that may be from a local microbrewery. Freshly cooked, homemade meals, using local sources wherever possible are served throughout the week. Book beforehand for main meals. Call 01234 720254.

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

## Bedford Arms, Bromham Rd, Bedford

Welcome to Tony Lachacz, who took over this Charles Wells Speciality Beer House in September. Four regular Wells & Young's beers are available with up to three guest ales, often from



microbreweries, and a changing guest cider. Burgers, home-made chilli, and Pieminster pies are served on Thursday and Friday evenings and from noon to 10pm at weekends. There is live jazz on Monday evening and Sunday afternoon, local bands on Sunday evening, with traditional music on the first Thursday of the month and a book club on the second Thursday. Call 01234 214656.

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

## St Johns Arms, Melchbourne

Landlords Eamonn and Julie Dowling, who now offer a guest ale from local micro Copper Kettle as well as Greene King IPA,

Abbot and Sharp's Doom Bar, plan to take beers from another new micro, Tinsed Ales of Kimbolton. Call 01234 708238.

## Fordham Arms, Sharnbrook

Rumours that the Fordham was closing with the departure of the last licensee have proved untrue, with manager Anna Dawson taking on the tenancy in her own right. Fuller's London Pride, Sharp's Doom Bar and a changing guest ale are available. A varied food menu is served throughout the week with fresh fish and chips on Friday evening and breakfast on Saturday morning from 7.30am. Call 01234 781357.

## Hare & Hounds, Old Warden

Welcome to Ben Hars and Emma Avery, recent arrivals at this handsome, multi-roomed pub-restaurant in one of Bedfordshire's prettiest thatched villages. Wells Eagle IPA, Courage



Directors and up to three guest ales are available. Good quality meals and light options are served at lunchtime, with a traditional roast on Sunday. Convenient for the Shuttleworth Aircraft Museum, Birds of Prey Centre and Swiss Garden. Closed on Monday except bank holidays. Call 01767 627225.

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

## White Horse, Southill

Welcome to new licensee Mamon Rashid and manager Joy Buchanan, who took over



this refurbished old inn in the summer. Regular beers Greene King IPA and Sharp's Doom Bar may be joined soon by up to three guest

ales, some from local microbreweries. Good value meals and snacks are served

throughout the week, including Sunday evening. The attractive garden includes play equipment and a heated dining patio. The Stable function room accommodates up to 100 and a conference room above the restaurant seating 25 is available without charge. Call 01462 813364.

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

## Royal Oak, Carlton

Following a strong village campaign to save this village pub, which closed at the end of 2010, sympathetic new owners have now



started repairing and renovating the building with a view to re-opening it in due

course, with several new houses to be built on part of the former garden. The owners even plan to move in themselves. Unlike so many pubs that have faced closure and change of use in recent years, this one is heading for re-birth, a fine case of why it is worth fighting to save your local. Perhaps the village will rename it the Phoenix?

## Castle, Bedford

Roland and Kay, licensees of the Castle in Newnham Street, Bedford, for the last fifteen months, have had a great few weeks of awards lately. Charles Wells Ltd have named the Castle as Charles Wells Pub of the Year for 2014-15, their Cask Beer Pub of the Year and their Marketing and Innovation Pub of the Year! And as if that wasn't enough, the *Morning Advertiser* (newspaper of the licensed trade) has named Roland and Kay as Newcomers of the Year for the entire East Anglia and East Midlands regions. Many congratulations to Roland and Kay from North Bedfordshire CAMRA on their achievements in the short time they have been in charge at the Castle.

## Unofficial Bedford Beer Festival Rules

*These 'rules' – alleged to be based on 25 years' experience – were found on the hall floor after the beer festival. I have no idea who the author is. Please note that they do not have the support of CAMRA, its North Beds Branch, the Bedford Beer Festival Organiser, or anyone else, and are provided purely for amusement. **CAMRA especially opposes 'rule' 11.** If you want to accuse me of breaching your copyright by reproducing them here, you'll have to admit who you are, won't you? Ed.*

1. No sitting down in main hall.
2. No going upstairs to food area.
3. No drinking of continental bottled beers (see rule 4 especially).
4. No drinking of continental bottled beers recommended on the night by outside sources, particularly via text, Twitter or other such electronic means, and in particular not from other people's acquaintances in Holland.
5. No drinking beers described as having such flavours as apple, pear, strawberry, raspberry, grapefruit, blackcurrant, orange, liquorice or chocolate. (Note: lemon is just about acceptable, but only at a push, if high on the innuendo name index scale, see rule 6).
6. Chosen beers should be consumed in the order of decreasing innuendo name index scale (while still applying rule 5). Exception to rule: order can be changed where combining consecutive beer names improves innuendo index. Examples: *'The Village Bike Piston Bob Gardeners Retreat'*, or *'Edwin Taylor's Extra Stout Posthorn Premium Mudpuppy'*
7. No playing of beer drinking games involving two fingers or fists. Note: if unsure of specific drinking games rules, be careful when Googling keywords.
8. Always order beers in halves, in pint glasses, from short bar staff, from barrels off the top row, to ensure extra measures from parallax half-pint reading errors.
9. No falling for the *'Every one's a winner'* raffle title (again).
10. **NO** singing along with Dr Busker, under any circumstances or after any quantities of beer.
11. No drinking of cider. Usually contravenes rule 5 (and human decency).

# Beds' New Brewery Town – Leighton Buzzard

**B**edfordshire's latest new brewery opened in July 2014, so it was appropriate that North Beds CAMRA's thank-you trip for our festival volunteers should go to see it. It's the



Leighton Buzzard Brewery and belongs to Jon d'Este-Hoare. At Bedford Beer and Cider Festival in

October we took firkins of Jon's three standard products – Narrow Gauge (3.8% abv, a hoppy golden bitter), Restoration (4.6% abv, a traditional-style best bitter) and Rebel Yell (5.5% abv, a 'black IPA', both malty and hoppy) – and all three sold out. Narrow Gauge was the first cask to sell out at the festival – pretty good for a brewery that didn't exist on 01/01/2014.

As our bus drove into Leighton Buzzard we found ourselves behind a chip van. "Bet that's our supper" we said, and indeed it was – we pulled into the brewery's yard right behind it. Jon welcomed us, drawing our attention to firkins of each of his regular brews plus two more – Smoking Angel, a



4.5% abv porter-style dark beer, and Restoration Lite, a 4.0% abv version of Restoration. We were free to sample all five

ad lib for the rest of the evening.

Jon said he had been a home brewer, aiming at beer styles not easily available in pubs. When he thought his job might be in jeopardy, he thought of brewing full-time. Early in 2014 he found this small unit on an industrial estate, but the landlord took some persuading to allow it to be used for

brewing. Once the lease was signed, he needed kit. Dave Porter is the main supplier of new microbrewery kit, but his lead time is 6-8 months. Fortunately, Dave was refitting the Bewdley Brewery in Shropshire, who were upsizing from five- to ten-barrel capacity, and Jon was able to secure their second-hand kit with little delay. Bewdley's advised on layout, water supply, drainage and electrics. John Coombes – South Beds CAMRA member and father of CAMRA's county co-ordinator for Bedfordshire, Mike Coombes – did the



carpentry work.

A mezzanine floor holds a shop which retails of polypins and bottles of his ales. The unit

isn't beautiful – industrial estates rarely are – but it is clean and smart, decorated with some of the brewery's advertising materials.

He uses mains water, which was analysed so that he can burtonize it appropriately. At Milton Keynes Beer Festival the week after Bedford's he won Beer of the Festival – another gratifying result within his first four months of brewing.

Finally we got to eat those fish and chips, and excellent they were, accompanying the ales perfectly. All the beers were in good shape, though the Smoking Angel was only four days old and therefore still green. I liked the Narrow Gauge and Restoration a lot, but Rebel Yell isn't my kind of beer. And we had the satisfaction of being the first CAMRA branch to visit, beating even Jon's own branch, South Beds, to it! A great evening, and many thanks to Jon d'Este-Hoare for organising it for us.

*Fytton Rowland*





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A beer to suit all palates? We'd like to think so.  
Available at pubs and our brewery shop.

**WWW.TRINGBREWERY.CO.UK**

# North by Northeast

September's trip visited the northeastern corner of Bedfordshire, where several village pubs have new licensees. We wanted to find how well they were keeping their beer!

The first leg from the Wellington Arms took a little longer than planned owing to the driver's satnav, but eventually we reached **Upper Dean** and the **Three Compasses**.



An old-fashioned village local, this, with two small bars, exposed beams, table skittles and an open

fireplace. A quite wide menu of pub food is served, and the real ales available were Greene King IPA, St Austell Tribute and Timothy Taylor Landlord. I tried Landlord and it seemed in good condition if a little chilly.

Next stop, the **St John's** ("Sinjun's") **Arms** at **Melchbourne**, a large Victorian building,



with meals served in a separate room. The new licensee, Eamonn, came from the Five Bells at Cople,

where he gained favour by keeping Green King XX Mild. Sadly he doesn't at Melchbourne – there isn't the demand – but he does stock mostly GK beers. When we visited he had GK IPA, Abbot and Ruddles County on. He usually has one of the brews from nearby Copper Kettle, but his Cornucopia had just run out (!). I tried Abbot and it seemed fine.

The **Chequers of Yelden** (yes, "of", not "at"), our next stop, has had its ups and downs, but now seems up again. It's a modern building, with one large bar plus a dining room. Another free house that favours Greene King beers, it offered GK IPA for the third time, plus Old Golden Hen and Sharp's Doom Bar. I tried the Old Golden Hen and found it good; others pronounced the Doom Bar a little less so. The new licensee is emphasising real cider – a big plus – and had four on all summer. Now he was down to Weston's Old Rosie and Thornhall's Thundering Molly.

The **Fordham Arms** at **Sharnbrook** is now happily operational again. A large pub



adjacent to the railway, it offers breakfast from 7.30 a.m. on Saturdays, and a Sunday lunch carvery. Beer is not neglected, and

Fuller's London Pride and Sharp's Doom Bar are the regulars. I found the Pride acceptable, and the welcome was warm

Final rural stop, the **Bell** at **Odell**. Despite all the evening's GK beers, this was the first Greene King tied house we'd visited, and the new tenant had been in place for only three weeks when we visited. A historic and beautiful old country inn, it is now aiming in the gastropub direction. Nevertheless, Ruddles Best, Old Speckled Hen, Abbot and XX Mild were available. I'm not a mild drinker but I tried XX.

It's a long time since CAMRA has done a pub trip without encountering any Wells beer, so we returned to the **Bedford Arms** in **Bedford** for a half of one of the local ales!

*Fytton Rowland*

# Collecting Old Pub Glasses

Since the Weights and Measures Act of 1878, draught beer can be sold only in marked vessels – whether glass, pot, pewter or whatever. The marks provide a basis for an interesting collection to be made. Up to 1969, glasses were marked not only with the content (half-pint, pint or quart) but also with the royal cipher (V.R., 1879-1901, E.R., 1901-1910, G.R., 1910-1952, or E. II R., 1953 onwards) and a number



identifying the local authority supervising the marking process.



In the examples shown in the photographs, 589 indicates Middlesex, 221 Worcester and 324 South

Shields. Lists of these official stamp numbers are published, for example in *Weights and Measures*, by J.T. Graham, *Shire Album 44*, ISBN 85263 8571.

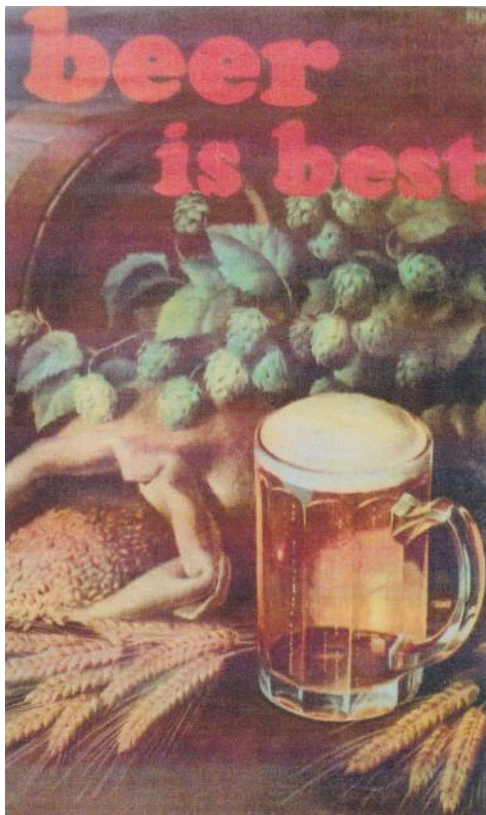
Only rarely nowadays will a publican offer the choice of 'handle' (mug) or 'straight' (beaker). Both come in a variety of designs. The most popular after WW1 was the panel-sided mug as featured in the 1930s industry-funded campaign '*Beer is Best*'. After 1940, the dimple design of mug became more popular. A variation of the beaker with a bulge near the top has the trade name 'Nonic'. The bulge aids the grip, and avoids breakage should the beaker fall on its side.

Where can old pub glasses be found? They turn up at breweriana auctions, for example those run by CAMRA in Burton and London, and on E-bay. Only rarely are they seen in car boot sales, flea markets or antique shops. But what about that old glass at your local pub which holds the darts chalks, or the one that strayed into your grandmother's kitchen cupboard?

Further reading: *Pub Beer Mugs and Glasses*, by Hugh Rock, *Shire Album 458*, ISBN-13 978 07478 06561.

David Maule

David Maule is a CAMRA member formerly resident in Bedford, now living in Hamburg in Germany





# 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 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](mailto:socials@northbedscamra.org.uk)

## DECEMBER

### Thursday 11 – Branch Christmas Social

At the Devonshire Arms, Dudley Street, Bedford, at 7.30 for 8 p.m.

## JANUARY

### Thursday 8 – Branch Meeting

Business meeting at Bedford Rowing Club, Duck-mill Lane, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

### Thursday 15 – Rural Pub Tour

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

### Thursday 22 – Walking tour of Bedford town pubs

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

### Thursday 29 – Rural Pub Tour

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

## FEBRUARY

### Thursday 5 – Branch Meeting

Business meeting at Bedford Rowing Club, Duck-mill Lane, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

### Friday 20 – Branch Visit to Luton Beer and Cider Festival

See p. 6 for details of the festival and see North Beds CAMRA website for details of the visit

## MARCH

### Thursday 12 – Branch Meeting

Business meeting at Bedford Rowing Club, Duck-mill Lane, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

### Friday 13 – Branch Visit to St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival. See

[www.hunts.camra.org.uk](http://www.hunts.camra.org.uk) for details of the festival and North Beds CAMRA website for details of the branch visit

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# Beer Tasting at the Bedford Arms

"British drinking cultures are dramatically changing" was recently posted on Facebook by a local landlord. One noticeable recent change has been the increase of quality bottle-conditioned ales available in your local off-licence or from specialist web sites. It is even possible occasionally to find a drinkable bottled beer in your local super-market!

The availability of quality ales to take home and sup, either with your food or round the table with friends, may have contributed to the decline of the pub, which is what prompted our landlord to post his comment on Facebook. So, with CAMRA's stated aim to support the pub as a focus of community life, some might feel uneasy about promoting the merits of beer in a bottle as opposed to a pint glass properly dispensed in your favourite hostelry.



However, the Bedford Arms on Bromham Road has since 2011 combined the best of both worlds by holding fortnightly bottled-beer tasting sessions, where real ale fans can bring in interesting and unusual beers which are sampled, discussed and rated. The inspiration came from a talk by Paul

Craven of Charles Wells Ltd, which educated us about the different esters in beer, lacing on the glass, how to recognise malt and hop flavours, and the six basic flavours that your taste buds can perceive.

Armed with this knowledge, a small group started to meet at the Bedford Arms, each bringing some bottled beers and a few dry snacks, to practise these new-found skills.

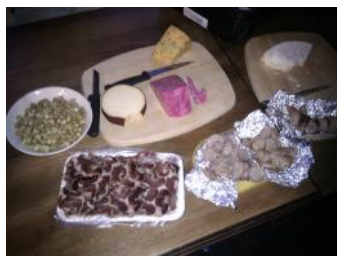
But over time the group has grown, with a greater variety of beers and foodstuffs being brought to the evenings.



A typical evening starts with the various beers being collated and arranged in abv order, although occasionally

they have been collated by type, depending on the variety that's available on the night. We encourage our tasters to bring their bottles to the pub at least five hours before the 8.p.m start, so that the beers can settle and reach optimum temperature in the cooler.

We usually find that our tasters bring the beer types that they prefer, so that we have a good variety of dark, amber and golden beers, often with some stouts and porters, and even the occasional barley wine!



The food has become as much of an event as the beer, and on a recent occasion the tasters had brought four different

cheeses to accompany the beer; we also had three different types of sausage from Lingers, some hand-made coppa (Italian sausage) from David John Butchers, and some wasabi peas from Wholefoods.

The basic kit for the beer tasting is: a wide-brimmed glass for each taster, a pen to write each taster's name on the glass, a large jug of water to rinse out the glasses (and occasionally to rinse out our mouths!), an empty jug for waste, and a laptop or notepad to record the scores and comments. Each taster also has a "palette cleanser" in the form of a drink from the bar! Finally each taster has a Petri dish, to cover

the top of the glass whilst the beer is swirled to activate the aroma.

The tasting process consists of looking (for colour, clarity, foam, lacing on the glass), smelling (primary aromas), tasting (taste in the mouth, secondary aromas), and swallowing (taste in the finish, after-taste). Each taster makes comments on what they detect during each of these steps (sometimes the results can vary dramatically!), and these are all recorded. We then score the "drinkability" of each beer out of 10, and record the average score for comparison.

A sample of the beers tasted one night: Dark Star Espresso (4.2% abv), a dark stout with black cherry and currants on the nose, coffee in the mouth and a smooth creamy vanilla finish; Wold Top Against The Grain (4.5% abv), an amber beer with grapefruit, lychee and lemon on the nose, a malty taste in the mouth with chalkiness on the tongue and a lemony finish; Fyne Ales Holly Daze (5.0% abv), another amber beer with orange, pepper, cloves and nutmeg in the nose, a marmalade sweetness in the mouth, and a dry bitter finish with hints of vanilla.

This was our champion beer of the night, scoring an average of 8.1. Williams Brothers' Midnight Sun (5.6% abv) was a porter, with chocolate and roasted coffee on the nose, chocolate and ginger in the mouth and a sweet milky finish. The evening finished with Sam Smith's Yorkshire Stingo at 8.0% abv, a dark ale with roasted malt and dark coffee on the nose, caramel and Christmas pudding in the mouth and sherry notes at the finish. This was my personal favourite of the night, although opinions

were divided.

The top beers (with an average score of over 8) are commemorated by displaying the bottles on the "Wall of Fame" in the bar, whereas those with a score of less than 3 are displayed on another shelf, the "Naughty Step". Thankfully, the latter holds a much smaller number, although few of us will forget the garlic beer from the Isle of Wight which scored an all-time low of 1.0! Some of us thought it was lucky to get 1!

Some unusual tastes and aromas have been recorded in the past; for example the taste of "wet dog" (usually caused when the beer is infected by wild yeasts during the brewing process) has been noted, as has the aroma of "window putty" (perhaps caused by oils in the malt). We will forgive the taster who once commented that the beer had the aroma of cardboard, which we were about to note down before we noticed that the person in question was using a beer mat instead of a Petri dish to cover the glass!

The tasting notes from the sessions can be downloaded from a Google document link which can be accessed from the group's Facebook page. Some beers have been tasted on more than one occasion; the difference in scores between tastings shows how the aroma and taste of a beer can be affected by the other beers sampled during that evening, and also by the accompanying food eaten. Beer sommeliers would no doubt agree with this!

So, with over 1,300 bottled-conditioned beers currently available in the UK, how would you decide which ones to sample, and which ones to avoid? One solution would be to purchase a copy of CAMRA's *Good Bottled Beer Guide* by Jeff Evans (available from the CAMRA web site).

Alternatively, you could pay a visit to the Bedford Arms Beer Tasting Evening, held fortnightly on Wednesdays, or even better, to start up a similar event in your local (with the landlord's permission, of course!).

Go to the "Beer Tasting Club" group on Facebook for more information.

*Mike Mackechnie*







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01/15

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