

The Firkin



Magazine for CAMRA North Bedfordshire

• Vol 50 No 1 Winter 2026

47th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival
See the highlights....



WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE

The London Walkabout
An update from the Firkin archive

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Branch Diary (all dates and venues subject to confirmation)

When	What	Where
Monday 26th Jan 7-9pm	Branch Social	The Hidden Barrel, Bedford
Thurs 12th Feb 7pm	Meet to discuss shortlist 'Pub of the Year'	Pilgrims Progress, Bedford
Thurs 12th March 7pm	Meet to decide 'Pub of the Year'	Pilgrims Progress, Bedford
Thurs 26th March 7-9pm	Branch Social	The Castle, Bedford
Thurs 23rd April 7pm	Branch AGM	North End Social Club, Bedford

For details of events check the Events page of the branch web site www.northbeds.camra.org.uk

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EDITOR'S CORNER

North Bedfordshire CAMRA Branch

The last quarter of 2025 saw not only the 47th Bedford Beer & Cider Festival but also a number of social events. You can find details of several of these in this edition of The Firkin. As this is the 2nd edition I have edited, I would like to thank all those that have contributed and let you know we always welcome new contributors – please do get in touch.

The Beer & Cider Festival was a great success. There's a write up in this issue of The Firkin. Thanks are due to all the volunteers that helped – I would like to thank three people for their involvement: Kath Lilley the Festival Organiser, Mike Parks the Festival Treasurer and Geoff Foll the Cellar Manager who kept the beer so well.



This first quarter of 2026 sees the start of the process of deciding our Pub of the Year (POTY) for 2026 and the process of deciding the pubs that will feature in the Good Beer Guide. Please do check the North Bedfordshire CAMRA branch web site to see the latest on how you can get involved.

CAMRA is a volunteer-led, consumer organisation that campaigns for pubs, pints and people across the UK. We work with the government, councils, the wider industry and more, to fight for consumer choice, save pubs and champion independent brewers. Why not join CAMRA or come along to one of our informal socials to find out more.

Cheers!

Dave Hodgson

secretary@northbeds.camra.org.uk

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ARTICLES & CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome contributions that will benefit our readers, to submit an article, please email secretary@northbeds.camra.org.uk

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BACK WHERE I CAME FROM

by Fytton Rowland

North Beds CAMRA aims to organise pub trips by train to towns with plenty of cask ale pubs, and Brighton proved a good choice for this year's visit. It is also my home town, where I enjoyed my first lawful pint on my 18th birthday, after a couple of less lawful ones beforehand. There are many good pubs within easy walking distance of the station. The story of our first attempt appears in the previous edition of *The Firkin*. Four weeks later...

Trafalgar Street, home to many Brighton pubs, runs uphill from St Peter's parish church to the station. Our first stop, the Battle of Trafalgar, was once on Trafalgar Street, but the upper section has since been renamed Guildford Street, leaving the pub slightly misplaced. It is a pleasant Victorian pub with an interesting cask ale range. I chose Gun Brewery's Scaramonga (3.9% abv).

We then headed east down Trafalgar Street, which passes beneath the station, to the Lord Nelson, another Victorian pub serving Harvey's beers from nearby Lewes. Most of us opted for their XX Mild (3.0% abv), rarely seen north of London. It was pleasant enough, though the low gravity was noticeable. Further down the hill we stopped at the Great Eastern, named after the wrong railway. They served beers from Only With Love Brewery, new to me, and I tried their Bunting (4.0% abv).

A short walk south took us to the Basketmaker's Arms, an unusually named pub serving Dark Star beers. Once brewed in Brighton, production later moved to a nearby village and the brewery has since changed ownership, though the beers remain the same. I chose Dark Star Hophead (3.4% abv), a long-time favourite. Continuing south towards the Palace Pier, we visited the Old King and Queen, a large and characterful pub and one of my father's favourites, near his former workplace. Harvey's appeared again, with Sussex Best (4.0% abv) the only cask option.

Moving deeper into tourist Brighton, we explored The Lanes, a maze of narrow alleyways in the town centre. Here we found the Bath Arms, serving Shepherd Neame's Whitstable Bay (3.9% abv). To satisfy those keen to see the sea, we walked along the seafront to the Hole in the Wall, a very old and very small pub just back from the promenade, where I sampled Anspach and Hobday's The Ordinary Bitter, brewed beneath the arches in Bermondsey.

The final scheduled stop was the Evening Star, just outside the station, another pub linked to the arrival of the railway in the nineteenth century. Sadly, there was no time for even a half.



EAST-WEST ALE: HOSTELRIES ALONG THE OLD A428. PART 1

by Paul Barnes

When the government confirmed in 2024 that the East-West Rail line would be pursued, the obvious flip side was the need for a look at East-West ale (from Go Outdoors to Biddenham Turn, or thereabouts). This arduous research follows up my "The Old A6" in previous issues of The Firkin; the 'west end' of it is held in reserve.

Setting off westwards, along what until fairly recently was the A428, you come first to KFC, once The Golden Lion, 498 Goldington Road, perhaps first a beerhouse in 1831. In 1891 it seems to have been known as the Red Lion. The Golden Lion was demolished and rebuilt in 1983, demolished again in 2005. Frankie and Benny's restaurant stood there until I think 2021 when KFC took its place.



Next, The Crown Beerhouse, Goldington Road was perhaps first licensed in 1834. The Crown seems to have closed its doors for the last time in the mid-1950s. It stood two doors west from the Golden Lion, so the site seems to be the car park of what was Frankie and Benny's. (Much of the historical detail in this article comes from Bedford Borough Council's valuable online archives.)

At last a modern, available venue, **The Orchard Harvester** just opposite (Mitchells and Butlers). Come make the most of your time, we are urged; mouthwatering rotisserie chicken and fresh, unlimited salad are publicised at this modern building. There is a bar of course, but no real ale for members of CAMRA. Trading all day every day.

Just a little further towards Bedford (the historic village and parish of Goldington only merged with Bedford in 1934), we stop for longer at The Swan, now the popular **Toby Carvery** at 403 Goldington Road; also trading all day every day. The Swan was Goldington's oldest recorded public house, emerging between 1723 and 1762. It was bought by Charles Wells in 1917. The Swan moved to a new building next door to the old one in 1925, the old pub being renamed Swanleigh Cottage. The 1925 valuer commented: "New - I say a white elephant," and more kindly "Large and very modern." (The old cottage burned down in 1975, and Scott Veterinary Surgery now stands there; the carvery has a Swanleigh Room.) The Swan was later acquired by Aylesbury Brewery Company and then Ind Coope and was renamed the Wayfarer. Now the building is a Toby Carvery, operated by Mitchells and Butlers. Doom Bar is the only real ale available.

Next door again, another active neighbour is **The Anchor** at 397 Goldington Road. Bedford brewer George Peregrine Nash (whose firm became Newland and Nash) owned this building. A licence to sell "exciseable liquors by Retail" succeeded in 1845. The valuer in 1925 found it owned by Biggleswade brewers Wells and Winch. The premises included a mortuary, as inquests were frequently held at pubs in the nineteenth century. The valuer commented: "Poor place" and "Must be some personality here." In 1962 Wells and Winch were taken over by Greene King from Suffolk. The Anchor remains a public house owned by them, but branded under its subsidiary Hungry Horse, and trading all day every day. There were four handpumps in use when I dropped in; the locals speak well of it.

A cheerful Christmas bar at The Anchor

Now step off the old A428 by 100 yards to visit The Lincoln Arms Public House, Goldington Hall, Church Lane, where years ago I ate and drank. This manor dates from the seventeenth century, though "much altered and enlarged" in 1884. It was acquired after 1945 by Bedford Borough Council, which sold the Hall in 1972 to brewers Bass Charrington; they opened it as The Falstaff pub in October that year. It was later renamed The Lincoln Arms. In 2006 plans were prepared to convert the former pub into fourteen flats with other buildings in the grounds. In January 2008, however, a serious fire broke out. A preservation trust rebuilt and restored the building (before running into trouble with the Charity Commission) and in 2014 it was for sale, now being a fine private house (guide price of 1.5 million in 2021). (The Golden Lion and The Falstaff are both included in volume 2 of Lloyd Lugsden's Dead Pubs of Bedfordshire. Also see Bob Ricketts, "Goldington Hall" in BLHM Spring 2025. My studies were complete before I was aware of the excellent The Lost Pubs of Bedford by Mike MacKechnie.)

Back on the main road, another deserted pub is **The Fox and Hounds**. In 2009, this described itself as a traditional English pub, built in the early 1900's and fully refurbished in June 2009. However, in May 2024, came a fourth application to convert to a retail outlet and four housing units. It's a fine imposing building and deserves to be better treated. Autumn 2025, and Planning Consent was granted for conversion into residential accommodation.



Next time, 'A long way along from The Anchor...'

SOCIAL EVENTS — ROUND UP

Sunday 7th September: A visit to the Regional Cider Pub of the Year, the Real Little R'ale House in Wellingborough, situated next to Platform 1 at Wellingborough railway station. As expected, it is cider focused, though real ales are also available. We left Bedford Station at 13.11, arriving ten minutes later, followed by a short walk to the pub at the north end of the platform.

The pub is a simple, single-room bar with outdoor seating, including cable drums used as tables, plus umbrellas and picnic benches. There were cask ales on offer and a wide range of ciders and perries, including apple, pear and flavoured options. Around 16 North Bedfordshire members attended and enjoyed a glorious day, friendly conversation and excellent drinks. It is well worth a visit, but check opening times, as it closes when the station toilets close.



Wednesday 17th December: We held a Christmas meet-up at the Devonshire Arms in Bedford. The team at the Devvy provided a generous spread of festive nibbles, enjoyed alongside the range of beers available.



Why not join us at one of our informal socials? These take place every odd month in 2026. Please check the website for details.



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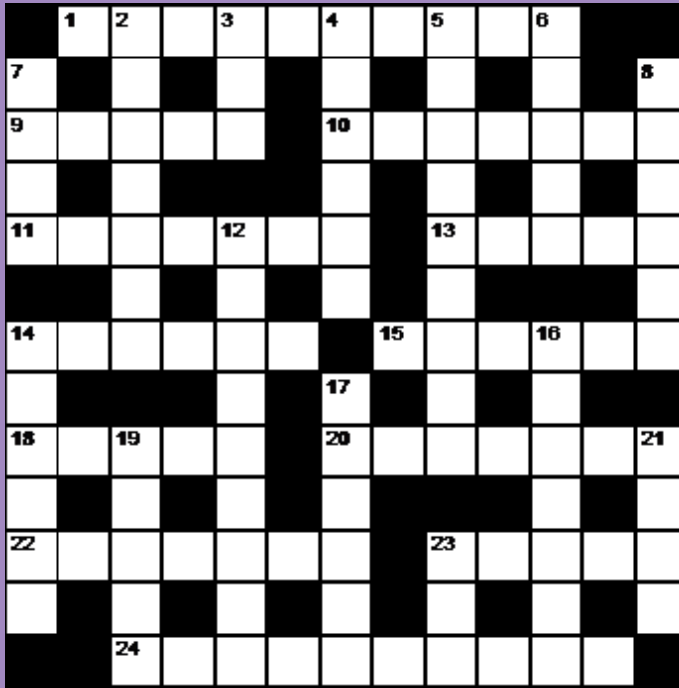
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THE FIRKIN CROSSWORD

Can you complete our tricky crossword? Answers on P15



ACROSS

- 1 Duke has been given the boot (10)
- 9 Bad librarian wraps up spontaneous action (2-3)
- 10 Scalene construction is a wash up (7)
- 11 After endless publicity no team has a lack of air (7)
- 13 Comic performance not starting boat (5)
- 14 See Emily Play (i.e. truanting) to be proper (6)
- 15 Flasher puts clothing on at the end of the road (6)
- 18 Confess to have what Rick will never give you (3,2)
- 20 Meat cooked in ovens (7)
- 22 Settled in I imbibed for days in town (7)
- 23 15 from 22, subtle change, not the first (5)
- 24 Curiously a merry peep could rub up roughly or smooth things over (5,5)

DOWN

- 2 See clip by mistake, block it out (7)
- 3 Balls up, only 60% in test environment (3)
- 4 Dizzy trance caused by sweet drink (6)
- 5 Yorkshire brewer hates knot in a tangle (9)
- 6 Group of musicians to perform without safety equipment apparently? (5)
- 7 Am leaving 5's home as first step to brewing (4)
- 8 Computer geek melted the ice (6)
- 12 Two unknowns cut and sharpen percussion skills needed for tunes on this, though a bit wooden (9)
- 14 Southern style's said to be putting on airs (6)
- 16 2 former pupils get better (7)
- 17 Enthusiastically brewed five daily (6)
- 19 Move bishop to knight with a prod (5)
- 21 Investigate feature of negatives in conversation (4)
- 23 Snake may be wrapped around one's neck (3)

NORTH BEDS LONDON WALKABOUT WITH NORTHAMPTON CAMRA

by Gary Mudd

With the transfer of our branch to the new East Central Area, I met my Northants counterpart at Bedford BeerFest, where he suggested joint trips to get to know each other. He was organising a London visit, so a small group of us joined in. We travelled from Bedford to Farringdon on a wet day and settled into the Sir John Oldcastle (Wetherspoons) to dry off and await our hosts.

The weather improved and we walked past Smithfield Market to the Fox and Anchor, a CAMRA Inventory pub owned by Young's. Designed in 1898, it has an impressive Art Nouveau exterior. Inside is a pewter bar, original partitions, reconstructed panelled rooms, plus surviving tiling and leaded glazing. We enjoyed Special and Winter Warmer for old times' sake, now brewed at Marston's in Burton.



Next was the Old Red Cow, a small single-bar pub with wooden floors and furniture, giving it a traditional feel. Only two beers were on and neither was in the best condition. We then moved on to the Hand and Shears, another National Inventory pub with a fine Victorian interior. Simple woodwork surrounds a central servery, with three screened bars and a snug at the front. I had a reasonable pint of Tribute.



Our next stop required a 20-minute bus ride to Wapping and the Town of Ramsgate, a Grade II listed pub with a long, narrow bar and a terrace overlooking the Thames. Ramsgate references appear throughout, especially on a large etched mirror depicting the harbour. Beers included Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter, Young's London Original and Portobello Market Porter, with a striking blackberry aroma.

A further walk took us to the Prospect of Whitby, another Thames-side pub named after a coal boat. The current building dates from 1777 and features flagstones and an unusual pewter bar top supported by barrels. Beers included Greene King Abbot and guest ales. Belhaven Haunted Highlander was disappointing, but the landlord did replace it.

We continued to the Clement Attlee, formerly the Railway Tavern, taken over by the Craft Beer Co in 2016. It retains original features including a Bass mirror and stained glass. Four cask beers were on alongside craft options. I tried Lakedown Brewing's Firefall, a pleasant American Red.

The DLR took us to Bank, followed by a walk to Cannon Street and the Pelt Trader, tucked into arches beneath the station. The décor reflects the pelt trade, including a canoe hanging from the ceiling. Four cask ales were available alongside craft beers. I had Iron Pier Two Cents and Mallinsons El Dorado.

Two Tube stops or a 20-minute walk brought us to the Blackfriar, a striking Inventory pub on a triangular site opposite Blackfriars station. Built around 1875 and remodelled in 1905 by architect H Fuller Clark, it is well worth seeing. Some of us then carried on to Fleet Street for the final pubs of the day.



The Punch Tavern is well known for its tiled entrance and exterior Mr Punch figure. Inside, the entrance corridor features tiling, a mosaic floor, mirrors and paintings of Mr and Mrs Punch. The decorated ceiling is the only original Victorian feature. Taylor's Landlord, Fuller's London Pride and Harvey's Sussex Bitter were on.

Virtually next door is the Old Bell, another Nicholson's heritage inn, offering their own ale plus four guests. I had Nicholson's Pale, brewed by St Austell.



We finished at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, a Grade II listed pub hidden off Fleet Street and rebuilt after the Great Fire. A small bar features old panelling, simple bench seating, a large fireplace and a Victorian counter. Under Sam Smith's ownership there is just one beer, OBB, though we also tried their Dark Mild on keg.

Thanks go to Karl and Northampton CAMRA, and we hope to arrange further joint socials.

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47TH BEDFORD BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL

by Katherine Lilley

A retrospective of the 47th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival, which once again took place at our regular home, Bedford Corn Exchange, at the beginning of October 2025, placing us right in the heart of Bedford.

It was another successful festival, featuring over 100 beers, ciders and perries across three bars: cask ale, ciders and perries, and the foreign beer bar.

With such a wide selection available, it was a real highlight to host the gold, silver and bronze Champion Beers of Britain 2025 at the festival: Penzance Brewing Mild, Sarah Hughes Snowflake, and Church End Fallen Angel.

For the second year, food was provided by Better Than Mama's, alongside snacks including the ever-popular, award-winning pork pies from Owen Taylor. We enjoyed an eclectic range of entertainment across the four-day festival, with performances from the Bedford Ukulele Band, Acoustopaea, Who Stung Sting and Skimmington Ride.

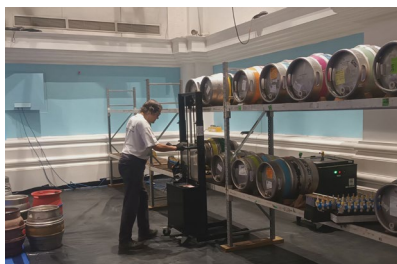
Our chosen charity for the festival was the Bedford MS Therapy Centre, who ran a number of fun games and raised valuable funds for their ongoing work.

On behalf of myself and the organising committee, I would like to thank everyone who gave their time to make this event happen. Whether you helped with set-up or break-down, or served on a bar, you are the heart of our festival. If you may be able to help at next year's festival, please let us know.

We would also like to acknowledge everyone who took out advertising. Our heartfelt thanks go to Gallagher Developments, who for the second year were our main sponsor. It would not be right to miss a special mention for Bedford Radio and Future Legend Media for their continued support. We must also thank token sponsor Breheny Civil Engineering.

The biggest thanks of all go to you, our amazing customers, who came along to enjoy some excellent beers and ciders. The festival committee is always looking at ways to improve the event, so please let us know of any ideas, comments or concerns. You can email me, **Katherine Lilley**, at beerfestival@northbeds.camra.org.uk or send a direct message via the North Bedfordshire CAMRA Facebook page.

Looking ahead to 2026, subject to CAMRA approval, the 48th Bedford Beer and Cider Festival is scheduled to take place from **7th to 10th October 2026**.





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FROM THE FIRKIN ARCHIVE

Summer 2005, vol 40 no 2

CAMRA has mounted a major campaign to save Jennings Brewery at Cockermouth in Cumbria, following its acquisition by regional giant Wolverhampton & Dudley plc (W&D), which already brews Banks's and Marston's beers in the Midlands.

Keep the Wolves at bay

CAMRA has called for W&D to come clean about its expansion plans and is seeking assurances on the future of the Jennings brewery, beer brands and pub estate. John Holland, CAMRA's Director of Breweries Campaigning said: "W&D has already secured 82 per cent of Jennings shares, but a substantial minority of small shareholders is clearly unhappy with the takeover and is supporting CAMRA's campaign."

CAMRA will present W&D with a petition containing over 5,000 signatures from beer drinkers who want Jennings to remain free and wants W&D to give assurances on the future of Jennings as a vertically integrated business.

Convincing the people of Cumbria

CAMRA's Chief Executive, Mike Benner, said: "A clear message has been sent to W&D that while they have successfully acquired Jennings, they now face the challenge of convincing the people of Cumbria, smaller shareholders and beer drinkers that they are committed to the future of Jennings as a thriving regional brewery."

Mr Benner added: "We have several concerns. What are W&D's future acquisition plans? Experience shows us that takeovers often lead to brewery closures and loss of beer brands, which in turn reduces consumer choice and competition. If W&D acquires more brewing capacity, a downturn in market conditions could lead to the closure of Jennings brewery. CAMRA will not sit back and let this happen."

Widespread concern

Mr Benner added: "We thank the people of Cumbria and Jennings shareholders who have supported our campaign to keep Jennings independent. An 18% shortfall in acceptances of the W&D offer strongly suggests widespread concern about their plans. "The fate of Jennings does not lie in the hands of national fund managers influenced by short-term financial considerations. We are confident that many of the thousands of individual shareholders will care about local heritage and such a long-established independent brewer."



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