

FREE

The Firkin



Campaign
for
Real Ale

Magazine of CAMRA North Bedfordshire • Vol 46 No 3 Winter 2022-23

This Year's Festival



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WELLS PRESENTATION PHOTOS
ORGANISER'S REPORT ON OUR
2022 FESTIVAL
JONATHAN KEMP
SUMMER STROLL IN BEDFORD

RETURN OF PUB TRIPS BY
MINIBUS
HORNE'S BREWERY OPEN DAY
PUB NEWS AND A NEW BOOK
WETHERSPOON'S FESTIVAL
BRANCH DIARY

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Chairman's Corner



As the same person is now Chair of North Beds CAMRA and Editor of the **Firkin**, for the next little while Chairman's Corner will double up as the editorial. As editor, I'd like to

thank Gary Mudd for his two trip reports in this issue, reporting on pub trips I couldn't attend – the first because I was working behind the bar at the Great British Beer Festival in London at the time, and the second because I was on holiday in Scotland. On the basis of these two articles, I'd say Gary can write just as well as he can sing – which is to say, very well indeed! Keep **Firkin** articles coming, Gary.

The key question for lovers of real ale now is – the licensed trade seems to have survived the covid lockdowns in better shape than we thought it might. But next comes an economic crisis – will this be the final straw for pubs and independent breweries? The customers of pubs will be worrying how to pay their bills this winter, so will they cut down their pub visits drastically? Real ale, a uniquely British product, has enjoyed a resurgence over the last fifty years, due in no small measure to the efforts of CAMRA. We have sometimes been described as the world's most successful pressure group, but now we have to redouble our support once again. Patronise your local real-ale pub. Drink real ales from independent breweries. Help CAMRA continue to succeed in its objectives for another fifty years!

Fytton Rowland

Presentation at Brewpoint

In 2022, Wells and Co. won one of CAMRA's Pub Design awards for New Build pubs. It was awarded to the taproom at Brewpoint in Bedford, as we reported in our Autumn issue. Now we can show you some photos of the occasion. Fytton Rowland, Chair of North Beds CAMRA, presented the award to Peter Wells of Wells and Co., and beer writer Roger Protz confirmed the award on behalf of national CAMRA.



CAMRA's Bedford Beer and Cider Festival 2022



At the beginning of October the 44th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival took place at Bedford Corn Exchange, from Wednesday to Saturday as usual. It was a week of hard work for all involved, but I'm pleased to say from the feedback we received from all our wonderful visitors you enjoyed yourselves.



Geoff, our beer orderer, chose an interesting and diverse selection of cask ales that many of you may not have had the opportunity to try before, with beers from Wales and the Peak District amongst the selection. This was likewise with the cider and perry, of which our cider bar manager, Chris, spent a considerable time sourcing, an interesting selection. But we had a surprise one morning during set-up when we arrived to find one of our plastic beer casks had split, and we had a lovely sticky puddle to mop



up, added to by the volunteers' tears at losing an amazing beer.

We were delighted to have Martin from Bedford Radio doing a live show from the balcony on Saturday afternoon, and he interviewed several of our volunteers. Martin has already said they would love to be more involved next year! Our attendance was impacted on the Wednesday and Saturday by train strikes (something we couldn't plan for) but everyone pulled together to make it work as some volunteers could not make it in. Twenty-seven of you who attended decided to become a member of CAMRA and I would personally like to say welcome,



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A large advertisement for whatpub.com. At the top, it says "CAMRA CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE" next to the "WHAT?PUB" logo. Below this, a man is shown holding two beer glasses up to his eyes, using them as binoculars. The glasses are filled with beer and have a layer of foam. Below the man, the text "whatpub.com" is displayed, followed by "Featuring over 35,000 real ale pubs". At the bottom, there are three icons: a beer glass with "Over 96% of Britain's real ale pubs featured", a book with "Information updated by thousands of CAMRA volunteers", and a smartphone with "Created by CAMRA who produce the UK's best beer & pub guide". The bottom of the ad features the text "Thousands of pubs at your fingertips!" and a hand holding a smartphone displaying the whatpub.com website.

CAMRA's Bedford Beer and Cider Festival 2022



you now have an opportunity to meet a great group of people. I have been a member for over thirty years and never regretted my decision.

Sadly, at the end of October we lost our Craft bar manager and very dear friend Jonathan Kemp (please see the obituary on page 8).



The tombola and game stall run by East Beds branch of CAMRA

So when do the discussions start for next year? Well, they already have. While the festival was happening I and other key staff started brainstorming ideas, some of which would mean some radical changes. Maybe change the layout of the hall or introduce a gin bar. But let's stop right there, what do you want to see? Should we bring back entertainment?? What about advance-purchase tickets, or complete entry packages including glass & tokens, or would you like to use your plastic card on the bar?.. If you have any thoughts and would like to feed them back please contact



beerfestival@northbeds.camra.org.uk. It is your festival and you can make it happen.

We would also love to welcome you to our small planning committee. So maybe you think you don't have the relevant skills? You have never organised a beer festival, you say. Well, we have all been in that position, we all started somewhere, so please come along and find out more, and you never know you might just have the best ideas. It's great fun working alongside a great team of like-minded people. So, thanks for reading and I look forward to seeing or hearing from you soon.

And last and by no means least a HUGE



The RAFA Club stall raised for a great amount for charity, and they also ran the cloakroom

THANK YOU TO EACH AND EVERY VOLUNTEER – without you the festival could not have happened – you are all amazing.

Katherine Lilley
Festival Organiser

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Campaign
for
Real Ale

R.I.P. Jonathan Kemp



This is something I really didn't want to write. At the CAMRA Bedford Beer and Cider Festival over the last few years, at our foreign beer bar when it was in the Howard Room, or in the last couple of years at the craft bar in the main hall, you will have met Jonathan Kemp, a gentle Scottish giant of a man, softly spoken, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of beer. Jonathan sadly died suddenly on 27th October at his home in Glasgow.

Jonathan was a very dear friend of ours and was an incredibly complex, multi-faceted and interesting man. He had many interests in life, reaching far beyond his love of beer and dedication to CAMRA.

Jonathan was Festival Organiser of the Glasgow Real Ale Festival for the last seven years. He served on the National Executive of CAMRA, where he took responsibility for Events – that is, beer festivals up and down the country. He was also the National Controller of Bières Sans Frontières – Beers

without Borders – CAMRA'S experts in continental beers.

Another of his greatest passions was watching his beloved Scotland play rugby, and we have spent hours discussing games and ribbing each other about the Calcutta Cup and the best team winning (we didn't agree). But we would both acknowledge good play. He regularly travelled to international games in France and Italy, giving him the chance to sample interesting beers.

Jonathan was also a recognised member of CAMRA's national stewarding group, Team Tango, and could be seen wearing a bright orange shirt at some beer festival venues. Members of the team use call signs to identify themselves on the the radio. Jonathan was known as the Percolater Fiscal, a take on his professional life and his great love of good coffee. His job was demanding and responsible, as he was the Procurator Fiscal of Western Scotland, something that he didn't shout about, considering its importance.

Jonathan enjoyed listening to music and seeing bands both throughout the UK and abroad – sometimes taking in a match, but always at a good pub. He enjoyed mead and became an avid supporter of Rookery Mead. He was also a supporter of CAMRA's engraver, the Pewter Scribe, and over the years Colin did a number of bespoke pieces for him.

Throughout his life he would always make the time to listen to people and go that extra mile to ensure everybody felt valued and appreciated. He would always be ready to offer support and encouragement, and I can personally attest to that. I only hope he knows just how important he was to us all and how lost we are without him.

Sleep well my friend.

Katherine Lilley

A Summer Stroll

Coming out of covid, it proved difficult to get going with our bus trips for rural pub tours. However, as we could get out on foot, we had a Summer Walk around central Bedford in August as usual.



A group of us met to start our walk at the **Foresters Arms** in Union Street. This pub was newly reopened after a refurbishment from Wells, with a new manager. DNA from Brewpoint was the only cask ale available (understandable in post-covid times), and an acceptable start as we gathered.



On to the **Ship**, on Bromham Road, a nice community pub. It has fine (if a little damaged) green tiling to the façade, and the front of the bar is a pleasant, wood-panelled eating area. Again, DNA was on the bar and in acceptable condition.

We moved on to the **Flowerpot** in Tavistock Street, which has had a facelift. It was busy

with a music evening, so we sat in the walled garden at the rear. Doom Bar and London Pride were on. We had Pride, which was good!



Onward to the **Bear** in the High Street. Its narrow frontage belies the reasonably spacious

panelled bar at the rear with stained-glass windows. It has been 'gothed' a bit with a fair amount of black! But you can find a fair pint. It had on Courage Directors, Brakspears Gravity and Marstons 61 Deep, all products of Carlsberg Marstons; 61 Deep was ok.



Crossing the High Street, we popped into the **Brewhouse & Kitchen**. This chain in-house brewpub was very quiet. Banker's Draft, Intrepid and Invarsity were on handpump and in good condition.



We pushed on down the High Street to the **Rose**. Make sure you have your

CAMRA membership card here for a

A Summer Stroll

discount! It also takes CAMRA tokens for 50p off a pint. Taylor's Landlord and Sharp's Atlantic were on the bar, but the Landlord was 'end of barrel', so we had Atlantic, which was good.



We toiled on down the High Street and turned left on to the Embankment and... the **Embankment Hotel**. This mock-Tudor Wells establishment is a popular food venue, overlooking the river. Brewpoint Legacy was the only cask beer on, and it was in an acceptable condition.



We disappeared up the snicket to finish our evening at the **Three Cups** in Newnham Street. This Greene King 'Local Heroes' pub is

run by Kelchner Brewery of Ampthill, and has a fine, changing line up of ales. The pub itself is welcoming, and also gives CAMRA members a discount on production of your membership card, but a face-lift is overdue. However, these are difficult times. You can be guaranteed a good pint at the Cups. On the pumps this evening were: Kelchner's Half Nelson; Greene King Yardbird; Brentwood IPA; Leighton Buzzard Best Buzzard; and Nethergate Stour Valley Gold. I had the Buzzard, and was pleased to find that this local brewery produces excellent beer! The Nethergate was also good.

Gary Mudd

Minibus Trip

At last, we restarted our rural pub minibus visits. Our Driver, Nigel, met us at the **Burnaby Arms** in Bedford, where we had a quick sample of Brewpoint DNA. An acceptable pint to start the evening, at a welcoming community pub under new management.



Our first stop was the **Swan with Two Nicks** in **Sharnbrook**, another Wells pub. They accommodated our twelve halves, even though busy with food and a pub quiz. Marstons Eagle and Brewpoint Origin and DNA were on the bar. All the beers were in good condition.



On to the **Cock** at **Pavenham**, which closes at 10p.m., so we had to arrive early. A welcoming pub, with art deco decoration, historic photos of the village, and a 'cheese' skittles table. Marstons 61 Deep, Pedigree and Wainwright were all in good nick.

Our First Minibus Trip after Covid



We then moved to **Harrold** to visit its two pubs. The **Muntjac** is a well refurbished free house, now run by the tenants of the Bell at Odell. Two cask beers were available: Muntjac IPA (Greene King's house beer...I think it was 'Hardy & Hanson's' bitter...but don't quote me) and Timothy Taylor's Knowle Spring, not often available down south – a light summer beer and very tasty, a highlight of the evening.



And then the **Oakley Arms**, another refurbished pub with food, where we holed up in the games room! The beers on were Tring Brock's Bitter and Castle Rock Harvest Pale, the landlord's favourite. Both were in good condition.

On to **Turvey**, we thought just in time to catch the **Three Fyshes**. Unfortunately it now closes at 9pm in the week! Helen and I have been in a couple of times, though.

Usually only one cask beer is on, but we've sampled one from Rocket Ales, and also Dark Star Hophead, which were both excellent.



So we repaired unto the **Three Cranes**. The décor is a bit cool and grey, but the welcome was warm, with Eagle, Woodforde's Wherry and Black Sheep Bitter all available and tasty.



Next on to **Biddenham** and the **Three Tuns**. (All good things come as threes, it seems.) This

newly refurbished pub reopened in July. It has been opened out with a single-bar feel, but is still cosy. A bit expensive, but it had Tim Taylor's Landlord, Greene King IPA and GK Harvest Moon (a red ale brewed in the Future Brewer National Apprentice Brewers Programme). Most of us were drawn to this last, and thought it one of the best GK beers we'd tasted!

Finally, back to Bedford where a few of us checked out the beer in the **Pilgrims Progress** before a taxi home. In general, a wonderful sample of the good pubs available in North Beds. Well done to you all! Beer lovers, please get out and enjoy them when you can.

Gary Mudd

Oktoberfest - Horne's Brewery Open Day



In October, Horne's Brewery in Bow Brickhill held an Open Day and invited North Beds CAMRA members to attend. Bow Brickhill is accessible by train from Bedford, so a dozen of us took up the invitation. We strode down the road from Bow Brickhill station, wondering how we would find the brewery – no problem, a couple of empty casks at a garden gate



marked the spot! Passing between two houses, we found the brewery. Six of Horne's cask ales were available on hand pumps at an outdoor bar, and we sampled all of them. I had had some of them before,



so I chose unfamiliar ones: Featherstone (3.4% abv), Dark Fox Bitter (3.8% abv) - very dark, in fact, Greensands (4.2% abv), and Unlocked Horne's (4.3% abv) and found them all very acceptable.

The brewery itself was open for visitors to explore, and had some indoor seating, on a chilly October day! A display inside showed the twenty beers that Horne's have brewed at one time or another. The mystery beer in the bottom row turned out to be one specially brewed for the open day – Oktoberfest (5.3% abv), rather strong for lunchtime. Sizzler's van was there providing German-style sausages for the hungry. One of our number remembered Rye Stone, a rye beer which is quite a rare thing in the UK, and asked Ryan Horne if there were any plans to brew it again. Ryan said no - It had in fact last been produced five years ago. Several of the Horne's beers are called 'Triple Goat', and indeed the three goats were present.



An excellent half-day out, with good beers, nice hot food, an interesting little brewery and a friendly host. Horne's has been brewing for a few years now, hasn't overstretched itself by trying to expand too fast, and appears to have coped well with the problems of the last couple of years. Long may they continue to brew in their little corner of Milton Keynes.

Fytton Rowland

Pub news

St John's Arms, Melchbourne

Former tenant Jan Wiles left again soon after the Autumn 2022 ***Firkin*** was published. New landlord Michael Wilds, who also runs the Swan at nearby Newton Bromswold, took over in October, working here with Samantha Harding. There are three good beers on handpump. After the kitchen facilities are renewed, food should be available again early in December.

Sun, Felmersham

After extensive thatched roof repairs in the summer, the Sun has been closed for refurbishment, but is expected to reopen by Christmas. Meanwhile, owner-licensees Peter and Conny Pestell have kept the village well-watered with beer in their "micropub barn". thesunfelmersham.com.

Woolpack, Wilstead

Although tenants Peter & Janice Benedikter were planning to give up the pub, we are pleased to report that they are still in charge. The bar is open mainly for drinks, although roast lunch on Sunday is still available for limited numbers, booking essential. [Facebook @woolpackwilstead](#)

Polhill Arms, Renhold

Apologies for a belated welcome to Steve and Lucie Fuller, who moved from the White Horse in Bedford last summer. This is a family-friendly village local with a welcoming atmosphere and a large garden, patio and play area. There are regular quiz nights, and live music. Light bites and a choice of Greene King and guest beers are available.

[Facebook @polhillarmsrenhold](#).

King William IV, Kempston

This prominent half-timbered pub on Kempston High Street closed recently when the last tenants departed. We believe owners Wells & Co hope to reopen the pub shortly as a managed house, but it may close again for refurbishment in the New Year. www.thekingwilliamkempston.co.uk

Tiger, Avon Drive, Bedford

The former Tiger Moth has been renamed and re-branded with a new tiger image, but sadly still offers no real ale.



Wellington Arms, Bedford

Wellington Arms, Bedford

Former brewers B&T have relinquished most of their tied pubs, including the Wellington Arms, which has returned to its freehold owner, Burlison Inns. We are pleased that former manager Liz Sutton is still in charge as a new tenant and we expect the pub to remain one of our leading real ale outlets. [Facebook @Wellybedford](#).

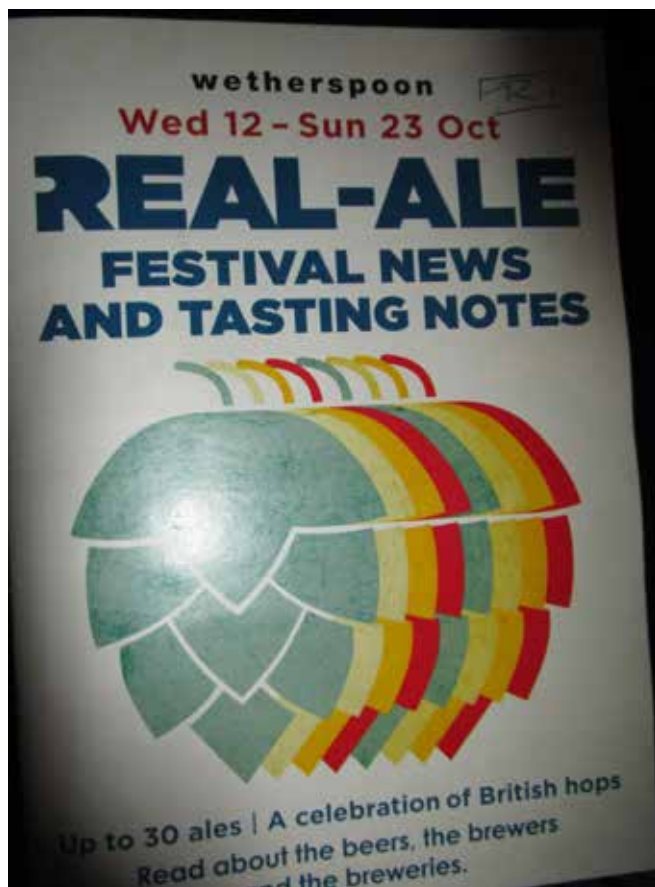
Bedford Arms, Souldrop

The Bedford Arms recently closed after the last tenant decided to give up the business. The owner is currently looking for a new tenant or lessee. We hope a new licensee comes forward to keep this fine real ale house open.

Dead Pubs of Bedfordshire

A new book on Bedfordshire's lost pubs will appear shortly from local journalist Lloyd Lugsden. Volume 1 covering mainly North Beds is to be launched on 20 November, with a second volume covering other parts of the county likely to follow soon. We hope to review the new book in our next issue. Meanwhile it is available for £6 via [Facebook @Dead Pubs of Bedfordshire](#).

Wetherspoon's: Friend or Foe?



We produced our CAMRA 50p-off vouchers, and the price came down to an unbelievable £1.69/pint!

So why does any CAMRA member have doubts about Wetherspoon's? Well, the price they charge for a pint is less than any pub tenant nearby would have to pay to their brewery. So there is a niggling worry that Spoon's might put the other real-ale pubs nearby out of business and become a real-ale monopolist. And that's not good for local small breweries, either.

Nevertheless, in October, when Wetherspoon's invited local CAMRA branches along to a preview evening the night before their annual real-ale festival opened to the public, a group of us went along to the **Pilgrim's Progress** in Bedford. Our East Beds colleagues went to the Crown in Biggleswade at the same time. Of the thirty beers listed in the programme, ten were brewed specially for this festival, and for me the most interesting were the ones

brewed by brewers from abroad. Nowhereman Wungong (5.5% abv), from Western Australia, was brewed at Banks's by Nowhereman's brewer Eddie Still; Mad Giant Autumn Amber, (4.3% abv) from Johannesburg was brewed by Mad Giants brewer Eben Uys at Hook Norton; and Telemark Rav (5.0% abv), from Telemark in Norway, a community-owned brewery, was brewed by its head brewer Kjetil Jikiun – a former airline pilot – at Shepherd Neame. I sampled all of these and found them all interesting and very drinkable. No-one can doubt Tim Martin's commitment to real ale.

Fytton Rowland

The summer 2022 edition of **Wetherspoon's News** contained an article by CAMRA's National Chairman Nik Antona, about CAMRA's activities, its Summer of Pub campaign, and how it survived the lockdowns. A friendly gesture from the pub chain towards CAMRA, clearly. And for many real-ale lovers of limited means, the local Spoon's, with a decent selection of cask ales at very reasonable prices, is a great boon. Just before August's Great British Beer Festival (GBBF), the bar team that I belong to at GBBF met in the Wimbledon Wetherspoon's. Cask ales were £2.19/pint, under half what you'd pay in any other pub in that very up-market district of London.

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.

Items for publication in the next issue should reach the Editor by the date shown at the foot of this page. Edited by Fytton Rowland, 73 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TA
firkin@northbeds.camra.org.uk

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Contact us

Chairman, Magazine Editor and Pubs Protection Officer

Fytton Rowland - 07753 694785
chairman@northbeds.camra.org.uk
firkin@northbeds.camra.org.uk
pubprotection@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Secretary and Pub Campaigns Co-ordinator

Peter Argyle - 01234 822698
secretary@northbeds.camra.org.uk
pubcampaigns@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Festival Organiser and Social Media

Co-ordinator Katherine Lilley
beerfestival@northbeds.camra.org.uk
socmedia@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Socials

Gary Mudd - 01234 741871
socials@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Finance, Press Officer and Clubs Officer

Roger Stokes
treasurer@northbeds.camra.org.uk
pressofficer@northbeds.camra.org.uk
clubsofficer@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Membership

Neil Ratnett - 01234 344388
membership@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Pub Data Co-ordinator

Paul Barnes
pubdata@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Cider Rep - Vacant

Branch Diary

CAMRA North Bedfordshire branch business meetings are normally held on the second Thursday of alternate months. Social 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 visit the branch website at 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

This diary is provisional. See the branch website for final information

JANUARY

Thursday 5th - Branch Meeting Business Meeting at the Ent Shed, the Gordon Arms, Castle Road, Bedford, at 7 p.m.

Thursday 12th - Pub Assessment Trip Minibus trip starting at 7 p.m. See branch website for starting point.

Thursday 19th - Pub Assessment Trip Walking tour, starting at the Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, at 7 p.m.

Thursday 26th - Pub Assessment Trip Minibus trip starting at 7 p.m. See branch website for starting point.

FEBRUARY

Thursday 9th - Branch Meeting Business Meeting, at the Ent Shed, the Gordon Arms, Castle Road, Bedford, at 7 p.m.

Thursday 16th - Pub Assessment Trip Minibus trip or walking tour starting at 7 p.m. See branch website for starting point.

MARCH

Thursday 9th - Branch Meeting Business Meeting, at the Ent Shed, the Gordon Arms, Castle Road, Bedford, at 7 p.m.

Thursday 30th - Branch Annual General Meeting At the Ent Shed, the Gordon Arms, Castle Road, Bedford, at 7 for 7.30 p.m. CAMRA members only.

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