



the

FREE

Casket

Campaign for Real Ale

September 2011



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



8 Pubs to celebrate with a beer festival

Potton beer wins award at GBBF

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The Casket

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CAMRA East Bedfordshire

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A quick word from the Editor

Some last minute news came in about Potton Brewery, following a blind tasting panel result at the Great British Beer festival. They were awarded '**joint bronze**' for Shannon IPA 3.6% in the honours for the 'Bitter' category. Congratulations to Bob and all the team at the brewery.

The branch received a 'thank you' e-mail from the Hopping Mad brewery in Olney in response to the Casket helping to promote their business and join in our branch LocALe scheme. They have recently launched a third ale—**Balmy Days**, described as a zesty summer ale.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Matt Dunkley at the Rising Sun, Potton for allowing us to put up posters and membership forms at their May bank holiday beer festival. I was also asked to make up a display board with some historical information about pubs in the town. I opted to highlight the plight of pub closures, by demonstrating that Potton now has only 5 pubs left, whereas back in 1861 under the reign of Queen Victoria, a pub crawl around the town would have visited 34 active pubs and beerhouses. The display featured some history, location and photos of many of those lost pubs. The display board almost didn't make it to the pub, as I had forgotten that I had down-sized my car in the last year.



On the left a proud man and his lovely creation.

On the right an idiot, the words 'piss-up and brewery' come to mind.



I no longer had the cavernous hatchback of the Ford Cougar, but was left with the rather diminutive Ford Focus. However, after some trial and error, and with back seats down and front seats as far forward possible, I managed to squeeze it in. Thankfully I did not have to execute an emergency stop on route to Potton, otherwise I might have been decapitated by the display board. It would have been one of the more unusual drink related injuries.

Finally, I would like to make a personal plea to all local members to come out and bring some friends along to support our pub based beer festival in September to help celebrate CAMRA's 40th anniversary. The main details of the festival are on pages 13-16, but watch out for more news on pub posters, the branch website and e-mail newsletters in the coming weeks.



LOCAL PUB NEWS

Hopbine, Biggleswade

The Hopbine closed down in June after a succession of temporary managers had not been able to keep the trade from dwindling away. Greene King still own the property, but have leased it out as an Indian restaurant. It re-opened towards the end of July although what name it is trading under is unclear. The Hopbine name still appears on it and also Shunar Bangla. The only beer you will find here now is Mongoose lager, which has replaced Cobra lager, brewed under licence at Charles Wells.



Brown Bear, Biggleswade

It was only last year that the pub was refurbished with a sports bar theme. But things went wrong over Xmas, and the pub failed to open again for some weeks after New Year. It did eventually open again, but with no real ale and rumours that the manager was buying cans of beer from a supermarket and selling them over the counter. It closed again in June and the lease is up for sale by Admiral Taverns. The pub did re-open in late July, but only with a temporary manager and NO Real Ale.

Crown, Stotfold

New arrivals at the Crown are John & Shirley King with a one year tenancy. They were approached by Greene King after completing a 3 month stint at the Coach & Horses earlier in the year. They currently sell GK IPA & Old Speckled and report an increase in beer sales. The pub is currently open Sun-Thu 4pm-12 midnight, Fri-Sat 12 noon—1am. This remains a drinking pub, although simple pizzas, burgers & chips can be ordered. There is a large secure child friendly garden. Live music nights with bands are popular, plus frequent karaoke and disco events. Darts and pool are played & Sky sports has been ordered and should be installed in time for the football season.



Lord Roberts, Sandy

Another pub undergoing significant changes following the arrival of lease owner Mick Bartlett, who also runs the Mayflower in Welwyn Garden City. There is NO real ale or food at present, but Mick hopes to re-introduce both once he gets to know his clientele. Opening hours are Sun to Thu 11-11 and Fri & Sat 11-1am.



The pub is run on a day to day business by manageress Jodie Hannibal. Live music and karaoke are still popular, plus many sporting events including petanque.

Coach & Horses, Stotfold

The future of this pub looks more secure now, as landlady Tracey Dobson has revealed that the owner would like to enlarge the building. Plans are being prepared to extend the rear of the pub creating a large new room with doors leading out to the garden. This will provide additional lounge seating, plus a dedicated games & sports area. The bar will be turned round ninety degrees into the new area, leaving the existing rooms as traditional public/lounge seating areas. Upstairs there will be more flats, which can be rented out to supplement the income of the business.



The redevelopment should commence in the next 6-12 months, subject to planning permission. Tracey has also recently introduced a variety of traditional pub meals for under a 'fiver'.

March Hare, Dunton

John, Janice & Kerry celebrated their first year at the March Hare on 13th August. They have taken on an apprentice to learn bar, cellar and food skills, working towards her Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Food and Beverage Service. The kitchen has been renovated and buffets are regularly enjoyed by customers for special events. More groups are meeting in the pub, such as book clubs, 'Monday Club', crib, Dunton Community Garden Group, local pre school committee, diving club, running clubs and 'Friday night is Take Away Night'. In May the Letchworth Morris Dancers entertained the villagers at the pub with a wonderful display. An enclosed family area and beer garden will open once the turf has settled. From September there will be a mid week quiz night and folk music on some Tuesdays. The pub supports drivers of a group of 2 or more, with free lemonade, orange squash, blackcurrant, tea or coffee.



County Pub of the Year 2011

There was a double celebration on Tuesday 31st May when the Engineers Arms, Henlow received two local 'real ale' awards. The presentation was attended by 45 CAMRA members, representing East, North and South Bedfordshire, plus neighbours from North Hertfordshire. The home branch, East Beds, started by presenting the licensees Kevin Machin and Claire Sturgeon with a certificate for being voted their branch 'Pub of the Year' for 2011. During a short speech, branch chairman John Goodlet paid tribute to all the Engineers Arms staff for their friendly and knowledgeable service, alongside the high quality and extensive range of the real ales on offer during the last year. A special mention was also given to the pub's 15th anniversary beer festival last October, which sold an impressive 107 barrels of real ale & cider.

The second award was for Bedfordshire 'Pub of the Year' 2011, voted for by members across the county. John Goodlet handed out the certificate and spoke about the role that cider and perry play in the campaign's aims. He congratulated Kevin & Claire on their new cider & country wine festival held in February and hoped that it would be a regular event. A wide range of ciders, perries, wines and mead were on show, many of which had not been seen before in the local area.



[Roy and Don join Claire, Kevin & John]

In response, landlord Kevin Machin said he was delighted to receive these awards and was somewhat surprised, given the tough competition recently from other much improved local pubs. He felt that the Engineers Arms had needed to 'raise the bar' further in terms of quality and service of 'real ale', and as such all pub staff now received full cellar management training, which benefits pub service and provides a stepping stone for staff who might later want to become licensees. He hoped that CAMRA too would continue to 'raise the bar' and keep pressure on local pubs to improve their products and service. Finally, Kevin, Claire and John were joined by the chairmen of South and North Beds branches, Roy Chatto and Don Allan for a photo and the proceedings closed as Kevin thanked all the CAMRA members for attending.

John Goodlet

Visit to Bamberg 12-17th May

Seven members flew from Heathrow to Frankfurt and then by train to the historic town of Bamberg for a very memorable visit to this centre of beer excellence. Bamberg has independent breweries producing over 40 beers which are available at the bars. They are unfiltered and gravity fed. Bamberg is a baroque city that has been declared a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1993. Rauchbier is brewed using malt produced from barley which has been kilned over burning Beechwood obtained from local forests. The most famous is Schlenkerla's Aecht Schlenkerla Rauchbier from the Heller brewery; it was enjoyed at the Schlenkerla tavern on the Dominikaner Strasse in the Old Town. Bamberg is home to eight breweries, Brauerei Fässla, Brauerei Greifenklau, Brauerei Heller-Trum (Schlenkerla), Brauerei Kaiserdom, Keesmann Bräu, Klosterbräu, Mahrs Bräu and Brauerei Spezial, and a brewpub Ambräusianum.

Friday:- First stop was the Schlenkerla tavern, most famous for smoked beer, where we had the famous Aecht Schlenkerla Rauchbier Märzen from the wooden cask. Then next door to Gasthausbrauerei Ambräusianum which had big copper brewery equipment on display, where Hell, Dunkel & Weizen beers were available. We then visited the Zum Dominikaner.



Saturday:- After a boat trip around the harbour we went to Brauerei Spezial which had Rauchbier Lager, Rauchbier Märzen, Weissbier beers available and then across the road to Brauerei Fässla where Lagerbier, Weizla dunkel, Weizla hell were available. In the evening we tried Gasthausbrauerei Ambräusianum

Sunday:- We took the train out to Forchheim where we visited Brauerei Eichhorn. Beers available Eichhorn Vollbier, Eichhorn Edel-Pils, and then to Brauerei Neder for a Pils. On the way back we stopped at Buttenheim to try St. Georgen & Bräu Kellerbier and finally to Löwenbräu where the beers were Löwenbräu Ungespundetes Lagerbier. Ungespundetes means 'Unbunded' referring to the bung being left off when it is fermenting this results in a less gassy final beer. The last evening was spent at the Hofbraeu



Monday:- Back to the Schlenkerla tavern and across the road to the Alt Ringlein which had Rauchbier from Shlenkerla and a special also a Kellerbier and Weizen. In the evening we went to the Zum Sternla.

A very enjoyable visit where a wide range of German beers can be drunk and where a good range of food is available in a relaxed atmosphere in a very beautiful city.

Clifford Luff

Tour de Bedfordshire Est

On Sunday 17th July a seven man group of intrepid CAMRA cyclists, plus a Real Ale supporter yet to be converted to the joys of CAMRA membership, assembled in Biggleswade for an attack on the roads of East Bedfordshire. In the best traditions of the less well known “Tour de France” they had taken the precaution of identifying suitable feeding stations or, more accurately “drink stops”, *en route*. The majority had cycled into the headwind across Biggleswade Common from Sandy (all the potential members of the yet to be formed “Sir William Peel Temperance Cycling Society” name still to be formally ratified) but their efforts were overshadowed by those who had come from as far afield as Tempsford (Tony Edwards) and Langford (Chris Freeman) and South Beds Secretary, Mike Coombes, who had cycled from Maulden.

As with all “mass start” sporting events the beginning was a little bit of a shambles with only three of the group at the agreed starting point, the Stratton House Hotel, sampling several fine ales including Green Jack’s Orange Wheat. The rest of the group had popped into the Golden Pheasant to try York’s Constantine and Older-shaw’s Byards Leap, both in excellent condition. Just as the *platoon* was about to regroup at the Stratton Houses, the skies took a turn for the worse and decided to unleash a deluge on Biggleswade which forced both parties to continue sheltering in their chosen pubs, apart from non-CAMRA Barry who had cycled across Biggleswade Common during the worst of it nursing a hangover from a party the previous evening.

When the rain eased the two groups got together for a gentle pedal over to the March Hare at Dunton – well it was gentle for some but others had to dash off into the distance as though they were determined to win the *maillot jaune* (Yellow Jersey). Unfortunately one of the riders arrived at the pub with a mechanical problem which was partially fixed by Al and his trusted multi-tool. After the long uphill pull to the Dunton plateau (well I’m trying to make it sound as exciting as I can as East Bedfordshire can offer neither the Pyrenees nor Alps) we quenched our thirsts with our chosen energy drink – some had Buntingford’s excellent Czech Mate while others had Nethergate’s Augustinian and Cliff Quay’s Anchor Bitter.

We also had the opportunity to hear landlord John’s plans for the future – particularly the much anticipated brewery and the possible provision of a village shop and coffee shop on the premises, plus outdoor repainting and improvements to the garden. It won’t be too long before we’ll possibly be directing people to, “...look for the yellow building just past the church...” .



Les and Heleena welcomed us at the John o' Gaunt after our downhill run into Sutton. Woodforde's Wherry was the order of the day for some, while others tried Oakham Inferno or Black Sheep Bitter – all quite delightful. It was quite a surprise to discover that the Bar had been redecorated in the past few weeks and the previously black beams had been stripped back to the original wood.

The skittle table was also missing but will presumably be restored when the decorating is finished. We also got a very helpful lady from the pub, referred to by Les as the pub's "official photographer", to record the *peloton* at rest before heading off to Potton. As can be seen from the accompanying picture the sun was shining and the little bit of rain we'd had when we set off was now a distant memory.



[L to R Chris Freeman, Barry Price, Al Britcher, Barry Giddings, Ian Lemin, Archie Campbell, Mike Coombes and Tony Edwards]



The Rising Sun was reached within a few minutes and the weather was so pleasant that we sat outside enjoying the sunshine entertained by a little chap who was seeking a cat which he thought he had seen under one of the cars in the car-park. Unfortunately none of us had the energy or the inclination to help him. The beers sampled were Newby Wyke's Orsino, Potton Shambles, Oakham Citra, Titanic White Star and Wolf's Lupus Lupus and again all were in very good condition.

After leaving the Rising Sun the group split into two with six of the riders returning along Old Bedford Road and the bridleways at the back of Sandy Transmitter whilst the other two went by road through Everton. Only one rider had a problem when his chain came off at very low speed just where the bridleway comes out opposite the entrance to the RSPB and I'm sure that something in the energy drinks I'd sampled all afternoon caused me to fall off but I came to no harm!

The *peloton* reassembled in the Sir William Peel where we could now relax with a pint although Tony, Chris and Mike still had to return to Tempsford, Langford and Maulden respectively. Beers sampled were North Yorkshire Brewing Co's Mayhem and Mighty Oak's Toe Wrestler. The always excellent ales were accompanied by landlady Lindsey's free Sunday afternoon spread of cheese and biscuits. Those of us who treat our bodies like temples were able to resist the cheese but after a sixteen mile ride a biscuit or two came in handy.



Thanks to all the landlords, landladies and bar staff for both the excellent beer and hospitality we received at each of their hostelries and their assistance with jogging my memory to let me know each of the beers which were available on Sunday. I think it would be fair to say that everybody who went on the ride thoroughly enjoyed themselves and I thank them for turning up and making it a success as well as helping me compile this report. Undoubtedly the exercise will be repeated at some time in the future.

Barry Price

DIARY DATES

- SEPT.** 6th, Branch Meeting, Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade, 8pm
- OCT.** 11th, Branch Meeting, Sir William Peel, Sandy, 8pm
- NOV.** 5th, East Anglian Regional Meeting, Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade 12 noon
22nd, Branch Meeting, Rising Sun, Potton, 8pm
- DEC.** 9th, Branch Xmas Social, Engineers Arms, Henlow, 7.30pm

BEER FESTIVALS

- Sep.** 9th-18th. East Beds 40th Anniversary Beer Festival, in 8 pubs across the branch, see centre pages for more details
- 9th-10th. Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival, Burgess Hall, St. Ivo Recreation Centre, Westwood Road, St. Ives **CAMRA**
- 22nd-24th. The 20th Letchworth Beer Festival
Plinston Hall, Broadway, Letchworth **CAMRA**
- 28th-1st Oct. St. Albans Beer Festival, Alban Arena Civic Centre, St. Albans **CAMRA**
- Oct.** 5th-8th. The 34th Bedford Beer Festival, Corn Exchange St. Paul's Square, Bedford **CAMRA**
- 19th-23rd. 16th Henlow Beer Festival, Engineers Arms, Henlow
- 20th-23rd. Trafalgar Beer Festival, Half Moon, Queen St, Hitchin
- Nov.** 22nd-26th The Rochford Beer & Cider Festival, Freight House, Rochford, Essex **CAMRA**

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SG9 9 3AA
Directions: In village centre off A246
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Owner: Free House
CAMRA Branch: Beds
Bodgers Bitter [H]
Guest Ales: Beer Range Varies [H]
Pubs & Restaurants



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

March Hare visit to Buntingford Brewery

On the 16th July, 31 customers of the March Hare, Dunton visited the Buntingford Brewery at Therfield on a rather wet day for a talk from Steve Banfield the brewer on all aspects of brewing beer, plus an overview of his brewery (in his usual amusing and sarcastic way) and followed by a barbeque.

The brewery was formed during July 2001 in a small industrial unit in Buntingford and afterwards for a brief period, the beers were brewed in Leicestershire, before a new brewery was assembled in a converted barn located on the edge of Therfield Heath, near Royston.



It is an idyllic site where water is taken from a borehole and waste water is returned via a pond where insects fully clean the water. Rare grasses and reeds are placed around the pond where rare birds for the area have been seen.

Three beers were available for sampling, Czech Mate, Apollo and Highwayman IPA. We didn't quite manage to drink the 3 casks available dry. Catherine was busy with the barbeque and supplied plenty of food for us under cover of a lean-to from a barn situated near the brewery.



Luckily the weather improved as the afternoon wore on so visitors could visit the pond and surrounding area whilst supping their beers.

Soon it was time to leave and after thanking Steve and Catherine and leaving plenty of food and beer behind, we left as the sun came out from behind the leaden skies.

Let us look forward to another enjoyable visit hopefully in better weather to this brewery in the not to distant future.

Clifford Luff



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**Celebrating
26 years in
the Good Beer
Guide**



40th Anniversary—Beer Festival

Four decades of brewing

By the early 1970s the British brewing scene was not a happy hunting ground for lovers of beer. Years of acquisition, merger and closure had seen production concentrated into the hands of six national giants. Worse, almost all of their production was bland, identikit fizz. Around 70 independent brewers remained but, for many, years of neglect, lack of investment and identity crisis were beginning to tell. Takeovers and closures of the remaining family firms continued at a high rate until the mid 1980's. Today, only half continue to trade. Yet without CAMRA, things may have been worse. The renewed interest in quality beer following its foundation enabled those brewers who had remained loyal to the production of distinctive cask ales, such as **Adnams**, to find new markets, while others, such as **Fullers**, who had begun to convert many of their pubs to keg-only establishments, backtracked and started to promote cask beers once again. In the 8 East Beds pubs participating in the CAMRA 40th Anniversary Beer Festival, we are pleased to offer a selection of products from established family brewers who have weathered these turbulent times. Some are beers first brewed long before the inception of CAMRA. Others have been launched in more recent times, including the new offering from **St Austell**.

As well as helping to preserve some of our brewery heritage, CAMRA has been instrumental in creating a market in which a new wave of British breweries have emerged and, in many cases, thrived. The first new players for decades emerged in the mid-late 1970s, but it was not until the 1980's that good numbers of new 'micro' breweries appeared. At first, and for a variety of reasons, the casualty rate among these new ventures was high. But those that have endured include some of the most significant players in the modern British beer industry. Many, such as **Woodfordes** and **Hopback** are not 'micros' any more, but producers of substantial volumes of ale. However, great beers remain at the heart of these successful businesses and these, alongside other pioneers such as **Nethergate** and **Orkney**, will be available at participating pubs.

The 1990s saw a continuation of the micro revolution, with many more new producers firing up their mash tuns. Due to more available knowledge on brewing and marketing techniques, the newer breweries have endured rather better than the 80's pioneers, with relatively low rates of closure. Significantly, breweries emerging at this time have been some of the leading exponents of diversification of beer styles. In the 1970s and 80's, even the most beloved of the traditional family brewers were not great on innovation. Almost without fail, the product 'range' was a bitter, sometimes a mild or stronger bitter and, if you were really lucky, a strong winter ale. Brewers such as **Castle Rock** and **Oakham** have helped to launch and popularise a new style of beer – golden ale – while others such as **Hambleton** have been successful in bringing back older styles such as stout and porter; for many years extinct as cask ales. A range of these new and retro styles will be available from our participating pubs.

The past decade has been a buoyant one for cask ale. Sales are up and so are the numbers of breweries. Nearly 750 are currently operating in the UK: more than at any time in the last hundred years. Many of these new breweries continue to be highly innovative. The likes of **Dark Star**, **Thornbridge** and **Otley** have produced styles – American IPA, Imperial Russian Stout - and used ingredients – fruits and wheat – previously unknown in modern British brewing. We hope to feature a few of these in participating pubs. Whether you seek an old favourite brew, obscure ales from far flung corners of Britain or award winning local beer from the **Potton** brewery, we hope that the E Beds CAMRA 40th Anniversary Beer Festival will provide you with a happy and enjoyable drinking experience.

The Festival

Eight pubs were asked to participate in the 40th Anniversary Celebrations, some large and some small, to represent a mix of town and village life in East Bedfordshire. Rather than organise a CAMRA run beer festival, which would to some extent have been in competition with our local pubs, we wanted our celebrations to be inside our pubs. Local CAMRA members have put together an initial list of 40 breweries, which we felt 'best represented' the four decades that CAMRA has been operating. The response from the pubs was so positive that we are likely to exceed expectations and offer over 40 breweries and 50+ beers during the 10 day 'rolling festival' from Fri 9th Sep to Sun 18th Sep.

Branch Vice-Chairman Tony Morris is currently liaising with the licensees about which breweries they will feature and helping to select the ales to ensure a good mix of styles, strengths and geographical sourcing, including LocALe. A full list of beers on sale will be prepared before the start of the festival and distributed to all participating pubs and placed on the East Beds CAMRA website. For now I can reveal which pubs will take part in the festival and there is a profile of each pub below, along with a draft list of which breweries these pubs hope to have available at the festival. Look out for more information in the coming weeks about the festival on pub posters, e-mail newsletters and our branch website www.eastbedscamra.org.uk.

The Pubs

Golden Pheasant, Biggleswade

This pub was first licensed in 1851, although the building itself is much older. It has been owned by Charles Wells since 1876 and offers a cosy environment amidst wooden beams and low ceilings, giving it a unique character. Up to 6 handpumps combine a mix of beers from Wells & Young, plus guests ales from across the nation. Quiz and chess evenings are popular. Handy for access to bus and railway station. East Beds branch Pub of the Year for 2009.

Licensee: John Walsh

Festival Breweries:- Buntingford, Cotswold Spring, Elgoods, Oldershaw, St. Austell, Wells

Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade

This building was originally an old manor house until sold in 1940, when it was used as a local Civil Defence HQ. It later became Council Offices, until 1979 when it was sold and after a conversion, it re-opened as the current hotel in 1981. The hotel is now free of the tie and offers up to 4 constantly changing ales, where a porter or stout can often be found. The hotel runs a summer beer festival and is fast becoming a popular haunt for local CAMRA members. Meals are available every day in the bar or restaurant.

Bar Management: Ben Perkins & Hotel Manageress: Kim Chalkley

Festival Breweries:- Adnams, Buntingford, Mauldons, Oakham plus others

March Hare, Dunton

There has been a pub here since 1840, and for most of its life it was known as the Wheatsheaf, and privately owned until 1891 when it was bought by Fordhams brewery of Ashwell. In 1962 it transferred to Whitbreads and by the mid 1980's it was renamed to the March Hare. More recently it was owned by Admiral Taverns until its closure in 2008. In August 2010, the current licensees rescued the derelict pub, and after a refurbishment, it re-opened it as a freehouse and it remains the only pub in the village. It now offers up to 4 ales featuring local & regional micro-breweries. Popular with local clubs who meet there and fans of quizzes, pub games and music.

Licensee: John & Janice Pritchett

Local Bus: E4

Festival Breweries:- B&T, Buntingford, Elgoods, Hydes

Engineers Arms, Henlow

First established as an unnamed beerhouse in 1830, it later got its name from a landlord of the 1880's, who also worked as an engineer maintaining a stationary engine in a local flour mill. It was owned and operated by Charles Wells for over a 100 years, until bought by the current licensee in 1993 and run as a freehouse. It features up to 10 handpumps with a vast range of ever changing ales, cider and perry. Local drinkers enjoy a mix of games, sports and live music. This pub has become a mecca for real ale fans and won many CAMRA awards, and is currently the Bedfordshire Pub of the Year for 2011.

Licensee: Kevin Machin & Claire Sturgeon

Local Bus: 82, M1

Festival Breweries:- Allendale, Batemans, Blue Monkey, Brains, Burton Bridge, Castle Rock, Crouch Vale, Hambleton, Holdens, Potbelly, Red Squirrel, Titanic, Wye Valley plus others

Rising Sun, Potton

First licensed in 1836 and run from 1897 by Phillips brewery, Royston. By 1962 it had been taken over by Whitbreads and more recently after a brief spell as a freehouse, it was purchased by Charles Wells, who allow the current licensees a lot of leeway in sourcing their ales. Up to 6 handpumps have Wells Eagle IPA plus 5 guests, where many of the beers come from micro-breweries across the country, with Oakham Ales proving very popular with local drinkers. The pub runs two beer festivals on May and August bank holiday weekends, plus it has an extensive food menu. East Beds branch Pub of the Year in 2010.

Licensee: Matt Dunkley

Local Bus: E1, E2

Festival Breweries:- Abbeydale, Bartrams, Hopback, Jarrow, Oakham, Orkney, Otley, Palmers, Panther, Thornbridge plus others

Sir William Peel, Sandy

This pub opened as the Lord Nelson in 1838, and was later renamed in 1994 after the naval hero, who also created the railway extension from Sandy to Potton. For a few years between 2002-07 a small micro-brewery 'Old Stables Brewing Co' operated behind the pub. Now a popular drinking haven in the town with a Batemans beer, 3 guest ales and 3 or 4 ciders.

Licensee: Lindsey Hehir

Festival Breweries:- Batemans, Coach House, Dark Star, Nethergate, Oakham, plus others

Coach & Horses, Stotfold

First opened as a beerhouse in 1844 and later ended up in the Whitbreads estate. This lovely little pub appeared a certainty to close a few years ago, until rescued by a local builder. It now offers Wells Eagle IPA, plus 2 guest ales and is set to expand. Plans are being drawn up to enlarge the pub and create additional lounge seating and a dedicated games/sports area, plus more accommodation upstairs. The pub offers a breakfast café service and has a new menu of competitively priced pub meals.

Licensee: Tracey Dobson

Local Bus: 97

Festival Breweries:- To Be Announced

John o'Gaunt, Sutton

This pub was established in 1835 under the Lord of the Manor, Sir John Montague Burgoyne, and it remains the only pub in the parish. It was sold by auction in 1939, and bought by Biggles-wade brewery, Wells & Winch. It later transferred to Greene King in 1961 and in more recent years it was run by Admiral Taverns, until bought by a local builder. It is now a freehouse with 4 ales, often featuring Fullers, Black Sheep and Woodfordes. The interior of the pub is now listed as part of CAMRA's national Inventory and it has been in the last 26 editions of the Good Beer guide. Northamptonshire skittles, petanque, folk music and visits by the Morris Men are popular.

Licensee: Les Ivell

Local Bus: E1

Festival Breweries:- Black Sheep, Fullers, Woodfordes plus others

Transport & Events

Branch members are busy trying to organise some transport, probably minibuses in order to take groups of members and guests/friends out to visit some of the pubs on the featured weekends. Ideally, we would like to put out a trip on Saturday Sep 10th afternoon (12-5pm) & also evening (6-11pm), plus Sunday 11th afternoon (12-5pm) and repeat the trips on the following weekend Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th. As eight pubs is too many to cover in a single day, we will likely cover 4 or 5 pubs in one trip. So you could do half the pubs on one weekend and the other half the following weekend. Using Biggleswade as the hub for all trips for members & guests coming in by public transport (bus and/or train), then one trip might start from the Golden Pheasant, with a visit to Dunton, Stotfold & Henlow, then back to Biggleswade for a final drink at the Stratton House Hotel. A second trip might start from the Stratton House Hotel, with a visit to Sutton, Pottton & Sandy, then back to Biggleswade for a final drink at the Golden Pheasant.

We hope to have more details on transport arrangements and costs available nearer the time, so please look out for more details on pub posters, branch e-mail newsletters & our website. These trips are not restricted to CAMRA members, please try to bring along some friends and fill the buses up. Where possible the branch will endeavour to subsidise the cost for CAMRA members. We are also inviting local members from North Herts, North Beds and South Beds too. If they can get to and from Biggleswade, they can join in with our bus trips or they may choose to lay on their own transport and select which pubs they want to visit. The branch would like to arrange at least one media event and seek coverage from local newspapers or TV stations. We will also organise a mid week social visit to Sutton & Dunton.

The Breweries

This table is an indication of breweries featured between the 8 participating pubs during the 9th-18th Sep. Not all breweries (or ales) will be available in all pubs and these breweries and beers will change throughout the duration of the festival. Some breweries may be added or removed during the ordering process. Further details of the products stocked by the participating pubs will be available from the pubs and the East Beds CAMRA website nearer the time. But if there is a particular beer you want to try, please phone ahead to check availability prior to your visit.

<1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Adnams	B&T	Abbeydale	Allendale
Batemans	Burton Bridge	Bartrams	Blue Monkey
Brains	Crouch Vale	Black Sheep	Buntingford
Elgoods	Hopback	Castle Rock	Cotswold Spring
Everards	Nethergate	Coach House	Dawkings
Fullers	Orkney	Dark Star	Jarrow
Holden	Titanic	Hambleton	Otley
Palmers	Woodfordes	Oakham	Panther
St Austell	Wye Valley	Oldershaw	Potbelly
Wells		Pottton	Red Squirrel
			Thornbridge



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.

The *posh* end of Peterborough

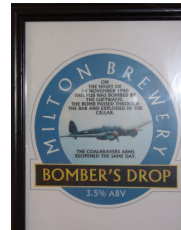
On Saturday 25th June some branch members departed by train from Arlesey & Biggleswade to meet up in Peterborough for a walk across the river to the area west of the football ground, home to Peterborough United FC [aka The Posh]. The meeting point was the Beehive on Albert Place, close to the ring road and opposite Park Inn. Although this pub was more of a bistro style outlet, there was range of three ales on offer. We ignored Fullers London Pride as we can get it locally and opted to try Nectar Ale from new local micro-brewery Castor Ales and also an old favourite Waggledance from Wells & Young portfolio. Both ales were excellent, the staff were very friendly, the décor was bright with quite possibly the 'poshest' [no pun intended] toilets I have seen in a while. Clearly the pub had been refurbished to a high standard in recent years. Although built in the 1850's, it closed as a pub in the mid 1980's, some 8 years later it was refurbished and re-opened in 1994 but it not last long, passing into the hands of a pub company and closing again. It was re-opened again in July 2010 as a freehouse by the current owners, a job well done.



As time ticked on and no sign of any other members joining us, our quartet of Jo & Chris Freeman, new member Mel and myself headed across the river and down Oundle Road to the Cherry Tree. Again there were several ales on tap and we duly ordered 3 pints of Digfield's - Barnwell Bitter and 1 pint of Taylor's - Landlord, accompanied by a round of sandwiches each, as we knew the next three pubs on our tour, would not be serving food during the afternoon. The pub was fairly quiet, but this gave us a chance to have a good look around this 200 year old pub, which had been knocked through into a one bar layout in 1988.

As our hunger abated, it was time to wash the lunch down with more beer, so we headed off down Oundle Road to the Palmerston Arms. One look at the range of beers was enough to decide, it was time to experiment with halves. Over three rounds we worked our way through Holden's - Jungle Jim, Bateman's - Salem Porter, Wharfebank - Slingers Gold, Castle Rock - Harvest Pale Ale, Hook Norton - Haymaker and the pick of the bunch the wonderful citrus flavour of Oakham Ales - Bishops Farewell. All the ales were served straight from the barrel and in sight of the customers, as the cellar room was in fact behind the bar with a glass panel to view through. I tried to take a couple of pictures of the stillage area, but only succeeded in getting a lot of reflection from the lights, however the landlord kindly allowed me to slip into the cellar room and take some photos. It is easy to see why this Batemans pub has been 10 years in the GBG and has many CAMRA awards on display.

As mid afternoon approached we said farewell to Mel, who disappeared off towards the cathedral to meet a friend and/or confess his sins, and the remaining trio ambled into a housing estate towards the Swiss Cottage on Grove Street. We exchanged a few worried looks, as having passed one banner proclaiming it to be an Irish pub, we then saw the name 'John Smiths' on the pub sign. We stuck our heads in the door and spotted a lively group of local drinkers, so in we went and were delighted to see two real ales at the bar, the rather good Roosters – Yankee and Adnams – Lighthouse. We supped the ales in the patio area, soaking up a brief spell of sunshine amidst the mainly cloudy day. We didn't linger long as I was looking forward to my first visit to the next pub, one I had heard excellent reports about, the Coalheaver's Arms, on Park St.



This pub has 4 ales from the Milton Brewery in Cambridge, plus up to 4 guest ales. What a treat, as I recalled a visit a few months earlier to the Devonshire Arms in Cambridge the newest Milton pub in the city. The memories seemed to trigger a 'Homer Simpson' style dribble down my chin as I salivated at the thought of those ales. Once inside we made a beeline for three Milton ales Icarus, Sparta and Tiki and although all three ales were a similar straw colour, the tastes were quite different, a mixture of sweet, zesty and crisp flavours. I took a little wander round this one roomed pub and chuckled as a I spotted a poster for a beer which I thought said 'Brewer's Droop'. Once I had cleaned my glasses and looked again, the beer was actually 'Bombers Drop' a house ale often on sale commemorating the Coalheavers Arms as being the only pub in Peterborough to be bombed during WW2. Realising that my eyesight was beginning to succumb to the afternoon session, I joined Chris in finishing off the visit with the wonderfully dark and chocolate tones of Miltons – Nero and Jo tried the Brentwood – Hope & Glory, a superb pub with friendly customers.

Our final stop of the day was back at the riverside for a Dutch barge that was built in 1907 and is now moored on the River Nene near Town Bridge, where it opened as Charters in 1991. A huge range of up to 12 ales were available, a mixture of Oakham Ales and guests. I opted for a pint of Titanic – Golden Age, Chris went for Oakham – White Dwarf and Jo slipped back to old habits and had a cider. We were overwhelmed with hunger again and decided to order down two mixed plates of starters & snacks to share from the Chinese restaurant upstairs. We felt revived briefly by the food and the mixture of satay and thai sweet chilli sauce left a tingle on the tongue. We grabbed one more half pint each and retired outside into the cool evening air. What we drank in that last round, I cannot recall, I had lost the will to pick up my pen and make a note. Later we wandered back to the train station and had a snooze on the homeward bound train.

A Bridge Too Far—Topsham

On a recent visit to South East Devon, with the 2011 Good Beer Guide in its customary role as Tourist Guide, it was a delight to discover the Bridge Inn, Topsham. This small town is easily accessible by public transport (Bus and Rail) from both Exeter in the North and Exmouth in the South and the Inn is only a short distance from both the railway station and bus stops. The Bridge is a large pink building which was possibly originally built in the 16th Century - with later additions - and has been in the same family since 1897. It is only a shot-putter's stone throw from the hurly-burly of the M5 Motorway but it nestles on the bank of the River Clyst quietly observing the ebb and flow of the river. It is initially slightly disconcerting to watch a river change direction and start flowing upstream, but the Clyst is subject to the tide in the Exe estuary. The seating around the car park is a very pleasant area from which to watch the river and its wildlife.

The pub entrance is from the car park/outdoor seating area up four or five stone steps which lead into a central corridor to the right. Immediately to the left off is a naturally lit room, known as the Tap Room, furnished with chairs, tables and benches. Books are available for those who like to read with their pint and above the doorway is an interesting 3 part window extolling the virtues of "Kennaways" which was apparently "Scotland's Best Whisky".



[exterior with bar]

The next room down the corridor, on the right, is the Parlour or "Inner Sanctum" and reserved for the family and their invited guests. It's a small room with a large settle similar to a high-backed church pew, a table and a couple of stools & a window seat backing onto the car park. This room leads directly to the cellar which is down a few steps and slightly reminiscent of the arrangement in the "Cock" at Broom with one major difference – the serving hatch is directly onto the car park obviating the need to enter the pub for your drinks. There is also a serving hatch in the Parlour which faces onto the second room on the right which is the dimly lit "Snug".



[tap room]



[bay window and snug]



[corridor, parlour entrance
& snug window]

An odd feature as you approach the Snug along the corridor is a large half-glazed bow window slightly protruding into the corridor which widens at this point. Behind the bow is a large settle which effectively creates one wall of the Snug. The rest of the room is an assortment of tables, chairs and benches and a massive fireplace. There is little natural light in this room and I can imagine that, in winter time, a roaring fire would make the place very cosy.

As far as ale is concerned there is an ever changing range and those available are shown on a dated and printed list both at the side of the entrance to the parlour and the outside serving hatch. When we visited there was Adnams Broadside, Teignworthy Strawberries and Cream, Blue Anchor Spingo Special (quite a surprise to realise that the Blue Anchor Brewery was now exporting from Cornwall to "England"!), Branscombe Vale's Summa'that & Branoc, Exmoor Gold and Jollyboat Mainbrace available and those we tasted were all in excellent condition. O'Hanlon's Stormstay had been blown onto the rocks before our arrival. Although there doesn't seem to be any formal "Off Sales" I discovered that the bar staff were quite happy to appropriate any suitable vessel (in our case a two litre lemonade bottle) and give you a carry-out. Extremely useful for those unfortunate enough not to arrive by public transport and who may need a "tincture" later in the day. Food is restricted to pies and pasties and the opening hours of the pub hark back to when I started drinking in the Sixties: Lunchtime 12-2; Monday to Thursday Evenings: 6 – 10.30pm; Friday & Saturday Evenings: 6 – 11pm; Sunday Evenings: 7 – 10.30pm.

Next door is the Twenties era "Exbourne" bungalow, owned by the same family as the pub, available for weekly or three night lets. The inn is on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors, it is Grade II listed & unique in being the only pub in the UK which has received an "official" visit from the Queen (rather than being one of those to which she nips out *incognito* on a Friday night for a few bebies). It also has friendly and helpful bar staff and an amiable clientele.




[view from garden]

It's well worth a visit if you are in the region but the fact that it is a round trip of around 420 miles from Sandy surely puts it into the category of "A Bridge Too Far" for a regular visit as far. In summary The Bridge at Topsham is a "gem" which shouldn't be overlooked if you're anywhere near it.

Barry Price





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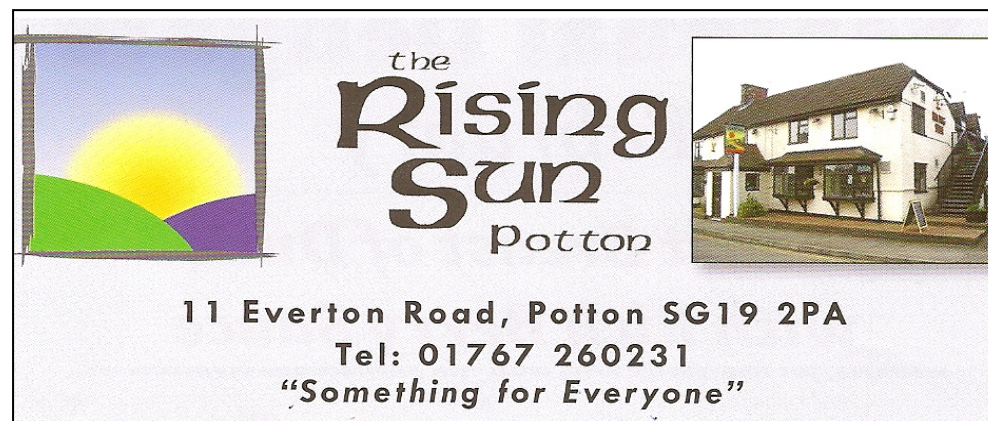
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Stratton House Hotel Beer Festival

A beer festival was held at the Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade on 1st-3rd July and with a 'Caribbean theme'. So out came the loud shirts, sunglasses and little umbrellas for the drinks as revellers filed into the marquee in the car park at the rear of the hotel. I dropped in mid Saturday afternoon and found a lively crowd including families enjoying the sunshine and the festivities. I quickly got hold of a 'beer menu' and set about sampling the ales, which were conveniently colour coded and grouped by strength and price. I have to admit the prices were extremely good value, with the majority of ales under 5% selling at £2.50 a pint and the stronger ales at £2.80.

Whilst deciding on my strategy of starting with low gravity beers and working my way up to finish on a couple of strong ales, I bumped into fellow East Beds member Chris Freeman. Between us, we tackled the list which had a good representation of local & East Anglian breweries. Buntingford, Tring, Red Squirrel, Nethergates, Milton, Potbelly and B&T had multiples ales available. From further away came beers from Dark Star (Sussex), Salopian (Shropshire), Skinners (Truro) plus others. I was very much impressed by Milton beers, having discovered them on a recent trip around Cambridge, so I started with their Justinian 3.9%, a golden ale with orange overtones. It went down so quickly (as the first pint often does) that I followed it with Salopian's Oracle 4.0% a slightly sweet and very hoppy ale, which I should have seen coming.



With second pint in hand, we wandered around to see what was happening. Customers seemed to be enjoying a variety of drinks, and a closer look into the marquee revealed quite a few ciders and perries, some from Westons and others including Black Dragon 7.2% & Fiery Fox 6.5% from Welsh producer Gwynt Y Ddraig and sourced via Red Squirrel. Bottled beers were also abundant, with many international brands including Timmermans (Belgium) and Goose Island (Chicago), plus a personal favourite of mine Kwak 8.4% from Belgian brewery Pauwel. But this was not a day to mix cider and beer, so I returned to the bar and collected a pint of another Milton beer Pegasus 4.1% which was copper coloured and a good mix of fruit and malt flavours.

As I left the marquee, there was a lot of cheering and laughter coming from one of the attractions. I strolled over to check out the fun and found the Caribbean version of a 'bucking bronco' or 'ride the bull' rodeo event. Only this was a surf board where various members of the public took turns to try to stay on it as it undulated and gyrated, and gradually got faster and faster to the surfing tunes of the Beach Boys. Of course, everyone fell off in the end, thankfully onto a safe bouncy castle style floor, but there were some impressive rides, I guess they had not been on the cider yet. Well it was time for another beer, so back into the marquee, where I gambled on Dark Star's Saison 4.5%, which was billed as a cask version of a Belgian farmhouse ale, normally produced for harvest time. It uses a mixture of saaz, styrian and Belgian goldings hops and combined with the specially imported 'Saison' yeast, from which it gets its name, the outcome is a distinctive dry ale with a slightly sour taste, common among many Belgian ales – yummy.

As Chris pedalled off into the evening and home to cook his dinner, I began to feel hungry. Next to our erratic surf board was the food stand, with an array of snacks and hot meals, including a barbecue. I opted for the rather appropriately themed 'goat curry' with rice and peas, very tasty and just right for soaking up some beer. What more beer? Why not? This time I settled on an old favourite from Crouch Vale, Amarillo 5.0% a lovely golden beer with hints of citrus and spice. I sat outside enjoying the last of the late evening sunshine and contemplated a return home by train to Arlesey and a 45 minute walk back to Lower Stondon. Then I thought the better of it and phoned a friend with the old line 'do you fancy joining me for a couple of beers' followed up rather cheekily with 'by the way I'm in Biggleswade and can you drop me home later'. Well, you can only ask, and I held my breath waiting for the reply or a terse refusal. Thankfully, it was 'sure why not, nothing else going on tonight'. Yippee this gave me a green light to hit the strong ales and not think about a walk home. So back to the marquee and a pint of Red Squirrel's London Porter 5.0% brought a smile to my face.

Porter is probably my favourite style of beer and this one was a heady and creamy mix of dark malt, chocolate and liquorice flavours. I drank this one slowly, partly to thoroughly enjoy the full flavour and partly to avoid chasing the goat curry down too quickly, which might yield an altogether different 'heady mix' at a later date. My lift arrived soon afterwards and he had a pint of Red Squirrel RSX which was a suitable low gravity ale, while I finished the porter. My final ale of the night was the aptly titled 'Colossus 5.6% from Milton brewery a great one to finish my visit and I left the other revellers to the steely tones of a Caribbean disco now under way in the marquee. My congratulations to Ben Perkins, Kim Chalkley and all the staff for putting on such a fun family event and serving some quality ales to boot.

John Goodlet

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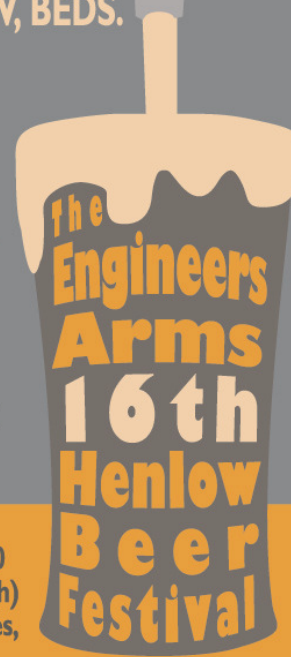
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