



the

Casket

Campaign for Real Ale

FREE

May 2011



EAST BEDFORDSHIRE
www.eastbedscamra.org.uk casket@eastbedscamra.org.uk



Branch Pub of the Year 2011— Engineers Arms, Henlow

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The Casket

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The views expressed in The Casket are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily represent the policy of CAMRA, the Editors or the East Bedfordshire Branch.

Contributions to the Casket are always Welcome.

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Casket Cryptic Crossword

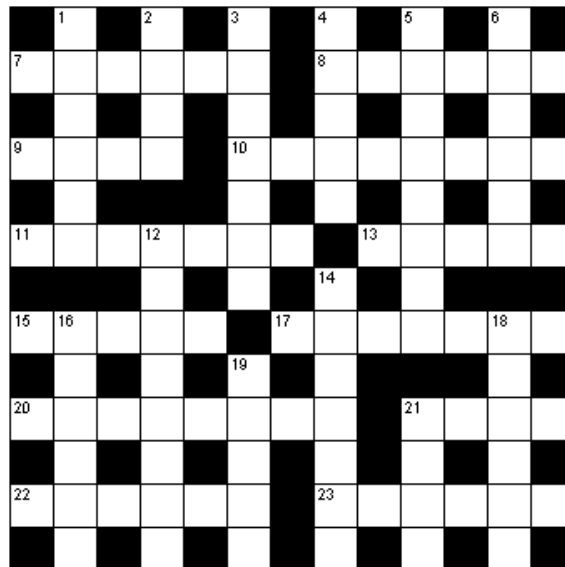
All answers have something to do with drinking, types of drinks, the art of brewing, names of pubs, things you associate with pubs , names of past and present beers and breweries etc.

Across

- 7 Whisky for Compton, pussy for James. (6)
 8 Part of getting me a down payment to get where the grass is greener (6)
 9 Many enquire as to whether their beer is this (4)
 10 Her kings are pickled (8)
 11 Drunken deity said to support you and me (7)
 13 Times about right for beer deliveries (5)
 15 Musical Scandinavians lose footing and take on extra work for clergyman (5)
 17 Worst place and best for a necessary break (3-4)
 20 The measure of Courage's Russian Stout (8)
 21 See 14 Down
 22 Communist spy to be shot? (6)
 23 Info about ancient is not quite 4 (6)

Down

- 1 Veto a tail-less horse - may cause a slip up (6)
 2 Badger loses right to get strong lager (4)
 3 I'm bugle blowing for beer country (7)
 4 Light beer? (5)
 5 Dark stain I lost juggling pots (8)
 6 Shy about posh books in this part of the land (6)
 12 Learning together about endless musical saga is how 9 was once (8)
 14/21A Big vile leak gets about in Pottton (7,4)
 16 Wellington possibly a personal problem for doctor and monarch (6)
 18 Alternative legend about the North part of Scotland (6)
 19 Police hesitation leads to drink (5)
 21 Rubbish target (4)



Solution on Page 10

Compiled by Chris Freeman



LOCAL PUB NEWS

Chequers, Wrestlingworth

A warm welcome to James Stapleton who took over as manager of the Chequers on the 14 Dec 2010. At the bar, GK IPA, Abbot and Old Speckled Hen are available. The pub is open every day from 12-11pm. The food menu has been revamped, serving daily until 10pm, try the Sunday Roast at £8.95. Regular events include card games, pentanque & a quiz on the first sunday of each month.



Two Brewers, Stotfold

After a 5 week refurbishment, the Two Brewers re-opened on March 11th as a gastro pub, with the emphasis on fine English dining using fresh local produce. Although still owned by Admiral Taverns, new tenant Darren Woodhams leads an experienced three man team. Opening hours are Tue-Sat 12-11 [food until 9pm], Sun 12-5 [food until 4pm]. At the bar, B&T Two Brewers Bitter is the regular ale. Check out sample menus & wine lists at their website www.twobrew.co.uk.



The Conker Tree Inn?

Where's that?. You won't find it in Bedfordshire.

However, what you should Look for is the on-line guide to the pubs of Bedfordshire
At www.bedspubs.org.uk

The Conker Tree Inn

61 High Street Pinton
SG9 9 3AA
Directions: In village centre off A246
A246
0311 123456
Owner: Free House
CAMRA Branch: Beds
Bodgers Bitter [H]
Guest Ales: Beer Range Varies [H]
P&W
C&R

Opening Times:
Mon-Sat 11.00-23.30
Sun 12.00-15.00, 18.00-22.30
Meals:
Mon-Sat 12.00-15.00, 18.30-21.00
Sun 12.00-15.00

Traditional cosy village inn with oak beams and a large inglenook fireplace. A small beer garden at the rear. Regular quiz nights
Surveyed: 21/10/2007



Brewery News

Potton brewery—update

There recently was held a Beer Festival at a British Embassy in the Middle East which featured 41 different bottled beers from ten British Micro Breweries. For full details see the January edition of the Casket. The competition for the most popular beer being served was won by Potton Brewery's Village Bike. Approximately four hundred and fifty people attended. They were entertained by Chas and his band who performed songs from their successful career including "Ain't no fooling you" which went down very well and there was no fooling the drinkers about the quality of Potton Brewery's beer either, which also went down well. Already a further thousand bottles of Potton's beer are winging their way across the world and this could lead to a lucrative export market through the International Supplies Ltd who organised the event and supply British embassies across the world. Congratulations to Bob, Dave and Peter of Potton Brewery

Potton Brewery have just completed their thousand brew which was "Potton Porter". This was originally brewed for a short trial period but proved so successful that brewing of this ale will commence again, on a regular basis, towards the end of the summer. Watch out for a new bitter at approx 4% ABV to be launched soon.

New LocAle brewery—Hopping Mad

Hopping Mad recently began production in Olney, just over the county border in Bucks. They have invested extensively in facilities and equipment with a vision of becoming a regional brewer delivering consistency, quality and volume. A soft launch during December via a number of local pubs, local media and events provided exceptional feedback plus strong repeat orders and they have achieved a permanent tap in a number of local pubs.. Hopping Mad beers have been seen recently in the Stone Jug (Claphill), Engineers Arms (Henlow), Rising Sun (Potton) and March Hare (Dunton) . Look out for the following ales:-

Brainstorm 4.3% ABV

A traditional beautifully balanced fully-hopped bitter, a complete beer experience provides a stimulating taste to savour followed by a fulfilling hoppy finish.

Colour Amber Brown Nose Hops, Malt, Fruit

Taste Smooth and balanced with a bitter finish



Fruitcase 4.5% ABV

An intricate, well balanced, drinkable and delicious Golden Ale . Full of interesting flavours using a delicate mixture of highly appealing hops, the perfect accompaniment to a range of subtle flavours driven by a blend of malts.

Colour Rich Gold Nose Hops, Malt, Floral

Taste Clean and balanced with a smooth finish



Branch Pub of the Year 2011

Congratulations go to Kevin Machin and Claire Sturgeon as the **Engineers Arms** is voted Pub of the Year for 2011 by East Beds CAMRA members. The Engineer's Arms regains the title, it last held in 2008 and what a year it has been for this popular freehouse. Their hugely successful beer festival in October 2010 sold over 107 barrels of ale and the decision to launch a cider and country wine festival in February this year, paid dividends and surpassed all expectations.

Henlow Cider Festival – ‘How do you like them apples?!’

Now I like a nice pint of beer as much as the next person, but I have to confess to a massive weakness for a good pint of cider. That's why I was so thrilled to be able to visit the ‘1st Henlow Cider and Country Wine Festival’ at the Engineers Arms 17th – 20th of February this year. The event was billed as having over forty different types of cider and perry, a claim which in the end turned out to be an underestimation as stocks ran low so quickly that ten more boxes were ordered in for Saturday morning.

Claire Sturgeon at the Engineers said it exceeded all expectations: “We knew how popular cider was just from our normal sales and from the ciders we've put on at our beer festivals, but this just proved how much people enjoy it.” CAMRA member Kim was one of the hardworking folk serving behind the bar during this busy weekend. She said “It's great to be able to try such a range – absolutely everything about it was positive and I look forward to it becoming an established part of the calendar.”

That idea of there being such a range is the key to the success of the occasion – lots of old favourites and established brands – from Westons, New Forest and from Baldock. The gorgeous cask flavoured ciders from Millwhites that came as Rum, Whiskey or Rioja, and Chafford's ‘Hellishly Strong’ from Tunbridge Wells that had its ABV listed as ??? just to keep us all guessing. My favourite? The Gwynt-y-Ddraig Black Dragon, that ran out pretty much as quickly as I could drink it ... I do hope lots of other people got to try some in those rare moments when I wasn't in attendance.....!

I leave the last word to CAMRA stalwart Clifford Luff, who was twice in attendance during the weekend. He told me “I don't normally drink cider – but I thoroughly enjoyed it – especially the Westons Winter Spice”. For me that's what these events are all about – the chance to try something you wouldn't normally, something different – and maybe to discover a new favourite in the great canon of fabulous ciders (and beers) that we all want to see encouraged in our pubs.

Also shortlisted were 2010 winner the Rising Sun, Potton and the much improved Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade—well done to both pubs. The Engineers Arms now faces tough competition from the winners of North Beds and South Beds, with the result of the Bedfordshire Pub of the Year to be announced in mid May.

South Beds Pub of the Year 2011

The English Rose, 46 Old Bedford Road, Luton has been voted branch Pub of the Year for South Beds. It is the second time that this friendly community based local pub has won the title, their previous award was in 2006. The pub has four ever changing guest ales and a popular annual beer festival. There is a large garden popular in the summer time and indoors there is pool, darts & a regular quiz.



[The English Rose, Luton]



[The Bedford Arms, Souldrop]

North Beds Pub of the Year 2011

The Bedford Arms, is located in Souldrop, just half a mile off the A6 north of Sharnbrook. Originally a struggling Greene King pub, it was sold to Punch Taverns some years ago. It continued to decline and was faced with permanent closure. Fortunately, it was bought by a businessman who after a renovation and refurbishment, re-opened it in 2005 as a free house.

In the following six years, it has regained some of its former glory under Fred and Caroline Rich with chef Sally Rushworth. The Bedford Arms has transformed into a wonderful pub offering quality real ales and really good food. The regular real ales are Black Sheep Best Bitter, Greene King IPA and Phipps NBC Red Star (brewed for the Northampton Brewery Company by Grainstore of Oakham), plus a guest ale, often from local independent breweries such as Potbelly in Kettering.

Booze on the Ouse 2011

Several groups of branch members and a few from North Herts CAMRA attended the St Neots Beer and Cider Festival for a Social on the afternoon and evening of 11th March 2011. Some arrived shortly after opening time on the day and stayed until mid-afternoon, those with more robust constitutions lasted until early evening before visiting further delights offered by St Neots [actually Jaipur IPA at the Pig n' Falcon] and others arrived mid-afternoon and disappeared into the night to await their carriages - well those on the line from Peterborough to London anyway – at around 8.30.

The festival had about sixty cask ales on offer, fifteen or so cask ciders as well as bottled ciders and bottled beers from Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, the USA and the UK. There was also an excellent delicatessen stall selling not only food to eat during the festival but also specialist breads, cheeses, etc. to take home.

Another novelty was a “passport” scheme, which was a card collected at the bar and stamped for each of the CAMRA “40th Anniversary” beers consumed. When the card was full (six stamps) you could claim a free gift at the tombola stall. Inevitably as the evening progressed some visitors almost became distracted from the full range of ales available to concentrate on the “Anniversary” beers to ensure that they could get a prize – well I was *almost* tempted! Luckily there were three or four of us drinking together so it was fairly easy to offload the Greene King t-shirt and assorted collectibles to less particular members of the “co-operative”.



[East Beds and North Herts share a joke]



[a pause for thought—which beer next?]

Around a quarter of the cask beers available fell into the “Locale” category as they were brewed within about 30 miles of St Neots, which helped reduce the environmental “footprint” required for delivery – the closest being from the Son of Sid Brewery based at the Chequers, Little Gransden. Of the rest, the furthest travelled was Fyne’s Jarl from Cairndow on the side of Loch Long in Argyll and Bute and other Scottish beers were from Kelburn brewery in Barrhead, Renfrewshire and Belhaven in Dunbar, East Lothian. Welsh brewing was represented by Brains from Cardiff.

In addition to those above there were beers from twelve breweries in East Anglia; nine from the East Midlands; five from Manchester and the North West; two from the South of England; one from the South East; two from the South Midlands and two from Yorkshire.

Cask beer styles ranged from wheat beers, honey beers and beer flavoured with ginger to old ales, stouts and porters supplemented with a good range of bitters, golden ales, milds and barley wines.



[Regional director Andrea Briers joins the boys]



[the calm before the storm]

There was a very convivial atmosphere and it was a pleasure to see a number of young people in attendance some of whom, judging by their discussions with the bar staff, had never before tasted real ale. This hopefully augurs well for the future of the UK beer industry, its many beer styles and pubs which sell it. All in all it was a very pleasant festival with a good selection of Ales, cider and food. Plus, but most importantly, all the beers which myself and my colleagues sampled were in excellent condition.

Barry Price

DIARY DATES

- JUNE.** 14th, Branch Meeting, John O'Gaunt, Sutton, 8pm
25th, Peterborough Train Trip, Meet at the Beehive, 12-1pm
- JULY.** 17th, Summer Bike Ride to Sutton & Dunton, details TBA
23rd, ALL Beds Branches social in London, details TBA
26th, Branch Meeting, Coach & Horses, Stotfold, 8pm
- SEP.** 6th, Branch Meeting, Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade 8pm

BEER FESTIVALS

- May.** 23rd-28th. The 38th Cambridge Beer Festival,
Jesus Green, Cambridge **CAMRA**
- Aug.** 2nd-6th. The Great British Beer Festival,
Earls Court, London **CAMRA**
- 5th-7th Stratton House Beer Festival, Stratton House
Hotel, London Road, Biggleswade
- 25th-29th 7th Potton Beer Festival, Rising Sun
Everton Road, Potton

Crossword Solution



The Potton Brewery Co.

10 Shannon Place,
Potton, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2PZ
Tel:- 01767 261042
www.potton-brewery.co.uk

Suppliers of 'Real Ale' in
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Above Number.

Brewers of
Shannon IPA

Inn Signs - The Pig & Whistle

Many animals are depicted in English inn signs, most relating to hunting and sporting pursuits. However one such sign is much misunderstood and its origins lie in the humorous and comic way one particular animal is shown. It is the well-known sign of the *Pig & Whistle*. The thought of animals performing human actions or dressed in human garments, is a throwback to the early stages of human wit. Egyptian, Greek and Roman culture used caricatures of animals personating men, and they became subjects for later mediaeval artists. A trip round Winchester Cathedral also reveals the sign, where in a stall carving a sow is shown sitting and playing on a whistle, as a second pig plays a violin and a third seems to be singing.

There are many different interpretations of the inn sign, but the most commonly held belief is that the name is derived from the 'piggin & wassail bowl'. In this case, piggin or peggin is an early drinking vessel, which houses a set of pins on the inside to mark various levels of the liquid and I suspect it was used commonly by a group of drinkers, possibly to drink one peg's worth and pass on to the next person, in the same way as one might drink one fingers worth from a spirit glass. Wassail can refer either to a salutation used in toasting a person's health or to a spiced ale that was drunk on Twelfth-night and it gets a mention in Shakespeare's Macbeth:-

*Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain*



[Pig & Whistle, Stotfold]

The practice of wassailing survives today, with drinking and singing to the health of trees, usually performed in apple orchards in the hope of encouraging a bountiful crop. Some theorists may claim descent from the Danish-Saxon 'pige-washail', meaning our Ladies' Salutation. Even the Scots claim a definition of their own, where the pig is a pot and whistle refers to small change, thus to go to the 'pigs and whistle', literally means 'going to pot' or 'to fall into ruin', and become a beggar. However, I rather like the myth that when servants were sent down to the cellars to fetch 'pigs of beer', they were obliged to whistle, to prove that they were not drinking the stock, whilst out of sight. Now if that story is true – then perhaps pigs can fly!

LocAle News

Two more pubs in East Beds have joined the LocAle scheme, helping to promote locally produced ales. The Coach & Horses in Stotfold joined up in March, only a few weeks after Tracey Dobson arrived as the new licensee. Tracey has worked in several local pubs, including a spell at the successful Half Moon in Hitchin. She keeps Wells Eagle IPA on permanently, the second handpump may be another Wells & Young beer or a guest, and the third is an ever changing guest ale.

East Beds held a branch meeting at the March Hare in Dunton during March, and we took the opportunity to talk to landlord John Pritchett about the LocAle scheme. He was happy to join, indicating that he had one handpump dedicated to a B&T ale, a second one often featuring Buntingford, Red Squirrel or Tring, plus up to two other rotating guest ales.

Lindsey and the Team Welcome you to

Sir William Peel P.H.



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3 Ever changing Guest Beers
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Opening hours Mon – Fri 12-12 Sat 11-12 Sun 12-10:30



39 High Street, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1AG 01767 6806047



CAMRA launched a scheme called LocAle to help pubs promoting locally produced real ales as well as local breweries.

East Beds Branch has adopted the area for the breweries to be 30 miles from Biggleswade and pubs selling good quality ales.

The benefits of the LocAle scheme are to improve consumer choice, enable local breweries to sell more ales so they can expand and benefit the local economy and an increase in local identity and pride.

Breweries that are within 30 miles of Biggleswade are:-

Potton, Potton, Beds.	B&T , Shefford, Beds.
White Park, Cranfield, Beds.	Green Tye, Much Hadham, Herts.
Buntingford, Royston, Herts.	Red Squirrel, Hertford. Herts.
Wells & Youngs, Bedford.	Alehouse, St Albans, Herts.
McMullen, Hertford, Herts.	Concrete Cow, Milton Keynes.
Milton, Cambridge, Cambs.	Cambridge Moonshine, Cambs.
Potbelly, Kettering, Northants.	Tring, Tring, Herts.
Hopping Mad, Olney, Bucks.	

Pubs that are participating in the scheme are:-

Golden Pheasant, Biggleswade.	Vicars Inn, Arlesey.
Engineers Arms, Henlow.	Rising Sun, Potton.
Sir William Peel, Sandy.	Stag, Stotfold.
Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade.	March Hare, Dunton
Coach and Horses, Stotfold.	

Please visit these pubs and enjoy locally produced ales.

Join CAMRA today

A Campaign of Two Halves.

Apparently, according to CAMRA HQ, too many of the Great British Public are under the impression that the Campaign is either a “real ale drinking club” or a “serious campaigning organisation” – but not both.

In order to correct this misapprehension, and to impress upon prospective members that CAMRA is a not-for-profit organisation consisting of jolly talented multi-taskers who are quite capable of campaigning for pub-goers and beer drinkers whilst having fun enjoying good real ale and great pubs, CAMRA has launched a new campaign – “A Campaign of Two Halves”

This was “softly launched” at the Great British Beer Festival 2010 and replaces the “Beer Head” campaign. New material has just been produced to support this (see the new membership form on the adjacent page).

The Benefits of Joining CAMRA


Some of you reading this magazine may not be members, but perhaps are considering joining CAMRA. If so, you may not be aware of the following benefits that you would enjoy on joining CAMRA, quite apart from helping to ensure the survival of Real Ale and to stem the tide of pub closures:

- Discounted or free entry to the 160+ CAMRA beer festivals including the GBBF.
- Discounted beer at some pubs – e.g. The Bree Louise at Euston, and all Wetherspoons pubs (members receive £20 worth of vouchers each year)
- Discounted items, such as books and t-shirts, from CAMRA website and from CAMRA stalls at beer festivals.
- Monthly Newspaper, “What’s Brewing” - keep up-to-date with the pub and beer world and revisions to the “Good Beer Guide”
- A quarterly copy of the magazine “BEER” which is packed with interesting features on pubs, beers and breweries.
- The CAMRA Beer Club. This provides a home delivery service to enthusiasts. All CAMRA members receive a £5 discount on each mixed case of 20 beers.
- Other benefits include discounts from Thomas Cook Holidays, Ramada Jarvis Hotels, Cottages4you, and Hire a Canalboat.

Add to all this an enhanced social life, and for a maximum of £20 a year it’s a “no-brainer” – isn’t it? Join the campaign today and make a difference.

Geoff Tilbury (Membership Secretary for East Beds)

A Campaign of Two Halves



Fair deal on beer tax

Save Britain's Pubs!

Join CAMRA Today

Complete the Direct Debit form and you will receive 15 months membership for the price of 12 and a fantastic discount on your membership subscription.

Alternatively you can send a cheque payable to CAMRA Ltd with your completed form, visit www.camra.org.uk/joinus or call 01727 867201. All forms should be addressed to Membership Department, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 4LW.

Your Details

Title _____ Surname _____

Forename(s) _____

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Email address _____

Tel No(s) _____

Partner's Details (if Joint Membership)

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Joint Membership £25 ☐ £27 ☐
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For Young Member and concessionary rates please visit www.camra.org.uk or call **01727 867201**.

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

I enclose a cheque for _____

Signed _____ Date _____


Applications will be processed within 21 days

12/10

Campaigning for Pub Goers & Beer Drinkers

Enjoying Real Ale & Pubs

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- This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay by Direct Debits.
- If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request.
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- If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when The Campaign For Real Ale Ltd asks you to.
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

Branch Social at Orange Tree, Baldock

On the evening of Tuesday 15th February seven members met at the Orange Tree, Norton Road, Baldock with the prospect of learning some local pub history, sampling some beers in the cellar and checking out recent restoration work. We met new tenant Rob Scahill, who some may recognize from his help in organising the Baldock Beer Festival. He is very experienced, having spent time at the Bass brewery and in recent years, managing the cellar at the Cock Inn on the High Street, Baldock.

Rob initially was looking to buy a pub from Greene King, but with nothing suitable at the time, he agreed to become the tenant at the Orange Tree, a pub which has grown on him and now shows signs of great potential. The history of the pub was not well known and recent renovations have uncovered a much early date for the building. I had a quick foray into the magistrates records and the earliest licensee I could find was from the year 1823, but I suspected the pub was possibly late 18th century. Rob's research now puts a definite date of 1680 although it was probably just for agricultural use at this time. The earliest reference to the name 'Orange Tree' as a pub is in 1760.



The building work, which includes stripping back many walls has produced a few surprises. Many old beams have been exposed, although they are quite thin and have suffered from an attack of woodworm at some point. In an older building you might have expected to find wattle and daub [sticks and mud] as the main material for packing in around the beams and posts, but in one section of the bar area wall, it seems that local reeds cut from the River Ivel have been used instead of the sticks.

The largest single item was the exposure of a huge inglenook fireplace and beside it a small door leading to a storage area. A wall has been inserted to create a snug bar and the large room to the left of the building is not original, but a 1930's extension built by the brewers Simpsons of Baldock. They also dug out and enlarged the cellar to run the whole length of the extension, for storing their stock of Best, Light and Mild ales. Inside the extension, work progresses with new floorboards having been laid down using materials from the old Benskins brewery in Watford. On the end wall, the removal of various hardboards revealed two large murals, one showing a coach and horses pulling up outside a pub and the other a scene inside the pub. Both appear to show scenes from Georgian or Victorian times, yet Rob assures me they were painted retrospectively in October 1945 by a customer Leonard Victor Norwood, as a means of paying off his substantial bar tab. Although there was quite a bit damage to the paintings, they have been carefully restored.



Outside the pub at the rear is a massive garden and since our visit now includes a patio, with a raised approach to the garden, a smoking area, pentanque court and area for outdoors functions, including a beer festival. Rob was given permission by Greene King to operate a festival 'outside of the tie' from 3rd-6th March, offering 16 real ales. Beyond the garden, there was a large area of allotments, which must have been on brewery land, as they were rented from the pub landlord. Rob has inherited an old book, which dates back to the 1930's, and names some of the 20th century landlords and has details of all the rent accounts for the allotments.

After the brief tour of the pub, washed down by an excellent pint of GK Mild or York Terrier, Rob led us to the cellar for some instruction on cellarmanship and to sample some beers due to come on in the next few days. The talk was illuminating and I was pleasantly surprised to see new technology being mixed in with traditional practices. The self-tilting stillaging was fascinating, ensuring that the barrel is gradually tipped over a longer period of time as the liquid is dispensed and the barrel gets emptier. We also saw a variety of spiles being used, including the new race spile. This mechanical device has two springs and two valves, letting air [natural CO₂] in or out as required as the beer is sold, thus no need to replace the hard spile at the end of each session.

Much to our surprise, the ales we were to sample had not yet been tapped. But Rob had left that task down to us and after a demonstration five members got their chance to tap a barrel. Barry was first up and tapped the GK Mild with a confident 'double whack', followed by Kevin, myself and Jo as we unleashed Holdens – Golden Glow, Coachhouse – Dick Turpin and Kelham Island – Easy Rider. Finally Chris wielded the hammer on a small pin of GK Abbot. Thankfully, there were no mishaps, just a few dribbles here and there, after all you can't expect CAMRA members to waste good beer. After sampling the excellent ales, we returned upstairs for a final pint and some chips for sustenance. A group photo finished off the evening, with a promise that we would return to see the completion of the restoration work. This once popular pub, had unfortunately been in decline for the last ten years or so, but now it looks like it will get a new lease of life under Rob's guidance and we all wish him well with his venture and we look forward to visiting this traditional alehouse again. There are now 8 handpumps offering a mix of Greene King and guest ales. Watch out for another beer festival to be held at the pub in the last week of June 2011.

Visit to Chalk Hill Brewery

On March 26th some regulars from the March Hare in Dunton visited the Coach and Horses in Norwich, home of the Chalk Hill Brewery. Beers on tap at the pub were Brewery Tap 3.6%, CHB 4.2%, Gold 4.3%, Flintknappers 5%, Dreadnought 4.9% and Old Tackle 5.6%, plus Cunards Cider 5.2%.

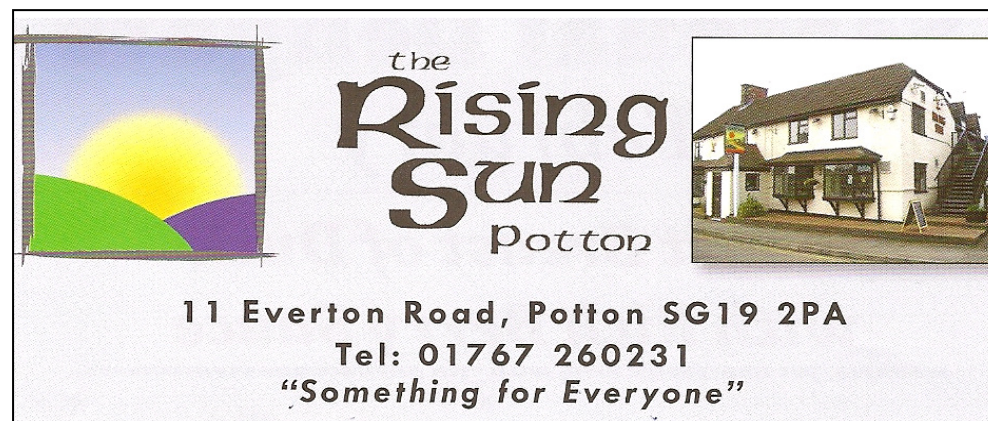
This ex Watneys' pub had been closed for 3 years until bought by David Blake who carried out a total renovation of this Grade 2 listed building. It included the installation of a brewery behind the pub and along with partners Bill Thomas and Tiny Little, both publicans & brewers, the Chalk Hill Brewery was born and the first brew mashed-in at 7am on the 30th November 1993.



Bill Thomas had previously set up the popular Reindeer free house in the city and brewed there in 1987 having gained brewing experience with the early Firkin chain. Tiny Little was the landlord of the Alexandra and had learned to brew with Bill at the Reindeer. The brewery is a 13 barrel plant and sells its beer to the Alexandra as well as the Coach and Horses.

Our next port of call was to the Kings Head where a fine beer list included Winters KHB 3.7%, Woodfordes Nelsons Revenge 4.5%, Blackfriars Yarmouth Bitter 3.8%, Blackfriars Old Habit 5.6%, Elmtree Bitter 4.2%, Humpty Dumpty Wherryman's Way 7.4%, Green Jack Albion Mild 3.8%, Woodfordes Sundew 4.1%, Elgoods Snake Slayer 4.5%, and Elmtree Burton's Cuckoo 3.8%. This keg-free pub sells local ales and Winter's brews their house beer. The interior is split into two areas and has been CAMRA's branch pub of the year several times.

Our last call in Norwich was The Fat Cat where the usual large range of beers were available. After a very enjoyable day in Norwich it was time to head home with a final stop at The Angel at Larling, which had 4 beers on Woodfordes Wherry 3.8%, Adnams Bitter 3.7% and Mild 3.2% and Ottley O, Bitter 4%. This pub, located just off the A11, has been vastly extended since the bypass was built and is famous for its Scotch Eggs. However we declined to sample them, as a buffet was to be laid on back at The March Hare.



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3rd Sir William Peel Beer Festival

The third Sir William Peel Beer Festival opened on Thursday 14th April in Sandy's finest Real Ale emporium situated in the High Street opposite St Swithun's Church. As has been the case at the previous two festivals the weather stayed fine for the duration of the event which ran until Sunday 17th April. Therefore drinkers neither had to don their waterproofs nor invoke the assistance of St Swithun who is regarded as one of the saints to whom one should pray in the event of drought. Only a few beers had ran out by Sunday afternoon so no shortage of liquid refreshment had manifested itself.

The theme this year was "On the Farm" and outside the pub were two, larger than life-sized, scarecrows guarding the premises. The suggestion that these dummies had been placed there as they were better looking, more animated and could provide more intelligent conversation than some of the pub regulars was nothing if not observant but can be refuted in the case of 99.9% of Lindsey's clientèle. However I cannot presume to vouch for myself.



Inside, the farmyard theme continued with the glass cabinets above the bar being filled with flowers, miniature cows, sheep, pigs and chickens. The stillage was also nicely decorated with blue & white flower-shaped streamers, decorated with pictures of various livestock, hanging between the barrels.

Eight Millwhite's ciders were tantalisingly placed next to the twenty-four real ales on the stillage and congratulations should be extended to Lindsey for providing an alternative for those people with an intolerance of wheat or gluten. It was also an alternative for those who prefer a 5%-7.5% pint or half to the 3.6% to 6.6% available in the beer choices. These ciders were supplemented by three more and a perry available at the bar.



Astonishingly, although thirty real ales were available, only two of them came from the same brewery in Masham, North Yorkshire, represented by Black Sheep Best Bitter and Golden Sheep. The other breweries ranged from Lowestoft in the east (Green Jack Brewery); to Pinchinthorpe in the north (North Yorkshire Brewery); Ipplepen, Devon in the West (Hunters Brewery) which was also the furthest south.

As an added incentive to sample beers one might not normally try, six “thirds” could be bought for a very reasonable £5.50. The only minor problem I envisaged with this arrangement was transporting six thirds all at the same time (as they had to be purchased together) but convenient little carrying trays ensured that the precious cargo was not accidentally jettisoned between the bar and the site of consumption. The purchase of “thirds” was so popular I was relieved that I didn’t have to assist with the washing-up.

There was a Branch Social on Friday afternoon which several members attended but an unfortunate incident on the railway lines just south of Sandy caused some to be delayed. Even so much light hearted banter was exchanged. On Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon the very joyful mood of the festival was enhanced further by the provision of both live music and fresh pies - food for both the soul and the body.



My favourite ale was Castle Rock’s Harvest Pale (the first barrel to be emptied) closely followed by the likes of Burton Bridge’s Top Dog Stout, Shalford’s Barn Field and Red Squirrel’s RSX but I can honestly say that none of the twenty-nine beers I sampled in three sessions could be faulted on quality although, of course, some suited my palate more than others.

The strangest beer on offer was Hunter’s “Slaughtered Lamb” which had an overwhelming aroma of the chemicals which ladies of a certain age will remember from the time they had their hair “permed”. Well some of the gentlemen who were filled with an uncontrollable desire to emulate Kevin Keegan’s “look” in the late Seventies/early Eighties may recall the smell as well. Fortunately, once you overcame your natural reluctance to drink the almost Technicolor red liquid, you were rewarded with an interesting cherry-flavoured beer which was quite palatable.

As well as the beers and ciders already mentioned there were a dozen fruit wines, nine Belgian beers and nine Belgian Fruit beers so there really was something for everyone. All in all the whole event was another tribute to Lindsey, Phil, Nikki, Cath, Helen, Tracey, Sandra and Caroline for creating a welcoming atmosphere, dealing with all customers with a sense of humour and keeping the beers and ciders in excellent condition. It was a pleasure to attend three of the sessions (I could not make it on Saturday) and there was a great atmosphere for all ages at each of them. Undoubtedly many of us are already looking forward to 2012!

Barry Price

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