

The Firkin

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 41 No 2 Summer 2016



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

FREE

Queens Tavern Lost?



Photo courtesy of Stephen Penn, Beds on Sunday

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

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COUNTY CHAMP – BLACK LION AGAIN

MANY PRESENTATIONS

BEDFORD FESTIVAL COMING!

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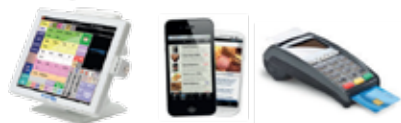
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Chairman's Corner



A holiday in the USA quickly reminds me why I like British pubs. American bars simply cannot compete in my book. The beer is served too cold and generally too gassy, both of which kill any subtlety of flavour it might have. Basically it is deprived of personality, even if it comes from a relatively small brewery. The bars tend to be lacking in personality too with TV screens showing sport that nobody seems to watch. Certainly there is no evidence of a group of fans watching the same game together.

CAMRA recently received wide publicity because of the Revitalisation Project, publicity which (as normal) was not totally accurate. We are the Campaign for Real Ale, but is that all we should be concerned about? As was observed at the Project's first consultation event, we need our pubs if we are to be able to drink real ale. We were told of the latest rate of pub closures. It is slowing but is still running at 1,400 pubs shutting each year.

Our pubs offer a community focus not found elsewhere in the world. They are places where people can interact and enable things to happen. We need to arrest the rot of pub closures. I am delighted that Mike Mackechnie has become our Pubs Protection Officer, bringing much needed focus and energy to this important role. Please report rumours of any closure or change of use to him, so he can act at an early stage when it has most chance of success.

Roger Stokes

CAMRA LocAle



LocAle is a CAMRA scheme to promote locally brewed real ales. The North Bedfordshire scheme includes all real ales brewed within about 25 miles of Bedford.

LocAle is about consumer choice, local jobs, a sustainable environment, creating local distinctiveness and promoting local pubs. Selling beers from local breweries helps reduce fuel usage, pollution and greenhouse gases. Supporting local breweries helps maintain local beer styles and supports the local economy.

North Beds LocAle currently includes beers from 41 breweries, including the six in Bedfordshire: Amptill Brewhouse, B&T, Biggleswade Brewhouse, Charles Wells, Leighton Buzzard and White Park. All breweries currently within the scheme are listed on our branch website.

All pubs and clubs that regularly offer at least one locally brewed real ale are eligible to join LocAle. CAMRA will provide window stickers, pump clip crowners and drip mats free of charge.

About 70 local pubs and clubs currently serving locally brewed real ales are eligible for North Beds LocAle. For more information, call Peter Argyle on 01234 822698 or email pubcampaigns@northbeds.camra.org.uk

Bedfordshire County Pub of the Year



The three Bedfordshire CAMRA branches have chosen the Black Lion in Leighton Buzzard as Bedfordshire County Pub of the Year for the second year running. The Black Lion was South Beds CAMRA branch's choice, and fended off the competition, East Beds CAMRA branch's choice the New Inn Ale House at Biggleswade, and our own North Beds CAMRA's choice the Castle in Bedford (see page 5).

The Black Lion's hard working licensees, Nikki Brodin and Stev Stipanovic, accepted the award again. Since taking on the pub in 2014, Nikki



and Stev, who previously worked at the famous Merchants Inn in Rugby, have turned the Black Lion around from a struggling, run-down boozer into a welcoming and thriving town centre pub.

Nikki said 'We feel incredibly proud and honoured to receive this award for the second year in succession and we would like to thank all those who voted for us. It's a great reward for all the hard work.'

There is always a good selection of interesting beers to try, served from cask and bottle, as well as a large range of real, traditionally produced ciders. Every summer they hold a festival with 50 different ciders and perries to try (see p. 11).



People like Nikki, Stev and their staff know how to attract people back to their pub and it's basically through a lot of attention to detail and extremely hard work.

A County Pub of the Year needs, of course, to have excellent real ale, but it also has to meet other standards – especially that of warmth of welcome. The Black Lion has eight cask ales and eight real ciders on at all times, at least one of the ales being from the Leighton Buzzard Brewery. They also have a large range of continental bottled beers as well. Their second victory is well deserved – let's see if they can go on to take the East Anglian Regional Pub of the Year award too this time! CAMRA members in Beds certainly hope so.

Presentations Galore



Our Branch Pub of the Year for 2016 was the Castle in Newnham Street, Bedford, where licensees Roly and Kay Keech had won 'Most Improved Pub' in 2015.



Fox at Carlton

Our Country Pub of the Year award went to Alison Brown at the Fox at Carlton, whose beer knowledge is impressive.



Bell at Odell

Our Most Improved Pub for 2016 was the much-loved Bell at Odell, where new licensees James and Sally Bolton

have brought this pub back up to standard in the short time since they took over.



Polhill Arms at Renhold

For the first time, we have a Cider Pub of the Year – the Polhill Arms at Renhold, where Paul Smith keeps real cider on all the year round and has four

available through the summer.

And we have nominated the RAFA Club in Ashburnham Road, Bedford, for Club of the Year.



To cap it all, B&T Brewery in Shefford has won awards in the East Anglian round of the Champion Beer of Britain competition – Dragon Slayer is the champion Best Bitter, and Black Dragon Mild is bronze medal winner in the Mild category.

FLYING HIGH

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Festival Time Again (well, nearly)



The years fly by, and although I'm writing this in May, the Bedford Beer and Cider Festival in October will be arriving sooner than we expect! The 39th festival

will take place in Bedford Corn Exchange – as have 37 of the previous 38. The dates this year are Wednesday 5th to Saturday 8th October. Always a high spot in Bedford's annual calendar for beer lovers, this year it will be better than ever, as we've learned from some of the changes we made in the previous couple of years.



As always the main attraction is the beer bar running down the middle of the main hall. This year it will have over 160 different cask ales available – a record – and the adjoining cider bar will have over fifty real ciders and perries, many of them locally produced. Upstairs in the Howard Room you will find the foreign beer bar, and we've increased the order for draught foreign beers in response to public demand. Catering by St Cuthbert's Hall proved popular too, and Angelo and his staff will be providing tasty meals and snacks in the Howard Room too. The wine bar selling English wines, introduced two years ago, will be back again,

but now it will be downstairs in the main hall, so that if you like wine and your other half likes beer you need not separate!

As usual there will be musical entertainment on the Wednesday and Saturday evenings, though the actual groups performing hadn't been finalised when we went to press. Watch this space. The Bedford Morris Men will dance on Saturday afternoon, and it's possible there may be entertainment in the early evening on the Thursday. No space is available for musicians during the crowded Thursday and Friday sessions, though!



If you've enjoyed visiting the festival in previous years, why not volunteer to work at it this year? It's enormous fun helping to run Bedford's biggest pub! You don't have to be a CAMRA member. If you don't fancy pouring drinks behind the bars, you could also help in the CAMRA shop, the festival office, or the glasses bar. We especially need people to help put the whole thing together on Sunday 2nd to Tuesday 4th October, and to take it all down again on Sunday 9th. So if you're young(ish) and fit(tish), please give us a hand then! There's an online volunteering form on the North Beds CAMRA website. There's great camaraderie, and of course a modest amount of free beer, to make it really enjoyable for all the volunteers.

Fytton Rowland

Pub News

Royal Oak, Carlton



We get so used to losing pubs that finding one raised from the dead is a special treat. The Royal Oak closed at the end of 2010, sparking off a vigorous campaign to save it. The pub was finally sold to sympathetic owners who agreed to re-open it after building a couple of houses on part of the grounds. New licensees Scott and Emma have completely redesigned the interior, with a long lounge linked to a small snug at the front, both very smart but welcoming. Phipps NBC Diamond Ale is joined on the pumps by two guest ales, often from other local micro-breweries. A range of seasonal food is available, from light bites to set lunches and main meals. The pub is closed Monday to Wednesday.

www.royaloakcarlton.co.uk

New Inn Alehouse & Kitchen, Market Square, Biggleswade

The New Inn, recently declared East Beds CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year, is a Local Hero pub offering Greene King IPA, three Greene King seasonals or specials and up to four guest ales outside the Greene King tie. It is a similar arrangement to the Three Cups in Bedford – and like the Three Cups with White Park, the New Inn now has its own house beers, brewed with a micro plant on site. The house beers change regularly, but Wicked Lady (4.4% abv) has earned good reports. This and other house beers are also sold at their other pubs, the Chequers Beer House in Stevenage and the Greyhound in Haynes (below).

www.thenewinnalehouseandkitchen.co.uk

Greyhound, Northwood End, Haynes



Corri Burke, licensee of the New Inn in Biggleswade and the Chequers Beer House in Stevenage, has also taken over the Greyhound, with support from managers Emma Chapman and Scott Bates. The interior is now a bit lighter and more open, with a new internal window near the entrance allowing you to see into both bars. Regular beers Greene King IPA and Abbot are joined on the pumps by one or two guest ales, which will often be from Biggleswade Brewhouse at the New Inn (see above). Creative dishes similar to those served at the New Inn are also available at lunchtime and evenings. www.thegreyhoundhaynes.co.uk

Woolpack, Shefford



This one-bar pub dating back to 1830 was closed for nearly three years after its former landlady sadly died, only to re-open last year under Michelle and Danny Smith. It has a bright new, uncluttered look with upholstered dining

Pub News (continued)

chairs and leather sofas, which may surprise those who remember the old wooden pews. The three real ales and a choice of real ciders change regularly, responding to customer feedback. Pub games include dominoes and killer darts. A beer and cider festival is planned, but probably not this year. Call 01462 235032.

Banker's Draft, Bedford

Barely two weeks after The Pilgrim's Progress re-opened (see page 23 in this issue), the Banker's Draft closed on 8th May. Wetherspoon had already revealed its plan to sell the pub, but its sudden closure was still a surprise to us. Wetherspoon has sold it to the Brewhouse & Kitchen Group, a small regional chain with twelve pubs across the south of England. As the name suggests, B&K pubs all have their own micro-brew plant producing cask or 'craft' beer on the premises. We expect the pub to re-open within a few weeks and rather hope it will also have an in-house micro-brewery.

Fordham Arms, Sharnbrook

The Fordham, closed suddenly just after Christmas, has re-opened with temporary managers, serving Greene King IPA and Sharp's Doom Bar, but currently no food.

White Horse, Newnham Avenue, Bedford

The White Horse is also currently run by temporary managers, following the sudden departure of the last tenants in January. We hope this suburban community pub, which has enjoyed success in recent years, will soon have a permanent team in charge.

Devonshire Arms, Dudley Street, Bedford

A fond farewell and best wishes to Martin and Naomi, who have made this popular community pub one of the best in North Beds, with regular entries in the Good Beer Guide and our branch Pub of the Year award in 2013. A new tenant is expected to take over in June – details in our next issue.

Bull, London Road, Bedford



Welcome to new manager Nick Phillis, who recently took over this large Greene King 'Meet and Eat' pub

south of the river. Greene King IPA, Abbot and two changing cask beers are available, with a standard menu including roasts on Sunday. Live Premiership football is shown and there is a quiz night on Sunday evening. The pub is popular with families at weekends. Call 01234 355719.

Queens Tavern, Queens Drive, Bedford

See pages 19-21 for a full report on the Queens Tavern's sad closure.

Cricketers, Goldington Road, Bedford

Owner Punch Taverns has recently advertised the Cricketers for sale. Current licensees Tom and Mary Kilroy have rebuilt the business since taking on the previously closed pub just over a year ago, but had never intended to stay there long. CAMRA North Beds has now nominated the pub for ACV status to make it more difficult to change its use.

Bell, Marston Moretaine

A Cider, Beer & Sausage Festival will be held at the pub from 17th to 19th June. The special bar will house 10 cask ales and 12 real ciders on gravity dispense as well as the regular ales on handpump. Live music will be on throughout and barbecued sausages will be sourced from the local butcher across the road. Call 01234 768310 or visit Facebook. The Bell's sister pub, the Two Brewers in Olney, will hold a similar festival from 1st to 3rd July.

Peter Argyle



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Summer Beer Festivals

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www.hitchinbeerfestival.org.uk

Gibberd Garden Beer Festival

Sat 18 to Sun 19 June, under canvas at Gibberd Gardens, Marsh Lane, Old Harlow CM17 0NA. Open 12-8, admission £4, CAMRA members and concessions £3, children over age 5 £1. About 60 real ales, ciders and perries. Entry includes access to the famous Gibberd Gardens. Sunday is Fathers' Day with extra free entertainment for families. Parking is limited – use bus 59 Harlow to Chelmsford or Harlow Mill rail station.

www.heb-camra.org.uk/gg.php

3rd Leighton Buzzard Cider Festival

Mon 4 to Sun 10 July at the Black Lion (our County Pub of The Year, see page 4) 20 High St, Leighton Buzzard LU7 1EA. Main town bus stops are right outside; railway station 15 mins.

Chelmsford Summer Beer & Cider Festival

Tue 5 to Sat 9 July at Admirals Park, Rainsford Rd CM1 2PN (bus and rail stns 10 min). Open 12-11, CAMRA members free entry. 300 real ales, 100 ciders/perries plus foreign beers, local wines and a wide range of food. Live entertainment eves.

www.cbcf.info

Grantham Beer Festival

Wed 3 to Sat 6 August at Huntingtower CP Academy, Huntingtower Rd, NG31 7AU (rail stn 3 min). Open 11-11, admission £2, Fri/ Sat eves £3, CAMRA members free. 40 real ales plus ciders and perries, hot and cold food. Live music Fri/Sat eves.

www.granthamcamra.org.uk

Great British Beer Festival

Tue 9 to Sat 13 August at London Olympia Exhibition Centre, W14 8UX. Open Tue 5-10.30, Wed-Fri 12-10.30, Sat 11-7. CAMRA's flagship festival with over 900 real ales, ciders, perries and international beers. Pub games, quizzes, live entertainment and variety of delightful cuisines to tempt every taste. Visit website for opening times and ticket prices, advance tickets available. See advertisement below.

www.gbbf.org.uk

39th Peterborough Beer Festival

Tue 23 to Sat 27 August, under canvas on the Embankment, Bishops Rd PE1 1EF (city centre 10 min). Open Tue 5.30-11, Wed-Sat 12-11. Admission £2 before 3pm, Wed eve £5, Thu-Sat eves £6, CAMRA members £3 eves only. Over 400 real ales including festival specials, a huge range of ciders and perries, bottled beers and wines. Selection of food stalls catering for all tastes. Pub games, tombola, quiz, live music every eve in a separate marquee.

www.real-ale.org.uk



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The Man on the Clapham Omnibus...

Was me, when I and a few other CAMRA members set out from Bedford Bus Station on the no.50 bus, to sample the four pubs in **Clapham** (Beds).



We alighted at the **Fox and Hounds**, to find a larger number of members already ensconced: they'd come on an earlier bus or by car, or else they lived in Clapham anyway. The Fox and Hounds as a biggish pub, a well-patronised old-fashioned local, and a Charles Wells house. Eagle is a regular, but with St George's Day imminent, the bunting was up and Bombardier was also on. It was in good nick, and others assured me that the Eagle was too.



Then we strolled down the road to the **Clapham Sports and Social**, which has now dropped the



word 'Club' from its title as it has a full pub licence. It stands behind Tesco, sharing its car park, and is a rather

bland mid-20th century building with one large, not to say cavernous, bar. Another source of Wells beers, it had Eagle and Directors on. I chose Directors and didn't regret it, but the Eagle was 'end of the barrel'.

After one drink we thought we'd wander across the road to yet another Wells house, the **Star**. But no. It was closed at 8.30 on a Thursday evening. So we moved on to the **Horse and Groom**, an old A6 coaching inn, the only Greene King house in the village, recently refurbished for new licensees who have gastropub intentions for it. However, few were eating at the moment we arrived and drinks service was swift. GK IPA and Abbot were joined by Tim Taylor's Landlord as guest. We mostly had the Landlord and found it in excellent condition. But like the Bombardier at the Fox and Hounds, it was £3.90 a pint. No wonder the former club is doing well!

With time to spare we headed back into Bedford. The last bus had gone, so a couple of taxis dropped us at the **Burnaby Arms** in Stanley Street, **Bedford**. The Wells beers on were their regular three – Eagle, Directors and Young's Gold – but the guest was The Awakening from Brains of Cardiff. This turned out to be a bright amber beer at 4.0% abv, with five different New Zealand hop varieties in it. Just the thing for a hoppy-beer fan like me, and well kept as one expects at the Burnaby. Then we remembered that the **Three Cups** had a festival on, so we walked across to Newnham Street. Two of the beers were from the Shardlow Brewery in Derbyshire, and I tried one of them, but then turned to the tried and tested, Bitter and Twisted from the Harviestoun Brewery for my final drink of the night. It was consumed in the garden alongside a flaming chimenea fed with wood, which was very welcome since it was one of the cooler, gloomier days of the Spring. A very pleasant finish to a marginally disappointing Clapham visit.

Fytton Rowland

Brewing in Ampthill is Alive and Kicking



This year's April brewery trip was to the Ampthill Brewhouse. Tucked away in an industrial estate, it is not easy to find.

Thankfully, Gary was able to direct us to a warm welcome from Mary and Peter Jeffery, the people responsible for the day-to-day work. A group of friends heard in April 2015 that the short-lived Ampthill Brewery was looking for somebody to take over the lease and buy the 5½ barrel kit which had been supplied by David Porter. A few meetings in the Albion, and 20 investors had formed a company and took over in late June with a trial brew in August.

So one of the delights of this brewery is that it is a group exercise – people have different levels of involvement and bring their particular skills to the enterprise. It was very evident from Mary's talk that she enjoys the work, wanting it to include an element of fun as well as a business. Some activities bring a group together for such key tasks as evaluating new recipes.

A sound business approach is evident. They are committed to a reliable supply of their three regular beers, 3.4% abv Session Ale, 4.1% abv Golden Ale and 4.5% abv IPA, though this was tested by the level of demand in the run-up to Christmas. Demanding as this was, it was a gratifying response to their desire to be part of the community, supporting local and charitable efforts.

We heard about a few of the learning experiences along the way, some of which were probably rather messy. In the future the range

will probably be extended and we were able to taste their first seasonal offering, a honey beer. Despite the honey, the other ingredients cut through the sweetness to give a balanced and refreshing drink. It was picked by their panel from a short-list of three it deserved to win.

More hands are needed on bottling days, when a production line is set up in the brewhouse. No high tech here, as it's done by hand, transferring unfined beer from the firkin into about 1500 capped and labelled bottles, to be conditioned there. They all work together smoothly, each person doing their task and maintaining the tempo.



In past centuries, the town had been home to a number of small breweries which closed through a process of takeovers and amalgamation. Now, thanks partly to the efforts of CAMRA and the small brewery tax relief, more breweries are opening every year. Not all of them will survive, but Mary has the clear determination to improve her skills further and to become a master brewer with the possibility of more beers in the future. This, combined with sound business sense, makes Ampthill one that has a good chance of success.

It was encouraging to welcome some new members on this trip but it was also clear that the more seasoned brewery visitors also had a good time. The only time the conversation stopped was when we were tucking into our fish and chips! The discussion of the beers also showed a variety of tastes among is with no clear favourite (*continued on p. 15*).

Bedford-Bamberg Lives!



Each spring for years a beer festival has been run by Bedford Borough Council, celebrating the beer heritage of our twin

town, Bamberg in Bavaria, and every spring it has given Bedford's beer lovers a lot of



pleasure. But the Council's well-publicised financial problems cause us to worry whether the German beer festival will happen. In 2016 the notice given was short, suggesting that matters hung in the balance, but on 29th and 30th April the festival duly opened! The format was as usual – 16 draught and 16

bottled beers from Germany, six from Bamberg, which is perhaps the finest brewery town in the world of its size. Also on offer were three Belgian fruit beers, six types of schnapps, and a choice of wines. The famed Bamberg oom-pah band, Dom Bosco Musikanten, performed, and a selection of wurst was available from the stall

outside. I managed to acquire a pint of Bamberg's finest smoked beer, Schenkerla Rauchbier Märzen, before it ran out. Even though the beer isn't 'real' in CAMRA's sense, German beer is special, and many CAMRA

members gathered in the Harpur Suite on both days. A good time was had by all!

Fytton Rowland

Brewing in Ampthill is Alive and Kicking (continued)

Mine was what I regarded as the well-rounded IPA, full of flavour. But 4.5% abv means that consumption should be limited.

Eventually Gary called time and we headed back to the bus for the journey back to Bedford at the end of a most enjoyable evening. The clink of bottles suggested that some of us were looking forward to sampling their beer again at home.

Roger Stokes

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.

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Lost Pubs of Bedford 1– Castle Lane

Castle Lane is a short thoroughfare in the centre of Bedford, starting at the junction of Castle Road and Ram Yard, curving around to join the High Street at what is believed to be the site of the original entrance to Bedford Castle. Unlike many other streets, Castle Lane has retained the same name it had when John Speed drew his map of Bedford in 1611.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, virtually every street in the Bedford town centre had a public house every 100 yards or so. Castle Lane was no exception, with two pubs. The Three Tuns was situated roughly where the Baja restaurant is now, and the Golden Eagle was around the corner, on the site of the present Castle Quay apartments.



The history of the Golden Eagle is well documented, with archive records held by the Borough Council and Charles Wells. Details of the Three Tuns, however, are harder to find. Deeds to the Golden Eagle Beer House (as it was known) begin in 1778, and in 1844 it was purchased by a brewer from St. Neots who traded as the St. Paul's Square Brewery. It changed hands again in 1888 when it was purchased by Charles Wells for £400.

Strangely, even though the Higgins & Sons Brewery was operating on the other side of Castle Lane from 1837, the brewery had no interest in either of these pubs at any time. After brewing ceased on the Higgins site in 1928, later occupiers included the GPO, who used part of it as a sorting office. This made the Golden Eagle very popular with postmen for a while!



The Three Tuns, on the other hand, was popular with bikers in the 1970s, and apparently was known to be lenient towards

under-age drinkers. Allegedly, the Three Tuns had one bar split in two by a dividing strip on the floor, thus creating a public bar and a lounge. The reasons for this are unclear, although it was suggested that if you stepped over the line into the so called lounge you paid a little extra!

The Golden Eagle was sold by Charles Wells to Bedford Borough Council in 1975, and it was demolished soon afterwards along with all surrounding properties (presumably including the Three Tuns). The whole of the Castle Lane area was flattened for car parking space, and it remained barren until the 2009 Castle Quay development brought the area back to life again.

Mike Mackechnie

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Queens Tavern Lost? Pub Protection Needed!

In January I added Pub Protection Officer to my list of CAMRA duties, hoping that it would not be too onerous a task. After all, what could possibly go wrong? All I needed to do was keep an eye on the Bedford Borough Council Planning Lists for any Change of Use applications, and use the CAMRA process for applying for Asset of Community Value (ACV) status for any pubs under threat.. Our local pub contacts and the network of contributors to our CAMRA Facebook page who could tell me about rumours, threats or concerns.

How wrong could I be. The first thing that I found out was that none of our ACV applications had been processed. The Council had asked us to supply additional information which was pertinent to the Community Right To Buy process, but not really relevant to the ACV application. However, they make the rules, so I started collecting the information required.

I had completed the process for two of the applications, when out of the blue I was notified through Facebook that Hawthorn Leisure Ltd, the owners of the Queens Tavern in Putnoe, had issued the manager with a notice to quit within two weeks. Further enquiries revealed that Hawthorn had also been granted planning permission to make alterations to the pub for use as a Convenience Store.



I had been scanning the Planning Applications every week, looking for Change of Use applications; however Hawthorn had used a loophole in the regulations whereby the change from a pub that sells alcohol to a shop that sells alcohol does not, in the eyes of the law, constitute a change of use. Their planning

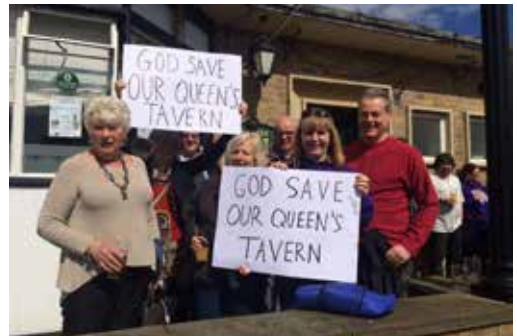
application had simply been for cosmetic alterations to the property (for example, installing an ATM machine), for the purpose of the 'provision of a Convenience Store' - notice how the word 'conversion' is nowhere to be seen?

So, alarm bells started ringing. The day I received this information, I popped into the Queens Tavern to see what was going on. Sure enough, the landlord John confirmed that the boards were going up on April 27th – less than two weeks. Speaking to some of the locals there, it was obvious that nobody wanted this to happen, and that they were aware of our ACV application.

It was time for action. I posted this news on to our Facebook page, which reached over 14,000 people, and got in touch with the Beds on Sunday (BoS) newspaper, who were interested in the story. The following day I went back to the pub and suggested that we organise a demonstration to show our support. I tried to contact the Council Planning Department to see if they had progressed our ACV application, but received no reply.

BoS wanted a piece for the edition that was going to press that day, so Peter Argyle and I from CAMRA got some placards made up and stood outside the pub on a chilly Friday afternoon for a photoshoot. The BoS were good enough to give us front page coverage that week, so we were getting some attention.

Two days later we were back with other CAMRA



Queens Tavern Lost? (continued)

members, and a good turnout from the community, to hold the demonstration, which was a vindication of our efforts; a couple who had met at the pub came over from St. Neots to join in, there were people who had been frequenting the Queens Tavern since it first opened in 1962, and BoS were back for more photos and videos, which you can see on their web site.



Curiously enough, the day after the article appeared in BoS, I received an email from the Council Property Group saying that a decision on our ACV application should be made 'within a week'. Needless to say it's now mid-May and I have not heard anything else from them. As predicted, the Queens Tavern closed its doors on April 27th, and I watched the windows and doors being boarded up. We still await the Council's decision on the ACV, and we have no news on what Hawthorn intend to do with the pub.

[Editor's note. There are now signs up outside the Queens Tavern posted under the Licensing Act of 2003, saying that Co-operative Group Food Ltd are applying for a change of licence at 120 Queens Drive (formerly the Queens Tavern public house).]

So how did we get to this state of affairs? No doubt changing lifestyles have made the pub less of a social and community hub than it was 40 years ago, and it is less likely that a pub can survive on 'wet sales' alone. However, the actions (or inactions) of Pub Companies have to take some of the blame for the current situation. Continuous lack of investment, overcharging for goods and services, and rent increases have all

combined to run many pubs out of business.

The 1989 Beer Orders were intended to break the stranglehold of the 'Big Six' breweries, who were at the time responsible for 80% of all the beer consumed in the UK, but what actually happened was that power simply shifted from the breweries to the newly-formed giant Pub Companies such as Enterprise, Punch and Mitchells & Butlers. The Beer Orders were revoked in 2003, but by then the decline of the pub industry was already in full swing. The PubCos had taken on huge loans to finance the purchase of the pubs, which were leveraged against the value of the properties. The property crash of 2008 saw many of the PubCos going into serious equity deficits, and the only way out was to sell those properties that could be converted into flats, shops or restaurants.

This is still the case, and there are very few pubs that could be considered safe from closure. To make matters worse, on May 5th it was announced that the Pubs Code of Practice, which was supposed to come into effect on May 26th, and would have given pub tenants a little extra protection with the new Market Rent Only (MRO) free of tie assessment, has been put back indefinitely due to a loophole in the wording of the legislation. When this new code was announced in 2015, it was hailed by some as the saviour of our pubs industry. Now it has gone back to be rewritten.

So, what next? We need a network of pubgoers to keep us informed of anything that might put your local pub at risk. Is the landlord retiring soon? Does the pub look as if it's being neglected? Have the owners made any Planning Applications? If so, please contact North Beds CAMRA using the email addresses on our web site, or through our Facebook page. We know that the Cricketers Arms is up for sale, and that the Royal George at Stagsden was closed at the time of writing. Let's hope we can get there in time to stop the next one closing.

Mike Mackechnie

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

JUNE

Thursday 9th – Summer Day Out

Visit to breweries in Nottingham, travelling by train from Bedford station at 0904.

Thursday 23th – Branch Social

Details to be announced

JULY

Thursday 7th – Branch AGM

At the RAFA Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford, at 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

Thursday 28th – Branch Meeting

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

AUGUST

Thursday 4th – Visit to pubs in Bedford

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

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 8th – Branch Meeting

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

OCTOBER

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

At Bedford Corn Exchange (see page 7)

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

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Welcome to the Pilgrim's Progress Hotel!



On 26th April Wetherspoon's Pilgrim's Progress at the corner of Midland Road and River Street in Bedford reopened after a five-month refit – and it's now a hotel! The disused floors of the historic building have been converted into modern, comfortable hotel bedrooms with individual character. All 32 rooms were taken for opening night – a first for a new Wetherspoon's hotel. The hotel entrance is at the Midland Road end of the frontage, adjacent to the old Nag's Head. Reception is on the first floor. The pub downstairs provides the meals for the hotel guests including Wetherspoon's traditional breakfast.

And the pub has changed too. The bar is now at the south end of the ground floor, with a food servery where the bar was. There are an outside beer garden and a further eating and drinking area on the first floor reached by a broad staircase. The north end of the ground floor is now a quieter family eating area, complete with a log fire and the library of rather old, buy-by-the-yard books. The total eating and drinking area is impressively large.

What of the beers, though? Twelve handpumps are fitted, but on my visit on day one, two of them carried Doom Bar and two had 'coming soon' on them, so nine cask ales were available. Doom Bar and Abbot will be regulars, and the



rest were: Wold Top's Wold Gold (4.8% abv), Yeovil Brewery's Lynx Wildcat (4.3% abv), Wickwar's Falling Star (4.2% abv), Rakau, a New Zealand single-hop beer from Marstons (4.0% abv), Wood's Shropshire Lad

(4.5% abv), Milestone's Little John (5.0%), and Moorhouse's White Mist (4.2% abv). A surprising absence of lower-gravity session bitters. I tried the Rakau and Wold Gold and found them to be in good condition.

No real ciders were in evidence, but a large number of craft ales were available, mostly in bottle but a few in kegs. Interestingly many of the craft beers were from respected real ale breweries such as Oakham, Dark Star and Hogs Back, though craft specialists Brewdog and Meantime were also to be seen. Hogs Back's Hogstar New English Lager was featured as 'craft beer of the week'. A number of craft beers from the USA were also in bottle.

Meanwhile, see Pub News on page 11 for news of the future of the Banker's Draft in Bedford High Street, which closed in early May as a Wetherspoon's pub.

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