

Beer Tiz



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Issue 15
Summer 2017

FREE



CAMRA North Devon Branch

THE 4TH ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF REAL ALE, ENGLISH WINE AND CIDER

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exevalley@supanet.com

Witterings of The Wizard



It's spring and I am definitely mellowing in my old age! Not much to grumble about this time.

BUT I have noticed a reluctance to try unknown beers by some people at the various beer festivals I have been lucky enough to attend recently.

I first noticed this at my local where there was an excellent beer festival over the Easter weekend. Eight beers should have been enough to stimulate interest and, in fact, it was interesting to see so many trying Sign Of Spring. Unfortunately I think it was the bright green colour that intrigued them rather than the ale itself. Of course I felt it my duty to drink at least a pint of each of the beers over the weekend and they were all excellent. Not all were to my taste but by sampling the whole range I was able to distinguish what it was about each that I liked or disliked.

I have heard people say, "Oh I don't like dark beers", "I don't like hoppy beers", "I don't like citrusy beers", "I like malty beers", "I like strong beers" etc. etc. All valid comments but how do you know what a beer is like unless you taste it? Ask for a sample. Many pubs will offer this, especially if they support CAMRA. A beer that you thought you wouldn't like may pleasantly surprise you. A beer festival is a fine opportunity to broaden your horizons, educate your palate and continue on the great adventure that is real ale.

Please, please don't be one of those drinkers that stands at a bar displaying a wonderful range of real ales who then opts for the 'safe' option of the well known and heavily marketed: "I'll have a Doombar please"!

Morris (aka Grumbledore) Elsworth - Chairman

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Branch Calendar

JUNE

Sat 10th

CAMRA South
West region meeting
Gloucestershire branch:
contact Fiona Elsworth
fiona.ndcamra@icloud.com

Tue 13th

Branch social gathering
(7.30pm) The Railway Inn,
North Tawton, EX20 2BE

Sat 17th

South - West region
campaigning day
Wells and area:
contact Mark Partridge
aswell007@gmail.com

Fri 30th/Sun 2nd

Country Life Beer and
Wellie Wanging Festival!
The Big Sheep, Abbotsham,
EX39 5AP

JULY

Sat 1st

Bude Brewery tour:
contact Mark Partridge
aswell007@gmail.com

Sat 8th

Branch meeting
the Black Cock, Molland,
EX36 3NW

Sat 22nd/Sun 23rd

The Grove Real Ale and
Cider Festival
Kings Nympton, EX37 9ST

AUGUST

Wed 9th/Sat 12th

Great British Beer Festival
London Olympia

Sat 12th

Branch Summer Social at the
Dartmoor Folk Festival
contact Mark Partridge
aswell007@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER

Sat 9th

Branch meeting
venue to be confirmed

Fri 22nd/Sun 24th

Roborough Beer and
Cider Festival
the New Inn, Roborough,
EX19 8SY

Fri 29th Sep/Sun 1st Oct

4th annual Real Ale
English Wine and Cider Festival
RHS Rosemoor, Torrington,
EX38 8HP

OCTOBER

Sat 7th

CAMRA South
West regional meeting
North Devon hosting
Bideford Conservative Club
EX39 2QA

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Exeter Brewery Visit



For those who follow the exploits of the North Devon branch there'll be no surprise to hear of our latest outing - a springtime visit to the Exeter brewery. Conveniently located next to St David's railway station, what better way to visit than by hopping on the Tarka line train and walking the short distance to the brewery's own Tap Room where our band of 14 were warmly welcomed by owner and brewer Alan Collyer. Since taking over and renaming the former Topsham and Exminster brewery in 2008, Alan has set about building up an impressive range of real ales, no less than 6 of which were available for us to sample on the day.

Kicking off with **Lighterman** (3.5%) the brewery's celebrated golden amber session ale provided us with the perfect combination of flavoursome hops and malt to start the day. Others in our party preferred to dive straight in at the deep end, enjoying the delights of **Darkness** (5.1%), Exeter's deliciously smooth chocolate stout - with just a hint of coffee to stimulate the palate! By way of contrast, we also 'sampled' the brewery's best selling ale, **Avocet** (3.9%), an attractive looking blonde beer which rightly prides itself on being the first organically produced real ale in Devon. Unfortunately for us on the day neither **County Best** (4.6%) with its malty-sweet taste and bitter-sweet finish, nor **Ferryman** (4.2%) which is the brewery's well balanced copper coloured premium ale, were available on tap . . . but I'm pleased to report were no less enjoyable from the bottle! Last

but not least, the favourite of most of our group had to be '**fraid Not** (4.0%) with its deep golden straw colour, terrific hoppy aroma, distinct bitterness and famously dry finish (and with every pint sold securing a contribution to the Mountain Rescue Service). And yes, there was also time for Alan to take us on a full tour of the brewery, and we even managed to fit in a stunning meal of Tom's award winning pies, complete with mash, minty peas and proper gravy - highly recommended!

So a big thank you to Alan and staff for giving us a marvelous day out.

Mal Thompson



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EXMOOR GOLD • ABV 4.5%
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EXMOOR STAG • ABV 5.2%
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EXMOOR BEAST • ABV 6.6%
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Branch Campaigning Day 2017

to the far North of Devon



This time last year the branch was fortunate enough to host CAMRA's regional campaigning day for the Southwest. The theme for the day was rural transport - or more accurately the lack of it - and the challenges this presents for landlords trying to make a living in rural areas where there may be just a few buses a week, if at all. Highlighting some of the more remote pubs in the far south of the branch around Dartmoor proved to be such a great success that we decided to repeat the exercise, but this year visiting pubs in the far north of our area, in or close to Exmoor. With near perfect summer weather, a minibus and professional driver, our branch contingent of 16 were ready to set off and explore some of the pubs many of us had never managed to reach before!

Once again, the event was generously supported by local breweries, in particular Barum Brewery and Exmoor Ales, who both donated beer to be sold at reduced prices on the day, with some of the proceeds going to good causes such as the Devon Air Ambulance. Landlords too showed enormous hospitality both in their welcome and in many cases providing food to sustain the hungry horde. So where did we manage to get to on the day?

Leaving Barnstaple, our first port of call was at the small settlement of East Down where the **Pyne**



Arms sits in a quiet valley in what was once the village post office. A real hidden gem. Exmoor Ale and Exmoor Gold were both on fine form,

not to mention the excellent home-made chips and sausage rolls! Although we could have easily stayed all day, our schedule demanded we leave and head even further northward to reach the **Beggars Roost Inn** at Barbrook. The classic 18th century building looked magnificent - the perfect back drop for a group photo - and just in time to savour the full flavor of the Breakfast Ale donated by Barum brewery before the sun came up over the yardarm!



Next on our itinerary was the **Blue Ball Inn** at Countisbury. The pub's authentic stone flagged floors add to the atmosphere

of the low beamed ceilings in this 13th century coaching inn, and by the large number of cars in the car park there appeared to be no shortage of visitors willing to drive to this destination pub - hardly surprising when both food and ale are of such high quality.

As the afternoon moved on, so did we, but not before encountering the Hound Dog, Exmoor Ale's 4% deliciously dark gold bitter, fittingly on tap at the **Staghunters Inn** at Brendon! Then without time to explore the 13th century chapel function room,



we were off once more. The **Rockford Inn** at Rockford certainly did not disappoint, as some of us took the time to ponder the meaning of life while quaffing



a half or two on the banks of the East Lyn river as it flowed gently by the pub. Then last, but by no means least, we headed across the moor to perhaps the most remote pub in north Devon

- the **Poltimore Arms** on (rather than in) Yarde Down. Regrettably we didn't get to see the friendly ghost reputed to haunt the pub at night, but the locals were friendly enough, so despite its lack of mains electricity it was a fitting place to end a truly memorable campaigning day for another year at least.



So a big thank you once more to the breweries, licensees and branch members who supported this year's event, and who knows where 2018 may take us ?

Mark Partridge
Social Secretary



Congratulations to...

Pub of the Year 2017



We are delighted to announce that for the third time in the last four years the **Red Lion** at Exbourne near Okehampton has been awarded the coveted North Devon CAMRA branch Pub of the Year for 2017.

Nick, Kathy and team have been running the pub for over eight years now, providing a great choice of real ales and ciders (other beverages are available!), maintaining a wonderful atmosphere and serving a sumptuous choice of home-cooked food. A traditional 16th century real-ale pub, set in the beautiful countryside of mid Devon, the Red Lion is one of only three pubs in the branch not to serve draught lager - so making them a firm favourite with traditional drinkers who long for the days of old before pubs became bars! With over 300 pubs in the branch area this is surely a tremendous achievement.

Mention also should go to the two other finalists in what was a very close run competition - the **Grove** at Kings Nympton and the **Champ** at Appledore. Well done all - we certainly have some great pubs up here in the north of the county!

SIBA Awards

Congratulations to **Country Life** brewery for picking up not one but two Gold medals at this year's prestigious SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers) south-west regional awards. **Reef Break** (4.0%) was judged best in the Standard Mild and Brown ale category, while **Old Appledore** (3.7%) also struck gold in the Standard Bitter and Pale ale category (in addition to receiving a Bronze in the overall championship!).

A mention too must go to **Forge** brewery (until recently based at Hartland but now relocated in north Cornwall) who are also to be congratulated for their **Litehouse** (4.3%) which was awarded Gold in the Best Bitters and Pale ales category. Well done all!



The Corner House

Congratulations to . . . the **Corner House** in Barnstaple which has now been formally recognised by CAMRA as 'an historic pub interior of national significance'.

This pub has a curved art deco frontage and an interior little altered since being built in 1935. While the main bar retains its curved counter, two sided back fittings and inglenook style fireplace, both bar and snug have attractive fielded panelling. Highlight however has to be the gents toilet with their original tiled walls and Twyford Adamant urinals!



Cider Pub of the Year 2017

Hearty congratulations to both finalists in the 2017 branch Cider Pub of the Year award - alas there can be but one winner and this year it was the **Grove** at Kings Nympton, but congratulations too to the close runner-up, the **New Inn** at Roborough. Well done both.

Pint Measures



Q: When is a pint not a pint?

A: When it's American!

I'm sure we have all heard the saying "A pint of water weighs a pound and a quarter"

But have you heard "The pint's a pound, the world around"?

A UK pint weighs 1.25 pounds

A US pint weighs 1.04375 pounds

But how did this happen?

British imperial fluid measures were standardized in 1824, after American independence.

In current American usage, 8 ounces make a cup, 2 cups make a pint, two pints make a quart, 4 quarts make a gallon. A pint of water weighs a pound.

But in the British Empire, it took 20 (fluid) ounces to make an imperial pint, making the Imperial gallon 25% bigger than the American gallon.

So, despite the common understanding that everything in America is bigger than anywhere else in the world we can proudly say that our pint is bigger than an American pint!

Cheers

Fiona

Pub News

from around the Branch



Greetings to one and all. At our recent AGM held at the **King's Arms** in South Zeal we decided it was time for a little change. Bob Goddard, who has been our branch pubs officer coordinator for five years, has now taken on the new role of Membership Secretary while continuing to hold brief for public transport. This leaves me with a rather large pair of shoes to fill, but with the help of the pub officers I will endeavor to keep you all up to date on what is happening in North Devon pubs.

So who is Andy Grant I hear you ask? Well, with my wife Lynn I ran pubs for around 25 years and if you want to know more then please ask me when you see me (and yes, that's my photo at the top of the page!). This is after all about your pubs and what is happening in them.

So where did Bob leave it? One of his final tasks had been to organize the judging of the Good Beer Guide entries for 2018. All current GBG pubs together with those newly nominated by CAMRA branch members - 42 pubs in all - fighting it out for just the 27 places allocated to us in next year's Good Beer Guide. With competition stronger than ever, not all pubs will be successful. However, this does not necessarily mean their standards have dropped, but simply that the bar is just getting higher every year. We really do have some great pubs out there. So who will be in the upcoming GBG for 2018? Well I'm afraid you'll just have to wait 'til the book comes out later in the year.

But what of pubs news?

(In my write-ups where I put a number in brackets this denotes the number of times the pub has appeared in an edition of GBG)

First . . . the Doom and Gloom.

The **Clinton Arms** at Frithelstock (7) has finally shut its doors with a planning application for housing on the site. The **Prewley Moor Arms** at

Sourton Down has also closed and is on the market. The **Portobello Inn** at Bideford (13) is currently being refurbished to become an Italian restaurant.

The **Cranford Inn** at St Giles in the Wood (3) is now fully open, but dog owners beware, leave your beloved pooches at home as they are no longer welcome apparently! The **Rams Head** in Dolton is still on the market for a tidy sum, but it does come with a Michelin accredited chef, and a secret garden, which is at the back of the pub, where you would normally find a garden, so the secret is out - sorry!

And now . . . Reasons to be Cheerful (let's all go to the pub . . .!)



The **Westleigh Inn** at Westleigh (12) that closed earlier this year has now been sold, with a notice under its sign on the B3233 saying 'reopening soon'. Good news indeed.

The **Beach Bar & Diner** formally the Blue and Green at Westward Ho! Has reopened but with no real ale on draught as yet. However, the manager (Mike) has assured my scouts that he is now reconsidering his plan to sell only mass produced beer (which is already far too common in these parts!) Having been put on the right road and given contact details for a number of local real ale suppliers, we look forward to one more lost sheep returned to the fold! The **Corner House** in Barnstaple town centre (17) surely must be a strong candidate for future GBG selection if the beer quality stays as good as it has been on my previous three visits. (It has also been put on CAMRA's national inventory of historic pub interiors for its unspoilt thirties interior - see 'Congratulations' page to find out more!) The **Farmers Arms** at Woolserly is

still being rebuilt although it seems very unlikely to be open for the rumored New Years Eve party. The **Grove Inn** at Kings Nympton (10) will be holding their annual Beer Festival on the 22nd and 23rd July. The **Maltscoop** at Merton (4) will have probably changed hands by the time you read this and reports from the natives say the new couple will fit in nicely. The **New Inn** at Roborough (6) are having their annual Beer & Cider Festival 22nd - 24th Sept. The **Seven Stars** at South Tawton (8) has reopened and new licensees Nick and Debbie are stocking three guest ales. We wish them both all the best for the future. The **Half Moon Inn** at Sheepwash (16) is now under new ownership, but will the new owners still favour the Cornish crafts over



our Devon delights? Only time will tell. And finally in reasons to be cheerful, rebuilding work is well and truly underway at the **Bell Inn** at Parkham (29)

after their devastating fire, so will no doubt rise from the ashes to become once again one of our great North Devon pubs.

Beer Watch (*pubs not currently in the GBG but heading in the right direction . . . and could be knocking on the door very soon!*)

Reports of very good beer quality in all of the following and so deserve a visit: **Marshall's** in Barnstaple (9) operate at least 3 pumps, which always include excellent Jail Ale. Similarly, **Lacey's Ale and Cider House** in Bideford (1) offers a choice of 3 good ales and John keeps a great pint of Country Life.

The **Appledore Inn** in Bideford (2) always has 3 good ales, but the trouble is that Jollyboat



Grenville's Renown is so good I can't even remember what the others are! The **Royal Oak** in Dolton (2) has up to 3 ales on offer, while the Exmoor Gold at the **Coach and Horses** at Buckland Brewer (12) is in fine fettle. The **Bell Inn** at Monkleigh (3) can always guarantee a great pint of



that Nigel & Catherine are certainly looking to change that!

Footnote: Whatpub has now been updated. Every pub that has been in any edition of GBG, apart from one, now has a link to their Facebook page. (Any guesses as to which is the only North Devon pub not to have a Facebook page???)

NB All the rest will be linked a.s.a.p.

Andy Grant
POG Coordinator

Oxenham Arms


South Zeal EX20 2JT

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Long lost pubs of Barnstaple

We hear a lot in the news these days about pubs closing down and the consequent loss of a valuable community asset. Landlords speak of their increasing difficulty in making a living, caught between the tax man and greedy pub companies out to maximize rents. Some attribute pub closures to unscrupulous owners more interested in the value of the property as a residential or commercial asset rather than continuing to operate as a pub. Others point the finger at discounting supermarkets and changing patterns of alcohol consumption.

But just how new is this phenomenon of pub closures? Walking around Barnstaple recently I was struck by a number of buildings with that distinctly pub-like appearance despite having no obvious connection today with the sale of ale. This then prompted me to do some research using the Lost Pubs Project website (www.lostpubs.etc). To my surprise I soon discovered that within the last century or so Barnstaple town centre has seen more pub closures than there are pubs in business today - and believe me there are still plenty going strong! In all, 23 pubs are listed as 'lost', many of which have since been demolished as part of the various episodes of urban regeneration which has resulted in the Barnstaple we know today.

I imagine there are few people, if any, alive today who can still remember the **Castle** or the **Salutation Inn**, both once in Castle street, the **Royal George** on the corner of Cross street, or the **Globe** in Queen street? These and many more have long since been demolished. But what of those buildings which have survived the wrecking



ball? Perhaps the easiest to spot is the former **Three Tons Inn**, still open for trade in the High St although now in its modern guise of Pizza Express. Unfortunately you can no longer buy ale in the former **Barnstaple Inn** on the corner of Trinity street as this is now a day nursery. The site of the former **Mermaid Hotel** on the corner of Boutport and High street has long since been the home of Youngs tobacconist and toy retailers, while the fate of the **White Horse** further along Boutport street is still awaited following its most recent sale by auction.



Some premises appear to have fared a little better with perhaps a more sympathetic change of use to become licensed restaurants such as the former **Golden Fleece** in Tuly street (now the Fullam Restaurant), or the former **Heart of Oak** on the corner of Boutport street and High street - the latest incarnation of which is yet another bistro (the South Gate). Other former pubs are possibly more difficult to spot these days, having long since been converted to residential use, but next time you're walking along Pilton street see if you can spot what's become of the **New Inn**?



So what can we learn from this brief trip down memory lane? First, that nothing lasts forever. Public houses, like every other business in a town centre environment, will come and go. New ownership, new buildings, new business models will all help shape and reshape the places where beer is sold. Secondly, unlike in a small village where the loss of the local inn can be a body blow to the very life of that community, there will always be a healthy supply of pubs to meet a steady demand in a larger town. And finally, I'd like to think that there is an element of 'survival of the fittest' at play when deciding which pubs thrive and which go to the wall but then again, looking more closely at some of the pubs still in business today and many of those long since lost this may be just wishful thinking ... ?

Peter Thompson



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Real Cider - a tradition worth saving...

Elsewhere in this edition you can read about the two finalists nominated by branch members to be the best real cider pubs in North Devon this year - and find out which of them was eventually voted the winner! But let's take a minute or two and think about where cider stands in today's drinks market. Real cider is a long established traditional drink which is produced naturally from apples and is neither carbonated nor pasteurized. From these simple ingredients the real cider or perry maker can cater for a vast range of tastes - from very dry to very sweet and all shades in between - not to mention how the simple addition of smaller amounts of other fruits can subtly alter the drink's flavor in enticing ways. To try and describe the unique experience that is real scrumpy would take a whole new article!

Yet, tragically real cider is in a similar situation to that which faced real ale some 30 years ago with the number of outlets offering the product for sale diminishing, even here in the West Country. Perry (which is made from pears) is in an even more perilous situation and is rarely available away from the farm gate. The sad fact is that many of the well known ciders sold in the UK are not produced naturally from apples. These fizzy cold drinks are the result of artificial processes and often made on an industrial scale. Alas they now make up more than 90% of the cider market in the UK.



Having said this, all is not doom and gloom, with a recent (October 2016) survey by Plymouth

CAMRA branch identifying no less than 33 Devon cider producers, albeit some small scale and with relatively few up here in the north of the county - although the encouraging sign of a newly planted cider orchard has now been spotted at Yelland!

Is the problem then more to do with licensees, not least being their concern that they won't sell enough or it will go off and have to be thrown away at a loss - concluding sadly that mass produced keg cider is the safer option? Not necessarily so. Ian Pinches from the Railway Arms, Downham Market, gave us an excellent insight (seen Beer Tiz issue 8) on how he became a CAMRA National Cider Pub of the Year winner in 2013. He argues that real cider does not need to go off, it simply needs to be kept properly. So he doesn't use pumps - his ciders are gravity fed from the air conditioned tap room - thus eliminating the most serious risks posed by air, heat and humidity. He also uses bag-in-a-box ciders, kept at around 8-10 degrees, which offer a shelf life of up to 3 months which ought to be sufficient to sell it all.

So CAMRA is supporting the fight back. In order to help people identify good local cider pubs CAMRA has developed a 'Real Cider Sold Here' window sticker for pubs which regularly sell real cider. Each pub is verified by CAMRA coordinators and to date there are over 780 awarded this accreditation nationally. (Is there a pub near you needs nominating?). CAMRA encourages all pubs to stock at least one real cider or perry, preferably from a local stockist.

Unlike real ale production which can happen at any time of the year, real cider and perry can only be made when the fruit is ripe. Harvest time for apples and pears is usually from September to November, with October being the most active time for producers. To highlight this CAMRA celebrates cider and perry months in both May and October! Why not give it a go this year ... ?



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