

# OPENING TIMES



Issue No 94 Nov1997

BRANCH NEWSLETTER  
BI-MONTHLY CIRCULATION 1,500 COPIES

## 'BOOZE ON THE OUSE' - ANOTHER SUCCESS

The 17th 'Booze on the Ouse' proved to be popular yet again as almost 1500 drinkers came through the doors at the four day event.

The eagerly awaited event draws lovers of real ale and cider from near and far as is proved by the addresses on our questionnaires that we ask drinkers to complete, so that we can try and give drinkers what they want.

Beer of the Festival' voted by drinkers at the festival was the excellent Dent Kamikaze, which is brewed in Cumbria. However, drinkers spread their choice across the full range of the sixty beers we had available and this had the effect of sales being steady across the beers with a good selection still being available up to Saturday night, making it an interesting Festival for everyone.

The first two beers to sell out were the ever popular Hopback Summer Lightning and the beer from one of our new, local breweries, City of Cambridge Hobson's Choice.

We were glad to see some local publicans attend the festival and also Rob and Liz Thomas from our other local brewery - Fenland from Chatteris with their beers proving popular.

Foreign Beer sales were also sustained, by those who wanted to try something a little different. We are already planning for next years event. If there any beers you would particularly like to see at St. Ives, then drop us a line and we will consider them for inclusion. All you new members that signed up at the Festival are welcome to attend our meetings and socials.

## WINTER ALE FESTIVAL

**January 22-23-24  
at St. Neots Town  
Football Club,  
Cambridge Street, St.  
Neots**

This is the next major event for the St. Neots branch and we are busy looking at the list of available winter ales, which of course gets larger year by year.

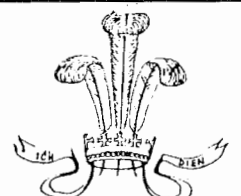
From that list we will be selecting about 15 beers for you to try and we hope to include some winners from CAMRA's Champion Winter Beer of Britain The venue is just five minutes walk from St. Neots railway station so is accessible from near and far.



**The Prince of Wales**

*'That nice pub at Hilton'*

(01480) 830257



ADNAMS BEST BITTER ELGOOD'S BLACK DOG MILD GUEST BEERS GOOD FOOD ACCOMMODATION

# BLUE BALL CLOSURE ALLOWED

**Brewers Greene King have been granted planning permission for change of use to a dwelling of their St. Neots pub the Blue Ball. The closure plans were the subject of opposition at public meetings and much press coverage during the summer, and planning permission has been granted despite objections submitted by the St Neots Branch of CAMRA and from local residents.**

Greene King will now be able to market the property with planning permission for conversion to use as a house. Conditions include the erection of a wall on the Russell Street frontage, and the development must begin within five years.

The Blue Ball was believed to be trading at a level of around 150 barrels per year until its recent closure and it is likely that the property would have been comfortably viable as a freehold free house. A wider range of cask beers available to a potential free house operator would have increased trading levels and ensured a viable operation.

There are no true free houses in St Neots and the Blue Ball provided potential for such a business, perhaps to a member of the local community. This could have been a chance for the improvement of consumer choice provided by suppliers of cask beer in the town. The large majority of pubs in the town are supplied by two brewers, Greene King and Wells. The Blue Ball provided a considerable social amenity for local residents, and was a meeting place for local clubs.

David Storrie, Development Control Officer for Huntingdonshire District Council states that CAMRA's opposition to the loss of this amenity for local residents 'did not constitute a valid reason for refusal of the plans'. He also states 'Indeed, I consider that a residential use is likely to result in less disturbance to adjoining residents, which is in the application's favour'. On those grounds, then every pub and other commercial enterprise should also be closed down as obviously a residential use would cause less disturbance depending of course on the resident!

It is to be hoped that a future local plan for the town will include the retention of public houses. In the current climate many more small town pubs are likely to be seen as non-viable by brewers such as Greene King, and the council should ensure that local plans give them valid planning reasons for retaining pubs as part of the life of our towns.

Greene King appear to be developing a 'churning' policy to change their tied estate towards higher volume

managed operations, in line with their recent takeover of the Magic Pub Company.

This involves the appearance of chains of so-called free houses known as the 'Pickled Newt', and larger themed food-orientated houses known as 'Hungry Horse'. A number of regional brewers, as well as the nationals, see such branded pubs as the route to higher profits, but there are many consumers who, given a choice, prefer traditional pubs, and there is an unsatisfied demand for genuine free houses in some areas.

It is to be hoped that our planning and pub licensing provisions may in the future be capable of encouraging a freer and more varied pubs market than they do now. The system should encourage new entrants to the pub owning business and discourage local monopolies.

Pubs which are no longer part of the owner's plans should have to be marketed as pubs for a minimum period before consideration of any change of use.

## BRANCH DIARY

All are welcome to attend our socials and meetings, which are held usually every other Tuesday at different pubs throughout our branch area.

Tuesday 25th November - CAMRA Curry Night - Meet **Royal Oak, St. Ives** 8.30pm themn local curry house.

Tuesday 9th December - Meeting - **Prince of Wales, Hilton** 8.30pm

Friday 16th January - CAMRA Cristmas Social - **Green Man, Leighton Bromswold** - 8.30pm Contact Kathy Hadfield 01480 496247 for details of mini-bus.

Thursday 22nd January - Saturday 24th January - **WINTER ALE FESTIVAL** - St. Neots Town Football Club.

For further details contact:  
Roy Endersby (Chairman) on 01480 473364

# OFFICIAL - BEER WITH NO HEAD IS BEST

## BREWERS AND PUBS IN A FROTH OVER FOAMING PINTS

Local real ale campaigners have hit out at brewers and pubs over the head on beer following a survey at the recent St Ives Beer Festival. The St Neots and District Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) claim that local drinkers prefer the taste of real ale served without a large head but that local pubs are following national marketing trends by serving their beers with a large tight head of froth.

St Ives CAMRA spokesman Paul Moorhouse said 'More and more pubs are serving draught real ales using a tight sparkler on the end of the dispense unit. This gives the beer a large head of foam similar to the image promoted for canned widget

beers and the new nitrokeg beers such as Caffreys. But the brewers admit that the sparkler changes the taste of real ale. The aeration removes natural fizz and bitter hop flavour leaving a flat, bland tasting beer.

In CAMRA's St. Ives survey drinkers compared samples of a popular real ale, Woodforde's Wherry Bitter, served by the two methods from a single cask. A resounding 86% of non CAMRA members preferred the beer served without a tight head and only 1 in 12 CAMRA members preferred a tight head. For fairness, the organisers avoided informing visitors of CAMRA's views before the tasting and a large number of non CAMRA members took part. Significantly, many of the comments of non CAMRA members confirmed the loss of taste with the tight head.

Drinkers said that the beer served with a sparkler 'loses sharpness and bitterness', 'was flat and lost its taste'. The beer served in the traditional way was 'more active on the palate', 'retained its original taste leaving a strong hoppy aftertaste' and had 'a fuller flavour' which 'fills your mouth'.

## GUEST BEER LAW EXTENDED TO BOTTLE - CONDITIONED BEERS

Following Parliamentary approval this will become law with effect from 1st April 1998 and allows tied house tenants of National brewers to buy in one brand of bottle-conditioned beer from whomever they choose in addition to the existing cask beer.

## 1998 Good Beer Guide Launched

The 1998 Good Beer Guide is now on sale at a cover price of £10.99 but at just £7.50 to CAMRA members.

The new guide is the biggest-ever with 560 pages listing thousands of pubs serving perfect pints of real ale and also lists 48 new breweries. You can get your copy from either your local Good Beer Guide listed pub or from the Editor, address on back page of this newsletter.

### JOIN CAMRA NOW

Just fill in the form below and send your remittance  
(Payable to CAMRA) to

The Membership Secretary, CAMRA,  
230, Hatfield Road, St. Albans, Herts, AL1 4LW  
Rates are Single £14, Joint £17 (at same address)  
Student/OAP/Unemployed/Disabled £8  
Joint OAP £11 (at same address)  
For Life/Overseas rates please ask for details

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....POSTCODE.....

I/We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale,  
and agree to abide by the  
Memorandum and Articles of Association.

I enclose a cheque for .....

Signed.....

Date.....

Opening Times 94  
St. Neots

FOR QUALITY  
**THE  
HAPPY  
BREWER**  
Est. 1985  
BREWING AT HOME

**HELPLINE**  
**01234 353856**

"Never knowingly undersold on  
choice, service or value"

**15 Union Street, Bedford MK40 2SF**

**TO ADVERTISE IN THE CHRISTMAS ISSUE OF  
OPENING TIMES CONTACT THE EDITOR,  
MIKE BIRCH ON 0 1 4 8 0 3 9 5 5 0 5**

# LOCAL NEWS

The **Nelson's Head** in **St Ives** closed at the end of October for refurbishment, and following the departure of the previous tenants Pam and Jack is believed to have been taken into Greene King's managed house sector, for transforming into one of the "Hungry Horse" chain with the aim of competing more aggressively with Allied Domecq's nearby managed Festival Ale House 'theme' pub the Royal Oak. The Nelsons Head is due to be trading again in December. Charlie and Audrey Marigold formerly of Good Beer Guide listed pub, The Millers Arms in Eaton Socon will be behind the bar.

The **Crown Inn, Eaton Socon** has a changing guest ale from the 'Tapsters Choice' banner which are distributed from Carlsberg Tetley. As each beer is sold out the next one goes on. Beers available from November are Tattie Howker (Alloa Brewery), Gamekeeper's Ale (Samuel Allsopp's), Gladstone (McMullen), Winterfold (Samuel Allsopp's).

The **Prince of Wales, Hilton** has Elgood's Black Dog Mild available. The beer won the Best Mild and overall Best Beer at the recent Norwich Beer Festival.

The 18th-century Good Beer Guide listed **Pig and Abbot** which is currently closed, is hoped to be reopened in time for Christmas. Its future looked bleak as the new owner applied for a change of use permission and closed the pub in May. However, he has now had a change of heart and has agreed to sell the pub to villagers who are raising the required £170,000.

The **Woolpack, Eynesbury** has just said goodbye to longstanding landlord Mick Gregory who has retired. The Greene King pub and regulars will miss him.

## GREENE KING CLOSE BIGGLESWADE BREWERY

East Anglia's largest regional brewer, Greene King ended 233 years of brewing history when they closed Biggleswade Brewery in October. In that time the towering brewery buildings in Church Street have dominated the local skyline and the company had offered jobs to thousands of Biggleswade people, with generations of families having been employed there.

The story began in 1764 when Samuel Wells bought a house, brewhouse and maltings in Back Lane now Church Street. In 1862 Clifton Brewery was bought. In 1899 the Breweries ownership passed from Wells and Co to George Winch who formed Wells and Winch. By the time he died in 1914 the firm had made giant steps forward. The brewhouse had been rebuilt and new equipment added and the company itself grew by purchasing two breweries: Henlow Brewery in 1900 and Baldock Brewery Co. in 1904.

In 1906 Biggleswade brews included XX and AK Milds and IPA Bitter with Stingo following the next year. The Redman family's long association began in 1915 when AJ Redman became managing director and Frank Day & Son, St. Neots was bought in 1919, JR Page, Ashwell in 1921, Newland & Nash, Bedford in 1924, Higgins & Son, Bedford in 1927, Hudsons Ltd., Cambridge in 1931, EJ Wickham, Hertford and Barclay Perkins, Cambridge in 1938 making Wells and Winch Bedfordshire's largest brewer, owning 383 pubs. In 1961, the company merged with Greene King of Bury St. Edmunds. In 1965 120 more pubs were added when Simpsons of Baldock closed.

In the late 80's all cask beer production was transferred to Bury and in January 1990 major redevelopment began with £5million spent to build a new lager and keg beer plant. The brewing block was gutted with only the boilerhouse, copper room and malt silos remaining. Brewing then continued, but over the last few years there have persistent rumours of closure. This proved the case as first Harp lager production was ceased with the last lager brewed in April this year and the last keg beer coming out of the keg plant on October 10th.