



the

FREE

Casket

Campaign for Real Ale

January 2012



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



Pubs fighting Back - Red Lion, Potton re-opens

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The Casket

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A quick word from the Editor

Well it has been a exciting second half to 2011, with the branch running a pub based beer festival in September. A full report is on Page 14, but the feedback so far from the pubs Involved is encouraging and it seems that we shall be running another festival in the future. This was followed up by the wonderful news, that the Engineers Arms, Henlow had made it through to the National Final of CAMRA's Pub of the Year competition. There is more information on Page 6 and on behalf of East Beds branch, we wish them 'good luck' in the final.

As we head into the Olympic year of 2012, we can look forward to the Engineers Arms Cider & Country Wine festival in February and also the 29th Luton Beer & Cider Festival. The latest beer list for Luton suggests 113 different ales, 36 of which will be on the LocALe bar. There will be about 18 ciders and a selection of perries, plus some English country wines. If you have a sweet tooth, check out the 'Merry Berry Chocolate' stall selling very special hand made chocolates and truffles. Volunteers [CAMRA members] welcome, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings.

We are currently putting together a list of social events for the first half of 2012, watch out for more details in newsletters and on our branch website. If you enjoy cider and perry, we shall be campaigning throughout the year to encourage more pubs to stock real cider and perry. I wish you all a Happy New Year.

John Goodlet

The Golden Pheasant

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East Beds CAMRA Pub of the Year 2009

Telephone John or Mavis on 01767 313650
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LOCAL PUB NEWS

Red Lion, Potton

The Red Lion re-opened 2nd December after a 2 year closure with Tom & Mary Kilroy, formerly of the Old Coach House taking on a short term lease from Punch Taverns, although the pub is still for sale. The pub has been refurbished and an extension can be used for meetings and buffets. Opening hours are Mon-Thu 12-2.30 & 5-11, Fri-Sun 12-11pm. There will be regular live music and a quiz on every second Thursday evening. GK IPA and Sharps Doom Bar are the regular ales, plus Weston's Old Rosie cider on special offer at £3.00.



Old Coach House, Potton

A warm welcome to Chris Woodcraft and Belle Burke, who have taken over after a short closure for a refit. There are 12 en-suite bedrooms and the bar and dining areas have been redesigned and redecorated. There are 4 hand-pumps featuring Potton and Wells & Youngs beers. The food menu emphasises fresh seasonal and local produce. New expanded opening times (including morning teas & coffee) are: Mon to Sat 9.30am - 11pm; Sunday 10am - 10pm.

Meals available Mon to Sat 12 - 2.30pm; 6 - 9pm: Sun 12 - 3pm. Check new website: www.coachhousepotton.co.uk



Crown Hotel, Biggleswade

Paul and Lucinda Granger arrived at the Crown during the autumn on a 1 year tenancy, with option to extend on behalf of holding agent 'Firkin Pub Co.' They are focusing on restoring the hotel and food side of the business. There are 11 rooms to let, a function room and the main bar area is much brighter now. Opening hours are Mon-Thu 10-10.30pm, Fri-Sat 10-11.30pm, Sun 12-4. Traditional pub lunches available every day, except Monday—no evening meals at present. At the bar, GK IPA plus one guest ale, which on a recent visit was Abbot Ale.



Stag, Stotfold

The pub is without a tenant at present after the departure of Chris Van Den Heever a few months ago. A temporary manager is overseeing the pub and assessing it's potential for a prospective new tenant. There is no food served now and the restaurant has been converted back into a public bar or games room. The good news is that 3 real ales are still available and GBG quality is being maintained. The cider hand-pump is now dedicated to Weston's Traditional Scrumpy and a second hand-pump now features Weston's Herefordshire Perry.



Fox & Duck, Stotfold

Welcome to new tenants Alan Thorpe and Sunni Peddie, who took over on 1st December. The new opening hours are Mon-Thu 12-3pm; 5-11.30pm & Fri-Sun 12-11.30pm. Try their traditional pub grub at reasonable prices 12-2.30pm & 6-8pm [9pm on weekends]. Specials deals on Tuesday evening curry & pint, Thursday evening steak night and Sunday lunches two for £10.99. For bookings contact E-mail: foxandduck@hotmail.com

At the bar Greene King IPA and a GK guest ale are served. The pub has a summer darts team and a floodlit Petanque court.



Chequers, Wrestlingworth

Another change at the Chequers with Joanne Aitchison taking over on 1st August 2011 as a temporary manager, for Firkin Pub Co., but with a view to potentially taking on the tenancy in 2012. The current opening hours are Mon 6-11.30, Tue-Thu 12-3.30 & 5.30-11.30, Fri-Sun 12-11.30. Traditional home cooked meals using fresh local produce. Bridge games feature on Thursday evenings, there is a floodlit Petanque court and a marquee for events or private hire. GK IPA & Abbot, plus one guest ale, which on a recent visit was Butcombe Bitter.



Engineers Arms in Grand Final

There were further celebrations during the Autumn, as the Engineers Arms continued its march through the heats of CAMRA National Pub of the Year competition. News of East Anglian regional heat result came out in mid September to coincide with the launch of the 2012 edition of the Good Beer Guide. The Engineers Arms was up against five other county winners and was successful in being awarded the East Anglian title. Members from the three Bedfordshire branches and other counties across the region arrived to see the presentation on Saturday 21st October during the pub's October beer festival. The certificate was presented to licensees Kevin Machin and Claire Sturgeon by East Anglian regional director Andrea Briers, accompanied by local branch chairman John Goodlet.



[Kevin, Claire, Andrea & John]



[Steam engine at the Engineers Arms]

What a great way to finish a successful festival which sold a whopping 112 barrels of beer and cider. The Engineers Arms went through to a super regional heat of the competition, along with the winners of three other South East regions. What a tough round this was up against the Southampton Arms [London], Flowerpot [Maidstone] and Evening Star [Brighton]. News of this result had not been expected until December, but an early decision came in mid November, while Kevin & Claire were enjoying a well earned break in Barbados. They arrived back to hear the wonderful news that the Engineers Arms had triumphed again and was now in the National final. The pub now lines up with three other finalists, none of which have been to this stage before and so the competition is now wide open. The other finalists are The Front [Falmouth, Cornwall], Bridge End Inn [Ruabon, Wales] and the Swan With Two Necks [Pendleton, Lancs]. The result of the National final is due in February 2012, possibly around the time of the Engineers Arms Cider & Wine festival. Keep your fingers crossed, there could be a big party on the horizon.

Casket Cryptic Crossword

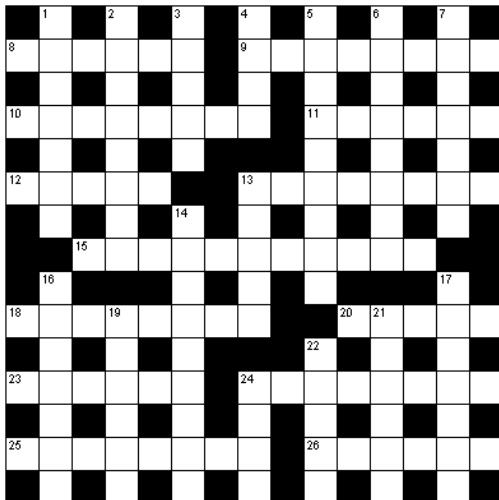
Once again all answers have some form of CAMRA connection; drinking, types of drinks, the art of brewing, names of pubs, things you associate with pubs, names of past and present beers and breweries etc, albeit somewhat tenuously in a few cases!

Across

- 8 In Hull a german beer is left over. (6)
 9 The French indoors for beer here. (8)
 10 See 20
 11 Smells of money on board ship. (6)
 12 Loops around for a palate refresher. (5)
 13 Weapon of celebrity passing over number of dogs and number of nights. (8)
 15 See 20
 18 Rock loses the point but takes on the drive for source of finings. (8)
 20/10/15 Ah - a car for veteran ministry arranged for big event of last year. (5,8,11)
 23 Unpopular in banking but loved in Norwich. (3,3)
 24 Game of drinking quantities. (8)
 25 Foreign man to the west gets his own drink. (8)
 26 Sample kitchen appliance with nothing to lose. (6)
 2 Spooner will warm trumpet for member of Rose's family. (8)
 3 See 22
 4 Mum's the word! Quiet! Starting a brew! (4)
 5 Most frothy and agitated once you have the foulest losing head. (9)
 6 Host is much warmer without model eating pork pie. (8)
 7 Wandering off around hospital finds item on the table now not so common in bars. (7)
 13 Mug of beer for the fish man. (5)
 14 Dreadful cast missing first act get beer instructors. (9)
 16 In drinking more than Oliver Reed we find pure one. (7)
 17 Food that was once caught in the Bush. (7)
 19 Spaceship to unsettle alien. (6)
 21 Initially an unusual get up signals the GBBF time. (6)

Down

- 1 A beginner is chilly but hot in the middle, possibly due to this. (7)
 22/3 Do a number that wasn't so magnificent? (5,5)
 24 24 ____ (4)



Compiled by Chris Freeman
 The solution is on Page 27



Potton Brewery News

Due to other commitments Potton Brewery was not represented at the CAMRA GBBF award ceremony to collect their Bronze award for Shannon IPA earlier in the year, therefore a special presentation took place at the brewery on the 15th November. Bob, Dave and Colin were there from the brewery along with Jackie, Dave's better half who put on an excellent buffet of some delicious cheeses, pickles and breads. The liquid refreshment was Shannon IPA, of course, plus Potton Porter and Village Bike. All the beers were in good condition especially the Shannon, a worthy award winner.

As the event was arranged at very short notice the East Beds CAMRA representatives were mostly committee members, but we were joined by Les Ivall, the landlord of the John O'Gaunt at Sutton, who was in fine form and back to his usual self after his recent illness. After a few drinks and the buffet, John Goodlet presented the award pointing out that the bitter category was the most fiercely contended award, well done Potton. The evening continued with a few more beers, some good conversation and an anecdote from Bob, regarding a Jaguar car enthusiast and some missing bottles of beer - more of this in the next issue of Casket. From all present we would like to thank Potton Brewery for a very pleasant evening and wish them all the best for the future.



[Colin, Dave, Bob & John]



[the award]



[some fine ales]

POTTON BREWERY COMPANY LIMITED - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Set up by former managers of Greene King's Brewery at Biggleswade, now closed, Bob Hearson & Clive Towner established the current Potton Brewery Company in the small market town of Potton in 1997, the first commercial brewery in the town since 1922.

Since the death of Clive Towner in March 2009 Bob has been responsible for running the brewery but has now decided to take early retirement on April 30th 2012. Bob is planning to return to the sea faring life as a ship's engineer for a while, in his words "taking it easy, having a proper salary and paid holidays."

Because of Bob's decision the brewery has been taken over by Mr Garry Doel of East Sussex. Garry Doel also owns Franklins Brewery which was originally in Harrogate Yorkshire but has now been re-established in Hastings. Bob is now working part time until his retirement, along with Dave Hutchinson who will remain as administrator and Peter Thomson continuing as brewer and drayman, they have been joined by Colin Morris who is overall manager.

Although under the same ownership the two breweries will operate completely independently of each other. Potton will continue to supply existing outlets with their award winning range of cask and bottled ales and also distribute Franklins beers in their area. East Beds CAMRA wish Bob good luck and calm waters ahead and Potton Brewery a bright future built on the foundations laid down by himself and Clive Towner.

Potton Beers are now available at the following outlets:-

Potton - Old Coach House & Red Lion
Croydon, Cambs - The Queen Adelaide
St Neots - The Weeping Ash [JDW] and The Lord John Russell
Stevenage Old Town - The Standing Order [JDW]
Bedford - The Devonshire Arms
Stevenage New Town - The Standard Bearer [JDW]
Baldock - The Orange Tree

Watch out for Franklins beers appearing in East Bedfordshire soon:-

Franklins Dry Hop 3.6% - An aromatic hoppy pale amber ale.
Strong & intense with rich Cascade bitterness and a dry aftertaste.

Franklins Brighton Rocks 4.0% - Easy quaffing and deeply refreshing. Fragrant hops give a meadow sweet after flavour.

Franklins EXP 4.2% - A crisp English amber ale, rich in flowery aroma with a nice dry finish and a harmony of malty sweetness & bitterness.

Franklins Conqueror 5.1% - A richly flavoured smooth beer, with 3 hops, a surprising fruity bite, and a hint of caramel.



Bob Trenholme

DIARY DATES

- JAN.** 10th, Branch Meeting, Golden Pheasant, Biggleswade, 8pm
- FEB.** 8th, Social in Langford, meet at Wrestlers 8pm, then the Plough 9.30pm
21st, Special GBG Selection Meeting, John O'Gaunt, Sutton, 8pm
- MAR.** 20th, Branch Meeting, March Hare, Dunton, 8pm
28th, Social - Stotfold Stroll, meet at Coach & Horses 8pm
- MAY.** 8th, Branch AGM, Engineers Arms, Henlow, 8 pm

BEER FESTIVALS

- Feb.** 16th-19th. 2nd Henlow Cider & Country Wine Festival, Engineers Arms, High Street, Henlow
16th-18th. 29th Luton Beer & Cider Festival, Hightown Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde Street, Luton **CAMRA**
- Mar.** 9th-10th. Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival, Town Hall, Brand Street, Hitchin **CAMRA**
16th-17th. 37th Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival, Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St. Neots **CAMRA**
- Apr.** 26th-29th. The 4th Sir William Peel Beer Festival, High Street, Sandy [provisional date, check with pub nearer the time]
26th-29th. The Half Moon 8th Anniversary Beer Festival, Half Moon Queen Street, Hitchin
- May.** 3rd-7th. The 8th Potton Beer Festival, Rising Sun, Potton

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
SG99 3AA
Directions: In village centre off A246
0311 123456
Owner: Free House
CAMRA Branch: Beds
Bodgers Bitter [H]
Guest Ales: Beer Range Varies [H]
P A W C B T O I C A Q Q 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

Kilverts Inn - Hay on Wye

Being aware that, whilst the Casket is primarily focussed on Bedfordshire most readers will have cause to travel outside the region for business or leisure purposes. Whilst the GBG is an excellent starting point for finding beer away from home we like to augment this with the occasional first hand account of an out of area pub, in particular those that also provide accommodation.



Hay on Wye is largely known as a centre for both leisurely book browsing and more energetic outdoor pursuits in the surrounding countryside. Both of these sit well in the Venn diagram of the interests of many real ale aficionados. We first discovered this inn on a trip to Hay a couple of years ago and now do not consider staying anywhere else if in the area. This time, although familiar with the route, I decided to test my recently downloaded GBG point of interest file on my SatNav and it took us straight there.



Kilverts Inn itself is a former doctor's house, built during the Edwardian period, which became a hotel at some point during the 1980s. The Davies family have run it since 2006, refurbishing the 12 en-suite rooms and building a good reputation for the food and drink. They have received several CAMRA awards and were the cider pub of the year and overall runner up in the area.

And so to the beer (and cider). On the pub website (hosted by Freddie the pub dog) there is a beer board listing the ales currently on. They have a close relationship with local brewers and generally have a wide selection of rotating guests (By this I mean, of course, the beers but it would certainly be possible for hotel guests themselves to develop a mild spin after working through the selection). On our latest visit the beers were: Gold Beacons (Breon Brewery), No. TwoOo (Spectrum), Butty Bach (Wye Valley), Black Buffle (Spectrum), Thai-Bo (Otley Pontypridd). Two of these were "CAMRA Special Limited Edition" brews and the whole selection provided a good range of styles and strengths. On this occasion the cider was all from Gwynt-y-Ddraig: Happy Daze, Two Trees Perry and Black Dragon. All in all, the place is well worth a visit, but if you want to enjoy a quiet pint by the open fire then resist Freddie's invitations to play tug of war! Website: www.kilverts.co.uk/

Chris Freeman



The Orange Tree, Baldock

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www.johnogauntinnsutton.co.uk

30 High Street, Sutton, Sandy, Beds. SG19

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Quality home cooked food served lunch and evening

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and CAMRA rural Pub of the Year 2009

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Celebrating
26 years in
the Good Beer
Guide



Visit to Gruut Brewery in Ghent

A visit was made to the Gruut Brewery in Ghent during October by several CAMRA members. The building was built around 1840 and was used as a gas factory and when suddenly everything switched to electricity it was acquired for spinning and weaving. It was then turned into a restaurant and then Annick De Splenter saw it as a great opportunity to open it as brewery.



Before the 13th century beer was mostly flavoured with herbs in Belgium instead of hops. The composition of herbs was different from region to region and only the ruler new the mixture and asked taxes on it. The herbs were called Gruyt or Gruut.

Eventually Gruut coins were made, they were used at the time of Emperor Charles. to pay taxes on the Gruut-herbs. There were single and double coins. Even after the disappearance of those herbs, people still used the coins. Now, the Gruut-currency is used in the brewery logo.



Annick singularly brews her own beer she produced 500 HL in 2010 and has produced 700HL this year but has a capacity for 2500HL per year. At present she brews twice a week but is planning to brew daily. She has 150 outlets as well as her own pub and restaurant which she also runs.

Gruut Amber Ale has an amazing rich taste, a deep copper colour and smooth drink-ability and when used in the typical open glass, has a fabulous head.

Gruut Blonde is cloudy, gently barleyed beer. It has a neutral, light and sweet flavour obtained by a special selection of herbs.



Gruut White beer is very aromatic with a fragrant fruity smell and a slightly herbaceous sharpness. The body is light, but soft. Thanks to the spices, the flavours are 'round', very fine and complex. The first impression is a spicy dryness, followed by a slight, creamy sweetness.

Gruut Inferno is a delicate ale with an intense flavour. It's golden colour and unique flavour makes it popular with all ages. Ultimate serving temperature: 8° - 9°

Gruut Brown has a pleasant, smooth beginning and a never experienced persistent aftertaste coming from a mixture of nuts.



[Cliff & Annick]

Many beers were sampled and it was a very pleasant visit. I recommend this place as a must for anyone visiting Ghent, which has many enjoyable bars selling a wide range of different beers.

Clifford Luff

40th Anniversary Beer Festival

East Bedfordshire CAMRA tried a new approach to a beer festival in September 2011, with a 10 day event running in eight of the areas pubs. The main idea was to celebrate CAMRA's 40th anniversary, but also to say 'Thank You' to many pubs for their support to the Campaign during recent years. We hoped the festival would increase visitors to all the pubs and showcase some of the best British Real Ales on offer.

I asked branch vice-chairman Tony Morris, if the festival had achieved it's original theme of 40 beers for 40 years and provided a good range of ales. He answered:-

"The eight participating pubs were so enthusiastic and wanted more than 40 beers. In the end they exceeded all expectations, lining up a wonderful array of 81 ales from 54 breweries over the 10 days of the event. Breweries established long before the birth of CAMRA in the 1970's and from new breweries set up in the 1980's, 90's and within the past 10 years were all well represented. The ales were sourced from throughout Britain; including representatives from Scotland (Orkney and Houston); the north-east & Yorkshire (Allendale, Hambledon, Jarrow); Isle of Man (Bushys); Burton Bridge from the heartland of British brewing; Wales (Otley); the south-west (Teignworthy) and East Anglia (Cliff Quay), with many LocAles too."



[John O'Gaunt, Sutton]



[Sir William Peel, Sandy]

I asked Tony if the beer range had represented a wide choice of beer styles. He replied:-

"It was very pleasing to see a diverse range of styles on offer; from dark milds, traditional 'brown' bitters, golden citrus hoppy ales to porter and stout. Out of the 30 or so ales I sampled, some personal favourites were Holdens XB (4.1%, a pale and malty perennial favourite); the new Orkney Corncrake (4.1% straw coloured, with citrus fruit), Titanic Plum Porter (4.9% rich plum flavouring counterbalanced with Goldings hops) and the mighty Thornbridge Raven (6.6% black IPA made with chocolate malt and New World hops). I very much look forward to the possibility of a similar collaboration between the branch's premier ale pubs in 2012."

I asked branch secretary Barry Price if the beer festival was successful from the pubs point of view and would they take part in a similar festival again. He responded:-

"We wanted direct feedback from the pubs on how well the festival was organised and perceived by the public, so we issued each pub a questionnaire to fill in. Seven of the eight participating pubs responded and the overall comments were very positive indeed. They thought the event was well organised and that the publicity material was good quality and issued on time. However, some requested that next time we could produce more posters and perhaps get a write-up in the Biggleswade Chronicle and Villager magazine prior to the festival."

"With regard to the range of ales, most pubs had no difficulty getting the wide choice of ales and most pubs reported a small to medium increase in the number of visitors during the event. In terms of revenue, about half the pubs thought that the festival had contributed to increased sales. The majority of pubs thought that September was a good time to run a 10 day festival and 6 of the pubs would be happy to participate again on a regular basis. One area that did need improving would be transport, in terms of being organised earlier and allowing a longer stay in each pub. But on the whole, this is encouraging feedback and I see no reason why we can't run another festival, maybe with a different 'theme' and change a few of the pubs taking part."

I asked Barry to comment on how the bus trips were organised and attended. He said:-

"We initially wanted to run buses on the Saturday and Sunday of both weekends during the festival, but we were a bit late getting options out to members, due to the shortage of local affordable coach services. In the end we concentrated on the Saturdays and had a bus coming down from Expresslines in Bedford, with a very friendly driver named 'Dave' who understood that our schedule would be a bit variable on timing. In each case, the bus started and finished its route from the Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade at 1pm. On the first weekend, we did the southern three pubs in Henlow, Stotfold and Dunton, then came back to the Golden Pheasant in Biggleswade, before continuing to the northern three pubs in Sutton, Potton and Sandy. The following weekend, we reversed the route, taking in the northern pubs first and the southern pubs later."

"On the first Saturday we had a total of 13 people, a mix of members and non-members, we were lucky enough to recruit three as new members on the day. At the same time a bus of 15 members came through from neighbouring South Beds branch, running about half an hour ahead of our bus. On the second Saturday we had a total of 17 people attending, plus during the week in between, we took a smaller group out to Dunton and Sutton to give them a bit more support".



[social at the John O'Gaunt, Sutton]

"Many other members visited the pubs individually or in small groups throughout the festival. With more notice I am sure we could attract visitors from North Herts, North Beds and perhaps Huntingdon in the future".

29th Luton Beer & Cider Festival

Hightown Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde St, Luton LU2 0JD

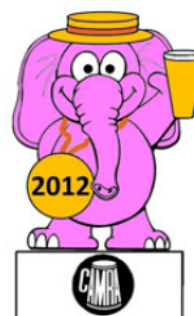
Thurs 16th - Sat 18th February 2012

About 100 real ales plus real ciders and perries
plus imported bottled beers and country wines

Opening times and admission prices		CAMRA Members	Non-CAMRA
Thursday	5pm-11pm	Free	£2.50
Friday	Noon-6pm	Free	£2.50
Friday	6pm-11pm	£1.50	£3.50
Saturday	Noon-6pm	Free	£2.50
Saturday	6pm-11pm	Free	£1.50

Three Halls
Live music from 8.30pm
in the Theatre Hall
(Main hall is music-free at all times)

Increased capacity
Plenty of beer!



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CAMRA in association
with Active Luton



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

No change in admission prices since 2010!

No admission to persons aged under 18. Proof of age may be required.
We reserve the right to refuse admission. Last admission 10.30pm.
All details correct at time of publishing and may be subject to change.

Visit: www.lutonbeerfestival.com for latest details



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"A large hotel with 31 bedrooms & conference facilities"

Just 10 minutes walk from Biggleswade rail and bus stations.

A large restaurant open every day



Landlords Choice Ale & 3 rotating guest ales,
often featuring a porter or stout
Summer beer & cider festival

**We are in the
CAMRA 2012 Good Beer Guide**

Telephone 01767 312442
www.strattonhouse-hotel.com

Dunton Cider

On Saturday 26th November a lively group of customers arrived at the March Hare to celebrate the launch of Bedfordshire's newest cider producer 'Dunton Cider'. This new business is the brainchild of Simon Bailes and Andy Barwell and it will operate in conjunction with a wider 'community garden' project. The main idea is that local villagers will donate their unused apples from their gardens and also help gather apples from public parks and gardens. It all started in Autumn of 2010 with the first batch of 150 pints of cider. The boys are keen on recycling and will utilise reusable fermentation vessels, apple crates and bottles.

The 2011 vintage of their cider is on sale exclusively at the March Hare, Dunton. I tried a few halves and found it to be extremely smooth, tasty and easy drinking, it belies its strength at 6.5%. Since then Dunton Cider has been requested by the Engineers Arms for their February cider & country wine festival and also CAMRA's Luton Beer festival. We hope to see Dunton cider making an appearance at more festivals and pubs in 2012.

The branch welcome this new business and watch out for a more detailed article in the May 2012 issue, as all three Bedfordshire branches will be working together to campaign for more of the county's pubs to stock real cider and perry and support local cider producers.

A letter received from the March Hare, Dunton

The March Hare is now in its second year of trading, moving from strength to strength, including the opening of the beer garden, which we hope all customers will enjoy during the spring and summer of 2012.

John and Janice have introduced themed food nights, including the recently held March Hare Chilli and German Sausage nights. The next themed food nights will be held fortnightly on a Tuesday from January 2012.

In November, some March Hare customers went on a pub outing to the Chequers, Little Gransden to sample the Son of Sid's micro brewery beers. A great time was had by all. Many of the customers at the March Hare are real ale enthusiasts and to satisfy their interest in real ale the March Hare Beer Club is being set up.

Folk musicians and singers congregate at the March Hare to play and sing with one another on the first Tuesday of the month. Everyone, including customers who just come along to listen have a great time listening to this traditional music.

Dunton Cider was launched at the March Hare in November and continues to be sold at the March Hare. This is a still cider locally produced in Dunton.

At the time of writing a Wassail night will be held on the 7th January 2012 by Dunton Folk at the orchard to scare off unwanted spirits and promote a bountiful apple harvest as part of the Wassail tradition. The Letchworth Morris Dancers will perform in the orchard. Afterwards all revelers will congregate at the March Hare to enjoy the Brafront Guizers performing a Mummers Play, followed by folk music and scrumptious Dunton Cider, real ale & mulled wine.

If you let the March Hare know that you are the driver of a group of 2 or more individuals, the March Hare will give the driver free lemonade, orange squash, blackcurrant, tea or coffee.

Finally John and Janice wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year.




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Wessex Wanderings - Part One

In the January 2011 issue, I wrote about Thomas Hardy's Ale produced by the late "Eldridge Pope" brewery in Dorchester and also of some of the West Dorset pubs that have featured in the novels of Thomas Hardy. This is the first of a two part instalment recounting the treks of my wife and myself in autumn 2010 to some of the more remote 'Wessex' country pubs. The pubs are listed from east to west for no other reason than simplicity and we did stray across the border for a worthwhile visit into Devon.

Blue Raddle, Dorchester

The Blue Raddle is situated in Church Street and has a good selection of Ales, Ciders and food. We arrived at 18.30 on a Friday just as the pub opened and the bar staff and kitchen lady could not have been more friendly. As the pub quickly filled there was a great atmosphere, friendly conversation and much laughter from the clientele, which came from all age groups, a true community pub.

The house beer, Sheep Dip brewed by Plain Ales and the wonderful ginger flavoured "Gold Spice" from Keystone were in excellent condition, as was the Butcombe Bitter drunk by my wife. Sharps Doom Bar and Otter Bitter were also available, plus a hand-pulled Perry and the food was excellent.

There is plenty to see inside the pub including, so many pictures of sheep of various breeds that your favourite Border Collie would drift off counting them. Live music is also a feature particularly on the first Wednesday of each month. The pub also seems to have a cycling club judging by the very humorous "write up" of one of their members in the glass case with a cycling shirt inside it.



The Boot, Weymouth

Visited on a weekday afternoon, the Boot is situated close to the fire-station and Council Offices. To find it, walk away from the main shopping area and on the left hand side, cross over the drawbridge. Then cross the road in front of you and turn right away from the entrance to the Marina and after a hundred metres the Boot is located on the corner of a street running parallel to you, but before you reach the fire station.

It is a Ringwood house with a friendly atmosphere and five hand-pumps including a guest, with Ringwood Best on special offer at £2. The Best was in great condition but we didn't try any of the stronger ales as we would be driving later in the day.



I knew the Boot had been in the GBG for a number of years and contacted the local West Dorset branch when I returned home to try to find out why it had been "dropped" from the 2011 issue. It appears that this was due to a change of landlord and a feeling that there is a bit of a sameness with Ringwood beers now that Marstons has acquired the brewery. The branch has a limit of 30 pubs to put in the Guide, so I suppose that they're a little spoiled for choice.

There is a local link with the Boot as John, landlord of the Bell in Sandy, ran the Boot for a while when he was in "the trade" in Weymouth. All in all another recommended place to visit.

The Greyhound Inn, Sydling St Nicholas

The Greyhound sits in the valley of Sydling Water which joins the River Frome at Frampton before flowing through Dorchester. An extensive building with an interesting interior and high quality accommodation on the opposite side of the car park to the pub. There are two distinct dining areas either end of a long narrow bar area, including a sunken well, plus a conservatory.

The landlord is friendly and knowledgeable about his ales but the pub seemed to be more food orientated with a comprehensive blackboard menu of fish and seafood dishes at the entrance to the left hand dining area, and a wonderful aroma coming from the kitchen.

The house beer, Sydling Bitter, brewed by Otter Brewery, was in fine condition and one other beer available on our visit - Otter Bitter. This was another fine pub and would probably be a great place to stay for a "get away from it all" break with good food and ale at hand.



Talbot Arms, Benville

This pub located in a hamlet between the A 356 Dorchester-Crewkerne road and Evershot, was recommended by the landlords of the New Inn, Eype and Winyard's Gap Inn where we stayed. Although not in the GBG, this large pub had a friendly landlady, who gave us some information about the locality and the recent history of the pub which she and her husband had run for the last two or three years. After a short time we were joined by another couple who were staying in the self-catering accommodation, which they praised highly as they did the food in the pub.

The Talbot Arms had only one real ale available (which I noted and subsequently lost) but it was in good condition, as it was a quiet time of the year. I'm sure that the range of beers available increases during the summer when there are more visitors. The best thing about this pub was the relative isolation and on a clear night the stars and planets were clearly visible.



Winyard's Gap Inn, Chedington

This inn is situated on the A356 just south of South Perrott at a junction leading to the small village of Chedington. Behind the Inn is some quite comfortable self-catering accommodation, the bottom half of which is very popular with dog-owners. A nearby small National Trust woodland has a pleasant figure-of-eight walk, as well as a monument, a replica of the memorial on Hill 112 at Caen, Normandy dedicated to the 43rd (Wessex) Division of the Dorsetshire Rgt.

The Inn largely depends on its food trade for survival but has up to three hand-pumps during the summer and an adventurous food menu. Sharp's—Doombar and Dorset Piddle's—Piddle were on, plus some Real ciders.

The pub has an exceptional location on a ridge with views across part of Somerset and Devon and the garden across the road from the pub was another great location for observing the night sky. During the blackest part of the night it wasn't unusual to hear owls and other creatures and the wood is, apparently, a good spot for observing the local wildlife.



Branch Christmas Social

Thirty thirsty souls from across the Branch area descended on the Engineers Arms on the evening of Friday 9th December to partake of the pub's enviable range of beers and ciders and celebrate the start of the Christmas period with a few refreshing pints.

Some arrived unfashionably early to ensure “bagging” a seat - nothing to do with some of the more bizarre practices which take place at Public School I've heard, but simply to be as close to the bar as possible. Others who hadn't travelled by horseless carriage were initially disoriented upon arrival as their spectacles had steamed up upon their entry to the cosy atmosphere of the front room after being out on the chilly night which the 9th turned out to be.

The animated chatter and laughter which were the signature sounds of the evening (along with “Another tenner for the whip” which always seemed to be directed at me) fell to an almost hushed silence when the food arrived – a veritable cornucopia of meat & seafood sandwiches, spring rolls, satay chicken, sausages, roast potatoes, etc. Beer and cider receded to little more than an after-thought as everybody slowly filled their plates – some to such an extent that I began to wonder if the Branch had more than its fair share of jugglers – but I was pleased to note that the British habit of orderly queuing still prevails in the Shires and any pushing & shoving was carried out in a respectful, almost sedate, manner.



After some of the more ravenous members had devoured their second platefuls (and some, I suspect, their third) John, the Branch Chairman called for and surprisingly received “Order” before making a short speech of welcome and extending the congratulations of the Branch to Kevin, Claire and the staff of the Engineers for their success in being one of only four pubs in the final of the National Pub of the Year. Kevin reciprocated by thanking the Branch for all of their support and also gave recognition to the hard work put into the pub by everybody who worked there. John and Kevin each received a round of applause after their speeches and it was obvious that their double act, honed in the studio of Biggles FM's Breakfast Show on Wednesday morning, could very easily go on to greater heights.

After the speeches and following the recharging of glasses all attention turned to the raffle and thanks should be extended to Alan and Jaquie Binnington for organising both it and the prizes on offer although it was fairly embarrassing that the first few numbers out of the “hat” seemed to be those of Officers or Committee members of East Beds CAMRA. Luckily other members also managed to win a prize or two. Kevin went to collect his prize “...anything off the table, sir...” and helped himself to a plate of food which I think only serves to illustrate the effort that he and Claire had expended trying to ensure that the evening was the roaring success it turned out to be.

The celebrations were still in full swing when myself and the rest of the Sandy faction left at quarter-to-eleven and I would imagine that they lasted into the early hours of Saturday.

I'd like to extend my thanks to Kevin, Claire and their staff; John; Alan and Jaquie; and all the other CAMRA members who turned up for making the evening a great success and one of which the Branch can be proud.



Barry Price



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.

Beer Heaven in Lancashire

Barrowford is a village on the Northern outskirts of Burnley in the district of Pendle in East Lancashire. It lies in easy reach of the Forest of Bowland, the North Yorkshire Moors and Southern Lake District. It also has a long industrial heritage connected to the cotton mill trade, making it an ideal centre for a week's holiday even in November.

After a long tiring drive and not feeling very adventurous we decided to walk to the local pub in Barrowford, The White Bear, for an early evening drink. There were four beers on the bar, Marston Pedigree, Thwaites Original, Wychwood Hobgoblin and Bass. We selected the Bass, which being pulled through a swan necked pump, as were all the beers on this trip, and obviously in good condition, took a while. Was the wait worth it? You bet it was. This was the best pint of beer that I've had in a very long time which was soon followed by another of the same.

Our holiday continued with days filled with walks which included The Forest of Bowland, Pendle Hill, the Witches Walk and the tiny village of Wycoller, which is lost in time and is very eerie on a damp, dismal day, no pub, I'm afraid. Our evenings were spent visiting a few more pubs all within a five mile radius of Barrowford, they included:



[The White Bear, Barrowford]

The Rising Sun at Blacko - this is a Moorhouse pub with one guest beer, at the time of our visit it was Oakham JHB. The Moorhouse beers were Pride of Pendle, Black Cat, Best Bitter, Blonde Witch and American P.A. We received a very warm welcome from the landlord, John Ingham, who happened to be the editor of the local CAMRA newsletter, "Witch Ale". This is a very informative publication which has an excellent article by John on searching for a perfect pint of Guinness in Dublin. Needless to say the beers were superb, although we had no desire to try the Oakham. We did try the local delicacy of pie, peas and chips, at £3.95, beat that!



[The Rising Sun, Blacko]



[The White Swan, Fence]

The White Swan at Fence - Timothy Taylor's only pub in Lancashire. No guest beers at this one but there were three pumps selling Landlord, Best Bitter and Gold. The wife selected the Landlord and I went for the Best Bitter, which I must confess I've not had before. What a surprise this beer was, initially sweet on the pallet with a rather delayed bitter finish. It was like drinking two different beers. Delicious! This pub also does food and has theme nights during the week.

The Cross Gaites Inn at Blacko—Yes this is the correct spelling! Beers were Marston Pedigree, Marston English Pale Ale and Jennings Cumberland Ale. This pub is a 16th century inn with open fires and a good range of food is also available at reasonable prices. We again received a warm friendly welcome and the Jennings Cumberland Ale was quaffed with great enjoyment.



[The Cross Gaites, Blacko]



[The Pendle Inn, Barley]

The Pendle Inn at Barley - This is a quite large hotel set within the shadow of the great Pendle Hill. There are many walks starting from the Barley car park including Pendle Hill and the Witches Walk. Again this is a Moorhouse pub with the beer list being the same as the Rising Sun at Blacko with guest beers coming from Thwaites and Bowland Brewery.

The CAMRA LocAle scheme seems to be doing well in this part of Lancashire with nearly 100 pubs in the area signed up and the numbers are growing weekly.

If you have never visited this part of the British Isles I can thoroughly recommend it for the scenery, the friendly people, the local history, the pubs and of course the beer.

Is this BEER HEAVEN? For a Northerner like me, could be. Oh, that pint of Bass!

Bob Trenholme

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