

# The Firkin



**FREE**

**CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE**

**Newsletter of CAMRA North Bedfordshire Branch Vol 40 No 4 Winter 2015/2016**



## ***Phipps NBC – A Phoenix***

***CHAIRMAN'S CORNER***

***PUBS AT RISK***

***BEDFORD FESTIVAL 2015***

***PUBS ON A WARM EVENING***

***WINTER FESTIVALS***

***PUB NEWS***

***MICROPUB OPENS***

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***BRANCH DIARY***

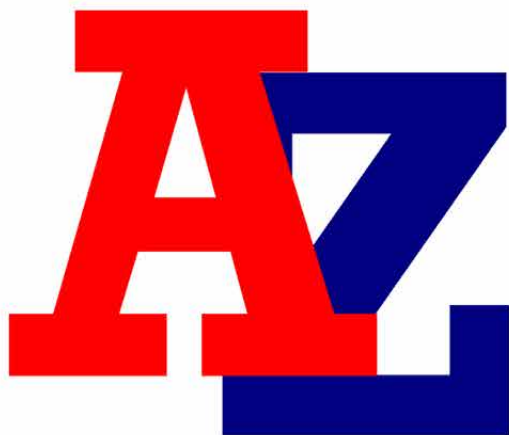
***AMBLING AROUND BEDFORD***

***WHAT NO FININGS?***

**The Compliments of the Season to all our Readers**

# BANKS & TAYLOR

an



of B&T Pubs

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**S**heffield...

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# Chairman's Corner

**W**hy go to the pub? No, it's not a trick question. Yes, for a drink – but you can drink more cheaply at home. Our pubs are so much part of the

British scene that visiting politicians are often taken to one. The gaggle of photographers may mean it's hardly a quiet drink, but hopefully they will sample something they have not encountered before – a uniquely satisfying flavoursome British real ale.

It is said that we like warm beer – not true. We like it cellar cool – not so cold that you cannot appreciate the full flavour. The pub is the only place you can really get that fresh-pulled pint, and a traditional local (like the one a visiting

politician may be taken to) in country or town offers a welcoming atmosphere as well. The rate of pub closures may have declined, but it is still significant and it is widely reported that licensees in such places often work long hours for less than minimum wage rates.

Can the traditional pub be saved? The answer is at least partly in our hands. We need to support them, visiting regularly as a place to be with our mates. Taking part in the quiz or other special evenings. Supporting their efforts to be a feature in the local community. Does your local serve your community? Would it be missed if it closed? Should it be registered as an Asset of Community Value? See below for how to make it that bit harder for a pub to be lost to an alternative use

*Roger Stokes*

## Pubs at Risk

**T**he law changed last April, allowing us more influence over local development by nominating pubs, post offices and other local services as Assets of Community Value. ACV status gives more protection against owners seeking change of use by imposing a six-month moratorium while the ACV sponsors either buy the property themselves or find a purchaser willing to keep it open. It's a powerful tool to save pubs and other local services from unwelcome developments.

Individuals can join together to nominate ACVs, but they need 21 names to submit an application. As a recognised consumer organisation, CAMRA can also nominate pubs for ACV status.

CAMRA North Beds has nominated four pubs this year – the **Jackal** at **Thurleigh** (which Charles Wells has now sold), the **Bluebell** and **Queens Tavern** in **Bedford** (which may both be at risk) and most recently **Ye Three Fyshes** at **Turvey** whose owner has advertised the pub for sale and applied for permission to build new

houses on half the car park. All four nominations are currently being considered by Bedford Borough Council, which is responsible for registering ACVs in its area.

If you think your local is at risk of closure for redevelopment or change of use, CAMRA can help you nominate it as an ACV. Contact branch secretary Peter Argyle on 01234 822698 or email [secretary@northbeds.camra.org.uk](mailto:secretary@northbeds.camra.org.uk)

## Pub of the Year Shortlist

The Drovers Rest in Monkhill, Carlisle – a community pub, dead three years ago

The Kelham Island Tavern in Sheffield – a famous pub – held the title in 2008 and 2009

The Yard of Ale in St Peter's, Broadstairs, Kent – the first micropub to make the four

The Sandford Park Ale House in Cheltenham – a new pub opened in 2014

# Third Time Lucky



The 38th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival on 7th-10th October was the third for which I've been called 'Festival Organiser'. But I haven't organised any of them. Co-ordinator would be a more accurate title, since many people more experienced than me each organise their own bit. I troubleshoot and do odd jobs that don't fit into anyone else's remit – like buying the soft drinks.

The festival went pretty smoothly, with only minor panics for me to sort out, which in general I managed to do quite quickly and without the customers noticing. Despite our usual fears of



not enough staff, we had slightly more volunteers than last year. The main bar was a bit pushed on Friday evening, when for the first time in several

years we had to operate a 'one out, one in' policy on the door in case we exceeded the Fire

Officer's limit for the number of people permitted in the Corn Exchange at once. But a problem of success is the kind of problem we like. Overall, I was reasonably relaxed and felt the festival was a success, though full attendance figures and financial results aren't available just yet.

After last year's innovations, not all of which were successful, we reverted to meal service in the Howard Room upstairs. But with a new caterer, St Cuthbert's Hall, who produced an excellent and varied menu throughout the festival – thanks very much, Angelo!

The English Wine Bar and the Chocolate Stand in the Howard Room, both new last year, were there again, but the Cider Bar returned to the main hall to much acclaim, and with a record number of different ciders and perries – reaching 50 for the first time.

And many thanks to Malcolm Graham, who travelled from London each day to work on the cider bar, returning home on the 23.40 train. That's above and beyond the call of duty – and like all CAMRA festival staff, he's a volunteer.

And the beers? On the main bar we had over 130 different cask ales this year, some from local small breweries including the newest, Ampthill Brewhouse, and some from far and wide – as far as the Orkneys, the Isle of Skye and the Isle of Man. Scapa Special, from the Orkneys, was the first beer to sell out, around lunchtime on the Thursday.

The Foreign Beer Bar had its usual varied selection of bottled beers together with five on draught, and this year the fruit beers sold particularly well.

One last thing. Unlike some CAMRA festivals, we don't hold a vote for 'Beer of the Festival'. (Perhaps we should?) But this means I can choose my own personal favourite. And this year it was an outstanding 3.9% abv bitter called – wait for it – Outstanding Three-Point-Nine!

*Fytton Rowland*

# An Indian Summer Pub Crawl

During the warm weather, CAMRA members left the Wellington Arms in Bedford in the community minibus to some pubs to the north. The first stop was the **Cock at Pavenham**, an old village pub with bare boards and a cheese skittles table. Once a Punch pub, it is a genuine privately-owned free house. Extended for a food trade, it still welcomed us drinkers with Fuller's London Pride, Jennings Bitter (3.5% abv), and Scarborough Brewery's Chinook (4.0% abv). Most of us tried the Chinook, and we found it a fairly hoppy blonde beer, refreshing and well kept.

Our next call was at the **Fox at Carlton**, a thatched village pub extended for the dining trade. Again a genuine free house, and with a new landlady very knowledgeable about real ale, it



**Fox, Carlton**

offered London Pride, Wells Eagle, Grafton Brewery's Lady Ruby (4.5% abv), and Red Squirrel Brewery's Hopfest (3.8%). 'Hopfest' attracted me, and it didn't disappoint – a hoppy beer, well kept.

Then to **Harrold**, once a three-pub village, but the Magpie is now an Indian restaurant. The **Muntjac** – surely not its original name – is half Indian restaurant too. The now smaller pub has



**Muntjac, Harrold**

been modernised but still has room for a pool table. The friendly staff offered us three Greene King products – Abbot, GK Black IPA (5.0% abv) and Ruddles Best, plus Sharp's Doom Bar and St Austell Trelawney (3.8% abv). I found the Trelawney very acceptable. Across the road, the historic **Oakley Arms** is a Wells pub with

only Eagle on handpump, Burning Gold having run out. It's now another half-pub, the rest being a Chinese restaurant just for a change – and as at the Muntjac, the two businesses are separate. It still finds space for cheese skittles. Eagle is not my favourite, but its condition was satisfactory.



Our next visit was to **Sharnbrook**, where we sampled the beers at the **Fordham Arms**, a 19th century former railway hotel, an Enterprise Inn now under new licensees. On handpump were Doom Bar and Conversion (3.6% abv) from Bath Ales. The road past the pub was closed for bridge rebuilding, which may account for the limited range of cask ales. Bath's Conversion turned out to be a golden ale, pleasant but not very hoppy, and its condition was o.k.

Finally to an old favourite under new management. The **Bedford Arms at Souldrop**, an old country pub now extended, has a cheese skittles table which can be watched from elsewhere in the pub by CCTV, a nice marriage of old and new! On this evening they had GK IPA, Cottage Brewery's SB (3.7% abv) and EPA (4.1% abv), White Park Cranfield Bitter (4.2% abv), and Black Sheep Best (3.8% abv) on handpump. As it was our last stop I tried both the White Park and the Black Sheep and found them to be in good condition.

*Fytton Rowland*

# Winter Beer Festivals

## 32nd Pigs Ear & Cider Festival

Tue 1 to Sat 5 December at Round Chapel, Glenarm Rd, Hackney E5 0LY (use Hackney Central stn). Open 12-11, admission £5, CAMRA members £3, free for pre-booked groups. No under 18's. Over 230 real ales and ciders or perries, foreign and bottled beers. Hot and cold food. [www.pigsear.org.uk](http://www.pigsear.org.uk)

## 20th Cambridge Winter Ale Festival

Thu 21 to Sat 23 January at University Social Club, Mill Lane CB2 1RX (X5 bus 10 min). Check website for opening hours and admission prices. Free to CAMRA members all times. About 100 real ales, including a wide range of winter beers from local and national brewers, plus ciders and foreign beers. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. [www.cambridgebeerfestival.com](http://www.cambridgebeerfestival.com)

## Stevenage Winter Beer Festival

Thu 4 to Sat 6 February at Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre, Lytton Way, SG1 1LZ (bus and train stns next door). Open Thu 5-11, Fri/Sat 12-11. Admission £2, CAMRA members free. Over 80 real ales plus ciders and international beers. Food available all sessions. [www.camranorthherts.org.uk](http://www.camranorthherts.org.uk)

## National Winter Ales Festival

Wed 17 to Sat 20 February at Roundhouse, Pride Park, Derby DE24 8JE. Open Wed 4.30-11. Thu-Sat 11-11. Over 400 real ales, bottled world beers, ciders/perries and mead, with an emphasis on winter ales. Hot food and live music. Under 18's allowed until 7pm. No advance tickets – pay at the door. Regular trains from Bedford and Luton. See website for admission charges and other details. [nwaf.org.uk](http://nwaf.org.uk)

## 33rd Luton Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 18 to Sat 20 February at Hightown Community Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde St LU2 0JD (rail stn and bus interchange 10 min). Open 12-11 daily, CAMRA members admitted free. Over 110 real ales including local brewers,

25 ciders/perries and bottled beers from UK and Europe. Live music in separate hall Fri/Sat eves. Frequent trains from Bedford and Flitwick. Check website for further details, including beer and cider lists nearer the date. southbeds.camra.org.uk

## 32nd London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Wed 2 to Fri 4 March at Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, WC1H 9AU (St. Pancras Stn 5 min). Open Wed-Thu 12-3, 5-10.30, Fri 12-10.30, admission Wed-Thu lunch free, otherwise £4, CAMRA members £1 off, pay at the door. Over 150 real ales, cider, perry and foreign beers, food available in all sessions. Frequent trains from Bedford, Flitwick and Luton. Check website for beer list nearer the date. [www.northlondon.camra.org.uk](http://www.northlondon.camra.org.uk)

## St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival

Fri 17 to Sat 19 March at Priory Centre, Priory Lane, PE19 6HB (X5 stop 5 min). Open Thu 5-11, Fri 12-11, Sat 12-10. Check website for beer list, admission charges and other details nearer date. Regular X5 bus from Bedford. [www.hunts.camra.org.uk/festivals](http://www.hunts.camra.org.uk/festivals)

### 33<sup>rd</sup> LUTON BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

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Visit: [southbeds.camra.org.uk/luton-beer-festival.php](http://southbeds.camra.org.uk/luton-beer-festival.php) for updates  
Email: [secretary@southbeds.camra.org.uk](mailto:secretary@southbeds.camra.org.uk) or phone: 07917 645222



No under 18s allowed except on Saturday before 6pm and only if accompanied by a responsible adult. No under 18s allowed in the bar halls at any time. Proof of age may be required. We reserve the right to refuse admission. Last admission at 10.30pm.

All details correct at the time of publishing and may be subject to change.

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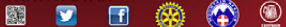


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# Pub News

## Royal George, Stevington



Welcome to Elaine and Denzil Lawson, who recently took over this friendly pub. Until recently,

Elaine managed the Standard in Bedford. Regular beers Wells Eagle IPA, Adnams Southwold Bitter and Fuller's London Pride will be joined by a regularly changing guest ale. Westons real cider is served direct from the cellar. Traditional pub meals will be available and the pub will open at lunchtimes during the week. The bar closes at midnight. Call 01234 822184.

## Standard, High Street, Bedford

Welcome to Rob Bartlett, who recently Succeeded Elaine Lawson as manager of this popular town centre pub. The Standard usually offers St Austell Tribute and up to three guest real ales. Watch this space for a report on any changes he makes. Beer clearly runs in the family, as Rob is the son of Martin Bartlett, landlord of the award-winning Devonshire Arms in Dudley Street.

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

## Three Cranes, Turvey



This comfortable old inn just off the A428 reopened as a free house in March 2014. Greene

King IPA, Abbot and two changing guest beers are served as well as a varying choice of home cooked food lunchtime and evenings. Bed and breakfast is now available with three en-suite

bedrooms, returning the pub to a time when it was a regular entry in CAMRA's Room at the Inn B&B guide. We hope the new initiative will be successful.

[www.thethreecranes.com](http://www.thethreecranes.com)

## Rose, High St, Bedford

This busy town centre pub has joined CAMRA's discount scheme, offering members 10% discount on real ales and real cider. The three real ales and one real cider change fairly often. Food is available throughout the week, including a roast on Sunday and there is a popular beer garden at the rear. There is regular music in the evening and a function room available for private hire.

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

## St Peter's Ale House, St Peters's Street, Bedford

This new micropub run by the Red Brewery of Great Staughton opened on Friday 27th November. See page 11 for more details.

## Kempston Hammers Sports & Social Club

Formerly owned by the old Cutler Hammer engineering works, this lively club at the corner of High Street and Cemetery Road serves Wells Eagle IPA on handpump. The grounds cater for football rugby and cricket, and there is even a bowling green. The function room with its own bar can be hired for private functions.

[www.kempstonhammers.com](http://www.kempstonhammers.com)

## Changes at Wetherspoon's pubs

The **Pilgrim's Progress** in Bedford will close early in December for about four months while the upper floors are converted into a new JD Wetherspoon hotel. We expect the hotel and ground floor bars to re-open in April. Meanwhile Wetherspoon's other Bedford pub, the **Banker's Draft** in the High Street, is among a number of pubs that they have decided to sell next year. We do not yet know whether the premises will be sold to another pub operator or for development.



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# A Micropub for Bedford



The Red Brewery of Great Staughton opened the doors of Bedford's first micropub, the **St. Peter's Ale House**, in a former hairdresser's shop at 38 St Peter's Street, on 27th November. Father and son team John and Joseph Kearney, alongside Rob Taylor, offer real ales from Red Brewery and other independent brewers, and sometimes one or two real ciders. But there is no lager, keg beer, noisy music or hot food.

Following in the footsteps of other micropubs, the St. Peter's Ale House is an arena to appreciate good quality locally produced beer, good company and good conversation. The Red Brewery team promotes an atmosphere that stimulates conversation away from phone screens, and favorite pub snacks such as locally sourced pork scratchings are always available if you get peckish.

The St. Peter's Ale House showcases all the regular favorites and seasonal ales produced by the Red Brewery, alongside a range of specially selected guest ales. Join John, Joseph and Rob on Mondays to Saturdays, and sample one of the eleven beers on tap, alongside a healthy serving of atmosphere. [www.redbrewery.com](http://www.redbrewery.com)

Bedfordshire already has two micropubs – the Old Transporter House at Henlow Camp and the Bald Buzzard in Leighton Buzzard. Another has planning permission to open in Woburn. CAMRA welcomes the micropub revolution, which widens the choice of cask ales available locally, in a new sort of pub.

## 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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# Rebirth of a Brewery

**W**e reward volunteers who worked hard at the Bedford Beer and Cider Festival by taking them on an evening trip to a brewery. This year our destination was Phipps NBC at the Albion Brewery in Kingswell Street, Northampton, and a wonderful place it turned out to be.

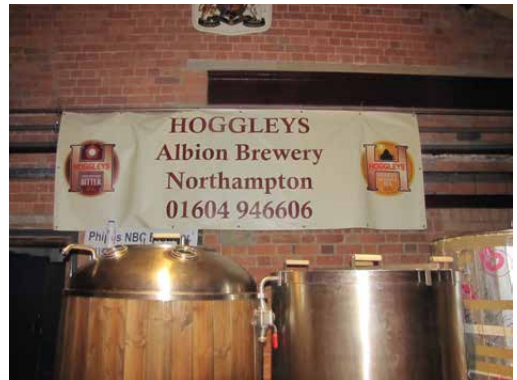


The brewery dates from the 1870s and was built by Radcliffe & Jeffery's, best known for their stout. Pickering Phipps had started brewing much earlier, in 1801 in Towcester, but bought a brewery in Bridge Street, Northampton, in 1817. Like Charles Wells, he expanded by taking over other breweries for their pub estate, and one of the takeover targets was Radcliffe's, in 1899. The final takeover was of arch-rival Northampton Brewery Company in 1957, by which time the combined firm owned 1300 pubs. Brewing at the Albion Brewery continued until just after World War One, when Radcliffe's production was transferred to Bridge Street and the Kingswell Street premises were sold to a grocer, James Brothers, who made jam, sweets and soft drinks there. When James Brothers went out of business the premises were sold to Teesdale, a tannery firm, who eventually stopped tanning but still made leather goods there. Teesdale still owns the freehold of the building but it was derelict when Phipps took a lease on it recently.

And what happened to Phipps as a company after 1957? Nothing good. In 1960, Watney's mounted a hostile takeover bid – with an eye on

those 1300 pubs. The Phipps family split, and some of them supported Watneys, who consequently got the Phipps company. At first they simply started to brew Red Barrel at Bridge Street alongside Phipps' own beers – Phipps IPA got the subtitle 'A Watney Mann Brew'. By 1974, all Phipps-branded brews had disappeared and the pub chain had been sold to Scottish and Newcastle (S&N). After the dust had settled on all the closures, mergers and takeovers of that period, the Bridge Street site ended up with Carlsberg, and their megabrewery still operates there today.

So Phipps was dead, it seemed. But some of the family and some ex-employees didn't agree. A former S&N manager got the intellectual property of Phipps (brand names, trade marks and recipes) in lieu of his redundancy pay, and worked with former Phipps and NBC brewers to recreate the old beers. They set up a new company, Phipps NBC Ltd. One snag, though. They didn't have a brewery. No problem. They worked with the Grainstore Brewery at Oakham, who produced Phipps beers under contract so that the Phipps, NBC and Radcliffe's brands re-emerged and found a market, while they looked for premises in Northampton.



And lo and behold, the leather goods firm put the old Radcliffe's brewery up for sale! It looked as if the historic building would be demolished. But fortunately the owners agreed to lease it to Phipps instead. Phipps moved into the ground floor and basement and converted the front of

# THE DEVONSHIRE ARMS

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**CAMRA North Beds Pub of the Year 2013**

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# Rebirth of a Brewery continued

the ground floor into a pub of retro design, complete with a bar billiards table, Northants cheese skittles, old adverts on the walls, and seven hand pumps. And it's open till midnight on many nights (though only 4 p.m. on Sundays and Mondays). The brewery is in the rear of the ground floor, and contains both a fifteen-barrel and a four-barrel plant. The basement is used for storage – but more of that anon.

One final development. Hoggleys Brewery in Litchborough, one of the many recent start-up microbreweries in Northants, has merged with Phipps, and Roy Crutchley, Hoggleys' owner, is now one of Phipps' brewers. He still makes Hoggleys' beers on the four-barrel plant.



And what of the beers? Just as the bar is retro, so is the range, producing many of Phipps and NBC's old favourites. Their two session bitters are Diamond Ale (3.7% abv), first made by Phipps in the 1860s, and NBC Red Star (3.8% abv). But their flagship beer is Phipps IPA (4.3% abv), a classic English bitter made with Fuggles and Goldings hops. It was far stronger until World War I, when the government mandated a general weakening of beers. And of course Radcliffe's Stout (4.3% abv) is back where it started in the 1870s, in the Albion Brewery. New brews have been added to bring the tally up to nine Phipps NBC brands, and the Hoggleys range contributes more.

When we arrived, Diamond, IPA, Radcliffe's, and Hoggleys Pump Fiction were on the



handpumps along with newer Steam Roller (4.4% abv), a copper, malty beer, Becket's Honey Ale (4.5% abv), Saxby's cider, and two guest ales. None of the fashionable golden ales – as befits the retro theme. The brewery tour deal includes one free pint in the pub beforehand, then a meal, followed by a highly informative brewery tour by manager Mel accompanied by tasters of some of the beers. Mel was assisted by Ian, the bar manager – who is the chairman of Northants CAMRA!



And yes, that cellar. The damp soil surroundings and clever nineteenth century design it keep it at a constant 12°C, perfect for cask ale. And off it there runs a tunnel, at the far end of which sits the brewery skeleton, with of course his pint in front of him. The tunnel would flood if not constantly pumped –if the pump failed, all the casks stored in there would be under water! Also in the cellar is a well, which

# Rebirth of a Brewery continued

produces water very similar to Burton water and thus ideal for beer making. They have made a trial brew with it, a fearsome Founder's Ale of 7.5% abv, sold in Grolsch-style flip-top bottles at £8 each.



They are being cautious about switching to this water for the bulk of their brewing – they need to be sure that the well produces enough water for their needs, and that its quality is consistent.

After the tour, it was back to the bar for a few more beers – with a 10% discount for CAMRA members. Red Star had replaced Diamond on the pumps, giving us a chance to sample both. There was general agreement that this was the best brewery tour we'd made for a long time.

*Fytton Rowland*

## 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](http://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](mailto:socials@northbeds.camra.org.uk)

### DECEMBER

#### Thursday 10 – Christmas Social

At the Devonshire Arms, Dudley Street, Bedford, at 7.30 for 8 p.m. Limited places; bookings a.s.a.p. to Gary Mudd.

### JANUARY

#### Thursday 7 – Branch Meeting

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

#### Thursday 14 – Rural Pubs Visit

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

#### Thursday 21 – Town Pubs Walk

Meeting place and time to be announced – see branch website or contact Gary Mudd.

#### Thursday 28 – Rural Pubs Visit

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

### FEBRUARY

#### Thursday 4 – Branch Meeting

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

#### Friday 19 – Branch Visit to Luton Beer and Cider Festival

At Hightown Community Sports and Arts Centre, York Street, Luton – see page 6 for details

### MARCH

#### Thursday 10 – Branch Meeting

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

#### Friday 18 – Branch Visit to St Neots Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival

At the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots – see page 6 for details.

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

# An August Stroll

We chose the **Kent Arms** in Salisbury Street as the starting point of our summer walkabout. On the wall is a 'CW 1900' plaque, showing that this was once a



Charles Wells pub, and the architecture is identical with the Devonshire Arms, which carries a similar

plaque dated 1897. The only cask ale available was Sharp's Doom Bar, which was in an acceptable condition. The back bar had many customers – it gives access to the garden, also occupied on this pleasant summer evening, and then out into Hartington Street by a rear gate.

We called next at the **Burnaby Arms** in Stanley Street, a Wells house of good repute. They had the usual Eagle, Directors and Young's London Gold on. Julian Church's Old Testament was the guest ale, a 3.9% abv golden ale, not as hoppy as I would have wished but refreshing and, as expected, well kept. Landlady Lucie made us very welcome.



Next stop, the **Forester's Arms** in Union Street, another Wells House, this time with Eagle and Bombardier Burning Gold on the

handpumps. A pleasant old-fashioned two-bar town pub, it has a large garden which was crowded. So was the bar, with football on the television. It was good to see this former student pub so well patronised. I had Burning Gold and found it acceptable.

Just around the corner into Tavistock Street, we called at the **Tavistock**, the former New Inn which was empty for several years. Now a carvery, it wasn't very full at 8.30 p.m. Yet another Wells house, it had only Eagle on handpump – it was in reasonable condition.



Further along Tavistock Street lies the **Flower Pot**, over 200 years old, of very traditional design though extended at the

back. These days it's music-oriented, and live music was on while we were in, and had attracted a good level of custom. It's a free house and had Doom Bar and Fuller's London Pride on. The Pride was drinkable.

The intention had been to call in at the **Mill Hotel** in Mill Street and then the **Ship** in St Cuthbert's Street next. But the newly repainted Mill had just closed when we arrived, and the Ship had no real ale available owing to a refrigeration fault in the cellar.



So on to the **Cricketers** on Goldington Road, our first visit there since new licensees Tom and Mary Kilroy arrived after a hiatus. They made us very

welcome. Their regular cask ales were on: Greene King IPA, Doom Bar, London Pride and Shepherd Neame Spitfire. I had the Spitfire, which was well kept; others wanted GK IPA, and Tom put on a new cask to ensure it was in good condition. The pub has been redecorated without changing its historic interior design. It was good to be back at the Cricketers, a fitting place to end our summer stroll!

*Fytton Rowland*



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01/15

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# Vegan Beer

On October 31st, Guinness announced that, after 256 years, it will stop using fish swim

bladders in its recipe, thus making their world famous stout suitable for vegans for the first time in its history.



This news may have had a few people checking their pints of the black stuff for a fishy aftertaste, or an aroma reminiscent of their local fishmongers, but the good news for them is that the taste and smell of their beer will not be affected by this change, the reason being that the aforementioned fish swim bladder is a component of a substance known as isinglass. This is used as a fining agent to clarify the beer by pulling yeast sediment to the bottom of the cask during fermentation. In theory, once the sediment has settled, you should not see it appear in the dispensed pint; however, if the cask is disturbed, or the pint is poured before the settling has completed (known as 'dropping'), then there is a possibility that 'minute quantities might be carried over into the beer', as Guinness say. The outcome of this is that any beer cleared with isinglass is not considered vegetarian, and will be avoided by strict vegans.

Real ale undergoes a secondary fermentation while it is being stored in the cask, and so will need fining to clear the suspended yeast particles, otherwise the beer will have a cloudy appearance when it is served. Given that we taste as much with our eyes as we do our other senses, it is no surprise that most brewers will use some sort of fining agent to give the beer a 'bright' appearance.

So, if you are a strict vegan, which real ales are ok to drink? Well, it's not a simple question to answer. Even though there are many real ales that are vegan friendly, most brewers do not reveal which beers contain animal products, and in 2003 the European Parliament threw out a plan to force beer makers to highlight the use

of isinglass on bottles and cans, after powerful lobbying from the big breweries.

However, there are vegetarian alternatives to isinglass, such as Bentonite clay and Irish moss (a type of sea weed), and brewers who use these are usually proud to proclaim that that beers are vegan-friendly,

such as the Hastings Beer Company from East Sussex and the Borough Brewery in Lancaster.



The other alternative for the brewers is to leave the beer cloudy. Beers like this are normally known as 'unfined', such as those produced by

the Bucks Star brewery from Stonebridge in Milton Keynes, who use solar energy for power and do not use finings in any of their beers, two of which were supplied to the recent Bedford Beer & Cider Festival.

Leaving the beer cloudy lends itself to the darker beers, so it's not uncommon to see unfined vegan-friendly stouts and milds behind the bar, such as those from the Hop Back Brewery and from Hoggleys of Northampton.

There are also a few pubs out there that specifically ask brewers to supply their real ales in an unfined state so that they can be served to vegan customers, although these are thin on the ground at present. One such pub is The Caledonia in Liverpool which has been serving local unfined real ales for several years.

The Vegetarian Society has a list of 60 or so beers that are recommended for vegetarians on its web site at [www.vegsoc.org](http://www.vegsoc.org)

*Mike MacKechnie*

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