

Opening Times



Huntingdonshire Branch of CAMRA
The Campaign for Real Ale

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Crystal Ship, Earith Hunts CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year 2025 and Cider Pub of the Year 2025



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Hunts CAMRA Pub Awards

Branch Pub of the Year, Cider Pub of the Year and Rural Pub of the Year - Crystal Ship, Earith



From its original opening in 2020 as a cafe and subsequently as the brewery tap of Papworth Brewery in 2021, the Crystal Ship has gone from

strength to strength. Offers up to 15 changing cask beers and a range of real ciders.

The Crystal Ship will now go forward into the county round for Cambridgeshire Pub of the Year and Cambridgeshire Cider Pub of the Year.

Urban Pub of the Year - Ale Taster, St Neots



A traditional, small back-street pub, which opened in 2017, it is operated in the style of a micropub and offers up to six

changing cask beers, which are served from stillage behind the bar.

Community Pub of the Year - King of the Belgians, Hartford



A sixteenth-century pub which is at the heart of the community and actively supports local charities, and

hosts beer festivals in May and August in aid of charities.

Most Improved Pub of the Year - Green Man, Leighton Bromswold

Here is an update from pub owner Lizzie Langridge: "Once a thriving village pub with boundless charm, The Green Man was falling into disrepair and looked a far cry from its glory



days. Since buying it in June 2024, we began the huge job of updating the building and

making it safe. Our main objective was to retain the feel and warmth of an old pub, which is hard to do when everything is new, but comments so far have proved that that is exactly what we've done. We're taking it back in time and celebrating its history. The kitchen needed to be gutted and completely renewed, and is therefore taking a little longer to sort. We are aiming to be food-ready by the summer, in time for the beer garden's opening in May. (It's a real suntrap, so bring sunscreen!) We are also renovating the big barn at the back of the pub for hiring. It already has its own bar and will be able to be used for a variety of events. Work will be on-going behind the scenes for some time yet, but we're in it for the long term and this special place deserves our care and patience. We look forward to welcoming you back!"

Mild/Dark Pub of the Year - Falcon, Huntingdon



This 16th century former coaching inn offers up to 14 changing cask beers, including several dark cask beers such as porters and stouts.

Locale Pub of the Year - Pig n Falcon, St Neots



Notable for being one of the best music venues in Cambridgeshire, the Pig n Falcon offers a wide range of cask and

KeyKeg beers and real ciders, including beers from local breweries like Three Blind Mice and Nene Valley.

Pub & Brewery News

Pub News

Elm, Abbots Ripton



The Elm recently reopened after an extensive refurbishment, and it is now operated by the

same team that run the Pheasant, Keyston.

Crystal Ship, Earith

It is planned to recommence the classic vehicle evenings from April (third Wednesday of each month). Open mic nights are now held monthly on the second Wednesday. The above along with the ongoing bingo and quiz nights means that the bar will be open each Wednesday from April-September (when the classic vehicle nights end for the winter) and the team are looking to identify something to fill those months with 5 Wednesdays (perhaps a comedy evening)! Plans are underway for an Easter Beer Festival (16th-20th April) with live music on Good Friday, and it is also proposed to hold an August beer festival, date to be confirmed.

Crown & Cushion, Great Gransden



A planning application for change of use to a residential dwelling has been submitted to Huntingdonshire District Council

(HDC) by the owner of the Crown & Cushion. This planning application has attracted a large number of objections, including from the Hunts Branch of CAMRA and also from the Great Gransden Community Benefit Society (CBS), who have made an offer to purchase the pub (an offer that was rejected).

Hartford Mill, Hartford

Over autumn/winter, lights have been installed over the rear decking.

Cock, Hemingford Grey

They are continuing with their in house ales of

Badgers Nadders from Papworth Brewery and Hophead from Brewster's. They also have a third guest ale that changes regularly (recently Simple Pleasures from Nene Valley Brewery). Their beer festival is booked in for the weekend before August Bank holiday - 15th-17th August. It will house 20 or so real ales, with a few draught keg beers and some real cider to accompany it.

Bell, Great Paxton



Rachael at The Bell in Great Paxton has been managing the pub for nearly seven years and she is now in the process of purchasing the pub from the owners she has been managing it for. Here is what she told us:

"We are a typical village pub. We offer food a drink and host events in the pub and also in The Baby Belle Bar and marquee. We host a string of teams including: one crib team, four petanque teams, three Thursday night dart teams, two ladies darts teams, one football club. We support all the groups and clubs within the village including the PTA, booze and brushes and the history society. We are a freehold and I've always worked with Dave Taylor from IDS however he has since merged with Inn Express. I always used to have Doombur and then a guest ale however late last year I've been changing it. The cask beers I typically offer include Butcombe Rare Breed and Butcombe Original, Adnams Ghost Ship, Fuller's London Pride, Black Sheep Best Bitter, Timothy Taylor's Landlord, Boltmaker and Knowles Spring. The Butcombe is proving to be very popular. We host a beer festival once a year and it's likely to be in line with a charity festival at The Bell in July. I do this alongside Great Paxton Recreation ground, a charity in the village. So we do have a lot going on and continue to remain busy."

Pub & Brewery News

Three Horseshoes, Houghton



Rob and Kathy, the current tenants celebrate 10 years at the pub this March. Over Autumn/

Winter, the decking in the garden has been renewed and extended and it is planned to use this as a stage to host live music in the warmer months.

Sandford House, Huntingdon



They will be having a Tap Take over with Woodfordes on the 17th April, with a

Raffle in aid of their Charity Young Lives for Cancer. They will have the full range of Woodfordes ales and The Raffle prize is a small Keg from Woodfordes. They are also planning a Cider festival Summer Jul/Aug time (more details in the next edition).

Old Falcon, St Neots

The Old Falcon in the Market Square, St Neots has been closed for over 20 years, whilst repeated planning applications submitted by the owner have been rejected by Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) since the planning applications were judged to be inappropriate for this Grade II listed important historic building. Finally the owner and HDC have come to an agreement of a planning application which both parties can agree on, and this planning application was recently approved. The bulk of the site will be converted into residential units, but two commercial units on the ground floor at the front of the building are included in the plans. The precise use of these commercial units has not been decided, but the under the terms of the planning application the possibility of a restaurant and bar is one of many options. A representative of Huntingdonshire CAMRA attended the planning development meeting, and made the case for restaurant and bar to allow local residents to have access to and enjoy this

important historic building, and CAMRA will continue to press for this option to be considered.

Shume, St Neots



Shume Bottle Emporium will be celebrating 3 years at its premises in Church Walk on 1st April.

They are open daily from 10:00 am with late nights until 20:00 on a Thursday & 21:00 on a Friday & Saturday. Winter hours (until 17:00) are currently operating on other days. Shume stocks a wide range of canned and bottle beers, wines and spirits. They also have 4 changing beers on tap which usually consist of a lager, a pale ale, an IPA and either a stout/porter or speciality with the most recent one bring the 2025 Verdant Putty. Shume supports local, small and independent breweries so the range available is ever changing. Teas & coffees are also available during opening hours along with a range of soft drinks. A variety of cheeses are also sold to takeaway or eat in as a cheeseboard whilst enjoying a drink. Cheese & wine/beer tasting evenings take place and these can be booked for private parties. A loyalty scheme is also available to customers.

Three Jolly Butchers, Wyton



Since COVID, the rear patio area has been covered and an outside kitchen has been installed to serve 'fast food' during

the summer months.

Village Club, Yelling

The Village Club is currently undergoing cellar improvements. They have two cask ales on a regular basis but sometimes they need a third line to help with quality. They will be having a 12th Beer Festival on 2nd-5th May, and will be having 12 extra ales, charging £3.50 per pint again.

Brewery News

Wheatsheaf Brewery, Huntingdon

Opened in late 2022 and run by Jon and Frank Gillham - wheatsheafbrewery.co.uk. All beers are vegan friendly and made in small batches. Initially they only bottled their beers but have since moved into casking as well. They have a bottle shop and taproom on site and can often be found at local farmers markets. They recently brewed a new beer Midnight Moon in collaboration with Huntingdon band White Heat, although this is currently only available in bottles

IVO, Somersham

Currently Charlie and Jason's main focus alongside brewing is getting the new brewery site up and running. They now have water and electricity, the only big thing still missing is drainage but Charlie tells me they aim to be brewing at the new site by Easter 2025 and hope to eventually open an on-site brewery tap. Also they have a new beer coming soon, an 8.49% chocolate and coconut porter brewed for their mate's 60th birthday over at The Ship in Chatteris. Whilst both pins have already been spoken for they will have bottles available at some point. They are also brewing a festival special for the Cambridge Beer Festival, which will be the very first beer brewed on the new kit.

Papworth, Earith

2024 saw the 10th anniversary of the brewery and some special anniversary beers were brewed. They also currently have a new, as yet unnamed beer in the fermenter using earnest and archer hops. This is anticipated to be a session bitter at around 3.4%, but time will tell!!!

Xtreme, Peterborough

Had a successful first joint venture with St Mary's Church, Whittlesey at Whittlesea Strawbear Festival, making a substantial donation to the Church. SmoXey Mild was the joint first beer to sell out at Colchester Winter beer festival. BlaX Forest was the first beer to sell out at Elysian Winter beer festival, closely followed by Strawberry Xtreme, and all six Xtreme beers sold out on the brewery bar at Elysian winter beer festival. The will be running a cask ale bar at Ely

Eel and Ely Food & Drink Festival 3rd - 5th May. XXV Bear Beer was a new beer for Strawbear Festival. Peterborough Morris have commissioned a new beer, to be brewed next month. Two new beers are proposed for Cambridge Beer Festival.

Oakham, Peterborough

2024 was another successful year for the brewery winning gongs at both CAMRA East Anglia & the National Champion beer event plus the cask aged 5% Icon winning the Champion beer at the SIBA East event in September. Icon will be reavailable in late January 2025. New to the seasonal range for February come Zig Zag a 50% wheat pale with 3 European hop varieties at 3.4% & an all English hopped Junkyard at 4%. You may well have seen plenty of 3.4% beers in the recent past as duty changes mean beers at this strength generate a lower duty charge to the brewery. The first collab. or Hop Alliance as they prefer it called will be available in March as head brewer Ed Sharman visits Gadd's brewery for a brew day in Ramsgate, Kent with owner brewer Eddie Gadd. A 4.3% beer hopped with Cascade from the USA & East Kent Goldings from Syndale Farm just down the road near Faversham. Next comes Cryptologist a 4.2% Red Rye beer with new English hop variety Olicana. Finally for the early part of the year comes Thirteen Steps a 4% golden beer tri hopped with an addition of lemon peel. Joining the cask aged range will be a 5% IPA called Skyline & a 5% stout using 5 different malts & 2 English hop varieties called Kingdom. As well as head brewer Ed, other team members Oliver Jones, Ollie Fendley & Stewart Poulter brewed the beers Zig Zag, Cryptologist & 13 steps. Oakham will be re-starting brewing at the Brewery Tap in Peterborough during the Spring concentrating on stronger dark beers & experimental beers.

Pub Features - Printworks

Printworks, Papworth Everard

Here is what Millie Calver of Printworks has told us:



“Here at The Printworks we have a micro-brewery onsite which will be launching very soon. We intend to establish a small community brewery in Papworth Everard. Our goal is to produce traditional ales and beers, with a focus on using UK ingredients and brewing lower-strength products (around 4.5% ABV). Our brewery will serve both on-site customers and local businesses, while also supporting the community through storytelling events linked to beer



brewing. This initiative aims to promote community engagement and sustainable local enterprise.”



“Our brewery is not just about beer; it’s about community. We plan to host storytelling events and music nights, creating opportunities for residents to connect through the shared history and craft of beer-making. We also aim to promote sustainability by incorporating solar power and eco-friendly brewing operations.”

“With an initial brewing capacity of 1,000 litres, we plan to

produce approximately 26 batches per year in our first year, doubling production in the second. Our offerings will include both on-site sales (£4.50 per pint) and off-sales options like 5-litre beer-in-a-box packages for events and community gatherings. We’ve also received interest from local cafes and bars that are keen to support our initiative.”

“We have a Facebook group set up with people from the local community that will be involved in this project and are hosting our first meeting this week, on Thursday. Our goal is to have our first brew on the taps for May 2025!”

Millie Calver

Pub Features - Royal Oak, Warboys

Royal Oak, Warboys

Helen & Andy at the "Oak" have sent us the following.

"We think our little pub is very much worthy of shouting about. We took over the pub three years ago just after COVID restrictions had been lifted and we have taken it from a failing pub to a thriving pub, with so many pubs closing we weren't sure if this would be the worst or best decision of our lives!"

"After we had both had a horrendous few months at our previous jobs we got a bit tipsy (OK very drunk) in a St Ives pub and decided we should go into business together and get a pub, and so the plan began and we started to do stealth visits to pubs we saw online to see what they were like. We had a tip off from a friend in the industry that The Oak landlords may be willing to come out of their lease early, so we popped over a few times for a quiet little drink to get a feel for the place. It was really quiet, even on a Saturday night prior to Christmas, but we got that feeling of what it could be with a bit of love and attention."



"We contacted Admiral Taverns and had discussions with them and ten took the keys on a bleak cold January morning, it was 4 degrees inside the pub and even colder outside! We decided to have 3 weeks decorate and make it "our" pub, blood sweat and tears were shed in those 3 weeks and at 2pm on the day we were supposed to be opening we still didn't have a floor behind the bar! But somehow with the help of family and friends we pulled it all together and we opened the doors at 5pm on

Thursday the 27th Jan, we had a queue of people waiting to come in, and they haven't stopped visiting since!"



"We are so lucky with our customers, we have a fantastic community who supports us, and who we try to also support as much as we can. We have weekly quiz nights which have raised over £8000 for local charities and events, live music regularly which are always well attended, since the demolishing of the parish centre we have been holding monthly lunches and parties for the village day centre (over 65's who come for activities and food) once a month and it's always such a fun afternoon! We have two darts teams in the local league (granted they might not be succeeding in them, but it's great to have something for the gents to get out and enjoy. We host a couple of different book clubs each month where I am told the ladies definitely discuss the books for at least 15 minutes lol. We are also a collection point for SERV, we collect soft toys for them to use in the charity tombola stalls throughout the year and we have helped to find loving homes for hundreds of teddies over the last few years."

"We are also super proud to be in CAMRA's wonderful *Good Beer Guide* for the second year running, we also have a five star Casque Mark rating. Our Irish contingent rates our Guinness as 9 out of 10, because you can't have a 10 outside of Ireland and we are more than happy with that!"

Pub Features - Royal Oak, Warboys



Each year we try to improve the pub in some way, year one was making it warm and cosy inside, year two we extended and improved the beer garden and this year we have had the gents toilets redone, new carpets in the bar area and new furniture for the restaurant, all made possible because of our loyal and lovely customers continuing to come in and spend their hard earned cash, we wanted to invest as much as they have into our pub, without them our pub is just a building, with them it's a family!"



"I am sure there may be more amazing stories out there, but a customer bought us a gift after our first year and it said - "from small acorns grow great oaks" and we think we are gradually living up to our name".

Helen & Andy



Pub Companies – Who They Are and What They Do

CAMRA feels that many pub users would find it helpful to have more information about the companies that control many of our pubs. This is the first in a series of articles that will provide the facts on pub company practices and operations, explaining in particular how their business models work and what this means for both licensees and, ultimately, us as customers. The aim is to let the facts speak for themselves so that members can make up their own minds about the positive or negative effects of these practices on our pubs and the folk who run them.

1. A Potted History of the PubCo

Fifty years ago, when CAMRA was formed, the pub landscape looked very different. For a start, there were many more of them – some 75000 against around 47500 now. The majority of pubs (52000 or so) were owned by breweries. The 89 small and regional breweries had 13800 of them and the rest were in the hands of the ‘Big Six’ – Bass Charrington, Allied, Whitbread, Scottish & Newcastle, Watney/Grand Metropolitan and Courage/Imperial.

Most of the other 23000 pubs were free houses (in name anyway – many tied their beer supplies to a big brewer in return for loans and discounts). Companies that just owned pubs were few and far between – the likes of Sir John Fitzgerald in the north-east and Heavitree in the south west (though they tied themselves to Bass).

Just about every pub-owning brewery rigorously imposed a supply tie on its own products. As late as the mid-1980s, I remember a Greene King Director recoiling in horror at my suggestion that they allow a few guest beers in their pubs. As a result, new breweries found outlets hard to come by and we customers were hardly spoiled for choice, as a glance at a Good Beer Guide of that era will reveal.

Then, in 1989, along came the Beer Orders. The story of this epochal legislation (for better or worse) is superbly told in Laura Hadland’s recent Fifty Years of CAMRA book but, in essence, the government acknowledged the stranglehold on

the industry exercised by the Big Six and, among other things, capped their pub ownership at 2000.

By now, because of closures and sell-offs, the Big Six owned fewer pubs between them but the Orders still meant around 11000 pubs coming onto the market. We, of course, dreamed of a new golden age of multi-handpumped free houses galore, but the reality was sadly different. Companies were quickly established, usually with close links to the Big Six, to Hoover up these pubs in big batches then negotiate supply deals, invariably with the company who previously owned the place. Enterprise Inns, for instance, started off with the purchase of 368 pubs from Bass, and that’s where they bought the beer from.

In the years that followed, wheeling and dealing saw companies variously grow, collapse, merge, acquire, dispose – it was very difficult to keep up with who owned what. Some companies concentrated on managed pubs, some on tenancies, a few on a mixed model. Behemoths emerged – by 2004, Punch Taverns and Enterprise each owned more than 8000 pubs, though both had accumulated so much debt that they ran into trouble come the financial crash and subsequently retrenched. We’ll have a closer look at the current pub company scene in the next article.

A brief history of Punch Taverns illustrates the volatility surrounding pubcos from the 1990s onwards. Punch formed in 1997, purchasing a tranche of pubs from Bass. Two years later, they bought Inn Business (mostly former Whitbread pubs) and then the rump of the Allied estate. The managed pubs were spun off into a separate division called Spirit. In 2003, they acquired their 3100-strong rival Pubmaster plus a couple of smaller companies. Next, Scottish & Newcastle’s managed pubs were snapped up and added to Spirit. By 2011 the impact of the crash was being felt, calling for a ‘strategic review’. Spirit was demerged and, in 2015, sold to Greene King. Come 2016, a takeover bid totalling £403m (plus the taking on of a billion pounds of debt) was accepted; 1900 pubs went to Heineken with the

Pub Companies

remaining 1300 residing with Patron Capital, though the Punch brand has been retained.

In the meantime, the treatment of their tenants by many of the Pubcos had become a major issue and, after years of campaigning, the Government was persuaded, in 2014, to announce a statutory Pubs Code aimed at regulating their practices and ensuring fair treatment for tenants. We'll return to the Code in a future article. In this context, though, it needs mentioning that the currently accepted definition of a pub company embraces breweries that own pubs – and nowadays most such companies have separate management structures for their pub and brewing operations.

Final comments. Pub companies are here to stay. There is nothing wrong with the basic model and, indeed, there are some excellent companies (mostly smaller ones) who treat their licensees well and clearly see their pubs as more than just property assets. It would, though, be difficult to argue that the ways in which some companies operate raise many issues around their custodianship of what aren't just piles of bricks-and-mortar but, in most cases, precious and valued community assets. We'll examine those issues in due course.



A graphic illustration showing a hand holding a red rectangular sign with the words "HANDPUMP HIJACK" in white, bold, sans-serif font. The sign is flanked by two black silhouettes of handpumps. Above the sign is a black silhouette of a person's head and shoulders. Below the sign is a black silhouette of a handpump. The background is a light, textured grey. In the top right corner, there is a small red circular logo with the letters "CAMRA" inside.

ASK, "IS IT CASK?"

The launch of 'Fresh Ale' by Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Company (CMBC) is a handpump hijack, which misleads consumers into thinking they will be served a cask-conditioned beer - which is far from the case.

Serving so-called 'Fresh Ale' though a handpump also boots a genuine cask beer off the bar, depriving consumers of choice.

CMBC claim to champion cask beer but have instead closed breweries and removed cask lines from bars.



A red rectangular banner with a white outline of a toolbox containing a wrench and a screwdriver. To the right of the toolbox, the text "Is your local pub under threat?" is written in white, sans-serif font. Below this, the text "CAMRA has the tools to help you save it" is written in a smaller white font, followed by the website address "camra.org.uk/saveyourlocal" in a larger white font.

Is your local pub under threat?

CAMRA has the tools to help you save it
camra.org.uk/saveyourlocal



A photograph of a two-story brick building with a sign that reads "BANKS'S ALES" and "THE CROOKED HOUSE". The building appears to be in a state of disrepair, with some windows missing and debris on the ground. A yellow and black caution tape is strung across the front of the building. In the bottom right corner, there is a black circular logo with the letters "CAMRA" inside, and the text "Campaign for Real Ale" below it.

Photo credit: Stop Press Media / Alamy Stock Photo

CAMRA
Campaign
for
Real Ale

North Manchester Wanderings

A recent visit to Manchester allowed me to visit the area north of Manchester that is covered by the Rochdale, Oldham and Bury (ROB) CAMRA branch that includes the towns of Rochdale, Oldham and Bury. The Manchester family brewer Holt's has many pubs in the area and there a few owned by Lees and Hydes. But the branch area has many excellent free-houses and micro pubs where the beers from local smaller breweries can be found. I based myself in Bury for a few days and using the Bee Network bus services 471 from Rochdale to Bolton via Bury and the 409 from Rochdale to Oldham both of which operate frequently till the late evening, I visited many of the better pubs in the area.

Travelling by train from Peterborough with a stop in Doncaster I was able to make a quick visit to the Draughtsman Alehouse on Platform 3 where my onward train to Manchester would depart. Here four real ales often from local breweries are sold. I tried Be There At 2 O'Clock Stout from Ticking Clock Brewery from nearby Worksop which is a brewery that I hadn't heard of before.

After checking in at my hotel in Bury the first stop would be at the Marketside Tavern micro pub which is near the transport interchange. There were a few customers here with football on the large TV screen. The four real ales are often from local breweries, today they were Bank Top Harlequin, Moorhouses Blonde Witch, Bradford Farmers Ale and Eagles Crag Eagles Feather.

A short walk away is the Robert Peel a former Wetherspoons pub named after the former Prime Minister and founder of the modern police force who was local businessman. There were six real ales including Holts Two Hoots, Bowland Hen Harrier and Acorn Old Moor Porter. The porter was particularly enjoyable. Several ciders are available but these are not considered to be real by CAMRA. The food here was excellent, with large portions and it is really good value.

Around the corner on Broad Street is the Broad Street Social, a bar that is owned by Brewsmith Brewery. All six beers were LocAles with five of their own as well as Blackedge Cascade from nearby Horwich. The Brewsmith Oatmeal Stout

was really good. The bar was really busy on a wet Thursday evening as it always is when I have visited here in the past.

Not far away at Bolton Street Station is Trackside. It is located in the station buildings and as its name suggests it is at the side of the tracks with outdoor seating on the platform. From here the trains on the preserved East Lancs Railway can be seen at close quarters. There are up to ten real ales available from across the UK. I tried the Moorhouses Flying Hopsman Pale Ale. Other beers available included Thornbridge Sequoia, Mighty Oak Jake The Snake and Five Kingdoms Wee McAsh demonstrating the wide range of beers sold here. The bar was really busy with a quiz night ongoing.

Also recommended is the Grade II listed Two Tubs a Thwaite's house with several of their beers available.

A half hour journey on the 471 bus takes you to Rochdale where there are two excellent pubs and two micro pubs that are recommended.



From the transport interchange it is a short walk to the Flying Horse which is located opposite the impressive Rochdale Town Hall one of the many buildings which show the history and former wealth of the northern mill towns. The selection of ten mainly local real ales is shown on the screen behind the bar. The selection of beers and the excellent food mean that you may not want to leave here. Some of the beers are from the co-located Wakey Wakey micro brewery. Among the beers today were Wakey Wakey Bright and Early

North Manchester Wanderings

Pale, Bowland Deer Stalker Stout and Front Row Day of the Jackler Pale Ale. Many of the other beers were from local breweries. The food here is excellent with Rochdale Rag Pudding a traditional local delicacy featured on the menu. The pub was really busy with the lunchtime crowd filling it up for meals and refreshments.



Under the same ownership is the Baum a former CAMRA national pub of the year. It is about a 10 minute walk through the town centre. The historic pub is next door to the Rochdale Founders Museum tracing the forming of the cooperative movement in Rochdale, and in the shadow of the Parish Church of St Marys. There are seven changing real ales here with the emphasis again on local beers. I tried Brid's Cross Aethelred APA and Pictish Godiva. Brids Cross Brewing is a small local brewery and I am told that one of its beers is always available here. Excellent food is available with Rochdale Rag Pudding and another local dish Black Pudding Sausages on the menu.

Near the transport interchange are two micro pubs. Our Gracies and the Lucky Duck neither of which I had visited before. My first visit was to the Lucky Duck were two changing real ales are sold which are always from local breweries. On this occasion they were Bank Top Back To The Bone and Rossendale Sunshine. The Bank Top was the first beer that I had tried this week that wasn't in top condition so a move across the road was made to visit Our Gracie's.

Five changing local real ales are available here and the ones that I tried were in excellent

condition. The bar is named in tribute of local lass Gracie Fields who the older amongst you may remember. The beers that I tried were Northern Whisper Yammerhouse and Whitworth Valley Beautiful Strangers Stout. The others were from Phoenix, Eagles Crag and Bradfield. My attention was drawn to the cooler cabinet in which there were several boxed ciders all of which were real according to CAMRA's definition. On another day I would have been trying the cider rather than the beers. As with many other pubs and bars in the area they give discounts to CAMRA members and both asked if I was a member which not many pubs do. Our Gracie's has a large 'A' board sign outside advertising that they give a CAMRA discount.

From Rochdale interchange the 409 bus runs to Oldham the third town in the ROB CAMRA branch area. There are two recommended pubs here, both very close to each other within a 10 minute walk from the bus station. They are also very near to the Oldham Central tram stop for anyone travelling by tram from either Rochdale or Manchester. The Ashton Arms is a traditional pub just outside the town centre that sells four changing real ales with some from local breweries. As it was from a brewery whose beers I hadn't tried for a while I had Goose Eye Chinook as well as Phoenix Black Bee. Also on sale that day were beers from Millstone and Saltaire.



A very short walk takes you to the Fox & Pine another traditional community pub. Ten real ales are available with Draught Bass a permanent feature on the bar and the other nine changing

North Manchester Wanderings

frequently. As well as local breweries a wide range of beer styles are featured including mild and porter with Bank Top Dark Mild and 4T's Cherry Porter on the bar. I tried the Marble Manchester Bitter and New Bru New Tun. Real ciders are available including Hicks Kingston Black and Harrys Scrummage, The Fox & Pine has just been awarded the ROB CAMRA Pub of the Year award for 2025 and is the current branch Cider Pub of the Year.

Across the town centre in Oldham's Tommyfield Market Hall can be found the Cob & Coal micro bar which is run by the same team as the Fox & Pine. Four real ales are available and Stonehouse Dark Force Stout was tried and was in excellent condition. Appropriately for an area steeped in Rugby League tradition one of the other beers on sale was Black Sheep Burrows Blond with the brewery making a donation to the MND charity for each pint sold. The market is due to relocate to a new site in the summer and hopefully the Cob & Coal will also make the move. The bar is only open when the market is open limiting opening hours to 11 am-5pm, and it is closed on Sundays.

Although it is not in the ROB CAMRA branch area the 471 bus from Rochdale to Bury continues on to Bolton Bus Station. To my knowledge there have never been any noteworthy real ale pubs in Bolton but these days things have changed with the opening of two new venues in the town centre so a visit was made to investigate. A 10 minute walk northwards from the bus station is the Market Place Shopping Centre which is in the listed former market hall dating back to 1855. On the way the equally impressive Bolton Town Hall is passed showing the Victorian heritage of another former mill town.

The atmospheric vaulted lower cellar level under the redeveloped market hall is where Great Ale at the Vaults can be found. There are three real ales which usually include a house beer brewed by the local Deeply Vale brewery but on this occasion it had been replaced by another Deeply Vale brew White Wolf Pale Ale. As well as this I also tried Settle Jericho Blond. The other two beers that were available were both from Titanic Brewery.



Great Ale at the Vaults

Also in Bolton local brewery Northern Monkey has opened a tap room in the town centre.

The Northern Monkey Bar is located in a former restaurant where there are normally two of their own real ales and two from local breweries. Unfortunately I hadn't checked the opening times in advance and the 4pm opening time early in the week meant that I would have to give it a miss this time. People who I was talking to in the Vaults recommended Northern Monkey so definitely one to visit next time I am in the area.

With one exception all of the pubs and bars were selling excellent local beers and in many excellent food including local specialities at some. Most are featured in the current edition of the CAMRA Good Beer Guide. Travel between the pubs is made easy by the good local bus services and the Metrolink trams from Manchester City Centre. The Bee Network day bus ticket is only £5 allowing use of buses within the ROB CAMRA branch area and to other parts of Greater Manchester. I stayed at the Premier Inn in Bury which is a short walk from the transport interchange and the town centre pubs. It is an excellent place for a few days stay in the area and I always find that it offers really good value. The cost of hotels in Manchester City Centre is always much higher and the tram up to Bury only takes less than half an hour. In Bury itself there are several tourist attractions to visit including the Bury Art Museum, the Fusilier Museum and the Bury Transport Museum as well as the previously mentioned East Lancs Railway. So if you decide to pay a visit yourself enjoy the pubs and the beers, and also visit some of the other attractions in the area.

Ian Baptist

April

Wed 16 - Sat 20 Easter Beer Festival, Crystal Ship, Earith

May

Fri 2 - Sun 4 Beer at the Hut, Scout Hall, St Neots

Thu 8 - Sat 10 Biggleswade Beer and Cider Festival (CAMRA), Biggleswade Conservative Club

Sat 17 - Sun 18 Wicken Beer Festival, Further details TBC

Mon 19 - Sat 24 Cambridge Beer Festival (CAMRA)

Fri 23 - Mon 26 King of the Beer Fests, King of the Belgians, Hartford

June

Thu 5 - Sat 7 Hitchin Beer and Cider Festival (CAMRA)

Sat 7 Branch AGM, Comrades Club, Godmanchester, Starting 2pm, followed by a pub tour.

Thu 19 - Sat 21 Booze in Fenstanton Pews, St Peter & St Paul's Church, Fenstanton

Fri 20 - Sat 21 Wilburton Beer Festival, The Recreation Ground, Wilburton

Fri 20 - Sat 21 Bluntisham Beer Festival, Further details TBC

Fri 27 - Sun 29 Haddenham Beer Festival, Haddenham Recreation Ground

An up to date listing of Pub & Local Beer & Cider Festivals can be found at:

hunts.camra.org.uk/pubbeerfest.

An up to date listing of Hunts CAMRA events can be found at: hunts.camra.org.uk/diary, or contact the social secretary, Juliet Ferris, on socials@hunts.camra.org.uk, 07590 579283.

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Who to Contact

Chairman: Jez Stone,
chairman@hunts.camra.org.uk

Secretary: Gareth Howell,
secretary@hunts.camra.org.uk.

Treasurer: Nikki Billingslea,
treasurer@hunts.camra.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Les Heathcote
membership@hunts.camra.org.uk



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