



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

opening times

**Huntingdonshire Branch of CAMRA
the Campaign for Real Ale**

**Issue 135
Summer 2008**



WILD FOR MILD

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George, Buckden
LocAle
Half Pints**

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2 Support your local pub - don't give them an excuse to close it!

WILD FOR MILD

The month of May has become linked with real draught mild ale through CAMRA's annual May Mild Month campaign. Many brewers give a push to their regular milds and others produce seasonal milds in May.

Mild can be dark, light or strong. Brewed with a lower hop rate, it is rounder and slightly sweeter than bitters. But it is strong on flavour and brewers are increasingly bringing out the best in the style.

Roast malt, caramel, roast barley or extracts from roasted grain are used to darken most milds and a variety of flavours can result - notably, liquorice, roast or caramel, but light hop or malt flavours and aroma can also be expected.



Locally, Elgoods produce Black Dog mild with its liquorice character and distinctive bite. Cambridge Moonshine brews Harvest Moon Mild. Milton Minotaur is an impressive reddish-brown mild with roast and liquorice layers and a bitter-sweet balance. A stronger mild with an appealing chocolate malt flavour and a great name is Smokestack Lightning from Fenland brewery in the Isle of Ely.

Look out also for milds from just over the county border, including Pargetters dark mild from Buntingford brewery near Royston, and Beijing Black from Potbelly.

But praise is also due to Greene King who have written to 2,000 of its licensees urging them to support CAMRA's Mild Month campaign by stocking Greene King XX Mild, CAMRA's Champion Mild of East Anglia 2007. There will be targeted marketing in May and licensees who order XX will receive a joint Greene King and

CAMRA promotional kit.

Greene King Brewing Company MD Justin Adams said 'XX Mild is an important part of our diverse portfolio of quality ales and we're working hard to ensure ale-lovers can still experience the unique taste of mild in pubs across the country.'



XX is a distinctive dark mild with liquorice and roast flavours from the use of black malt in a blend with crystal malt and a delicate hop aroma from Northdown hops.

One local Greene King pub that stocks XX Mild is the Waggon and Horses in Steeple Morden. Opening Times would like to hear from readers who discover XX in other Greene King pubs following Mild May, or indeed any mild in any local pub. Details will be published in future issues.

Elgoods Black Dog is a regular line at the Cock at Hemingford Grey and is expected this May at the Floods Tavern in St Ives. In St Neots, the Lord John Russell offers Batemans' nutty, fruity Dark Mild and a real cask mild is also stocked at the Hyde Park. Huntingdon's Market Inn is another good mild outlet, with Potbelly's 4.2% Beijing Black from Kettering a regular offering.

Huntingdonshire CAMRA is celebrating Mild May Month on Friday 30th May from 830pm with simultaneous gatherings in the Lord John Russell and Hyde Park in St Neots, The Market Inn at Huntingdon and the Cock, Hemingford Grey.



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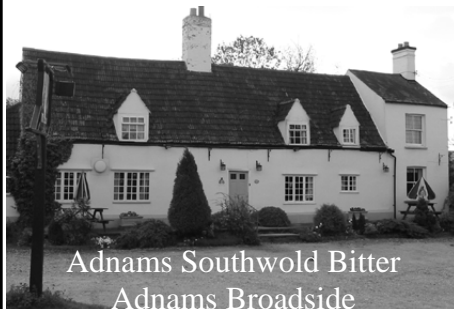
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Huntingdonshire CAMRA Pub of the Year 2006

PUB OF THE YEAR

Chequers, Little Gransden



The Huntingdonshire Branch of CAMRA has this year selected the Chequers, Little Gransden to be awarded Pub of the Year 2008. This is the fourth year in a row that the Chequers has won the award.

CAMRA gives this annual award to the pub that it judges to provide the widest appeal for its combination of good beer, atmosphere, style, service and value.

Bob and Wendy Mitchell have owned and run the Chequers, Little Gransden for 13 years and the pub has been in the Mitchell family since 1950.

Bob has a passion for real ale. As well as the house beer Oakham JHB, at least one unusual guest beer is always available (on special occasions as many as 6 real ales are available).

Bob also has a passion for good food. Friday night is fish night at the Chequers, and on a recent visit, Bob had organised a home made pate competition which he, numerous pub regulars and CAMRA visitors took part in

The cosy public bar with its plain wooden seating and open fire is an unaltered gem and there is a choice of two other rooms. There is always a warm welcome at this

family run pub, from Bob and Wendy and the village regulars.

The Chequers truly is a community pub, and the heart and soul of this Cambridgeshire village. Many of the regulars are country people who work in agriculture.

Bob opened a brewery at the Chequers in November 2007, the first operating brewery within the branch area since James Paine closed in the 1990's.

Since then a steady stream of distinctive beers of a wide variety of styles have appeared, as the collection of pump clips below attests. Bob freely admits that he is still experimenting, and he has yet to arrive at a series of regular brews, all beers brewed to date being "one offs"

The Chequers is also very much a family business. As well as Bob and Wendy, their son's Andy and David are involved in running the pub. Bob hopes that he will one day pass this pub onto the next generation.

There was a presentation of a framed certificate to licensees Wendy and Bob Mitchell on the occasion of the the pubs St Georges Day celebrations. Pictured are Bob, Wendy and Branch representative Roy Endersby.



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A LOOK BACK IN TIME

25 YEARS AGO

James Paine brewery of St Neots announced a doubling of beer production to 100 barrels a week in the year since March 1982, during which time the company had been given a boost by its purchase from Paine and Company by four successful members of the travel business. James Paine was also boosting production by entering into trading agreements with Charrington, part of the Bass brewing group, and Blackburn brewer Matthew Brown. XXX Bitter was the biggest selling James Paine beer, making up 60% of total production, with EG at 15%. Four of the 20 Paines pubs had recently been sold, three with a licence, but one, the Royal Oak in St Neots, to a property company for redevelopment.

Three more cask milds were lost as brewers found mild brewing to be uneconomic in the face of a slump in demand. Following the loss of Elgoods mild earlier in the year, Greene King in Biggleswade discontinued their dark mild XX. Other losses were Youngs Malt Ale and national brewers Whitbread and Watney announced losses of Wethereds and Manns Milds respectively, the latter only two years after its introduction. Meanwhile, another branch of the Watney group, Websters Yorkshire brewery, launched a new mild, Websters Dark Mild, in both cask and keg forms.



White Hart at Alconbury Weston

CAMRA's St Neots branch held its 'Booze by the Ouse' beer festival in St Neots

from June 3-5 1983. That summer the branch met at the White Hart at Alconbury Weston and there were socials at the Oliver Cromwell in St Ives and the Prince of Wales, Hilton.

Ipswich brewers Tolly Cobbold faced an uncertain future as their owner



TOLLY COBOLD

Ellerman Lines was put up for sale, following the decision of charitable trusts to look for a better return on their investment, worth 80% of the Ellerman group. Ellerman had bought Tolly Cobbold six years earlier. Camerons Hartlepool brewery, which the group had bought in 1975, was also part of the proposed sale.

CAMRA's group of eight pubs was renamed Midsummer Inns and there were plans to concentrate on owning pubs within 60 miles of its Cambridge headquarters, and to increase its stock of pubs to 25.

CAMRA's Norwich Branch reported a renewed East Anglia pubs purge by national brewers Watney. Following an earlier campaign of pub closures in the 1970's after Watney had taken over the estates of three Norwich breweries, CAMRA had catalogued over 40 closures in 1982 and 1983.

Hereward Brewery was launched at Market Deeping in May 1983. The first pint was drawn by Cambridge resident Tony Millns, chairman of CAMRA and was drunk by the mayor of Peterborough, who was so impressed with the cask Hereward Bitter that he ordered a firkin for the mayor's parlour at Peterborough Town Hall.

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A LOOK BACK IN TIME

10 YEARS AGO



Potton brewery was set up in the Bedfordshire town by Bob Hearson and Clive Towner after they were made redundant on the closure of Greene King's Biggleswade brewery. Potton was home to the original Potton Brewery which closed in 1921.

Wetherspoons backed CAMRA's May Mild promotion in 1998 by serving a choice of cut price cask milds in all of its 200 plus outlets.

More good news for real mild was provided by Lancaster brewer Mitchells' reintroduction of its cask Dark Mild, after having discontinued production the previous year.

In summer 1998 St Neots CAMRA branch held meetings at the White Hart in St Ives



and the Prince of Wales, Hilton and there was a curry night in Eaton Socon. There were trips to pubs in Gamlingay and

Little Gransden in June and Keyston and Leighton Bromswold in July.

CAMRA launched its 'Pub Viability Test' to help government and local council officials assess the viability of pubs threatened with closure by owners claiming that pubs are no longer viable when applying to change use to private houses. The test was aimed at helping campaigners and providing protection for pubs. The test uses a tick list of objective criteria such as location and condition of buildings.

In summer 1998, Marstons Pedigree over-

took Draught Bass as Britain's biggest selling cask beer, following a radio and poster advertising campaign with the slogan



'Barrels are meant for brewing', a reference to the use of the traditional Burton Union method of fermentation in large wooden casks (still used by Marstons in 2008), retained by Marstons but phased out by its then Burton neighbour Bass.

Former Bedfordshire CAMRA stalwarts John and Christine Cryne were given an emotional send off at CAMRA's 1998 annual conference in Edinburgh after they both stood down from the campaign's National Executive after 14 and 9 years respectively. Later that summer John was named Beer Drinker of the Year by the Parliamentary Beer Club, a group of MPs who enjoy their ale.

Oxford brewer Morrells appeared to face closure after the sudden departure of chief executive Charles Eld and his replacement by Ken Hodgson, who declared 'Only a fool would give a commitment to stay in brewing'.



CAMRA was outraged as Suffolk brewer Greene King used a loophole in new government legislation to de-licence the historic George and Dragon in Baldock. The beer orders had banned the sale of pubs with restrictive covenants preventing them from continuing as pubs. But Greene King was offering the George and Dragon on a 99 year lease, after their lawyers found that the new rule did not apply to leasehold transfers.

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PUB PIECES

Wetherspoons are set to open in St Neots, following the granting of a licence by Huntingdonshire District Council for its new pub on the site of the old post office in New Street. Planning permission for this change of use was granted last December. Work should start on the conversion this September, to include the addition of a new single storey extension at the rear of the existing building, and the new pub is expected to open in February 2009. The new licence will allow opening until 0030 Sundays to Thursdays and 0130 on Fridays and Saturdays. Pub-goers in St Neots can expect cheap food and drink, including real ales of high quality at competitive prices. There are fears, though, of the threat that Wetherspoons outlets can pose to existing pubs. The centre of St Neots has only a dozen or so pubs to share any hits in trade – and three have already closed since the year 2000.

At **Kneesworth, the Red Lion**, a picturesque old roadside inn near Bassingbourn, has closed and is reported to have been sold to a chain of Indian restaurants. Planning permission will not be needed for change of use from a pub to a restaurant. Bassingbourn will be left with two pubs - the Hoops, a Greene King pub, and free house the Pear Tree, after the closure of the Antelope a decade or so ago.

In **Brampton the Harrier** is expected to revert to an Indian restaurant following the impending sale of the lease. Previously it was changed to an Indian restaurant followed by a period of dual use as both an Indian restaurant and a pub.

Also in **Brampton, the Grange** is to be redeveloped as 14 flats, subject to

planning permission. The Grange was built as a residence but over the years has also provided accommodation for a girl's school and military headquarters. It was converted to a hotel in 1980 and became very popular a few years ago for its gourmet food and local real ales under the proprietorship of Nick Steiger, previously of the Old Bridge Hotel in Huntingdon. More recently it became a guest house, but its viability has been compromised by the need for significant building repairs. Developers discussed various options with council planning officers, including demolition or refurbishment as an improved hotel, although this was not considered to be commercially viable. Conroy Construction Ltd propose retaining the original Georgian building and replacing existing additions with new single and two storey extensions and providing 9 flats on the ground floor, four on the first floor and one in the second floor roof space.

Greene King pub the **Bell in Great Paxton** has a new licensee, Mike Johnson, who took over last December

with his partner Jenny and chef James Goodland.



Also last December, Dai Heafield took over the **George at Fenstanton**, and has been busy refitting the kitchen to be able to offer

traditional pub fare. Dai also hoped to add

PUB PIECES

more real ales, possibly from Wales or local producers.

New licensees at the **Seven Wives in St Ives**, Tony and Lynn Herrick have brought a firm emphasis on entertainment and



food, with themed food nights, live bands and karaoke competitions. Real ales have included the products of the Hobgoblin brewery, recently taken over by Marstons.



At **Houghton**, village local the **Three Horseshoes** is establishing a reputation

for its restaurant menu, offered at pub prices alongside a good selection of real ales, and themed food events that have included a Spanish night recently.

In **Peterborough**, Batemans pub the **Palmerston Arms** closed for a major refurbishment in February and reopened on 1 March with a member of the Bateman family in attendance.

New tenant for Cock, Gamlingay.



Pubgoers in Gamlingay are facing the future with much more confidence now there's a new tenant at the 16th-century Cock in Church Street.

For though Nessie Roberts is the Greene King pub's third tenant in as many years, she's a familiar face behind the bar. For she has worked at the Cock for nine years

and was manageress under the last long-serving tenants, Roger and Tina Collins.

Roger and Tina left at the end of 2005 after 10 successful years because they said Greene King was demanding ridiculous rent increases. Roger maintained that he and Tina were paying themselves less when they left the pub than they did when they first leased it, despite having increased its barrelage five-fold.

Since then two tenants have tried to make a go of it – but owing in part to the high rent, neither of them lasted a year.

The pub has also had several temporary managers and trade has suffered drastically as a result, but fans are confident that Nessie can revive its flagging fortunes. She claims to have negotiated a much more realistic rent out of Greene King and promises to reintroduce the special events that were so popular in the Collinses' day.

She's also a personal friend of most of the regulars, who had urged her to apply for the tenancy and are deeply relieved that she got it.



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MORE MICROBREWERY TAKEOVERS

Two more major real ale microbrewers and the Deuchars IPA, Hobgoblin and Brakspear brands have been swallowed up by bigger brewers. Scottish & Newcastle have bought out the remaining 70 per cent of the shareholding in Caledonian Brewery of Edinburgh and Marstons have taken over Refresh UK, owners of Wychwood Brewery in Witney, Oxfordshire, brewers of the Hobgoblin and Brakspears brands.



Caledonian will soon be run by Dutch brewers Heineken. S&N are themselves the subject of a current takeover by a consortium of Hei-

neken and Carlsberg and will be operated as part of Heineken.

In 2004 S&N bought the Caledonian brewing site and a 30% share of the brewing business. In the latest deal they have bought the remaining 70% of shares. The former Caledonian directors will retain ownership of Harviestoun brewery in Clackmannanshire, taken over by Caledonian in 2006, which means continued independence for the popular brewers of real ales like Bitter & Twisted and Schiehallion.



Marstons' latest acquisition follows their purchase of Cumbria brewer Jennings in 2005 and the Ringwood microbrewer in

Hampshire last year. Marstons appear to be committed to the continued operation of these breweries as they

develop a large portfolio of locally brewed real ales to back up the national Marstons Pedigree brand.



Refresh is also the largest British producer of organic ales, including the Duchy Original real ales in bottle.

And Marstons plan to keep Refresh's deal to import Inbev brand Löwenbräu and investigate bringing in more strong Inbev brands from other parts of the world.

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HALF PINTS



The former Bass Brewery Museum in Burton on Trent could be saved as a result of a campaign against the closure plans of owners Coors. The campaign is being led by local MP Janet Dean

and has the support of CAMRA and beer writer Roger Protz who said 'The museum is the only national centre to celebrate British beer' Coors have now offered the museum at a peppercorn rent and will offer matched funding of up to £200000 to any organisation taking on the site.

Punch Taverns has said that its Spirit estate of managed pubs is not for sale, following a bid by pub group Mitchells and Butlers. This follows Punch's withdrawal of its earlier merger proposal for M&B.



Greene King has announced its seasonal cask ale range for 2008. Morlands Tanners Jack (4.4% alcohol by volume) will be available in May. Look out for the pale, zesty Ale Fresco (4.3%) in May and June

and Sundance (4.1% abv) from July to August. Bonkers Conkers (4.1% abv) and Ridley's Witchfinder (4.3%) will be available during September. Abbot Reserve (6.5% abv) and Hardys and Hansons Rocking Rudolph (4.5% abv) will be the winter offerings, with Abstinence Ale (3.6% abv) after the New Year celebrations.

Meantime Brewing Company is to revive brewing at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, which has a history of brewing

dating back to 1717, and the brewing project is part of the redevelopment of the Old Royal Naval College visitor centre. The brewery will form the centrepiece of a new Meantime outlet and include an exhibition of brewing history in the area. The products of the new brewery will include a London Porter as originally brewed at the site.

Dark Star brewery won awards at two CAMRA beer festivals in March for its American Pale Ale. The beer was voted best beer at the Sussex Branches



Beer and Cider Festival in Hove and then the following weekend at the London Drinker Festival at the Camden Centre. Dark Star started brewing in Brighton and moved operations to its current site near Haywards Heath, Sussex in 2001.

The 'Stuff the Supermarkets' campaign, run by the 'Head of Steam' pub chain is preparing a new stage of its attempt to encourage alternatives to cheap booze from supermarkets. From May, Head of Steam will offer a 'Stuff the Chancellor' discount offer on bulk beer for home consumption in response to last month's budget. Take home beer will be offered at prices such as 99p a pint for quantities of 36, 72 or 144 pints. Head of Steam boss Tony Brookes claims that this discounting is not selling below cost and is a clear difference from the approach of many supermarkets. 'Several pub companies are now actively planning to implement our scheme', he said, 'Some are calling it a different name, but that's all right – it's the outcome that counts.'

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GEORGE, BUCKDEN

They're a problem, aren't they, old coaching inns? Huge great piles of mouldering masonry, full of rot both wet and dry, and normally in completely the wrong locations for modern needs – let's face it, who needs 'em?

Yes, it's a sad fact that the grand inns that used to be one of England's glories have had a thin time of late. No amount of history has been able to guarantee their safety, and some of the most historic of them have been drastically and unsympathetically altered, demoted to local beer-houses, or effectively left to rot.

Astonishingly to anyone with a sense of history, both the New Inn at Gloucester and the Angel & Royal at Grantham, two of Britain's most venerable late medieval inns, have had to be rescued at huge cost after years of neglect. Of lesser-known coaching inns, too many to mention have gone under altogether, victims of redundant locations and facilities that may have suited the 18th-century traveller but proved too hard to adapt to modern needs.

One that has survived – just – is at Buckden near Huntingdon where the George, a vast brick-built barracks of a place, fronted the Great North Road from the early 18th century until the 1970s, when the village was bypassed by the A1. Over the years

the George's fortunes gradually faded, and half of it was even sold off piecemeal as shops, the post office, and a cottage. Then, three years ago, the two halves were reunited when the Furbank family came to the rescue.

Anne and Richard Furbank started a very swish dress shop in part of the sold-off half 27 years ago; and as their business grew they bought up the rest of it. Then in 2003 the George itself was put up for sale by Greene King as part of the fall-out from its acquisition of Old English Inns. And, says the Furbanks' daughter-in-law Becky, the sale came as no surprise.

"You should have seen the state of the place," she says. "The bedrooms were damp and peeling and were let out at B&B rates, mostly to visiting fishermen. There was no dining trade at all, and the bar was all dark paint and velvet upholstery with a horrible patterned carpet – and no customers to speak of."



But the Furbanks knew the old inn had potential. Buckden is an affluent village; and having enjoyed the custom of the wealthier women of the district for many years, the Furbanks not only knew the market, they knew most of the market by name. The shop also attracts custom from much further afield, and Buckden – al-



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GEORGE, BUCKDEN



though it has another, even more historic, coaching inn, the 15th-century Lion – lacked a sufficiently chic venue for coffees and lunches.

And so they bought the George.

But it needed more than just a bit of TLC. The whole place closed in July 2003, and the ground floor didn't reopen until March 2004. (The 12 bedrooms, all named after various Georges – Best, Orwell, Washington and so on – reopened one by one thereafter). Becky won't say how much the refurbishment cost; but it looks expensive

For the six-month project saw the place utterly transformed, from a cheap and weary pastiche of an olde inn into a smart, modern, upmarket bar-brasserie with zinc counters, chunky woodwork buffed to gleaming-point, and comfortable leather chairs. The only original feature you'll see is the parquet floor, which reappeared as the swirly carpet and the concrete screed underneath it were hacked away. Even the layout is nothing like the original: part of the courtyard is now the Orangery, a conservatory-style dining room; what might once have been the coffee-room is now a very elegant private dining room; and the new bar and restaurant merge into each other, all light and air where once was solemn gloom.

It's a big shock walking into what you think is going to be an old country inn packed with hunting prints and grandfather clocks and finding yourself instead in what could be a well-heeled brasserie in Kensington or Chelsea. But it works. The effect is one of elegant informality that suits both the local and the travelling trade; more to the point, perhaps, it suits chef Ray Smikle's menus.

For although the letting rooms are usually fully booked and there's always a cracking pint of real ale at the bar – Adnams Bitter and a changing guest from Nethergate – it's the food that matters here, and the market the whole operation is pitched at is both sophisticated and contemporary. It speaks volumes that general manager Cynthia Schaeffer is French; and as for Ray – why, the Furbanks had to pursue him all the way to Spain.

“Ray had been with Huntsbridge Inns and had run the Falcon at Fotheringhay in Northamptonshire and also cooked at the Mermaid at Ellington near here, which is where my husband Tim has his business,” says Becky. “So we knew him, and we knew his style of cooking, and we knew it was exactly what we wanted.

“The only trouble was, we didn't know where he was. Eventually we found he was cooking in Spain, so we got in touch a n d p e r - suaded him to c o m e h o m e .”

R a y ' s style is c o n -



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GEORGE, BUCKDEN



temporary but international, rather than the Modern British that still seems to be in the ascendant in these parts. Light lunches range from roast tomato and basil soup at £5.50 via smoked salmon and crayfish sandwiches with cream cheese and spring onions at £7.95 to Gloucestershire Old Spot pork belly with red cabbage, mash, and Thai dressing at £12.

Dinner is rather grander, with noisettes of lamb with tarragon mousse, garlic and rosemary panacotta, and spinach, tomato and morel jus at £19.95 and grilled fillet of Highland beef, crushed truffle potato, butternut squash and cherry tomato confit and red wine shallot sauce at £24.95. But Becky insists that this is brasserie food, not fine dining.

"We have a lot of good gastropubs in the district, and there are nationally-known fine dining restaurants in and around Cambridge," she says. "We wanted some-

thing in between, something more sophisticated than a gastropub but less formal and more personal and accessible than a fine dining restaurant.

"Ray is exactly the right chef from that point of view. We already knew his cooking was fantastic, but he builds on the reputation of his food by not hiding away in the kitchen. He's a great character who spends a lot of time out front turning customers into friends – and that, of course, generates repeat business.

"Like us, he's well-known in the village. We built our reputation on taking personal care of our customers and getting to know them, and he shares that philosophy."

You know the Furbanks have got the mix right when you can't find a space in the George's substantial car park even on a Monday lunchtime. The investment has been huge, but the old place has gone from decrepitude to bustling, buzzing life. The beautiful old George has been not just rescued but reinvigorated, and good food has saved a slice of antiquity for posterity.

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THE GOOD BEER GUIDE PRAGUE



The “Good Beer Guide for Prague and the Czech Republic” had not been published when we booked our

flights to Prague early last year, but as soon as we saw it advertised in “What’s Brewing” we thought that it would make a useful complement to our Lonely Planet city guide. Prague is a city so well supplied with pubs that were we left to our own devices, we would surely never have sampled such a huge variety of beers as we were directed towards by the Guide.

We started our stay with a walk through the more touristy areas of the city centre. We looked at the astronomical clock, and after a few moments careful consideration, decided that it was trying to tell us that it was pub o’clock. The Guide indicated that “Kolkovna” (No.3 in the GBG Prague) was not far away, and served “tank” (i.e. unpasteurised and unfiltered) Pilsner Urquell. Not being particularly familiar with Czech beer, we weren’t sure what to expect – what we got were tankards of rich golden creamy lager with improbably large heads. Served at cellar temperature, the luscious malt flavours and aromatic hops were free to fill the mouth. We enjoyed the beer so much that we had another. We were really starting to get the hang of things, so we had some dumplings too.

Our next stop was “U Rudolfina (6)”, which again served excellent tank Pilsner Urquell in surroundings described somewhat ungraciously by the Guide as “dingy”, but which we found most agreeable. By this stage we had realised that almost every pub sign in Prague adver-

tised Pilsner Urquell, and with almost all pubs selling only one type of beer, it became apparent that we might have to make more effort to try some of the different styles and brands on offer. This is where the guide became indispensable. The descriptions of different beer styles and the maps provided made it relatively easy to find an ample selection of interesting drinking establishments all within walking distance of the main Wencelas square. “Duende (2)” was only a short walk from U Rudolfina, and provided us with our first experience of “Bernard” beer – an excellent well balanced lager. From the cellar bar of “U Zeleneho Stromu (7)”, we could actually see the large tanks containing the Pilsner Urquell.

We then moved on to what turned out to be probably our favourite Guide recommended pub – “U Medviku (5)” – a brewpub serving dark (Tmave) and light (Svetle) Budvar, and their own bottle-conditioned “Oldgott”. This is an old fashioned unfiltered “half-dark” lager. A gloriously complex malt flavour is balanced by strong hoppiness. From here, we also helpfully directed a hen party towards an Irish pub.

Having visited the various sights of Prague castle, we dropped in to “U Hrocha (meaning ‘Hippo’)(28)”, which was a miniscule pub nestled on the side of the hill beneath. The single room was heaving with moustachioed Czech men drinking tank Pilsner Urquell, and pouring it on their beer cheese (a curious, yet strangely compelling Czech tradition – “beer cheese” is usually quite soft



THE GOOD BEER GUIDE PRAGUE

and eaten mashed up with some beer and then spread on some garlic-smeared toast). The nearby "U Kocouru (29)" afforded us our first taste of Kvasnicove Pivo – a Czech Hefeweizen style beer, and a real bargain at around 75p per pint.

The Guide recommends several brewpubs, and in addition to U Medviku, we visited "Pivovarsky Dum (17)" and "U Fleku (20)". The contrast between the two establishments was very marked. Pivovarsky Dum serves 3 house brews, including a fabulous dark lager, accompanied by traditional Czech cuisine (so more dumplings) in a relatively quiet unassuming area of the city. U Fleku is described by the Guide as "a tourist trap, but a good one"; their own dark lager (the only beer on sale) being truly magnificent (and easily the most expensive we encountered – about £1.50 for 0.4l).

"U Zlateho Tygra (8)" is thought of as one of the truly great pubs in Prague, and had a fantastic atmosphere including some rather enthusiastic accordion-based music in the tiny back room. The Guide warns that it is often impossible to get a table in here, but we managed (just) to find a place to squeeze in (vertical drinking seems to be completely absent, not least because where would the waiter put your little score card listing all the beer you'd drunk?). Whilst the tank Pilsner Urquell was not noticeably much better than at other tank pubs, who could resist visiting the pub to which Vaclav Havel took Bill Clinton for a drink?

Having visited most of the pubs in and around the old town recommended by the Guide, we decided to take a

trip to the outskirts to see what lurked beyond Prague's tourist-filled centre. Taking the trams recom-

mended by the Guide, we got completely lost. It would appear that some of the tram lines have been re-numbered. Eventually, we made it to "U Klastera (31)", and found some excellent "Klaster" beers, and great value food. Sadly, "Bastard (32)" appeared to be closed for the summer. So, we wended our way back to the city for a final lap of our marathon pub crawl. "Ferdinanda (12)" had 4 Ferdinand beers on tap, including the "7 bullets" beer ghoulishly commemorating the means of Franz Ferdinand's assassination. A real gem that we very nearly missed was "Rehore Samsy (14)" – a tiny bookshop within a shopping centre just of Wenceslas Square – which just happened to serve two varieties of draught Policke beer. We were the only people drinking beer, which was rather surprising in itself, and especially given that the dark lager was just about the best we had found.

We finished our pub crawl at "Kyvaldo (15)" where we enjoyed Bernard yeast beer and a dark lager which was so rich in complex malt flavours that it was almost like a porter. As we tucked in to a valedictory helping of dumplings we reflected on our very good fortune that the Guide had come along at just the right moment for us to take full advantage.

Mel and Edric
Ellis



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THE BUDGET

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has hit out at the Chancellor's decision to increase beer duty by 4 pence a pint in today's Budget, together with annual increases of 2% above inflation for the next four years. The consumer group claims that the increase will lead to at least 20 pence on a pint over the bar, fuelling pub closures and increasing unregulated drinking as more choose to drink at home or on the streets. This is the first time ever that beer tax has increased by 4 pence - a rise of 13%!

CAMRA slams inflation-busting beer duty increase as 'a charter for smugglers and cheap supermarket booze'

CAMRA recently announced that 57 pubs are lost permanently every month as the price differential between pubs and supermarkets widens. Pubs provide a regulated environment for people to enjoy alcohol socially and responsibly.

Mike Benner, Chief Executive of CAMRA said, "The Chancellor has failed to recognise that well-run community pubs are the solution to Britain's binge drinking problems. This budget will do nothing to stop binge drinking, but it will lead to pub closures on a huge scale, widen the gap between supermarket and pub prices and encourage smuggling and cross-border shopping. It's a great big nail whacked ruthlessly into the coffin of the British pub."

The 90,000 strong consumer group has condemned the announcement that beer tax will increase above inflation for the

next four years, despite what happens to UK pubs and the beer market.

Mike Benner added, "Pubs are defined as local services*, yet this tax rise alongside other market pressures will accelerate closures to unprecedented levels. The budget shows a disregard for our national drink and for the 15 million people who enjoy it responsibly.

Four penny tax increase will do nothing to curb binge drinking but will hit poorest the hardest

CAMRA called for a cut in beer duty in the Budget to help pubs compete with supermarket prices. CAMRA believes that supermarket prices of beer are unlikely to be affected significantly by the tax increase, but pubs as small businesses, will have no choice but to increase prices at the bar.

Latest survey on pubs prices released today

The latest survey of pub prices across Britain is also released by CAMRA today. It shows that real ale prices across the UK have increased by 4.6% in the last year and the average price of a pint now sits at £2.45. CAMRA claims that average post-budget pub prices will now hit at least £2.65 for real ale and £2.85 for lager.

Before Budget increases apply, the most expensive region for a pint is London at £2.64 for real ale and £2.84 for lager. The best value pint of real ale was in the North at £2.15, with the best value lager in the North West at £2.40.

Full results of the survey are available at www.camra.org.uk/budget2008.

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EVENTS AND SOCIALS

May 2008 – St Ives Pub Ramble / Mild Month

- Sat 24th **Local pubs of St Ives.** A trip around the pubs of St Ives starting in the Floods Tavern 8:30 / Nelsons Head 9:15 / Royal Oak 9:45 / Oliver Cromwell 10:15
- Fri 30th **Mild Month Celebrations.** CAMRA members will be partaking of simultaneous visits to pubs serving **Mild** in the branch area, including - the **Cock, Hemingford Grey / Hyde Park & Lord John Russell, St Neots / Market Inn, Huntingdon.** Further details will be posted on the CAMRA members Yahoo Group and Hunts CAMRA web site.

June 2008 – Pub Presentation

- Tues 10th Open Committee Meeting, the **Cock, Hemingford Grey**, (8.30 pm).
- Fri 20th Trip to the **Mad Cat, Pidley**, to present their award for **Most Improved Pub 2008.**

July 2008 – West of Huntingdon Pub Tour

- Tues 8th Open Committee Meeting, the **White Hart, Great Staughton**, (8.30 pm).
- Fri 25th Touring around the country pubs **West of Huntingdon**, starting at the **Fox, Catworth** at 8:30, then the **Swan, Old Weston** at 9:15, finishing at the **Green Man, Leighton Bromswold** at 10:15. A series of car pools will be arranged to transport members around the pubs.

August 2008

- Tues 12th Open Committee Meeting, the **Anchor, Little Paxton** (8.30 pm).

For further information contact Pete Godfrey, Social Secretary, on 01480 212849 or e-mail: socials@huntscamra.org.uk. An up to date listing of Social Events can also be found at the web site: www.huntscamra.org.uk/diary.

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TRADING STANDARDS

Your local Trading Standards organisation is Cambridgeshire County Council Trading Standards. If you have any complaints about trading standards issues at local pubs please contact them.

They have a role to protect consumers from errors or frauds concerned with quality, description or price of goods, services or facilities and to detect and rectify unfair advertising practices.

Contact **Cambridgeshire Trading Standards** helpdesk on 08454 040 506, or at Trading Standards Division, Sackville House, Sackville Way, Great Cambourne, Cambridgeshire, CB3 6HD. The local trading standards web site is www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business/trading/. The national trading standards web site is www.tradingstandards.gov.uk.

OPENING TIMES

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To contact the Editor Andy Shaw, see "Who to Contact" opposite.

To Advertise

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LocAle

LocAle campaigner wins CAMRA's first National 'Real Ale Campaigner of the Year' award.

Steve Westby from Nottingham has been named as CAMRA's first Real Ale Campaigner of the Year at their National Members' Weekend & AGM.

Steve Westby was presented the award for his hard work in creating and promoting a new initiative called LocAle which encourages pubs to serve at least one real ale that is brewed within 20 miles. The scheme has been trialled in Nottingham and CAMRA is set to roll it out nationally.

Following the announcement of the acquisition of Hardys & Hansons brewery by Greene King in 2006, Nottingham CAMRA tried desperately to persuade Greene King to keep the brewery open.

Although the campaign unfortunately failed, it did have a knock on effect. It was suggested by CAMRA that environmentally it would be better for people to drink local beers than have beer moved around the country creating 'Beer Miles'. Too many pubs were also just offering global brands. Enthused about the idea, Steve coined the phrase 'LocAle' and a new positive campaign was launched.

With the support for this campaign from the Nottingham CAMRA branch, Steve took it upon himself to draft the guidelines, to source appropriate point of sale items and ensure that the campaign would impact on pubs and drinkers alike.

The end result is Nottingham pubs now consider selling local beers, those that sign up to the campaign are selling local real ales and this is therefore environmentally friendly and supports local business.

This results in a better choice of beers for the consumer at the bar.

To be included in the Nottingham LocAle scheme a pub must sell a beer that has been brewed within a 20 mile radius. Pubs that sign up to the campaign receive a variety of point of sale material to promote that they sell local beers. Over 70 pubs in Nottingham have signed up to the scheme and the principles of the initiative have been adopted in York, Isle of Wight and Sheffield.

On winning the award, Steve Westby said, "I feel very proud to be honoured as CAMRA's very first Real Ale Campaigner of the Year in recognition of the success of the LocAle campaign. I dreamt up what became LocAle over a pint one evening whilst mulling over the impact of the take-over and cynical closure of Nottingham's last major brewer and it is pleasing that such a simple idea has become so successful. This success is very much due to the hard work of my colleagues on the Nottingham CAMRA committee in supporting the idea and I must also thank my son, Richard, for the clever design of the very distinctive LocAle logo and for the supporting artwork that he created."

Brett Laniosh, CAMRA's Promotions and Marketing Director said, "CAMRA LocAle is an exciting campaign that we will be encouraging our 200 branches to adopt. It is amazing how such a simple idea will now help local pubs and breweries and give consumers more local beers to try in pubs. I would personally like to congratulate Steve on being the first winner of this award."

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