

The Firkin

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 41 No 3 Autumn 2016



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

FREE

Festival Time Again!



39th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival 5th-8th October 2016

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

A BREWPUB IN BEDFORD

BEDFORD BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL

CHAMPION BEER OF BRITAIN 2016

OTHER AUTUMN FESTIVALS

PUB NEWS

TRIP AROUND THE VILLAGES

SHAKESPEARE AND BEER

THE OLDEST BOTTLED BEERS

NOTTINGHAM BREWERIES

BRANCH DIARY

ALL CHANGE AT THE DEVVY

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

FLYING HIGH

FOR 2016, ALL OUR MONTHLY BEERS ARE NAMED AFTER DE HAVILLAND AIRCRAFT

FOR 2016 WE'VE TEAMED UP WITH THE DE HAVILLAND AIRCRAFT MUSEUM, HELPING TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THEIR NEW HANGER PROJECT. VISIT THE TRING BREWERY SHOP FOR THE CHANCE TO WIN TOURS AND A DE HAVILLAND BI-PLANE FLIGHT.



TringBrewery

TringBrewery

www.tringbrewery.co.uk 01442 890721

TRING
BREWERY Co.



 oakham ales

www.oakhamales.com

Tel 01733 370500

Chairman's Corner



Only a small Corner this time, but I can report a well-attended North Beds CAMRA AGM at the RAFA Club, when I was able to present the Club with the Club of the Year certificate and sample the beers they had on offer. In the formal business it was good to bring Dan Veal on board as our Young Members Contact since we are only too aware of the need

to encourage our young members. They are our future.

Mike Mackechnie and I had what I think was a positive meeting with the Mayor on how we can work together to save pubs. The Mayor says he will be away for the Bedford Beer and Cider Festival, but I look forward to seeing you there, by which time I hope to be almost fully recovered from a recent accident. Keep safe.

Roger Stokes

A Brewpub in Bedford

On Referendum Evening, a group of CAMRA members gathered in the former Bankers Draft in Bedford High Street. We'd been invited to a preview at the Brewhouse and Kitchen (B&K), a small pub chain which has taken over the former Wetherspoons.



And right in the bar is a brewery! The three-barrel plant will provide the beers for the pub's handpumps. Five carry the regular beers: Invarsity, a darkish strong beer at 6.0% abv;

Night Fever, a 5.0% abv porter; The Sprinter, a strong, full-bodied amber bitter also at 5.0% abv; Intrepid, an American-style pale ale at 4.2% abv; and finally their traditional session bitter (3.6% abv), named in Bedford 'Bankers' Draught'. It tastes stronger than it is. A sixth pump carried Preacher John (4.5%), a seasonal witbier, and the last two had real ciders on them.

We were given samples of all of the beers, and then ordered pints of our favourites to drink with our meal. The beer was perhaps a tad too cold



but this was explained by the cellar thermostat being stuck, which had been corrected. We noted that the beer menus on

the tables don't distinguish between cask, keg and bottled beers – the handpumps reveal which ones are cask. The printed menu is also the only place to find the prices.

The food was typical pub fare at a decent quality. As this was a preview night for invited guests only, not all the menu items were available, but I enjoyed my rack of barbecued ribs. Afterwards the brewer, Ben Pearson, showed us the brewery, due to start production a week or two later. (The beers on the pumps that evening had been brought in from other branches.) Ben trained at Oldershaw's in Grantham. Although the beer range is similar in all the pubs, the local brewers have scope to vary the recipes. So maybe when we visit again they will taste a little different...

B&K offer a Beer Masterclass at £20, giving a guided sampling of eight beers, and a Brewery Experience Day, for £85 when you can brew yourself! These can be booked online at www.brewhouseandkitchen.com

Fytton Rowland

Reserve the dates...



Wednesday 5th to Saturday 8th October 2016 – you'll want to be in Bedford Corn Exchange on those days, because they are the dates of the unmissable **39th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival**.

As always the Corn Exchange will be converted into an enormous pub for the occasion. There will be a few changes from previous years. One good one – we'll have more different cask ales for you to choose from! We've decided to maximise choice by buying just one nine-gallon cask of each beer this time, so we'll have **170 different cask beers** over the four days. Though with only one barrel of each, once it's gone, it's gone. Contrariwise, others won't come on until later in the festival. These beers will be on the beer bar running down the centre of the main hall.

The cider bar will have over fifty different real ciders and perries, and as last year will be in the northwest corner of the main hall, handily adjacent to the beer bar.

And this year, our English Wine bar will also be close by, in the northeast corner. So if one of your party likes beer, one likes cider and one likes wine – no problem! They're all close together.

If your taste is for German, Czech and other foreign beers, you'll be catered for in the Howard Room upstairs, where there will be more draught foreign beer this year – it always sells out, so we're upping the order. A large variety of bottled beers will be there too, of course. And keeping them company in the Howard Room will be our caterers, Angelo St Cuthberts, who were such a hit last year. They'll be supplying a daily changing menu of our festival favourite hot meals at lunch and dinner times, with cold snacks, teas and coffees in between. By popular demand, there will be smaller portions available this year, and if you want just chips, you can have them!



To complete the temptations in the Howard Room, Merry Berry Chocolates will be here again with their suggested chocolate and beer pairings. Their chili chocolate has been very popular for the last two years.

If all this beer and food isn't enough to keep you occupied all day, there's entertainment.





On Wednesday evening, Sloop Groggy Dogs – a new group for us – will provide ‘sea, folk and drinking songs’, appropriately. On Saturday evening, singer Kerry Jo Hodgkin will return for a second festival appearance, accompanied this time by Carlos Linnett on guitar.

And no doubt Bedford Morris will dance on the Saturday afternoon.

Under the balcony in the main hall you will find the CAMRA shop selling memorabilia, clothing and books about beer, the ‘Every 1’s a Winner’ tombola, and engraver Colin Lilley there to personalise your glass. Colin also does leatherwork, engraves pewter tankards and even designs our festival logo each year – versatile fellow, Colin! In the same row of shops you’ll find the festival office, where you can get all your enquiries answered – by me, if you’re really unlucky.

On arrival you collect your special festival glass (pint or half-pint, your choice) at the glasses bar in the main hall – there’s a charge of £2.50, but this is refundable when you leave if you don’t want to keep the glass. (But not if Colin has personalised it for you!) Beer and ciders can be bought in pints, halves or thirds, as all three measures are marked on the glasses. You can even take your favourite cask ale home with you, since two-pint containers are available.

The festival will open at 4 p.m. on Wednesday 5th October and at 12 noon on the other days,

and will close at 11 p.m. each evening. CAMRA members get free admission at all times – so why not call at the festival office on your first visit and sign up as a member? Non-members’ admission is £1 until 5 p.m., then £2 on Wednesday, £3 on Thursday, £4 on Friday, £2 on Saturday.



If all this sounds like real fun, why not try it from the other side of the bar? Everyone working at the festival is a volunteer, except for the Corn Exchange and caterer’s staff. We need staff for the beer, cider, wine and foreign beer bars, for the glasses bar, the shop and the tombola. If by good fortune you have cellar training or experience, our cellar and cooling teams particularly need new recruits. People are also needed on Sunday-Tuesday 2nd-4th October to help build the giant pub, and on Sunday 9th October to knock it down again. Any CAMRA member can volunteer – even if you’ve only just joined! Go to www.northbeds.camra.org.uk and follow the link to Bedford Beer Festival to find the volunteering form.

Fytton Rowland

Champion Beers of Britain 2016

While I was working at the Great British Beer Festival (GBBF) at Olympia in August, the results of CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain (CBoB) contest for this year were announced.



The overall champion was **Vanilla Stout** from **Bingham's of Reading**. I tried a half of it, and although I'm not generally a stout drinker, I agree that it was pretty nice! It was also the champion in the *Speciality Beers* category.



In second place overall was **Snow Top** from the **Old Dairy** Brewery of Rolvenden, Kent.



Third was **Death or Glory** from the **Tring** Brewery in Hertfordshire, a strong, dark barley wine.

The champions in the various categories were also announced at GBBF.



The champion *Mild* was **Williams Black** from Williams Bros of Alloa in Scotland. Second-placed mild was Oscar Wilde Mild from Mighty Oak Brewery, a Champion Beer of Britain of a couple of years ago.



Another recent overall champion, **Boltmaker** from **Timothy Taylor** of Keighley in Yorkshire, was champion in the *Bitter* category.



The *Best Bitter* category was won by **Shere Drop** from the **Surrey Hills** Brewery. Last year's overall winner, Cwlch from Tiny Rebel of Mid-Wales, came third in the Best Bitter class this year.

The *Strong Bitter* class was won by **77** from the **Heavy Industry** Brewery in North Wales, with Hawkshead Brewery's NZPA second, and Adnams' widely-available Ghost Ship in third place. The *Golden Ales* category was won by **Mosaic City** from the **Golden Triangle** brewery of Norwich.

The bar that I worked on at GBBF offered three of the finalists in the Champion Beer of Britain contest, though none of them made the top three, and guess what, they all sold out. The overall champion, Bingham's Vanilla Stout, was on the bar next to ours, and had to be rationed despite an additional supply being obtained – Reading fortunately being only thirty miles or so away from Olympia – and long queues formed every time a cask of it was made available.

The value of being a CBoB was demonstrated by Tiny Rebel's rapid rise in the twelve months since they won. Not only did they have their own brewery bar at GBBF this year, they were also the sponsor of the GBBF volunteer staff's t-shirts – an honour usually reserved for larger breweries like Shepherd Neame, St Austell or Hobgoblin.

Fytton Rowland

39th BEDFORD BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

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

Wed 5th - Sat 8th October 2016

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



CAMRA
FOR
REAL ALE



160 real ales + 50 ciders and perries
Selection of international beers • English wines

Admission

- * Before 5pm: £1
- * After 5pm: Wed £2, Thu £3, Fri £4, Sat £2
- * CAMRA members free
- * No tickets - pay at the door
- * Street pass-outs for smokers etc
- * Wheelchair access to all floors

No one under age 18 admitted
ID may be required

Entertainers

- * Wed eve - Sloop Groggy Dogs
- * Sat lunch - Bedford Morris Men
- * Sat eve - Kerry Jo & Carlos

Other Features

- * Souvenir glasses £2.50 sale or return
- * Oversize glasses for a full 20 oz pint
- * Pint, half + third pint measures
- * Hot and cold food
- * Free soft drinks
- * Engraver
- * Clothing, books and gifts
- * New Good Beer Guide 2017
- * Tombola and pub game
- * Chocolate and beer matching stall

Sponsor a Cask of Ale!

- * £50 puts your business on the bar
- * Phone 01234 822698 or visit website

Volunteers Needed!

- * Complete e-form on website
- * Phone 01234 303221



facebook.com/nbcamra



northbeds.camra.org.uk

ST. ALBANS BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL 2016

XXI



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**



28th September – 1st October

ALBAN ARENA, ST ALBANS, AL1 3LD

Up to 300 real ales, plus ciders, perries and foreign beers

Open: 11am – 11pm on all days

Admission: £3 Wednesday – Friday, £5 Saturday (CAMRA members free at all times)

Thursday evening – The Zipheads

Saturday lunchtime – Bagatelle String Quartet

Saturday evening – Geno Washington and the Ram Jam Band

Note: A beer tokens system (tokens purchased at the festival) will operate on the bars. Trader stands will be cash.

stalbansbeerfestival.org.uk / realales@yahoo.com

No advance tickets for any session. No one under the age of 18 allowed in the bar areas at any time or anywhere on the premises after 5pm. Don't drink and drive. Use the train or bus.

ALBAN ARENA
ST ALBANS
2016

Autumn Beer Festivals

21st St Albans Beer & Cider Festival

28 Sep-1 Oct at Alban Arena, Civic Centre, St Albans AL1 3LD. See page 8 opposite for details. www.stalbansbeerfestival.org.uk

39th Bedford Beer & Cider Festival

5-8 October at Corn Exchange, St Paul's Square, Bedford MK40 1SL. See pages 4, 5 & 7 for details.

www.northbeds.camra.org.uk/beerfestival

St Ives Booze on the Ouse Beer & Cider Festival

6-8 October at Burgess Hall, Westwood Road, St Ives PE27 6WU. Over 70 real ales plus real ciders/perries. Food available all day, free soft drinks for drivers.

www.hunts.camra.org.uk/festival

Nottingham Robin Hood Beer & Cider Festival

12-15 October at Nottingham Castle. Over 1000

real ales and 200 ciders/perries. Advance tickets available through website.

www.beerfestival.nottinghamcamra.org

19th Oxford Beer & Cider Festival

13-15 October at Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford OX1 1BX. 140 real ales and 60 ciders/perries. www.oxfordcamra.org.uk

10th Cambridge Octoberfest

14-15 October at University Social Club, Mill Lane, Cambridge CB2 1RX. About 40 real ales plus draught German beers.

www.cambridgebeerfestival.com

23rd Milton Keynes Concrete Pint Beer Festival

19-22 October at the Old Bus Station, Elder Gate, Milton Keynes MK9 1LR. Over 90 real ales and 25 ciders/perries. See below for details.

www.mkcamra.org.uk

CONCRETE PINT 2016

23rd MILTON KEYNES BEER FESTIVAL

October 19-22 (Wed-Sat)

At "Old Bus Station" (formerly The Buszy),
Milton Keynes, MK9 1LR opposite Central Milton Keynes Station

Wed 1600-2300 Thu- Sat 1200-2300

CAMRA Members free entry at all times.

Non-Members free entry before 16.00 + all day Sat/day; £3 at other times.

Over 100 beers

This year celebrating the role in brewing of

Heriot Watt University Brewing & Distilling School

featuring beers from across the country brewed by its graduates

Plus: Local Beers,
20 ciders,
Belgian bottled beers,
keykeg range,
Prosecco
free soft drinks &
water,
Food throughout



THE CONCRETE PINT 2016
BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL
MILTON KEYNES AND NORTH BUCKS
CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

Tombola & games
Live music Thu and Sat
night.
More from Branch
Website:
www.mkcamra.org.uk
Or Twitter/Facebook:
[@mkcamra](https://twitter.com/mkcamra)



The Swan
at Cranfield
Your Traditional
Pub at the Heart
of the Village

Tara and Mark welcome you to the newly refurbished Swan at Cranfield.

We are located in the heart of the village right next to the Village green and War Memorial.

We aim to serve the best in traditional home cooked pub food with a cracking selection of ales, lagers and wines.

Our beautiful and friendly pub also has three guest rooms which have been totally refurbished to a very high standard which are now open to book.

2 Court Rd, Cranfield,
Bedford MK43 0DR

Tel: 01234 750332

We Are Open
Weekdays 12-3pm,
6-11pm; Friday &
Saturday 12-11pm;
Sunday 12-10.30pm

Kitchen Open
Weekdays 12-2.30pm,
6-9pm; Saturday 12.30-
2.30pm, 6-9.30pm;
Sunday 12-4pm

www.swanatcranfield.co.uk



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



Bedford's
Premier
Homebrew
Centre

- comprehensive range of bitters
 - wide selection of lagers
 - excellent prices
 - free advice
- and a happy smiling face

HELPLINE
01234 353856



15 Union Street, Bedford MK40 2SF

Opening Hours:

Tuesday to Saturday 9.30am to 5pm
Bank Holiday Saturdays 9.30am to 2pm

Olde England

199 Kettering Road,
Northampton, NN1 4BP
07717 014001



18 Real Ales
12 Ciders



Northants CAMRA
Cider Pub of the
Year 2014



Northants Pub
of the Season
Spring 2014

WINNER



St Johns Arms



**Eamonn &
Julie offer
a warm
welcome
to all
customers**

**Free house in
Rural Setting**

**4 Real Ales
always available**

**Large Beer
Garden**

**Knotting Road, Melchbourne,
MK44 1BG**

**Good quality
home cooked
"Pub Grub" at
reasonable
prices**

**Camping pitches
available**

01234 708238

Pub News

Devonshire Arms, Dudley Street, Bedford

Welcome to new landlords Ronnie and Rebecca Toms, who took over this award-winning community pub in June. See full details on page 23. www.devonshirearmsbedford.co.uk

Queens Tavern, Bedford

Headlined in our last issue, the Queens is to be converted into a Co-operative store that many locals think isn't needed. The local community is unlikely to get its pub back.

Brewhouse & Kitchen, High Street, Bedford

Just after Wetherspoon reopened The Pilgrim's Progress, it closed the Banker's Draft in Bedford High Street. Fortunately, the pub was sold to the Brewhouse & Kitchen Group. See full details on page 3.

www.brewhouseandkitchen.com/bedford

Barley Mow, St Loyes Street, Bedford

After some years with only keg and lager, this popular gay bar opposite Bedford prison now offers real ale again. Landlord Daniel Fisher serves a changing guest ale, ordering beers that customers suggest. The pub is open until midnight every day except Wednesday (2am), Friday and Saturday (4am). Call 01234 359355.

Snug Bar, High Street, Bedford

Barely eight months after Hawthorn Leisure re-launched the old Bear as the Artisan Tap, it changed again to the Snug, mainly a cocktail bar. No real ale can be expected.

Crown, Little Staughton



Licenseses Kevin and Maria Foskett have been busy installing a micro-brewery. We don't yet

know when they will start brewing, but watch this space! The Crown is a member of the Oakademy of Excellence and offers B&T Shefford Bitter, Black Sheep Best, bottle-conditioned beers from Draycott, plus two changing guest ales and a real cider.

www.thecrownstaughton.com

Ye Three Fyshes, Turvey



Considered at risk a few months ago, this old inn next to the medieval bridge over the Great Ouse has been purchased by private owners who want to develop the business. New managers Jenna and Howard offer Sharp's Doom Bar and three changing guest ales often from local microbreweries such as Leighton Buzzard and White Park. Locally sourced fresh produce is used where possible for meals served in the bar, restaurant and lit courtyard garden overlooking the river. The detached car park is 50m east along Bridge Street.

www.yethreefyshes.co.uk

New Letchworth brew-pub

The Garden City Brewery, located in the Wynd, close to Letchworth town centre, serves several home-brewed ales straight from the cask, alongside changing guest ales from local breweries and around the UK. Home brews include Amarillo Pale (3.6%), First Garden City Bitter (3.7%) and GROG porter (4.6%). Local real ciders and tasty bar snacks are also available. The pub is open from noon Thursday to Sunday, closing at 10pm (11pm Friday and Saturday). gardencitybrewery.co.uk



A quintessential village pub

Real ales - Greene King IPA & Abbot regular, plus up to three guest ales

Relaxed charm of a village local with a varied menu of quality home cooked food

No gimmicks - just a great British pub!

Bell, Odell

Horsefair Lane
MK43 7AU

01234 910850

 TheBellInOdell

Opening times:

Mon-Thu 11.30-2.30,
5-11; Fri-Sat 11.30-
11.30; Sun 12-10.30



POLHILL ARMS



NEWLY REFURBISHED

Cask Ale is our Speciality

Greene King fine Ales
& Changing Guest Beers
on 5 Handpumps

Great British Pub Food Served

Large Family Play Garden
& Car Park

North Beds CAMRA
Cider Pub of the Year 2016

 Find us on Facebook

T: 01234 771398 W: www.polhillarms.co.uk
Wilden Road, Renhold, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK41 0JP



You're more than welcome. Traditional High Street Pub...

Fresh food served daily 12am-9pm

Locally sourced produce

Real Ales & Fine Wines

Live Music every Friday & Sunday / Live TV / Special Events / Private Parties

Like us on Facebook to keep up to date with all our events:

 The Standard /  @StandardBedford

26/28 High Street, Bedford MK40 1SP / Tel : 01234 269285

Round the Villages in the Spring

On a sunny spring evening we set off from the Wellington Arms for some of our prettier villages, in the YMCA minibus even though the 'Y' word didn't apply to any of us!



First stop was the 'St John Arms' at Melchbourne – at least, that's what's etched on the front door; the sign says 'St Johns Arms'! It's a free house that chooses to sell Greene King beers, GK IPA and Abbot being the regulars. On this

occasion we were pleased to find the third pump occupied by GK XX Mild. Friendly licensee Eamonn used to run the Five Bells at Cople, which in his time was the only reliable source of XX in the Bedford area, and he is trying to wean his Melchbourne clientele on to it too. As expected it was well kept – one of our number rated it the best XX he'd had in a long while. The pub is a biggish Victorian building just outside the village, once a resort for bikers, now doing food and attracting a more mature crowd.



Second stop, the Chequers of Yelden – yes, 'of' Yelden, it says on the sign. Our first visit to this

free house since it changed hands showed an improvement from the previous licensee's time. Its most regular ales are Theakston's products from Yorkshire, and their Black Bull Bitter (3.7% abv) went on during our visit. Theakston's seasonal Tour de Wot?(4.0% abv) was coming

next, but the other two cask beers available were from the Caledonian Brewery in Edinburgh– Flying Scotsman, a conventional bitter at a modest 3.5% abv, and First Dawn, a 'light zesty bitter' at 3.7% abv. Most of favoured the First Dawn, and it was in fine condition and a very pleasant pint. The new licensees were very welcoming. The single-storey pub is quite modern and looks rather like a village hall; inside it is light and airy, and now does a strong food trade.



Third stop was the New Inn at Wymington, a northern outpost of Bedfordshire almost in Rushden. As the name implies (!) it's a very old stone-built pub, now substantially extended and internally modernised. It

was a very busy quiz night, and clearly attracted custom coming out from Rushden. Though not a cask-ale specialist house, it offers GK IPA and Abbot. The welcome was friendly and the atmosphere light-hearted.



Royal Oak, Carlton

Then on to a pub we hadn't expected to visit– the Royal Oak at Carlton, which had reopened only a couple of weeks before after a six-year

closure. The new licensees, who were in the bar and very welcoming, have given it a very thorough refurbishment in vintage colours, with bare polished floorboards. It's another large Victorian pub, now offering a wide menu of meals. *(continued on page 15)*

THE DEVONSHIRE ARMS

*Serving Real Draught
Cider
Fine Wines*



*Lovely courtyard
garden
Free Wi-Fi available*

*A local community pub in the
Castle Road area of Bedford
with a warm welcome and
friendly atmosphere.*

*Serving an increased range of Quality
Cask Ales — Eagle IPA, Young's
London Gold, Young's Special,
Directors and Guest Ales.*

CAMRA North Beds Pub of the Year 2013

www.devonshirearmsbedford.co.uk

32 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TB Tel: 01234 301170



**ENGINEERS ARMS
HENLOW
BEER FESTIVAL**

Thursday 20th - Sunday 23rd October

**www.engineersarms.co.uk
HIGH STREET, HENLOW,
BEDFORDSHIRE
01462 812284**



**OVER 80
TRADITIONAL REAL ALES,
CIDERS & PERRIES
OPEN ALL DAY
EVERYDAY FROM 12 PM**

Thursday Night:

**The Incredible Dr Busker
Sunday Night: Boo Sells**

**Snacks Available Daily, +
Boozy Bangers Thursday & Friday
Mexican Street Food on Saturday**

Local Hotel offering Special Festival Rates: Call -
The Airman Hotel, 01462 850853 Quoting Ref: Fest 21
Nearest Station: Arlesey (Kings Cross - Peterborough)
For Camping or Caravanning facilities -
Henlow Bridge Lakes, Arlesey Road, Henlow
Call 01462 812645

Round the Villages in Spring ... continued

The main source of their cask ales is the reborn Phipps NBC of Northampton, and they offered both Phipps Diamond and NBC IPA, as well as Timothy Taylor's Landlord. The Diamond I had was in excellent shape.

While in Carlton we couldn't miss our Country Pub of the Year, the Fox, a lovely old thatched building. Licensee Alison was coping alone with a fair crowd, but served us quickly. In addition to her regulars, Fuller's London Pride and Wells Eagle, she had Salopian Darwin's Origin and Atomic Brewery's Meltdown on hand pumps, and most of us sampled these guests and found then, as expected, to be well looked-after.

We phoned ahead and were assured that the Sun at Felmersham would stay open, so we headed to our 2015 Pub of the Year as our final stop. This was our first visit since the lamented departure of Ben and Hannah, who piloted the Sun through its meteoric rise, and we were happy to find that the new licensees hadn't changed a winning formula. Like all the others



Sun, Felmersham

on this evening, they welcomed us warmly, and offered London Pride and Eagle again, but this time

with the option of Tring Side Pocket for a Toad, which we mostly sampled – it was in good condition.

Heading back to the Bedford Arms in Bedford, we agreed that this was one of our best pub trips – new licensees taking over excellent pubs, offering an interesting choice of beers and keeping them well. The people of Bedfordshire's northernmost villages are fortunate in having all these pubs to choose from, during difficult times for the licensed trade.

Fytton Rowland

The Firkin

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

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
Printed by Portland Print, Kettering
Advertising sales by Neil Richards MBE, Matelot Marketing
Tel 01536 358670 Mob 07710 281381
N.Richards@btinternet.com
© Campaign for Real Ale Ltd 2016

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

Contact us

Chairman: Roger Stokes
chairman@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Secretary and Pubs Officer:
Peter Argyle – 01234 822698
secretary@northbeds.camra.org.uk
pubsofficer@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Newsletter Editor and Festival Organiser:
Fytton Rowland – 01234 303221
beerfestival@northbeds.camra.org.uk
firkin@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Socials: Gary Mudd – 01234 741871
socials@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Pub Protection: Mike MacKechnie –
pubprotection@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Finance: Mike Benyon –
treasurer@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Membership: Neil Ratnett – 01234 344388
membership@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Website: Alan Hawkins –
webmaster@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Cider Rep: John Cowell –
cider-representative@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Young members Rep: Dan Veal –
youngmembers@northbeds.camra.org.uk



Shakespeare and Beer

In 2016 we celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and the 500th of the German Reinheitsgebot.

One of the ways used in the past to raise money for essential church repairs was the holding of a 'Church Ale' – a convivial festival held in a church or in an appointed house at which a specially brewed beer was consumed.

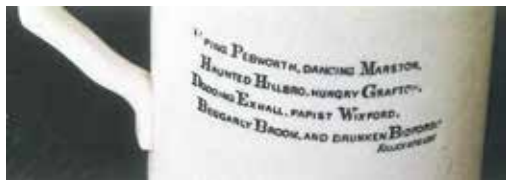
In his book 'The curiosities of ale and beer' (second edition published in 1965 by Spring Books) John Bickerdyke records that at such a festival held in Bidford (not Bedford!) the young Shakespeare and his friends were challenged to try their powers as ale drinkers.

However, they had me their match and, try to walk back to Stratford, they fell asleep under a crab-apple tree a mile out of Bidford.

From this spot eight surrounding villages were visible as listed in the following lines written by Shakespeare: 'Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston, haunted Hillbro, hungry Grafton, dodging Exhall, papist Wixford, beggarly Broom and drunken Bidford'.



A Victorian quart mug commemorating Shakespeare's stay in Bidford



A Victorian quart mug commemorating Shakespeare's stay in Bidford

Seven of these are noted in my road map (four miles to the inch) of Great Britain from which a good guess can be made of the location of the crab-apple tree. The lines and a picture of the Falcon Inn at Bidford are featured on a Victorian quart mug which I acquired some years ago.



Festival Ale brewed by Barclay Perkins for the Festival of Britain (1951)

A picture of Shakespeare and the Globe Theatre (1599-1613) appeared on the label of Festival Ale, brewed by Barclay Perkins for the festival of Britain in 1951.

Underneath the picture of the Globe Theatre was the line: 'upon the site of which our brewery now stands'. Such is the cyclical nature of history that the brewery has now disappeared and the Globe theatre is back – complete with thatched roof!

David Moule

David Moule's father was second brewer at Barclay Perkins when the Festival Ale was brewed

The Oldest Bottled Beers

The oldest commonly known bottled beer is Ratcliff Ale, brewed for the birth of Richard H. Ratcliff (1869-1902) by brewers Bass Ratcliff and Gretton of Burton-on-Trent. The beer was brewed on 16th December 1869 and bottled ten years later. I was in Burton in 1969 when several bottles were opened, exactly 100 years after the brewing date. When perfectly decanted the beer tasted like Madeira – the result of slow oxidation of what was a very strong beer. Another sampling took place in 1996 when the beer was described as acetic but drinkable.

Another really old beer was discovered bricked up in a cellar at Charrington's Mile End Brewery. The bottles found their way to Watney's laboratory, where the beer was analysed by Dr Bishop, a well-known brewing chemist. A search of the literature indicates that the results were never published. It was said that the beer was brewed to commemorate Nelson's victory over Napoleon at the Battle of the Nile. Unfortunately the bottle bore no labels.



Left to right: A beer commemorating the Battle of the Nile (1798); Ratcliff Ale (1869); Arctic Ale brewed for the expedition of 1875

It is possible that the beer was brewed by Charrington's in 1848 or 1898 to celebrate to 50th or 100th anniversary of Nelson's victory.

I first saw a bottle of Arctic Ale, brewed by Alsopps for the polar expedition of 1875, in a display cabinet at the Brewing Research Foundation at Nutfield in Surrey. Recently this establishment moved to new premises and the bottles in the cabinet were sent to headquarters in London for disposal. I made a successful bid for the Arctic Ale. In 2012 a bottle was opened and tasted. The flavour was described as drinkable but, as John Keeling of Fullers said, you would not want to drink two pints of it. Alsopps also brewed a special 'Arctic Ale' for the expedition of 1852 which endeavoured to find the ill-fated Sir John Franklin whose party set off in 1845. A surviving example of the 1852 beer was sold on ebay in 2012 for a six-figure sum and is the world's oldest bottled beer.

David Moule

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

Magpies and Monkeys, Writers and Rocks

On a pleasant June morning when the world was young – that is, before the Referendum – a group of CAMRA members gathered on Bedford Station. I arrived last, and we all boarded the Nottingham train.



First stop: the Magpie Brewery, in the shadow of Notts County's grandstand. (Notts County, Magpies, gettit?) They market cask ales as

Magpie, but their craft ales as Pica – the Latin name for the magpie. The brewery was started by the father of the current brewer Gavin ten years ago, as his retirement project, with a couple of his friends. Sadly, Gavin's father died four years later, and Gavin took over. Their premises in an industrial unit are small, but they are expanding to a 15-barrel plant anyway. They own two pubs – the Crafty Crow just outside Nottingham Castle, and the Doctor's Orders in North Nottingham. To drink, they had provided us with Thieving Rogue, a pale, hoppy beer at 4.5% abv, and Jay PA, an IPA at 5.2% abv. Both seemed excellent of their types. A batch of Best Bitter (4.2% abv) was in the mash tun when we were there. They also make seasonals and also sell bottle-conditioned beers; bottles of Girl and Boy (full names Three for a Girl, Four for a Boy) were opened for us to sample. Girl is a 4.6% abv dark ale, and Boy a 3.8% abv weakling – sorry, mild. A little bird (a magpie of course) later on told me that 'Seven for a secret that cannot be told' might be available at the Great British Beer Festival this year (*It was. Ed.*). Later in June the company celebrated its tenth anniversary with a special beer containing ten hop varieties. Some of them are grown in Gavin's garden. He has had to prove to the police that they are hops and not something else...

After a walk up the hill to work up a thirst, we next sat down to lunch at the Crafty Crow. It's a large, modern pub designed to attract the craft-drinking yuppie classes. But it didn't charge the



excessive prices that a pub like that in London would have. It had ten handpumps in use, three of them with Magpie's products on them (Best Bitter,

Thieving Rogue, and Pica Porter). The other beers were from various small breweries; I tried Nene Valley's Australian Pale Ale (4.4% abv) and found it very palatable. The pre-ordered sandwiches were also excellent.

Then we had to hit the hill again. (Did Gary, who designed our walk, know how hilly Nottingham is?) Our next destination was the Organ Grinder, Blue Monkey Brewery's pub.



Fortunately, there was time for a rest at a micropub half way up, the Room with a Brew. This belongs to Scribbler's Brewery in Stapleford, a few miles west of Nottingham. Their beers they 'published' (sic) that day were: Beerfest at

Tiffany's (3.8% abv, a golden session ale), Rubecca (a ruby ale at 4.8% abv), Beyond Reasonable Stout (a 6.0% abv porter), and Masher in the Rye (an American Pale Ale at 4.8% abv). Not on (out of print??) was One Flew over the Brewer's Nest, but they also had a couple of beers from other local small breweries.

After this literary interlude, we clambered up to the Organ Grinder (originally the Red Lion) at Canning Circus, central Nottingham highest point, site of several good pubs. The Blue Monkey brewery was too far out for us to visit, so the brewer came to us. The brewery's name came from its origins in Ilkeston; the founder, a home brewer, had worked at Stanton Ironworks. Apparently 'blue monkey' is ironworkers' jargon for the flame coming out of the top of the furnace. After a year in a five-barrel plant in Ilkeston they moved to a larger industrial unit in

Magpies and Monkeys, Writers and Rocks continued

Giltbrook with 20-barrel equipment They now have four tied pubs, all Organ Grinders except for one that was previously a coffee house, hence called the Coffee Grinder. The Canning Circus one sold Doom Bar (why?) and Sarah Hughes Ruby Mild (6.0%) as well as the owner's brews. These included their best-seller, BG Sips (4.0% abv), Chimp Chim (a pale 3.8% abv golden ale), Mild Monkey (5.0% abv), Fat Ape (7.0% abv!), and the current Champion Beer of Nottingham, Infinity (4.6% abv). Like Magpie they are gaining sales. They said that Nottingham is now the top real ale city of England – though Sheffield and Norwich might have something to say about that.

After that, it was downhill all the way – in terrain only. I left at this point to indulge my other passion, rail transport, and took a ride on Nottingham's two new tram lines. I rejoined the



group later on at the final stop, the Vat and Fiddle near the railway station. This is the brewery tap of Castle Rock Brewery, which is right next door

and was to be our second brewery visit of the day, followed by dinner in the pub. Visit time was 6 p.m. At two minutes to, I was the only Bedford person there... Fortunately the others hove into view just in time. They had visited sundry other pubs on the way down the hill.



The Castle Rock tour was conducted by Robin Hood – for his age, remarkably knowledgeable about modern brewing! In fact he was Nottingham City

Council's official Robin Hood and plays the role at civic events, and is also hired by Castle Rock to run their tours in costume. The firm dates from 1977, when an early CAMRA member, Chris Holmes, bought his first pub and founded Tynemill as a real-ale pub company in the East Midlands. Their empire now spreads as far north as York. One of the pubs he bought – the Vat and Fiddle, then called The Grove Hotel –

already had a small in-house brewery established by Phil Niven, which was expanded to supply other Tynemill pubs. As it grew, Phil decided he wanted to stay small, so he left and founded the Nottingham Brewery Company, and Tynemill became Castle Rock. But the two firms remain friends, with Nottingham producing small batches and Castle Rock larger ones. In fact, expansion out of the Vat and Fiddle (where the original brewery is now the visitors' centre) into adjoining buildings has led to Castle Rock now operating a 350-barrel plant. Very much into the middle-sized category, maximum brewing capacity being 100,000 pints per week!



They operate at about 80% of that rate, and 80% of the production is Harvest Pale, their renowned hoppy pale session beer at 3.8% abv,

which was CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain in 2010. It's made with American Cascade hops. Town water is Burtonised, as it is a soft-water area. The mashing takes 90 minutes at 68.1C, the wort is boiled, then dry-hopped and fermented for five days, racked and finally stored in casks for two weeks before delivery to pubs.



Following Robin's detailed tour, we sat down in the pub for dinner – the quality of which, it must be said, wasn't quite as high as the lunch's had been.

Harvest Pale, Elsie Mo (a pale golden bitter at 4.8% abv) and Preservation (a traditional ruby bitter, 4.4% abv) were made available in large jugs for us to help ourselves during dinner. Then a five-minute stagger up the road got us on to the second-to-last train to Bedford, after a thoroughly enjoyable if exhausting day in hot, sultry Nottingham. It's a far cry from the days of Shipstones, Home Ales and Hardy Hanson's, but who's to say now that the old days were better?

Fytton Rowland

THE BOTTLE MIX



Northamptonshire's only Real Ale Shop

Selling the finest Ales from around
the UK as well as Ciders, Foreign
Beers and Pipers Crisps

Come try our vast variety
with specials such as
Gluten Free and Ginger Beer



Email: thebottlemix@outlook.com



Market Street,
Kettering. NN16 0AH

Tel: 07538 107641

**Find us on
Facebook and Twitter**



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

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

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 8th – Branch Meeting

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

Thursday 15th – Pub Tour

Details to be announced

OCTOBER

Wednesday 5th to Saturday 8th – Bedford Beer and Cider Festival

At Bedford Corn Exchange (see pages 4, 5 & 7)

Thursday 20th – Brewery Visit

Priority given to those who have volunteered at the Bedford Beer and Cider Festival. Details to be announced.

Saturday 29th – All-Beds London Visit

Jointly with South Beds and East Beds branches. In the Hackney area. Details to be announced.

NOVEMBER

Thursday 11th – Branch meeting

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

Thursday 25th – Pub Visit

Details to be announced

DECEMBER

Thursday 8th – Christmas Social

Details to be announced

A Campaign of Two Halves

Join CAMRA Today

Complete the Direct Debit form and you will receive 15 months membership for the price of 12 and a fantastic discount on your membership subscription. Alternatively you can send a cheque payable to CAMRA Ltd with your completed form, visit www.camra.org.uk/joinus or call 01727 867201. All forms should be addressed to: Membership Department, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 4LW.

Your Details

Title _____ Surname _____ Direct Debit Non DD

Forename(s) _____ (UK & EU) Single Membership £24 £26

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) _____ Joint Membership £20.50 £31.50
(Partner at the same address)

Address _____
Postcode _____

Email address _____
Tel No(s) _____

Partner's Details (if Joint Membership)

Title _____ Surname _____
Forename(s) _____
Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) _____
Email address (if different from main member) _____ 01/15

I wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association

I enclose a cheque for _____
Signed _____ Date _____
Applications will be processed within 21 days

Campaigning for Pub Goers & Beer Drinkers

Enjoying Real Ale & Pubs

Join CAMRA today - www.camra.org.uk/joinus

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in this form using a ball point pen and send to: Campaign for Real Ale Ltd, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4LW

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To the Branch _____ Sort or Building Society _____

Name(s) of Account Holder _____

Rate of Building Society Account Number _____ Branch Sort Code _____

Reference _____

Service User Number 9 2 6 1 1 2 9

FOR CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE LTD OFFICIAL USE ONLY

This is part of the instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Membership Number _____

Name _____ Pseudo _____

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay CAMRA (the Member) (sorted Direct Debit) from the account detailed on this instruction subject to the safeguards contained in the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain valid 'Campaign for Real Ale Limited' and if not it is agreed automatically to the Building Society.

Signature _____ Date _____

Name and Sorting Instruction may change. Direct Debit instructions will remain valid if correct. This Guarantee should be displayed and retained by the payer.

The Direct Debit Guarantee

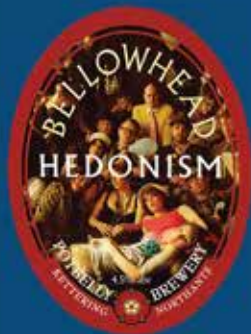
• This Guarantee is offered to all banks and building societies who accept instructions to pay by Direct Debit.

• If there is an error on the account due to an error by your Bank or Building Society, the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd will be liable to reimburse you the amount of your payment being debited or a refund of any amount. If you receive a Direct Debit from the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd to confirm a payment, you will be notified and able to go to your bank or building society for the details of the account to which the payment of Direct Debit is made.

If you receive a refund you are entitled to request a refund of your direct debit. The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd will refund you.

• This is not covered by Direct Debit as it is not a direct debit instruction. Please see terms and conditions for more information. For more information, please contact the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd.

Piggin' Great Ale!



Try one of our award
winning ales
Call Potbelly
Brewery on:

01536
410818

Bottle Conditioned Ales
Now Available!

Contact our brewery for
details on how to purchase
our award winning range in
bottles. Perfect for Parties
and summer BBQ's.



POTBELLY  **BREWERY**

It's Goodbye from Her, and It's Goodbye from Him

When Naomi Stanford and Martin Bartlett arrived at the Devonshire Arms in Dudley Street, Bedford, in 2010, the pub had lost popularity to the point



where local residents feared we were going to lose it altogether. We shouldn't have worried. They turned it into a thorough-going real ale pub – six handpumps initially, rising to eight – as

well as making it one of the few pubs in Bedford flourishing without a major food offering. It was usually crowded – even on Mondays, when music evenings usually ended with Martin himself at the microphone.

When Martin told last year that they had decided to retire, the worries resurfaced. They were a hard act to follow – would the pub survive their departure? The Bank Holiday Beer Festival in late May was their swansong. The festival was up to its usual high standard, with the 'Ale House' (a.k.a. the garden shed) providing sixteen varied beers rarely seen in Bedford, dispensed by gravity.



The Bank Holiday Sunday brought the best Sunday takings they'd ever had, the pub was packed. 'A seat? No chance! A place to put your glass down? Maybe'.

Their last night was Monday 6th June. And that final day was surely their best-ever Monday as well. A very emotional farewell to Naomi and Martin came from staff and customers alike, and I'm sure I detected tears on Naomi's cheeks. A last-ever mellifluous rendition of 'Driving in the Middle Lane', Martin's signature tune, and it was all over.



At noon the next day, Martin and Naomi left for their new home several hundred yards away. Five hours later, Ronnie and Rebecca Toms opened the pub, having moved in upstairs after midday. Choice of beer was limited, as that days' delivery hadn't had time to settle, and pouring rain reduced the number of customers, but there was no hiatus. Quite an achievement, especially as Ronnie and Rebecca have children to look after as well.

Ronnie is an actor by profession and played one of the firefighters in the TV series London's Burning. He has experience of the licensed trade: his parents ran a working men's club in St Albans. Rebecca worked for Marks & Spencer's for fifteen years, but both of them are now full-time publicans. And their children Joseph and Phoebe are enjoying the experience of living in a pub! Like Ronnie, Rebecca has a thespian background – born into a well-known local am-dram family and acting herself.

Ronnie used the pub before, and likes it the way it is, so I'm hopeful that my beloved Devvy has found careful new owners who won't institute any changes for changes' sake. On day two, the choice of cask ales was back up to seven – all of them Wells products, admittedly, but we can hope that others will appear before long. And with better weather, the numbers present were gratifying too. Good luck, Ronnie and Rebecca – the people of the Castle Quarter are behind you!

Fytton Rowland

BORN AND BREWED
IN BEDFORD.

Official Beer of
BEDFORD
BLUES



Brewed in the heart of Bedford with the finest English malted barley and natural mineral water from our well, sunk by Charles Wells himself in 1904.

Wells Eagle guarantees a quality pint, every time

 [facebook.com/wellsbrewery](https://www.facebook.com/wellsbrewery)

BEDFORD'S BEER FOR THE BEDFORD BLUES