

ale



Campaign
for
Real Ale

Cambridge & District Branch Newsletter Issue 406 December 2023

Skittles at the Kingston Arms

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Pub News

Welcome to Cambridge and District CAMRA's ALE magazine. Wishing a happy Christmas to everyone and hoping that we all enjoy at least some of the coming yuletide celebration in the pub!

I am writing this before the Chancellor publishes his Autumn statement. Rumours are rife that it will include personal tax cuts. Will the Government also show a little seasonal goodwill to our hardworking licensees? Again, we hope so. There was a handy, "Lobby your MP" template available on the members pages of the CAMRA website. Using it, we wrote to our local MP's asking their views.

Cambridge Labour MP, Daniel Ziechner, was the first to reply. He told us that he supported our campaign and that he is very concerned to learn that over 6000 British pubs have shut since 2010. He also quoted surveys carried out last year by (amongst others) UK Hospitality, which reported that "... more than a third of hospitality businesses said that they were at risk of failure in the following months." He welcomed the extension of the 75% business rate relief for hospitality which will continue to next year, and has promised to monitor this issue, hoping that the Government considers the difficulties small businesses continue to have. In the longer term, he would like to see the scrapping of the current rates system in England and Wales and see it replaced with a fully costed and funded system, fit for the 21st century.

East Cambridgeshire Conservative MP Lucy Frazer wrote to say that the Government's "Brexite Pubs Guarantee" confirms that the alcohol duty we pay for a drink on tap at the local pub will be up to 11p less per pint than we would pay in a supermarket. She also pointed to the Government's "draught relief" which provides a significant (but unfortunately not stated) duty discount on alcohol sold in containers of 20 litres or more in the on trade.

Lucy also mentioned the carry-over of the

Branch Diary

Don't forget that all Branch members are very welcome to attend the monthly business meetings, as well as our socials.

Thu 7 Dec 19:30: Thursday Throng Social - Press Room, Free Press, Prospect Row.

Tue 12 Dec 20:00: Open Branch Meeting - Queen Edith, Wulfstan Way.

Sat 16 Dec. Strolling Social around Peterborough Pubs.

Tue 9 Jan 20:00: Open Branch Meeting. Venue to be confirmed.

Sat 27 Jan. Minibus Tour of Rural Pubs.

Fri 2 & Sat 3 Feb. Ely Winter Beer Festival, the Maltings, Ely.

Sat 10 Feb. Strolling Social in Cambridge.

Tue 13 Feb 20:00: Open Branch Meeting. Venue to be confirmed.

See branch website cambridge-camra.org.uk for more details.

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Pub News continued

75% business rate discount, but added that there is a baseline discount given on energy bills for “eligible businesses” which extends to March 2024.

Two different points of view – both filled with facts. The bottom line is, pubs are still closing, and tenants are difficult to find.

It has been a relatively quiet couple of months for the ALE Pub News desk. But here are a few snippets:



Fond farewell to former landlady Dore McCann who has retired after serving 30 years as licensee of the Barley Mow, Histon. The pub will undergo a major refurbishment and will reopen as part of Greene King's “Hive Pubs” franchise.



Admiral Taverns has taken on the Navigator, Little Shelford, having bought it from Hawthorn Leisure “about a year ago”. The company is seeking a new licensee.

Welcome to John and Lana the new licensees of the Red Lion, Swaffham Prior. The Red Lion is the only Batemans owned pub in our district and is certainly worth a visit.

We have been told that the Ickleton Lion in Ickleton has reopened. New management too at the Lion and Lamb, Milton (the second this year) and in the Hopbine, Cottenham. Apologies, we haven't managed to get out to these pubs yet – we will soon!

Staying in Cottenham, we hear that the Waggon and Horses is due to get a major refurb.

Planning permission has been sought to

build nine homes on the car park of the Ship, North Arbury. If it goes through it will leave the pub with six parking spaces.

Greene King are seeking new tenants for the Duchess of Cambridge (formerly Hudson's Ale House), Trumpington and the Clarendon Arms. Looking through the brewery and pubco websites we have noticed that quite a few pubs are shown to be “under offer”. These include Wells and co's Admiral Vernon in Over and the Rose, Stapleford, and Everard's Tram Depot in Cambridge. On the plus side the Duke of Wellington in Willingham is no longer listed at all so we hope to see it reopen soon.



Cambscuisine has opened a new bar called the Astronomer in the Eddington district of Cambridge. It is based in the

Hyatt Centric Hotel. The cask beer offered is a new one from Milton Brewery – called rather suitably - Orion.

Many a tear will be shed when Rachel and Pete, the multi award winning owners of the Chestnut Tree, West Wrattling, leave for pastures new.

Their achievement in taking over what was a dying pub and transforming it into a thriving community hub cannot be overstated. We will miss them dearly and wish them well.

Editors note:

The Autumn statement was announced on 22nd November and as both MP's predicted, the business rates discount has been extended. This was noted in a press release by CAMRA Chair Nik Antona;

“Extending the 75% discount on business rates bills for pubs in England for another year beyond next April is very much welcome – and much needed for pubs facing rising prices and the impact of the cost-of-

living crisis.”

A freeze on alcohol duty was also announced. The CAMRA press release noted:

“Freezing all alcohol duty until August 2024 is certainly to be welcomed. However, this is a missed opportunity to give targeted help to protect the nation’s pubs, social clubs and taprooms by cutting tax on draught beer and cider served in pubs instead of an across-the-board freeze in all alcohol duty.”

“Reducing the tax burden specifically on pints in pubs must be extended in the future to keep pub-going affordable and to help keep pubs open and at the heart of both community life and local economies by giving them a fighting chance of competing against cheap supermarket alcohol.”

CAMRA’s campaigning has borne fruit. We hope that the next government, whichever party is in place, continues to listen.



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Midlands Meanderings: Shrewsbury (part 2)

Finally, just before the summer ends, I looked away from the Black Country for a while to continue my exploration of the pubs of Shrewsbury. For newer readers, this was inspired by an item I found in the magazine of the Birmingham branch of Camra last September. Part 1 appeared in ALE 400 (available as a PDF on the branch website) and covered predominantly the northern suburbs. For Part 2, we head eastwards and then sweep round to the south.

Emerging from the station, turn right and head out along Castle Foregate/St Michael's Street; just beyond the fire station you arrive at the **Dolphin**.



Dating from 1828, and rescued from potentially permanent closure by local brewery Joule's about ten years ago, this is a proper old ale house. The description on WhatPub sums it up nicely, particularly this:

"They have taken a basic three-roomed layout, and with the use of reclaimed material, old photos, clever artwork and the retention of original features, have reproduced an updated but unashamedly old-fashioned community local."

Just my sort of pub! And a very friendly welcome from the landlord, too: I felt at home almost immediately.

I can't remember coming across Joule's Slumbering Monk since enjoying a pint or two of it in the Angel, Lichfield, several years ago, so I was excited to see it here. Unfortunately this one didn't live up to expectations, it tasted a bit off. The landlord assured me it was fresh on, but commented that Joule's had been playing with recipes recently, so that might account for it – though why anyone would deliberately make a beer that tasted 'on the turn' is beyond me.

Anyway, he was happy to swap it for a pint of the Pale Ale, and that was very nice indeed. So nice, in fact, that I just had to have another one, didn't I? I could quite happily have stayed there all afternoon...

It's frustrating when the first pub of the crawl is so lovely (something I find happens a lot), but, mindful of the number of pubs I had on today's itinerary, I headed off to the next one.

A quick meander down the side streets to a footbridge across the Severn and past a nature reserve eventually brings you to the **Abbey**.



This is an imposing place, a former gentry town house, later a hotel, with sweeping driveway, extensive grounds and, apparently, it still has its old stabling at the back. The large interior is mostly open-plan, broken up enough to prevent it feeling like a huge barn, with a smaller separate room at the front. It was in here that I secreted

myself to enjoy (if that's the word) a passable Fixed Wheel Blackheath Stout. Well, at least I'd found one Black Country beer out in the wilds of Shropshire.

I can't say this is exactly my kind of pub. Very much food-led, and for a large group or special family occasion I can think of worse places to go, but I prefer something a bit cosier. It wasn't really worth the detour.

From here it was a bit of a walk down to Abbey Foregate and then along out of town to where it splits into London Road and Wenlock Road. Nestled in the fork between these two roads is the sprawling **White Horse**.



My second Joule's pub of the day, this one rescued from Greene King and extensively refurbished. As with the Dolphin, they've done a fine job. The interior is lovely: lots of dark wood panelling, and as well as the usual horse brasses and the like the walls bear an eclectic collection of old prints, many of them on botanical subjects.



At the far end a function/dining room is separated from the main pub by the salvaged late-Victorian frontage of the Duke of Albermarle, Mayfair, which closed in 2006. It's rather magnificent:

I tried the Slumbering Monk first, just to see whether the one I'd had in the Dolphin was a rogue, but it was the same here. The Pale Ale was better, but not a patch on the one in the Dolphin. So the beer may not have been special, but it was a nice environment to sit and sup in – although as time was getting on perhaps I should have supped a bit quicker.

From roadside inn to backstreet local – so backstreet, in fact, that I took at least one wrong turning trying to find it! But the **Prince of Wales** was definitely worth the searching-out.



This is a medium-sized two-room pub, with a large garden and even its very own bowling green! (For football fans, apparently some of the seating from Shrewsbury Town's old Gay Meadow ground has found its way here to augment a large collection of Shrewsbury Town memorabilia.)

But I didn't venture that far, I stopped at the bar and surveyed the handpumps. Hobson's Mild? That'll do very nicely! The pork scratchings were also Hobsons-branded, and they were exceptionally good as well.

Then I found a nice little corner to sit in not far from a wall pretty much covered in CAMRA Award Certificates.

Midlands Meanderings: Shrewsbury (part 2)

I happened to be wearing one of my Flying Pig Stage T-shirts and the lady behind the bar remarked on Strawberry Fair and how she'd lived in Cambridge for 17 years until recently – small world! So we had a nice chat and I brought her up to date on all this pub in her former home.

Two pints and then, before I got too cosily settled, off northwards across the river and to the **Cross Foxes**, a largely wet-led traditional boozer, which has the funkiest sign of this trip.



“The best pub in Shrewsbury,” a man sat at the bar assured me. Hmm, maybe I'm not seeing it at its best but I can think of at least four I probably like better. Beer choice was Bass,

and not the best pint of that I've ever had. However, the pub does get a bonus point on account of its old electronic till, a real relic of the late 20th



Credit: Michael Croxford

century – none of that new-fangled computerised touchscreen nonsense here. Perfectly in keeping with the décor, too, come to think of it. Apparently they keep having to get it repaired, but they have no intention of ditching it.

By now it was getting decidedly dark, and town centre pubs on a Saturday night aren't exactly my idea of somewhere for a nice quiet drink so I decided to call it a day. I suppose this means I'll have to go back again next year to explore the town centre properly (preferably not on a Saturday), give the Cross Foxes a better chance to display its qualities – as well as revisit the Dolphin and the Prince of Wales.

And that, dear readers, is likely to be the last Midlands Meanderings till I start venturing into new territories again in the summer.

Steve Linley

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Lost pubs of Cambridge(shire)

Last issue's mystery lost pub was, of course, the Snowcat/Grove, in Arbury.



The pub was built in 1959 and was considered by those who know about such things as one of the best designed pubs of the period. Yes, really! It took its name from the modified caterpillar tractors that had been used on Sir Vivien Fuchs' Trans-Antarctic Expedition of the previous year. Photos of this expedition, including the eponymous vehicles, decorated the walls inside.

One thing that almost everyone knows about this pub, even if they'd never been there, was the distinctive beer dispense arrangement, in which the "cellar" was upstairs and the beer travelled down to the pumps through glass tubes. Our branch chairman, Will Smith, used to help out his step-father on his milk round and remembers being fascinated by the sight and sound of this phenomenon – though as he was only about 12 his drinking was restricted to Vimto.

The pub's heyday was during the 1970s, when it provided somewhere with a bit of atmosphere for local residents to get together. It's hard to believe now, but it even made half a dozen appearances in the *Good Beer Guide* at that time!

It remained largely unchanged, the "last unspoilt pub in Cambridge", until 1996 when the ever-wise Greene King decided to sweep all away in one of their 'bull in a china shop' refurbishment spasms and open it up

into a single bar. All the better to accommodate a brace of pool tables I suppose. There were four handpumps, but only Greene King IPA on offer, according to *ALE* at the time.

For reason best known to that esteemed brewery, five years later it was renamed the Grove. Maybe it meant they could just get away with an uninspiring sign rather than try to create than anything interesting.

The number of handpumps was reduced to two, and the real ale offering remained at just GK IPA.

These don't seem to have lasted long because in 2010 the return of a single handpump was heralded in *ALE* 345, offering a changing guest from the rather limited GK portfolio. Tolly Phoenix, anyone?

Any joy surrounding that was short-lived as the following year the pub, which had oddly struggled since having its old character ripped out of it, was being marketed by Savills as a "former public house". It was bought and given a new lease of life by the local Sikh community, reopening as the Cambridge Gurdwara early in 2013.

Well, that was short and not all that sweet. Here's a nice easy one, let's make the next instalment a bumper one!



Please send any reminiscences, gossip or old photos to me at pub-history@cambridge-camra.org.uk.

Steve Linley

Knock me over with a Cheese!

Cambridge and District Skittles League

I recently met with Dave Plumb and James Wells, veterans of the Cambridge and District Skittles League.

Dave who has played the game for 44 Years – first played in the Great Northern, which once stood in Station Road. James was initiated 20 years ago when he joined a team in the Carlton Arms, Carlton Way, a team he still plays for.

The league itself predates both players by some way – the tiny shields identifying winning teams on the prestigious trophies date back to the 1930s.



Picture by permission Linda and John Gooch

I met them at the Kingston Arms, where we had been watching the local team play a friendly game with a team from the Carlton Arms. It is hoped that the Kingston will be joining the league proper next season bringing the league up to eight teams.

This is a far cry from the 1970s when a thriving league boasted two divisions – the first division being nine pubs, and the second division having eight pubs.

Why the modern day lack of interest?

David and James have several theories.

A lot of pubs have closed. A brief look at the 1970s league table shows the number of pubs - nine in total - that are no longer with us.

CAMBRIDGE & DISTRICT SKITTLES LEAGUE.									
Final Tables:--									
Division A.									
	P.	W.	D.	L.	F.	A.	Pt.		
Chequers	16	7	6	4	35	29	19		
Norfolk	16	6	6	4	35	29	18		
Haymakers	16	6	6	4	35	29	18		
Earl of Derby	16	6	5	5	33	31	17		
George and D.	16	4	8	4	33	31	16		
Alexandra Arms	16	6	4	6	32	32	16		
Eagle	16	4	7	5	30	34	15		
Maypole	16	4	5	7	27	37	13		
Old Abbey	16	3	6	7	28	36	12		
Division B.									
Granville	14	6	6	2	32	24	18		
Grasshopper	14	7	3	4	33	23	17		
Geldart	14	6	5	3	31	25	17		
Carpenter's A.	14	5	6	3	32	24	16		
Baker's Arms	14	4	4	6	24	32	12		
Northerners	14	3	6	5	24	32	12		
Yorkshire Grey	14	4	4	6	24	32	12		
Lo-1 Nelson	14	2	4	8	22	34	8		

These include Mill Road' Grasshopper, and Dave's former home venue, the Great Northern. He now plays for the Rathmore B team.

The passing decades have seen pubs move away from pub games to concentrate on providing food and dining areas. Bums on seats took precedence and space for dining became a premium. A skittle oche demands a throw of 9ft from oche to table, with the table itself being 3ft x4ft in dimensions. Too much space for a busy food orientated pub.

The third theory is that people have stopped relying on pubs for socialising and entertainment. Many young people have turned to Netflix or online forums and gaming to do both. Consequently, pub games have become unfashionable.

The lowest score wins!



But is that about to change? We are, after all, social animals. The COVID lockdown deprived us of face-to-face contact. Perhaps in its aftermath people will return to the social environment and friendly competition to be found in the pub and pub games. Mark Donachy, licensee of The Kingston Arms certainly thinks so. Keen that his pub becomes a member of the league and never short for words he offered us the following quote:

“I am keen to encourage the sociability of pub games, crib and skittles are perfect elements in creating an old-fashioned local community pub in the city. With teenagers playing alongside seasoned campaigners, all boxes are ticked – trade levels are the consequent beneficiary of creating the right environment.”

Food production is an expensive business. Adding up energy, increasing staffing costs, and ironically, the loss of space for drinking clientele, it is entirely possible that other

licensees will follow his lead. The rise in number of fast-food vans to be found outside pubs suggests this may well happen.

Skittles tables are also portable. Two people can set up the play area without too much effort.

But, back to the league.

The Cambridge and District Skittles League runs in two sections. The first from October to December, with return games being played between February and May. Non-league competitions, singles doubles, 5 a-side etc are played in January, and the Finals Night gathering is in May. Games are played on Tuesday evenings, usually starting at 8.30pm.

As you would expect with a game that has its origins lost in the mist of time the rules are a little confusing – though not according to James and Dave – and some of the terminology a little weird. The skittles are, of course, called Pins, and the flat piece of hardwood thrown by the contestant in an effort to knock as many as possible over is



Cambridge and District Skittles League

universally known as the Cheese. The scoring is also a little back to front too. The team with the lowest score wins!

This is because, with each player having up to four throws, it is the number of throws taken to knock down all nine pins that is counted. Therefore, the best score a player can get is one – whilst a score of five (there are still pins standing after four throws) shows that he or she is not a great shot – or has just been unlucky.

The action of knocking all pins down with one throw is known as “a floorer”. Having achieved this the lucky player does not have to throw any more cheeses in that set.

To get “a floorer” is quite an achievement. James still talks about the time he scored 2 consecutive floorers in the men’s singles final – something that hadn’t been achieved in the previous 40 years.

There are normally 6 players per team, and the winning (lowest) score is decided by adding up the number of throws taken by all of them.

But rules aside, Dave and James are keen to emphasise the social aspect of the games.

“It is a contest,” James told me, “And we all want to win. But it is a friendly atmosphere, and we try to encourage everyone to improve their skill levels and do well. It is very much a family game. We have noticed that we have younger people wanting to play. We would like to invite people of all ages to join us.”

If you are interested in joining a team, or would just like to know more, please contact John Gooch, the Cambridge and District Skittles League secretary by emailing cdslsecretary@hotmail.co.uk

Will Smith

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December 2023

The CAMRA Good Beer Guide

Is your local good enough to get in?



Every year CAMRA publishes the *Good Beer Guide*, the completely independent guide to the pubs across the United Kingdom that serve the best real ale. Listings are based entirely on evaluations by CAMRA members. Alongside the pub section there is a comprehensive guide to every brewery in the UK along with tasting notes for their beers.

The pubs that make it into the guide are selected from scratch each year. Each CAMRA branch has a certain allocation of pubs they can include in the guide, and is responsible for selecting those pubs. In the case of Cambridge and District branch, we have 26 spaces available. We select the pubs in two stages: compiling a shortlist of nominations, and then voting.

Using information gathered via the CAMRA Whatpub website, we shortlist any pubs that our members have registered consistently good beer scores. We also offer branch members the chance to nominate the pubs in the Cambridge and District that they think should be considered for inclusion. A weighting system is applied. Pubs need multiple nominations to be shortlisted for the final round of voting, and pubs within the city need more nominations than rural pubs. The nomination threshold is set each year to give a reasonable number of pubs to vote for. The nomination period runs from

September until the middle of December each year.

Once the shortlist is complete, we ask our members to mark the shortlisted pubs that they've visited in the last six months. Marking can be done online, in person at one of our monthly meetings or in person at an event shortly before the closing date. The marking period runs from December to the weekend before the February branch meeting. Branch meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month.

With marking complete, the 26 eligible pubs with the highest average mark go forward as our submission to the Guide. We ensure that at least 40% of our pubs come from outside the city, to make sure the guide is useful to all visitors to the area. To date, this has happened naturally with no need for further adjustments.

It is easy to take part in the online nomination and marking exercise. Enter the CAMRA Cambridge and District branch website and click on the Good Beer Guide link. Alternatively go to gbg.cambridge-camra.org.uk

You will be asked to fill in your CAMRA membership number and membership password.

Once confirmed, you will be taken to a list of pubs. Before the middle of December, the list will name every pub in branch district. Please tick the boxes of the pubs you feel should be in the guide. After December you will find the shortlisted pubs for which we will ask you to offer marks based on the quality of the beer you have tried in that pub. For the 2025 Guide the nomination deadline is 9th December and the marking deadline 10th February.

Simple!

Paws for thought

Goodness isn't Norfolk cold -especially in October! My humans decided it would be a great idea to celebrate my male human's 65th birthday with a cottage stay on the North Norfolk Coast. I thought it was a good idea too. I was looking forward to a run on the beach. As this picture shows – there wasn't much running to be done. The beach at Walcott looked like it was going to be blown away.



Naturally, my male human insisted that the best way to escape the terrible weather was to visit as many pubs as we possibly could. He asked me to pass on his praise for the White Horse in Overstrand, and the Red Lion in Cromer.

My female human likes pubs, but she also likes to do other things, so she suggested we take a ride on the Sheringham to Holt steam train. They call it the Poppy Line, but I didn't see any poppies, and if I am honest, I didn't like the trains too much – noisy, smelly, and full of steam, a bit like my male human after a session in the Kingston Arms.



My male human likes trains though, so much so that he insisted that we hang around Holt station in the drizzle so he could get this photo of The Black Prince steam train.

Soaked through, my female human and me were very pleased when we hopped on the bus into Holt.

There we found some wonderful shops, but more importantly a wonderful pub, called the Feathers which is a sister pub to our own Rupert Brook in Grantchester, Three Blackbirds in Woodditton and the Carpenters Arms in Great Wilbraham

Needless to say, as it was his birthday, my male human wanted stay for a pint or two – for him not me – I am strictly a water pup.



We all had a dog nap on the journey home.

This November I joined another CAMRA minibus campaign tour of some of our Cambridgeshire village pubs.

Here I am with fellow pub lovers, Andi, Pete and Ali. We are enjoying a drink in the Red Lion in Swaffham Prior. The second picture is of my uncle Mervyn at the bar. He is being served by landlord John. He and landlady Lana have only been in the pub for 4 weeks. Everyone said his beer was good! Especially the Batemans XB. I saw my male human sneak an extra half before we had to move to the next pub.

The wonderings of a pub going dog



Andi, Pete and Ali in the Red Lion, Swaffham Prior



Uncle Mervyn at the bar

November is the time of the year when pubs that have them light their open fires. I love it. There's nothing like an open fire for drying your fur.



This picture is of my friend Andi and me. The fire is in the Black Bull in Balsham. It is a very big fireplace. I could have stretched out and stayed for a very long time, but the tour had to move on – this time a short walk to the Bell in Balsham.



Fortunately the Bell also has a lovely open fire. The arm in this picture belongs to my uncle Helge. He knows I like a good tickle under the chin.

I love these minibus trips because I get to meet the lovely licensees of all the pubs we visit I especially like it if they have a few treats to hand. This picture is of Ruth the landlady of The Dykes End in Reach. I first met her when she and husband Dan first took over the pub about a year ago. She says that business is going really well – Sunday



dinners are particularly good. Everyone knows I like my chicken – so expect to see us back there soon!



My final picture is of another relatively new landlord and an open fire. This is Danny. He and his open fire can be found in the Bull in Burrough Green. The Bull had been closed for over a year before Danny and landlady Tina took it on 7 months ago. Like

Reach, Borough Green has a magnificent village green. It is surrounded by lots of public footpaths. A dog walkers paradise.

Woof for now.

Apple and Pears

A pleasant surprise at The Bell Inn, Balsham



Guest writing for Jerry this issue, I must confess I was scrumping (probably not the right word, but it sort of fits) around for ideas. I am a casual cider drinker. I find it a refreshing alternative to bitter on warm summer days, and of course I prefer real cider to the fizzy pop to be found in most pubs. But my knowledge of both the drink and of the cider industry is limited to say the least. The December issue deadline was fast approaching when I joined The Cambridge and District CAMRA branch minibus tour of village pubs. I do know a few things about pubs, and one of my favourites is The Bell Inn in Balsham. Licensees Phil and Mary are current holders of the annual branch award for serving the best dark ales in our area. It is well, deserved. The Mighty Oak, Oscar Wilde was in excellent condition and was voted the beer of the tour.

However, for me, the find of the tour is evident in the photo of Phil beside the Cider board. Eight ciders!

Ok, some of them wouldn't be defined as real ciders if we were to stick to CAMRA guidelines. Old Rosie and Thundering Molly are well known brands.

Phil is very up front about this. The fruit ciders, Rhubarb and Mango are commercially produced, but they are very

popular in the summer. He wants to please his market, so they stay on the list.

Real Cider is bought from local cidery Duxford Scrumpy Co. *"I have a good relationship with them. I call and take whatever is available. On this occasion the choice is Disco Cox at 7% and a refreshingly dry Direct Hit, which hovers around the 5% mark."* New to the list is a rather lovely medium dry single variety Dabinett (7%) produced by Potton Press. *"He popped in to see me, so I thought we'd give it a go."*

So how long, I asked, have you been serving such a large list of ciders?

"We started with a choice of two. They became popular, and realising that cider is relatively easy to look after, we have added to the list over several years."

And do you think cider sales will outstrip sales of beer?

Phil smiles. *"We are introducing a fourth real ale in preparation for the winter months."*

Ah well..... I guess that's a no.

Cider drinkers should try a trip south east. The Bell Inn is a smashing pub. I enjoyed drinking my nicely chilled real cider whilst seated beside the open fire.





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2023 – 2024 Football Pub Guide

Several Ales ago, Cambridge CAMRA Cider Officer and dedicated supporter of Watford FC Jerry Ladell produced a pub guide for travelling Premier League football fans. Watford having been relegated to The Championship; Jerry has produced the following list of recommendations. This is part 2. These are very good pubs that are worth a visit even if you aren't a football fan – though they may be a bit crowded on match days.

13. Norwich City – Fat Cat & Canary NR1 1TR

This pub is a regular haunt, along with the Coach & Horses NR1 1BA, for the Norfolk Hornets who form part of the EA Horns. You can rely upon, at some stage during the pre-match build up, there will be a large round of Sambuca on offer. The beers and ciders though are the main attraction. On matchdays they have food trucks outside to help soak up some of the alcohol. The pub is a 15-minute stroll from Carrow Road.

14. Plymouth Argyle – The Fortesque PL4 6JQ

Untested: Recommended by the Facebook group 'Real Ale Football Away Days', it's a 25-minute walk to Home Park, according to Google Maps, but apparently well worth the effort to seek out. The pub is a regular CAMRA award winning venue, renowned for its selection of real ales and ciders, as well as a friendly welcome from staff and locals. The pub has plenty of 5* reviews, the only negative comment I could find was from somebody who was given some duff info regarding the start time of a poker night!

15. Preston North End – The Plau Gin and Beer House PR21 2EE

This was a great find last season, really good beers a couple of interesting ciders and if gin is your thing, then you'll be in

heaven. It's a strange set up though, with small garden terraces leading to different independent small businesses, all of which seem to be somehow connected to each other. The food was extremely good too. Be aware though it is a 30-minute walk to the ground, cheap car parking nearby.

16. Queens Park Rangers – The Princess Victoria W12 9DH

We've been visiting this hostelry for a few years now. Its beer range is good, and the décor of the building is very much what you'd expect, Victorian. It's a great pub with a good vibe, home and away fans are welcomed, but I would recommend no colours. You're a 15-minute walk from the away end at Loftus Road.

17. Rotherham United – Cutlers Arms S60 1BQ

This is a great 'not so little' pub. Out the back they have a terrace for drinkers who enjoy al fresco drinking. They also have a semi-permanent stage set up for live music acts that regularly perform in the evening. The beers were very decent on our last visit and it is only a brisk 10-minute walk to the stadium.

18. Sheffield Wednesday – The New Barrack Tavern S6 2GA

It's been a few years since we've played Wednesday but this is a cracking pub, 15-minutes tops from Hillsborough. The pub is part of the Nottingham based Castle Rock brewery, so you know you can be assured of a decent pint. They have a cider bar too, which is a new addition since I was last here, so happy me! If memory serves me correctly, there are no food options at this pub.

19. Southampton – Olaf's Tun Craft Ale Bar SO19 9AA

Our favourite haunt in Southampton unfortunately closed down during the Covid pandemic, which was a real shame.

The Championship - Part 2

After some lengthy research we decided to try out Olaf's Tun for our last visit to St. Mary's. The research paid dividends, the pub was superb. However, be aware, they are not licensed to allow children on the premises, so if you have the kids in tow, you will have to do your own research, sorry.

The pub is on the other side of the estuary and is quite a hike from the City centre. It's a small, one-room bar in a small parade of shops but well worth looking out. They even offer you free cake with your beer! You are about a 20-minute walk to St Mary's, so allow yourself sufficient time. Side-street parking is relatively easy to find nearby.

20. Stoke City – Congress Inn ST3 1HG

This pub is probably about 30 minutes away from the ground if you are walking, a cab though only costs about a tenner, so that is always an option. The beers last time we were here were fantastic, they had some decent cider too. The food was limited but exceptionally good, so something for everyone – and there's free car parking over the road too.

21. Sunderland – The Ship Isis SR1 3QJ

The ground looks a lot closer than it actually is. It's a good 15-minute peg to the away end, so beware. The beer and food are really good, beware though, it gets incredibly busy leading up to kick-off, so it is probably best to double-up on beers when at the bar. It was pretty amazing how quickly the food came, considering how busy they were. This is a top pub – which I think was a recent CAMRA pub of the year winner.

22. Swansea City – Beer Riff Brewing Company SA1 1UN

Untested: This has the potential for being the best sited pub in this guide. It is based in the maritime quarter of Swansea and

the rooftop taproom sits above the brewery, overlooking the marina. They have up to 15 taps serving their own beers and lagers. It's a 45-minute walk to the ground, so a cab may be the best option, as you don't want to waste valuable drinking time, do you?

23. Watford – The Mad Squirrel WD17 2EN

This is a relatively new addition to the Watford drinking scene, and what a great one it is too. It's a genuine 10-minute walk to the ground, which makes it even more attractive. There is a small pavement terrace to the front, but there's plenty of room inside. The majority of the beers are their own brand, and they are really good – they even have a Hornets Golden Ale to savour. The pizzas as well are to die for.



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