

The Firkin



FREE

**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 40 No 2 Summer 2015

Black Lion is County Champ



**Black Lion, Leighton Buzzard - CAMRA
Bedfordshire Pub of the Year 2015**

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

PUB NEWS

NEWNHAM STREET CELEBRATION

RURAL PUBS

**2015 BEDFORD BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL
COMING UP**

COOL TANKARD

GERMAN BEER ENJOYED

BRANCH DIARY

CAMRA SUMMER FESTIVALS

MEET THE BREWER

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Chairman's Corner



The possible demise of the Amphill Brewery highlights one of the issues facing all those who start a brewery. You need premises, equipment and

ingredients, but also outlets. In a phased programme, large pubcos will have to offer tenants the option of paying market rent and sourcing beer from wherever. CAMRA welcomes that development – but it is not enough.

In 1989 the large pub-owning breweries were obliged to allow their tenants to sell beer from other brewers under the Beer Orders. Before these were revoked in 2003, CAMRA called for a study into the impact of repeal. Yes, guest ales are now sold in most tied houses – but

usually a list from the brewery. These beers come from breweries large enough to provide sufficient quantity to meet the likely demand. Small breweries can't do this.

A pubco without a brewery may still have an agreement with some, and offer a limited range of beers from which the licensee can choose. While the range may change throughout the year, the same need for quantity and consistent quality will still apply.

The start-up brewer is limited to supplying free houses which are not restricted in this way. Some 'free houses' are actually part of a chain which can also restrict managers' choices. Sometimes chains do agree to some local sourcing. This increases choice and supports smaller firms, which helps growth locally.

Roger Stokes

A Happy Evening in Newnham Street



The Spring issue of the Firkin reported that two near neighbours in the same street in Bedford – Newnham Street – had both won CAMRA awards. The Three Cups was Town Pub of the Year for North Beds CAMRA, and the Castle was our Most Improved Pub. On 19th March the presentations to both pubs were made by CAMRA Branch Chairman Roger Stokes. Our photos show Roger with Alan Kelly, lessee, and Bev Burridge, Manager, at the Three Cups, and



then with Roland and Kay Keech, licensees of the Castle. Plenty of branch members attended to applaud those in charge of these two great pubs, and a very happy evening was had by all!

North Beds CAMRA's Pub of the Year is the Sun at Felmersham – a photo of the presentation of that award to Ben and Hannah Just on 24th February appeared in the Spring issue of the Firkin.

New Broom Sweeps the Board

Every year, the three branches of CAMRA in Bedfordshire select the County Pub of the Year, from the three branch pubs of the year. It's never easy – all three are always good – but our decision was clear for 2015. The Black Lion in Leighton Buzzard is Bedfordshire Pub of the Year. The presentation took place on 31st May.



Nikki Brodin (right) with barmaid Holly

It's been a meteoric rise. Eighteen months ago the Black Lion was run-of-the-mill – it's a historic, listed building, but the beer was nothing special. It isn't in the 2015 Good Beer Guide, as the entries were chosen in early 2014. But in January 2014 – always a pub's slackest month – Nikki Brodin set about changing all that.

Wisecres in Leighton said she couldn't make a specialist real-ale pub pay in the town centre and predicted bankruptcy within months. They couldn't have been more wrong.



Nikki has eight cask ales and eight real ciders on at all times, with 100 different bottled beers, many of them Belgian or German, and business is booming. One of the cask ales is

always from the local Leighton Buzzard Brewery, while the three regulars are Nethergate Suffolk County, Oakham Bishop's Farewell and Draught Bass.

The pub is one of the nine real-ale pubs owned by Gary Burlison, and he also has an interest in Nethergate, which has swap arrangements with other local breweries around the country. These bring interesting beers from far and wide to the Black Lion as guests.

Nikki and her partner Stev Stipanovic come from Rugby, where the Merchants Inn is Gary's managed house. Nikki was deputy manager there, and when Gary bought the Black Lion and renovated it, he offered her its tenancy.

She and Stev are now planning future events at the Black Lion. These include the second Annual Cider Festival on 13th-19th July, and the Leighton-on-Sea Beer Festival, featuring fifty beers all from breweries at the seaside, on 2nd-6th September.



These festivals will be housed in the historic barn behind the pub, currently storage for all those bottled beers, but being adapted by Stev with stillage to serve beers straight from the cask. Customers can take their drinks out into the garden, and by September this will contain a beach!

Fytton Rowland

Roll up, Roll up and Volunteer!

38th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival, 7th-10th October 2015

A fixture in Bedford's annual round for nearly forty years now, Bedford Beer and Cider Festival will be back again in Bedford Corn Exchange from Wednesday 7th October to Saturday 10th October this year. And by far the best way to enjoy it is to volunteer!



All the old favourites will be there, of course – the main beer bar with 100 different cask ales

from around Britain, the cider and perry bar with over 40 real ciders and perries, a foreign beer bar with a great variety of continental draught and bottled beers, the CAMRA shop and the tombola.

The engraver will be back this year, to personalise your festival beer glass for you! And some innovations from last year – the English wine bar and the chocolate-and-beer pairing stall – were liked and will be back. Our entertainers this year will be, on the Wednesday evening Acoustopea, a trio with their own versions of popular classics, and on the Saturday evening, Hair of the Dog with Irish/Gaelic/Knees-up music.



But we've listened to public opinion regarding some of our other changes last year. Our customers didn't like all of them! So the meal service will be back upstairs in the Howard Room (along with the foreign beer bar, the wine bar and the chocolate stall), and with new caterers providing the service we hope to see a lot of pub favourite items on the menu. The cider bar will return to the main hall. We won't be using Number 13 for the meal service this year – its use last year dictated some restrictions in the menu owing to the small kitchen there.



So by judiciously combining the best of the old and the new, we are intending to give Bedford the best beer festival yet. Why not be part of it? We need plenty of volunteers to work behind the various bars – go on, volunteer, you'll have a lot of fun in congenial company, and get free beer and subsidised meals while you're on duty.

We also need volunteers on Sunday 4th to Tuesday 6th October to convert the Corn Exchange into a huge pub, and then on Sunday 11th October to put it back again. Young and agile people would be particularly welcome on those dates! You don't need to be a CAMRA member to volunteer.

Go to <http://northbeds.camra.org.uk>

So – put the dates into your diary now, and come along to the festival, on one side of the bar or the other.



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Bamberg Beer

The popular German beer festival organised by Bedford Borough Council as part of the twinning activity between Bedford and Bamberg took place this year on Friday 1st and Saturday 2nd May in the Harpur Suite. This event had been run by Corn Exchange manager Sunil Kalyan, who left for a new job last year.



We were concerned that his departure might put the event at risk, but we needn't have worried. The event was a big success – very

crowded even by mid-afternoon on the Friday.



The Dom Bosco Musikanten (a.k.a. the oompah band) from Bamberg and the German sausage stand were there as usual.

The Schenkerla Rauchbier was its usual wonderful self! Let's hope they're all back again next year – if you didn't go this year, don't miss it in 2016!

Correction and Apology

In the Spring 2015 issue of the Firkin, there were errors concerning some photographs. On page 13, in the article on the Annual Pub Visit Season, the photographs of the Black Horse at Ireland and the Knife and Cleaver at Houghton Conquest were transposed, and an out-of-date photo of the Burnaby Arms in Bedford was also used. And on page 17, the photograph attributed to the Princess Louise in London was in fact a picture of one of the bar staff at the Five Bells in Cople. My apologies to the licensees of the Black Horse, the Knife and Cleaver, the Five Bells, the Burnaby Arms and the Princess Louise, and to the lady behind the bar at the Five Bells, for these mistakes.

Fytton Rowland, Editor

The Firkin

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We welcome correspondence and any relevant features for publication. Views expressed here may not be those of the Editor, the Campaign for Real Ale, or its North Bedfordshire Branch.

Items for publication in the next issue should reach the Editor by the date shown at the foot of this page.

Edited by Fytton Rowland, 73 Dudley Street, Bedford MK40 3TA

firkin@northbeds.camra.org.uk

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Advertising sales by Neil Richards MBE, Matelot Marketing Tel 01536 358670 Mob 07710 281381 N.Richards@btinternet.com

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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

Important Note: Our website has moved and our e-mail addresses have changed slightly – there's an extra dot now. Please use the new e-mail addresses given below from now on.

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

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



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Summer Beer Festivals

Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 11 to Sat 13 June 2015 at Hitchin Rugby Club, Old Hale Way, Hitchin SG5 1XL. Organised by CAMRA with Hitchin Rugby Club and the Round Table. Open Thu 5-11, Fri/Sat 12-11. Admission £2.50, CAMRA members free. Over 100 real ales, cider and foreign beers, plus food at all sessions. Buses 71 & 72 from Bedford, with late return journeys. www.hitchinbeerfestival.org.uk

Gibberd Garden Beer Festival

Sat 20 to Sun 21 June at Gibberd Garden, Barn Marsh Lane, Harlow CM17 0NA. Open 2-8 each day, last entry 7pm. Admission includes gardens. Over 35 real ales from small breweries in London and East Anglia plus cider and perry from regional producers. Harlow Mill stn 20 min, parking limited. www.heb-camra.org.uk

Derby Summer Beer Festival

Wed 8 to Sun 12 July in Derby Market Place. Open Wed 6.30-11, Thu-Sat 11-11, Sun 12-2. Admission prices vary, CAMRA members free. Over 200 real ales plus cider, mead and continental beers. Live music plus food at all sessions. Trains from Luton & Bedford. www.derbycamra.org.uk

Crown Beer & Music Festival

Fri 10 to Sun 12 July at the Crown, Station Road, Flitwick MK45 1LA. For further details, call 01525 713737 or visit www.crownflitwick.co.uk

Black Lion Cider Festival

Mon 13 to Sat 19 July at Black Lion, High Street, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1EA. About 50 real ciders, perries and fruit wines at CAMRA's Bedfordshire Pub of the Year. Also at the Black Lion – **Leighton-on-Sea Beer Festival** Tues 6 to Sat 9 September: real ales from seaside breweries. Main bus stops directly outside the pub, Leighton Buzzard station 10 min. Call 01525 853725 for details.

7th Bishops Stortford Beer Festival

Thu 23 to Sat 25 July at the Royal British Legion Club, Windhill, CM23 2NG. Large selection of rare and interesting real ales and ciders, mainly from small local breweries and producers. Barbecue food, rolls and sandwiches available. www.heb-camra.org.uk

Grantham CAMRA Beer Fest

Wed 5 to Sat 8 August at Grantham Railway Club off Huntingtower Road (rail stn 3min). Open 11-11, admission £2, CAMRA members free. About 30 real ales plus cider and perry. Live music Fri eve, food available all sessions. Contact nlomas180@btinternet.com

Great British Beer Festival



Tue 11 to Sat 15 August at London Olympia Exhibition Centre, Hammersmith Road, 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. See advert on opposite page or visit website for opening times and ticket prices. Advance tickets available. www.gbbf.org.uk

38th Peterborough Beer Festival

Tue 25 to Sat 29 August, under canvas on the Embankment, Bishops Road Peterborough PE1 1EF (city centre 10 min). Open Tue 5.30-11, Wed-Sat 12-11, admission £2 before 3pm, Tue-Wed eves £5, Thu-Sat eves £6, CAMRA members £2 eves only. Over 400 real ales including festival specials, a huge range of ciders and perries, bottled beers and wines.

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Pub News

Bell, Odell

A warm welcome to James and Sally Bolton, who re-opened the Bell in March. Greene King IPA and Abbot are served, plus three guest beers, often not from Greene King. Good pub lunches and evening meals are available through the week and up to 4pm on Sunday. Call 01234 910850. www.thebellinodell.com

Fordham Arms, Sharnbrook

Welcome too to Sharon and Kelvin Vaughan, who took over in March at this pub with its sheltered garden and 60-seat restaurant. Sharp's Doom Bar and a changing guest beer are currently served, and occasional mini beer festivals are planned. A good choice of lunches and evening meals is available, including a Sunday roast. Call 01234 781357 or email thefordhamarms@outlook.com

Swan, Bromham



The Swan near Bromham Mill is now managed by Stephen Cook. The building has been a licensed inn since 1798 and retains many

old features. Greene King IPA, Abbot and a guest ale are served. A classic pub menu is available, with Sunday roasts and daily specials for one, two or three courses. Call 01234 823284.

Royal George, Stagsden



Welcome to new managers Dave and Jane at this bistro-style village pub. Regular beers are Sharp's Doom Bar and

one of the White Park range. The menu includes home-made pies and a Sunday roast. Call 01234 823299.

www.royalgeorgestagsden.co.uk

Polhill Arms, Renhold



This popular village pub re-opened in February after refurbishment, still in the hands of Paul Smith. Regular beers

Greene King IPA and Hardys & Hansons Olde Trip are joined by up to three guest beers and two real ciders rising to four in summer, changing regularly but usually include Westons Old Rosie. Traditional pub food is served, including fish and chips. Regular quiz nights and live music events are held. Call 01234 771398. www.polhillarms.co.uk

Cricketers, Goldington Rd, Bedford



The Cricketers reopened in March, refurbished and redecorated, with familiar faces Tom and Mary Kilroy in charge. Fuller's

London Pride, Greene King IPA, Sharp's Doom Bar and Shepherd Neame Spitfire are currently served. The pub opens on weekday evenings and all day at weekends. The Cricketers is especially busy on Bedford Blues rugby match days. Call 01234 961987.

Cross Keys, Pulloxhill

Peter and Sheila Meads have semi-retired after over 40 years at this popular pub-restaurant just outside our branch area. Their son Paul is now in charge. Adnams Broadside and Wells Eagle IPA are available, together with a guest beer. There are regular quiz nights, and live jazz on Sunday evenings. Meals have a traditional English menu. Call 01525 712442.

Rural Riding

On our minibus trip in early April our first stop was the **Bell at Odell**, and we received a warm welcome from the new regime there. The regular beers, Greene King IPA and Abbot, had been joined by GK's St Edmund's and Thwaites Lancaster Bomber. The St Edmund's was very palatable, though pricey at £3.80/pint



Next stop, the **Fox at Carlton**, a Good Beer Guide entry under its previous licensee. The regular cask ales, Wells Eagle and Fuller's London Pride, were joined by Leighton Buzzard Brewery's Borrowers Bitter (3.6% abv), and Nene Valley Brewery's Release the Chimps (4.4% abv). The Chimps turned out to be a hoppy golden bitter, enjoyable and well kept.

This old village pub is being extended by its new licensee and building work was in progress there. And the other pub in **Carlton** – the **Royal Oak**, closed for several years – also had builders in and is rumoured to be reopening soon.



On to the village of two Threes – **Turvey**. The **Three Cranes** died as a Greene King pub, but the new owners have refurbished it

completely, painting the interior white, designed to give a bistro look. GK IPA and Abbot were on, joined by Adnams Southwold and, at our visit, Heskett Newmarket's Skiddaw (3.6% abv) from Cumbria. Most of us tried the Skiddaw, which we found to be in average condition. Strolling to the **Three Fishes**, we found Jennings Cumberland (4.0% abv), Hobgoblin (4.5% abv) and, from Sharp's, the inevitable Doom Bar and the rarer Atlantic (4.7% abv). I tried the Atlantic and found it acceptable. This eating pub is an

attractive old building and we were made welcome, but there is no separate drinking area.

Stagsden's pub, the **Royal George**, was a Wells house until it was sold off. We found another white-painted bistro inside an old village pub! Only Doom Bar was on handpump; the other pump is reserved for White Park beers – a worthy plan – but one cask had run out and the licensee was holding back the next one for the weekend trade.

Final stop, the **Swan at Bromham**, a Greene King house, with GK IPA and Abbot on handpump, plus as guest Rooster's Yorkshire Pale Ale (4.0%). I tried the Abbot, and found it much as usual. The pub is large, a typical GK house with a strong dining trade as an Old English Inn.

Our usual terminus, the **Bedford Arms in Bedford**, gave us a choice of Wells cask ales. Courage Directors, Young's Bitter, Young's Special and Wells Bombardier Burning Gold were available, and the guests were from Buntingford Brewery – Britannia (4.4% abv) and Aurora (4.0% abv). I chose the Aurora for my final half before I set off for the long walk home.

Our second April minibus trip set off for Old Warden. But ROAD CLOSED confronted us, so



we diverted to **Southill** and the **White Horse**. Two handpumps offered Sharp's Doom Bar and

Greene King IPA. We all tried the Doom Bar, which was in pretty average condition and cost £4 a pint.



Then we moved on to **Old Warden** by an alternative route to visit the **Hare and Hounds**. This Wells house was busy with diners, but a room is set aside for drinkers. Eagle, Bombardier and as guest Yorkshire Terrier, were on. The Bombardier was in decent condition.



It was only a couple of miles to our next stop, the **Cock at Broom**, which was East Beds CAMRA's Most Improved Pub for 2014. The Cock (photo above) is the most historic pub in Bedfordshire, one of only ten pubs left in the UK that have no bar. You order your drinks at the cellar door, and all the cask beers come by gravity from the stillage. The multiplicity of small rooms also attest to the pub's unmodernised state – long may they survive! Formerly a Greene King pub, now a free house, it had Woodford's Wherry, Doom Bar, GK IPA and

Brain's Trickster on. The Brain's was new to me, so I tried it and found it a very drinkable pale bitter. Other tried Wherry and found it in fine condition.

Next stop was the **Crown at Northill**, still Greene King'. Food service was over, so we provided some welcome trade, though we weren't the only ones who were only there for the beer. The atmosphere was pleasant, and GK's IPA, Abbot, and, from their Scottish subsidiary, Belhaven Golden Bay were in decent condition.

Just east of the A1, we called at Sandy and the Sir William Peel, which belongs to Gary Burlison, the local real-ale pub entrepreneur (see also p. 4). Like all his pubs it always has a selection of interesting cask ales on. They were masquerading under aliases, since there had just been a Mediaeval Beer Festival: Bateman's XB became eXcaliBur, Bishop's Farewell became Mediaeval Bishop, and King Arthur from Grafton Brewery was another themed name. The fourth cask beer available was Lodestar from Calvor's of Suffolk – I tried it and found it good nick.



Last stop, Wells' **Horseshoes** in **Blunham**. The staff were friendly and welcoming, under a long-serving licensee. Young's Bitter and Courage Best were on the handpumps. The beer was o.k. but expensive – £4/pint for Young's ordinary! Then it was back to the Bedford Arms in Bedford, where Wells products are more reasonably priced.

Fytton Rowland

THE SUN

FELMERSHAM

North Bedfordshire CAMRA
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A Cool Little Tankard

This year's Bedford Beer & Cider Festival will be the 38th (see p. 7). They've been organised and run by CAMRA every year since 1978. Souvenir glasses are made for each festival with the logo for that year. Many of us have collections of these glasses, but we rarely stop to think of them finding homes far from this area.



logo that year showed a 'Bedford' dray – Bedford trucks were still made in Luton then. She was interested in its history and how much it might be worth.

Last summer we received an email from a lady in Florida, who had recently bought a half-pint Tudor tankard from the 7th Bedford festival in a local flea market (see photo). Our

We couldn't tell her its value. But in the 1980s we often welcomed US Air Force personnel to our festivals from the then NATO intelligence base at Chicksands. Many of them bought glasses and other souvenirs to take home. We think it's likely the glass got to Florida that way. It has been treasured and kept in good condition.

She said: 'I enjoy finding treasures at flea markets. I don't buy a lot of things, only what really intrigues me, and then I like to research these items. It's very rare to get such detailed information as you shared with me. Now, besides being a cool little tankard, it tells a story, it's like reading a book and feeling like you're a part of it!'

We wondered whether she might stage a visit glass in hand to our last Bedford Beer & Cider Festival, in which case I am sure we would have felt honour-bound to fill it free, but sadly she probably had to settle for celebrating on her side of the Pond.

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 4 – Summer Day Out

All-day visit to breweries in Cambridgeshire. Coach departs from the Wellington Arms, Bedford, at 10 a.m. £10 deposit to Gary Mudd.

Thursday 25 – Pubs trip

Details to be announced

JULY

Thursday 2 – Branch Annual General Meeting

At Charles Wells Brewery, Havelock St, Bedford, at 7.30 for 8 p.m. CAMRA members only.

Thursday 30 – Branch Meeting

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

AUGUST

Thursday 6 – Visit to pubs in Bedford

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

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 10 – Branch Meeting

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

OCTOBER

Wednesday 7 to Saturday 10 – Bedford Beer and Cider Festival

At Bedford Corn Exchange (see page 5).

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



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Meet the Brewer:

Alan Kelly, White Park



Alan Kelly met me recently in the garden at the Three Cups for a chat about himself, the brewery, and his pub.

CAMRA: Can you tell me about your background, and how you got into the brewing business?

Alan: Well, my background is in technology – I spent my early career in financial software development. This took me around the world, for example to Hong Kong, Tokyo and New York. I got involved in various hobbies, which with one thing leading to another, got me into the brewing business!

During 1999, I was working on the Y2K bug, and



we were trying to predict all the various worst-case scenarios that could occur. My family were wondering what would be the one thing that you would miss if you had a complete financial meltdown, and you couldn't get any money from the bank. Our conclusion was – beer! So how would you go about making your own beer? The first thing to do was to learn the theory behind full mash brewing. My father is an organic chemist, so he had an interest as well.

There were two CAMRA books about the history of real ale and processes involved in brewing, which included some recipes. I studied them to understand the processes, then we bought a small brewery kit from Hop & Grape in Darlington. This was an insulated picnic box with a 15mm copper pipe, a draining system at

the bottom and a sparging arm drilled through the lid of the box, which was the mash tun. Then there was a 14-litre boiler which was a plastic tub with a kettle element in it. So we set about making our first nine-gallon brew. We found a firkin from somewhere and within a day we had our first beer and on fermentation for a week. Banks & Taylor sold us the ingredients, and I still deal with B&T today. We began brewing every fortnight, whilst drinking the beer we brewed last time. A family homebrew club came out of this, which continued for a year or so. I, my brother, father and uncle would take turns brewing in the garage, using fresh and wholesome ingredients.

This brewing malarkey carried on, with me working in London and brewing at weekends for fun. At some point, I sent an email to microbreweries, asking if they had any spare equipment, so that I could brew to a bigger scale with the proper equipment. I wanted to do a really good job of brewing, without really thinking much further ahead than that. I bought the Frankton Bagby Brewery in Rugby – they had decided to stop brewing. They told me I would need a removal van, as there was a lot of kit to take away. I arranged for it to be delivered, having only the garage to fit it into, and when it arrived it filled the entire space! I had no idea how to put it all together, or even where to put it.

So it sat in my garage for six months. Then I





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Meet the Brewer (continued)

was asked to work in New York, so I thought I'd better find somewhere to put this stuff. I called up Jonathan Billington, the farmer at Perry Hill Farm, where we now have the brewery, asking him if he had a spare barn. I just wanted storage, but he suggested that it would be better to set it up as a brewery, as his barn had just been refurbished. This would be ideal, as he was looking to diversify the farm business. We started to set it up, but I had to leave for New York before we'd finished. Fortunately my brother managed to get it done.



We started the brewery by phone, with my wife Laura making sales calls on a laptop using Skype from New York and my brother Peter brewing in Cranfield. We had assumed that the rest of the family would join us in this new venture, but by the time we started brewing they had all disappeared! I met John Kenyon (recently involved in the Amptill Brewery) and he became the brewer. Eventually my brother took over and he's been brewing ever since. A friend, Lloyd Lugsden, did all the artwork for us, eventually joining us as a drayman, and my mother-in-law did the book-keeping, so it was a family business. Now I've moved permanently away from working in the City to become involved full-time in the running of the brewery and the pub, which has become part of the same business.

We are all passionate about real ale, but it has been really tough at times. There have been very meagre earnings, and we've had to be

committed 100% for it to carry on. My brother's been an absolute star in keeping things going through good and bad times, and it's only really now that we feel that it's going somewhere that I can stop working in London and start to develop the business. The pub has been a cornerstone of that – the brewery and the pub help each other.

CAMRA: Well, that's a good time at which to ask, how did you get into the pub trade? Is it something that you'd been intending to bring on board?

Alan: Yes it is. I suppose it was more of a dream to start with. I'd looked at various properties, but finding a pub that was viable was difficult, and it took us a long time to find an opportunity that we were happy with. So when the Three Cups opportunity came up, the manager Beverly



Burridge is someone I've known for a long time, and it just made so much sense for us to go for it. We talked to Greene King about the Local Heroes tenancy model, which was offered to us through this pub, and I felt that it worked well for us as it de-risked the whole project. We didn't have to buy the pub, and processes that Greene King had in place for deliveries and support were nice to have. We had some control over the bar so that we were able to sell our products, and that was enough for it to be worthwhile. We haven't ruled out the possibility of taking on more pubs when the time is right. White Park definitely benefits from having control of the full



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Meet the Brewer (continued)

value chain; as selling to the free trade is painful. There are lots of breweries out there doing the same thing, and if you own a pub it just makes things much easier. Having half a dozen pubs would be fantastic, but, saying that, running a pub is hard work, and to do it well is very time-consuming. So it's better to concentrate on running one pub and focus on doing that really well than diversifying and diluting yourself.

We want to make the Three Cups a special place for different types of people, through the events that we have here, and the drinks that we offer. We want to develop the pub



to its full potential, including the garden which is a bold design with one or two twists. I'm particularly pleased to announce the delivery of two eight-person tele-cabines (the gondolas used to ferry skiers up the mountain slopes) from Austria, which we are going to install in the garden. This idea came from a conversation about how to get more inside/outside space for the pub and maybe draw people into the garden a bit. I've been a skier as long as I can remember, and I really like that link. We've built a covered seating area in the style of an alpine shelter and surrounded the garden with blockwork planting areas and new fencing. Greene King helped with the cost of it, but we are financing it ourselves mostly. Hopefully it will be a really nice addition to the pub.

CAMRA: So who do you have currently working at the brewery?

Alan: My brother Peter is the full-time production worker. Chris Garner, a fantastic guy who I've known for years, deals with sales and delivery. He looked after all my animals whilst I was working in New York. I have a herd of cattle, and Chris took on the job of looking after them. I have an interest in food and farming in

the River Cottage style, which started with a few chickens and grew from there to 35 head of White Park cattle (hence the brewery name!) and a hundred Shetland sheep. Thomas Billington, Jonathan's son, helps us with various jobs such as cleaning the casks.

CAMRA: Tell us more about the farm in Cranfield and the brewery.

Alan: We rent the main courtyard barn building, which is the perfect size for us. We are a 4.5-barrel brewery and we brew two to three times a week. We've got capacity to go up to four to six brews a week so we've got the potential to increase from where we are now, which is likely, given recent developments. We do six to eight bottle-conditioned ales which we sell to shops, supermarkets and farm stores, and we sell cask ales to the free pub trade. Thinking about my contact list, we have maybe 250 places that we deliver to, within a 50-mile radius of the brewery. We have delivered 18-cask pallets to national distributors, which was an interesting experiment, but we're not really cut out for that market. We're more of a boutique brewery – wholesale is for the big boys.

CAMRA: Are you constantly thinking of new recipes, new ways to take the business forward?

Alan: Yes Peter and I talk about new recipes and ideas often. We brewed Nussknacker, a really interesting Altbier, last Christmas. That

was born out of an interest my brother shared with friends in Dusseldorf, and some customers in the pub were also big fans of Altbier. We had a range of twelve beers that we've been brewing, but I was keen to develop a core range of six beers that we would have on permanently and then do a couple of specials on a



Meet the Brewer (continued)

monthly basis.

I had a phone call a year ago from a wonderful lady called Mo Lea who lives locally and is a relatively famous artist. She is a senior lecturer at Bedfordshire University Art & Design School in Luton, and she was keen on giving her students more exposure to industry. Initially the conversation was about sponsorship, but there's not much spare cash lying around. So I said it'd be really interesting to us to engage in a project with the university, and one I wanted to do was redesigning the imagery, the fonts, the logos and the pump clips. She jumped at the idea and we spent a number of months getting the various lecturers and faculties on board. By last October the students had a course project to prepare for presentation to us.

We ended up with thirty rebrandings of the White Park Brewery to choose from, which was amazing! I had made a commitment that I would

pick the best design for us and go with it. We chose the winning designer, Jack White, who created some amazing designs which we are introducing into our core range of beers, four of which are in fact new beers.

We have finished the designs and approved the proofs of the new pump clips. They're contemporary, very different to everything else on the bar, so I hope that people like them and find them bright and interesting. All of the new beers are out in the market with their new pump clips. The bottle labels followed on. With this rebranding in place, we'll be looking to relaunch the brewery into new places such as the London market. I'm able to do now that we've had some time for the pub to bed in and we've hired a new salesperson. I'm very excited!

CAMRA: So you're still enjoying what started out as a hobby and has now become a full time career?

Alan: Absolutely. It really suits my lifestyle now – I have three young children. Rather than getting up early, spending all day in London, and getting home just as they're getting ready for bed, I'm able to spend more time with the family and enjoy myself. More so now than ever, I enjoy developing technology, keeping the processes tightly controlled and keeping administration costs down. It's a small number of people running quite a large operation now.

Mike MacKechnie



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