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# Campaign for Real Ale asket September 2012

FREE

#### EAST BEDFORDSHIRE

www.eastbedscamra.org.uk casket@eastbedscamra.org.uk



# Wiggo inspires East Beds cyclists—see page 22

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Issue number 3 Volume 8 2012

#### **EAST BEDS COMMITTEE 2012/13**

Committee:

Chairman: John Goodlet e-mail: chairman@eastbedscamra.org.uk

Vice Chairman: Tony Morris e-mail: vicechairman@eastbedscamra.org.uk

**Secretary:** Barry Price e-mail: secretary@eastbedscamra.org.uk.

Treasurer: Chris Foskett e-mail: treasurer@eastbedscamra.org.uk

Social Secretary: Jo Freeman

& cider rep e-mail: socialsecretary@eastbedscamra.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Geoff Tilbury

e-mail: membership@eastbedscamra.org.uk

Webmaster: Chris Freeman: e-mail: webmaster@eastbedscamra.org.uk

Casket Contact: casket@eastbedscamra.org.uk

Branch Web Site: www.eastbedscamra.org.uk

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#### The Casket

Published and Produced by: CAMRA East Bedfordshire

**Editor** John Goodlet

# A quick word from the Editor

I am pleased to report that the launch or our County wide campaign to increase choice of cider and perry in our pubs is already having an effect. During the summer we saw two new local cider festivals, firstly at the Sir William Peel, Sandy in July, followed in August by the Coach & Horses, Stotfold. It has been several years since the branch ran a cider stall at Bromham Mill during the autumn and we have been on the lookout for a new venue to replace this event, see page 14 & 15 for details on our latest venture.

Back on the 'real ale' front, it is good to see that Greene King pubs are introducing more interesting guest ales. For example, the Wrestlers in Langford has featured Exmoor Gold, Summer Lightning and Old Hooky recently, plus they received their Cask Marque accreditation in July. We also look forward to the first beer festival to be held at the March Hare, Dunton in late September, a remarkable turn-around in the fortunes of a once lost pub, brought back to life in the two years since it was rescued from obscurity. In October, the branch will again be running the products and tombola stand at the Bedford beer festival and a little later in the month we will see another chapter in the Engineers Arms beer festival. So please visit some of these events and join in with CAMRA, we always need volunteers—come on—get involved.

John Goodlet



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# **LOCAL PUB & BREWERY NEWS**

#### Cock Inn, Broom

Landlord Gerry Lant is retiring due to ill health and will leave in the autumn. Initial reports suggested that the brewery might close the pub permanently, but Gerry says it is more likely that agency staff will be appointed in the short term. However the long term future is uncertain, although current indications are the Greene King may sell the pub on to another brewery. As the property also includes 3 cottages and extensive land, it may take some time to strike a final deal. This unique pub is a listed building with many snug style rooms and of course there is NO BAR, all drinks are served direct from the cellar. It is an important heritage pub, so we hope the Cock Inn gets a new lease of life.



#### White Horse, Broom

Dean Hankins & family have left the pub, ending nearly 100 years of their family tenancy. The new arrivals in May were Charles & Sam Biswell, who also run a catering business. All are welcome and the restaurant trade, offers a mix of traditional pub food and 'a la carte', with steaks proving very popular.

The pub is open from 12-3 & 6-11 every day except Mondays. At the bar GK IPA and Golden Hen are the regular ales. There is a monthly Sunday night quiz and live music may be re-introduced soon. For new menus, please check the website www.whitehorsebroom.co.uk and also www.charlesbiswellcatering.co.uk



#### **Inn Briefs**

quickly in this turbulent economic climate. Since our May issue, there have been more licensee changes in our pubs. Firstly, at the **Bricklayers Arms, Potton** which was up for sale recently, it has now been taken off the market and new managers Gary & Michelle Harding were assessing the pub's potential with a view to taking it on permanently. But by mid August it was reported as closed again.

The pub news comes and goes very

Secondly, another quick change at the **True Briton, Arlesey** has new managers with Danny & Carol taking over in May. Real ale disappeared for a while during the changeover, but is back on again and normal service has resumed.

#### **Potton Brewery Update**

Brewery Manager, Colin Morris, is planning a rebranding exercise to revitalise interest in the brewery and its products. This will include new designs for their pump clips and a general makeover at the brewery to make it more suitable for visitors & group visits.

On the beer front, Penny Bitter has been brought back into regular production and a new brew, Moonraker, has been added (the first batch sold out straight away!). Penny Bitter is a 4% traditional malty bitter while Moonraker is a 5.2% premium bitter. Both will appeal to those of us who still support the 'brown' beers in favour of the current tide of light bitters.

Colin is also forging links with the land of his fathers via the Evan Evans brewery concern in Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire. They are brewing some of the beers formerly brewed by the popular Buckleys Brewery, which is now defunct. Other welsh brews such as Felinfoel Double Dragon are also available via Potton Brewery – keep your eyes open for these!

David Young

Lindsey and the team Welcome you to the

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#### Sir William Peel 1st Cider Festival

Landlady Lindsey Hehir already has a well established Spring 'beer festival' at the Sir William Peel in Sandy and has been stocking 'real cider' for nearly 3 years now. There are usually 2 or 3 available at all times, plus a Perry. (Perry, by the way, is the drink made from pears, there's no such thing as "Pear Cider" – just as there is no vegetarian steak). These cider and perry options proved to be a popular addition to the 4 ale hand-pumps, and so a Cider Festival seemed the next logical step.

The 1st cider & perry festival ran from 12th to 15th July and the event showcased 23 ciders and 3 perries from 16 different producers. The ciders that were enjoyed by all ranged from 4.5% to 8% coming from locations as diverse as Wales, Somerset, Herefordshire, Wiltshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire and not forgetting Worcestershire.

The festival started on the Thursday evening at a steady pace with pub regulars and a few others from the town trying the new ciders alongside their usual beers. By Friday evening the pub tables were full of little yellow trays containing six "3rds of a pint" glasses sampling the ciders available in the Festival. The cost was a reasonable  $\pounds$ 7.00 a tray which I thought was very little to pay to taste all the new ciders on offer. A third of pint is the minimum legal volume for beer & cider, and it proved to be an exceptionally popular idea with both couples and individuals.

Around 7 o'clock on the Friday evening there were people coming from all around Bedfordshire to sample the golden liquid. From the nearby village of Gamlingay we had five vintage tractors pull up and park opposite the pub and their drivers came in and sampled the delights that The Sir William Peel had to offer, which was quite a novelty. As usual at such occasions, the mood of the Festival was relaxed, informal and good natured. One of the – perhaps – surprising things was the popularity of the festival with younger drinkers, many of whom commented in favour of the brews on offer and were keen to try more Ciders at a later date, in lieu of their usual beverages.

#### Former branch chairman Chris Bunyan commented that:

"Whilst the crummy Summer weather had obviously affected attendance, all the ciders and perries were attacked with eager trepidation and the longer shelf life of cider in comparison to beer meant that although some of the ciders were still available during the week following the festival, they remained extremely drinkable. Fiery Fox and Farmhouse Scrumpy (Gwynt Y Ddraig) and Bristol Port (Broadoak) had been drained dry by the discerning customers and therefore were the unofficial top 3 Ciders of the Festival. Even Chant's "Badger Spit" had its fans, although they did concede it was a psychological battle to get past the "lively" bouquet. With the perries, Bumbleberry (Sandford Orchard) proved the most popular. One noteworthy item is the Cider producer Millwhite's; they're from Hemel Hempstead, not traditionally known as a Cider producing area. Will we all have Walter Gabriel accents before long?"

Local branch member Keith Wareham gave his comments about the festival:

"My personal favourites were Farmhouse Scrumpy 5.3% from Wales a medium cider that really tasted of apples and was light and flavoursome. Fiery Fox 6.5% was another I liked from Wales, it was a stronger, darker cider which was deceptively easy to drink making over indulgence difficult to avoid!



One of the ciders was Old Rosie 7.3% from Westons, a medium dry cider and still my all time favourite and I am lucky enough to have this particular cider at my local pub, available all the time alongside other real ciders that Lindsey stocks.

I became a cider drinker four years ago this October when it was discovered that I had Coeliac's disease, an intolerance to gluten which is in wheat and barley, therefore I could not drink real ale ever again. When Lindsey found out that I could no longer drink real ale, she opted to stock real cider behind the bar permanently for me and all the others that enjoy a glass of cider. Although cider will never outclass real ale it has become more popular and a real contender for people who fancy a change of drink."

[Editor: my thanks to Chris Bunyan and Keith Wareham for their reports, hopefully one of them will clue me in on who Walter Gabriel is?]

#### What's in a Name

On a recent visit to Dorset my wife and I stopped in Thame, Buckinghamshire for a little refreshment on the journey home.

The Five Bells, a Fullers pub in Lower High Street, displayed the following chalkboard which was extremely useful and could, perhaps, be adopted by other pubs who wished to communicate the details of their ales. The heading which is slightly obliterated by the reflection from the light reads "Sam's Ale Trail"



I had to admit that I didn't know the meaning of the word "**Gyle**" in the headings until I looked it up and discovered that it means "...a large vat in which wort ferments". The word is more commonly used today to identify a Batch number.

# DIARY DATES

SEP. 4th, Branch Meeting, Thornton Arms, Everton, 8pm30th. Cider stall @ Potton Apple Day, Potton, 12-4pm

OCT. 13th. All Beds Branches Social in Hampstead, London, meet @ noon, location TBA

16th, Branch Meeting, Coach House, Potton, 8pm

**NOV.** 20th, Branch Meeting, Two Brewers, Stotfold, 8pm

**DEC.** 7th, Branch Christmas Social & Buffet, Rising Sun, Potton, 7.30pm

## BEER FESTIVALS

Sep. 20th-22nd. 21st Letchworth Beer Festival, Greenhouse Community Market,
 The Gallery, Station Road, Letchworth
 26th-29th. St. Albans Beer Festival, Alban Arena, Civic Centre
 CAMRA
 27th-30th. The 1st March Hare Beer Festival, March Hare, Dunton

Oct. 3rd-6th. The 35th Bedford Beer & Cider Festival, Corn Exchange,

St. Paul's Square, Bedford

CAMRA

17th-21st. 17th Henlow Beer Festival, Engineers Arms, Henlow 18th-21st. Trafalgar Beer Festival, Half Moon, Queen St, Hitchin

25th-27th. Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival, Burgess Hall, St. Ivo Recreation Centre, Westwood Road, St. Ives

**CAMRA** 

Nov. 20th-24th. 34th SE Essex Beer Festival, Freight House, Rochford CAMRA

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

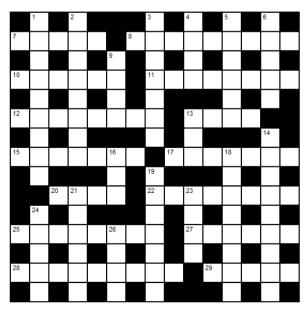


## **Casket Cryptic Crossword**

Once again all the answers are as usual, mostly beer related, however obscure, with an occasional nod to current(ish) events.

#### Across

- 7 Sovereign in title is a fishy old bird. (5)
- **8** Mad thug toils at the end of the day. (6,3)
- 10 Will these 5's change Scandinavian currency? Yes. (6)
- 11 Not married? Taking that endlessly onboard but still frigid. (8)
- 12/24 Annoyed men deserve jar of Welsh beer. (8,5)
- 13 Much ado you say about wherein lies the master! (4)
- **15** Sister to Stoke brewer's inspiration is short sighted and in a muddle over student. (7)
- **17** Will Julie be excited about the celebration? (7)
- **20** Common drinking vessel? (4)
- 22 Free love or angry bird? (4,4)
- 25 Value of bundle of notes in Wiltshire? (8)
- 27/5 Let renegade headsman kill pale rider's maker. (6,6)



- 28 Serious warnings about pub game the French got into. (3,6)
- 29 All points about model are often mentioned in comparison when over 18. (5)

#### Down

- 1 Wild rebel yell, beginner leaving for beginner's beginner, is a stout indicator of consumption. (4.5)
- 2 A little time on gymnastic apparatus makes light of the dark. (8)
- **3** Beer and cider are fifty one pounds. (7)
- **4/13/23** Your personal preference is why I leak out in confusion. (4,3,4)
- 5 See 27 Across
- **6** George's instruments follow John's lead for music boxes. (5)
- **9** Said to conceal doctor's secret identity (4)
- 13 See 4 Down
- **14** Songs on a foreign sea for traders. (9)
- **16** Single representative can be up to mischief (3)
- **18** Deluding, confused, having partaken. (8)
- **19** Upset 21 drops last with good man backing correct attire for divided opinion. (3,4)
- **21** What Australia briefly ordered when thought out. (6)
- 23 See 4 Down
- 24 See 12 Across
- **26** The game's up for Ollie. (4)

Compiled by Chris Freeman

The solution is on Page 26.

#### "Are We There Yet?!?"

The Branch's trip to the Cider Festival at Rugby on  $7^{\text{th}}$  July gave some of the travellers (Chris Bunyan, Ian Lemin and myself) the opportunity to visit other pubs in the town after sampling some of the excellent beers on offer in the destination pub, the Merchants Inn. For those who haven't been to the Merchants Inn it's a little like the Welly in Bedford but on steroids. It's a large high-ceilinged pub with a large bar area to the right hand side when you walk in the front door. There's a lot of brewery related artefacts and a lovely atmosphere as both staff and customers are extremely chatty and helpful – giving us the assistance we would eventually need when starting our little town pub walk.

I'd had a quick look in the 2012 Good Beer Guide and selected three or four pubs I thought may be worth a visit but, after a pint in the Sir William Peel before boarding the scruffy charabanc which served as transport and a knuckle whitening journey through a downpour on the M1, I could only remember by name one of them - the Alexandra Arms.

After three or four nerve settling pints in the Merchants – we wouldn't have drunk that much but there was a slight delay as rain stopped play for about half an hour - we set off for the Alexandra Arms with the directions from the girl behind the bar not, unfortunately, engraved in my brain. If she had written instructions on my arm her assistance would have been slightly more helpful in retrospect. Before leaving I checked to ensure that the cider drinkers were happily ensconced in the large back room of the pub overlooked by the sixty or so ciders and perries which were on offer. They looked fairly relaxed and were in "good spirits" so away we went. [Report on the cider group on page 14]



A wander through the town centre revealed several other tempting looking real ale outlets but our determination to reach the Alexandra was pursued with both hesitation and deviation (for those fans of Radio 4's "Just a Minute") as I knew it had its own on-site brewery. Deviation was caused by getting lost and hesitation by asking the locals the correct route to the pub. On reaching the pub it was quite surprising to see the old building sandwiched between a multistorey car park and a new housing development but we were glad that it had been unaffected by the recent changes to the area. There are two entrances to the pub – the one on the left takes you down a corridor to the large garden where, on the right just before the garden, is a large games room with bar and jukebox. The first turning on the right in the corridor takes you into a smaller L-shaped front bar which can also be entered from the main central door on the street.

We were slightly disappointed not to see clips on all the hand-pumps in the back bar until the young lady serving pointed out the stillage in the back garden with about 70 barrels on it. Unfortunately for us the Beer Festival started the following week! We all opted for a pint of Atomic Fusion and the barmaid asked if we wanted a snack, we all chose burger and chips which we awaited in the front bar. The brewery produces one beer for the Alexandra - Petit Blonde – and about half a dozen sold under the Atomic Brewery name which are available at another of Rugby's pubs (which we didn't visit), the Victoria, which is regarded as the Atomic's brewery tap.



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Well the burgers, two meat (possibly) and one veggie (probably) were accompanied by a large portion of what looked like home made chips and a choice of chilli sauces – normal or hot. We all elected for the "hot" despite warnings from the people at the bar. The princely sum of £5 was all that was asked for a pint and a rather filling snack. The beer was in very good nick and the hot chilli sauce would have been useful in Siberia for removing ice & snow from your windscreen.

My simple measure of whether Carol's home-made curries are hot or not is the hiccup test – if I get them straight away it's hot and the measure of heat can be calculated by the amount of time it takes me to get rid of them. As thirty or forty fresh green chillies, a large chunk of root ginger and a couple of bulbs (no, not cloves, bulbs) of garlic are the normal base for her curries I am quite used to "spicy" and rarely get hiccups unless the chillies are particularly high on the Scoville Heat Index which, of course, you can't tell until you try them.

The Alexandra's hot chilli sauce hit the hiccup register immediately with a tiny dip on the end of a chip so I was happy. The hiccups didn't last long so I knew it wasn't too fiery and by the end of the snack I'd eaten mine and what Ian had left as well, ensuring I had a very clean palate. Most of the rest of my digestive tract was pretty clean as well, I imagine. Anyway not wishing to hesitate too long we spoke with the locals about other real ale outlets and they indicated that the pedestrian way through the adjacent housing estate led to the "Seven Stars" which had just been reopened after a refurbishment so we wandered down to said establishment which turned out to be spotless inside and out, as you'd expect.

The biggest immediate surprise for me was the appearance of the chap behind the bar. "I know you...you worked in the Welly in Bedford, didn't you?" "Yes and you played for the cricket team that used to come in for a pint after their matches, didn't you?" It was Ryan who those of you who drink in the Welly occasionally would also know. It transpires that the Seven Stars is the second joint venture between Everards and B & T – the first being the 2012 Bedfordshire Pub of the Year, The Albion in Ampthill – and Ryan is the licensee.

Anyway there was an excellent range of beers available and as Ryan was coming off duty in about an hour we thought it would be churlish not to invite him to come for a pint with us and show us another well regarded pub in town before we needed to head back to the Merchants Inn.

At the end of his shift Ryan took us on a slow stroll to the Raglan Arms which helpfully turned out to be roughly in the direction of the Merchants. The Raglan is a "deep" pub, rather than a wide one, with a raised area where the bar is located and a large seating area to the right hand side of the entrance between the front door and the bar. It was busier than either of the two preceding pubs but that may have been because it was later in the day when we arrived. Again there were about eight hand-pumps and all of the beers that the four of us sampled were again "spot on".



A gentle walk back to the Merchants and another couple of pints before the coach journey home concluded a fine trip and left the three of us with nothing but praise for the four pubs we had visited, along with a general feeling that Rugby could very easily be a venue for a worthwhile weekend out for any CAMRA member.

Thanks very much to Jo Freeman for organising the day out and to the rest of our travelling companions for tolerating our general boisterousness on the outward journey from whence comes the title of this article.

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Barry Price



# The Plaugh

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# NEXT BEER FEST 18th - 21st October

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### **LocALe Scheme Update**

There have been a few changes in the LocALe scheme in East Beds. The **Two Brewers** in Stotfold has joined the scheme with regular outings for B&T Two Brewers Bitter and Potton Village Bike. Other East Anglian beers occasionally feature with Woodfordes Wherry proving very popular, plus Westons Old Rosie cider was on trial recently. Congratulations to Darren & the team, we appreciate their effort.

Two new breweries have been added to the scheme. The **Red Brewery** is a new venture by amateur brewer John Kearney based in a grain store on Garden Farm in Great Staughton in Huntingdonshire. Initial feedback from members on the quality of their first three ales had been extremely positive. The latest ale Pathfinder, is named after the RAF target-making squadron based in Huntingdon.







The four regular ales are:-

Staughton Bitter 4% bitter, copper coloured, hoppy, late hopped with Boadicea and Progress. Light fruit.

All Saints Ale 4% premium ale, garnet, balanced hop, late hopped with Progress and Goldings. Blackcurrant.

Sundial Gold 4% golden ale, deep hop, late hopped with First Gold and WGV. Citrus with light hop finish.

Pathfinder (New) 4.5% amber ale, high hop, late hopped with Cascade and Summit. Orange / Grapefruit citrus. Contains wheat and may have a slight haze.

They will also be producing a number of seasonal beers and a dark mild, see their website for more details at www.redbrewery.com

Also over the border in North Herts is the **Addled Brewery** at Weston. This seems to be quite a small business at present, but their first two ales were on tap at the Orange Tree in Baldock during August. It is likely that the ales will also feature in the Letchworth Beer festival 20th-22nd September. The first is a fruity amber ale called "Fair Warning" and the second a strong ruby ale named "Edward's Confession". The brewers are Adam Scoot and Edward Lee, contact them on Twitter as @AddledBrewery.

For a full list of LocALe breweries supported by East Beds — see page 21.

At the Great British Beer festival held in London during early August, there was a bronze medal in the Mild category for Muckcart Mild produced by the Son of Sid Brewery in nearby Little Gransden. The over festival winner was **No. 9 Barley Wine** from the Coniston Brewery in Cumbria. For a full list of category winners check website www.gbbf.org.uk and click on the article "CBOB Supreme Champion is Announced".



# In-Cider Dealings

Hello again, and welcome back to our column dedicated to Apple-Heads and Perry-Winkles!! I hope you've had a good Summer, and enjoyed some old favourites or new finds from the cider world. We'll have a quick look back first, to some of the things that have gone on since our last Casket, and then there are some 'forthcoming attractions' you might want to put in your diary!

Firstly, a very brief mention to the **Sir William Peel** in Sandy for their Cider Festival in July, you'll find a full report on page 6. It's always great to see pubs increasing their range of ciders during beer festivals, or even holding dedicated cider and perry festivals in their own right, and this is something the Peel does to a very fine degree.

Another place that can't be faulted for its cider range is somewhat out of the area for usour old friend the **Merchants' Inn** in Rugby. They held their cider festival during the first week of July, and a brave band of pilgrims headed off from East Beds to Warwickshire on a quest to quaff. The twelve of us arrived there in the early afternoon, to find 80+ ciders & perries on offer, alongside the usual range of tempting and well-kept ales (you'll see more about those on page 10). Taking advantage of the third pint trays, which allowed us to sample six different ciders at a time, we worked through what was on offer diligently, and with attention to detail in order to do justice to the apple and the pear!





Pausing only for cheeseburgers in the pouring rain from the outdoor barbecue, we tried everything from Ben Crossman's to Westcroft's, with stops at Gwynt y Ddraig, Gwatkin's, Orchard Pig and Snail Bank, all ranging from 4.5 to 8% with a majority in the 5-6% mark - something for everyone. My personal favourite was the Kingston Black from Gwatkin, but I'm always a sucker for a Gwynt y Ddraig so I tried all seven that were on offer. Other folk's favourites to emerge from our trip were the Blakeney Red Perry (6%) from Hecks and good old Badger's Spit from Chants (7.5%). I look forward to a return visit to next year's festival - why don't you come too?

Between the Casket going to press and you reading it, the **Coach and Horses**, Stotfold will have held its 'first annual Cider & Perry festival'. I hope to bring you a write up of that next issue - if you were there and want to share your thoughts before I write it, let me know! The exciting news is that the Coach and Horses looks set to become the latest of our 'official' real cider pubs, and may well become so by the time of the next Casket.

Now, two upcoming events in the Autumn - firstly, Potton Apple Day is on the 30th September, 12-4 at St Mary's Church Hall in Potton, and for the first time, CAMRA will be running a cider bar there. We've done this at other Apple Days elsewhere, and can promise you a range of sweet, medium and dry ciders, some from local producers, and *all* selected by someone who has actually tried them (and I don't just mean me!). It would be great to see you there.

Secondly, we will be touring our friendly neighbourhood cider makers in Dunton. Many of you will have tried Dunton Cider, and if you haven't yet you really should! Simon and Andy have agreed to give us a tour of the premises and show us how it's done! I can't give you a confirmed date just yet as it will depend upon when they're pressing and that information isn't available for a few weeks, but it *will* be a weekday evening, and is likely to be around the beginning of October - further details will be on the branch website and posted in newsletters. That's it for now, support your local cider producers, support your local 'real cider' pub and I'll see you next time.

Jo Freeman

# Real Cider & Perry in Bedfordshire

Pubs in East Beds branch permanently selling at least one 'Real Cider or Perry'.

Golden Pheasant, Biggleswade March Hare, Dunton Engineers Arms, Henlow Rising Sun, Potton Sir William Peel, Sandy John O'Gaunt, Sutton

Cider may also be available seasonally in

Tudor Oaks, Astwick Ivy Leaf Club, Langford Red Lion, Potton Coach & Horses, Stotfold Locally produced cider can be ordered from the following outlets

Apple Cottage, Baldock, Herts Millwhites, Boxmoor, Herts Cassels Cider, Cambridge Dunton Cider, Dunton, Beds Hereward Cider, Ely, Cambs Harrold Calvados Society, Harrold, Beds Eversheds Cider, near Odell, Beds Pickled Pig, Stretham, near Ely, Cambs Virtual Orchard, Wolverton Mill, Bucks

ASK YOUR LOCAL PUB TO STOCK A REAL CIDER OR PERRY

#### St. Neots Stroll

On Saturday 28th July there was an informal social in St. Neots, giving six intrepid branch members an opportunity to explore this town, which is within easy reach using the London to Peterborough train line. With trains running twice an hour, we timed it right to arrive at a quarter to 2 in the afternoon, giving us 15 minutes to wander down to the bottom of Station road, before heading west along Cambridge Street to our 2pm meeting point at the Bulls Head.

We piled into this Greene King pub expecting to enjoy our first pint of the day, only to find that all the pumpelips were facings inwards. The barman, realising our dismay, informed us that there was no 'real ale' on at that time and that the next beers due on were still settling in the cellar and not in the proper condition to sell at that point. Clearly disappointed, we explained that we were CAMRA members out for a trip around the town, but we understood that the beers were not ready. It seems the pub had been extremely busy the previous evening with a large thirsty crowd watching the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and drinking the pub dry. The barman was kind enough to agree to point any CAMRA stragglers coming later to follow us on to our second pub the Ye Olde Sun on Huntingdon Street.

This next pub was new to many of the group and we ignored the old wall signs indicating that it had been a Whitbread pub in earlier days, hoping it had fallen into more friendly hands. This lovely old inn had great character and lots of low beams—very low indeed. They could do with digging out a trench in front of the bar to save you having to press your chin into your chest whilst waiting to be served. Despite this small inconvenience, there was a fine selection of ales on offer and I opted to start with low gravity beer Thwaites Nutty Black, 3.3% a fine dark mild full of roasted malts and bittersweet flavour and slightly dry finish.



We retired to the rear patio to catch some rays in patchy summer, some people tried Woodfordes Norfolk Gem 4.5%, an amber ale produced for the Diamond Jubilee using Pacific Gem hops from New Zealand. We opted to stay for a second pint, in case there were more members still trying to catch us up, after missing out the Bull's Head. This time I went for Elgoods Greyhound 5.2%, a strong brown bitter, whilst others tried Thwaites Wainwright, a golden ale at 4.5% with a sweet citrus taste

We left Ye Olde Sun and headed north on Huntingdon Street, then turned left onto Russell Street. I was already salivating with the anticipation of ordering Salem Porter or XXXB at the excellent Batemans pub, The Lord John Russell. But luck was not on our side and when we arrived outside the pub, there was only the sight of several workmen busy refurbishing the pub. One chap explained that it had closed three weeks earlier and when completed, it would re-open as the Hog'n' Partridge. It seems that it was destined to become the sister pub to the Pig'n' Falcon, which we planned to visit as our last stop of the day. We guessed that the landlord of the Pig & Falcon had perhaps purchased this pub and that Batemans ales may still feature as part of a wider ale selection.

16

Having struck out with two out of the first three pubs on our itinerary, we decided to improvise and add in another pub. Following a quick huddle, we decided to continue west along Russell Street, then turn right up New Street to try **The Hyde Park** pub. It was very quiet being the middle of the afternoon and we checked out the ales finding Spitfire, Black Sheep and Directors. Some opted for Black Sheep, whilst two of us chose Spitfire, but before we could even get a taste of the beer, there was a distinctive aroma of vinegar—a bad sign indeed. A tentative sip confirmed the diagnosis that this beer was definitely off. The bar staff were fine about this and quickly replaced the beer with two pints of Directors, which were rather average but okay.





Back on track we retreated down New Street to **The Weeping Ash**, a J.D. Wetherspoons pub that was relatively new, being based in the old Post Office building, but gaining a reasonable reputation for ale quality. As we entered and scanned the two long banks of handpumps, it slowly dawned on us that there actually very little 'choice'. Most of the pumpclips advertised the beers, but many had the words "**coming soon**' plastered over them. When we asked about them it became clear that there only 2 other ales on besides the boring old Greene King beers. A short debate resulted in half the group moving on immediately to the Pig & Falcon, whilst the remainder although disappointed tried one beer. I had Thwaites Torchlight 4.4% a golden ale. I really 'loathe' this company policy of showing pumpclips of beers that are not ready. It only leads to customers being disillusioned, but it is clearly used as a technique to get people into the pub, under the false promise of a wide range of ales, but once you are inside you find most are not available. In my view this is 'bad practice' and tantamount to 'false advertising' - I wonder what 'Trading Standards' would make of this procedure. Why can't they just have a separate blackboard with 'beers coming soon' instead. We quickly drank up and moved on to the **Pig 'n' Falcon**, which was the only pub in the town listed in the current 2012 Good Beer guide.

Finally, a pub with an excellent range of quality beers and well known to most of the members. We regrouped and started to work our way through some of the ales and enjoyed the patio area at the side of the pub, to chat and watch the world go by. Along the way, between us we sampled Titanic Stout 4.5%, Potbelly Best Bitter 3.8%, Oakham Citra 4.2% and Tydd Steam Armageddon 5.0%. The group began to break up and head home after a mixed day of beer hunting. On the way home I realised that I had not eaten anything all afternoon, no doubt I would pay for that with a thick head later in the evening.















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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.

White Park, Cranfield, Beds.

Buntingford, Royston, Herts.

Wells & Youngs, Bedford.

McMullen, Hertford, Herts.

Milton, Cambridge, Cambs.

Potbelly, Kettering, Northants.

Llanding Mad Olacy Duels

Hopping Mad, Olney, Bucks.

Addled, Weston, Herts.

B&T, Shefford, Beds.

Green Tye, Much Hadham, Herts.

Red Squirrel, Hertford. Herts.

Alehouse, St Albans, Herts.

Concrete Cow, Milton Keynes.

Cambridge Moonshine, Cambs.

Tring, Tring, Herts.

Red, Gt. Staughton, Huntingdon

#### Pubs that are participating in the scheme are:-

Golden Pheasant, Biggleswade. Vi

Engineers Arms, Henlow.

Sir William Peel, Sandy.

Stratton House Hotel, Biggleswade.

Two Brewers, Stotfold

Vicars Inn, Arlesey.

Rising Sun, Potton.

Coach & Horses, Stotfold.

March Hare, Dunton

Please visit these pubs and enjoy locally produced ales.

## **Tour de Bedfordshire Est - Stage 2**

May  $27^{th}$  2012 saw the second stage of the East Beds Branch Tour de Bedfordshire Cycle Ride after a break of just over 12 months to allow me to recover from last year's exertions.

This section started at the *Vicars Inn*, Arlesey where the flag should have dropped at 1.00 pm but there was a slight delay while awaiting the arrival of those joining the *peloton* from the South Beds Branch - Mike Coombes and Chris Madden who cycled across from Maulden and points west (and at the end of the ride cycled back again!). East Beds team members (plus one from the Huntingdon Branch) had arrived at Arlesey by train or cycle.

As usual there was a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the Vicars, the two hand-pumps both dispensing ale of high quality at a very fair price, perhaps the lowest in the Branch. Congratulations to the licensees for keeping the costs down for local drinkers. As the South Beds Team hadn't turned up by about 1.10 pm the main body set off for Stotfold only to meet them round the corner from the pub where they were heading to the Vicars for their first drinks stop. After a quick chat, they declined to join us on the next leg to the Two Brewers, Stotfold until they'd taken refreshment, we arranged to see them later on.

A "first" for this year was the appearance of the team car, driven with aplomb by Jaquie Binnington, joining us on part of the trip – well a few yards anyway – before setting off ahead to ensure that the staff in the Two Brewers were aware of our imminent arrival. The rest of us rode on from Arlesey on what could best be described as a balmy afternoon.

It wasn't long after arrival at the *Two Brewers* before the *arrière de course*, Mike and Chris, caught up with the main *peloton* and we went into an almost empty Two Brewers – Jaquie being the sole customer on our entry. With beer ordered and consumption under way we had a meaningful discussion with the chef about the lack of clientele. He explained that, unfortunately, some of the staff he had been expecting for work were not available so he had been forced to cancel all meals for the day which had obviously had a significant impact on the pub's trade. To be frank I think that the only reason they had opened at all was because they knew that we were turning up.

The beer was OK and as a B&T beer is always now available the pub can be listed as "LocAle" but I couldn't help but think that the beer would have been of better quality if there had been more customers and greater throughput. There was a little dissatisfaction from one of the team about the unavailability of a screw on sparkler (none available) but the rest of us were reasonably satisfied with the offerings. At least the new people running the pub are trying to balance the fine line between real ale and food which CAMRA members should support.

As is the norm nowadays in the slightly more well known *Tour de France*, Chris Freeman, our surveyor and cartographer, felt that we needed to cross a border so, without as much as a thought for our own county's ale reputation and with Belgium and Switzerland being slightly out of reach, our next stop was in Hertfordshire - the Orange Tree in Baldock. This stage of the journey proved to be controversial as the planned route was to follow the course of a bridleway through Norton Bury before joining the Norton-Baldock road just before it crosses the A1(M).

But the *peloton*, on a variety of velocipedes ranging in design from out and out "racer" to something akin to a grocer's delivery bike, split at this point with only two sticking to the approved route whilst the rest, led by the "Eaton Ford two", careered off into the distance along the road. Technically, had this been a race, only Chris & myself would have avoided disqualification but we caught up with the other riders when we eventually reached the *Orange Tree* where the novelty of Chris Madden's folding bike was creating a stir.

The range of beers and their quality was up to the normal high standards anybody visiting the Orange Tree would expect and for those who hadn't been before I took the opportunity to show them some of the architectural and artistic delights of the place until my audience started to glaze over. This took about two minutes.

It was very pleasant sitting in the back garden enjoying the banter and watching the aerobatics of swallows and swifts whilst listening to the robins, greenfinch, sparrows and chaffinch which were secreting themselves around the pub garden. It would have been easy to abandon the ride there and then, but we all knew that we needed to torture ourselves on the next leg so we reluctantly remounted and headed off to the **Coach and Horses** at Stotfold where Jaquie was on hand in the role of official tour photographer.

The beers at the Coach & Horses were a little disappointing which was surprising as Kim usually has top quality products on offer. A couple of the beers went off, so those who got the ends of the barrels were not best pleased although the ales were readily changed on request. Unfortunately the beers which went off were not changed immediately so the range available was somewhat restricted. Even so, we know these things happen and after assurance from others of our party that the pub's beers are usually "on song", peace and harmony once again prevailed.



The last stop was the *Engineers Arms, Henlow*, which was a fitting location for the end of such strenuous exertions (look, I've got to try to make it sound as though we deserved at least one drink at each stop, haven't I?) as we had covered around twelve miles. As usual the range of beers and styles were sufficient to satisfy the most discerning cyclist or drinker and all those sampled were in excellent condition. I apologise for not listing the beers we tried – not that it would be of much interest to anybody but ourselves – but next year I shall try to remember to take photographs of the banks of hand-pumps we encounter to act as an *aide memoire*.

At the end of the excursion some cycled home while others made their way to Arlesey station to return to Sandy and St Neots. Finally I'd like to say a special thank you to all of the tenants and licensees whose establishments we visited; Chris Freeman for organising the trip; Jaquie for providing the support and photographs; and Alan, Al, Archie, Tony, Mark, Phil, Chris F, Mike, Chris M and Ian for their good company on a grand day out.

#### Purbeck Beckons

Recently my wife and I visited the Isle of Purbeck which is part of Dorset and not an isle at all but quite firmly and irrevocably attached to the mainland. It is possible to see "real" islands from Purbeck, such as the Isle of Wight (providing the weather is clear enough) or Brownsea Island, southern England's last bastion of the red squirrel. It's even possible to cross from Sandbanks to Purbeck on the chain link ferry or from Bournemouth Pier or Poole Harbour to Swanage on the passenger ferry. But it matters not a jot how much you drink or how many hallucinogens you might take it isn't possible to dislocate the "Island" from the rest of Dorset.

Our stay was in the Bankes Arms, in the village of Studland, which also happens, quite fortuitously, to be the home of the Isle of Purbeck Brewery. Much of Purbeck is owned by the National Trust (NT) and the car park next to the pub is free for NT members but

those staying in the pub can get a token for use of the car park.





On the opposite side of the road from the pub is its massive garden which overlooks Studland Bay and across to Bournemouth. This is a bit of a wildlife "hotspot", despite the proximity to the pub, where squirrels, rabbits, tits, sparrows, jackdaws and other assorted birds and animals appreciate the crumbs and scraps left by the humans in the garden. What took us by complete surprise was an unknown (to us) bird call in some adjacent trees early one morning which, on further investigation with a pair of binoculars, turned out to be a pair of green parakeets.









The pub is very attractive from the outside with a climbing plant growing all over it, but the interior was a bit of a disappointment with tables not wiped down after customers had left and the bar was in a similar condition. Even so I thought it would be churlish not to try a pint but only about five of the nine hand-pulls had pump-clips on them and only three of those were from the brewery next door. Despite this I tried a pint of Solar Power which was perfectly acceptable although not exceptional which was surprising as we were, effectively, in the brewery tap. Carol had half of Fossil Fuel which was slightly better.

Only being in the vicinity for a couple of days we thought it best to try to fit in as much as possible and headed for Corfe Castle where, slightly up from the village square, there is a spectacular view of the ruins of the castle over the top of the Greyhound Pub. This is another very impressive pub from the outside but, being keen to visit another of my favourites later in the day, I declined to enter. Instead we had a fairly invigorating walk to the top of the castle ruins (another NT location) where there was an excellent view to the Swanage Railway and it was good to see the steam locomotives hauling carriage-loads of tourists between Norden and Swanage and stopping at Corfe Castle station.



Chatting with one of the NT wardens on our return from our exertions she gave concise instructions on how to reach the Square and Compass at Worth Matravers, which was our next much anticipated destination and the "favourite" I referred to above. The Square and Compass is a wonderful establishment and has been in the same family for around a century. The tables at the front look out to the English Channel through a gap in the hills and you can admire the view or watch the pub's chickens strolling around the tables taking little notice of either the humans or dogs sharing "their" garden.

The inside of the pub has an entrance passage which leads directly to the counter which serves as the bar and rooms to the left and right of the bar area. At the end of the passage to the left is the pub's other draw aside from the excellent beers and ciders, its museum, which may be unique in the UK. This is chock-a-block with lots of interesting artefacts from the local area particularly the archaeological finds from the nearby beaches. You can occupy yourself for a good half an hour looking at the exhibits while sampling, for instance, a beautifully kept pint of Palmers Copper Ale.



To sit outside the Square and Compass on a balmy summer evening with a nice pint while watching the sheep on the hills and the sea in the distance has to be one of Britain's pleasures. If you're really lucky and visit at the right time you may even get a pie or pasty.

Returning to the Bankes Arms for a bit of a nightcap was a bit of a disappointment as the beer I chose tasted as though it was on its last legs but, not having sampled the particular brew before, asked the lad behind the bar if it was near the end of the barrel only to be reassured that it had been put on the previous day. I finished it quickly and had a pint of something else to help take the taste away.

The following day we went to visit the red squirrels on Brownsea Island (NT) which was very rewarding as the adults and young were very approachable and extremely acrobatic. They make very light work of raiding the bird nut holders no matter how precarious the branches are on which they have been placed. Although it was raining fairly hard on some of our walk around the island the sight of these beautiful little animals made us forget that we were soaked to the skin as we'd set out in shirts with no coats or umbrella.

continued on next page

Later in the afternoon we returned to the pub where we were staying and the offending beer from the previous night had been replaced. I gently remonstrated with the same barman and he apologised but I was left with the overall impression that the pub could be much better than it is with a little care and some staff training.

That evening we went over to West Lulworth to the Castle Inn which turned out to be another excellent pub. The reason I went there was because, on our last visit to Dorset in 2010, I was chatting with the dray woman for Dorset Piddle Brewery who told me that her favourite pub was the Castle which was quite close to where she used to live. It was easy to understand her enthusiasm as, on our visit, they were serving Plain Ales Innocence, Yeovil Ales Ruby, Flacks Double Drop, Goddards Fuggle Dee Dum, Palmers Best Bitter and Dorset Piddle's Piddle. Ten ciders and three perries were also available.



The only drawback was that the smaller of the pub's bars had a couple of dogs in it with their owners who I could only speculate had lost their sense of smell. I've since discovered that the pub prides itself on being "Dog friendly" so if you've got a pooch and want somewhere to bed down with it for the night then the Castle is just right for you.

It comes as no surprise that the pub was East Dorset CAMRA's "Rural Pub of the Year" 2010 and has won the accolade again in 2012.

The return to the Bankes Arms for our second night's stay was enlivened by a Women's Morris side from Poole and top quality beer at last which allowed me the opportunity to sample all that were available (three or four) from the next door brewery.

Before leaving the next morning we had the opportunity to chat with the brewer's parents who explained that all of the brewery's beers are rarely available at the pub at the same time as so much of it is sold in other pubs. The brewer's father asked if we'd be back for the mid-August beer festival which, if you look online, promises two hundred real ales and ciders.

All in all a good pub to visit if the beer is in good condition and the bar staff would show a little more enthusiasm for keeping the place clean and tidy. I should also mention it's about five minutes stroll from the beach and the South West Coastal Path.

Barry Price

#### **Cryptic Crossword Solution**

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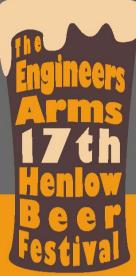
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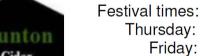
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