

The Firkin

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 40 No 1 Spring 2015



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

FREE

The Sun Rises in Felmersham



North Beds CAMRA's Pub of the Year

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

NATIONAL PUB OF THE YEAR

CHAMPION WINTER BEER OF BRITAIN

NORTH BEDS PUB OF THE YEAR 2015

PUB AND BREWERY NEWS

SPRING BEER FESTIVALS

JANUARY PUB VISITS

NOVEMBER TRIP

BRANCH DIARY

HISTORIC LONDON PUBS

HOGSHEADS, BUTTS AND TUNS

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Chairman's Corner

Each week, thirty pubs call 'Last Orders' and shut their doors for the final time. We love our pubs and that is a depressing fact.

The good news is that

the picture is not unrelenting gloom. This month, we show what can happen with dedicated licensees and community support. Our Pub of the Year, the Sun in Felmersham, reopened after its owners closed it.

Even better, we can prevent pubs closing in the first place. Throughout the country they act as foci of their local community, places where people can meet and socialise. This helps to strengthen community cohesion, with all the benefits that brings. Our pubs are something uniquely British, and need to be valued as such.

Over 600 pubs have been registered with their local authority as Assets of Community Value. This makes it harder for the building to be

converted to another use. The Sun was listed, and then a local group had the opportunity to bid to buy it and save it for the village, as they did.

Is your local place that should be retained in use to prevent the heart being ripped out of the local community? Have you considered getting together with twenty other people to nominate it for listing? The decision whether to list or not is taken by officers in the local authority but the crucial thing is to be able to demonstrate support in the local community for its retention.

Roger Stokes

Winter Beer of Britain 2015

CAMRA's Champion Winter Beer of Britain for 2015 is...the same as the Champion Winter Beer for 2013 – Elland Brewery's 1872 Porter.

Not, perhaps, as big a surprise as it sounds, because this formidable dark beer, weighing in at 6.5% abv, went on to be the overall Champion Beer of Britain in 2013 as well. Now it's in with a chance of repeating the achievement in 2015.

It's creamy, full-flavoured porter, with a rich liquorice flavour, just a hint of chocolate from roast malt, and a soft but satisfying bittersweet aftertaste.

National Pub of the Year 2015

The Salutation Inn, a free house in the village of Ham, Gloucestershire, has walked away with CAMRA's National Pub of the Year Award – a feat made even more impressive given that this is the first pub the landlord has ever run.

Former business analyst Peter Tiley had never even pulled a pint when he decided to quit his job and follow his love of beer to take over the Salutation with his wife Claire.

The three other finalists were the Freshfield in Formby, Merseyside, the Harewood Arms, Broadbottom, Greater Manchester, and the Windmill in Sevenoaks Weald, Kent.



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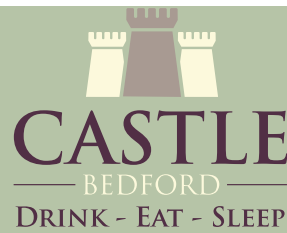
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The Sun shines in Felmersham

North Bedfordshire CAMRA's **Pub of the Year** for 2015 is the **Sun at Felmersham** – and it's the first time this pub has won! A former Wells house, this pub became privately owned a couple of years ago, and under friendly licensees Ben and Hannah Just it has become the social centre of the village – a classic old village local, with exposed beams and a real fire in the grate. By hard work and commitment, Ben and Hannah manage to run a village pub without going foodie.



Hannah & Ben receiving their award from Chairman Roger Stokes

Two of their three handpumps dispense guest ales from nearby smaller breweries – the other carries Wells Eagle – and the beers are always well kept. In 2014, the Sun was named our most improved pub, and the improvement has continued. So the Justs deserve the title of Pub of the Year. Congratulations to them!

The branch has made two other awards, and as it happens the two pubs concerned are only yards apart in **Newnham Street, Bedford**.



The Three Cups is Town Pub of the Year for 2015. It is one of Greene King's *Local Hero*

pubs which are encouraged to serve guest ales from local smaller breweries. Bev Burridge, formerly at the Bedford Arms in Bromham Road, took over as manager a couple of years ago and looks after the beer; she stayed on when the tenancy was recently transferred to Alan Kelly, the owner of White Park Brewery. Now three GK cask ales are usually joined by at least one White Park one, three other local guest ales and a real cider. It's a historic town pub, too, and its panelled interior survived its modernisation almost unscathed.



The the tenancy of the **Castle Inn** was taken over 18 months ago by Roland and Kay Keech, and they have already

won honours from Charles Wells. Now North Beds CAMRA has named the Castle our **Most Improved Pub** for 2015. Another historic pub, its warm and welcoming small bars have seven handpumps, five serving Wells products, usually including all three of Young's regulars – Bitter, Special and Gold – and the other two guest ales, including some not on Wells' usual guest list. The standards in the cellar are high, home-cooked food is also served, and there are also four en-suite letting bedrooms upstairs.

Now the **Sun at Felmersham** goes into battle with the Pubs of the Year two other two Bedfordshire branches – South Beds and East Beds – for the title of County Pub of the Year.

South Beds has chosen the **Black Lion** at **Leighton Buzzard**, and East Beds has chosen a perennial favourite, the **Engineers Arms** at **Henlow**, which is always difficult to beat.

Let's hope Ben and Hannah can carry the day!



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Pub and Brewery News

Fox, Carlton



A warm welcome to new owner Alison Brown, who took over this pretty thatched pub in November. Wells Eagle IPA, St Austell Tribute and

two changing guest beers are on handpump, and a range of traditional pub grub is available (not on Monday or Tuesday evening). A beer festival is planned for the Spring Bank Holiday weekend. Call 01234 720235.

www.thefoxatcarlton.pub

Pilgrim's Progress, Bedford



Welcome to Mark and Dawn Judd, new managers at this popular Wetherspoon's. The pumps serve Greene King Abbot, Ruddles

Best Bitter and up to eight guest ales as well as two or three real ciders. There are food and drink offers most days. Call 01234 363751.

George & Dragon, Mill St, Bedford



Greene King now operate the G&D as a managed house: Scott Durbin was in charge when we visited. The pub is open 11-11 - later on

Friday and Saturday evenings - and offers meals 11-9. GK IPA, Abbot and Old Speckled Hen are usually on the handpumps. Call 01234 345061.

Bedford Arms, Bedford



Apologies to landlord Tony Lachacz and his team for errors in our last issue. There's a completely new lunch menu including soup, home-made pies,

ham, egg & chips, cod & chips, sandwiches, paninis and jacket potatoes (choice of fillings). Lunches are served 12-2.30 Monday to Thursday and to 3pm Friday and Saturday, but the pub doesn't offer Sunday lunch or evening meals. Call 01234 214656.

www.thebedfordarmsbedford.co.uk

White Horse, Bedford



Congratulations to landlords Nigel and Sue Anstead for being awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year's Honours for their charity fund-raising work. Well deserved recognition!

Bell, Odell



The couple who took over this handsome pub-restaurant last summer suddenly departed again at Christmas. It clearly must have surprised

owners Greene King, as the pub is still closed as we go to press.

Copper Kettle Brewery, Rushden

After rumours that Copper Kettle Craft Brewery at Bencroft Grange on the A6 had closed, brewing has restarted under new owner Vince Stimpson. It was founded by ex-soldiers with financial support from the Royal British Legion. Despite creating interest with interesting real ales, the owners found it difficult to keep up the commitment on a part-time basis. We thought it was lost, but it looks like good news after all. Watch out for CK beers in local pubs.

ckcb.webs.com

Hopping Mad Brewery, Olney

Last summer it closed for a few weeks then restarted, but this once popular brewery sadly seems to have shut down for good – we have seen no Hopping Mad beers on sale recently.

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24 Newnham St, Bedford MK40 3JR
Tel: 01234 352153
thethreecupsbedford@gmail.com



Spring Beer Festivals

On this occasion we have included some local non-CAMRA festivals in our list. Ed.



31st London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 11 to Fri 13 March,
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 £2.50. 150 real ales,
cider, perry and foreign beers, food at all
sessions. Trains to St Pancras from Bedford,
Flitwick and Luton.

www.northlondon.camra.org.uk

Leicester Beer Festival

Wed 11 to Sat 14 March, Charotar Patidar
Samaj, St Margaret's Way LE1 3AE (rail stn 15
min). Open Wed 5-11, Thu-Fri 11-11, Sat 1-10.
Admission £2.50, Thu/Fri after 3pm £3.50, Sat
after 5pm free, CAMRA members free. 220 real
ales incl 50 from Leicestershire breweries, 30
ciders and perries. Indian and English food. Live
music Sat. Trains from Bedford and Luton.

www.leicester.camra.org.uk



St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer & Cider Festival

Fri 12 to Sat 14 March, Priory
Centre, Priory Lane, PE19 2BH
(X5 Market Square 5 min).

Open Thu 5-11, Fri 12-11, Sat 12-10, admission
Thu £2, Fri £1, after 5pm £3, Sat £2, after 5pm
£1. Over 60 real ales plus real ciders and
perries, bottles British and foreign beers, free
soft drinks for designated drivers. Food
available all sessions. Regular X5 buses from
Bedford. www.hunts.camra.org.uk/festival

Ye Olde Medieval Beer Festival

Thu 16 to Sat 19 April, Sir William Peel, High
Street, Sandy SG19 1AG. Over 40 real ales and
ciders available, barbecue and live music.

Regular 73 buses from Bedford.

www.sirwilliampeel.webs.com

Local Beer, Music and Talent Festival

Wed 29 April to Mon 4 May, White Horse,
Newnham Ave, Bedford MK41 9PX. Open 11-
11, admission free. Full programme of events.
www.whiterhorsebedford.co.uk

Bedford-Bamberg Spring Beer Fest

Fri 1 to Sat 2 May, Harpur Suite, Harpur Street,
Bedford town centre. Open 12-12, admission
free. Over 40 German beers, wines, schnapps
and authentic German barbecue. Expected to
include breweries in Bedford's twin city of
Bamberg. Live German band.

www.bedfordcornexchange.co.uk

15th Banbury Beer Festival

Thu 7 to Sat 9 May, TA Centre, Oxford Road
OX16 9AN. Open Thu 5-11, Fri 12-12, Sat 11-
11. More than 80 real ales and 20 ciders with a
Welsh emphasis, plus evening entertainment.

www.northoxoncamra.org.uk

42nd Cambridge Beer Festival

Mon 18 to Sat 23 May, under canvas on Jesus
Green (X5 Victoria Ave 5 min). Wide range of
local and national beers, plus cider, perry, mead,
wines and foreign beers. Food includes locally
baked bread, pork pies, ham and cheese
counter. Regular X5 buses from Bedford.

www.cambridgebeerfestival.com

Fox Inn Beer Festival

Fri 22 to Mon 25 May, Fox Inn, High St, Carlton
MK43 7LA. Details to be confirmed. 01234
720435. www.thefoxatcarlton.pub

NEW WEBSITE ADDRESS

The CAMRA North Beds branch website was
transferred to a new server on 21st February.
Visitors will not notice a lot of difference, but
the site address includes an extra dot:

www.northbeds.camra.org.uk

New email addresses for branch officers are
given on page 19.

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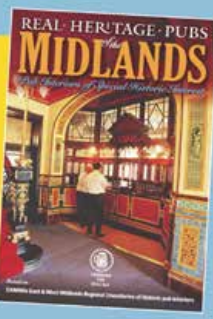
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The Annual Pub Visit Season

With New Year, North Beds CAMRA's annual round of pub visits begins. On 15th January our first trip headed north from the Wellington Arms.



First stop was the **Bluebell in Putnoe**, a Greene King house, predominantly a drinkers' pub, with a pool table and two cheese skittles tables.

They have their own beer, Bluebell Ale, rumoured to be from the Caledonian Brewery, but it had run out. So Greene King IPA it was, as the only cask ale on offer. Not my favourite, but it was at the right temperature and in good condition, and the price was moderate. Service was welcoming but a little slow, considering that few people were in other than us.



We next called at the **Horse and Jockey in Ravensden**, a nice old village free house much extended and devoted to dining. It

was busy with meals, but there is a pleasant drinking area and our group was served quite quickly. Sharp's Doom Bar and Adnams Southwold were available. I had the Adnams and found it good but a little pricey for a 3.7% abv beer.



Heading on, we visited the **Jackal at Thurleigh**, another attractive old village pub, a Wells house, with a food trade. A

real fire burned welcomingly in the grate of the cosy bar. The cask ale choice was Eagle or Young's Special – I had the Special, which was good, as one expects in a Cask Marque pub, but the upward trend in price continued.

On then to another Wells pub, more thoroughly foodie – the **Fox and Hounds at Riseley**, with a



high reputation for steak. This tradition continues, but we were there for the beer. This time the

handpump offering was Eagle, Directors, and McEwan's IPA (4% abv), the Wells seasonal. I enjoyed the McEwan's, which was well kept, and the price trend now reversed!

Next we visited the **Swan with Two Nicks in Sharnbrook**, our third Wells pub. There are newish licensees here, and they are doing a good job. It's another attractive



village pub with modern extensions to accommodate diners, again with a real fire burning. Eagle and McEwan's IPA were on handpump, along with Young's Winter Warmer, which I can't resist. It was in good shape.

Bustling on we called at the **Sun at**



Felmersham, which has a reputation for unusual beers. More oak beams and another open fire on a

bitterly cold evening welcomed us to this village drinkers' haunt. The current licensees remembered me even though this was only my second- visit – impressive. Eagle is offered for the locals, and the other two pumps dispensed Digfield's Chiffchaff (3.9%abv) from Northants and Buntingford Highwayman (3.6% abv) from Herts. I tried halves of both – the Buntingford, a traditional amber bitter, and the Digfield's, the modern pale, hoppy style. Both were in excellent condition. See page 5 for more about the Sun.

A phone call to our intended seventh stop wasn't answered and we guessed it might be closed at 10.45 p.m. So it was directly back to the **Bedford Arms in Bromham Road, Bedford**.



Annual Pub Visit Season continued ...

A Wells specialist cask ale house, it often has guest beers not on the usual list. Wells Bombardier and Young's Bitter and Special together with Wadworth's Bishop's Tipple (5% abv) and Tring Brewery's Redshank (4.2% abv) were on offer.

And on to our second trip, on 22nd January. A 'town walkabout' which started by bus to **Kempston High Street**.



We met up at the **Half Moon**, a traditional local pub where people like Wells Eagle, which is often the only cask ale on. The staff were welcoming, but the Eagle was perhaps not quite up to the standard we remembered.



We strolled a few yards up the road to the **King William IV**. How, I wonder, did this particularly unmemorable monarch get a pub

named after him – especially since the historic half-timbered pub dated from long before his time? The King Billy is a Wells house, and more of an eating pub than its neighbour. Four pumps offered Eagle, Bombardier, Black Sheep Ale (4.4%) and Caledonian Bitter Weather (4.8% abv). I tried the Black Sheep and found it good.



Back on the bus into **Bedford** for a walk to three more pubs. First, the **Ship** in **St Cuthbert's Street**, a pub with a substantial food business. It's a

Greene King house, and offered GK IPA and Abbot on handpump plus Tolly Phoenix (4.4% abv) and their own beer, Ship's Surprise (3.9%). I had the Surprise, which didn't admit who brewed it. It had a Greene King flavour about it, though, and it was well kept.



Round the into **Newnham Street**. First stop, the **Castle**, winner of awards recently from Wells. Impressively, it had seven cask ales on –

Eagle, the Young's beers (Bitter, Special and Gold), Directors, Black Sheep Ale, and Everard's Tiger. I had the Tiger and found it well-kept. The pub was crowded at 9.20 p.m. on a Thursday in January, which explains how they can keep so many cask ales on. It's an old-fashioned pub, with two formerly separate bars still not fully knocked together. The Castle has a good food business and four letting bedrooms. More about the Castle on page 5.



A few yards along the street, our final stop was at the **Three Cups**. A Greene King *Local Hero* pub, it has guest ales from local breweries as

Annual Pub Visit Season continued ...

well as GK products. On this evening it had GK IPA, Old Speckled Hen and GK Suffolk Porter from the owners' stable, along with beers from the XT Brewery in Buckinghamshire and the Milton Brewery in Cambridgeshire, and White Gold from White Park Brewery. The tenant is Alan Kelly, who owns White Park, and the manager is Bev Burridge formerly at the Bedford Arms – a formidable team for a real-ale pub! The beer was in good form, and I enjoyed the guest from Milton. Again, more on page 5.



Trip three, on 29th January, was another minibus ramble, to pubs in the south of our area. A minority faction met at the **Burnaby Arms** in the

Prime Ministers district of **Bedford** at 6.15 p.m. A small backstreet Wells pub with a loyal local following, it has one small bar with comfy chairs in front of an open fire, and another with tables and chairs. Eagle, Young's Bitter and Courage Directors are the regulars, and they also had Caledonian Bitter Winter (4.8% abv) as a guest, as well as McEwan's IPA which promptly ran out. Butcombe Gold went on instead. All the beers were in good condition.

The Burnaby Tendency then strolled round to the Wellington Arms to meet the rest and board the minibus.



The first stop was the **Anchor at Great Barford**, a riverside Wells pub popular on summer days but often quiet in the winter. Not this time,

though – it was fairly buzzing. It emphasises food, and had a real fire and no intrusive music or TV. Eagle and Young's Bitter were joined by Black Sheep Ale and Bishop's Tipple from Wadworth's; but the latter had run out.

Next, yet another Wells house, the **Guinea at Moggerhanger** and then the **Five Bells** at

Cople, a Greene King house famed for its GK XX Mild. These two pubs had both been visited in November, so see page 15 for Roger Stokes' coverage of them.



We moved on to the **Black Horse at Ireland**, well known as a restaurant – really the only survival strategy for a pub in a tiny hamlet. The

dining period was nearly over, and the drinkers' seating area was comfortable. It's a free house stocking Fuller's London Pride, Sharp's Doom Bar and Adnams Southwold Bitter – an unimaginative selection, but the Pride was in good shape.



The next stop was another eating pub, the **Knife and Cleaver at Houghton Conquest**. It was quiet at 10.15 p.m., and we sat in the

modern, comfortable drinkers' area. On the handpumps were Eagle, Directors, Courage Best and Belhaven Robert Burns Brown Ale (4.2% abv) as guest – on for the Burns Night celebrations.



Finally, the **Chequers at Wootton** was warm and welcoming, with a log fire in the grate and John Martin ensconced in his usual

corner. A free house, with Eagle, London Pride and Wadworth's Henry's IPA (3.6% abv) on handpump. We all tried the Henry's, which turned out to be a traditional amber session bitter, very acceptable and well kept.

And so ended 2015's January pub marathon!

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Points East

North Beds CAMRA's last pub tour of 2014 started at the **Bull** in **London Road**.

Greene King IPA, Abbot, Old Speckled Hen and Timothy Taylor's Boltmaker – the Champion Beer of Britain – were available. I went for the champion, having tried it elsewhere, but decided it was not to my taste.



The bus arrived and we were then transported to the **Wheatsheaf** on the old Great North Road at **Tempsford**. On offer were Adnams

Southwold Bitter and Broadside. I opted for the Bitter, which was in reasonable condition, while others reported the same of the stronger offering.



The route back towards Bedford then brought us to the **Moggerhanger** and the **Guinea**, where Young's Bitter, Eagle, Directors and

Winter Warmer were the offerings. The staff were happy to cater for us, but we declined the quiz. The Eagle was in fine form!



A few miles brought us to the **Crown** at **Willington** where Eagle and Directors were to be found. Unfortunately the guest beer, Moorhouse's White

Witch, had run out just as we arrived, but Lilley's Pig Swill cider (with pear) was available for our cider drinker, who said it was surprisingly sweet for 7.5% abv.

The **Five Bells** at **Cople** was the next stop, and GK XX Mild was still on despite the change of



licensee, along with GK IPA and Marston's Pedigree. I found the mild very palatable, slipping down easily enough to allow time for IPA to follow it. Greene



Next we came to the **Kings Arms** at **Cardington**, a popular food pub. It draws its beers from a number of brewers, but there was no taste of Cornwall that

evening as an attempt to draw Doom Bar showed that the barrel was doomed. Hobgoblin was still on, as was a favourite, Brain's Rev James, and both were in reasonable condition.



The **Anchor** at **Fenlake** was open despite the scaffolding. Only Tribute was on handpump. The landlord explained there isn't enough

demand to keep two cask ales in condition. Crystal clear pints showed the beer's good condition, and it tasted as good as it looked – a pleasant surprise.

Finally, to the **Bedford Arms** in **Bromham Road**. It was encouraging to see Tinshed's Old Smokey and Holt's Maple Moon as guests alongside the Wells trio of Winter Warmer, Young's Bitter and Bombardier Burning Gold. The new licensee had returned to a full hand of cask ales following an initial cautious period with fewer on.

Roger Stokes

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.northbeds.camra.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@northbeds.camra.org.uk

MARCH

Thursday 5 – Branch Meeting

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

Thursday 12 – Branch visit to St Neots Beer Festival. See p. 9 for details of venue and times.

Thursday 19 – Presentations of branch awards

at the Three Cups and the Castle, Bedford. Meet at the Three Cups, Newnham Street, at 6.45 p.m.

APRIL

Thursday 10 – Branch Social

Contact Gary Mudd or see branch website for details.

MAY

Thursday 14 – Branch Meeting

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

JUNE

Thursday 4 – Summer Day Out

Contact Gary Mudd or see branch website for details.

JULY

Thursday 2 – Branch Annual General Meeting. Venue to be announced.

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

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A London Pub Walk

In December I visited a number of historic London pubs with Gullefer's Travels, on one of their guided walks.

(www.gulleferstravels.co.uk). While the focus was on the pubs, beer was sampled while we enjoyed the décor!

Our first stop was the **Queen's Larder** in **Queen Square**. I was able to sample some Brain's Rev James, while Redemption's Hopspur and Belhaven's St Andrews were also on offer.



Princess Louise

The next stop was the **Princess Louise** in **High Holborn**. It offered less choice (only Sam Smith's Old Brewery Bitter), but it was a veritable treasure trove of Victorian pub architecture.



The **Cross Keys** in **Endell Street** (*Good Beer Guide* listed) offered a very pleasant mild and

Shoreditch Sunshine, both from Brodie's. Also in evidence were Redemption's Pale Ale and Belhaven's seasonal. Another short walk brought us to the **Freemason's Arms** on **Long Acre**, a Shepherd Neame pub with five of theirs available – Bishop's Finger, Master Brew, Spitfire, Whitstable Bay and the seasonal.

At the **Prince of Wales** on **Drury Lane**, Adnams Ghost Ship was available alongside their regular London Pride and a seasonal guest. We ate at our next stop – the **Globe** on **Covent Garden**, near the Royal Opera House. Ruddles Best and Truman's Swift were on offer in this free house.

Suitably refreshed it was time to head to **The Strand** and the **Wellington** for Truman's Runner, made using the original Truman's yeast. The selection of guest beers included Doom Bar and Tribute alongside Bass Premium Ale. The next port of call was the **Coal Hole** by the **Savoy**. On offer were Doom Bar, Nicholson's Pale Ale (brewed by St Austell), Truman's Runner, Saint Nich's Festive Ale, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Adnams Southern Lights.

At the **Lamb & Flag** in **Rose Street**, the bar was so full it was hard to see all that was on offer, but Gale's Seafarers Ale, brewed by Fullers, caught the eye and the palette. Butcombe's Rare Breed also made an appearance, with Adnam's Ghost Ship and Fullers Bengal Lancer. Final port of call was another Nicholson's pub, the **Porcupine** on **Charing Cross Road**. Southern Lights and Caledonian Autumn Red were on there, alongside Nicholson's Pale Ale and Saint Nich's Festive Ale again.

Roger Stokes

Editor's Note: The annual London trip by the three Bedfordshire branches of CAMRA took place in November, but no North Beds members joined it. I hope you enjoy this article about another London trip!

How Many Pins in my Butt?



... is not a question you would expect to be asked nowadays! However, if you sold ale in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, you would know the answer. Tuns, butts, hogsheads, barrels, kilderkins, firkins and pins, as well as familiar gallons and pints, were units of volume, in descending order.

The basic numbers are as follows: There are eight pints in a gallon, 4.5 gallons in a pin, two pins in a firkin, two firkins in a kilderkin, two kilderkins in a barrel, 1.5 barrels in a hogshead, two hogsheads in a butt, and finally two butts in a tun. So, what is the answer to the question in the title of this article? It's simple really, but you may need a lie down after reading this far.

There were once three different gallons in use: the wine gallon, or Queens Anne's gallon, which was 231 cubic inches, the corn gallon, or Winchester gallon, of about 268.8 cubic inches, and largest of all, the ale gallon of 282 cubic inches.

The Weights and Measures Act of 1824 established a standard gallon, 'the volume of 10 lb of distilled water weighed in air with brass

weights with the barometer standing at 30 in Hg at a temperature of 62 °F'. All of those measures have nowadays been officially superseded by metric equivalents – and indeed mercury (Hg) is no longer allowed to be used!

Apart from our beloved pint, in this country the gallon is probably the only other imperial unit of liquid volume still in common use today, most often with regard to miles to the gallon.

However, the Americans care little about European things, and are still using the gallon for measuring fuel, beer, maple syrup and cowboy hats. Just to be awkward, the Americans are still using the wine gallon, so that an American gallon is in fact only 82% of its British equivalent.

The terms tun, hogshead and butt have fallen into obscurity, probably because of the sheer size of the casks needed to contain such large amounts. Ale in a hogshead of would have to be drunk quickly before it started to go off!

However, a butt was in olden times a commonly used measure of wine and you might remember from your Shakespeare, specifically in Richard III, that the Duke of Clarence was drowned in a butt of Malmsey wine.

'Barrel' is often used to describe the container (although 'cask' is of course the correct generic term), as well as the measure of its contents. Breweries often express their output in barrels, so the Gun Dog Brewery states that they produce six barrels a week. Thankfully the draymen know that they will be collecting 24 casks a week, as Gun Dog, like most breweries, delivers its ale to pubs in firkins.

Dictionaries refer to the 'kilderkin' as an obsolete measure, and your spell-checker probably won't recognise the word. But many of the casks supplied to beer festivals are known as 'kils', an abbreviation of kilderkin. Anyone who has attempted to lift up a full kilderkin won't forget it in a hurry!

The firkin is the most commonly used cask, and is also the name of this magazine. (Older readers may remember when it was called *Firkin Weekly*.) Many other plays on the word are possible, 'firkin ale' being the most popular, which has been used to name many a pub quiz team.



'Beer boxes' are popular items bought for consumption at home. They are usually one pin, although nowadays they have to be sold as '20 Litre Pin (36 pints)' boxes! The beer in the box is encased in a polythene membrane, so the box is often called a 'polypin'.

To show how little these measures are now used, a recent question on the BBC2 quiz *Only Connect* asked for the next word in this sequence 'hogshead, barrel, kilderkin'. One team did not know the answer! However, the terms are preserved within the brewing trade. Three tuns adorn the coat of arms of the Worshipful Company of Brewers, and hence the name of the Three Tuns at Biddenham. The hogshead and the firkin both gave their names to long-lost pub chains. And the butt is the source of the punning name of the Butt Inn at Reading.

Mike MacKechnie

The Firkin

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