



the

Casket

Campaign for Real Ale



FREE

January 2013

EAST BEDFORDSHIRE

www.eastbedscamra.org.uk

casket@eastbedscamra.org.uk



1,200 CAMRA members at London rally, page 16

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Volume 9

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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

Last October, the branch held a meeting at the Coach House, Potton giving members the chance to see how well the pub has progressed under Chris and Belle. There were four real ales available, two from Wells & Young, a third dedicated to a local ale such as Potton or Buntingford, and the 4th one was another rotating guest ale. Everyone enjoyed their beer and voted to invite the Coach House to become the 10th pub in the branch LocAle scheme. I met with Chris & Belle a few weeks later and they were delighted with the news and now display the LocAle pumpclip crowners, poster & window sticker—well done to everyone at the Coach House.

On the '*real cider*' front we are pleased to announce that the Coach & Horses, Stotfold is the now the 7th branch pub selling at least one real cider or perry on a permanent basis. It did not take landlady Kim Clark long to install a regular '*real cider*' after taking over the pub in March 2012. Since then she has put on a dedicated 'cider & perry festival' during the August bank holiday weekend. This was an ambitious move & although there was plenty of cider left over, we trust Kim wasn't too put off by this first effort and we hope she will try this festival again in 2013, perhaps on a smaller scale. For a full list of LocAle & Real Cider pubs go to page 21.

John Goodlet



The Orange Tree, Baldock

A 330 year old traditional pub with 8 real ales on sale at all times, always including Greene King IPA, Abbot Ale, XX Mild and a LocAle from Buntingford Brewery.

We also sell locally made Apple Cottage real cider. Fantastic home-made, locally sourced food available every lunchtime and evening, along with wonderful Sunday lunches with Chapman's roasted meats.

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LOCAL PUB & BREWERY NEWS

Punch Taverns in Potton

This national pub company owns two pubs in Potton, within a few hundred yards of each other. The **Red Lion** which had been closed for two years, was refurbished and re-opened in December 2011, suggesting it may have a bright future. Meanwhile, the nearby **Bricklayers Arms** continued to decline, losing trade and had been run by temporary managers since January 2012, until it suddenly closed last August.

There were rumours that Punch wanted to take advantage of the large garden area and sell off the property for development, only for them to discover that part of the garden cannot be sold, as it is covered by a long standing covenant from a previous owner, ensuring that the ground can only be used as part of licensed premises or for horticultural use. It is rather fitting that a national pub company is falling foul of a covenant, given all the 'bad press' incurred by the pub industry for using restrictive covenants to prevent their competitors from using old pubs as licensed premises.

This U-turn in policy has resulted in a rather bizarre decision, where Punch are now reportedly selling off the Red Lion privately to an investor who wishes to run an Indian restaurant. They are likely to ask the tenants Tom & Mary Kilroy to move and re-open the Bricklayers Arms. Such a shame, given the time and effort they put in to restore the trade at the Red Lion.

They are hoping the Bricklayers will be given a full refurbishment before agreeing to the move. Why are Punch Taverns, selling a pub which is in good condition & planning to re-open the run down pub. It is a mystery—do they really know what they are doing?

Inn Briefs

Gerry Lant retired after 17 years from the **Cock Inn** in Broom in early December. The inn is currently being operated by a 'holding company' with a 12 month lease, on behalf of owners Greene King, whilst the inn is 'up for sale' for £350,000. We hope it will go to another brewery, pub chain or as a freehouse, but concerns remain that the pub may be bought by property developers.

Local press reported that the former **Lord Roberts** in Sandy which has been closed for a year, was sold on 24th Sep 2012, by Charles Wells to Aminur Rohman. It was due to re-open as an Indian restaurant before Xmas, but was still boarded up as we went to press.

Whilst checking the sale details of the Cock Inn on the internet, it was noted that the **Admiral** in Clifton was also up for sale by Greene King. If you have information about any pubs currently closed or up for sale, please write in and let us know at casket@eastbedscarma.org.uk

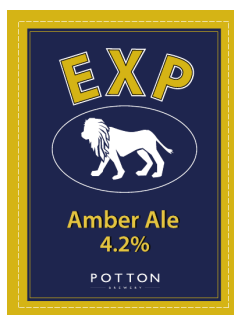
Potton Brewery Update

The brewery has welcomed a new brewer, Stuart Robson to Potton joining Manager, Colin Morris. Potton's sister brewery, Franklin's at Bexhill-on-Sea also has a new brewer.

Stuart hails from Durban, South Africa where his family is involved in the brewing industry. They have won CAMRA World Bottled Beer awards. Some new brews are already in the pipeline at Potton and will be available before the end of 2012 as described below.

Potton's beers are selling well and their 35 barrel plant will need to expand to keep pace during 2013. Moonraker, a 5.2% classic premium bitter, which was introduced in the autumn has sold well, as did Penny Bitter which at 4% is an eminently quaffable session beer.

For Christmas two old favourites will be brewed, Fallen Angel at 4.8% and No Ale also at 4.8%. In January 2013, Pride of Potton will re-appear - a strong winter bitter at 6%. No doubt influenced by the arrival of a new brewer, three more new brews are on the way:



EXP Amber Ale – a 4.2% medium coloured bitter

Chestnut Original – a 5.1% premium beer

Lion Pale Ale – a 4.4% golden ale

Watch out for these beers in local pubs, particularly the White Hart in Campton, which has been featuring 3 Potton ales in recent months.

The brewery premises are currently undergoing a major overhaul to accommodate increased production and also to enable brewery tours to recommence. It is anticipated that these will start early in 2013.

The Stag Tavern in Stotfold

The Stag in Stotfold closed last July, but after a refurbishment it reopened under new management on Wednesday 12th September, followed by a more formal opening, buffet and party on the following Saturday. The changes give a fresh and airy feel to the main bar area, with the little island section behind the bar much altered. This will hopefully solve the ‘blind spot’ where in recent years staff regularly failed to notice new customers arriving via the front door. The modern approach has resulted in a lot of the wood panelling above the bar being removed and gone with it are all the historical handpump clips, plus the little railway track that a former landlord used to have for model trains to run round above the bar. One thing to watch out for, is that the Ladies and Gents rooms have swapped places, so if you haven’t been recently, mind you get the right one, although it could be an interesting way to meet members of the opposite sex.

Owners Punch Taverns have leased the pub to a company called ‘Paperweight’, who also run 40-50 other pubs nationwide. They have asked Tony Johnson to be the pubs manager, operating it as “franchise” and part of a branded image for the company. “The refurbishment has given The Stag a new lease of life, it looks fantastic and there is now something for everyone”, said Punch Taverns’ partnership development manager, Julian Searle *[seen on the left in the photo, with manager Tony Johnson on the right]*



Technology moves on with everything in the pub, being centrally monitored via a system installed by Ibrew, which gives full access to all lines whether it is for beer, lager, cider etc and feeds data about temperature and consumption straight to the back office computer and Paperweight HQ.



You can expect to see national brands of real ale on offer. Fuller’s London Pride and Adnam’s Bitter will be regular ales and two other rotating guest ales, which on a recent visit were GK IPA and Sharp’s Doom Bar. Prices are about average for the area at £3.00/3.20, there may be some promotional pricing on future guest beers.

Once things have settled down, manager Tony plans to bring back some events that were popular in the past, such as a beer festival and hog roast in a marquee in the car park, plus music nights involving karaoke, discos and live DJs. Regular hours for food Mon-Sat will be 12-2.30pm & 6-9pm and a Sunday Roast at £7.45 served 12-4pm. Watch out for special offers, weekday lunches with 2 main courses for £11 and on Thursday nights – a choice of curries for £4.95 [or £6.95 including a pint of beer]. I am sure many customers will like the sound of that.



Sadly there won't be any LocALe beers or scrumpy style cider. Will the new approach win us over? You will have to visit the Stag to find out. So pop in next time you are in Stotfold and see what you think of the changes, the beer and the service.

John Goodlet

Lindsey and the team Welcome you to the

Sir William Peel P. H.



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DIARY DATES

- JAN.** 8th, Branch Meeting, Sir William Peel, Sandy, 8 pm
29th, Special GBG Selection Meeting, Two Brewers, Stotfold 8 pm
- FEB.** 9th, Branch Social @ March Hare Winter Beer Festival, Dunton 1 pm
26th. Branch Meeting, Plough, Langford, 8 pm
- APR.** 9th, Branch Meeting, George & Dragon, Potton, 8 pm
26th, Branch Social @ Sir William Peel B.F., Sandy, 1 pm
- MAY.** 7th, Branch AGM, Engineers Arms, Henlow, 8 pm

BEER FESTIVALS

- Feb.** 7th-10th, Winter Beer & Cider Festival, March Hare, Dunton
14th-17th. 3rd Henlow Cider & Country Wine Festival, Engineers Arms, High Street, Henlow
21st-23rd. 30th Luton Beer & Cider Festival, Hightown Sports & Arts Centre, Concorde Street, Luton **CAMRA**
- Mar.** 14th-16th. 38th Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival, Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St. Neots **CAMRA**
- Apr.** 25th-28th. The 5th Sir William Peel Beer Festival, High Street, Sandy
25th-28th. The 9th Anniv. Beer Festival, Half Moon, Queen Street, Hitchin
- May.** 2nd-6th. The 10th 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

Steppingley Beer Festival

This is usually a large affair held in the grounds of the Drovers Arms, a pub-turned Indian Restaurant and normally has about 1,500 people and 50-odd beers. In September 2012 – due to planning permission refusal for the marquees – it was a smaller, more intimate soiree held in the village hall, which was the recipient of any profits. About 150 people attended to sample 10 beers, 4 ciders and a couple of wines for the unbelievers. Not a spectacular selection of beer – 4 were from Banks & Taylor – but enough variety for such a small festival and all priced at a reasonable £3 a pint and £3.50 for the cider.

Entertainment was provided in the shape of a Ukulele band, they massacred well known classics to the delight of the party-spirited attendees. Food was in the form of wraps for the early session and later sausages a la barbecue were on offer at reasonable prices. A thoroughly fine time was had by all. 2013 should see the Festival restored to its former capacious glory and if so, perhaps an outing of East Beds members in t' charabanc would be a good idea?

Chris Bunyan

THE POTTON BREWERY

COMPANY



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Potton Apple Day

The East Beds branch recently took part in the Potton Apple Day on Sun 30th September, running a cider stall for a four hour slot in the afternoon. This is still a relatively young event and in the early days of development. The main focus of the day is to promote apples and their use in the food and drinks industry. In St. Mary's Hall, Potton there were displays from the Potton Apple Society showing current and historical information about local orchards and apple varieties, many of which are disappearing from the countryside and now endangered. The event was organised by the Potton Apple Day Committee, with branch member Sally Wileman as liaison officer. Sally is well known in our branch, having been involved in running Bromham Apple Day where we used to run a cider stall.

Outside in the adjacent grassed area, were groups of visitors bringing along 'cider presses' big and small, with locally sourced apples and they gave demonstrations to the public on how apples are pressed to get the juice. Elsewhere there was a stand selling local apple juice and another with a pig roast, plus tea, coffees and cakes were available in the hall itself. Potton branch member Stephen Black had a stall to promote 'home brew' kits for cider, as part of his business running the 'Happy Brewer' shop in Bedford. We also had a special visitor, with the arrival of Ted Bruning, who came along with copies of a new book he has written called "Golden Fire – The Story of Cider". As a long time CAMRA member Ted has been active in our organisation, writing many articles in our flagship newspaper 'What's Brewing'. His book charts the history of cider making in England over the centuries. I was lucky enough to get a 'signed copy', if you would like a copy check out the Amazon website.



[The Happy Brewer stand]



[CAMRA members with cider press]

Meanwhile, the CAMRA cider stall was being set up, with Jo Freeman acting as our team leader. Jo ordered the cider, the takeaway containers and arranged the stall with the help of husband Chris and also branch vice chairman Tony Morris. Chris Foskett our treasurer turned up and provided a float for our till and we were ready to go. We had 10 boxes of cider and perry, some in 10 litres and some in 20 litres sizes. We opened up with the following list:-

Apple Cottage – Filthy Tramp Juice 6.7% [med]
Dunton Cider – Cider 6.5% [dry]
Potton Press – Sweet Spot 8.2% [sweet]
Gwynt y Ddraig – Two Trees Perry 4.5% [med]
Gwynt y Ddraig - Happy Daze 4.5% [med]
Mr. Whiteheads - Strawberry Cider 4.5% [sweet]
Potton - Apple Daze [amateur cider maker
using last years pressings]



[Les Ivall tries the cider]

As we progressed, the Dunton dry cider was selling out, so we opened a Dunton medium cider 6.5%. We had two more unopened boxes of cider in reserve, but they were not required. Whilst Jo and Tony were front of house, Chris took on the role as ‘Mr. Shifter’ and I took to cleaning glasses. I am glad we chose to use proper glasses, cider tastes so much better in a glass. We still had some small plastic glasses for ‘tasters’ but used proper glasses for service, sourced from CAMRA Products. Many of these glasses came from previous beer festivals all over the country and are often used as prizes. Tony pointed out a rather elegant Stewart Brewing glass, from my home city of Edinburgh, I quickly appropriated it as my drinking glass.

We were fortunate enough to spot quite a few CAMRA members, popping in to try our wares. Les Ivall worked his way through most of our tipples, Mel Draper tried a fair few before walking to the John O’Gaunt on route back to Biggleswade and a big shout out to our Geordie member Kevin Blackett. When his wife volunteered to drive home, he felt it was his duty to manfully set about drinking 4 pints of cider and take some more home as well. I suspect he single-handedly contributed to our stall making a profit. We hadn’t intended to make much of a profit, the main aim was to promote local ciders and their producers, such as Apple Cottage in nearby Baldock, and indeed two of their staff there came along to check us out.

continued on next page

Providing we did not make a loss, as there was a licence fee to pay, we were happy to 'break even' or make a modest profit for fund raising. This event certainly has the potential to become bigger and better supported in years to come. Increased advertising and the addition of some other stalls would benefit the event. I can imagine a home baking stand with apple pies, strudels and cakes. Perhaps a Bedfordshire cheese stand, with fresh bread would accompany a pint of cider. We look forward to being invited back next year.



[Ted Bruning & his new book]



[more apple pressing]

As the event began to wind down and we wanted to finish off some of the cider boxes with only a few pints left, I was despatched like a 'town crier' to walk round the event shouting 'last orders at the cider stall for take-aways'. After that it was back to the kitchen to wash more glasses, I was beginning to sense my long term role in this event as a 'potboy'. Oh why wasn't the dishwasher working? Which bright spark had sabotaged it, just to watch me get my 'marigolds on' and disappear in a flurry of bubbles. My back still hurts just thinking about, ah well – no pain, no gain. I don't think drinking scrumpy is a cure for sore muscles, but I got my own order in for some takeaway cider & perry and I gave it a damned good go over the next few weeks. With the event wrapped up, the team retired to the remnants of the March Hare beer festival for a rest and a beer. See you next year, I'm off to buy new marigolds.

John Goodlet

The Half Moon

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Come in and try our great range of real ales, real ciders and home cooked food.

Opening Times

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Friday, Saturday : Noon - 1am

Sunday : Noon - 11pm

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CAMRA North Herts POTY 09, 10 & 11

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The Stag Tavern at Stotfold



Opening Hours Mon-Thu 12-11, Fri-Sat 12-12 & Sun 12-10.30
Traditional pub meals served daily 12-2.30, 6-9, plus Sunday Roast 12-4
Adnams Bitter, Fullers London Pride, plus two changing guest ales
Regular music evenings featuring karaoke, discos & live DJs
Sun Terrace & Car Park

35 Brook Street, Stotfold, Beds, SG5 4LA

Telephone: 01462 730261

Website: www.thestagpubstotfold.co.uk

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Russell Square Romp

Arriving at Kings Cross with 4 hours in hand before the peak ticket time kicked in and not wanting to again frequent the Parcel Yard at Kings Cross, I ventured out one stop on the Piccadilly Line to Russell Square Station. On leaving the station, I turned right and right again into Grenville Street, then left into Guildford Street and right into Doughty Street where at the junction with Roger Street is **The Duke of York**.



This is a real period piece of 1930's architecture. It has two bars with Art deco flooring, doors and wall panelling and a red piano stands along one wall. At first when entering the pub it looked rather tatty, but after a while it portrayed a certain charm. However the pain of purchasing a pint of Harveys - Sussex Best Bitter 4% at £4.10 came as a bit of a shock. It was the most expensive beer I had on my visit to the 4 pubs, but it could have been worse as St. Austell - Tribute 4.2% and Sharp's - Doom Bar 4% were also available at a whopping £4.30 a pint.

Upon leaving the pub I carried on down Doughty Street and John Street, until it joined Northington Street, where I found the former King's Arms, now **The Lady Ottoline**. Presumably it is named after Lady Ottoline Violet Anne Morrell (1873–1938) an English aristocrat & society hostess. It is clearly now a pub/restaurant and the complete opposite to the one I had just left, being classily set up for diners, whilst drinkers had stools at the bar. Timothy Taylors - Landlord 4.3%, Sambrook's - Junction 4.5% and Pumphouse Pale Ale 4.2% & Sharp's - Doom Bar 4% were available. I had enjoyed a pint of Junction at £3.60 a pint, more like the price I expect to pay in London. The staff were very pleasant and had no objection when I asked for my pint to be topped up. (I do like my full measure). The food also looked very good at sensible prices.



Heading for the next pub I walked west along Northington Street and at the bottom with Great James Street on my left, I cut across to the right to the end of Rugby Street, where I came across the **Rugby Tavern**, so named because it was built around 1850 on land donated by the founder of Rugby School. It seemed that Christmas had come early in mid November, as it turned out to be a Shepherd Neame pub where Late Red 4.5%, Spitfire 4.2% and Master Brew 3.7% were available.



I had a pint of Late Red which again was in good condition at £3.70. The pub has a large horseshoe shaped bar and the food looked excellent at reasonable prices. If you wish to visit this pub, be aware – it does not open at weekends, just Mon-Fri 11am-11pm.

On leaving the pub I turned left up Rugby Street and right into Lamb's Conduit Street to visit my last pub **The Lamb**. The pub was first recorded in 1729 although now it is mainly a Victorian building. This pub has snob screens around the bar – a set of small pivoting panels of etched glass on the bar counter positioned at head height to increase privacy.



Young's – Bitter 3.7%, Windsor & Eton – Guardsman 4.2%, St Austell – Tribute 4.2%, Redemption – Bloomsbury Blond and Meantime – London Lager 4.5 were on tap. I had the Guardsman at £3.70 pint which again was in good condition. So returning north along Lamb's Conduit Street to Guildford Street, I retraced my steps back to Russell Square Underground Station in time to catch the off peak train home after a very enjoyable walk around 4 very unusual pubs, ranging from the rather tatty at first appearance of The Duke to the well laid out pub restaurant of the Lady Ottoline and the typical city pubs of The Rugby Tavern and The Lamb.

Clifford Luff

Parliamentary Lobby

On Wednesday 12th December 2012, more than 1,200 CAMRA Members, publicans and brewers descended on Parliament to ask their MP to support the campaign to scrap the beer duty escalator. There was also a virtual lobby, with over 1000 emails sent to MPs and an unprecedented number of tweets showing support for the campaign. Headquarters for the event was the Emmanuel Centre on Marsham Street, within 5 minutes walk of Westminster.

The day started with a rally in Parliament Square giving many an opportunity to relive their youth and take part in a peaceful demonstration about beer tax. The group also highlighted the plight of pub closures by displaying the signs of three pubs closed down in the week before the lobby. A total of 5,800 pubs have closed since the 'beer duty escalator' was introduced in 2008. A survey between March and September 2012, indicates that the rate of closures has increased to 18 pubs per week, projecting a total of more than 900 pubs closing within the year. Can you spot East Beds branch secretary, Barry Price in the photos below?



Back at the Emmanuel Centre, members registered to see their MPs and get briefed on beer tax facts and figures. Some had pre-arranged meetings, whilst others turned up to 'green card' their MP to ask for an open meeting in the lobby. About 300 MPs were lobbied, some members had positive chats with their MP, some even got a tour of Westminster or a visit the MPs "Strangers Bar". For the rest, their MPs were either not available or did not turn up. In Bedfordshire, Alistair Burt was overseas on business, but several members managed to speak with one of his staff. In Mid Beds, the meeting with Nadine Dorries was "on and off" several times in the days before the event. Ms Dorries eventually said she would be available on the day — but failed to show up to meet her constituents, who included CAMRA Chief Executive Mike Benner and East Beds chairman John Goodlet. South Beds branch fared better with several positive meetings.



In the afternoon when all the MP meetings had been concluded, members gathered again in the Emmanuel Centre for a roundup of the days events and to hear from a number of guest speakers. CAMRA National Chairman Colin Valentine kicked off proceedings by paying tribute not just to CAMRA members taking part in the event, but also to those who helped to organise and administer the event, including a plucky group of volunteer stewards, who manned the streets on a bitterly cold day guiding members to and from Parliament.

A number of MPs, Norwich publican Dawn Hopkins and London brewer Duncan Sambrook, all supporting the campaign, each made a brief statement. The most passionate plea came from Hazel Blears MP who said that ***“continuing pub closures were ripping the heart out of local communities and putting thousands of young people out of work”***.



Hazel Blears, MP for Salford

"The beer duty escalator is not doing the job it was designed to do. It is not getting the money in, it is not sensible. It is not getting the revenue in - how stupid is that?"

Andrew Griffiths, MP for Burton & chairman of All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group

"Today we have sent a strong message to MPs, to Parliament & the Government that we love our beer, we love our pubs & we are going to fight to defend it. Whilst we drink 13% of Europe's beer we pay 40% of all its taxes. We should scrap the beer duty escalator."

Charlotte Leslie, MP for Bristol North West

"Myself and other MPs like me are making the case to the Treasury that the beer duty escalator is a false economy. The beer duty escalator must be scrapped."

Greg Mullholland MP, chairman of All-party Parliamentary Beer Save the Pub Group

"You believe in our great national drink and you believe in the importance of the great British pub. You are some of the best campaigners in the country."

When the speeches had finished, members retired down to the reception area, to enjoy a pint or two of free beer laid on by local London and SE breweries. This gave members a chance to mix with other branches and share their experiences of the day and also of the impact of the beer tax and pub closures in their areas.



We all hope the government have listened to CAMRA members and are ready to act, because the statistics don't lie. The government takes £1 of every pint in duty and VAT. At the last budget the beer duty rose by 5%, yet in the first half of this tax year the revenue raised increased by only 0.3%. In the next two years the beer duty revenue is predicted to fall by £100 million, as the impact of pub closures and falling consumption takes its toll. The beer duty escalator no longer makes any economic sense, the tax has increased by 42% since 2008—when will enough be enough? Keep the faith and continue to apply pressure to MPs and government ministers to scrap the beer duty in the next budget.

30th Luton Beer & Cider Festival

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

Thurs 21st - Sat 23rd February 2013

About 110 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)

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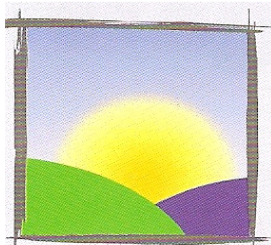
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East Beds Branch has adopted the area for the breweries to be 30 miles from Biggleswade and pubs selling good quality ales. The benefits of the LocAle scheme are to improve consumer choice, enable local breweries to sell more ales so they can expand and benefit the local economy and an increase in local identity and pride.

Breweries in the scheme

Potton, Potton, Beds.	B&T, Shefford, Beds.
White Park, Cranfield, Beds.	Addled, Weston, 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.	Red, Gt. Staughton, Hunt'don
Green Tye, Much Hadham, Herts.	

Pubs in the scheme

Golden Pheasant, Biggleswade.
 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
 Coach House, Potton

Please visit these pubs and enjoy locally produced ales.

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

Cider may also be available seasonally in

Tudor Oaks, Astwick
 Ivy Leaf Club, Langford

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**

Did you “Grin and Beer It” - I did

A new event appeared in our beer calendar from 27th-30th of September with the first “Grin and Beer It” beer festival held at the March Hare, Dunton. Landlord John Pritchett planned to have 16 to 20 beers rotating during the festival, starting with 4 on handpump and a further 4 were being dispensed by gravity from barrels on a temporary stillage. The barrels were covered with cooling jackets and set upon modern self-tilting mechanisms, which slowly tilt the barrel slowly as the beer is drawn off – clever stuff!

I popped in on the opening evening for a few quick halves and sampled Exe Valley – Shepherds Crook 4.7%, the refreshingly hoppy Buntingford – Polar Star 4.4%, plus the wonderful Belvoir – Dark Horse Mild 3.4%. On hand at the barrels were various members of the pub’s “Hare Beer Club” who volunteered to serve customers throughout the weekend, leaving John free to man the bar. The club is made up of beer enthusiasts from Dunton and the local area, Well done to Nigel, Simon and all the crew.



[Keith Rowland on barrel duty]

I wasn't in on Friday evening, but several customers said that the pub was rammed and had a very successful evening. On Saturday, CAMRA members arrived for an afternoon social, taking advantage of the local buses. First in was Al from Sandy on his bike, on a short break from the ‘Sandy Cycling Temperance Society’ to enjoy a few ales and chat about his forthcoming retirement and extending his cycling horizons. I was next to arrive, followed by Dave and Sue from Holwell, Cliff from Langford and Stephen from Potton. Lastly a group who had walked across from Potton, ably led by Les & Heleena.



The next bus brought Jo and Chris from Langford to complete our bunch of wandering ale testers. I took a few photos, but one [on the left] was rather mistimed, as Dave & Sue became camera shy, Cliff was busy getting his tongue to bottom of his pint jug and Al was more interested in me getting a round in, as he waved his glass in my direction. I took the hint and went to the bar.

Whilst John ran the bar, Janice was busy in the kitchen, preparing hot meals and snacks. Many customers enjoyed a bowl of ‘Chili con Carne’ and the aroma was very tempting, but fearing an internal combustion if the chili mixed with my stomach full of beer, I gave it a miss, much to the relief of my colleagues who would be sharing the bus journey home.

I concentrated on my ale intake by the quaffing Son of Sid – Muckcart Mild 3.5% and Festival 4.2%, Triple FFF – Jabberwocky 5.0% & Hard Knott – Code Black 6.5%. The latter two beers were a new style of ale, made popular by American craft micro-brewing. They were Black IPA's, a most unusual mix of the dark chocolate malt with the heady bitterness of an IPA. A strange brew indeed but they passed muster with most members, so we can expect to see more of this style of ale in the future.

Some members had Tring – Lord Darby 4.0%, Buntingford – Imperial Chocolate Wheat 6.8% & Blueberry Fields 3.8%. A few of the beers served from the barrels did not have much of a head, but never the less tasted fine. In the late afternoon we were entertained by John Eagling & Charlie Leslie [see photo], *sans instruments*, to sing us some 'sea shanties' and soon had everyone joining in the chorus. If only they had dressed for the part, I had visions of Prince Charles in his sailor outfit jiggling along to a hornpipe. I realised that the alcohol was having its desired effect and left with the others to get the bus home.



Saturday evening was also a very busy time at the March Hare, where visitors enjoyed folk music and the Letchworth Morris Men. By Sunday, I was busy all afternoon helping to man the CAMRA cider stall at the Potton Apple Day. After we had dismantled our stand, I brought my fellow cider sellers Jo, Chris and Tony down to the March Hare for a 'wash up' drink or two, trying Belvoir – Rare Breed 4.4%. Meanwhile as Jo was still in cider mode, she put in a supreme effort to Hoover up some of the festival cider .

John got a little carried away when he ordered the cider and had an extensive list with Cornish Orchards – Farmhouse 4.8%, Vintage 7.2% & a Perry 5.0%, Dunton Cider - a medium and a dry 2012 cider 6.5% and a medium 2011 vintage 5.6%, Apple Cottage – Rum Cask 6.8%, Old Albanian 6.9% & the wonderfully named Filthy Tramp Juice 6.7%. I meant to ask Jo which ciders she had liked the best, but by this time after a long day serving and imbibing cider, she was getting tired and having trouble with her 'worms' [as *Ronnie Barker* used to say]. I can only assume that she enjoyed THEM ALL.

The festival came to close, although a few beers stayed on an extra day or two. I managed to catch a late entry Belvoir – Oatmeal Stout 4.3% on Tuesday evening, when Chris and I returned to listen to the monthly folk music session. Speaking with landlord John, he said he was pleased with how the festival went and hopes to repeat the exercise perhaps in February with a focus on winter ales – I look forward to that.

John Goodlet

A beer or two in Ostend

My wife Carol and I recently spent a couple of nights in Ostend - ostensibly to visit the Christmas market both there and in Brugge, but also to take back twelve crates of empties to the Delhaize supermarket in Adinkerke – the first Belgian habitation of any notable size over the French border. In truth we also had to pick up eight full ones as I'm always a little concerned about getting snowed in during the winter months and I like to ensure we have a back-up stock of something more life sustaining than food.

Delhaize, Adinkerke is quite a good source of Belgian beers but they don't have anything extremely exotic or difficult to get hold of although, on the plus side, they will order crates of what you fancy **if** they can get hold of it through their main supplier. For those tempted to try this option it's always best to visit a couple of times and buy some crates of what you fancy but make yourself known to Mr Christian, the manager, who will take 'phone calls from the UK and have your order ready for collection when you arrive as long as he gets a few days notice. For example I'd heard (or read) of a beer called Floreffe some years ago the reviews of which were pretty positive and he ordered me a crate of it even though it wasn't stocked. It is now permanently on the supermarket shelf so I imagine the Belgians who frequent the shop also developed a taste for it. If he's not there when you ring it's our experience that the same arrangement will be made but some of the staff speak very little English and misunderstandings may occur unless you're fluent in the Flemish dialect or, at the least, Dutch.

All the Trappist beers are available, except the ever elusive Westvleteren from St Sixtus Abbey of which I wrote in an earlier article, and probably between eighty & one hundred other beers all at reasonable prices. It's worth bearing in mind that both bottles and crates carry a deposit (I think a full crate amounts to around 6.20 Euros) and Mr Christian basically refused to sell us any more beer when we returned after our first visit and explained to him that we'd chucked the bottles into the glass recycling system in the UK.

When we last visited we dropped off our empties on Friday and picked up our new supplies on Sunday so that we were neither carting a load of extra weight from Adinkerke to Ostend and back or leaving beer on display in Ostend's underground car parks – not that I've ever seen so much as a broken headlamp glass on my visits. The day we arrived was the first day of Ostend's Christmas Market so there was not the complete gamut of stalls that there will be in the weeks ahead but there were a few stalls in the market place mainly selling alcoholic beverages. These were grouped around the temporary ice skating rink which had been set up for the duration.

Fortified with a gluhwein we watched in admiration at the young kids skating some of whom, to me, seemed to be in need of "suicide watch" judging by the pace at which they raced around the rink as there were all abilities from "unable to stand" to "look at me, I'm going to be a speed skater" competing for the same stretch of ice. It wasn't long before we were lured by the siren call from "t'Bottelje", perhaps Ostend's premier beer establishment, which is located on the ground floor of the Hotel Marion. **[on right]**



The first time we visited it, possibly twenty or so years ago, the Good Beer Guide to Belgium and Holland (as it was then) indicated that there was a sign outside in English which said “Members Only” but, as long as you behaved yourself, you’d be served. In those days the beer list was a massive roll of dot matrix printed paper and an old couple ran the place which was about one sixth of the size of its current manifestation. I’d only had a couple of Belgian beers in the UK in those days and my first reaction on seeing the assembled ranks of bottles was that I’d died and gone to heaven

Nowadays there are a number of beer menus scattered around the place listing perhaps two hundred & fifty bottled beers with another ten or a dozen on tap as well as perhaps twenty genevers. The old couple have been replaced by knowledgeable bar staff in their twenties or thirties and its even possible to get food should you need it. The interior of the t’Bottelje is fairly dimly lit and has tables with comfortable chairs and sofas and fake Tiffany style lamps over some of the tables.



I started with an Hanssens Oude Gueuze (6%) **[on left]** which is perhaps a little sour for some tastes but cleared the sweetness and spiciness of the gluhwein from my palate. Hanssens doesn't brew beers but they are an artisan blender of spontaneously fermented beers from a number of lambic producers all located in the Payottenland, south-west of Brussels. Gueuze is a mixture of differently aged lambics which themselves are brewed using spontaneous fermentation so the yeast which starts the batch's fermentation is from anything which happens to blow through the window – a totally different concept from most brewers who jealously guard the origins of their yeasts and protect their integrity to ensure consistency in their beers' flavour.

By the time I'd poured my beer and wandered off to take a couple of photographs Carol had started a conversation with the old feller sitting next to her at the bar (Paul) who turned out to be an ex-diplomat who had served the Belgian government in the Belgian Congo (during the twilight of Belgium's colonial ambitions), Lebanon, various Caribbean and South American countries and the Orient. He spoke about six languages and I had an interesting chat with him about the difficulties that there are in Belgium – particularly with regard to the apparently insoluble division between Wallonia (the French speaking part) and the Flemish area of the country. Not only did Paul suggest that there is a linguistic divide but there are also cultural, social and religious differences as well as an entirely different work ethic which he likened to the laid-back attitude of southern Europe when compared to the “nose to the grindstone” of the North. He readily accepted that these may be stereotypes but they were alive and well, he assured me, in Belgium. Luckily there are a couple of things which do unite the country one of which is beer.

Paul was drinking a St Bernardus Christmas ale (approx. 10%) from the barrel which he highly recommended so, after finishing my gueuze and polishing off the free savoury nibbles which are generally provided at most decent Belgian bars, I availed myself of the St Bernardus **[on right]**.



I have to be honest I generally avoid Belgian beers which are on tap as the look of the dispense always reminds me of keg beers in the UK but, much to my surprise, the St Bernardus was opaque implying that it wasn't filtered. Additionally it possessed quite a nice "head" and wasn't at all gassy. After the gueuze it tasted quite sweet, which was hardly surprising as I've had sweeter lemons than the Hanssens, but it was very flavour-some after the first couple of sips had been dispensed with.

I raised the question of the aforementioned Westvleteren and he assured me that it was available in Ostend at a certain outlet (and for a high price) but that the St Bernardus range were similar to the ales from Westvleteren as the brewers who produced St Bernardus had brewed for the St Sixtus Abbey until a few years ago. I have to admit that there may be a certain amount of hyperbole about the Westvleteren 12 but that won't stop my determination to get a crate or two before I turn up my toes for the last time! I thoroughly enjoyed St Bernardus's Christmas offering and Carol was relieved to discover that t'Bottelje also served one of her favourite winter warmers – the Chouffe brewery's 25% coffee liqueur which is served warm with a head of cream.



I next tried the Dolle Brouwers (Mad Brewers) Stille Nacht **[on left]** which is 12% and exceptionally complex with sweetness, bitterness and acidity as it passes through the palate. Their beers are instantly recognisable as each of their bottles has a little bow tie on the label halfway up the neck. Like the Achouffe beers, decorated with little elves or gnomes on the labels, there is no respectful nod to monastic brewing traditions of Belgium which are normally firmly grasped by many other Belgian breweries whether they ever had anything to do with a religious order or not. The Dolle Brouwers labels are highly colourful and cartoon like and their Dulle Teve (Mad Bitch) has a caricature of what is rumoured to be the brewer's mother.

Whilst gently making my way through the Stille Nacht we opted for a little snack, a platter each of bread, pickles and cheese from the Trappist monastery at Orval. To be honest the cheese could have been from anywhere in the Low Countries as they all seem to have a similarly bland taste to me (my preference is for a strong Cheddar or similar which gives you a tingle at the back end of the jaw-bone) but there is a cheese shop in Ostend the aroma from which could fell an unsuspecting buffalo from about five paces so there must be strong cheeses available. In contrast Orval beer is again slightly on the sharp side but quite quaffable at 6.2%.

To finish the evening after a long day I had a Moinette Blonde **[on right]** from Brasserie Dupont which at 8.5%, ensured that I wouldn't need much rocking to sleep when I got back to our hotel. The next morning we strolled from our hotel to the railway station via the Saturday market for the train to Brugge which takes under fifteen minutes and is fairly inexpensive compared to the UK. Which European railway system isn't? The second leg to Brugge will feature in the next edition of the Casket in May 2013.



Barry Price



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