

FREE

The Firkin



Campaign
for
Real Ale

Magazine of CAMRA North Bedfordshire • Vol 47 No 1 Spring 2023

Well, Well, Welly!



Wellington Arms is Pub of the Year 2023

EDITORIAL

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

NORTH BEDS PUB OF THE YEAR

FIRE AT THE GREEN MAN

WORD SEARCH CONTEST

CAMRA PUB ASSESSMENT

NATIONAL CHAMPION 2022

BEDFORD TOWN PUB WALK

JANUARY MINIBUS PUB TRIPS

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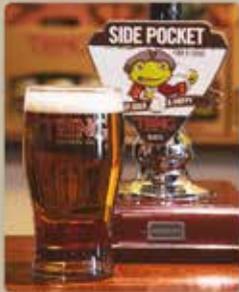
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Editorial

I am writing this in January before North Beds CAMRA branch has made its choices of pubs for the Good Beer Guide and our branch Pub of the Year (see pages 4 and 5). For the last few weeks, papers and magazines have been full of 'Dry January', with a basic assumption in most cases that not only is this A Good Thing, but also most people are doing it.

CAMRA has always supported moderate and responsible drinking. Traditional British beers have been quite weak by international standards since the First World War, when the Government wanted to ensure that munitions workers were present and sober at their workplaces. A session ale is usually about 3.8% abv or so, and our stronger beers, of 5.0% abv and upwards, have about the same strength as many countries' standard beers.

Britain's pubs and brewers are just coming out of an appalling three-year period of poor business due to Covid and the resulting lockdowns. Many businesses in the licensed trade have not survived, and others are hanging on by their fingernails. Did all those media people writing so happily about Dry January – with an underlying assumption that alcohol is bad – consider the harm they might have been doing to one of Britain's best-loved traditions, the local pub? Beer drinkers and pub-goers mostly consume alcohol in moderation. Please don't kick our publicans when they are down! And next year, when January rolls round again, if you wish to abstain for the month, please keep visiting pubs and drink low- or no-alcohol beers, if you must. They are much improved recently. Then return to proper real ale on 1st February 2024!

Fytton Rowland

Letter to the Editor

Dear North Beds CAMRA,

Once again I was rather disappointed in the write-up of the Three Cups in the recent edition of the Firkin. You seem to have copied and pasted from previous editions with a slight tweak. We have had numerous comments from customers and others who just laughed at the inaccuracies. It would be helpful if you took the time to engage with us and asked what was going on.

- First of all, we are not a Local Heroes Pub and never have been under our tenure. Greene King does not offer this concept any more and hasn't for a about three years or more.
- Tired and need of renovation it may be, but so are a few of the mentioned pubs in the article, but there was no mention of their condition.
- Very little mention of our continued rotation of the ales we have available.

We are now on 198 different beers from 38 different breweries under our tenure, but very little mention of this.

- No mention that we now have five free of tie pumps at the pub.
- No mention that we now have a permanent "Dark Ale" pump which rotates between stouts, porters and other dark ales.
- Permanent hand pulled cider for over a year, of which we have had nine different ciders this year.
- No mention of the events to support the Royal British Legion and other charities which we have held over the last few months.

Hopefully, you can adjust the information for the Spring edition of the Firkin.

Regards, Chris Kelly, Kelchner Brewery

Branch Awards 2023

CAMRA awards are given to the best pubs and clubs, and to the hard-working people who make them a success. This year North Beds Branch is making just two awards for excellence: our top award for Branch Pub of the Year and a Country Pub of the Year for the runner-up. Framed certificates will be presented to the winners. You can find more details about them on www.whatpub.com.

Wellington Arms, Wellington Street, Bedford. **Pub of the Year 2023**



The Editor at the Welly

The Wellington Arms has played a key role in the recent story of real ale in Bedford. Under the former B&T Brewery it won our first five Pub of the Year titles and then twice more before we gave it a unique special award for consistently promoting real ale in 2017. For many years it has offered a wide range of real ales, always in excellent condition.

Change became inevitable after the B&T brewery in Shefford had to close. B&T surrendered the lease and the pub reverted to owner Burlison Inns, who were keen to retain the pub's position as a leading venue for real ale and wisely offered former manager Liz Sutton a new tenancy in 2022. We are delighted at the outcome for what was already one of our best local pubs and is now a free house, which fully deserves our Branch Pub of the Year 2023 award.

A row of 8 handpumps serves a range of real ales, mostly from microbreweries and usually including a mild and a stout. Another pair of handpulls usually serve draught cider. The well-stocked fridge offers a range of Belgian and other imported bottled beers. We hope landlady Liz may bring back the pub's seasonal beer festivals in due course.

Congratulations to Liz Sutton, Burlison Inns and the Wellington Arms for winning our latest Pub of the Year title. For more information, visit the pub's Facebook page at @Wellybedford.

Stone Jug, Back Street, Clophill. **Country Pub of the Year 2023**



Originally three 16th-century cottages, the Stone Jug has an L-shaped bar serving two drinking areas. Its name may come from the local quarry stone from which it is mostly built. It became a public house in the early 1900's and is now a popular free house. It has been run by the Stevens family since 1981.

Benches along the front provide a perfect seat for those who like to watch the world pass by and there is also a rear decking area that catches the sun on summer afternoons and early evenings. Parking can be difficult at busy times, but it is an ideal refreshment stop for the nearby Greensand Ridge Walk..

Regular real ales Shepherd Neame Spitfire

Branch Awards 2023

(continued)

and at least one from 3 Brewers of St Albans are joined on handpumps by up to three guest beers. Home-made lunches are available from Tuesday to Saturday. The pub is highly valued for its relaxed atmosphere, and the regulars always help visitors feel at home. It's a proper, traditional village pub!

Congratulations to licensees Vikki and Joyce Stevens, Mark and the ever helpful bar staff for winning our award. For further details call 01525 860526, visit the pub website at www.stonejug.co.uk or its Facebook page at @thestonejugclophill

Cider Pub of the Year and Club of the Year.

The branch decided not to make these awards this year, with few pubs currently offering real cider and our regular contacts with local clubs still recovering from the covid disruption.

Peter Argyle

Fire at Clophill Pub



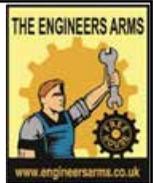
On 22nd December 2022, a fire almost destroyed the Green Man at Clophill, a traditional-style village pub in

the centre of the village. The Green Man had been operating as an Italian restaurant for some years and had fairly recently reverted to a proper pub, which makes the fire all the sadder. It is not yet known whether, or when, it will reopen. A free house, it had been selling Doom Bar and Proper Job as its regular cask ales.

There are two other pubs in Clophill, the Flying Horse on the A507 roundabout and the Stone Jug in Back Street (see pages 4 and above), but nevertheless the probable loss of the Green Man is tragic when so many attractive village pubs are closing for other reasons. Let's hope that the Green Man does get repaired and make a comeback!

Engineers Arms

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Brewery

Wed 28 June – Sun 2 July

Live music on Fri 30 June with Christian Smith

Tap takeover from

Grainstore Brewery

Wed 19 – Sun 23 July

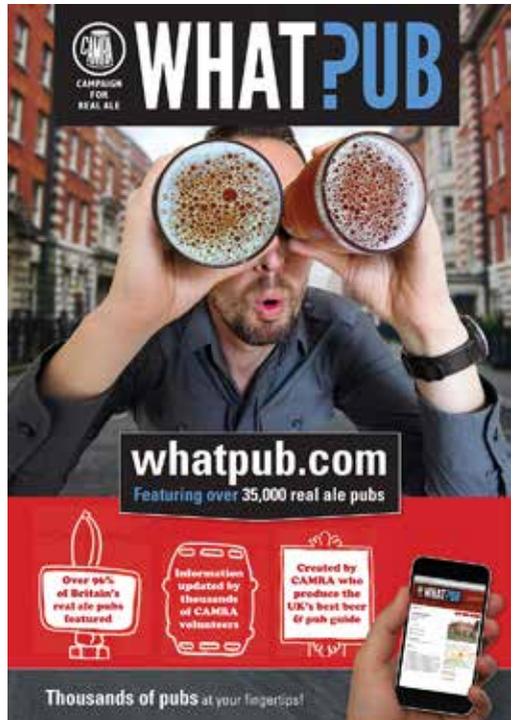
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Word Search (see page 7)

New Year, new Firkin.

So, to kick off 2023 we are now including a puzzle in each issue that has been sponsored by our resident festival engravers and branch members The PewterScribe.

If you complete the puzzle and email it to

beerfestival@northbeds.camra.org.uk

you will be in with a chance of winning an engraved glass tankard.

The winner will be selected by a random number generator from all the entries received.

But be warned there is a word not included in the key, so you'll need your wits about you!



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vogue
 George and Dragon
 The White Horse
 Foresters Arms
 The Bedford Arms
 The Jug
 The Bell
 Anchor
 The Rose
 Jolly Milliner

Ours
 Kings Arms
 The Castle
 The Embankment
 The Ship
 Wellington Arms
 Saddle and Spoke
 Cocos
 The old sugar loaf
 The carriage house

The Queen
 Three Cups
 The Bear
 Brewhouse and Kitchen
 Ship and Mitre
 Old nags head
 Star and Garter
 King William IV
 Bricklayers Arms
 The bumble bee

The bull
 Gordon Arms
 The park
 The Pilgrims Progress
 The Swan
 Fox and Hounds
 The Red Lion
 The King Henry
 The Bluebell
 Rose and Crown

Why do we Assess Pubs in January?

Regular readers of the Firkin will have noticed that the Spring edition each year always contains a lengthy report of several pub assessment trips taking place in January, generally a month of poor weather, not to mention 'Dry January' (see the Editorial on page 3).

One reason is that pubs generally do less business in January than in any other month, so if a pub serves good cask ale in January it's likely to be dependably good at any time. But there is another reason. CAMRA's flagship publication, the Good Beer Guide, is created by its members throughout the UK. Every CAMRA branch has to decide which of the pubs within its area will be in the Guide, and the schedule for compiling it requires a branch's recommendations for inclusion of pubs in the 2024 Guide to be submitted quite early this year. So we assess them in January, though our recommendations are confidential until the Good Beer Guide is published in September.

We use the same visits, though, together with those we made throughout last year, to choose our local branch Pub of the Year (PoTY) for 2023, together with other awards. These are announced in this issue - see pages 4 and 5. The local winner goes forward to compete with the branch PoTYs of South and East Bedfordshire CAMRA branches for the title of Bedfordshire County PoTY, and that pub then competes with five other county champions to be East Anglian Regional PoTY. In turn, this competes to be one of four supra-regional champs, and finally the title of national CAMRA Pub of the Year is announced around Christmas! Yet another reason for our January visits - we have to fit into this long-drawn-out timetable for selecting the national PoTY. And so, on page 9, we

announce the national Pub of the Year for last year! It is the Tamworth Tap in Staffordshire.

Other factors as well as beer quality count too - for example, warmth of the pub, cleanliness, quality of food if it's an eating pub, friendliness of the welcome from the licensee and staff.

But how do we make our assessments? Britain's pubs are assessed by CAMRA's local members for a national publication and a national accolade. We need to apply consistent standards everywhere. The key feature is, of course, the quality of the real ale in each pub. The national organisation prescribes a system for judging a beer. Each CAMRA member on a trip scores each beer that they drink in each pub according to this scoring system. Members can also score beers at any time in any pub and submit them to the WhatPub website. All the scores in a year for a given pub are then averaged to help branches in making their choice. Guidance on how to judge each glass of real ale is also provided to assist consistent scoring.

Fytton Rowland



*Wellington Arms, Bedford
Pub of the Year 2023*

Tamworth Tap is National Pub of the Year 2022

An impressive brewpub located in a 16th century shopfront falling within the shadow of Tamworth's historic Norman castle has been named the best pub in the country in CAMRA's Pub of the Year competition for 2022.



The **Tamworth Tap** is housed in an elegant building with Tudor features in the cosy upstairs room and a historic courtyard beer terrace that offers striking views of the castle. It went from empty premises to an iconic brewpub in less than five years and today boasts eight handpumps, including at least one ale brewed on site. At the bottom of the stairs is a rare, complete set of Good Beer Guides from issue 1.

George and Louise Greenaway, licensees of the Tamworth Tap said: "We can't express how much this accolade means to us. CAMRA values have been at the core of everything we have done since we opened our doors.

John Rowling, Pubs Officer with Lichfield Sutton & Tamworth CAMRA branch, said: "I'm absolutely elated at this fantastic news that the Tamworth Tap has won the coveted top award. For real ale drinkers, the Tamworth Tap is the jewel in Tamworth's crown. George and Louise are to be congratulated on their tremendous success."

January Pub Walkabout in Bedford

The starting point for our Bedford walking pub tour in January was the **Devonshire Arms in Dudley Street.**

Only a about a dozen members came on a very cold night, but we warmed up on entering the Devvy with a blazing fire in the grate. The Devvy was busy. Handpumps carried Charlie Wells Legacy and DNA, Timothy Taylor's Landlord, Black Sheep Best, Fuller's London Pride and St Austell Tribute. The welcome from Rebecca, Ronnie and the staff was as warm as the bar itself, as we have come to expect, and my half of Legacy was in good shape.



A stroll took us to the **Three Cups in Newnham Street**, where licensee Chris Kelly, the proprietor of Kelchner Brewery, welcomed us. Cask beers available were Kelchner's IPA (4.5% abv) and Rule 6 Green Hop (4.2% abv); Milestone Brewery's Sherwood Pale (3.9% abv) and Fletcher's (5.2% abv); Hammerhead Stout (5.6% abv); and GK IPA from the pub's freeholders. Chris has a policy of always having a dark beer on one pump. He believes strongly that a real-ale specialist pub should provide a wide and varying choice of beers from independent breweries. I tried the Green Hop ale, and found its and found its flavour different – and of course it was well-kept.

Our next walk was very short, just along **Newnham Street** to the **Castle**, a Wells house. Another warm and welcoming pub!

January Pub Walkabout in Bedford

(Continued)



On the handpumps were Timothy Taylor's Landlord and London Pride again, together this time with Adnams Broadside and Courage Directors –

the latter being now brewed by Carlsberg Marston. I sampled the Directors, which I've always liked. It was properly kept. We commented to the landlady that this Wells house carried no Wells cask ales, but she said that they had no market for these, though they did have several of the Brewpoint keg beers on regularly.

After the Castle, the party divided. I went to the **Ship, St Cuthbert's Street**, where the beer is usually 'there or thereabouts', while the other faction tried the **George and Dragon** in **Mill Street**. Both are GK eating pubs. The George and Dragon group were pleasantly surprised, finding the GK IPA and Abbot much improved. Our group also found GK IPA and Abbot at the Ship, together with Yardbird and their own pub beer, 'Holy Ship' (3.9% abv). Sadly the Yardbird had just run out, so I settled for a half of GK IPA. The staff were friendly, and it gives a CAMRA members' discount.

We all next visited the **Brewhouse and Kitchen** in the **High Street**. It is substantially an eatery, as the name hints; the B&K chain seem to be modelled on American brewpubs. The cask ales are brewed to standard recipes, which local brewers are given some leeway to vary. In Bedford they are named Banker's Draught (4.0% abv), Invarsity (4.0% abv), and



Intrepid (5.0% abv), with a fourth handpump carrying changing beers, currently Whisky Stout (4.5%). I tried the Intrepid and found it not detectably changed in flavour from the former 6.0% version. Most tried the Whisky Stout and found it very drinkable. The cellar work was good. It gives a CAMRA discount.

Our final stop was a favourite one, the **Wellington Arms** in **Wellington Street**. The Welly is very much a proper pub, though a rather cramped one when full of real-ale drinkers, as it was on this occasion. It has been through a major change recently. With the demise of the B&T (nee Banks and Taylor) brewery of Shefford, control has reverted to its owner, Gary Burlison. Manager Liz Sutton remains in charge, now with the status of tenant. The ten hand pumps remain, though early January justified fewer than usual. The only constant is at least one Nethergate beer, on this occasion Venture (3.7% abv). The others were Cornish Crown Citra Boom (3.7% abv), Roman Way Aquila (4.0% abv), Rudgate Milk Stout (4.2% abv), and Thornbridge Jaipur (5.9% abv). For my final drink of the night I went for Jaipur. It was of course in good condition.

Fytton Rowland

First Minibus Trip of the Year



Refurbished - Now the Blue Horse?

North Beds CAMRA's first minibus pub trip of 2023 started from the **White Horse, Newnham Avenue, Bedford**. This large Wells interwar suburban-style pub, recently refurbished, is under new licensees, and they had Wells Legacy and Black Sheep Best on handpumps. At 7p.m. on a freezing Thursday evening in January, no-one was dining, but a sprinkling of drinkers were in along with fifteen CAMRA members awaiting our minibus. I tried the Legacy and found it more than satisfactory.

The Villager bus with its volunteer driver Nigel appeared on time and we set off on a winding route through the villages east and



southeast of Bedford. First stop: the **Polhill Arms at Renhold**. The licensees there are the couple who had departed from the White Horse a few months before, Steve and Lucie Fuller. The Polhill Arms is a Greene King house. From GK they had Old Speckled Hen and Hardy Hanson's bitter, and also on the handpumps were Caledonian's Deuchars, not often seen south of the border, and Rosie's Pig cider. Lucie was serving meals to some of the customers, and the pub was quite busy overall. I enjoyed my half of Deuchars, in excellent condition.

Consequent to roadworks in Renhold, Nigel had to backtrack a little to find his way to our next stop, the **Anchor at Great Barford**. Although it was still only 8p.m., only one table was still dining and the pub was quite quiet. A very pleasant Wells village pub, it had Wells Origin, St Austell Tribute and (again) Rosie's Pig cider on handpumps. Our group soon used up the Tribute, but my Origin was very drinkable.



Next we crossed to south of the river and headed for **Moggerhanger** where our destination was the **Guinea**. A quite large Wells house, it is another eatery and was moderately busy even before our group joined the customers. The Manager, Josh, was behind the bar and served us very promptly with his usual good humour. On the handpumps he had Wells DNA, London Pride and Adnams Southwold. I completed the set of Wells current cask ales by sampling the DNA, which was in nice condition.

Another longish trundle southwards brought us to the **Crown at Northill**, an attractive old village pub next to the church. No-one was eating and it wasn't busy. Our second Greene King pub of the evening, it had GK IPA and Abbot on its handpumps. We soon exhausted the cask of Abbot, and as there was a delay on putting the new one on, I settled for GK IPA. It was in decent condition. The welcome was warm, with apologies from the licensee for the delay.

First Minibus Trip of the Year

(Continued)



Carrying on further south again, we arrived at the **Hare and Hounds at Old Warden**.

We were back in Wells territory again, and on the pumps we found Wells Origin and Black Sheep Best. I chose the Black Sheep this time and found it really pretty good. Another warm and welcoming country pub, it was fairly busy, but our busload were served efficiently by the friendly staff.

Our final stop was the **Stone Jug at Clophill**, where we arrived to find it still well patronised at 10.30. The only free house of our evening, it had a selection of unusual ales available for us: Buntingford's Chinook



Stone Jug at Clophill

Single Hop (4.0% abv), Milestone's Arabian Nights (4.7% abv), Lister's Gold (5.0% abv) and the 3 Brewers of St Albans Classic

English Ale (4.0% abv) were joined by the more conventional Shepherd Neame Spitfire. My choice was the 3 Brewers. As one expects at the Stone Jug, the beer was in excellent condition. Then Nigel carried us back to the **Pilgrims Progress in Bedford**, open till midnight so that those wanting taxis home could wait in the warm with one last beer.

Fytton Rowland

The Fox at Carlton



North Beds CAMRA Pub of the Year 2022

North Beds CAMRA Country Pub of the Year 2016, 2017, 2020 & 2021

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www.thefoxatcarlton.pub

Second Minibus Trip of the Year

Our second minibus trip for assessing local pubs took place on 2nd February 2023.



This time the starting point was the **Burnaby Arms** in **Stanley Street** in **Bedford**, a proper old-fashioned local. A Wells house, it had Charlie Wells DNA on the handpump, and my half was very acceptable. St Austell Tribute had been on another, but it had run out before we arrived. The pub was warm, welcoming, and lively, but the noise was mostly from our group – not many other customers were in at 7 p.m. Our minibus picked us up from there to drive us out to pubs in the northwest of Bedfordshire.



First stop – the **Cock** at **Pavenham**, a popular village pub under a fairly recent new regime. Although a free house, it favours Marston's beers, and had Pedigree, Wainwright and 61 Deep on its pumps,

though the 61 Deep had just run out. The fire was burning, but again it wasn't very busy apart from our group.



This was followed by the **Sun** at **Felmersham**, which has enjoyed a recent refurbishment but without losing its traditional character. It normally has four beers and a cider on handpumps at weekends, but on this Thursday it had only Eagle on. My sample of it was well kept. As explained elsewhere (page 15), the former Bedford favourite Eagle can no longer be obtained in Wells houses, so it is good that free houses like the Sun, and the Fox at Carlton, still stock it.

We then moved on to the **Swan with Two Nicks** at **Sharnbrook**, our second Wells house of the evening. It was busier than most pubs on that evening. It offered DNA again, together with Black Sheep Best and Adnams Southwold. I had the Black Sheep and again its condition was good.

The next hop to the **Bell** at **Odell** was a short one. This is a popular eating pub, where a few were finishing their meals at 9p.m. It is a Greene King House and it routinely offers GK IPA, Abbot and GK's so-called Ruddles Best. I had a half of Abbot, which was fine. Again our group provided the main liveliness!

We then moved to that rare thing in these times – a village with two pubs, **Harrold**. The group split, and we alternated between

Second Minibus Trip of the Year

(Continued)

the two, which are only yards apart. The **Oakley Arms** was a historic village pub but has been extended and is now more restaurant-like in character. Dining had finished, and no other drinkers were in. A free house, it offered Ringbeck, from the Pheasantry Brewery, which most of the group chose, and Tring Moongazing, which was my choice. Like all our stops that evening, the Oakley kept its cask ales well. Then the group that I was in moved across the road to the **Muntjac**. It was better filled than most of our pubs that evening, which gave it a good atmosphere. It is a Greene King house, but its handpumps carried Timothy Taylor's Landlord - which most of my colleagues chose - their own Muntjac IPA and Kelchner's Full Nelson. I chose the Kelchner and found it enjoyable and in good nick.

And finally we headed to **Turvey** and the **Three Cranes**, now free of tie. A Victorian-style building, it is principally an eating pub these days, and at 10 p.m. was quite empty - our group of sixteen gave the pub a nice little bonus for the evening! It had Eagle on handpump for the second time this evening, along with Black Sheep Best and Hobgoblin Ruby. I hadn't encountered Ruby on draught locally, so I tried it and found it acceptable and in good condition. Then it was finally time to head back into town and the **Pilgrim's Progress**. The general standard of cellar work in the villages in the northwest of the county is agreeably high!

Fytton Rowland

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/diary.

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

See the branch website for diary information

MARCH

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.



10 great reasons to join CAMRA

- | | |
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No Eagle in any Wells Pub!

Some years ago, Wells ceased to run their own drays and contracted out distribution to Koehne & Nagel. When Marston's took over the Eagle Brewery, they took the distribution back in-house, and Marston's drays delivered to Wells pubs the beers brewed by Marston's and also the beers that the Eagle Brewery made on behalf of Wells and Co.

After Brewpoint opened in 2020, Wells still got Marston's to do the deliveries to the Wells pubs, delivering the Wells Brewpoint beers first to Havelock Street for onward distribution (along with Marston's own beers) to the Wells pubs. Efficient – one dray to each pub – but leaving Wells dependent, once the merger with Carlsberg occurred, on Carlsberg for deliveries to Wells pubs.

Now, the Brewpoint products get sent to the pubs by Matthew Clarke, along with any beers that the Wells licensees may have ordered from other brewers that Matthew Clarke delivers for. These do not include Carlsberg Marston's, so Wells pubs can no longer get them. They can, however, get popular brands like Timothy Taylor's Landlord, Black Sheep and London Pride.

And what of the Bedford favourite, Eagle? Wells pubs can't get it any more! And it isn't brewed in Bedford any more. One free-house licensee who sells Eagle told me that it brewed at Ringwood in Hampshire, but others believe it now comes from the Marston's brewery in Burton. But it can't go into Wells houses!

Fytton Rowland

The
Firkin

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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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