

FREE

Swan Supping



Issue 99

Dec 2013/Jan 2014



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

COVER STORY
20th Vale of Aylesbury
Beer Festival.

Full details on page 4.

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REAL CHOICE



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NEWS FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome, once again, to the latest issue of *Swan Supping*.

We have included a lot more **CAMRA** related material this time, but we hope that won't put off the vast majority of our readers who have yet to join in with the campaign (but if you are tempted to join, there is always a membership form in the magazine, this time it is on the inside back cover).

We have a report from our beer festival which we held in October and features on our front cover and pictured top right.

This was the twentieth festival we have

organised in conjunction with the **Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity** who are coincidentally celebrating their 25th anniversary. We had 25 beers on offer, plus a range of cider and perry, and the festival went very well, raising over £4,100 for the Charity. We will be running another festival next year and would welcome more volunteers to assist us as sometimes our meagre resources get stretched to breaking point. Don't worry about getting dragged into a lot of hard work, it's great fun and usually results in enjoying a few drinks.

At the festival, votes are taken for the best beer on offer. This year, the



winning beer was **Chiltern 300's Old Ale**. This was the second successive win for the brewery from Terrick as their **Beechwood** won last year. A presentation of the certificate was made to George Jenkinson, Brewery Director and the man in charge at the **Kings Head**, Aylesbury, by my myself and Teresa King from the Charity. A picture (by kind permission from the Bucks Herald) appears on page 4.

Besides running beer festivals, we have enjoyed a lot of socials over the last two months, including a very good trip to Birmingham to sample some of the many excellent pubs in the city. A report of the trip appears on page



8 showing how we took advantage of the wonderful service offered by Chiltern Railways whilst musing on what will happen if the dreaded HS2 starts creaming off the few people who can afford to use the new (and just a bit quicker) service between London and Birmingham.

Other articles include your usual favourites including a festive **Gravediggers** offering, a foreign trip and articles from our new Regional Director, Nick Boley, and our Branch Chairman, Alexander Wright. Please remember that we welcome pub news from all sources for our Local News section, which we know is the first stop for a great many of our readers.

Also, special thanks must go to Colin Thomas for his article (page 18) about an event outside the **White Swan** in Whitchurch which shows that community spirit still exists and which could easily be lost if we continue to lose our village pubs at an alarming rate. We always welcome articles like this as we think our readers appreciate and enjoy them. So, keep them coming! They will be especially appreciated for our next issue, as we reach the magic 100th edition, which we intend to make really special!

The cold weather doesn't usually bring any smiles, but I was amused by the sign, pictured left, from the **James Figg** in Thame, so forgive me for including it in my editorial.

Thanks once again to all the people who have given their free time to contribute to the production and circulation of *Swan Supping* and many thanks to Colin Stanford for the cartoon.

A very Merry Christmas to you all and all the best for the New Year!

Cheers!

David W. Roe - *Swan Supping* Editor

NATIONAL CAMRA NEWS

It's time for pubcos to reassess their approach

Campaigning activity on pubco reform has intensified as the Government's decision grows near. **CAMRA** is resolutely determined to secure reform of the beer tie as operated by the large pubcos. As a consumer group, we want to see a thriving, healthy and diverse pub sector. We also want fairness for licensees so pubs are run by motivated people earning a fair living, who can afford to (and are incentivised to) invest in improving their consumer offer.

The way to deliver this is with a statutory code of practice and adjudicator, which must include Guest Beer and Market Rent Only options for licensees tied to the big pubcos. Giving licensees this choice would incentivise pub companies to act in a competitive manner and make their tied deals fair and attractive. Greater choice and flexibility for talented licensees is the key to reversing the decline of the pub sector.

This year alone 7,500 **CAMRA** members have contacted their MPs and Vince Cable – securing the support of 203 MPs for these vital reforms. 400,000 beer mats have been distributed in pubs raising public awareness. We also took the campaign to the party conferences to make our case direct to decision makers. Just last week I wrote to key Ministers demanding their support change.

The failure of pub companies to reform voluntarily is having a hugely damaging impact on our communities who are losing their pubs, and on individuals who are losing their livelihoods. Our polling evidence indicates that 57% of licensees tied to big pubcos are earning less than £10,000 a year.

Staunch resistance to effective reform, and a 'business as usual' approach from the pubcos has so far meant disaster for their own businesses, which have suffered collapsing share prices and falling profits.

CAMRA's approach is now, and has always been, about evolution not revolution. Market Rent Only and Guest Beer options would be phased in over five years at rent reviews and lease renewals. We are not out to destroy the pubcos – we simply want a sustainable pub sector where licensees make sufficient profit to enable them to invest their pub's future.

After a decade of broken promises, the Government now needs to step in to deliver a legal framework to protect the future of the pub sector. We are calling on pub companies, at this late stage, to reassess their approach and recognise that a statutory code, Market Rent Only option and adjudicator is in their best interest, in the interest of the long term health of the pub sector and of Britain's millions of pub goers.

This piece by Mike Benner, **CAMRA's** Chief Executive, first appeared in the *Publican's Morning Advertiser*.

BEER FESTIVAL REPORT



The **Vale of Aylesbury Beer Festival** is held in the sports hall at the Bucks County Council sports and social club, just opposite Aylesbury ambulance station. Organising the festival is one of the highlights of my year, despite the many hours that the rest of the team and myself put in. As you may know, the Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity and **Aylesbury Vale & Wycombe CAMRA** have been organising the festival for twenty years now. The Charity, itself celebrating its 25th year, is primarily responsible for the festival, doing the bulk of the organisation and marketing, leaving **CAMRA** the very pleasant (but time-consuming) job of organising the beer, and volunteers to man the bar.

The ordering process was started about two months before the festival. This year, we had a strict (and reduced) budget, as we had a reduced attendance last year. We try and get a mix of ales from our local breweries, though we are now having to rotate who we stock, as there are many fantastic breweries who are within delivery distance. We are also lucky to be close to the drinks distributor, **Dayla**. Their **Cask Marque** warehouse in Aston Clinton stocks a great range of ales.

In addition to our local breweries, we try to get a range of interesting and unusual beers from around the country. This has also included the **Supreme Champion Beer of Britain**, this year **Elland's 1872 Porter** - something I had been wanting to try, as I (and many, many others) had missed tasting this at the Great British Beer Festival in Olympia over the Summer. All in all, it is surprisingly tricky to arrange 25 beers and 5 ciders for our budget. We are very lucky to get discounts from several suppliers.

The Hospice Charity was also hard at work, arranging for the hire of the hall, food, sponsorship for the beers, glasses, tickets and publicity. The festival is the result of a lot of hard work and volunteer time.

The beers were delivered on the Wednesday before the festival, and after a struggle getting them into their correct positions on the stillage, were left to sit for a few hours before tapping. It is very important to allow real ale to settle, as when it is delivered, there is lots of yeast floating around the barrel. It is this yeast that provides the cask conditioning that is an important part of the real ale brewing process, and distinguishes it from keg bitters and lagers. Once a barrel is placed on the stillage and chocked in position, the yeast begins to settle to the bottom of the barrel. Any movement will then stir it up; this is why you can't move a barrel once you have started to serve.

The festival opened at 6pm on Friday, with an expectant queue of drinkers. Friday evening is always a great time to visit, as the beers are all in tip top condition, and there's no chance of anything running out. This year we had decorated the hall more than in previous years, and replaced the harsh hall lighting with something a little softer. I hope you liked it!

Serving behind a bar is always fun, and it is surprising how quickly you learn where all the beers are located. I like being able to recommend beers for people, especially as we had chosen some black IPAs for those that usually like paler beers to try. A black IPA is a beer brewed in the style of a modern IPA, pale malt and lots of hops, but with a generous amount

of chocolate malt in the recipe. This adds the color to the beer, and is a fantastic alternative to a more standard IPA.

With the strength of beers ranging from **Windsor & Eton's Parklife** at 3.2% (a personal favourite) to the 6.5% **Elland 1872 Porter**, all tastes were catered for.

A large dent was made in the stocks on Friday, and we were all looking forward to another successful day on Saturday. The festival opened at 11am, and we soon had a steady stream of visitors. There was a fantastic hog roast (I had several) that went very well with the darker ales (in my opinion). As well as the beer, we also had a number of ciders and perry, though only one from the locality, **Virtual Orchard's Hard Core**. The number of cider producers has increased markedly in the last few years, and I'm going to ensure we have a better selection next year.

Saturday at the festival is generally less rushed, with drinkers staying to sample extensively. We were a little short of staff for the bar this year, so I didn't get to sit out as much as I would have liked, with a couple of volunteers working a straight 12 hours. If you would like to help next year, please get in touch!

The festival closed with beer remaining, which is always a little disappointing. If you did not come this year, please consider putting it in your calendar for next year! There is an excellent bus service from Aylesbury and High Wycombe bus stations; you really have no excuse! We did, however, raise £4100 for the hospice. I'd like to thank all the volunteers that help make this festival happen, as well as all the attendees, who gave so generously, in return for a great pint or two!

Finally, it's my pleasure to announce that **Chiltern Brewery**, for the second year in a row, has won **Beer of the Festival 2013** with their **300s Old Ale**. The photograph below, courtesy of the Bucks Herald, shows the presentation of the certificate to George Jenkinson (on the left) by Teresa King from the Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity and the editor of **Swan Supping**, David Roe.

Alexander Wright



MEMBERS: YOUR VOTES ARE NEEDED!

An important part of campaigning for **CAMRA** has always been to champion standards in both real ale production and places for consumption. Our **Good Beer Guide** has expanded from barely more than a list of pubs to a worthy volume with detailed descriptions of both pubs and breweries, together with lots of other useful information. As such, it leads the campaign for better beer in pubs. The premier real ale competition, the **Champion Beer of Britain**, and its sister competitions, the **Champion Bottled Beer of Britain** and the **Champion Winter Beer of Britain** all start with nominations from members. The winners from these area competitions will then be put forward as finalists into the **Champion Beer of Britain** national competitions held at the **Great British Beer Festival** and the **National Winter Ales Festival**.

A few notes on beer eligibility:

Only beers listed on the Eligible Beers List for the London & South East **CBOB** Area, are eligible to be voted on.

Each member can vote for up to **five entries** in each category

Only breweries which were operating before 1st August 2013 are eligible.

Other than Real Ale in a Bottle, beers are categorised based on the Original Gravity (OG) of the beer not the ABV, therefore only beers for which the OG have been supplied are included on the eligible beer list.

Beers must be available for three months or more every year, except for old ales, porters, stouts and barley wines, where a beer has to be brewed regularly for any period. This is to encourage more representation of the less common styles of beer.

The style category assigned to a beer is chosen based on the **CAMRA** Style Guidelines.

Members can vote at: <http://www.cbobvoting.org.uk/> Please log in with your **CAMRA** membership number and password. Your password by

default is your postcode with the space removed. If you have difficulty accessing the site, or don't use the Internet, please contact me on 07970 633952 for a voting form to be sent to you. Remember, you have until the **31st December 2013** to register your vote!

Good Beer Guide

Each **CAMRA** branch is responsible for selecting pubs in their branch area for inclusion in the **Good Beer Guide**. As the guide takes some time to put together, the selection process starts in the new year for the 2015 guide, published in September 2014. The selection meetings will take place here:

13th January, **GBG** Pre-Selection Meeting, **Bull**, Stoke Mandeville

17th February, **GBG** Final Selection Meeting, **Belle Vue**, High Wycombe

This year, we will place a much greater emphasis on scores entered via **CAMRA's** beer scoring system, so please remember to rate your ale at

<http://www.beerscoring.org.uk>. While we are getting close to the selection deadline, it is important to score beers year round to get the maximum visibility on our pubs' all round quality.

The **Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe branch** has 281 pubs and just 32 places in the Guide, so competition is fierce!

CAMRA members have always been a vital part of these campaigns, so this is a reminder to all members reading this to participate. Your input is vitally important to our campaign.

Alexander Wright



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Tuesday 10th and 17th December from 12 to 1.30pm – **OAP's Xmas lunches**: Roast turkey and all the trimmings plus Christmas pudding and brandy sauce £11.50 a head.
 Saturday 21st December from 9.30 to 11.30am – **Breakfast with Father Christmas**. £10 per child includes breakfast, a visit from Father Christmas and a present. Email: charlnov3@tiscali.co.uk to book and get a breakfast menu.
 Saturday 28th December @ 8.00pm – **Darts Knockout**.
 Sunday 29th December @ 7.30pm – **Quiz Night** with teams of 4-6, £1 entry per person.

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LOCAL NEWS

ASHENDON

At the **Hundreds** Matt and Pia are continuing to serve **Locales** from **XT**, **Vale**, **Chiltern** and **Tring**. *Side Pocket for a Toad* from **Tring** was on fine form when visited recently. The restaurant is well worth a visit with interesting menu choices available.

AYLESBURY

Ben's daughters, Olivia and Hannah, have been running the **Bricklayers Arms** for some time now and are offering **Fuller's London Pride** and **St. Austell Tribute** plus a guest beer. Why not join them on Saturday 14th of December for a beer tasting with Alex Smith from **Aylesbury Brewery Co.**

The **Britannia** reopened under the management of James Dean (no kidding) on the 15th of November. This **Punch** owned pub will specialise in live bands and no real ale is available at present.

The new beer from **Chiltern**, *Foxtrot*, a 3.9% ale is available in the **Kings Head**, and very nice it is too! In January they will be holding their third 'Celebration of Beer: Porters, Stouts, Dark and Old Ales' event with over twenty beers new to the pub (unfortunately only one at a time!). Breweries to be represented include **Andwell**, **Bradfield**, **Coastal** and **Hawkshead**.

Hayley and Lyndsay, who used to be at the **Millwrights**, have taken over at the **Hop Pole** following the departure of Eric Mills in October. The range of up to ten ales include offerings from both **Vale** and **Aylesbury Brewhouse** plus a variety of guest beers. Traditional pub food is available again and families are now welcome including children if they are dining (until 9pm). Licensing hours have been increased with the pub now open from 11am to 11pm Monday to Thursday, 11am to midnight on Friday and Saturday and 11am -10.30pm on Sunday. Live music will start again soon with the first event on New Year's Eve. Following the departure of Hayley and Lyndsay, Steve has been holding the reins at the **Old Millwrights** until **Greene King** are to retake control early December. More news next issue.

Westons Old Rosie has replaced the **Scrumpy** at the **Queens Head** and **Sharp's Doom Bar** is available for the ale drinkers. They are currently recruiting darts players to set up a team to play on Monday nights.

Weavers, which became a free house earlier this year, offers **Sharp's Doom Bar** at £2.60 a pint and two guest ales starting at £2.30 a pint. Live music is also available every Saturday.

BIERTON

The **Bell** is now under new management. They serve both Thai and traditional English food lunchtimes and evenings and take-away Thai. Roasts every Sunday. At least two **Fuller's** ales always available.

BOURNE END

Helen, the landlady of the **Walnut Tree** has moved a mile or so down the road to the **Old Bell** in Wooburn Green and has turned around a dying pub. Loads of real ale such as **Rebellion IPA**, **Sharp's Doom Bar** and a guest. Very much appreciated by the locals.

Chris has taken over the **Walnut Tree** and is keeping the real ales on and the place much the same.

CHEARSLEY

Fuller's London Pride and **Chiswick** are available at the **Bell** throughout the week with the addition of a guest at the weekend such as **Gales HSB** which goes down well. Festive ales will be available during the winter.

CUDDINGTON

The **Crown** offers **Adnams Bitter** and **Fuller's London Pride**, but be aware that the cost of two halves tends to be significantly greater than a pint. Surely this encourages a driver to have a 'last pint' rather than a 'last half.' The guest was **Liberation Ale Golden Brew** at 4% brewed in the Channel Islands.

DINTON

Stephanie at the **Seven Stars** is celebrating winning **AVDC's Village Pubs Competition** and also for being commended in the Best Food Pub category. **Sharp's Doom Bar** and **Vale Best Bitter** are on throughout the week and at the weekend a third ale such as **Rebellion IPA** is put on.

FORD

The **Dinton Hermit** keeps **Vale's Best Bitter** (3.7%) and **Brill Gold** (3.5%) on permanently.

GIBRALTAR

The **Bottle and Glass** currently offers **Morland Original** and a guest such as **Belhaven Handcrafted Copper Brown Ale**, with festive ales coming up in December. Although now permitted to source a **Locale** such as **XT**, by the time **Greene King** has surcharged the price by around £50 a barrel the proposition is no longer viable.



HADDENHAM

Don't miss the **WinterFest** on Saturday 14th December from noon to 5pm at the Scout and Guide Hut, Village Hall Complex, Banks Road (HP17 8EE).

Patrick Hunter, from Skipton, North Yorkshire, took over as manager at the **Green Dragon** on 11th November. The pub will concentrate on becoming a central part of the village supporting local clubs and organisations with home cooked pub classics available at reasonable cost complemented by daily specials 'with a twist'. **Sharp's Doom Bar** will continue to feature for the immediate future with two ever-changing **Locales** from the usual suspects. Patrick may, however, surprise us all once in a while with an offering from 'up North'.

The **Rising Sun** will be offering Big Breakfast Baps from 10am on the day of the **WinterFest**, with a mini beer festival in the evening for 'laters'. On Friday evenings, special rarer **Locales** are available such as the recently featured **Loddon Hoppy Appeal** (4.4%), **Tring Moon Gazer** (4.3%) and **Rebellion Tanked Up** (4.2%). During the rest of the week and weekends, favourites from **Vale**, **XT** and **Chiltern** are in the gravity dispensed barrels. **Virtual Orchard Falstaff Cider** (5.5%) is also available. On New Year's Eve, the free entertainment will include a DJ and nibbles.

At the **Cask Marque** accredited **Kings Head**, **Sharp's Doom Bar**, **Brakspear Bitter**, and **Fuller's London Pride** are regularly available, but **Theakston XB** (4.5%) was on when visited. **Rebellion IPA** will be tried during December.

Greene King are brewing a 3.8% bitter specifically for the **Rose and**

Thistle. Spas and Candice are running a competition to name the ale which should be available before Christmas. **Greene King IPA** and **Olde Trip** will remain as permanent features supported by the new beer.

HARDWICK

As we featured in our last issue, the **Bell** has recently reopened. However, in the article we made a few errors! The **Bell** is hosting their evening of Christmas carols with a brass band on Wednesday 11th December from 6pm onwards. Children and dogs welcome. More details can be found by phone on 01296 640005 or go to www.thebellathardwick.co.uk. Our apologies for any inconvenience caused.

HIGH WYCOMBE

The **Belle Vue** held another successful beer festival last month with 21 ales and 10 ciders. Ales were chosen from a list supplied by **Punch** via **Small Beers** and this was given to the regulars. They picked what they would like to see and the selection was made. Six ales were quite standard beers including **Courage Directors**, **Young's Special** and **St. Austell Tribute** while the rest were from independent and smaller breweries. The entertainment was all low-key and acoustic, so it was a reasonably comfortable level.

The **Bootleggers** have started putting live music events on, with a regular acoustic open mic night every Tuesday.

HULCOTT

The **Barn** is now under new management. They serve traditional English food and **Chiltern** beer is their preferred local choice of ale. Their Christmas menu will be available throughout December with discounts for parties and complimentary champagne.



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ICKFORD

Paul Honour and his partner Jan Thomas have celebrated 13 years in the **GBG** at the **Rising Sun** and are delighted to serve **Adnams Southwold Bitter** and **Broadside**, **Black Sheep Bitter**, **Hook Norton Hooky** and have a rotating guest beer each week.

LONG CRENDON

The **Churchill Arms**' regular ales are **XT 4** and **Sharp's Doom Bar**, with **Wychwood Hobgoblin** making a most welcome appearance when the pub was visited for this report.

The **Eight Bells** is under new management as of 18th of November. Paul Mitchell (pictured above). From Haddenham, he has previous experience in the trade and has bought the business from Helen who has moved on to pastures new. This free house will continue to be a mecca for real ale as Paul has committed to supporting **Locales** such as **XT** and **Vale** and has a number of exciting ideas. We wish Paul and his team all the very best in their new venture. **Vale Red Kite**, **XT 4**, **Ramsbury Pophams Pride** and **Manchester Skyline** from **Brightside Brewing Co** were available recently.

MARLOW

The **Hare and Hounds** is closed and its future is uncertain. After featuring on Raymond Blanc's series 'The Restaurant' on BBC2 the pub became the **Cheerful Soul** before changing hands again, and now a series of three

tenants have failed to make a go of the place.

The **Royal British Legion** will be holding a 'Winterfest' from Saturday 28th to Tuesday 31st of December. Everyone is welcome to come along and enjoy the twelve seasonal ales on offer.

QUAINTON

The **George & Dragon** is offering OAP Christmas lunches on Tuesday 10th and 17th December from 12 noon to 1.30pm. Breakfast with Father Christmas is on Saturday 21st December 9.30 - 11.30am and includes a visit from Father Christmas and a present. On Saturday 28th December a darts knockout will be held starting at 8pm and on Sunday 29th is a quiz night at 7.30pm.

The **Greene King** owned **Swan & Castle**, closed since February, is rumoured to have been sold but nothing more is known of its future.

STOKE MANDEVILLE

The **Bell** offers three real ales, **Eagle IPA** and **Bombardier** from **Wells & Youngs** and a monthly guest ale.

The **Bull** has increased its number of handpumps to five and is currently offering **Fuller's London Pride**, **Chiltern Ale**, **Rebellion IPA**, **Brains SA** and **Sharp's Doom Bar**. There is also a new bar menu offering traditional pub food to help soak up the ale.

THAME

At the **Cross Keys**, as well as the ever changing eight ales, they now offer four real ciders from various producers. Peter is brewing a beer for the Haddenham beer festival and there should also be a Christmas beer at the pub.

At the **Swan**, there are still five rotating

beers (one of which is **Sharp's Doom Bar**) to try whilst doing their popular music quiz on the last Sunday of the month at 8pm and the open mic sessions on the 3rd Sunday from 4pm to 8pm.

Down at the **Six Bells**, manager Sam will have left when this issue comes out and we wish her every success for the future. We extend a warm welcome to the new person at the helm, Kit Lett, who has come from the **Duke of York** near Barnet. He has been in the trade for many years and was originally trained as a chef, so both the beer and food should be good! As well as the usual **Fuller's** beers of **London Pride**, **Seafarers** and **Gales HSB**, they have **Red Fox** and **Chiltern 300's Old Ale**.

The **Falcon** are still into their charity events in a big way with the continuation of their Fat Club which you can join and give pounds weight for pounds sterling. Not a bad idea seeing that they now do Thai Buffet Tuesday/Friday/Saturday. Coming for December is the **Hooky** seasonal brew, **Twelve Days**. A fourth pump is being introduced which will initially have **Butcombe Haka** (4.5%). Quiz night is every Thursday. Note the opening hours. Monday to Thursday: 4.00 till 11.30, Friday/Saturday/Sunday: 12.00 till 11.30.

As it is the festive season, the time to be merry etc, the 280 bus (or Route 40 hourly from High Wycombe - not late evenings) is a good way to get to Thame and try the various beers in the good variety of pubs that Thame has to offer, without getting breathalysed!

WENDOVER

Fleurets are advertising the leasehold of the **Village Gate** (previously the

Marquis of Granby) at World's End, so if you fancy running a mainly food-led pub.....

WESTON TURVILLE

Young's and Wells are working closely with a couple for the **Chandos Arms** with the aim of placing them in the pub early in the new year with an internal development to support them with building up trade.

WING

Following a period of closure this summer when ominous steel shutters appeared over the windows the **Sportsman's** reopened in August. New licensee with a warm and enthusiastic welcome is Jim Anderson who is the holding manager while owners **Punch** continue to try and sell this popular traditional back street local. Over the last ten years Jim has run pubs in Worcester and the midlands for **M & B** and the **O'Neill's** chain.

Two ales are normally available on handpump and these vary. **Fuller's London Pride** and **Sharp's Doom Bar** were available at the time of visit, and in good form. Opening hours are: 4pm - 12pm Monday to Thursday, 4pm - 2pm Friday and Saturday, and 12.30pm - 2pm Sunday. Sky sports are featured as are pool and darts. Also there is live music presented monthly.

WOOBURN COMMON

The **Royal Standard** beer festival in October went very well and we look forward to their next one! In the meantime, the popular beers **Rebellion Roasted Nuts** and **St Austell Proper Job** will help keep the drinkers happy throughout December.

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A HIGH SPEED PUB CRAWL

The government has tried so many spurious and futile arguments to justify the economic case for HS2 so we thought we'd offer another one – had we been able to travel at 250mph to our recent Saturday branch social in Birmingham we'd have arrived there so quickly that we'd have had time to fit in perhaps one more pint on the crawl. And if that's not a convincing economic argument to spend £80bn then surely they'll never find one?

Oops, despite it being planned to scythe right through our branch area, we forgot that we'd have to get to London to catch HS2 in the first place. Oh well, perhaps we'll have to keep on slumming the current hour-and-a-half journey on Chiltern Railways past 2026. And unlike their weekday peak-time shambles of a performance during the past couple of months, Chiltern Railways did a pretty decent job of transporting our hardy bunch of ale-fellow-well-met travellers up to this great city of beer.



Our first pub, the **Woodman**, ironically, stands next to another monumental but entirely superfluous piece of railway engineering. Bang in the middle of a piece of post-industrial wasteland is the Grade One listed entrance to the long-abandoned Curzon Street station (pictured below). With its classical inspiration and Doric columns, the building was designed to mirror the demolished Euston station arches at the other end of the line.

The building is one of the oldest pieces of railway architecture in the world – opened in 1838. However, it was superseded after only a couple of decades by New Street station, Curzon Street being deemed too inaccessible



and remote from Birmingham City centre. It's therefore very apt that the HS2 Birmingham terminus is planned to be built in almost the exact same location.

So, in fifteen years' time the **Woodman** might be bursting with laptop-toting business types if it's spared the bulldozers. In that case, in the intervening period we can enjoy a classic Victorian street-corner boozer – albeit the rest of the Victorian street has been demolished. This may explain why the pub has had a chequered recent past.

But, for now it has been rescued from closure and the interior appears happily unspoilt by progress. It's apparently been recently refurbished by its owners **Birmingham Inns** – with splendid mirrors behind the L-shaped bar counter and a traditional tiling throughout the bar and smoke room at the rear.

It also boasts several handpumps serving a tasty array of ales – including our own **Tring Gunpowder Bell** (should we as **LocAle** promoters insist that it be barred from a Birmingham bar?). I had an invigorating pint of **Castle Rock Black Gold** from Nottingham (at least that's in the Midlands) to start the day. Others had **Jennings Knight Porter** and **Warlord Brewery Black** (**Warlord** being a cuckoo at **Purity Brewery** in Warwickshire).

Speaking of the very reliable **Purity Brewery**, I had a good pint of their **Pure Gold** in the next pub – the very different **Square Peg** – a **Wetherspoons** house on Corporation Street. Apparently the **Square Peg** has the longest bar in the city centre, which is no use whatsoever if there are only two or three bar staff serving behind it.

After the dreaded 'Coming Soon' pump-clips, the sometimes appalling staffing levels are a close second in **CAMRA** members' bugbears about the pub chain. Fair enough to have a skeleton staff at 9.30am in the morning when only the hardened winos and cooked breakfast trade require serving but, even before 12.30pm, the pub was so packed that a very helpful member of staff was trying to find customers somewhere to sit – eventually consolidating a few random pensioners to find us a table for our party of eight.

Unfortunately the service for both drinks and food was so slow we only stayed for one. At under £2 per pint for beers as interesting as **Milk Street Zig Zag Stout** then we can't grouse too much – certainly the pub's popularity means **Wetherspoons** are doing something right (other pubcos and licensees take note).



Being the penultimate Saturday in November, it was the first weekend of Birmingham's gargantuan Christmas market. This stretches about a mile – from the Bull Ring, along the length of New Street and right over towards the convention centre in the west. It's well worth a visit – many of the stalls being manned by genuine Germans. We gave the steaming glühwein a miss as we elbowed through the heaving crowds to the **Post Office Vaults**.

This is a small, subterranean bar with a cosy atmosphere and a great selection of ale, including another from one of our **LocAle** bustling breweries – **Animal Roar** (which is brewed by **XT**). Other ales sampled by our merry band included Sheffield's **Brew Company Bock** and **Brightside's Darksides Stout**.

We then headed under the infamous ring road into the dilapidated fringes of the western city centre. Not far from the designer shops in the Mailbox shopping centre and at the top of a surprisingly steep hill, we found the



spectacular hidden gem that is the **Craven Arms**. Originally built by **Holder's Brewery** and now owned by **Black Country Ales**, the pub has a stunning blue and gold Majolica tiled exterior.

The interior has been sympathetically restored with large mirrors and engraved windows and an unusual selection of real ales. The **Summer Wine Barista Espresso Stout** was highly recommended by all who sampled it. The **Revolution Brewery** musically inspired **Scary Monsters Black IPA** also went down well – as did the traditional West Midlands pork pies.

Neither the **Craven Arms** nor the **Woodman** features in the **2014 Good Beer Guide**, probably because their refurbishments were too recent for consideration but they were certainly on a par with the other seven pubs, which were drawn from the **Good Book**. Many thanks to Noj and his contacts for suggesting the pair.

Back towards the centre, the **Victoria** was our next call. Located next to the New Alexandra Theatre and decorated inside with murals and assorted props, the pub has a friendly bohemian atmosphere – the heavily tattooed barmaid was a human artwork herself.

The **Victoria** had an interesting selection of ales – Macclesfield's **Redwillow Brewery's** pairing, **Wreckless** and **Fearless**, and an unusually low alcohol ale from **Thornbridge**, **Wild Swan**, plus the excellent **Wye Valley's Butty Bach**.

Next on the crawl were two famous pubs bang in the city centre – the phenomenal **Wellington** where the beers change so often they're displayed on airline departure lounge-style TV screens and the magnificent **Fuller's** bank conversion, the **Old Joint Stock**. These pubs marked the inevitable point on all-day crawls where everyone's good intentions of noting down beers start to go awry and memories get fuzzy – although Eddie recalls **Ruby Porter** in the Old Joint Stock.

The **Prince of Wales**, a ten minute walk around the canals behind the Symphony Hall was next, although only Dave and Eddie were hardy enough to make the



trek. They were somewhat underwhelmed by the range of mainly national ales on offer – **Tetley's Mild** being the best of the lot.

Last stop and conveniently next to Snow Hill station was the **Old Contemptibles**. Named after a British Expeditionary Force in the First World War, this is a busy, large pub with a long bar and many excellent ales – so excellent, in fact, that their names are already a distant blur.

And so back to the train and the hour and a half journey back that the government thinks is so intolerable. But perhaps there's yet another argument against HS2 – if it only took 45 minutes to head back to London then Simon wouldn't have time for his traditional post-crawl beauty sleep. Then again, on the other hand...

Charlie Mackle





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LOCAL BREWERY NEWS

CHILTERN BREWERY

The latest offering from the **Chiltern Brewery** is a claret, mellow, fruity and rounded 3.9% ale called *Foxtrot*. Besides being available in the **Farmers Bar** at the **Kings Head** in Aylesbury it will appear at both the **Pink & Lily** and the **Whip** in Lacey Green.



Bottles of *Glad Tidings*, a superb black, sweet stout with a unique style and flavour, are available at the brewery shop and the last remaining bottles of the *Ruby Anniversary Ale* (7.2%), brewed to celebrate 40 years of the **Good Beer Guide** are being sold off singly, as opposed to the usual gift packs of five bottles and a commemorative glass. A great way to round off your Christmas dinner!

MALT THE BREWERY

Malt The Brewery staged their first anniversary event last month. Despite the inclement weather there was still a great turn out, proving real ale enthusiasts are made of strong stuff! Those who went along with treated to local folk music, local food from Pot Deli of Great Missenden and Seasons farm shop in North Dean, who were also celebrating their first year in Business.



Nick the Brewer created an anniversary ale for the event, named after the brewery's birthplace, *Prestwood's Best*. It has proven so popular it has been brewed again to be available throughout the festive season.

Work is now underway to build up stocks

of bottles for Christmas. **Malt The Brewery** hand fill all their 500ml bottles in the brewery itself, to deliver real ale in a bottle as well as a truly local product. Customers comment positively on the similarity of the bottled ale to the handpumps at the brewery's tasting bar, particularly the *IPA* which is fast becoming their signature ale.

TRING BREWERY

St Alban's CAMRA Beer Festival saw *Tea Kettle Stout* pick up two awards in the **SIBA** East Region Finals. In addition it also walked away with the title of **Champion Beer of Hertfordshire**.

At the recent national **JD Wetherspoon** beer festival that saw UK/USA collaborations sitting alongside offerings from a range of smaller UK breweries, **Tring's** New Zealand hopped, rye crystal malted *Waimea* picked up an award for best bitter of the festival and took the overall silver award.

A new fermentation vessel is soon to be installed in the brewery. This will replace two that were carried over from the old brewery site. This will provide a slight increase in capacity enabling them to meet the demands of Christmas and increasing popularity of their beer. On the subject of Christmas they will be launching two seasonal specials - *Santa's Little Helper* (4.8%) and *SnowFake* (4.2%) and that's not a typo as there is supposed to be no 'L' (if you don't get the joke, you've drunk too much!).

For 2014 **Tring** are running a project that links their monthly specials to Tring's Natural History Museum and the Woodland Trust. More information on this will be published early next year.



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I recently came back from a two week holiday from these two Balkan countries, and whilst I did not have high hopes on the beer front I did attempt to sample what I could and write an appraisal of it. Well, unfortunately these two countries are still stuck in the dark ages of brewing – from the anecdotal evidence that my friend and I saw. But there are beers worth seeking out and they are all dark. Denars in Macedonia and Dinars in Serbia – beer, wine and food is cheap here. Common beer volumes are 0.33L and 0.5L in bottles and 0.5L draught (Toceno).

Firstly Macedonia. We spent the first week in the capital Skopje and in Ohrid in the south. Skopje is in the midst of a big building boom – it's a little bonkers I might say. I have never seen a city so full of monuments – a lot on horseback including the 'Warrior on horseback' which looks like something out of Jason and the Argonauts – quite impressive. This monument and all the others are part of the Skopje 2014 rebuilding project – to give the city a more nationalistic feel and remove itself from the drab Yugoslavian architecture. 80% of the city was levelled in the 1963 earthquake so I guess this rebuilding project is a good start. Ohrid in the south is on the northern bank of Lake Ohrid and shares part of the lake with Albania. It's a very pleasing town – pretty, and as with Skopje it has a fortress which dominates the town.

The beer. Well, it's dominated by the *Heineken* brands including *Amstel*. We asked for a Macedonian beer at one bar and we were given an *Amstel*! I think some of the staff are not au fait on their beer knowledge (note: everyone we spoke to in both countries, spoke English so misunderstandings were minimal). The beer of Macedonia from our wanderings is *Skopsko* brewed by *Pivara Skopje (Heineken)*. Pleasant and drinkable but after three days of it I got rather fed up. *Zlaten Dab* is brewed by *Prilepska Pivarnika* and is a pilsner – it didn't ask any questions. Mmmm. The beer of Macedonia? Was Slovenian!

In Skopje we crossed the Vardar river over the stone bridge and passed neoclassical buildings under construction into a street lined with shops and cafés and the odd beggar – this includes cats which are a feature of café culture in this country. At the very top of this line of cafés and also on the other side of the road to the fortress was a large bar and beer garden. The name escapes me but it had one thing that was not surpassed during the holiday – it sold beer in litres. It also sold beer in 2L and 3L sizes – the latter two were containers with taps. We stuck with the 1L (which we had twice btw). It was the only pub in the holiday that did Belgian beer - *Chimay* and *Duvel*. The Slovenian beer was *Laško dark* – a lovely malty earthy beer and 5.9% abv – what's not to like?! Some bars did this beer and *Laško* on the parasols was a good indication. Incidentally Pivolend started on our last day in Skopje – at the foot of the fortress it was a beer festival (pictured below) with performing bands and was somewhat of a wash-out with the heavy rain at the time. The familiar beer brands were there including some new ones, but the rain, plastic glasses and the proximity (about 50 metres) of the 'Litre' beer bar we had visited the previous occasion put paid to this.

Serbia. Our first destination was Nis, a five hour journey train journey from Skopje, Serbia's third city and touted as the birthplace of Constantine the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity. Our other venue was Belgrade (pictured alongside the Danube above right), a five hour journey from Nis, from where we would depart to come back home. *Jelen* was the most common beer – a light lager, owned by *Molson-Coors*. Pleasant but we saw no reason to hunt this down. Two other beers we tried were from the *Zajecar* brewery - *Zaječarsko* and *Plus pils*. I'm afraid the former would give *Zlaten Dab* a run for its money for blandness. We were saved by two common beers – *Carlsberg Lav dark* at 5.2% and *Trebjesa (Molson-Coors) Niksicko Tamno* (dark) from Montenegro at 6.2%. Both quaffable with a good roasted taste and thoroughly enjoyable. We also tried the *Niksicko* pale version and this was also pleasant – although it may have been a little boring some way into a session. Belgrade had one thing that was unique to our travels – a microbrewery.

The *Black Turtle* commenced brewing in 2010 and had five pubs in the area. We went to the one on Kosancicev Venac near the fortress. It was difficult to find. There was a bar, people were sitting outside – we went past and did





almost a complete loop of the street again. It was next door but downstairs with a silver plaque marking the brewery. The people outside with *Jelen* glasses? Some were drinking the brewery beers – odd choice of glass! Perhaps ‘backed’ by *Molson-Coors*? The interior was reminiscent of an English pub and they had a choice of a ‘monastery’ beer, fruit beers and an Irish stout. My friend tried the blueberry one – a bit sickly I thought. My monastery beer was a bit odd, couldn’t really detect the smoky character – it felt like an unfinished product. We both tried the stout and found the dry hoppy character to our liking.

Perhaps in the next few years we will see a microbrewery revolution in these countries, but that is some way off. No one can ever expect too much from the ‘club med’ countries but if you eventually find a beer you like – stick with it!

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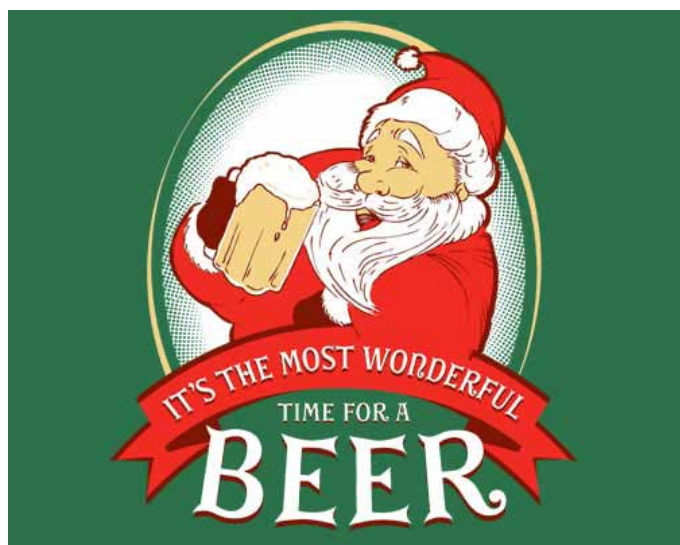
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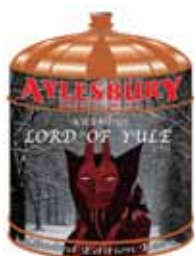
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MORE LOCAL BREWERY NEWS

AYLESBURY BREWHOUSE COMPANY

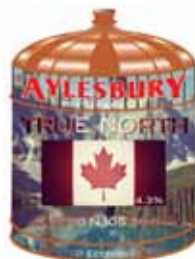
Aylesbury Brewhouse were victorious at the *Milton Keynes CAMRA Concrete Pint Beer Festival* this year, winning 'Beer Of The Festival' with the infamous *Calico Jack Coconut Stout*! It's head brewer Hayden's first award, but we hope it is not his last!



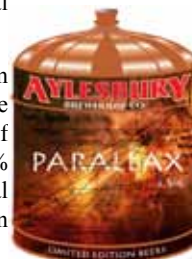
Kicking off the festive period is *ABC's Christmas ale*. While other breweries bring out their dark and fruity winter ales, down at the *Brewhouse* they always like to be different. *Krampus Lord Of Yule* is a 4.5% blonde orange and cinnamon ale which will complement long winter nights warming up by the fire.



Hei Tiki takes its name from a Māori pendant of Tiki, the first man in Māori legend. It's brewed using the finest New Zealand hops in a crisp, light IPA style at 5.5%. Then it's off to Canada for a less than traditional copper ale, *True North*, which will be brewed at 4.3% with Canadian maple syrup and smoked malt to give a sweet caramel yet smoky taste. A North American inspired smoked English ale. From out of this world, *Parallax* is an easy drinking and refreshing traditional 3.9% bronze bitter.



From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of *Double Think* — greetings! A 4.4% ruby ale with an inviting floral aroma and bitter aftertaste, it's an ale for all Parties.



All of these beers will be available at the brewery tap, the *Hop Pole*, now under new management and serving tasty homemade food, and in the *Aylesbury Brewhouse* brewery shop, while *Pure Gold* is now permanently available in the *Swan* in Great Kimble!

VALE BREWERY

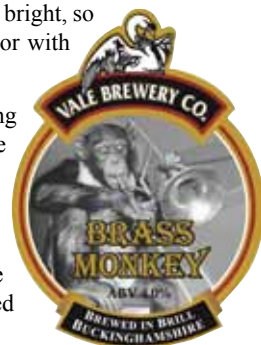
In December *Vale's* special beer of the month is *Brass Monkey*, a 4% mahogany bitter, heavy on the malt but not without the bitterness usually associated with *Vale* brews. The name is derived from the colloquial term, 'Cold enough to freeze the balls off a Brass Monkey'. This bitter should be enjoyed in a local pub in front of a warm log fire.

Also in December, *Good King Senseless* is available in both cask and bottle-conditioned form. This 5.2% bitter is an annual favourite, certainly one worth searching for.

Whilst a pub remains the best place to enjoy real ale, *Vale* also cater for those who enjoy imbibing at home. Their shop is open and taking advance orders for minipins (17 pints) Polypins (36 pints) and for the really enthusiastic - Firkins of 70 pints. This beer can be bright, so ready to drink with a three or four day shelf life or with the yeast sediment and lasting up to seven days.

Gift vouchers make this an ideal gift shopping location for the beer lover. So start dropping some less than subtle hints about the Brewery Shops in Brill and at the *Hop Pole* in Aylesbury.

2014 starts with a new monthly special, *Barleycorn*, a golden 3.8% bitter named after the personification of a key ingredient in beer, malted barley.



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HADDENHAM WINTERFEST



Haddenham Winterfest 2013 takes place on Saturday, December 14, and this year there are some exciting changes in store.

The popular village event that is part-beer festival part-Christmas fair is moving to one giant festive marquee next to the Scout and Guide Hut. Boasting more than enough room for everyone the giant tent will incorporate the bars, mulled wine, live music and Christmas fair. All the hot food will be just outside; well within touching distance.

The festival offers 24 real ales - ranging from golden bitters to darker winter stouts - and a nice selection of real cider and high quality and international lagers. There will also be mulled wine and a variety of soft drink options.

Food offerings consist of the now traditional barbecue run by the Haddenham masons as well as a smattering of other stalls to be confirmed.

This is Haddenham Beer Festivals Trust's second festival of the year and after the success of Summerfest 2013 they're looking forward to another great turnout. Haddenham Beer Festivals Trust is a registered charity dedicated to raising money for good causes in Haddenham and the surrounding area. For more information on the trust visit the Haddenham Beer Festival website <http://haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk>.

Tickets cost £5 in advance, £6 on the door. Check the website to see where you can buy advance tickets.

Winterfest 2013 takes place on the December 14, midday to 5pm in the Scout and Guide Hut, Banks Road, Haddenham.

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SEVEN STARS WINS VILLAGE PUB AWARD



Glasses have been raised at a Dinton inn after being named the best village pub in Aylesbury Vale.

The **Seven Stars** won the title in Aylesbury Vale District Council's Village Pub of the Year awards, sponsored by **Dayla Drinks Ltd.**

The 17th century pub was set to be sold in 2011 when a campaign to save the pub was started. A total of 65 residents came forward and raised the £360,000 required to save the pub for the community.

Landlords Stephanie Guiraute and David Berry have turned the pub's fortunes around making it into a thriving village local. 'It is less than two years since a number of the local community came together and bought this lovely 17th century village pub and offered David and myself the opportunity to turn it into a successful business,' said Stephanie. 'We have worked hard to achieve our vision of providing good beer and quality English pub dining with a French twist.' Winning this prestigious award reflects the efforts put in and the support of the community. We will keep working hard to ensure the **Seven Stars** will be the number one destination pub in the Vale.'

Now in its 16th year, the competition generated hundreds of nominations from local residents, all wanting their local to be named as Aylesbury Vale's best village pub. The pubs were judged on a number of criteria including their overall character, friendliness of staff, quality of food and drink, community spirit and family facilities.

Councillor Pam Pearce, Cabinet Member for Community Matters, said: 'The judging panel were delighted by the high standard of all the applications from the 38 pubs nominated. Village pubs at their best bring people together and are the heartbeat of communities. This competition celebrates some of the great things they do and encourages more people to use them, which is great for the pubs and great for the local economy.'

The winning pubs in each of the categories are: **George and Dragon**, Quainton (Best Community Pub); **Old Swan**, Cheddington (Best Food); **Unicorn**, Cublington (Best Family); **Crown**, Great Horwood, and **Village Swan**, Invinghoe Aston (One to Watch).

Dolly Saville, who is famously still working as a barmaid at the age of 99, has been chosen to receive a special lifetime achievement award. The great, great grandmother has worked at the **Red Lion** in Wendover for about 74 years.

Tim Cooper, Managing Director of **Dayla**, said: 'We are delighted once again to be sponsoring this great local initiative. It acts as the perfect vehicle to promote the great village pubs that we have in our area, all well worth exploring and discovering their delights. I am especially pleased that Dolly's loyal work has been recognised since she was even working at my parent's wedding reception at the **Red Lion** back in 1948...that really does deserve to be in the Guinness Book of Records!'

For more information about the competition, visit www.aylesburyvale.gov.uk/pubcomp.

<From an AVDC Press Release>

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REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S VIEW

Having stood down as Berkshire South East Chairman of the Berkshire South East branch at the last AGM, I have now been elected as Regional Director (RD) for **CAMRA Central Southern Region**, which covers Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire (and, I believe, a tiny part of Hertfordshire).

So, you may well ask what EXACTLY does a **CAMRA** Regional Director do? I am just beginning to find out in detail, but it can be summed up simply as being a conduit for communication between branches (there are 11 in my region) and the National Executive (NE), who are the volunteer directors of **CAMRA**. That makes communication a vital part of any RD's remit, and email, telephone and face-to-face communications all have their part to play.

One of my frustrations as a branch chairman was not knowing exactly what **CAMRA**'s policy was in certain areas, knowing enough about important initiatives such as the *WhatPub* database, or knowing what campaigns we were meant to participate in and what the timescales were. I'm not denigrating my predecessors – far from it – but there is certainly a challenge in getting that information from the NE or the permanent staff in St Albans and explaining it to branches in a clear manner!

RDs are expected to attend four NE/RD weekends a year, where the RDs meet and discuss relevant issues (Branches Committee) and then can participate in a wider meeting involving the NE. It is a good opportunity to get to know your fellow

RDs, but also to see what issues and problems they have in their regions, and to share in best practice in solving and preventing problems. I have so far only attended one of these weekends, in Warrington at the end of September, where my appointment was ratified by the NE. Being very much one of the new boys, I was rather quiet much of the time (those that know me well may find that hard to believe), but once I get in the swing of things I will be much noisier. One thing I did find out during that weekend is that one of the major qualifications to be an RD is the ability to quaff copious quantities of beer until the early hours. I have to say I am sadly very much out of practice!

As Regional Director I am a resource to all members of **CAMRA** within the region. All members, you note, not just committee members and branch officers. So, if any member needs to contact me or ask me a question, please don't hesitate. I can be contacted, in the first instance, at RD.CentralSouthern@camra.org.uk.

I hope to be able to attend all branch AGMs in the region as well as chairing the quarterly Regional Meetings, attended by representatives of all branches. At the first meeting (on 16 November in Thame) one of the things I addressed was the subject of Regional Officers – a team to assist me in the effective and efficient running of the region. These posts are important, as they help to keep things running smoothly. There is only one of me, and I have a full-time job and a family as well as only 24 hours in a day!

Perhaps I should finish by giving you a flavour of what the current issues are which affect us in the region. Obviously one is the continuing spate of pub closures and the process of getting pubs listed as Assets of Community Value (ACVs) with local authorities. I hope to get some detailed advice on this soon which I will pass on to all branches.

The issue of activating members and getting volunteers to carry out activities within branches is also important. Again, communication is the key here, as is the attitude of members to newcomers to branch events.

We are a volunteer-led organisation, and a bottom-up organisation. We must never forget that the membership, all 154,000+ of them, drive what we do, and that we are all volunteers and are only able to do what we can. The more members there are who are prepared to do just a little, will make life easier for those who may be doing too much, and will make us an even more effective organisation.

But we are also very much a social organisation, and that makes just going down the pub and enjoying a pint or two of real ale or cider an important activity too.

The more we do that the more we can do to keep our pubs open AND selling real ale and cider. Happy pub-going!

Nick Boley - Regional Director for **CAMRA Central Southern Region**,

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DISASTER AVERTED IN WHITCHURCH!



On the evening of 22nd October 2013 Whitchurch village, in Buckinghamshire, was hit by a terrible storm. Thunder, lightning and torrential rain, coupled with strong winds, made for a very miserable evening outside and for the participants of the **White Swan**'s pub quiz the evening was about to get very interesting.

At around nine o'clock in the evening, while the patrons of the **White Swan** were enjoying their quiz in the warmth of the open fires, there was an almighty crack outside, followed by a crashing sound. Curious as to what the noise was a group of them went outside to find one of the old trees in the Firs business park, opposite, had lost a giant branch to the wind and it had come down across the main road about 20 yards away. The road was the A413, a major trunk road linking Aylesbury to Winslow and Buckingham and very heavily used, and the branch was completely across it right by the junction with **Swan** close and very close to a blind bend and the junction with Bushmead Road.

Despite the adverse weather conditions the villagers knew that the situation was very dangerous and needed to be dealt with quickly. It was dark, raining heavily and windy. A band of locals took it upon themselves to make the situation as safe as possible, warning approaching vehicles of the danger, managing the flow of traffic around the obstacle and attempting to move the branch and clear the road.

Local farmer and general field monkey, Buster Bond, was the first to step up to the mark. He went back to his farm to pick up his chainsaws and safety equipment. The landlord of the **White Swan**, Andy, called the emergency services and then he and his son joined the team which consisted of Neale Baker, Caroline Baker, Mike Harris, Yvette and Heidi Smith, Carrie and Chris Thomas.

The traffic was stopped and then released in a controlled manner, using the entrance to Swan Close to bypass the fallen branch, while other members of the team removed the foliage and lighter branches that had snapped off when it fell. Buster Bond quickly set to work on the main branch, which was at least 18 inches in diameter, cutting it up into manageable chunks to be removed to the grass verge.

After nearly an hour of gruelling work and soaked to the skin,

the branch had been cleared. The highways department from the council had attended site, but seeing that the villagers had already dealt with the situation, they left and went onto another incident. A policeman from Aylesbury also attended the incident.

The tired, cold and wet crew of locals retired back to the warmth of the pub for a well-deserved pint. This story goes to highlight the importance of pubs in local communities, especially in village life. We've all seen and heard about the antics of youngsters, binge drinking in towns and causing trouble, taking up valuable police resources and being a general nuisance. This shows the power of community and sense of spirit that goes with a decent local pub. They were willing to put themselves out and inconvenience themselves for the sake of helping others. It's just a shame that the government and some breweries make it so difficult to keep these local pubs in business.

Chris Thomas (Photographs: **Mike Harris**)



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GRAVEDIGGERS - PART TWENTY SIX



It was approaching December in the **Gravediggers**, the time for the seasonal argument between the most anti-social and repulsive-bodied wizened regulars about who would be awarded the duty as the most cantankerous Father Christmas.

'My breath stinks so much everyone thinks the local sewer has collapsed,' Old Joe would say.

'My language is so foul they wanted me sampled for a rap record,' Young Duwayne boasted.

'And I'm such an argumentative, miserable git that the parents run out in floods of tears, never mind the kids,' Old Pete said. 'Saves a fortune on giving out presents.'

None pretended they wanted the job but all recognised that it was a particularly perverse achievement to be crowned most obnoxious local in the pub. So their behaviour more than matched their favourite beer's foulness during the last weeks of November.

But this year, the usual suspects were nowhere to be seen in the bar.

James stared at the cobwebs on the handpumps for *Old Sludge* and *Septic Fleabite*. 'If we don't sell this soon it's going to dissolve the metal in the barrels,' he said to Mazz.

'We need something corrosive to clean out the gents' urinals,' she said. 'We might have to splash it straight in there rather than have it get concentrated in the old soaks' kidneys first. I'm finding it quite strange having polite customers who remain vertical for the whole evening. I wonder where the miserable sods have gone. They won't be abstaining, that's for sure.'

'I've no idea,' James said. 'Any pub that lets any of that lot through the door must have a death wish.'

The next lunchtime Mazz was wringing out the bar towels for slops to go in the next barrel of *Fit Shaced* when she noticed a flashy Rolls-Royce pull up outside the abattoir gate. Skulking in the shadows were Old Joe, Old Pete, Young Duwayne and a few other assorted down-and-out regulars. Sneaking out of the front door of the **Diggers** for a peek, she saw each miserable old soak handed a bottle of beer and then jump in the back of the car. When it was full the limousine swept out of the village.

Mazz jumped in the old tractor which they used for towing the muck-spreader in which they distributed the **Diggers** beers to nearby pubs under the *LocAle* scheme – although she'd heard her beers referred to as *LocWail* once they'd been sampled. She followed the Roller into the nearby town and was surprised to see it stop and drop off one of the erstwhile **Diggers** locals at each of half-a-dozen pubs – normal looking pubs! And, unfailingly, within thirty seconds of each entering the pubs doors, a stream of customers staggered on to the street in the other direction, sinking their pints and heading for the next watering hole.

This strange phenomenon was repeated the next day and Mazz realised it coincided with a modest growth in the number of normal, civilised customers. These had been driving out to the **Gravediggers** and, bizarrely, requesting edible food and palatable beers from local breweries. James was

perturbed by the need to clean the filth from the beer lines but was placated when he realised he could charge more than a pittance – and get paid straightaway.

An enthusiastic young chap with a bright, clear ale tapped away at an iPhone. 'I'm giving you a score of five out of five on **CAMRA**'s What Pub app. Your average beer score is slowly rising.'

'So we'll be in the **Good Beer Guide**?' James joked.

'In about a hundred years at this rate in normal circumstances,' the **CAMRA** enthusiast replied. 'But we're getting so worried about the state of the pubs in the local town. They're so empty that we think that most won't last until Christmas. If they all close then we might even have to consider this place – even though by including the tap of the brewers of *Old Sludge* that would literally be scraping the barrel.'

'Why are the pubs all deserted?' Mazz asked.

'Go down *The Sick Parrot* and you'll hear.'

The next day Mazz and James went on reconnaissance into the local town. The **Sick Parrot** looked smart on the outside – at least all its window panes contained glass and the paint hadn't peeled off the walls several years ago. Inside it was all leather sofas and polished wood. There was only one customer but his voice echoed around the pub like a foul-mouthed boomerang – Old Joe. Even the pool table and fruit machines were deserted. The barman – sporting a pair of designer earplugs – lined up pints for his sole customer on the bar.

'Oh, pint of *Fit Shaced*,' Joe said as James picked him up off the floor.

'Joe, this isn't the **Diggers**,' Mazz said.

'I was dreamin'...the things you do for money,' Joe muttered before singing drunkenly.

Just then a well-dressed business man in a suit walked into the pub and stuffed an envelope into Joe's pocket. Seeing James and Mazz sat quietly in a corner table he walked over to them menacingly and snarled 'You're barred.'

'Why?' James asked.

'You're too normal,' the man said as he slammed the door behind them. As James and Mazz headed back to the tractor a van pulled up outside *The Sick Parrot* with Big Pete's Pubco Ltd written on its side. A workman took a sign saying 'Coming Soon: Luxury Commuter Cottages' and hammered it to the pub wall.

'So Big Pete's Pubco's been using our toxic locals to make his pubs unviable?' Mazz said. 'I never thought anyone could be so evil.'

A couple of days later and the **Diggers** had almost been transformed with chinking glasses and polite conversation from the new set of customers. The atmosphere had been praised on a local foodie blog as muddily-civilised and Mazz had even had to open the moth-eaten diary to take bookings.

But the peace was shattered when a Transit van roared up outside. Its brakes screeched and a couple of burly blokes threw half-a-dozen comatose bodies through the front door.

'Yer no good to me if you've stopped being obnoxious because you've gone cold turkey,' Big Pete shouted before he sped away.

'He's not talking about Christmas dinner,' James said. 'They must be suffering withdrawal symptoms – they can't survive without foul beer.'

'The *Fit Shaced* is all in the cellar. Would it be inhumane to make them suffer more,' Mazz asked. ''

'I hope so,' James said.

As he spoke the corrosive effect of the locals' fetid, stinking bodies interacted with the chemicals in the newly polished wooden floor and the boards gave way, dropping the locals into the cellar underneath – and the latest vat of *Fit Shaced*. The new customers looked with horror through the hole in the floor at bodies writhing with joy in the stinking fluid below and bolted for the car park.

'Ho ho ho,' Old Pete said as he resurfaced.

Charlie Mackle

Branch Diary

Everybody welcome to all socials and meetings!

December

Monday 2nd BRANCH MEETING

8.00pm, Hop Pole, Aylesbury

Friday 13th AYLESBURY PRE-CHRISTMAS PUB CRAWL

Start 7.30pm Hop Pole, then... (catch up using the Branch Social phone!).

Saturday 14th WINTER BEER FESTIVAL

Noon, Haddenham WinterFest (details on page 15)

Tuesday 17th BRANCH CHRISTMAS DINNER

7.30pm, White Hart, Aylesbury (please let us know in advance if you'd like to join us so we can organise tables etc.).

Thursday 19th HIGH WYCOMBE PRE-CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

6.30pm Belle Vue, 7.30pm Bootleggers', 8.15pm Hobgoblin, 9.00pm Falcon

Monday 24th CHRISTMAS SHOPPING SOCIAL

12 noon, King's Head, Aylesbury

January

Saturday 4th OXFORD PUB CRAWL

Start 11.45am, Four Candles.

Saturday 11th BEER FESTIVAL

Potential Trip to Whittlesey Straw Bear Festival, Cambs (train via London). Watch e-mail/Facebook/website for details.

Monday 13th GBG PRE-SELECTION MEETING

8.00pm, Bull, Stoke Mandeville

Saturday 18th CENTRAL SOUTHERN REGIONAL PUB CRAWL

Bermondsey: Start (Aperitif) 11.30am Kernel Brewery (SE16 3SF) (Crawl) 1.00pm Shipwrights Arms (SE1 2TF).

Full details of the crawl can be obtained from the editor.

Wednesday 29th SOCIAL

8.30pm, Squirrel, Booker, 9.15pm Hour Glass, Sands.

February

Saturday 1st SWAN SUPPING 100TH EDITION SOCIAL

12 noon Venue to be confirmed

Monday 17th GBG FINAL SELECTION MEETING

8.00pm Belle Vue, High Wycombe

Monday 24th BRANCH AGM

7.30pm, King's Head, Aylesbury (tbc).

Every local **CAMRA** member should come along. Besides the formal meeting, there will be a buffet and a bottle raffle.

Further details can be found on our website

www.swansupping.org.uk

CATCH UP DURING BRANCH SOCIALS:-

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Keep up with the latest local pub news, be given beer festival information plus the latest social details, please join our e-mailing list by going to:-

www.swansupping.org.uk/joinin

Swan Supping

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Copy deadline for next issue (due out 31st January) is 14th January 2014.

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