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FOR
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THIRSTY TIMES

Chelmsford & mid-Essex Branch of CAMRA



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Thirsty Times

COLCHESTER PUB WINS ANOTHER CAMRA AWARD

If someone were to ask you what is the best pub in East Anglia what would you answer?

I'm saying this as The Victoria Inn in Colchester has been given this CAMRA accolade for 2014. By the time you read this the pub may have been judged as being the best pub in the eastern quarter of the UK. Whether this happens or not this is a remarkable pub and a "must visit" if you ever pass close to Colchester. Located a short walk from the busy town centre and even closer to the station, in North Station Road, you will find this 3 storey Grade II listed building, dating from the 17th century but with a Victorian frontage.

5 years ago the pub was closed and the building was facing what seemed the inevitable demise of so many buildings in a similar position. Luckily for the beer-drinking, and pub-going, population of Colchester and the rest of Essex enter Sheena and Andy, both originally from Yorkshire. They bought the unloved pub in September 2010, their key reason for going for The Victoria rather than so many other closed pubs available was that it was completely free of tie and they were in control of their own destiny. The pub had no real history of selling decent beer. Although their initial budget was small, all spare income was, and is still, directed back into improving the pub. Both Andy & Sheena have backgrounds in the trade and have a lot of experience and positive views on how to run a pub.

The key component of their strategy is focusing on good beer. Apart from the odd pickled egg they do not sell food. They are surrounded by a plethora of fast food outlets and there are a huge number of quality restaurants nearby, so why compete. The raison d'être here is quality

beer, over 100 different ales have been served in the last year. Oh, and cider too, with up to 9 usually available.

When they first opened they decided to start with just a single handpull. As trade and their reputation for good beer built up they increased this and now have five. They are also proud to feature a keg Craft beer on draught which can be sourced from any of the increasing number of breweries now available. Beers usually come direct, fresh from breweries rather than agencies and come from all over the country through good brewery relations. In an interesting experiment recently customers were encouraged to compare draught and keg versions of the same beer (with prices equalised). There is also a good selection of bottled beers from breweries large and small around the globe.

The pub has 3 distinct areas, a quiet area with sofas, a traditional pub area with low tables and a real fire in winter and a lively rear bar with high tables and stools, but all are connected around a central bar. Outside is a sheltered courtyard with seating leading to an open "barn" with comfy conservatory style seating. There is live music on Sundays from 5.30pm, usually folky/blues/acoustic based and often featuring touring artists.

Upstairs is a function room and the pub is the home of the Colchester Cheese Appreciation Society, The Victoria Wine Club and the Mile End Coffee Club. A beer festival in the summer features 30 award-winning beers.

Yes, folks, it's a "proper pub" and it's on our doorstep. Go and have a beer.

Winter 2014

PUB NEWS

The usual mixture of good and bad news – I'll leave you to judge!

Greene King have acquired Spirit Group's 1,227 pubs bringing their total estate to around 3,127. There were, I believe, 6 Spirit pubs in our area, trading under 4 different "brands" – **Globe, Chelmsford** (John Barras), **Grange, Boreham & Horse & Groom, Writtle** (Chef & Brewer), **Queen B, Chelmsford** (Flaming Grill), **Great Baddow Barn** (Fayre & Square) and the **Royal Steamer, Chelmsford**. Most, but not all, of these pubs are "food-led", which is the area GK are concentrating on. I wonder if the 10% discount to CAMRA members on real ale, offered by most Spirit pubs, will continue!

The appeal against the refusal of planning applications for the **Bull at Blackmore** has been rejected. Good news as many villagers felt these applications could jeopardise its future as a pub, although the present owner denied this.

At last some movement at **St Anne's Castle, Great Leighs** which Punch plan to develop as a food-destination. A planning application has been submitted which would provide a larger kitchen, new toilets, an external raised seating area and a much larger car parking area.

The new **Spread Eagle, Witham** opened on Saturday, 8th November. It is a one bar pub attached to a cafe/restaurant. Adnams Southwold Bitter and two guest beers are served on gravity from casks behind the bar. The pub also has a large selection of bottled beers from Europe and North America.



The **Woolpack, Witham** is up for sale (as a pub) for £325,000 but the pub, and brewery, continue to operate as normal at present.

The **Boutique Café Bar** in **Chelmsford** has closed.

The planning application to convert the **Cock, Boreham** into 3 dwellings has been approved, so we must say a final goodbye to another historic pub.

It's also goodbye to Neil and Theresa who have run the **Fitch of Bacon, Little Dunmow** for the last 10 years. In that time the pub has been in the Good Beer Guide 6 times and featured in every one of our Recommended Pubs leaflets. So, well done to them. The good news is it has been bought by a group of 7 local residents who want to keep their village pub open and we wish them well. Put it on your list to visit.

The **Leather Bottle, Pleshey** has been sold, we hear, to Keith Flint of the Prodigy.

The **Two Brewers, Chelmsford** was closed for a couple of weeks but should be open again now with a new landlord. Other pubs with new

PUB NEWS

landlords are the **Beehive, Great Waltham** and the **Royal Steamer**.



Congratulations to Rosemary Cotton, landlady of the **Three Compasses, West Hanningfield**, who has been serving real ale there since 1971, the year CAMRA was founded! The branch intends to mark this achievement with a presentation in the New Year.

The **Golden Fleece, Chelmsford**, will be closed from 4th-23rd (approx) January for a refurbishment which will give increased seating capacity by extending the raised area to run the whole length of the pub. There will be a new floor, a refurbished bar, "intelligent" (improved) lighting and a new seating area where the pool table is currently located.



Alongside the real ales there will be craft beer, on draft as well as in bottles, and a new feature area for real cider. Look out for a better quality food menu too and a wider range of wines.

When the Fleece reopens (most likely on Tuesday 27th January) local CAMRA members are invited along to sample the new menu and see the improvements made.

After the recent autumn/winter beer festival (their 4th) another 2 festivals are planned for 2015.

What is a community pub? Well, here are two which certainly qualify.

Mike and Jacqui at **The Endeavour, Chelmsford** held a Macmillan Coffee Morning in September and raised a brilliant £191. They hold their weekly meat raffle every Sunday with Farleigh Hospice and the RNLI sharing the funds raised. The pub has teams in several leagues, poker (Monday), darts (Wednesday) and crib (Thursday). They're always looking for new talent! Their pop up restaurants with monthly themed food nights continue and are almost always full, the latest being a Beaujolais Evening. Saturday 20th December is the Landlord's birthday party with the Midnight Ramblers making a welcome return, and New Year's Eve will have a ticket only Black and White theme and a great disco.

You can like their Facebook page or join their mailing list, endeavourpub@aol.com, to be kept up to date on the latest events.

News from another community pub, the **Little Elms, Witham**. Landlord Kieran reports that at the end of August they hosted a charity event in aid of Cancer Research UK with live

PUB NEWS



music and a raffle, attracting a large crowd and raising over £600. There is a substantial playing field and park area next to the pub and families with children are always welcome up to 9 pm. They have a Disco and Karaoke evening every Friday, if that's your thing, and a monthly Quiz night, the winners receiving a £25 bar tab and the winning team name gets a bottle of house wine. There is live music on the last Saturday of each month. And the pub sponsors a local football team - Valley Green Veterans. Food is

served with a new menu coming in January.

On the 11th December they host a Christmas Carol Service by the local church and school choirs around their real fire with home-made mulled wine. I'd choose something from their range of 3/4 real ales though, 2 regulars and changing guests. The Little Elms was due a small refurbishment in November; new front doors, carpet and wooden flooring to the saloon bar area and some decoration behind the bar.

And finally, good luck to John Prior whose micropub, **The Hop Shop**, is now open at 173 Moulsham Street. Read more about micropubs elsewhere in this issue but you really need to give the concept a try, and now you can, right here in Chelmsford.

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BREWERY NEWS



BISHOP NICK

Libby Ridley writes:

We're toggling up for winter here at Bishop Nick HQ. The

brewery shop is stocked and open for business on Saturdays in the lead up to Christmas and through to New Year with merchandise and all our bottled beers. Polypins (34pints) and Minipins (17pints) available for home entertaining. Also available are 5litre mini-casks of all our core beers in time for the Festive Season.

Our Limited Edition beers are proving to be popular – **Martyr IPA** and **Dark Mild** were both voted Beer of the Month by a discerning panel at The Griffin in Halstead. **Embers** (3.8%) sold out extremely quickly and we've replaced it with our first Porter – topically named **Witch Hunt** (4.2%) – a devilishly dark bitter defined by roasted chocolate malt. We have a little left in cask and in 500ml bottles.

Feast is back due to popular demand as our Limited Edition for the winter – a warming pudding of a beer at 4.5% brewed with a blend of crystal malts.

Colchester CAMRA enjoyed their visit to our brewery on October 28th and it was a pleasure to show them what we're all about. We are gearing up for more public tours and 'brew experiences' in 2015.

New outlets include the Rainbow & Dove in Hastingwood, the Theydon Oak, the Crown in Old Harlow, the North Countrymans Club in Colchester, Chelmsford Rugby Club, the Globe in Clare and the Wagon & Horses in Great Yeldham. Nelion Ridley conducted a 'Meet The Brewer' evening at another new outlet – the Woodbine Inn in Waltham Abbey. New stockists for our bottles include The Elder Street Farm Shop in Wimbish and Linsells in Felsted.

We took our **Witch Hunt** and **Heresy** to Rochford Beer Festival in November.

Here's wishing all our customers and supporters much joy for the party season.

Reach us on 01376 349 605 and follow us on Facebook - BishopNickAle and Twitter - @BishopNick or sign up for our newsletter at info@bishopnick.com

GEORGE'S BREWERY

Mark informs us that their Christmas selection will be:



Balthazar's Feast, 9%. Our premier beer. Brewed for sale in 330ml bottles this extra strong Old Ale is the stuff of legend. Dark as midnight with a flavour that defies description.

To taste this ale is to step back into a time when nanny governments did not exist and people could find real beer. We do let this out into the world in cask but we advise it is sold as HALF pints only.

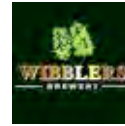
Ebenezer Old, 4%. This beer is deep ruby in colour but we like to think that it's black and dry like Ebenezer's heart! Brewed using Phoenix and Centennial hops and 5 malts, this beer is rich and well-balanced and not sickly sweet like your usual festive offering. Consider this a Black IPA.

Marley's Ghost, 4%. Six malts and five hop varieties combine to make up this festive offering. This complex light amber beer is a pleasantly sweet easy drinker with a good hop balance at the end.

Snake Oil Stout, 5%. Black as Satan's heart. We used 5 English malts and 2 hop varieties to brew this devilishly moreish venomous reptile of a beer. If you are of a weak disposition or not too fond of snakes don't get close enough to let this bad boy bite you.



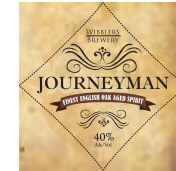
BREWERY NEWS



WIBBLERS BREWERY

Nigel Sadler reports:

December will see the launch of our oak-aged 40% distilled spirit, "Journeyman". This was produced from a wash made here in the brewery using our Apprentice recipe, hence the name, a journeyman being the next stage on from an apprentice. However unlike other such spirits distilled from beer recipes we have gone a stage further and perhaps better, in our opinion, by using minute additions of hop oils extracted from Polish Marynka hops, which feature in the original beer, to add to the complexity of this limited edition run. We're sure it will be a big hit for those looking for something a little different as a gift this year.



Also for December we will be brewing our ever popular Santa's Night Off 4.2% ABV plus limited runs of our Oatmeal Stout 4% and Spiced Porter 4.5%.



In January we will be once again brewing our golden ale, Polar Beer 4.2%, which was first produced this year. It proved to be a great success with all who tried it and in the end we brewed 3 batches to keep up with the demand.

Our Christmas Brewery Open Day will be on Saturday 13th December from midday till 4pm. There will be free beer and cider tastings, brewery tours and a chance to pick up Christmas gifts from our brewery shop.



MIGHTY OAK

Gill Crawford reminds us of the MIGHTY OAK OPEN DAY on Saturday 6th December, 11am to 3pm. Everyone is welcome to join the fun – free entry, free beer tasting, and if you enjoy the beers why not buy beer in a box to take home on the day or pre-order for Christmas. This day is always very well attended, and we look forward to seeing you and your friends! If you can't make it along on the day, then you could always order over the phone.

Beatle-mania at Mighty Oak
The 2015 monthly special beers are themed to The Beatles' Lucy In The Sky track. With 12 beers appearing over the whole of 2015 you can look forward to some cracking beers with Beatle-ish names, such as Lucy in the Sky 3.5% blonde in January, Plasticine Porter 4.5% dark porter

in February, Tangerine Trees 3.9% citrusy ale in July, Kaleidoscope Eyes 5% glowing amber ale in August and Rocking Horse People 5% dark oaky ale in October – more info on our website www.mightyoakbrewing.co.uk.

As always, we have some very interesting pump clips to go with the beers – our artist, 'Lidders', has excelled himself this year, they look fab and we are over the moon with them! Look out for some of our 'one off' brews with a Beatles name too; I'm particularly looking forward to Strawberry Fields in June! Our brewer, Dr Alex, has put a lot of thought into the recipes, tweaking and refining to make all the 2015 Beatles theme beers extra special – we hope you will enjoy them.



BREWERY NEWS



ROUND TOWER

Simon Tippler writes:

Our winter beers are already out in pubs around the county. This year we are offering Fezziwig 4.6%, a chestnut coloured beer with Crystal and Chocolate malts to give a sweet malty fruitiness with a hoppy finish from the Cascade and Chinook hops. We have two gold beers; ABC at 4% and Cascade at 5.2%, both dry hopped and Pentlow 4.4% which is a pale ale and is full of dry, crisp, citrus flavours. We are now stocking our Stout and our Slipstream Black IPA as regular beers.

A number of new outlets are stocking our bottled beer including Beautiful Beers in Bury St Edmunds (our first retailer to offer an online service). Our cask beer is being enjoyed in even more pubs across Essex including The Victoria Inn in Colchester.

During Saturdays in December, we are open to the public for sales of our bottled beers including gift packs and cases. We will also be happy to discuss the sale of pins if you would like something special to drink at home over the Christmas period.

Sign up to our newsletter at www.RoundTowerBrewery.co.uk and follow us on Facebook and twitter to find out all our latest news.

MALDON BREWING

Mike tells us:

This year we are seeing the return of two of our favourite Christmas beers, Five Gold Rings and Farmer's Christmas Stout. We are also continuing our line of monthly specials commemorating the 100 year anniversary of WWI, with particular reference to Stow Maries aerodrome



BRENTWOOD BREWERY

Wendy Pike tells us:

Plumberry Ruby, Chockwork Orange, Chestnut Stout, Berry Christmas & Santa's Paradise will all be available until Christmas. In addition, we have just started selling The Poppy Beer. At least 10p per bottle sold will be donated to The Royal British Legion.

CROUCH VALE BREWERY

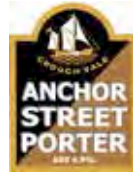
A certain Mr Colin J. Bocking informs us:

To buck the trend of certain Essex brewers to run about 8 or more Christmas beers, we will have just 2!

Happy Santa – ABV 4.3% – Deep ruby in colour. Full and well-rounded.

Santa's Revenge – ABV 5% – Pale, golden and hoppy.

There will also be **Anchor Street Porter** for December (ABV 4.9%). Call in at the Queen's Head to see what's new.



in Essex, by brewing 'Christmas Wish'. The pump clip is based on an old Royal Flying Corps Christmas card. New additions for Christmas also include Agnes' Fountain, Sleigh Bells and Crisp and Even, all available in December. We are bottling all our Christmas beers this year and have some lovely new gift packs.




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WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT CRAFT BEER - A RESPONSE

I admire the efforts of Tim Webb in the last couple of issues of Thirsty Times to raise the profile of "Craft Beer" on the CAMRA agenda. It remains embarrassing that CAMRA persistently champions any number of side issues, some of which are not even relevant to beer, yet continually fails to recognize good, tasty, British brewed beer, albeit served using modern (perhaps imported) storage and dispense methods.

However, we are not the Campaign for good and tasty beer. We are the niche within a niche that is the Campaign for REAL ALE and it is my honestly-held belief that we should be concentrating with added focus on our founding principles. Our message as a single-issue campaigning voice would be much louder as a group of almost 200,000 real ale drinkers shouting a simple message without the fog of other "campaigns". Over time, our campaigning message has become diluted by the decision to support a huge number of these related issues, from cider to historic pubs, from public transport to foreign beer, from complaining about short measures to moaning about levels of alcohol taxation and that's before I have a poke at so-called Real Ale in a Bottle.

Marking CAMRA's 40th anniversary in 2011, one of the Campaign's founding fathers, Michael Hardman MBE, said "we are the Campaign for Real Ale – we set out to safeguard that type of beer. If people think that pressurized or processed beer is threatened, they can go away and set up the campaign for genuine Australian lager brewed in Scunthorpe. None of these beers needs any protection." (Reference: Will Hawkes – The Independent – blogs 23/9/11).

If we are interested in traditional brewery buildings, we can join the Brewery History Society. If we like old pubs, there is the Pub History Society. CAMAL used to be the

Campaign for Authentic Lager; the Society of Preservation of Beer from the Wood (SPBW) is still going, and there are member groups of the European Beer Consumers Union (EBCU) that are active in most EC beer-loving countries. The Campaign for Really Good Beer (CamRGB) was formed specifically to embrace all good beer. APPLE is for cider drinkers (oh, hang on, that is a group within CAMRA but you get my point). All are begging for new members and all are interesting and worthy groups.

But they have hardly any members and zero influence, I hear you cry. Exactly my point! As CAMRA has grown it has transitioned from being the voice of the real ale drinker to become the voice of the beer drinker, nay the alcohol drinker, in the recent face of neo-prohibitionists, solely because it is the biggest, most successful, closely relevant, consumer group.

The message to promote fresh, tasty, locally-brewed real ale, in a variety of styles, served with a natural sparkle at cellar temperature through a hand pump in a pub at a reasonable price is a simple one that we are losing in the mist.

Most members join CAMRA to campaign for real ale – and don't think that simply paying a subscription and supping the stuff counts as campaigning – it does. Real ale remains the type of beer that needs to be safeguarded. We might regularly drink craft keg beer or take the occasional cider; we might often travel abroad on the quest for good foreign beer, we may read a lot about beer, we all like pubs - old pubs, new pubs, craft beer bars and brewpubs, we drink bottled beer and we pay our taxes. Perhaps we like red wine, gin and the odd whisky; we may prefer good cheese, meat and bread. Art or politics may be subjects that stimulate us or being sympathetic to any number of charities and other worthy causes but our individual

campaigning – and the issue that still gets me most excited and passionate - is for real ale – and real ale alone. Simple!

Quoting Hardman again, this time from the pages of the Campaign newspaper, What's Brewing, in December 2011 " I'm still happy that the core idea is there but I'm a bit concerned that the Campaign is becoming a bit too diversified. Everybody says single-issue idea campaigns do not work, this is one that did work and why we should change tactics I don't know. Distractions like the full pint campaign, for example, are irrelevant."

Perhaps you are not with me on this and you may think that this particular horse has bolted. If so, and CAMRA is stuck with all of the other hangers-on, then you may say we must avoid further embarrassment and embrace so-called "Craft Beer". It is ridiculous to support a beer from Czechoslovakia or Germany and not give a shout-out to nearly identical, good and tasty beers brewed in Camden, Greenwich, Norwich, Henley or dare I say, Aberdeenshire. A niche within a niche within a niche.

CAMRA's policymaking and your influence on its future strategy and campaigning is an open book and a most transparent process. If you agree with anything or nothing that Tim or I have to say then I urge you to join the debate. It is a simple procedure to take a motion to conference in Nottingham next April and let 800+ of the hardest of hardcore campaigners debate the merits of proposed policy changes. Alternatively, just rock up to conference, drink some great beers, meet good like-minded people, join the debate and assert YOUR influence on YOUR Campaign.

Cheers!

Steve Williams (@BeerJustice)

Beer geek, blogger, twitterer and industry commentator, CAMRA Regional Director for Greater London 2004-2009

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MICROPUBS

Finally Essex has got its first micro pub/off licence in The Hop Shop at 173 Moulsham Street under the auspices of John Prior.

The phenomenon of the micro pub has been increasingly sweeping through the country over the last few years and has finally rocked up in Chelmsford. Surely it can only be a great advancement for us all sampling good beer.

The micropub revolution can trace its origins to a change in the 2003 licensing act which came into effect in 2005 and made it much easier to open a pub on a new site without all the previous planning guff of old. Martyn Hillier was one of the first to realise this potential and opened The Butchers Arms in Herne, Kent later that year.

The micropub revolution was born and the Butchers, possibly still the smallest freehouse in England became the general template upon which all subsequent models have been based. The key components have always been keep it small and keep it simple. Martyn's vision, endeavour and enterprise have inspired many others to follow the same path.

In 2009 the Rat Race Ale House opened in Hartlepool, based in a room at Hartlepool Railway Station that had been at various points in its existence a waiting room, a taxi company office and a newsagent. The pub measures just 20ft by 14ft and is so small there is not enough room for a bar so owner Peter Morgan pours his beer directly from the cellar.

Just Beer in Newark-on-Trent, The Conqueror Alehouse, Ramsgate, The Railway Arms, Downham Market and Marpool Brewery Alehouse in Derbyshire all opened the following year.

By 2010 new micro pubs were really starting to take off and by 2013 we saw over 30 new micro

venues open in locations all over the country during that year alone.

Why is it that micropubs are thriving whilst there is a national trend of pubs closing around the country at an incredible rate?

First, now that the law allows shops to become outlets where beer can be drunk on site has given access to lots of new venues to be up for grabs.

These local former shops come at lower start-up costs for what basically becomes a pub, albeit on a small scale. Any shop that can be found at a reasonable rent can quickly become a new outlet for beer on-sales. The present recession has offered up many premises for easy picking. Another boon to this sector has been the sheer growth of interesting beers from the revolution in micro breweries that are now coming on stream. Reduced tax costs due to sliding scale duty has also added power to the cause.

What also cannot be underestimated is that drinkers today are getting fed up with pub chains and the mass market, they are now looking for something different, local and somewhere to call one's own. Could it be that the micropub is bringing back the concept of the front parlour and the community local of a bygone age?

Today in the UK there are over 100 micropubs operating but each has its own distinctive footprint.

I recently visited the Beer Engine in Skipton opened by former lawyer Steve Banks in a disused fitness centre and before you ask, yes, he has heard the one about being called to the bar.

The Beer Engine is a single room pub just over the lane from the GBG-listed Narrow Boat. It prides itself on not having music or television, its

Thirsty Times

main feature is a glass-fronted and cooled rack of casks in two rows behind the bar, feeding the six traditional beer engines on the bar.

The racks are there as the pub does not have a cellar, in fact when I was there Great Heck Brewery were delivering firkins of beer and they temporarily stored each barrel under seats in the pub before being lifted onto the racks later in the evening. The food menu runs to nuts.

Steve said: "We've provided a place where people can come and chat and make new friends. It's great to hear the hum of voices rather than voices clashing with music".

The brews are constantly changed, many supplied by very local breweries. The Beer Engine is only open Wednesday to Sunday from noon to about 11pm which is great for controlling staffing costs.

I also called in at The Beer Shack in Burnley. Again, this is located opposite a GBG pub in the form of the local monolithic Wetherspoons. This however is a world away in size as the Shack is based in a former hairdressers under a solicitors' office. Like the Beer Engine, the driving force is good beer. In this instance they have eight hand pumps which are constantly changing but they also manage to feature a huge range of local bottled beer too. On my last visit the place had a real buzz about it even though there were never more than around twenty customers. Local CAMRA activist Steve Slater said "This has been a real boost to the local beer scene with a fast turnover of lots of beers from microbreweries".

Another twist on the use of premises is what the Barearts Brewery has accomplished in Todmorden which is to establish a tasting café attached to their brewery. The brewery has been active since 2005 selling mainly bottle-conditioned beers. It has become increasingly

Winter 2014

receptive to visitors enjoying drinking beers in their well-appointed shop which also supplies a few snacks. At the limited number of tables you often find groups of people deep in conversation about the beer range and life in general. The brewery has started to become the hub of the local community.

Although this seems to be a national trend there is still a high and increasing concentration of micropubs around the Thanet area of Kent. If you fancy checking them out and exploring their diversity see their website at www.micropubcrawl.co.uk.

As to what direction The Hop Shop in Moulsham Street is to follow I suggest you call in, have a beer, and ask John.



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BRANCH DIARY

Wednesday 10th December:
Branch Meeting at The Globe, Chelmsford
No bus to this meeting which starts at 8.30pm.
PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF VENUE FROM THAT ANNOUNCED AT THE NOVEMBER BRANCH MEETING AND ADVERTISED IN DECEMBER'S WHAT BREWING.

Friday 19th December:
Pre-Christmas Chelmsford Crawl
Meet at The Woolpack, Mildmay Rd, moving to the next pub at 8pm.

Tuesday 6th January:
Real Ale Runabout to Corbets Tey & Grays
Bus departs opposite rail station at 7.30pm, fare £6 members/OAPS, £7 non-members.
ADVANCE BOOKING PREFERRED SO I CAN GAUGE NUMBERS PLEASE

Wednesday 14th January:
Branch Meeting at the Wheatsheaf, Hatfield Peverel
Bus fare £5 members, £6 non-members.
Depart from opposite rail station at 8pm, with the meeting starting at 8.30pm.

Saturday 17th January:
Visit to George's Brewery, Great Wakering and presentation to the landlady of the Three Compasses, West Hanningfield
We'll arrive at the brewery about 1pm for a tour, some beer and a ploughman's lunch (£9 all in), then work our way back to Chelmsford via the Bell at Rettendon, the Windmill at East Hanningfield, The Compasses at West Hanningfield (where we will present Winter 2014

a certificate at 6.30pm to the landlady to celebrate her 40 years running the pub) and the White Horse in Great Baddow. Some of these pubs are in our CAMRA 40th anniversary ale trail booklet which will be launched on the day. Bus fare £20 members, £22 non-members. Depart from opposite rail station at 12.15pm. **PLEASE BOOK FOR THIS BY SUNDAY 11th JANUARY.**

Thursday 29th January:
Rail Trip to Colchester Winter Beer Festival
Meet at Chelmsford rail station at 6.30pm for the 6.47pm departure.

Tuesday 6th February:
Real Ale Runabout to Coggeshall, Colne Engaine & Halstead
Bus departs opposite rail station at 7.30pm, fare £6 members/OAPS, £7 non-members.
ADVANCE BOOKING PREFERRED SO I CAN GAUGE NUMBERS PLEASE

Wednesday 11th February:
Branch Meeting at The Orange Tree, Chelmsford
No bus to this meeting which starts at 8.30pm.

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WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT CRAFT BEER...

Part 3: Call that beer good?

This is the third of four articles by prize-winning beer writer Tim Webb, author of The World Atlas of Beer, Pocket Beer Book, Good Beer Guide Belgium, LambicLand and others, in which he traces the progress of beer in the last 40 years; debunks some myths about British brewing; picks out those parts of beer-making that create flavour; and challenges CAMRA to retake its vow to improve beer in Britain.

A few years back, I had a civilised row with a professional brewer and friend, who has helped hundreds of small producers around Europe. Drifting into discussion of an obscure beer that sits in the back catalogue of AB InBev he cited this as “probably perfect”, while I preferred “instantly forgettable”. After four hours’ debate we agreed we were both right.

Many if not most, industrial beers are technically perfect. The problem is that in the course of making them so little effort is put into giving them memorable character that beyond being an alcohol delivery system they have little purpose.

Blame the drinker

It is not the brewers or accountants who cause industrial beers to be bland; it is opinionated drinkers. If you doubt this, go and read Maureen Ogle’s *Ambitious Brew*, an excellent account of the rise of US brewers like Miller, Coors, Pabst and Anheuser Busch. In particular read the chapter about market research.

The flaw in asking people what they like is that most can pinpoint what they dislike, based on experience. In contrast, few of us can imagine what we would like but have not experienced. So when US consumers were asked in the 1960s

how beer could be improved, they suggested removing stuff. Thus, American lagers went first bland, then ‘Lite’ and eventually ‘Ice’, as brewers smoothed out ruffles and made them ever duller.

However, the popular notion that such beers are “full of chemicals” is largely myth. If chemical additives matter at all, the class most vulnerable to the charge is cask ale, for its auxiliary finings.

Likewise, critics including myself who suggest that big brand beers use cut-price ingredients are only partially correct. AB InBev is open about cheapening Stella Artois by putting maize on the grain bill but the rice they use to make Budweiser often costs more per ton than their barley. Carlsberg and Heineken even claim to have moved back to 100% malt.

Hops cost less in industrial brewing but only because so few are used. When it comes to substituting them with oil, jam or extract, better-known smaller brewers are often greater sinners.

Who cares about flavour?

CAMRA publishes relatively little about why beers taste the way they do and much of what appears seems politically filtered. This is not as daft as it may seem. From the consumer perspective the golden rule is that beyond those aspects of production designed to avoid flaws, golden rules are unreliable. Here are some of the more reliable ones.

Brew with malted barley that is cracked on site and avoid sugar, maize or syrups. Add whole hops or well-prepared pellets and use newer varieties that are more distinctive. Mash, sparge and boil in line with the intended style rather

than to keep costs down. Ferment wort slower, with fresh yeast, not dried, and condition it at the brewery for as long as possible. More ingredients add more flavour.

Then recognise that some excellent beers cut every corner on the track and that, as my brewer chum eventually admitted, some perfectly made beers are perfectly dreary.

Making real good

So how do Britain’s cask-conditioned light ales, ‘real ale’ if you prefer, pack so much flavour into such a tiny frame?

Mainly it is by mashing at higher temperatures. This squeezes out grain flavours in a way some European brewers consider crude. Chancier beers may duck fine filtering, leaving flour in the body of the beer to make it taste bigger than it is – grain’s answer to dry hopping, the late addition of fresh hops.

Is conditioning in the cask crucial to flavour development? Well yes and no.

Blind tasting of beers conditioned only by *saccharomyces* – the fast yeast of fermentation – suggests these add little to taste, except by trading in some sugar for alcohol and gas. This can also be achieved by conditioning at the brewery.

Conditioning for greater character involves the action of slower yeast. Even where these are present, with many pubs using rapid turnaround times for casks, this is unlikely to happen. In truth many cask ale supporters are not drawn to greater flavour but to lower carbonation, which of course requires no conditioning at all.

You cannot be for real ale but against ‘fizz’, as bottle-conditioned beers are the fizziest of all. Is this the area of confusion that leads CAMRA to duck making policy on tank-, keg- and can-

conditioned ales I wonder?

Don’t need taste – got rules

For centuries British brewing ruled the world with beers like porter, stout, India Pale and Burton ales. Were these cask-conditioned? Yes, but not as we know it.

A major aspect of flavour creation that got deleted from beer-making along the way was storage in large oak casks, or tuns. This was the stage when slower-acting yeast in the cask walls evolved complex flavours similar to those found in other drinks that are ‘aged in the wood’.

These older styles, which feature prominently within ‘craft beer’, must be allowed to use these formats, along with flashier hops, more intricate production techniques and smart marketing.

CAMRA’s current take on craft beer is one of confused wariness. From one quarter comes suggestions that the emergence of newer forms of old British ales is no business of a beer consumer group while from another the emergence of tasty new beers that are not *saccharomyces*-conditioned in the cask is sacrilege.

The current stances are as confused as they are absurd and dangerous. New brewing needs informed and sceptical wisdom. In the final piece in this series I will suggest, I hope, a more appropriate and intelligent approach.

Tim Webb served on CAMRA’s National Executive for seven years, running the Great British Beer Festival for the first two, then heading up publicity and publications. He has since written numerous best selling beer books, thus far translated into nine languages.

In his spare time he runs a small publishing company and booksellers (www.booksaboutbeer.com).

NATIONAL CIDER TRIP

On Saturday 18th October 2014 Doug and I went on the National Cider and Perry Trip in Somerset joining two coaches of cider enthusiasts at Taunton Railway Station. We visited three very different operations with their own orchards, interesting talks and award-winning cider to sample.

Sheppy's Cider is very commercialised with massive stainless steel fermenting vessels and uses a belt conveyor and press, originally used for wine making in Italy. We had their medium cider, which was awarded Gold in the National Championships judged at Reading festival in May 2014. There has been a lot of modernisation in recent years but the sheer scale and extent of modern technology has spoiled the image of traditional production for me, especially as their logo has a horse-drawn dray with wooden barrels.

Rich's is still a family-run farm at Watchfield where essentially the production of cider from apple juice is traditional and matured in oak vats. The 10,000 gallon oak vat was incredible



Sheppy's Press Building

to see and stand next to. If you drank 4 pints a day of the 80,000 pints it holds it would take you 54 years 9 months and 20 days!

West Croft Cider is made from traditional varieties of Somerset cider apples such as Kingston Black, Brown Snout, Sheep's Nose and Yarlington Mill. They do not use dessert or culinary apples, sugar or concentrate. In 2007 West Croft Janet's Jungle Juice was voted Champion Cider of Great Britain by CAMRA at the Great British Beer Festival (from a blind tasting of over 150 ciders). In 2008 JJJ as it is known was runner up for the same award and was Champion Cider in 1997. Andrea Briers, Chair of the National Cider and Perry Committee (commonly called the Apple Committee), presented John Harris the cider maker with a certificate for Janet's Jungle Juice. This had been voted Cider of the Festival at Somerset Branch 15th festival in September at Minehead and also the People's Choice Cider of the Festival 2011 at Cider and Winter Ales Festival run by Manchester Branch. No other cider has been so successful and has featured on my cider bar at Chelmsford Festivals. Having tried the Morgan's Sweet and the Little Trees cider I plan to get them for our Winter Beer and Cider Festival.



Rich's 10,000 Gallon Oak Vat

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We have hot food available at all sessions courtesy of Tim and his Hopleaf team, featuring Burgers, Hot Dogs, Chips and their homemade Chillis and Curries, and his mean Chilli Sauce.

We are extremely grateful for our sponsors without whom we would have a much more difficult task setting up and running the festival. These are our four breweries in the Chelmsford Area - Bishop Nick, Felstar, Round Tower and Witham - along with The Essex Cider Shop.

The Festival is manned by CAMRA members who are all volunteers and who give up their time to build, run and take down the Festival - for fun!

Our opening times are Wednesday 18th February 3pm to 11pm, Thursday 19th to Saturday 21st 12 noon to 11pm.

Admission is free to card-carrying CAMRA Members at all times, and to everyone on Wednesday all day and until 6pm on other days. After 6pm Thursday to Friday £3.



www.chelmsfordbeerandciderfestivals.org.uk

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RAISING THE TEMPERATURE...

The British, as everyone knows, drink warm beer. Or more accurately, they prefer their traditional ale at cellar temperature, rather than chilled. Though most Brits in truth now drink cold lager like everyone else, the fact that a sizeable minority continues to enjoy less refrigerated booze is heart warming, so to speak, in a commercial world where, as Nigel Huddleston reported in *Beers of the World*, the thermometer is heading downwards.

Most people appreciate that different wines are best served at different temperatures – serving claret in an ice bucket or mulling your Muscadet is not the best way to impress at dinner parties. But when it comes to beer, whether it's a well-aged Westvleteren 12 or Tesco Value Lager, there's a tendency to simply bung it in the fridge with the rest of them.

In Belgium they take a little more care – specialist beer pubs often boast several fridges set to different temperatures. While in Britain you might get a grudging “Serve Cool” on the label, in Belgium the temperature is usually specified in precise degrees, though not always reliably – sadly some Belgian brewers have also succumbed to chiller-mania and increasingly recommend inappropriately cold temperatures.

So what difference does temperature really make? Apply energy by heating something up and its molecules start buzzing around busily, bumping into other molecules and occasionally escaping. As a substance cools down, its molecules move more sluggishly, and are less likely to interact with their neighbours. When those molecules are what give a beer its odour and flavour, the warmer they are, the more energy they'll have to bounce around the taste and smell receptors in your nose and mouth.

The body itself is a warm place and its systems work best at warmer temperatures; cold substances in the mouth literally numb the senses, not to mention their challenge to our digestive

system. On the other hand, drinking something cold helps cool us down when hot, so can be experienced as pleasantly refreshing. The marketers of chilled beer trade on the appeal of this with endless images of condensation-jewelled bottles.

Behind such images is an assumption that beer's only function is to make us feel refreshed despite the dehydrating effects of alcohol, and the truth is that most beers marketed in this way are good for little else. Where a beer has little native aroma and flavour, serving it at a warmer temperature will simply expose its emptiness. Chilling it, particularly to 4°C or below, makes its limitations less evident by neutralising the taste buds. More cynical brewers have long taken advantage of this by using excessive refrigeration to disguise cheap and nasty beer.

This is not to say that all good beers should be served uniformly warm. British and Belgian ales are warm fermented -- unsurprisingly their chemistry is most active at warmer temperatures and their recipes evolved to taste good when drunk from a pub cellar in a cool climate. Traditional German and Czech lager styles originate from more southerly climates where they were brewed in deep, icy caves – the resulting smoother flavours work better at lower temperatures, maintaining enough hop aroma to cut through.

Avoid the habit of keeping beer indiscriminately in the fridge for days or weeks and both your taste buds and the yeast cells in a bottle conditioned beer will reward you. Anything half decent is best kept in a dark cupboard at a relatively constant temperature and only put in the fridge, if at all, for a controlled length of time before it's consumed.

However it's tricky to achieve precise temperatures at home. Wine thermometers designed to be left in a bottle neck as the contents gradually warms or cools are less useful with beer, which

starts to go flat as soon as it's opened. So try experimenting by keeping beer in the fridge for a set length of time and checking the results – your own taste is at least as good as a thermometer here.

Fridge temperatures vary according to how much other stuff is in them, when it was put there, and how often the door is opened and closed – which is likely to be often if it's also the place you keep tonight's snacks and tomorrow's breakfast. Constant fluctuations in temperature aren't good, and putting beer in the freezer for a few minutes to cool it quickly is definitely bad. Remember fridge temperatures get cooler as you move deeper inside – the back of my fridge can sometimes freeze an ice pop, but the milk rack inside the door stands in well for a cool pub cellar.

Room temperature seems straightforward – but in these days of global warming and central heating it's warmer than it used to be. It's best suited to big, strong and complex beers like barley wines, imperial stouts and high gravity abbey ales. Arguably such beers are best when a couple of degrees short of contemporary tastes in home heating, at around 17°C, an hour or so in a milder part of the fridge.

European pale and brown ales and stronger German beers like bocks are best at that good old cellar temperature of 12-14°C, perhaps a couple of hours in the fridge door. American derivatives of these styles tend to be brewed with slightly cooler temperatures in mind, around 10°C. Golden and summer ale, Altbier and lambic also work well at this level, and some may prefer to cool session strength stout and porter for a little longer than bitter and pale ale.

Below this things get controversial. Some sources – including certain beer labels – suggest chilling wheat beers, Duvel-style strong golden ales, Kölsch and quality blond lager to a genuinely cold 6°C or below. In my view many of these beers only reveal their true delights at slightly warmer temperatures. It's worth experimenting

here to find your own personal preference.

Whatever you do, experimenting with temperature will add variety to your drinking – and will hopefully convince you that, whatever the million dollar marketing campaigns might say, as far as good beer is concerned, it's often cool to be warm.

In researching this article I conducted a home tasting of three very different beers at three different temperatures.

Chilling **Budweiser Budvar** to 5°C does it no favours, neutralising the aroma and more interesting flavour elements on the palate, and allowing too much emphasis on bitter hop resins. At a cellar-cooled 12°C there's more aroma, more delicate hop flavours and juicier malt. Room temperature reveals some surprising whiskyish, spicity notes – the quality of the beer holds up but it's a less intense experience.

Three B's Shuttle Ale, an excellent microbrewed bottle-conditioned bitter from Lancashire, has a good malty, orangey aroma when served cold, but numbing the mouth again lends undue weight to hop bitterness. It's much better balanced at cellar temperature, revealing more fruit and roast notes. When *chambré*, the hop aroma is intense and earthy, but the thick marmalade notes get just a bit cloying.

Classic dark barley wine **Robinsons Old Tom** is a challenge when chilled; the combined numbing effect of cold and alcohol is like a mouthful of dentists' novocaine! The powerful dry cocoa finish still shows through, but the flavour development is better at cellar temperature, with tannins and cake notes more evident. The beer is still richer and more luscious at room temperature, with fruit and smooth burry hops better integrated.

First printed in Beers of the World.

Des de Moor is author of The CAMRA guide to London's Best Beer Pubs & Bars.

THE CASK REPORT:

AN OVERVIEW BY SIMON TIPPLER OF ROUND TOWER BREWERY

'The Cask Report' is commissioned every year to look into the health of the cask ale market and for the last few years it has highlighted that the cask beer market within the United Kingdom is in rude health.

This year 'The Cask Report' was written once again by Pete Brown, the prolific and well known beer writer and general advocate of great beer and cider.

THE STATE OF THE CASK ALE MARKET

In 2013/14, the cask ale market continued to grow by 1.1% - 1.3% and up until June 2014, there had been ten consecutive months of growth.

The cask ale market is bucking the general trend for on-sales. A long term view shows that the value of the cask ale market has grown 23% since 2010. This is against a declining market of on-sales. In 2013, the total on-sales showed a fall of 3.4%. However, cask ale only accounts for 1 in 6 pints served in pubs.

Another interesting trend has become apparent; the decline in smooth-flow keg beer. In 2010, the ale market was split evenly between keg and cask but since then cask has shown a steady rise and smooth flow, pasteurised & filtered keg has shown a steady decline.

Although 'The Cask Report' is predominantly concerned with sales in pubs, it does mention that there has been a steep rise (12.1%) in sales of premium bottled ale, set against the retail market which is increasingly moving toward discount and value lines in many other products.

THE CASK ALE DRINKER

Pete Brown suggests that the average cask ale drinker is no longer the stereotypical middle-aged man with a flat cap and a whippet and

this stereotype is left over from the older generation. Research shows that cask ale is being drunk by a younger population (a third of all 18-24 year olds have tried it) and more women than before (75% of women who have tried cask still drink it).

THE BROADER CONTEXT

Another 170 breweries opened in the last year increasing the availability of cask ale to all outlets.

Although overall visits to the pub are in decline, there is a trend for people to spend more on each visit and they are demanding something different from the normal brands they get in the supermarket, and this is where cask ale has a unique selling point for the pub. The public are looking for more interesting beers but this is mirroring the trend across the board as more people are trying artisan gins, darker rums, buying darker and more bitter chocolate instead of milk chocolate, preferring full flavoured real coffee instead of instant. In short, people are searching for something new and more fulfilling, experimenting with strong and bold flavours as well as locally-sourced products across the whole food and drink market place.

'Craft Beer' features highly in this report but there is no firm definition of what this term means. In some circles the term craft beer has become synonymous with unfiltered, unpasteurised keg beer, however some brewers are

packaging beer in both keg and cask and as Pete Brown puts it, "It would be nonsensical to argue that, say, Thornbridge Jaipur or Magic Rock Cannonball were craft beers when packaged in keg but were not craft beers in cask." This leads on to the natural conclusion that 'craft beer' should not be a definition of the way it is packaged but more appropriately used to describe challenging beers with a bigger, fuller flavour.

The difference between the price of craft cask and craft keg is said to be too great and the report suggests that cask beer should be classed as a premium product and could probably be sold for a little more whereas craft keg is overpriced and should be sold for a bit less.

PERFECT PROMOTION OF CASK ALE

The Cask Report advocates 'Try Before You Buy' as one of the best methods to increase sales of cask beer and to increase the number of people who try cask beer. The main barrier to TBYB is that members of the public are sometimes worried that the bar staff will refuse to give samples.

There is no better way to conclude this brief look at the cask report than this quote directly from it:

"There's a beer revolution going on in Britain – and cask ale is right at its heart. Sales of cask beer, the number of people who drink it, breweries who make it, and festivals that celebrate it, are all increasing as good quality, flavoursome beer continues to gather mainstream interest and popularity. People may be going to the pub less often, but when they do go, in increasing numbers, they're looking for something special, something different from discounted supermarket lager brands. And that's why more of them are drinking cask ale. There are more brands, in a wider variety of styles and flavours, than there has ever been before."

A SOUTH LONDON CRAWL

South London has often been considered a bit of a beer desert. Fortunately, things are changing rapidly, with a host of excellent new venues opening in recent months and years.

This crawl (which can only be done on the 1st and 4th Saturdays of each month) showcases some of south London's best new bars, starting in Gipsy Hill. If you're coming from the Chelmsford area take the Jubilee Line from Stratford to London Bridge, where you can catch a direct train to Gipsy Hill in about 25 minutes.

The first two stops are new breweries which both opened their brewery taps earlier this year. They are located on the same industrial estate just under 10 minutes' walk from Gipsy Hill station. First, **Gipsy Hill Brewing Co**, Hamilton Road Industrial Estate, London SE27 9SF. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.178

Specialising in beers below 4% ABV, this innovative brewery is now open two Saturdays a month (opening times are subject to change so check before you travel, but they are currently opening on the 1st and 4th Saturdays from 12 noon to 6pm). Their first few beers have been quite impressive, packing big flavours in despite those low ABVs.

Across the yard you will find **London Beer Factory**, whose brewery tap is currently open every Saturday from 12 noon to 6pm. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.176



London Beer Factory



London Beer Dispensary

This brewery's initial beers have been solid, with production being mainly in cask-conditioned format, though keg and bottled beers are starting to appear. The spacious and airy tasting room gives excellent views of the brewing kit – an impressive setup indeed. Returning to Gipsy Hill station you'll find the next stop right opposite the station: **Beer Rebellion Gipsy Hill**, 126 Gipsy Hill, London SE19 1QL. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.101

This is the first of three venues on this crawl run by south London's excellent **Late Knights Brewery**. All their bars are very good and well worth a visit, and with good transport links it's easy to visit them all in one day.

After a period as a temporary popup, Beer Rebellion has recently moved into permanent new premises next door, and here they offer an ever changing range of 12 draft and about 40 bottled beers. The selection in all the Late Knights bars is usually excellent, featuring many of the best new breweries from London and around the UK.

From here take the train from Gipsy Hill to Honor Oak Park (there are some direct trains taking just 16 minutes, but you may have to change at Crystal Palace or Norwood Junction, adding a few minutes to the overall journey time). It's just over ten minutes' walk from the station to the next venue, **London Beer Dispensary** 389 Brockley Road, London SE4 2PH. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.175

With an outstanding red ceiling this innovative 'bar without a bar' – a feature which greatly enhances interaction between staff and customers - oozes atmosphere and offers a great range of 10 draft and about 50 bottled beers. Food at all the Late Knights venues is excellent and they do particularly good burgers here.

From here take the 171 bus from just across the road in the direction of Peckham. In less than 20 minutes you'll be deposited right opposite the 5th stop of the day, the newer **Beer Rebellion Peckham**, at 129 Queens Road, London SE15 2ND. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.177



Beer Rebellion, Peckham

This is a compact one-roomed bar offering 18 drafts and about 50 bottled beers, more good food and another excellent atmosphere. Again the beer selection here focuses on the best from London and other UK micros, with many great choices.

Almost next door to Beer Rebellion you will find Queens Road Peckham station, from which you can take the London Overground train 3 stops to Clapham High Street and visit **Craft Beer Co**, a short walk away at 128 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.113

This is a proper, cosy pub which has been given a new lease of life by Craft. Offering 30 drafts and around 50 bottles this is another impressive selection – and while many UK micros are featured, here you'll also find some of the best from outside the UK.



Brew Dog, Clapham Junction

Returning to the Overground it's just two more stops from Clapham High Street to Clapham Junction, where you'll find the final stop just under 10 minutes' walk from the station. **Brew-Dog Clapham Junction** is at 11 - 13 Battersea Rise, London SW11 1HG. www.beerguideldn.com/pubs.173

This is the newest of 4 London BrewDog bars, their first south of the river. A gentle evolution of the BrewDog brand, this modern but comfortable bar offers 24 drafts and around 60 bottled beers. Around half of the drafts are BrewDog beers, with the rest including an often outstanding range of beers from some of the world's best breweries.

Return to Clapham Junction (if you are still thirsty, why not call in at **The Falcon**, 2 St John's Hill, SW11 1RU – Link to Guide entry: <http://beerguideldn.com/pubs.93> - a rather good Nicholson's pub with 'the longest bar in the UK') where you have a choice of the Overground back to Stratford or a short train ride to Victoria where you will have a number of options for your onward journey after this excellent south London crawl.

Written by Jezza, SW London. Jezza's guide to pubs and breweries in London can be found online at www.beerguidelondon.co.uk. The site contains full details of all the bars featured in this article – including opening times, which you should check carefully before setting off. You can also follow Jezza on Twitter @beerguidelondon or @bonsvoeux1 for frequent updates.

OCTOBER CIDER TRIP



As CAMRA has designated October to be Cider and Perry month I organised a trip to Pickled Pig Cider; The Queens Head at Allen's Green (Hertfordshire Cider Pub of the Year 2014); King William IV, Braintree (our branch cider POTY 2013); The Carpenter's Arms in Maldon and The Ale House (our Cider POTY 2014). Although it was warm and sunny when we left Chelmsford on Saturday 4th October by the time we had gathered up people from Sudbury and 5 Essex branches to travel to Cambridgeshire the heavens opened.

Pickled Pig Cider, Stretham

A roaring fire in the 2-roomed stone cider house with wooden pews, lit by 4 candles (yes we had various quotes from the Two Ronnies' sketch) and 2 barrels of cider were very welcome indeed. Rolls filled with roast pork, beef and veggie options gave great sustenance while we quaffed the New Season and Old Spot ciders and chatted in the quaint surroundings.

Charles Roberts, the maker of Pickled Pig Cider took us over to his cider barn to give us a very interesting and informative talk regarding his cider, which he makes from a mixture of culinary, and dessert apples (cookers and eaters).

He uses many old English varieties from 28

an old orchard at Haddenham, a few miles from his cider barn at Stretham, near Ely in Cambridgeshire. These include Cox, Bramley, Lanes Prince Albert, Pearl, Worcester Pearmain, Ellison's Orange and Charles Ross.

He stressed the importance of washing the fruit thoroughly and using good quality fruit. The apples from impoverished trees are small with russetting (brown rough areas) on the skin and have intense flavour but low nitrogen levels, which cause a slower less violent fermentation than that which would occur from apples from trees fertilised with nutrients with high levels of nitrogen. He gave us several to try and all agreed that the ones that he uses, which are not pretty enough for supermarkets, did indeed have great flavour. It was interesting to try his red Bramley apples that are an old strain and are left to ripen properly on the tree so that they are sun-ripened to become red unlike the commercially-picked ones, which are picked too early and hence are green. Several people commented that this was the healthiest CAMRA trip they had been on with lots of apples to munch.

The natural yeasts present in the apples and on his cheesecloths take several months to ferment
Thirsty Times

the apple juice into alcohol. Each yeast brings its own character to the party and changes the flavour of the cider which also mellows with the secondary lactofermentation. We supped on the New Season Porcker's Cider, which had only been fermenting from August until October, hence it was sweeter than the Old Spot Cider from 2013, which had fermented fully to be dry with all the sugar being turned into alcohol. Having drunk as much as we liked we then all had 2 pints to take home, including the bus driver who had both to enjoy later as reward for trundling around Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and dropping people off around Essex.

Queen's Head, Allens Green

Brendan Southcott, Chairman of Herts and Essex Borders (HEB) Branch of CAMRA welcomed us to their Cider Pub of the Year at which Cliff Caswell, the landlord, has extended the range over recent years since volunteering at the cider bars at Chelmsford and Chappel beer festivals. We had a choice of several ciders and 2 perries to wash down the buffet. I particularly enjoyed the local dry Herts Secret Cider, Cromwell's Oliver's Choice and London Glider from Woodford (London-Essex border). Many of the Cider Circuiteers on the trip had not been to this excellent pub before and were suitably impressed. Hence, Maldon and Dengie (MAD) members plan to have a branch trip there. It was a wonderful opportunity to chat with members of other branches and exchange ideas and opinions regarding all sorts of cider stuff. Leaving our HEB friends behind we dropped off Chris Rouse, the East Anglian Cider Coordinator, at Bishops Stortford railway station to continue our journey to Braintree.

King William IV, Braintree

Squeezing into this little pub which was already busy we had Orchard Pig Navel Gazer, GYD Black Dragon, Autumn Magic and Two Trees Perry to sup whilst chatting to the friendly locals. Landlords Angus and Marion provided cheese and biscuits prompting debate about cider and cheese pairing. Our party was getting smaller

but merrier with new friendships developing all the time. Moving on to Maldon we met more MAD members in the "Carps" as it is known locally.

The Carpenter's Arms, Maldon

We had a very warm welcome from John Walpole, with a vegetarian buffet including his landlady, Julie's homemade special porkless pork pies and evaluation sheets for the several ciders and 3 perries on offer for market research. Having met the producers of Gregg's Pit Perry and Tutts Clump Diamond Cider I had half of each. The two elderflower ciders were very different and prompted lots of discussion as did the fact that the Thistly Cross Whisky Cask was sweet rather than medium dry.

As we had to be back to Chelmsford in time for some of our number to get trains to Sudbury and Colchester we left the MAD guys to mull over the merits or otherwise of extraneous flavours.

The Ale House, Chelmsford

A band was playing when we arrived so some of our group had a quiet drink in The Railway Tavern for some peace before returning to the Ale House when it had quietened down. Faced with 12 draught ciders/perries from around the country with a variety of styles we were spoiled for choice. It was unfortunate not to have had time to go to our runner up cider POTY, the Three Elms in Chignal St James. However it was on a Branch runabout in November and usually has 15 ciders and 5 perries so you can be like a Wurzel and sing "I am a cider drinker, I drinks it all of the day" without bussing around three counties.

However everyone agreed it was a very enjoyable trip with plenty to eat, drink and be merry without much Wurzellling at all! I plan to have a range of **Pickled Pig Ciders** on the cider bar at our **Winter Beer and Cider Festival 18th-21st February 2015** at King Edward VI Grammar School, Broomfield Rd, Chelmsford so please come along and try some for yourself.

A THIRD KIND OF BEER!



There is only one basic way to produce beer. Mashed grain is boiled with hops to produce hopped wort, then cooled and yeast added in order to ferment sugars to create alcohol.

There are two kind of yeast – ale yeast which froths and ferments on the top of the vessel at room temperature for about a week and lager yeast which drops to the bottom of the vessel and ferments at a lower temperature for longer periods.

In a nutshell that's the difference between ale and lager – it's not the colour (you can get black lagers and black IPAs these days!), it's the yeast which makes the difference and the amount of time lager is conditioned at the lower temperature. Lager in German means “store” and lager should be conditioned for at least 6 weeks.

On a recent visit to Belgium we encountered another way to produce beer! Lambic beers are produced in the valley of the River Senne to the south and west of Brussels. Here they produce beer almost like they did in medieval times using a method of spontaneous fermentation. Here the cooled, hopped wort is left in a flat open-topped fermentation vessel in the top of the brewery with the windows left open and wild yeasts are allowed to blow in and begin the fermentation process.

I had read of this method and in my mind I

could see a picturesque brewery, surrounded by flowery fields, with open windows and horse-drawn drays...

The Cantillon Brewery is situated on the western edge of Brussels just beyond the ring road in a street with both residential and industrial buildings. There were no flowery fields!

Lambic beer is produced between October and early April (the last brew had been completed the week before our visit) and is made with at least 30% wheat and the rest malt, and old hops which are used more as a preservative as they impart little bitterness. Following the initial fermentation period the beer is then fermented in oak casks for anything up to three years!

After three or four months the action of micro-organisms in the walls of the casks brings a lactic flavour to the beer - this is a classic component of oak-ageing. After three years and occasionally longer the wild yeasts will have contributed a sharp citric tang and perhaps a musky character, the result of the ageing process.

There are several sub-styles of lambic beer. Traditional unsweetened variants are usually labelled as “oude” (old), while more modern,



The vigorous phase of fermentation, seen here, lasts little more than two weeks before tailing off as the natural sugars are fermented out.



An impressive array of handpumps in the Moeder Lambic Bar serving a variety of lambic and gueuze beers from the cask.

sweetened, versions are often identified with the term “nouveau” (new). In its raw form unblended old lambic is found only in a few cafes in and around Brussels. Totally flat, with musty, cheesy and leathery notes, old lambics are more often used as the essential character-bringing component in an even more complex version of lambic; gueuze.

Gueuze is made by blending old and young lambics. After sampling the beer from each cask a highly skilled blender determines which are ready to be mixed and in what proportions. As a rough rule the best results come from blending 3-year-old lambic with some 1-year-old. Once the contents of the casks have been combined, the gueuze blender will add a tiny amount of sugar in order to trigger refermentation. Finally the beer is bottled, usually by hand.

Pouring the colour of onion skin, with no head, a traditional oude gueuze is earthy and slightly savoury, something like a cross between a toasty, nutty chardonnay and a bone-dry cider.

Sampled for the first time lambic beer can be a real shock to the senses. In his Good Beer Guide to Belgium, beer writer Tim Webb wrote, “These are not easy beers for timid palates but try them whenever you can.”

Adding locally-grown soft fruit to casks of lambic initiates a further fermentation and

contributes yet more complexity to the finished beers. Framboise (raspberry) and kriek (cherry) lambics are the most traditional. We were warned on our brewery trip to ignore the spiders and their webs as they are there to protect the deliveries of summer fruit from flies!

We were lucky in that just around the corner from our hotel was the Moeder Lambic Bar with an extensive range of Belgian beers in both bottle and on draught – some on handpump!

The range of lambics available locally is limited. Sweetened examples from BelleVue, Mort Subite and Timmerman's are the most widely sold and least costly, but more traditional examples from Boon, and occasionally 3 Fonteinen and Cantillon can sometimes be found in specialist shops and bars and are well worth the money.

Go on just try one, and then another!
John Ingham

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CHELMSFORD PUB WALK



Tendinging Camra and the author's sister from Ipswich branch, outside The Woolpack, Chelmsford. Photo by Jane Wharnsby

Saturday 16th August saw 19 Tendinging Camra members, and my sister from Ipswich Camra Branch, set off for a walking tour of Chelmsford Pubs.

The meeting point was the Railway Tavern, a Gray's pub opposite the railway station. Gray and Sons were Chelmsford brewers until 1974, when brewing ceased. They kept their tied houses however, and have around 40 pubs in Essex. The Railway Tavern is a great pub with several changing beers from local breweries, such as Wibblers.

A ten minute walk through Central Park to Lower Anchor Street took us to Crouch Vale's pub, the Queen's Head. This is a former Chelmsford Pub of the Year, and an excellent watering hole, with up to eight real ales available: four guests and four from Crouch Vale, including the excellent Yakima Gold.

It was a short walk down the same street to our next pub: the current Chelmsford Pub of the Year, and another Gray's pub, the Orange Tree. This pub is run by a friendly landlord, "Silent Mike", who used to run the Queen's Head when it was Chelmsford POTY. Here he keeps up to eight changing real ales, including those from the new Chelmsford Brewery - Round Tower.

Walking down Moulsham Street, we detoured to Robinson's chip shop for lunch before our next stop at the Woolpack, another former Chelmsford POTY. This used to be a Ridley's pub until they were taken over by Greene King. Well, if all Greene King pubs were like this, then we would be in heaven. With around eight different ales available, most from the Greene King range, this was a surprise for many.

After a great day's drinking, some of the party returned to the Railway Tavern and thence home. A few of us went on to the Boutique Bar & Café in Tindal Sreet. This pub recently sponsored the Chelmsford Summer Beer Festival. Quite a variety of "craft" beers were on offer, along with two real ales, from Adnams and Tring.

Everyone seemed to really enjoy the day, and I enjoyed organising it. We visited three pubs that had been Chelmsford POTY, and the highlight for many was the excellent Queen's Head. The Crouch Vale beers were all in excellent condition and crystal clear, a credit to all concerned.

I have begun planning the next Chelmsford tour, and look forward to a fun packed day, with some great friends.

Peter Butler, Tendinging Branch

BRANCH PRESENTATION TO DEREK BEAUMONT



Following our Branch's AGM in November, there was a special presentation by Doug Irons (Chairman) to one of our long-standing members, Derek Beaumont, in recognition of all the hard work, time and dedication that he has given to the Chelmsford & mid-Essex Branch of CAMRA over many years. He has held several branch roles, such as Membership secretary, Treasurer, Vice Chairman and Beer Festival Organiser, as well as participating in the Essex Liaison and Regional meetings. Derek has contributed immensely to the running of the Branch and by his own admission, he won't give up drinking real ale but the time has come to give up being quite so active (although he promises to carry on distributing Thirsty Times magazine!).

REAL ALE & CIDER TRAILS 2015



To celebrate 40 years of Chelmsford and mid Essex CAMRA in 2015 we will be organising Real Ale and Cider Trails.

Sat 17 January – Sat 13 June 2015

Simply collect stickers when you visit our 39 recommended pubs and the Black Bull, Margaretting

Look out for posters in participating pubs, where you can also pick up our recommended pubs booklet "Where to find the BEST REAL ALE in Chelmsford and mid-Essex" and "Thirsty Times"

Winter 18 to 21 Feb
Summer 7 to 11 July

39 pubs from the book and the Black Bull, Margaretting, where the first meeting of the CME CAMRA branch took place

Chelmsford City Centre	14 pubs
Out-and-About	14 pubs
Rural	12 pubs

Collect a numbered pub sticker when you buy a half pint of real ale or cider

10, 20, 30, 40 stickers will give you entry into the prize draws

Prize winners will be contacted

You can collect your prize at our Summer Beer & Cider Festival from 7-11 July 2015

Pick up your entry form from a participating pub or download it: www.chelmsfordcamra.org.uk

Completed entry forms must be received by midnight 13 June 2015

Draw prizes are yet to be confirmed (but may be beer or cider related!)

For rural pubs the branch may run organised transport (similar to our Real Ale Runarounds)

Terms and Conditions apply

For more information go to: www.chelmsfordcamra.org.uk



e. & o. e. JLM 7 November 2014

Thirsty Times

BRANCH CONTACTS

Chairman Doug Irons
chair@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk

Secretary Stuart Forbes
secretary@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk

Treasurer Paul Murrell
treasurer@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk,
01245 290409 / 07762 514018

Publicity
publicity@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk,

Social Secretary
socialsecretary@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk

Membership Secretary Ian Holbrook
membership@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk

Cider Rep. Claire Irons
cider@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk,

Essex Brewery News
Chris 'Podge' Pollard
podgehome@blueyonder.co.uk,
01245 354677

Chelmsford & mid-Essex Pub News,
Bryan Grimshaw,
pubnews@chelmsfordcamra.org.uk

Essex County Council Trading Standards
08454 040506

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Derek Beaumont, 01245 264128,
beauat62@tesco.net.
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