



ARTICLES:

- [MAJOR NEW CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED](#)
- [REPRIEVE FOR LOCAL PUBS](#)
- [CHEQUERS IS PUB OF THE YEAR](#)
- [ASK IF IT'S CASK](#)
- [SHAW'S STROLLS](#)
- [MILTON CLASSIC BEERS](#)
- [LOCAL NEWS](#)
- [PETERBOROUGH SHOULD SAVE BREWERY TAP](#)
- [BRANCH DIARY](#)
- [A LOOK BACK IN TIME](#)

MAJOR NEW CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

For two years CAMRA has been building a 'fighting fund'. This allowed us to launch "ASK IF IT'S CASK", on March 1st, one of our most ambitious projects to date. See inside for further details.

REPRIEVE FOR LOCAL PUBS?

Two local village pubs have reopened and a third one may have been saved by recent events in the local area.

The Crown at Broughton is set to reopen in March under a co-operative of forty villagers who wanted to keep their local when it was threatened last year with permanent closure. Two hundred shares valued at £1000 each were sold and a board of five directors was set up to run the re-launch of the business, which has included a doubling of space for diners to forty.

At Woodwalton the Elephant and Castle has won a reprieve as Huntingdonshire District Council recently refused planning permission for conversion of the pub to housing. And at Pidley the Mad Cat closed last year but then reopened and continues to trade in a similar situation. But at Elsworth the Poacher closed a couple of months ago and is reported to be for sale. And in St Neots the Angel has closed recently and its future is unknown.

Forty villages in the local area have only one pub, and Huntingdonshire District Council has given them some protection in new planning guidance on the retention of shops, post offices and public houses in villages. The last pub in a village will need to have been on the market for more than 12 months as a going concern before permission can be granted for change of use.

Permanent closure will only be allowed if there is 'no reasonable prospect of the established use being retained or resurrected' and 'little evidence of public support for retention of the facility'. CAMRA's pub viability test is available to councils in reaching decisions in individual cases.

The message is clear. Small pubs are under threat and pub goers need to use their pubs more to help them survive. But pub owners cannot assume they can eventually sell community pubs at inflated prices as housing and those buying pubs should understand this

Small village pubs may need to expand their range of facilities to attract visitors from a wider area.

Villagers cannot always provide sufficient support alone, and good food is increasingly essential, as fewer people are prepared to drive to pubs just to drink

Since 1992 local village pub closures have included the Chequers at Fenstanton, the Falcon at Buckden, the New Inn at Great Staughton, the Bell at Stonely, the Antelope at Bassingbourne, the Unicorn in Kings Ripton, the Three Horsehoes in Abbots Ripton and the Chestnuts at Needingworth.

Stonely, Kings Ripton, Abbots Ripton and Oldhurst are some of the local villages that now have no pub. But St Neots pubs the Blue Ball and the Wheatsheaf have also closed in recent years, and this year the Black Bull in St Ives has been converted to an Indian restaurant.

CAMRA is campaigning for the restoration of separate use classes for restaurants and pubs - this would strengthen planning procedures for such changes and allow the public a say. CAMRA would also like to see councils retaining the character and diversity of amenities within urban areas - this should include, for example, the retention of pubs in town centres like St Neots, Huntingdon and St Ives..

CHEQUERS WINS 'PUB OF THE YEAR' AWARD

The Chequers, Little Gransden has been chosen as the St. Neots CAMRA Branch PUB OF THE YEAR. Landlords Bob and Wendy Mitchell were presented with a framed certificate to commemorate the award at the pubs' '50th anniversary' event on 2nd March.

The event was held in a largemarquee in the pubs garden and was attended by 300 invited guests, including local CAMRA members, to celebrate the pub being in the Mitchell family for 50 years. Bob and some of his regulars brewed 'Gransden Glory' 1041 at Cambridge brewers Milton Brewery especially for the celebration, and very nice it was too, with Richard Naisby from the brewery also attending the event. Another highlight of which was the excellent pig roast prepared by Bob himself, something he does regularly for outside events. With some solid 60/70's sounds played live it was a very enjoyable night for all.

ASK IF ITS CASK

CAMRA has launched the biggest generic promotion of beer for fifty years in it's battle to save the great British pint. Following two years of fundraising, the consumer group is joining forces with dozens of real ale brewers and thousands of pubs to buck the trend and put real cask ales back on top.

Hundreds of advertising billboards will be launched throughout the country supported by leaflets and posters in pubs. The campaign is urging lager and smoothflow beer drinkers to 'Ask if it's Cask' and discover the taste of real cask ale next time they visit the pub.

Over 130 regional and national beer brands have been axed since 1990. Excluding those brewed by the 350 very small brewers (which collectively have only 1% of the total beer market), there are about 250 beers still in regular production. If the trend continues it will take only 16 years to reduce the market to three or four mega beer brands. Thirty three medium sized or national breweries have closed since 1990. Over fifty breweries remain in operation if trends persist, there will be nothing but global operators left by 2020.

The end of the great British pub?

CAMRA research in 2000 shows that twenty pubs a month are closing. This is approximately double the monthly closures only five years earlier. If that trend continues then by 2020 eighty pubs a month will be closing, and many consumers will be faced with the grim prospect of supping at home or visiting big themed bars in town centres.

In January 2001 nearly 1,000 pubs were put for sale by Bass and a further 3,000 by Whitbread. There is wide speculation that Scottish & Newcastle and Wolverhampton & Dudley may shortly put for sale signs on around 1,000 pubs each. The Whitbread pubs have now been purchased by Fairbar Ltd for £1.625billion putting them in 3rd place in the pub ownership league..

Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns and Communications says, "The 'Ask if it's Cask' campaign is a consumer fight back against the disease caused by consolidation, closures, mergers and sell-offs in this great British industry. We want to convince beer drinkers that nothing beats a pint of real cask ale in a local pub. If people start drinking the taste and shun big-brand marketing, the British beer market will be safe for future generations to enjoy."

The real ale market has been in decline since it peaked at 17.5% of the total beer market in 1994. It is now less than 10% as consumers are bombarded with global lager brands and smoothflow processed ales. The campaign aims to get the message across that real cask ales meet the needs of modern cultured beer drinkers. CAMRA is urging drinkers to 'Ask if it's Cask' next time they visit the pub, in an attempt to get

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SHAW'S STROLLS

BY ANDY SHAW

Welcome to a new series of articles on Pub Walks. For me, the definition of a perfect Sunday, is a walk through the countryside followed by a Pub Lunch. If you agree with me, then you will take to these walks like ducks to water.

If you are not already enthusiastic ramblers, then I hope that these articles will persuade you to dip your toe in it.

Each walk will begin and end at a particular pub. They will vary in length from 3 to 7 miles, and each route will be described in detail with an accompanying map. I hope you enjoy these 'Walks for all Seasons'.

Before describing my first walk, let me tell you about my passion for walking and real ale. I was born and brought up in the southwest suburbs of Sheffield, with the limitless moorlands and valleys of the Peak District on my 'back door step'. When I first arrived in this area over twenty years ago, my first reaction was that the walking in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire was like the local beer, 'all flat and boring'. I soon put these prejudices ideas behind me and discovered that this area has much to offer the walker (and the real ale drinker). The rolling landscape of the Beds/Cambs border offers wonderful walks with

constantly changing vistas, the essence of good walking country, and the riverside walks offer endless tranquillity.

Everton and Gamlingay

Introduction: The walk starts and ends at the Thornton Arms, Everton and offers a chance to visit the Cock, Gamlingay at the half way point.

The small village of Everton sits on top of the Greensands Ridge, with a fine church and some thatched cottages. The church is mentioned in Domesday, but this early church was rebuilt in the middle of the 12th century, as a chancel and an aisled nave, the greater part of which still exists. At the end of the 14th century, the tower, south porch and clearstory were built, and about 100 years later, the chancel arch was rebuilt.

Everton is part of the old parish of Everton-cum-Tetworth that spans the Bedfordshire- Cambridgeshire border.

Gamlingay's interesting name is Saxon and means Gamlin's Hae or Island, since at one time the village was surrounded by a marsh. In medieval times Gamlingay held three manors, one of which was acquired by Merton College, Oxford who own a lot of the local land. Most of the village today dates from after the Great Fire of 1660 that destroyed 76 houses.

Distance: 9.5 km (6 miles).

How to get there: Everton is 1 mile north east of Sandy. After passing through Sandy, turn left off the B1042 just after the station.

Parking: There is a car park behind the pub, but if it's full, the park in the cul-de-sac alongside the pub leading to the church.

The walk: Walk down the cul-de-sac beside the pub towards St Mary's Church. From the church, follow the Greensands Ridge Way signpost, along an estate road through Woodbury Park Estate.

Passing arable fields on both sides, walk towards woodland with views of the Bedfordshire countryside on the left. Pass through a gate past Storey Farm and continue on estate road. At the 'cross roads' continue on towards Home Farm with Woodbury Hall on your left. Where the track bends to the left towards Home Farm, go straight through a kissing gate, and across a well-defined path across a field. At the hedge, go over a stile and turn right along an estate road for 100m, and then turn left to follow a path along the side of a field. Crossing another estate road, go through a gate and follow the way-sign across a meadow. After passing Tetworth Hall on the left, pass through a gate, walk across a field and join a track past an attractive thatched cottage on the right. When the track turns right, continue straight along left side of a field. At this point there are fine views of rolling countryside to the left. At the end of the field, pass through the gate to a road. This is the end of the Greensands Ridge Way.

Turn right long the road, and at the crossroads, go straight on towards Gamlingay. After 100m, just before the bend in the road, turn right along a marked footpath 'The Clopton Way'.

Follow the track between two cottages, and continue along the track past a house on the right, continuing between a hedge and a fence. Reaching the edge of a field, with Sandy Heath Transmitter in front of you, turn left along an old track between fields and heath land (this track can be muddy).

At the end of the track, you have a choice. If you are ready for some refreshment, turn left along Heath Road, where the centre of Gamlingay is 600m away with a number of pubs, the Cock in Church Street being particularly recommended (more details below, and return to this point to continue the walk).

Turning right from the end of the track, follow the Heath Road back towards Everton, past the idyllic Mount Pleasant Farm on the left, until after 500m you turn left onto a track, signposted to Potton. Where this track bends to the right, cross the stile following the way-mark to follow a parallel track.

As you enter woodland, cross a stile next to a gate, and pause to take fine views across wooded countryside. Follow the right edge of the field, cross another stile and continue on to pass through a gate. Turn left and cross a stile and a plank bridge over a brook. Follow the right hand edge of the field in front, towards rising land. Where the line of trees ends, continue between two open fields.

Passing to the right of a line of trees, and then a disused pit, you come to the edge of the large field.

At this point turn right and follow the edge of the field. Continuing in the same direction for 650m will bring you to a road. From this point, there is no easy route back to our starting point, other than via road, and since by now you will no doubt be developing a thirst for some good ale, a major detour would not be a good idea. Turn left and follow the road to a T-junction. Turn left onto the Everton-Potton road and

walk the remaining 1-mile back to Everton.

The pubs:

Thornton Arms, Everton, Potton Road, (01767) 681149,

Open 12-3, 6-11 (M-F);

11-11 (Sat); 12-10:30 (Sun).

Real Ales: Wells Eagle and guest beers. Food: A varied menu of home cooked traditional pub food and Indian specials is available at all times.

The Thornton Arms was purpose built in 1852 and originally had it's own brew house. Entering the pub by the front door, you enter a large comfortable open plan lounge, with the bar centre stage sporting a bank of hand-pumps. A second lounge to the rear of the pub serves as a dining area. Outside there is a garden area next to the car park.

Cock, Gamlingay, Church Street, (01767) 650255,

Open 11:30-3, 5:30-11 (M-F);

11:30-11 (Sat); 12-4, 7-10:30 (Sun). Real Ales: Greene King IPA, Abbot and guest beers. Food: A varied good value menu.

The Cock is the oldest building in the village, being over 400 years old. It comprises three main areas: a wood panelled lounge bar with an inglenook fireplace with a real log fire in winter; a public bar with a tiled floor collection of pottery cocks; and a separate restaurant. The garden is enormous considering the location in the centre of the village, and includes a variety of children's playground attractions and a collection of animals. There is also a pleasant patio area with plants and hanging baskets.

Other publications:

CAMRA's Good Beer Guide, for more details of the pubs above and other pubs in this area serving excellent real ale. The Good Beer Guide can be purchased online at www.camra.org.uk or by mail order (call 01727 867201).

Pub Walks in Cambridgeshire (by Jean and Geoff Pratt), and Pub Walks in Bedfordshire (by James A Lyons), both published by Countryside Books, and available in most local bookshops. These books were the inspiration for this series of articles, and I can personally recommend them. There is different pub walk based on the Thornton Arms, Everton in Pub Walks in Bedfordshire.

Note: I wrote this article before the start of the current Foot and Mouth epidemic. Obviously walking in the country is not appropriate at the moment, but we decided to publish the article in anticipation of the countryside returning normal in the near future.

Image produced from the Ordnance Survey Get-a-map service. Image reproduced with kind permission of Ordnance Survey Multi Media Mapping

MILTON - CLASSIC LOCAL BEERS

Around 15 members of Huntingdonshire CAMRA Branch journeyed the 20 miles or so to Milton. There then followed an extended tour of this northern suburb of Cambridge in search of the industrial unit that houses the Milton Brewery. Eventually, a call to the brewery elicited the necessary directions.

We were met by Richard Naisby, who set up the brewery in 1999 with business partner Tony Brooks. The two had met 3 years earlier in the mountains of Islamic Pakistan, 500 miles from the nearest beer, which resulted in many a long chat about beer and ideas about setting up a brewery.

We settled with a pint as Richard reminisced on his early enthusiasm for beer in the University Real Ale Society at Oxford. On arriving in Milton to start the arduous task of designing and building the brewery themselves using an assortment of used and reconditioned brewing vessels, Richard and Tony decided to name beers on classic themes, the link being classic author John Milton.

The brewery has now seen a year's successful production. The 15-barrel plant can produce up to 45 barrels a week. Malt is milled on the premises. Maris Otter pale malt as well as amber malt is used in all the beers. Some torrefied wheat boosts head retention in the regular mild, Minotaur, and Jupiter, a session bitter with 3.5% alcohol. Roast barley goes into Babylon Stout, an occasional 4.4% brew. Cascade hops are supplemented by the blackcurrenty US Willamette in Babylon, and a new dwarf hop from the English West Midlands gives good aroma and high bitterness in Zeus, an occasional 4.2% bitter.

Racking vessels give extra maturation after primary fermentation. The time allowed varies from almost zero for the mild, to over 2 weeks for stronger beers such as the complex tasting Cyclops (5.3% abv).

The agency Flying Firkin take some beers, and there are some swaps with brewers like Hart in Lancashire, but most of the Milton production is sold direct to pubs in and around Cambridge and in the Bristol area. A number of village pubs take Pegasus (4.1% abv), the brewery's top selling beer, as a permanent feature. The yeast drops out quickly in cask, so some Cambridge pubs happily feature a changing selection of Milton ales, from Neptune, a well rounded 3.8% abv bitter to the mid range Electra (4.5%) or Mammon, a powerful and spicy winter ale at 7.0% abv. The Cambridge Blue and the Live and Let Live are two major city customers for the beers.

Richard and Tony have developed a tremendous range of individually crafted beers with varied and distinctive character. They deserve every success and more recognition in the pubs of Cambridgeshire. Contact Richard or Tony at Milton Brewery on 01223 226198 or enquiries@miltonbrewery.co.uk

LOCAL NEWS

The Greyhound, St Ives is selling 'Greyhound Bitter', cask beer produced by Payns of Ramsey. Buckden, Spread Eagle was still trading as a pub, selling Thai food.

Kevin and Maria Foskett have taken over at the Crown, Little Staughton. and are keen to develop the real ale trade, stocking Greene King IPA, Fuller's London Pride and Bass, permanently plus guest ales -Badger being on at the moment. The pub is owned by Bowstridge Taverns who also own the currently closed Angel in St. Neots. They say that pubs future is uncertain.

The Pig and Abbot, Abington Pigots is running an Easter beer festival featuring all the City of Cambridge Brewery beers.

The Samuel Pepy's, Huntingdon (formerly O'Reilly's) re-opens on March 24th as a real ale house specialising in independent brewery ales. In the cellar currently are Elgood's Black Dog, Oakham JHB and Charles Wells Bombardier plus draught versions of Leiffmans and Timmermans.

7th WINTER ALE FESTIVAL A ROARING SUCCESS

Everything worked at perfectly at our 7th Winter Ale Festival held at St. Neots Town F.C. in January. The beer ran out about half an hour before our scheduled closing time. All 12 draught beers went and so did half a kilderkin of bottled foreign beer.

PETERBOROUGH SHOULD SAVE THE BREWERY TAP

The pub goers of Peterborough were shocked and outraged last year by plans to demolish the immensely popular Brewery Tap in the city after less than 2 years operation as a successful brewpub. The original Oakham Brewery was born in an industrial unit in the Rutland town when John Wood set up a brewery in 1993 after early retirement. His JHB quickly became legendary, winning awards and a strong following locally and nationally. Production reached 10 barrels a week.

In Peterborough, the converted Dutch grain barge named Charters had become well established as a major local Mecca for aficionados of real ales brewed near and wide. Their employee Jake selected JHB as a product line. The owning partners of Charters developed a strong relationship with John Wood and when John sold the brewery they were persuaded to buy it.

Oakham's current head brewer, another John, trained under John Wood after the sale, and customers were unable to identify any differences in the beers after the change of brewer, nor after the eventual move of the brewery to Peterborough in October 1998. Paul, the senior partner in the Charters/Oakham set up, had always fancied the idea of running a brewpub, and when the old Peterborough labour exchange came up for sale he saw it as an ideal venue. Second hand brewing vessels from Ruddles, Greene King, Wards, Home and Websters breweries and a malt mill from Elgoods were shoehorned into the building, now the 'Brewery Tap' with impressive vast drinking and eating areas on two levels.

Excellent authentic Thai food is available at all times. The brewery is visible behind a large glass screen as a major feature of the venture, which quickly established itself as an important part of the Peterborough scene and is busy every day of every week.

The brewery is open for visits on Saturdays. In February a party of a dozen CAMRA members from St Neots area crowded between mash tun and copper as Jake, now a partner in the enterprise, recounted the story behind the brewery venture.

All the malt comes from Fawcetts since the closure of the Beeston maltings. Pale beers prove popular, and many beers use little or no dark malts, although more are being used for popular darker beers such as Black Hole Porter and Harlequin Stout, produced for a Porters and Stouts event being run by the Small Independent Brewers Association at the Brewery Tap. The Oakham benchmark is hops, and hop flavour is a strong feature in all the beers, with flavoursome hops such as Cascade and Challenger being major ingredients, and late hopping 5 minutes before the end of the boil adding the big hop aroma. Steam is the heat source for the copper. Conditioning vessels after primary fermentation allow flavour maturation and control of final yeast levels.

The plant has a 35-barrel brew length, with a minimum of 25 barrels. JHB, Old Tossport and Helter Shelter are currently brewed in 35-barrel batches. Production now varies between 70 and 100 barrels a week. Growth followed a number of CAMRA awards, with the overall second prize in the CAMRA Champion Beer

BRANCH DIARY

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

Friday 23rd March- Huntingdon Social - Start Samuel Pepys - (newly re-opened real ale house) 8.30pm then Old Bridge 10.00pm

Friday 6th April - Buckden Social - Vine - 8.30pm then Spread Eagle 10.00pm

Monday 30th April- Open Meeting- Chequers, Little Gransden 8.30pm. Please contact Kathy Hadfield-Moorhouse (see below) for further details (Note: BRANCH AGM is postponed until June)

Saturday 5th May- Rail Trip to Stamford - (Bateman's, Everards, Oakham, Samuel Smiths, Timothy Taylors and many more) For further details contact Kathy Hadfield-Moorhouse.

Monday 28th May- Open Meeting - Bell Eaton Socon - 8.30pm

For further details contact:

Kathy Hadfield-Moorhouse, Branch Social secretary on 01480 496247,

E-mail kathryn.hadfield@bbsrc.ac.uk

A look back in time....

20 YEARS AGO

In the spring of 1981 CAMRA had started celebrating the tenth year of its existence. A new CAMRA policy booklet entitled 'Whose Pint is it, Anyway?' called for the break up of the 'Big 6' national brewers. They had dominated the industry since their formation during the merger mania of the 1960's and were held responsible for the loss of most of the UK's real cask ale brewers and their ales.

In February 1981, one of the 'Big 6', Allied Breweries, closed Ansells Brewery in Birmingham in reaction to a strike by its workforce. Courage was about to close its Horsleydown brewery in London. But the Manns arm of the Watney group brought some local cheer by reintroducing real ale, in the form of Manns Bitter, into 200 pubs in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. And Ind Coope East Anglia (part of Allied) launched a new Burton-brewed cask beer, Ind Coope Bitter, into 300 pubs.

CAMRA had made a loss of £47000 over the previous year and at its Annual General Meeting in Durham, increased the price of a year's membership to £7. The AGM, chaired by Tim Amsden, began with a minute's silence in honour of former chairman Joe Goodwin, who had died tragically the previous November. Peter Lerner topped the election to the National Executive with over 300 votes.

10 YEARS AGO

The Office of Fair Trading's investigation of the brewing industry had resulted in the big brewers being forced to relax their tie on thousands of pubs. Scottish and Newcastle had sold pubs in order to no longer be counted as a national brewer. Bass was busy taking avoiding action by selling pubs and converting

others from tenancies to directly managed pubs. Grand Metropolitan pulled out of brewing in the spring of 1991 as big brewers Courage swapped its pubs for Grand Metropolitan's Watney group breweries. Whats Brewing, the CAMRA members' newspaper, called for the government to clarify its new guest beer rule. It said that big brewers were abusing the policy by supplying a limited range of 'guest beers' as tenants were being denied their right to buy in guest beers direct from competitors of their own choice. At CAMRA's 1991 Annual General Meeting in Sheffield, chairman John Cryne lashed big brewers Whitbread, Greenalls and Scottish & Newcastle for a catalogue of brewery closures, but lauded the revival of real ale brewing at Tolly Cobbold in Ipswich and at the former Higsons Brewery in Liverpool, where the new Cains Beer was about to be launched.

At the same meeting, Miles Templeman, Managing Director of the Whitbread Beer Company, denied stories about a possible Whitbread merger with Allied Breweries.

Greene King launched Rayments Special Bitter, a new beer named after the Hertfordshire brewery it had closed in 1987.