

Beer Tiz

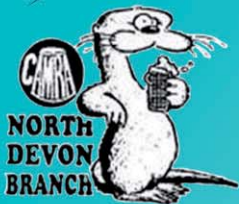


CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Issue 20

Autumn 2018

FREE



CAMRA North Devon Branch



**NORTH DEVON BRANCH MEMBERS
ON SUMMER MANEUVERS**





Exeter Brewery

Cowley Bridge Road Exeter EX4 4NX

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View from the Chair



I'm writing this while pondering the many pub Beer Festivals I've visited myself and encouraged you to visit as well over the course of this long hot summer. We're told this has been a good season for the pub trade, yet still we are seeing over 20 pubs a week closing nationally. Not so good for some it seems?

In the last edition I touched on the new craft ale revolution. Well we all appear to be on the same bandwagon – the whole world seems to have gone craft mad. We now have craft bread and craft breadcrumbs, craft chocolate, craft eggs, craft cheese and I even passed a bakers the other day selling craft cakes. Then, of course, we have craft ale. I do understand why the term 'craft' has been so enthusiastically embraced by so many as it is just about impossible to define and so allows people to adapt it to their own use. It implies the concept of individuality as opposed to mass production. I'm sure all our fine North Devon breweries would rightly pride themselves in crafting their own distinctive ales.

Yet while I have no problem with breweries experimenting with different hops and using a wide range of exotic ingredients to produce new and exciting beers, I do find personally that over-hopping beers leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Of course I accept that this all comes down to personal preference. We each have a palate which has been tutored by years of experience, and individual tastes can change over time. But what I would say about a lot of these new craft ales is that they should come with a government health warning - on price - when pint for pint they can often work out double or even treble the price of a decent real ale on draft!

On a visit to Cardiff last year with Peter I came across an award winning city centre pub with wall-to- wall taps the length of its gigantic bar. It was virtually impossible to work out which were the real ales, which were craft keg, and which

were plain grot. Picking up my glass I feared for frost bite. How comforting was it to see the few welcoming hand pumps at the front of the bar, making for a tasty and reasonable temperature drink. After all, if I'd wanted to drink something so cold it couldn't be tasted then I could have settled for a Eurofizz extra cold and been done with it! At the very least I would hope that a pub tells me that all the taps on their wall are served with Nitrogen - then at least I know where I stand - but for me, I think I will always stick to what I know I like best. That will be a choice from the selection of hand pumps on the bar - especially if it's a fantastic pint of real ale from one of our great North Devon breweries.

Mark Partridge

(Branch Chairman and Social Secretary)



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Fat Belly Brewery



Based in the lovely 17th century **Cottage Inn** at Lynbridge, and situated in an idyllic Exmoor riverside location, this brewery is already off to a good start. Set up by landlord Gary Eastman and ably assisted by his dad Ken and wife Nartnapa (Pam to her friends), the brewery has gone from strength to strength since its start up in 2016. I must also make mention of Gary's new assistant brewer Nick (the Apprentice). Asking how the idea of a brewery fist came about, Ken describes the spooky déjà-vu moment when on returning from a break away, he told his son about a wonderful Craft Brew pub he'd come across in Gloucester, and wouldn't it be a good idea to create something similar at their pub? At this point, Gary held up the Tablet he was working on saying that was exactly what he was just researching. And so it just had to be. As to the name 'Fat Belly', I got total silence on that one, so I guess the reader's idea is as good as any!

Once agreed on a 3 barrel kit for the new brewery, Gary quickly started putting his own distinct mark on the first brews. Influenced both by traditional English Ales and by American-style lighter, fruity hops, Gary had soon produced a core range of three very good beers indeed. These were all sampled by Branch chairman Mark Partridge and myself on our initial visit. Mark, of course, liked the Lyn Valley bitter best, with me preferring the fruity hopped **Crafty** golden ale, but with both of us saying the **Carver Doone** stout was one of the best of its kind we'd ever tasted. In truth,

all the beers sampled on the day were of a very high standard. Gary has since also introduced his own lager called **EX35** (no prizes for guessing why). This too is a very good example of its type and is selling well.

Added to the mix there are now a number of one-off specials based on the core beers but with added exotic fruits and flavours. We were fortunate to sample four of these on our visit, all of which were extremely palatable, with the **Mango Guzzler** being judged the most interesting. Being on the sweeter side, Mark thought this would make a very good addition to the permanent range, although given the price of mangoes cost could become a significant issue with this one. These specialities are all served in half pints, with third-pint glasses soon to be available apparently. All are dispensed through a novel USA-style 'Pour Through Craft Range' system of 17 taps on the wall behind the bar. The Cottage Inn also offers a wide range of ciders and Craft beers from other breweries. To help with this considerable volume and range of beers, Gary has now invested in a new brewing vat soon to be installed outside in a covered area. This will be used for larger brews, and so free up capacity to increase Real Ale production in the base plant.

To add to the novelty and keep keen beer drinkers returning, Gary has created a '**Fat Belly Mug Club**'. For a £20 joining fee you get your own Fat Belly glass with your chosen name on it (and yes, I did spot 'Nick the Apprentice' on one!). Away days, special parties and events are all benefits of club membership with certain other privileges occasionally thrown in. To date the club has over 70 members and is still growing. The annual **Real Ale and Music Festival** held over 3 days each June is a highlight in the pub's calendar, featuring barbeque food and live bands throughout, and members of North Devon CAMRA were certainly made to feel most welcome on their recent visit there. As if all this was not enough the pub also boasts an authentic Thai restaurant. The Nartnapa **Thai Kitchen** really does provide excellent cuisine, serving Thai street food at is very best. The pub itself has 3 B&B rooms, again furnished to a high standard and in beautiful riverside surroundings. In short, this place is a must visit destination if ever you are in the area.

FAT BELLY BEER TASTING NOTES

- **Lyn Valley bitter.** OG 1037. ABV 3.7% (formerly Guzzler) A well balanced light bitter. Pale tawny in colour, very good clarity, medium carbonation, lovely hop finish with a hint of malt. This is an excellent Session Bitter.
- **Crafty golden ale.** OG 1045. ABV 4.5%. Medium golden colour with a light and fruity mouth feel, slight citrus flavor, gradual light fruity hop finish. A good Summer drink.
- **Carver Doone stout.** OG 1047. ABV 4.7%. Creamy head and mouth feel with this excellent well crafted stout. Very good clarity, slight treacle toffee and liquorice taste. Slow and gradual mild hop finish.

STOP PRESS

FatBelly have just confirmed the purchase of a new 10 barrel plant to be located in Ilfracombe on the Mullacott industrial estate - not far from Wizard's brewery. They hope to have the new plant fully operational by early September when an Open Day is planned. This leaves open the possibility (yet to be confirmed) of FatBelly retaining the old 3 barrel plant to use for test brews and small batch specials. We wish them well in this new enterprise.

Chris Smyth

Branch Calendar

OCTOBER

TUE 9TH

Branch Committee Meeting - (7.30 to 9.30pm)

The Town Arms, South Molton, EX36 3BU

SAT 13TH

South-West Regional Meeting

Royal British Legion Club, Tewkesbury, GL20 5SN

NOVEMBER

SAT 10TH

Branch Meeting - The Pint and Post,

St Giles on the Heath, PL15 9SA

FRI 16TH

Brewery Visit - GT Ales, Chivenor, EX31 4AY

(further details on request)

DECEMBER

SAT 8TH

Branch Meeting - The Post Inn, Whiddon Down, EX20 2QT

SAT 15TH

Country Life Brewery Tour

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So which is North Devon's Oldest Pub...?



I was recently asked by a good friend (and long-time drinking companion) visiting the region for the first time - so what's the oldest pub in North Devon then? That had me thinking for a few moments. Do you mean the pub with the longest continuous history of serving ale, or the pub now occupying the oldest building I asked. And when you say pub, I assume you would want to include old coaching inns where ale was part of the offer, but would this then extend to old religious houses such as monasteries where ale might have been offered to passing pilgrims? Leaving aside these problems of definition, we decided to do some digging on-line before agreeing to visit some of the main contenders - all in the name of academic research you understand?

Our problem, of course, was where to start given that North Devon is jam-packed with historic drinking haunts, many of which lay claim to be amongst the oldest in their area. Leaving aside the numerous Victorian establishments founded in the 19th century, and passing over the many 18th century inns - often found on or near the new coaching roads then being introduced - we set off to discover something a little older.



And where better to capture the genuine feel of a 17th century inn than the **Poltimore Arms** at Yarde Down near Brayford

- so remote that it's completely off the grid, generating its own electricity when needed, heated by woodburners, using water from the local spring, and with furniture and fixtures to match. This pub has the look (and smell!) of history through and through, as does another 17th century inn not too far away - the **Rockford**

Inn in the secretive Brendon Valley, although it should be said that today this pub offers an altogether more modern experience for visitors looking for comfortable accommodation.



One pub which does claim to be amongst the oldest in continuous use is the **Black Horse Inn** at Torrington. With its traditional oak beams and panels, we were pleased to find that this 16th century former coaching inn with its Civil War connections is still serving fine ales and food. Not to be outdone, the following day we



headed back out to the north coast where the **George and Dragon** proudly proclaims itself the oldest pub in Ilfracombe. Dating back to 1360, this

place is the essence of an old fashioned traditional English pub, complete with wooden beams set in a low ceiling, stone floors and large welcoming fireplace. You can just sense the history that this place must have witnessed over its 600 plus years!

But surely there can't be many more contenders for North Devon's oldest pub I hear you say?



Well you'd be wrong. Both the **Blue Ball** at Countesbury and the nearby **Staghunters Inn** in Exmoor's Doone Valley (with its ancient chapel function room) can boast of 13th century



origins, though it has to be said that by the time of our visit much of their histories have been lost to the mists of time, but fascinating to ponder

nonetheless. So, at the end of our search of North Devon pubs, which one did we think had the strongest claim to being most ancient?

The answer is the **Oxenham Arms** in South Zeal - and not on account of the fact that Charles Dickens was a frequent guest there on his journeys to and fro the west country, nor because the building was once a fine manor house having been converted by the Burgoyne family around 1350 from a former 12th century



Benedictine monastery. The principal reason for our award still stands proudly erect in the snug - so tall in fact that it has to project through the ceiling and into the chamber above. This is the famous South Zeal Menhir - a Neolithic standing stone estimated to be at least 5000 years old - which is 1000 years older than Stonehenge! Whether or not the ancients who first erected it liked their real ales we can only guess, but with a history going back at the very least 840 years the Oxenham Arms, set in the beautiful Dartmoor National Park with its rustic bar, flagged floors and mullioned stone windows is surely not to be missed on any tour of historic pubs.

Now as I finish this story, I hear people out there saying "but what about my local - surely it must be in with a shout?" Well, if you think so, be sure to let me know and you may get a mention in the next issue of BeerTiz.

Peter Thompson

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Congratulations to...

Bay's Brewery.... We are delighted to see a Devon brewery recognised in this year's CAMRA Champion Beer of Britain 2018 awards, announced at the Great British Beer Festival, where Devon Dimpling has been awarded Silver in the Strong Ale completion - well done Bay's!



North Devon Finalist in both Pub and Cider Pub of the Year 2018

GROVE INN
Kings Nympton



The Cyder Presse at Weare Gifford...

hot on the heels of being voted 2018 North Devon's 2018 Cider Pub of the Year, the Cyder Presse has now been voted runner-

up in the CAMRA South West regional cider pub competition.



And finally, **Clearwater Brewery** will have a new brewer by the time you read this edition. Dayle Helsby has been assistant brewer for a number of months and will take over this autumn when Paul and Ali Stewart-Reed leave to pursue a new lifestyle in Plymouth. Paul and Ali have worked at Clearwater for 9 years and will be much

missed. Dayle (well known locally as the lead singer in Gypfunk) has ideas for new beers as well as keeping up the excellent quality determined by Paul. So, from all at North Devon CAMRA, it's best wishes to Paul and Ali, and congratulations to Dayle on his promotion!

[Photo gallery also includes a selection from our recent branch award presentations]

North Devon CAMRA Club of the Year 2018

CONSERVATIVE CLUB
Bideford



Brewery of the Year 2018

Now that the dust has settled on this year's branch Pub, Cider Pub and Club of the Year presentations, it's time to think about our much coveted Brewery of the Year award. Unlike the other gongs, this accolade is more a celebration of the brewery which has not only achieved something of merit in recent years, but by its activities has reflected well on the whole North Devon brewing fraternity. As ever, there are difficult decisions to make with well over a dozen eligible breweries currently operating within the branch area. But by a democratic process of nomination from branch Brewery Liaison Officers, we have arrived at a shortlist of just 3 breweries for your consideration. These are as follows, in alphabetic order:

Country Life Brewery based at the Big Sheep in Abbotsham

FatBelly Brewery, currently based at Lynbridge but soon to relocate to Mullicot near Ilfracombe

GT Ales who brew out of Chivenor industrial estate

Further details together with a short 100 word statement in support of each of the nominated breweries will be posted on the North Devon CAMRA website - members are encouraged to read these statements before casting their votes - remember, you are not voting for your favourite ale or pub, but which brewery you think most deserves this year's award.

CAMRA branch members each have one vote – but this year there are **4 ways of voting**: You can use the on-line voting facility (membership number required to log in); or contact the branch secretary direct by email; or post your vote to the Chairman (c/o 18, Taw Meadow Crescent, Fremington, EX31 2QA); or you can

vote in person by attending the 10th November branch meeting. **All electronic or postal votes to be cast by 31st October.**

This year's winner will be announced at the branch meeting on 10th November.

Chris Wells
Branch Secretary



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2017



Pub News

from around the Branch



A number of pubs reported a decline in sales of real ale during the warm summer weather, with drinkers temporarily switching to cider or even lager! Perhaps they just wanted something cold to drink although, with the abundance of well-balanced IPAs and similar styles available today, there are thankfully many more suitably refreshing beers to enjoy than we had during the last similarly prolonged heatwave back in the 1970s. They just need seeking out. But whatever the punters were drinking, our pubs and hotels have generally reported being busier than usual which is, of course, good news.

It was also interesting to note the number of well-run pubs where a policy of "fewer is better" was adopted. It made good sense for them to slightly reduce their range of ales in order to ensure consistency with a faster turnover. Unfortunately, the more difficult conditions did lead to some pubs serving poor pints and thereby expose those who generally take less care. In the majority of cases bad pints were replaced with good grace and without question. Let us just hope that too many drinkers did not suffer in silence.

At present there appear to be rather fewer newly advertised pubs coming on to the market. Meanwhile others are proving difficult to sell. Apparently the **Exeter Inn** at Chittlehamholt



failed to reach its reserve when auctioned at the end of July. This formerly thriving village local has now been on the market for more than two

years. Similarly the **Barnstaple Inn** at nearby Burrington, closed for two and a half years, remains on the market with a couple of abortive

sales having fallen through. Better news at Umberleigh however, where the **Rising Sun**

reopened in July following a few weeks closure. Now run by Kate and Charlie O'Shea who both have local connections, this



iconic fishing inn has been given a new lease of life, with some tasteful refurbishment to both pub and accommodation. They report very good support from the village and surrounding area since taking over. On a recent visit we found a very welcoming atmosphere, together with three well-kept ales and three real ciders. Along with other events, a beer festival is now planned for mid October.

When the **Arscott Arms** at Chapman's Well suddenly closed its doors yet again last winter, there were serious doubts as to whether it would ever re-open. So, intrigued to see lights on when we drove by in July, we duly called in. Although still closed, it is currently being renovated and



we were told it should be open again from October. Re-opening a little sooner we hope, will be **The Bell**

at Parkham which suffered such a devastating fire in February of last year. Given the extent of the damage the speed of the restoration has been remarkable. For the past 18 months, in order to provide an alternative watering hole for the village, owners Mike and Rachel Sanders

have run "The Inn Over The Road" in Parkham's parish hall, including for the second year running their annual beer festival - and very good it was too! Among several other beer festivals enjoyed this summer was that held at the **Old Smithy Inn** at Welcombe. Some 18 well chosen real ales, together with a good range of ciders were featured, along with live music throughout. Murrough and Grainne McHugh



who took over here earlier this year certainly seem to have brought both the warmth of their Irish hospitality and high standards to this welcoming hostelry.

Thanks too to all those other North Devon pubs that have promoted real ale and cider at their festivals over the recent months.

Bob Goddard

CAMRA is nothing if not a Campaigning Organisation

When CAMRA was first set up all those years ago to save real ale from oblivion, who would have thought that in the 21st century it would still be battling away to preserve good beer and good pubs? Yet here we are, with everyday it seems bringing news of fresh threats to the very things that CAMRA has held so dear for over half a century? Landlords struggling, pubs closing, small breweries being taken over by national and multinational conglomerates - how familiar does it all seem? But fear not - hope is on the horizon - and you can play your part! On Tuesday 30th October CAMRA is set to take its campaigning to the heart of government with a mass lobby of parliament. This is the opportunity for YOU - the common or garden branch member (after all, aren't we all?) - to voice your concerns about the way things are going to your local MP ahead of the Autumn budget.

So what do we want to say? For a start off there's a strong case for axing plans to increase beer duty in the upcoming budget - how much longer can ordinary honest drinkers be expected to subsidise the fiscal failures of successive

governments? Then there's the case for a permanent rate relief for English pubs - how many have to go to the wall before somebody realises this is eating at the heart of so many communities? And last but by no means least, there's the need for an urgent review of the Pubs Code which is clearly not working as intended, so that the market rent option becomes a genuine choice for pub tenants which it clearly isn't at present.

So, to do your bit, contact your local MP today, or get in touch with CAMRA's campaign@camra.org.uk . – between us we CAN make a difference!

Editor



Please don't forget Beer Scoring



CAMRA introduced on-line beer scoring several years ago now, as a means of quantifying the consistency of cask beers served in particular outlets. In a number of branches it quickly became the main criterion for Good Beer Guide nomination. Whilst our own branch has continued to select pubs using the same all round assessments for nomination as are ultimately used in selection, data from beer scoring still remains an important factor. It is after all, the only objective measurement we have of establishing the condition in which ales are regularly dispensed. Obviously the more members who record their scores, then the more likely the data is to be representative. Before continuing perhaps we should establish what beer scoring is and, more importantly, what it is not. It is all about the condition of the beer (see more below).

The Beer Scoring system **should not** be used for any of the following:

- A complicated tasting assessment
- A measure of preference for a particular style or brand of beer
- An opportunity to sycophantically promote a particular pub
- A means of deliberately damaging the reputation of a pub

The Beer Scoring facility is available to all members via WhatPub, which can be accessed either directly or via the link from our branch website. The following official guidance is provided by CAMRA under:

So how do I score the quality of the beer?

"You don't have to be an "expert" to begin scoring your beer. However, it is not about your personal favourite beer receiving the highest scores! You may try a beer that isn't to your normal taste but what you need to consider is the quality of the beer, how well the pub has kept it and served it, and score it according to the general guide below. It is a simple system

of a ten-point range from 0 to 5, with half points being used if your opinion of the beer falls between two categories.

1. No cask ale available.
2. Poor. Beer is anything from barely drinkable to drinkable with considerable resentment.
3. Average. Competently kept, drinkable pint but doesn't inspire in any way, not worth moving to another pub but you drink the beer without really noticing.
4. Good. Good beer in good form. You may cancel plans to move to the next pub. You want to stay for another pint and may seek out the beer again.
5. Very Good. Excellent beer in excellent condition. You stay put!
6. Perfect. Probably the best you are ever likely to find. A seasoned drinker will award this score very rarely.

Additional observations

Remember that cask ales do run out and that sometimes in a busy bar you may be the first person to be aware of this. If you point it out and a replacement pint is served without question, then score the replacement not the original. It is only fair.

Decide before you visit a pub whether or not you will be scoring and then do so accordingly. Otherwise the temptation will be to score only very good or very poorly presented beers.

Make up your own mind and do not score on the basis of the pub's reputation whether it is good or bad. Never take notice of people who make comments about pubs they themselves rarely, if ever visit.

The more frequently you record your scores, the quicker and more proficient you will become. It can also be interesting to look back at your recorded scores from time to time by selecting view scores when on the WhatPub site.

And finally - try to score every night if you can!

Bob Goddard

Witterings from the Branch President



For the first time in many years I have not been at CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival at Olympia. To say that I missed it would be an understatement; of course I missed all the ales but I also missed the incredible 'family' of volunteers. This cannot be described, it has to be experienced.

So what is this craft real ale I keep hearing about?

Seeking clarification I looked up the definition of 'craft': - the skilled practice of a practical occupation.

I learned my first craft as an apprentice engineer at Woolwich Arsenal and used my skills to become a toolmaker. Later I learned the craft

of jewellery making and became a jeweller. As a craft teacher I taught young people how to work with metal and wood and when I retired I took my skills with the craft of metalworking and became a blacksmith.

So, if a brewer uses brewing skills to make real ale that must be a craft!

I still don't understand what the difference is between a real ale labelled as 'craft' and one that isn't. I just don't get it. Do you?

Cheers

Morris Elsworth
(Aka Grumbledore)

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