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FREE

Casket

Campaign for Real Ale

January 2019



EAST BEDFORDSHIRE

www.eastbedscamra.org.uk

casket@eastbedscamra.org.uk



Red Lion faces uncertain future - see page 4

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The Casket

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A word from the Editor

As summer slipped away into Autumn local branch members were starting a busy season. Firstly we set up and ran cider stalls at Fairfield, Potton and Stotfold Apple Days, secondly we manned the games and tombola stall at the Bedford Beer Festival for 4 days. All events proved more successful than before and all the funds raised will be used for local Campaigning. My thanks to all those volunteers and the branch will organise an evening out in 2019 to celebrate their contribution.

As far as the magazine goes this should be my last issue as editor. I announced last spring that I would be stepping down after eight years in the role, at the end of summer 2018. But, we are still looking for a new editor so and I have continued on a bit longer. The September issue did not go according to plan due to delays at the advertising company leading to the issue being ten days late. Also in their rush they made a big mistake and accidentally copied a page from the Social Bike Ride article and copied it elsewhere covering up the second page of the Huntingdon Pub Walk article. The online version of the magazine has been corrected, so if you want to read the Huntingdon Pub Walk, look for the September 2018 issue at <http://www.eastbedscamra.org.uk/casket.html>

Some late news before we went to press was that the **Chequers** in Little Grandsen, which lies a few miles across our border into Huntingdonshire, has made it through to the Grand Final of the National Pub of the Year competition. This pub is home to the Son of Sid brewery and has been run by the Mitchell family for 60 years. A special presentation was held at the Chequers on Sat 24th November and the overall national winner will be announced in February 2019.

John Goodlet



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LOCAL PUB NEWS

Red Lion, Biggleswade

In September Greene King announced that the pub was 'for sale', so landlady Juke Tyler, working for a management company applied for an Asset of Community Value in an attempt to buy the pub. She was backed by a 200 strong petition of local customers, who want the pub to continue as a vibrant live music scene which is quite distinct from other pubs in the town.



However, the application was rejected by Central Beds Council and their letter of reply looked strangely unprofessional. There was no reason for the rejection, it was not signed by anyone and the letter did not have the correct logo & council contact details. Juke wrote again to the Planning Department asking for clarification and the reason for rejection as did branch chairman John Goodlet, but neither received a reply.

Greene King then announced that they had sold the pub and gave notice to Juke and her partner to leave the Red Lion by early November. There were the usual rumours about land development deals, but that would still require 'change of use' planning approval.

A few weeks later, the story changed again, when the sale of the Red Lion fell through. Greene King extended the managers stay until the New Year. But there was one further twist in the tale a few days before Christmas, as another sale had been agreed and seemed likely to proceed quickly. The managers were asked to leave after New Year, then the pub will close down for 2 - 4 weeks for a refurbishment. It is thought that the new owner may also have purchased the New Inn.

So this has come a bit of a shock to the pub's loyal customers. The Red Lion is a classic Tudor style building and most likely the second oldest pub still operating in Biggleswade after the White Hart. What will happen to the Red Lion in 2019, we shall have to wait and see.

King's Reach, Biggleswade

A new pub opened in Biggleswade just in time for the Christmas period. The pub is located near the roundabout where Baden Powell Way meets the Potton Road. It was built by McMullens brewery of Hertford and it will operate under their "Chicken and Grill" brand.

The pub shares its name with one of the many new housing estates built inside the Baden Powell Way Road, which is now an eastern bypass for Biggleswade. Local members look forward to trying some McMullens ales, which have not been seen in this area for over 30 years. There should be two handpumps, perhaps offering AK and a seasonal ale.

Cromwells Cider Award

At the Potton Apple Day event Last Gasp cider from Cromwells won the best cider award. Tim Naisbitt, Andy Gibb and John Goodlet made a trip out to see Tony Hobbs at his home in Hemingford Grey near St Ives to present him with the award—a hand-painted plate. What a treat they had when Tony offered to give them an unofficial tour of his business. Tony has his own orchard in the village and all the fermenting kit is contained within his garden, garage and outbuildings.

This included a special press designed by Tony (he was a former engineer). Under the trees in the garden are many poly tunnels filled with fermenting tubs of cider.



Inside Andy and Tim sampled many different ciders, whilst John (as designated driver) got some perry to take home. Tony had dabbled in making spirits and liquors and so the tasting moved up a gear. There was even a cask strength Islay malt whisky, the remains of which Tony had discovered in a barrel bought and later used to age his cider—what a find!

Potton Brewing Company News

Potton Brewery has been operating for six months now and is making great progress. In the autumn, three of their beers were on sale at the Bedford Beer festival—Republic IPA 4.2%, Holly Pup Mild 3.8% and Hard Times APA 4.3%. Richard, the brewer, was also kind enough to donate some bottles as tombola prizes. For those interested in the technical aspects of the brewery, it was founded in May 2018 in an unused Victorian industrial unit behind the Market Square in Potton. It is a 2.5 Barrel system produced by Oban ales in Scotland, the equivalent of 10 firkins holding 72 pints each, total 720 pints per brew.

At present there are 1 - 2 brews per week producing beer in cask, bottles and unusually 5 litre minikegs. The cask ales feature in approximately 20 pubs in Bedfordshire and nearby counties. The brewery donates a penny from every pint to charity and supports local community projects. We look forward to further development of the brewery in 2019 with a possible visitors area opening on a mezzanine floor and perhaps some outdoor seating and BBQ. The brewery may then hold open days with ale tasting, food and entertainment on Fridays & Saturdays once or twice a month during spring & summer.



East Beds CAMRA has nominated the Potton Brewery to be considered for the Great British Beer festival in August 2019, no doubt many other breweries will be vying for the honour to showcase their ales at this prestigious event.

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DIARY DATES

- JAN.** 22nd. Special GBG & POTY Selection Meeting, Cock, Broom 8 pm
- FEB.** 9th. Branch Social & March Hare Winter Beer Festival, Dunton 1 pm onwards
19th. Branch Meeting, Crown, Stotfold 8 pm
- MAR.** 2nd. Branch Social , Engineers Cider & Sausage Festival, Henlow 1 pm onwards
15th. Branch Social Visit, St Neots Beer Festival 1 pm onwards
- APR.** 9th. Branch Meeting, Yorkshire Grey, Biggleswade 8pm
26th. Branch Social, Sir William Peel Beer Festival, Sandy 2 pm onwards
- MAY.** 14th. Branch AGM, 8 pm [venue TBA]

BEER FESTIVALS

- Feb.** 19th-23rd. Great British Winter Ales Festival, St. Andrew's & Blackfriars Hall, Norwich
8th-10th. March Hare, Winter Beer Festival, Dunton **CAMRA**
- Mar.** 1st-3rd. Engineers Arms Cider & Sausage Beer Festival, Henlow
14th-16th. The 44th Booze on the Ouse Beer & Cider Festival, Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots. **CAMRA**
- Apr.** 25th-28th. The 11th Sir William Peel Beer Fest, High Street, Sandy



Booze on the Ouse Beer & Cider Festival
Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots
14th-16th March 2019

Opening times

Thu 14th March from Noon to 10.30pm
Fri 15th March from Noon to 10.30pm
Sat 16th March from Noon to 10pm

Casket Cryptic Crossword

As before, all answers have been used as names of beers and/or breweries at some time somewhere in the world or have some other connection (however tenuous) with the wonderful world of beer and drink .

Across

- 5 Knock back one before dad gets a beer, possibly for two. (3,1,1,1)
- 7 Former pupil has a drunken fiddle leading to insensibility. (8)
- 9 Disreputable bar to fail but still make a big splash. (4-4)
- 10 Enjoyment but hangover not finished - quiet! (6)
- 11 Hmm, no Etonian disturbed heavenly neighbour. (3,2,3,4)
- 13 Part of beauty spot to note locally. (6)
- 15 Top protection for other than us. (3,3)
- 18 Spring water? (5,7)
- 18 Girl has a leaning to get drunk. (8)
- 21 With no ties a variety of techniques can put an end to thirst. (6)
- 22 Best counterfeit Toolmakers beer (3,5)
- 23 Habitual avoider of shorts, he will order nothing (8)

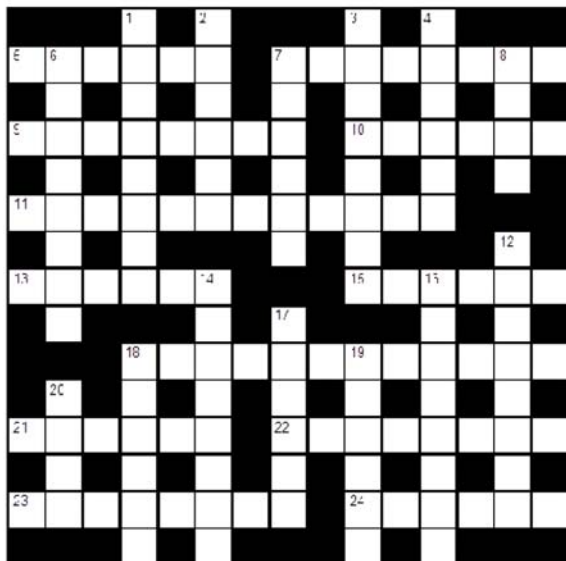
- 24 Northern brewery has got well and truly established here. (6)

Down

- 1 & 7 Drunken Ben recipient of 13's pleasant tippie (8,4,2)
- 2 Fend off unfathomed puzzle for trainer (a Jumbo one) (6)
- 3 Student immersed in endless carnage, debts follow - magnificent! (8)
- 4 After return of fiery torrent, no going back to legendary island (6)
- 6 Turn, turn endlessly after one soldier becomes a troublemaker. (8)
- 7 See 1 down
- 8 Big oven, but Sunday lunch is a non-starter. (4)
- 12 Herb can be arrogant when annoyed. (8)
- 14 Team could have pressed on it's said - top tip? (8)
- 16 Non-European whines, we hear, if leaving windflower in ruins. (3,5)
- 17 Rover once unwrapped 13 and found 7 (6)
- 18 Brewery sees the point in a president or two (6)
- 19 Didn't skip the beer flavouring? (6)
- 20 Drink one ugly zombie orders initially. (4)

Compiled by Chris Freeman

The solution is on Page 22



nature's
voice

St Albans Amble

On Saturday 13th October, I met up with pals Owen, Clive and Norm for a pub walk around St Albans. We took the train to Hatfield and then bus across to the City railway station, where just five minutes away was our meeting point at the **Robin Hood**, Victoria Street. It was a bright pub with a narrow frontage, but it went back a long way with a rear patio garden. A sensible start to the day saw us try Robinsons Dizzy Blonde & Harveys Sussex Best, missing out on the stronger Fleck Manor Wolfie and six real ciders.

As I walked around I noted the old game of the Nine Tailors and had a play, but alas my skills were found wanting. On one of the walls I saw an old photo of the pub possibly from the 1950s as it had J.W. Green's brewery signs. So it likely transferred to Flowers Brewery in the 1960's, then Whitbread and probably ended as part of Enterprise Inns before becoming a Free House (thank god!).



We headed down Keyfield Terrace where three pubs were in close proximity. First was the **White Hart Tap** and I was looking forward to trying some of their own brewed ales, but sadly none were on that day. Instead six pumps had three well known ales Taylor Landlord, Sharps Doom Bar and Castle Rock Harvest Pale, plus three more unusual ales in these parts. So we tried Pomona Pale Ale, Howling Hops Pale Ale and Turning Point Soothsayer which were pretty good, but similar in style.

Round the corner we found the **Garibaldi** near the foot of Albert Street. It was a Fuller's pub and had the usual London Pride and ESB, plus HSB and Seafarers from the former Gales Brewery. We opted to have the seasonal ales, Fuller's Red Fox and Dark Star Hophead and sat outside enjoying some later summer sun. Just before we left, a quick trip to the Gents loo proved curious. One wall was adorned with plaques with a variety of witty sayings.

Onwards, round another corner and into Sopwell Lane, we found the **White Lion**. At the bar were the familiar St Austell Proper Job & Tribute, plus Oakham JHB. But again we opted to try the lesser known ales of 3 Brewers Blonde and XT Animal—Lemur. This last ale was part of a series of beers featuring animal names and I think it is part of the Bucks based XT brewery. It was time to stretch our legs, so we went up Sopwell Lane and crossed Holywell Hill.



We ambled through the grounds below St Albans Abbey to arrive at the bottom of the Lake to find a famous historic pub Ye **Olde Fighting Cocks**. There had been some debate about whether to visit this pub, as we had heard that it had been taken over by Fuller's who were charging nearly £5 per pint. However, I was keen to see it for its architecture and history, as it claims to be the oldest in the country dating to the 8th Century, although the current building was finished in 1485.

Inside we found a busy pub struggling with staff shortages and the customers in their infinite wisdom had formed an orderly queue in each bar, despite a long bar area and they took umbrage as I walked to a gap at the bar seeking service. After a polite exchange of words I relented and let the Great British disease of queuing proceed



When we finally got served, we were delighted to see some ales from the Farr Brewery in Wheathampstead alongside Fuller's beers. For the first time that day Norm and I smiled at the same time, as we were lovers of dark ales. We tried Farr Porter and their Black Listed black IPA, both were excellent and made up for the plethora of pale ales already sampled that day. The only downside I noted later was the pub offered CAMRA discount of 20 pence per pint, but I did not know that on the day, nor did I see any signage, instead we paid £4.75 a pint.



Onwards we made our way up the east side of the Lake to reach the **Six Bells** on St Michael's Street. Here we found a beautiful 16th century freehouse with low ceilings and exposed beams. It was very homely, so we opted to stay longer and had a meal, a lovely plate of bangers and mash. At the bar Taylor Landlord, Bass, three from Greene King and Tring Ridgeway, were all in good nick.

As dusk fell, we wanted a final pint in the once classic **Lower Red Lion**, Fishpool Street. I recall this pub when it was run by Alan & Mary back in 1990s, it was an awarding winning destination pub with a large selection of ales. Today the pub has been modernised and still features in the Good Beer Guide with four ales. The ales were all fairly pale from Tring, Extreme, Oakham and Hornes. After that we wandered back to catch our bus to Hatfield, where we had just missed a train. So yet another pint in the Eight Bells, pretty much finished us off and left us eventually snoozing on the train home. We shall certainly return to St Albans for another walk as there are many more good pubs—The Goat, The Boot, The Mermaid, Rose & Crown, Verulam Arms, to name but a few.

John Goodlet

Autumn Cider Season

The first event of the season was the **Fairfield Apple Day**, held at Kipling Crescent in the Village Hall. However, with fine weather forecast, we set up our stall outside with a gazebo for wind protection. A fine range of ciders were on offer, plus for the first time in many years, there was 'mulled cider' using Stotfold Press' own cider. There was quite a debate amongst the volunteers who were checking the quality of the mulled cider. It was like producing a 'fruit punch' where everyone had different tastes and wanted to add things to the recipe. In the end, we added some sugar, ginger and extra cloves to give it a much needed lift.

So with the stall ready, Tim and Peter left to start the 'apple pressing', whilst John, Barry and Simon opened the bar. The range included three from Potton Press—Cox 7.5% single variety cider, Pyder 7% (mix of apple and pears), and the strong dry Trip Hazard 8.2%. From Cromwells in Hemingford Grey, Huntingdonshire we had three ciders —Oliver's session 4.5% medium, Oliver's Choice 6.2% medium & Oliver's Last Gasp dry. There were two ciders from Cam Valley—Punters Pleasure 7.3% sweet, Discovery 7% sweet, plus one more from Cambridge Cider company—Much Merriment 6.5% sweet.



This proved to be our most successful year at the event and blessed with good weather, the customers got through a few of the smaller boxes of cider and made a reasonable dent in the others, with the exception perhaps of the strong 'Trip Hazard'. The event was quite busy with a mixture of stalls offering baked goods, cheese, hot pork buns, Bedfordshire Clangers, chocolate, tea and coffee. etc. There was some music and a live show by the young Majorettes.

Onwards and the next day, we set up again at the **Potton Apple Day** outside St Mary's Hall. Again we had a similar range of ciders, plus some from local producer Andy Gibb including a sparkling version in bottles. Again Tim and Peter were busy pressing the apples and at the bar, a change of volunteers with Chris, Jo and Mel joining John to serve the customers. We were lucky again with the weather, although it was overcast and a little breezy, it was fairly warm and the visitors took advantage of the seating to watch the apple pressing and listen to the live music.



There were other stalls offering a pork bun, sweets, Asian snacks and much more. Inside the hall, there was a variety of baked goods, tea and coffee. During the busy afternoon we saw several of our friends from RSPB Sandy coming in to try the cider and enjoy the music. Within a couple of hours, many of the ciders were running out, so we made an executive decision to contact John Weekes from Potton Press cider and ask him to bring two extra boxes. He duly arrived with Happy Medium 7.4% and Sweet Spot 7.4% to boost our range of ciders.

Jo slipped off for a short period to hobnob with some local Potton dignitaries and organise them into a blind tasting panel to sample one cider from each of the producers on show. After much deliberation they selected Cromwells—Last Gasp dry cider as the Best Cider in show for 2018.

The event was easier to manage this year, as we had stopped using festival glasses (except for the mulled cider). John was relieved as he was usually the one who ended up in the kitchen with his marigolds. Instead we used recyclable rigid plastic glasses, this too made clearing up a simpler task as most customers disposed of their glasses in the receptacles provided at the bar. Towards the end of the event, some of the customers returned to the bar to purchase our 1 pint and 2 pint containers to take some cider home. The staff too get a perk whilst serving at the bar, getting a few free halves of cider during service and the option to take some away at half price later on. Most of our cider sold out that day, but there was still enough left for our final cider stall of the season at Stotfold a week later.



The **Stotfold Apple Day** is still in its infancy with just the cider bar, some apple pressing and some lovely homemade chutneys on sale. Tim, Peter and Mel set up the stall, but as it is still a fairly new event, they opted not to do the mulled cider. The remaining boxes of cider were quite low in quantity and it didn't take too long to finish then off and by the end of the event, there was not much left. The local kids too were keen to try the freshly squeezed apple juice and a few customers went off with a takeaway of juice.

The local branch owe a huge 'Thank You' to cider rep Tim Naisbitt for organising the cider stalls and procuring the an excellent range of ciders showcasing local producers in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The proceeds of the three cider stalls will be used for more 'local campaigning' to promote real cider & perry, along with Real Ale in East Bedfordshire. Plus there will be a subsidised evening out for all volunteers in the New Year to reward them for their efforts.



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NORTHANTS CAMRA AUTUMN
TOWN PUB OF THE SEASON 2018

Setting Up and Selling Out

Bedford Beer Festival used to be, for our Branch, the main annual source of income to run Branch activities, cover expenses and fund campaigning. Although still very important the efforts which have been made by our members at the Cider stalls at Fairfield, Potton and Stotfold Apple Days (this year all fell within eight days of each other) have helped to supplement the income we get from Bedford.

Over the past couple of years the emphasis of the stall at Bedford has changed, such that we no longer sell “Collectibles” (books, glasses, clothing and Real Ale Guides) but simply concentrate on Tombola and the pub game “Shut the Box”. Also the stall is no longer fully an “East Beds CAMRA” stand as Alan and Jaqui Binnington, the prime instigators of the venture from its inception, have moved out of the area and settled in their new home in Stamford, Lincolnshire. The upshot of these changes has been that the responsibility of organising the prize “kits” required to reward the winners of the two games – one entirely of chance and the other needing a certain degree of skill and a larger degree of luck - has now fallen to Roger Stokes, the Chairman of North Beds Branch. although all of the staffing this year was entirely from East Beds with Roger in overall command and providing essential backup.

Unfortunately this year started with a bit of an hiccough as the stand which displays the Tombola prizes failed to put in an appearance on the Tuesday morning (the festival opens the following day). Luckily the “kits” had arrived so Roger, Alan and myself were able to label up both kits of Tombola prizes – each lasts a couple of days before they start to appear a little “threadbare” as the prizes are claimed - before the arrival of the stand the next morning. Alan and myself were so fraught that we repaired to the Wellington Arms for a couple of pints to calm our nerves!

Because of the delay to the “timetable” Roger and I assembled the stand on the Wednesday morning and ensured that the prizes were artistically displayed before the public arrived. Well, to be honest, aestheticism didn't figure very highly – the only important target at this stage was to ensure we got all of the prizes on the shelves for the delectation of our discerning customers without breaking our necks doing so.



My next visit was on Friday with Ian and we arrived just in time to repopulate the shelves with “goodies” as “Kit 1” was down to a much depleted number of items thanks to the efforts of those who had been encouraging the clients on Wednesday and Thursday. Luckily Roger had taken a photo or two on Wednesday so we had a good idea of the spacing for the “Kit 2” prizes which were all in place before the hordes hit the doors.

Friday started off slowly but a bit of banter and noise started to attract our esteemed customers and we were soon into the swing of things. As usual the Tombola bucket emblazoned with the logo, **“Every ‘1’s a Winner”** quickly lures a few players. Those who haven’t played before expect a prize with every ticket when they reveal their number and have to be let down gently with the response “Unfortunately, you haven’t won as you don’t have a number ‘1’ on any of your tickets – every ‘1’ is a winner so you need the number one somewhere on your ticket.” Anybody who does win – and the odds are quite good – invokes the cry of **“And another lucky winner!”** from the staff on the stall which generally frightens those of a more nervous disposition or who have not yet been numbed by their alcohol intake and attracts the attention of those within earshot who may be persuaded to have a try themselves or perhaps to have a go on **“Shut the Box”**.

This game tends to captivate more adventurous folk than Tombola and if the players are in a crowd it is likely that all of their mates will also want to have a go – the friendly rivalry is infectious. Excitement mounts until somebody wins a T-shirt which usually provokes more people to invest their logic and mathematical skills in trying to duplicate the victorious player’s success. As you may imagine the consumption of beer and cider increases the animation of both competitors and bystanders until they are as willing to hand over their coinage as we are to take it.



The great thing about working on the Games stall is the total lack of animosity – everybody arrives in good spirits and leaves in much the same frame of mind. Indeed some are verging on the ecstatic when they ‘win’ a six quid T-shirt having spent ten or fifteen pounds doing so.

If you would like to join in next year then please come along for the fun but this year I’d like to thank, Roger Stokes, Mel Draper, Chris Freeman, Chris Foskett, John Goodlet, Ian Lemin, Cliff Luff, Andy McWhir & Simon Reynolds for their sterling efforts on the Games Stall, plus all the thirsty festival visitors who played our games in good humour.



May I also thank Richard Haigh of the Potton Brewery Company for his generous donation of bottled beers to be given away as tombola prizes – much appreciated – a sentiment which I am sure would be echoed by each of the winners of his ales.

So **“CHEERS!”** to you all.

Barry Price

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**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

Campaign Corner Report

Village or Town, Pub	LocALe	Real Cider	ACV	Festival	Discount
Arlesey, Vicars Inn	Wells				
Arlesey, White Horse			Yes		
Biggleswade, Crown Hotel					Yes 50p
Biggleswade, Golden Pheasant	Wells +	Yes			
Biggleswade, New Inn	Wells	Yes			
Biggleswade, Stratton House		Yes		July	
Biggleswade, Yorkshire Grey					10%
Broom, Cock		Yes		July	
Clifton, Admiral		Yes		June	
Dunton, March Hare	Wells, B&T	Yes		Sep & Feb	
Everton, Thornton Arms	Wells	Yes			
Henlow, Engineers Arms	L. Buzzard, Tring	Yes		Oct & Feb	
Henlow, Old Transporter	Several	Yes		several	Yes 20p
Langford, Plough			Yes		
Langford, Wrestlers			Yes		
Meppershall, Sugar Loaf			Yes		
Potton, Coach House	Wells, Buntingford				
Potton, George & Dragon			Yes		
Potton, Rising Sun	Wells	Yes		May & Aug	
Potton, Royal Oak			Yes		
Sandy, Bell			Yes		
Sandy, Four Horsemen		Yes			
Sandy, Kings Arms			Yes		
Sandy, Queens Head			Yes		
Sandy, Sir William Peel		Yes		Apr & July	
Stotfold, Coach & Horses	Wells	Yes			
Stotfold, Crown		Yes			
Stotfold, Stag		Yes			
Sutton, John O'Gaunt		Yes			
Wrestlingworth, Chequers	Wells	Yes	Yes	May	

A full list of LocALe Breweries and Cider Producers can be seen at
www.eastbedscamra.org.uk/locale www.eastbedscamra.org.uk/cider

Aldeburgh with the Engineers Arms

On 30th August last year the Engineers Arms ran a coach trip to Aldeburgh and other points East. Not “East” of Aldeburgh I hasten to add as nobody had taken their personal Victorian Bathing Machine or taken leave of their senses enough to take a dip in the North Sea. Luckily for those of us travelling from Sandy there was no delay on the railways and the weather was also set fair for a brisk walk from Arlesey Station to the Engineers Arms. We arrived at the pub at 9.00am and loading was already underway and the merry band were soon *en route*. Apart from a slight delay on the journey caused by a recalcitrant tractor driver on the A505 refusing to acknowledge a tailback from Duxford to Dunstable – we sped to Stowmarket to visit the **Royal William**. This backstreet pub, which Kevin had managed to persuade to open early turned out to be an absolute gem.

Walking through the front door the bar is set to the left which, at first glance, seemed a little disconcerting as there were no handpulls on it. Opposite the entrance door there was a beam with, hanging from it, small handwritten notices on slate or similar each having a beer, gravity and price displayed in chalk lettering. There were about a dozen ales available and all were served direct from the barrel from a small temperature controlled room behind the bar. Not only were they in superb condition they were reasonably priced as well.



The pub itself is an extremely handsome brick building with hanging baskets and flags displaying the Cross of St George and it seemed, with my entirely limited architectural knowledge, to be from either the Georgian or early Victorian era. Walking straight through to the rear we found a small patio which, even at 10.30am, was a perfect little sun-trap in which to down a couple of pints. Although Stowmarket may be a little difficult to get to by public transport it is well worth a visit if you are in the area and even better staying overnight nearby, as there are other pubs which may also be worth visiting but which may be runners-up to the **Royal William**.

After two or three very refreshing pints we got back on the bus and headed to our next stop which was, to somebody who hadn't been there before, a pub of considerable note given its location and the activities which regularly take place there, all of which are entirely innocent...well most of them probably are. The journey from Stowmarket to the hamlet of Blaxhall – I won't give it the honour of calling it a village as it would be like comparing the popular '70s Hamlet cigar to one of those big Cuban jobs so beloved by Fidel Castro and Winston Churchill – was only remarkable because of the skill of the Hungarian driver at negotiating lanes and traffic as though he was on a motorbike...very impressive.

The Ship Inn in Blaxhall is on School Road - one of the three main roads in the hamlet together with Church Road and Station Road, each of which should lead you to the destination mentioned on the street sign. Station Road appears to be most optimistically named as the 'station' appears to be in Campsea Ashe (although it is listed as 'Wickham Market' by Network Rail) a mere three miles away. There is little doubt that you would need a drink at each end of the journey if you were walking.



The pub has five or six very well kept real ales and is a smart pale-cream coloured building of considerable size considering the potential trade from the local clientele. There is a large patio area at the front – again it was sun-soaked on our visit – and a car park opposite. Inside there is a quite splendid folk music display with photographs, artefacts and information dating back many decades. It has a long tradition of live music which continues to this day and there is a Monday afternoon sing-song with the ‘Company of the Blaxhall Ship’ along with many other live music events throughout the year.

What is even more remarkable, in a setting where the only excitement appears to be the occasional tractor chugging past the pub, is that internationally renowned musicians of the calibre of Martin Simpson (a few days after our visit) and Martin Carthy (appearing in January) regularly play there. To aid anybody wishing to visit the pub and stay for a day or two, there are chalets for hire which include breakfast from its highly regarded restaurant. Another pleasant hour or so were spent in this rural idyll before it was time to move on a few miles to Aldeburgh, which we reached in twenty minutes.

The **White Hart** is a one room pub selling four Adnams beers and a couple of guests. It is located next door to Aldeburgh Fish and Chip Shop which was doing a roaring trade while we were there – as it does, on most days. The single storey building has wood panelling on floors, walls, front of bar and even the ceiling; seating out the front for the afternoon sunshine; tables and benches to the side and a pizzeria at the back with a wood-fired oven. The two beers I tried were spot on but slowly the group started to split up – in search of sustenance or food.



After taking in a breath of sea air I joined others in the **Mill Inn** for more of Adnams finest. This pub, in contrast to the last one, has several rooms with a view over the stony beach rather than the High Street. The interior has oak beams, tiled floors and leaded windows with a corner entrance almost opposite the Moot Hall. After a couple more pints we took another gentle stroll to the **Olde Cross Keys** which is entered by some steps down from the road. The exterior is cream and notable for the wrought iron pub sign while the interior has benches, chairs and tables and a “real” fire to huddle up to if visiting in the winter. Out the back is a large patio with benches and chairs and a sea view which was a pleasant spot for another pint or two of Adnams. Ian and I got chatting to a couple at the next table who were from Kings Lynn but, in what Bob Dylan called “A Simple Twist of Fate”, they had a fresh fish stall at St Neots market about a mile from Ian’s home.

We wandered back to the bus for the next visit, the **White Horse** at Sweffling which is on a junction of the B1119 – not quite in the “back of beyond” but just down the road from it. I’d never heard of Sweffling but couldn’t think of anything other than the old Edwardian joke about Kipling as we travelled to it. Quite frankly, despite my unbridled enthusiasm for the other two pubs we’d visited before Aldeburgh, I think that this was the best of a brilliant trio. As with the Royal William at Stowmarket the licensee had opened especially for us – we arrived just before 5pm when the normal opening time on Thursday is 7pm



Continued on next page

It was East Anglian Pub of the Year in 2015 and local branch winner 2015/16/17 and it is quite easy to understand why. The exterior is bright and welcoming and inside the brick walls, wood panelling, comfortable furnishings and friendly ambience make it a very cosy place to sit, drink, chat and eat - all food is sourced locally and all meats are free-range. Cooking is carried out on a wood-fired range.

Although it has a limited number of beers, at reasonable prices, they were in excellent condition, gravity dispensed - as was the cider - and served from the taproom door as there is no bar. All are sourced directly from East Anglia producers. On the wall above the taproom door are many bottled beers including "nilcoholic" drinks for those unfortunate enough to have to drive. Organic and Fair Trade wines are also on offer. For those who wish to stay there is an adjacent cottage which can sleep four people and Alde Garden behind the pub with yurts and other eclectic accommodation options.



Most of the commercial operations at the pub have eco friendly and environmental considerations, but that doesn't mean that hair-shirts and candles are obligatory. In my opinion it's well worth a visit. Finally it was time head for Henlow and the journey, full of cheerful banter and general razzle-dazzle, seemed to fly by—possibly as I may well have been 'Sweffled'.

Finally may I pass on my thanks to Kevin for organising the trip; my travelling companions for their good humour and sense of fun; the licensees and their staff - particularly those who opened specially for us - at each of the establishments; and of course our Hungarian driver who transported us safely throughout the day. I hope everybody enjoyed themselves as much as I did.

Barry Price

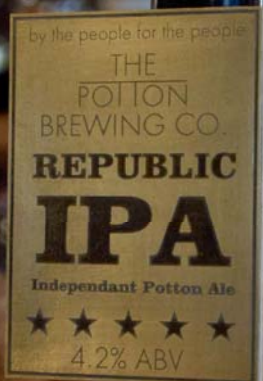
Cryptic Crossword Solution



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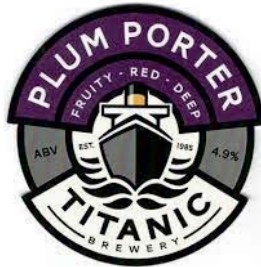
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