

CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

ST. NEOTS & DISTRICT

OPENING
TIMES



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BRANCH NEWSLETTER
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WINTER ALES
SELL-OUT

The St. Neots Branch Winter Ales Festival held at St. Neots Town Football Club in January proved a sell-out with all the beer going at 5.30.

With the festival due to close at 6.00 it was just what we had hoped for with plenty of satisfied customers and nobody disappointed.

All the ales sold consistently, so that we had all the beers still available on the third and last day of the festival.

With some drinkers travelling a good distance it was important that we could offer a good selection.

We now of course move on to the much larger 'Booze on the Ouse' which will be held at the Burgess Hall, St. Ivo Centre, St. Ives from 14th - 17th Sept. Make a note in your diary

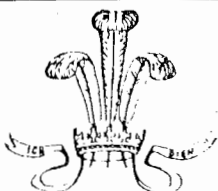
LOCAL PUBS UNDER
THREAT

As the Golden Miller, Longstowe closed at the end of February it brought sharply into focus the mounting threat to rural pubs.

Pub closures is a growing issue for CAMRA, particularly in rural parts of East Anglia. Real ale is only available in pubs, which are therefore essential for its future. Threats to small local pubs are increasing due to changes in the brewing and pubs industry and changes in the demand for different services which pubs can provide.

Pub customers increasingly demand food and family facilities and there is a dwindling demand for pubs that continue to focus on drinks trade alone. In addition the largest pub operators in the UK are now UK and foreign non-brewing pub chain operators such as Unique (owned by the Japanese bank Nomura), Punch and Pubmaster.

Nomura and Pubmaster now own around a third of pubs in the Huntingdonshire District Council area. This fact alone brings uncertainties for many pubs and their tenants, and brewery-owned pubs are also threatened by current brewery policies for maximising profits from their assets. Small, low turnover pubs are often seen as poor contributors to profits compared with larger pubs and local brewers Greene King and Charles Wells have been



The Prince of Wales

'That nice pub at Hilton'

(01480) 830257



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

actively changing the profile of their pub estates with this in mind.

Many small pubs are genuinely becoming non-viable for continued operation on the basis of wet trade alone and operators of such pubs often need to adopt a more entrepreneurial attitude to provide a profitable range of facilities to attract customers from a wider area.

But many operators are increasingly seeking closure and sale with change-of-use permission as a means of alleviating losses, maximising profits or financing retirement.

CAMRA sympathises with the financial difficulties which some operators of pubs experience but believes that the above option should not be available to them and that the role of pub owners should be seen as one of temporary custodianship of part of the heritage of the local community.

In 1999 Charles Wells sold a batch of pubs, fortunately all as going concerns i.e., The Angel, St. Neots and The Crown and Cushion, Great Gransden in our area.

But large East Anglian brewers have a history of closing pubs and the planning system has been used to prevent potential competitors from running such properties as pubs. By

obtaining planning permission for non-retail use, brewers are able to stifle potential competition and recoup more profitable selling prices for the properties.

CAMRA believes that it is wrong for large companies to promote profits at the expense of the loss of such amenities to local communities.

In our local area the threat appears to affect urban pubs as much as rural pubs. During the past three years, losses of pubs owned by Greene King have included the Blue Ball and the Wheatsheaf in the centre of St Neots, and the Spread Eagle at Croxton.

Since 1992 the Chequers at Fenstanton, the Falcon at Buckden, the New Inn at Great Staughton, the Bell at Stonely and the Antelope at Bassingbourn have closed at the hand of Charles Wells and other closures have been the Unicorn in Kings Ripton, the Three Horsehoes in Abbots Ripton and the Chestnuts at Needingworth.

In November 1999 the Mad Cat at Pidley closed and is the subject of a change of use application. At the end of February the Golden Miller, Longstowe also closed and another change of use application will be lodged, whilst Stonely, Kings Ripton, Abbots Ripton and Pidley now have no pub.

CAMRA is seeking changes to the Huntingdonshire District Local Plan to provide some protection for pubs as in the South Cambridgeshire District Local Plan.

CAMRA would like to see an initial presumption in favour of retaining retail use, particularly for the last pub in a village or where pubs offer facilities not offered by others in the immediate locality. Rural pubs are particularly important for social life and employment within villages and their loss causes problems by increasing travelling distances for drinkers.

Change of use could also be restricted where it might adversely affect the character and diversity of amenities within an area: this should include, for example, the retention of pubs in town centres.

CAMRA believes that owners should have an obligation to seek disposal of pubs as a going concern before any change of use is granted. They should be forced to demonstrate reasonable attempts to improve viability or sell to another operator. With this in mind, CAMRA is shortly to launch a viability test for pubs. This will hopefully allow planning departments to assess evidence of non-viability from applicants and may assist in determining change of use applications.

PAUL MOORHOUSE

LOCAL MILD OUTLETS

Mild outlets as we know them:

Eaton Socon
George & Dragon
Greene King XX Dark

Hilton,
Prince of Wales
Elgoods Black Dog

Huntingdon,
George Hotel
Theakstons Mild

St. Ives,
Black Bull
Ansells Mild

St. Neots,
Lord John Russell
Batemans Mild

Gt. Staughton
White Hart
Batemans Mild

If you know of any other local, mild outlets not listed, let the editor know.

PUB CHAINS UNDER SCRUTINY

The government's Office of Fair Trading is having another look at the pubs and beer industry to see whether pub goers are getting a good deal following the 1989 Beer Orders which re-shaped the industry after an investigation by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The 1989 Beer Orders were intended to widen consumer choice, reduce prices and increase competition. The Orders reduced the ownership of pubs by big brewers and forced big brewers to allow their tied pubs to stock a guest beer. There were also restrictions of free trade loan ties and the removal of the tie for drinks other than beer.

The new review, to be completed by August, will assess the success of the Beer Orders and whether they should be retained, removed, tightened or relaxed. An important part of the review concerns the new non-

brewing pub chains that have largely replaced the big brewers' pubs.

The four biggest non-brewing pub chains now own over 15000 pubs. Over 10000 pubs are owned by the two biggest chains, Punch and Nomura. These chains are supplied by highly discounted beers from the same national brewers that once owned them. They are not controlled by the Beer Orders, which apply only to brewers. The guest beer right has been removed from the tenants of these pubs, and smaller brewers have lost thousands of outlets as a result.

In the Huntingdonshire area around a third of pubs are owned by these non-brewing pub chains, notably Nomura and Pubmaster.

CAMRA welcomes the new review and hopes that the non-brewing pub chains will come under new controls to increase choice and competition and reduce retail prices. The original beer orders increased the numbers of pub retailers but did not affect the monopoly enjoyed by the four big brewers that supply them. They may have driven wholesale prices down but the consumer has not benefited from reduced prices or improved

choice of beer suppliers. Regional brewers have been closing at an ever-increasing rate and small brewers are unable to supply their local pubs.

Mike Benner of CAMRA said 'The MMC made a series of good recommendations in 1989, but these were watered down in the final legislation. The beer market would offer a better deal for consumers if the government had introduced a progressive scale of excise duty for small brewers and limited the ownership of any company to 2000 pubs'.

The national brewers own only 9300 pubs, around 8000 less than in 1994. Significantly most of them are now managed houses. The guest beer provision only applies to loan-tied free houses and the tenanted estates, which have been reduced from 6500 in 1994 to less than 1900 now. Whitbread owns most of these. In the Huntingdonshire area the guest beer provision now only applies to loan-tied free houses and nine Whitbread pubs.

PAUL MOORHOUSE

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)

Under 26: £8 date of birth

For Life/Overseas rates please ask for details

NAME..... Opening Times
ADDRESS..... 106
.....POSTCODE St.Neots

I/We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Rules.

I enclose a cheque for

Signed..... Date.....

Contact the editor by E-Mail

If you wish to contribute to Opening Times you can E-Mail to:

mike@rowleypark.freeserve.co.uk

LOCAL NEWS

A new brewery has started in Ramsey. Payn's is the name, a name St. Neots has heard before.

This is a new enterprise with Roger Payn at the helm, giving financial backing to brewers Glyn Creamer formerly with Nene Valley of Wellingborough and Charles Wincott formerly of Nix Wincott of Turvey.

The brewing equipment has been re-located en-bloc to Ramsey from Wellingborough. The brewery produce a 3.8% beer, Bullseye and Ramsey Ruin at a staggering 13%.

The **Angel, St. Neots** having been one of the pubs sold off by Charles Wells is now offering a guest real ale alongside Wells Eagle.

Good news for take-away beer fans is that Cambridge's long-established **Jug & Firkin** real ale off-licence is to keep its huge range of bottled beers as well as the choice of local and guest real ales under its new owner Paul Bowes. The shop will be re-named Bacchanalia, the same as his Victoria Road shop and he intends to stock the same choice there.

Shoppers at Tesco are in for a double-delight this Summer as bottle-conditioned beers from St. Austell and Hop Back hit the shelves.

Offerings from the two breweries have been named as winners of the prestigious annual Tesco Challenge. St. Austell Vanilla Ice a 5% ABV Wheat beer and Hop Back Crop Circle 4.2% in the large and small breweries sections respectively.

OTHER NEWS

Elgood's of Wisbech have purchased the Waggon & Horses at Milton, near Cambridge. Also in Cambridge, there is now a Ridley's tied house - The Alma Brewery in Russell Street.

Milton Brewery in Cambridge are seeking outlets in our branch area. Landlords ring 01223 226198 if you are interested.

Cambridge University students from Selwyn College aim to raise £45,000 to buy the lease of the Hat and Feathers in Barton Road, Cambridge a long time college favourite and real gem threatened with closure when the current landlord retires.

GREENE KING BACK CASK BEER BOOM

Greene King is doubling the capacity of its Bury St. Edmunds plan to 500,000 barrels a year with a £4m investment that will involve a second

and brand new fermenting hall with 14 new fermenters and a range of other equipment.

The expansion will more than cope with the addition of Morland's Old Speckled Hen and Ruddles brands and will leave plenty of space for a further sales increases of Greene King's own established and newer brands.

Greene King is also spending £6m on marketing its cask ale brands to exploit the vacuum the nationals are leaving in the cask ale market.

And it is spending £17.5 million on a new packaging plant which it claims is the first successful automatic cask filling line and will increase the speed at which beers are put into casks.

All Greene King has to do now is to convince drinkers that it can produce Speckled Hen and Ruddles As well as Morland and Ruddles itself did with head brewer Iain Masson admitting to only just about achieving the perfect replication.

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

Friday 24th March - Curry Night, S.Ives - Meet **Royal Oak*** 8.00pm then Indian Kushiara Restaurant 9.00pm

Tuesday 18th April - BRANCH AGM - **Rivermill, Eaton Socon** - 8.30pm

Friday 28th April - Mini Bus Trip*

Tuesday 16th May - Open Meeting - **Prince of Wales, Hilton** 8.30pm

Thursday 5th May Mini Bus Trip to **Cambridge Beer Festival***

Tuesday June 6th - Open Meeting - , **White Hart, St. Ives** - 8.30pm

* Contact Kathy Hadfield 01223 496658(W) or 01480 496247(H) for further details