

CONGRATULATIONS TO COUNTRY LIFE BREWERY Branch Brewery of the Year 2018

PUALITY EVON AL





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View from the Chair



What is Real Ale? I've always found this an interesting term, suggesting that if a drink calls itself 'Ale' but is not 'Real Ale' then it's somehow fake? Enough said.

CAMRA can proudly claim to have invented the term 'Real Ale' way back in the early 1970s to describe traditional draught cask beers in contrast to the highly carbonated processed beers then the norm for the big national breweries. Since then Real Ale has always been equated with traditional storage and fermentation techniques - live beer delivered to the customer without the need for gas additives to simulate a 'live' product.

In pubs today the majority of Real Ales are served using traditional hand pulls rather than through modern fonts, but there are some exceptions to this so if in doubt, just ask. Occasionally you may find Real Ale served directly from the barrel (called Gravity Dispense) - to be recommended as a genuinely authentic experience, but don't expect a large head on your pint!

To qualify as Real Ale, traditional ingredients are left to mature in the cask from which the product will be served after undergoing secondary fermentation. It is this magical process which gives each Real Ale its unique taste and aroma - unlike the bland homogeneous product of other 'so-called' ales. (And just for once, I won't digress at this point on the subject of Craft Ale!)

So where's the problem? While market research suggests that the numbers drinking Real Ale are still increasing, it appears that overall sales of Real Ale have in fact been falling in recent years. How so? The mystery is solved when we learn that many who profess to being Real Ale drinkers do so only occasionally - often opting for something else from the increasingly wide variety of pub drinks available - alcoholic and non alcoholic. Plus we all know how the tax on alcohol sales favours the supermarket and discount booze outlets at the expense of the local pub selling Real Ale.

So what can the market researchers tell us about drinkers' attitudes toward Real Ale to help explain these trends? They suggest that Real Ale has an image problem. Apparently words like 'strong', 'dark' and 'bitter' are most likely to be used to describe peoples' perceptions (especially younger people) of Real Ale served in a pub by handpump and from a cask. (Have they never tried a delicious 4.0% IPA or Golden Ale???) Above all, the very fact of being traditional can it seems be seen to a younger generation as being old fashioned. Well, I for one am not afraid to stand up and be counted as an old fashioned traditionalist when it comes to my ale! Yet hope springs eternal - especially when I hear of the success of Exeter University's Real Ale Society - then perhaps even the young are now beginning to see the error of their ways and learning to enjoy the delights of genuinely Real Ale?

So at the end of this rant, what's the answer to it all? Quite simply, in the immortal words of W C Fields "Everybody has to believe in something, and I believe I'll have another beer".

> Mark Partridge (Branch Chairman and Social Secretary)

The Taw Valley Brewery





Possibly North Devon's newest brewery, Chris Smyth and myself spent a great afternoon here meeting with Marc Whiteside who is without doubt one of the most enthusiastic brewers it has been my pleasure to meet. There could hardly be a more atmospheric location for a brewer to work and craft fine ales than in Taw Valley - acknowledged to be the only UK brewery set in a fully thatched Grade 2 listed barn dating back to the late 17th century.

Everything about the brewery is done with great passion and foresight, taking pride in being self contained and using only locally sourced ingredients wherever possible. Even the water used by Taw Valley is from



an ancient spring on the premises first mentioned in the Doomsday Book - just one of many examples of their strong commitment to environment friendly sustainability.

Proud to have set up a proper micro-brewery (technically a nano-brewery!), Marc currently has the capacity for two 1000 pint runs per fortnight preferring to produce small batches of genuine 'craft' ale in traditional casks or conditioned in bottles. For the fullest flavour, all Taw Valley cask ales are fined without isinglass in the traditional way, while bottleconditioned ales are unfined and unfiltered so demand to be treated with respect! The three and a half barrel plant produces four core ales:

Tawton Session Ale (4%): A punchy English session ale with balanced citrus flavours, a hint of grapefruit and a fresh floral aroma. An approachable modern tasting golden ale – a real taste of the Taw Valley.

Black Ops (3.9%): A dark hoppy ale with a big flavor from the roasted black malt and generous quantities of four different types of hop. Very drinkable and just a bit different.

Taw Golden Brown (4.5%): A full-bodied, deep golden brown ale with a depth of 'moorish' malt flavour. A traditional Devonshire bitter style but updated with a more modern hop profile and texture like sun!

Kennard's Steam Ale (4.2%): A traditional best bitter brewed exclusively for the Plume of Feathers at Okehampton. Inspired by the types of ale that would have been served by Kennard-the-landlord back in the day, it has a fruity blackcurrant finish and a really nice mouthfeel.



In addition, Taw Valley has so far produced an interesting range of one off's or seasonal ales, cask and bottled, including:

Devon Jester (4,2%): a hoppy pale ale made with Cascade and Jester hops - highly quaffable and packing loads of fruity aromas.

Franken's Curse (4.2%): a tawny coloured ale laden with fruits and a complex malty bitterness. (Legend has it that a local brewer called St Franken sold his soul to the devil in return for an apple blossom blight and reduced competition from Devonshire cider - to this day locals fear the damage a late frost can have on the apple harvest and so celebrate Franken Night toward the end of May when the potential for frost has passed).

Spring Taw (4.2%): made with a fresh and slightly spicy blend of traditional all-English hops, together with Maris Otter malt and medium crystal and crushed wheat – a hoppy golden ale with a good shine and plenty of feel-good factor.

Moortown Golden Ale (4.2%): a dry golden ale with a biscuit malt backbone, grassy floral notes and moderate bitterness – subtle dry hopping added late during fermentation imparts aroma and slight elderflower characteristics.

Paul Wells Brewery Liaison Officer, North Devon CAMRA

Branch Calendar

JANUARY 2019 SAT 12TH:

Annual Branch Festive Lunch

The Bell, Chittlehampton, EX37 9QL (Booking essential - contact Mark Partridge)

FRI 18TH & SAT 19TH:

The 30th Annual Exeter Festival of Winter Ales Exeter City FC, St James Park, EX4 6PY

TUE 22ND:

Branch Committee Meeting The Globe Inn, Beaford, EX19 8LR

FEBRUARY

SAT 9TH:

Branch Meeting The Champ, Appledore, EX39 1RJ

MARCH

SAT 9TH:

Branch Annual General Meeting The Rising Sun, Umberleigh, EX37 9DU

APRIL

SAT 13TH: Branch Meeting TBA

COMMITTEE CONTACT INFORMATION

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WEBSITE MANAGER Vacancy

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PUBLIC TRANSPORT OFFICER Vacancy

HONORARY PRESIDENT Morris Elsworth fiona.ndcamra@icloud.com

MEET THE BREWER Lawrence D Weatherston



A brewer of distinction

When it comes to describing Lawrence's approach to brewing real ale I think it's fair to say that he's a very passionate if somewhat unconventional perfectionist. Let me explain more.



Meeting Lawrence for the first time at his Yelland Manor brewery, I was left in absolutely no doubt about the strength of passion for his craft. This is a man with incredible knowledge about the science of brewing real ale and he brings

a lifetime's experience and expertise to his current business - having previously set up, amongst others, the Topsham and Exminster Brewery (now known as the Exeter Brewery) where he helped develop some of their award winning premium range of ales.

Never happier than when discussing the virtues of crafting a well brewed pint, Lawrence can be somewhat dismissive of the new generation of 'craft' ale brewers but at heart he believes in the sanctity of real English ale and for that he cannot be faulted. Such is his passion for getting things right that he tells how once he persuaded a friend to fly his plane to the Timothy Taylor brewery in Leeds simply to replace his highly prized yeast which had unexpectedly expired! In fact, the secret of the success of Lawrence's ale is not simply the traditional SMASH recipe (single malt and single hop) but the yeast itself – that magical living organism which does so much to impart its character to all real ales!

The somewhat unconventional aspect of Lawrence's approach to brewing is perhaps best

illustrated by his relative lack of commercialism when it comes to actively marketing his produce – his main outlet being the brewery itself but this is only open for a limited number of hours each weekend* and signage from the main coast road (B 3233) or indeed from



the Tarka Trail which passes nearby can best be described as hit and miss. As for regular sales in other local pubs, when asked where these might be, Lawrence had to confess that he often didn't necessarily know where his distribution company would actually end up selling them! (Speaking as a regular drinker in and around the Barnstaple and north coast area I can confirm that seeing Yelland Ale for sale in local pubs is indeed quite rare - yet from personal experience I know just how popular this ale can be at the North Devon Beer Festival held each May in the Pannier Market). Some too might consider being served their real ale from the marvelous brewery tap 'bar' situated below ground level in a former milking parlour guite unusual - but perfectly serviceable for all that!

But it's the perfectionist in Lawrence that comes through most strongly. Underpinning his entire brewing operation is a never ending quest to produce the perfect pint. So much so that typically there's only a single ale on tap at the brewery - with regard to which Lawrence is quick to reassure drinkers this will NOT necessarily taste the same as that from the last barrel even though it had the same name, nor will a pint from the top of the barrel taste the same as one from further down! Whereas other brewers crave consistency, Lawrence takes delight in promoting the unique flavour of each brew and indeed every pint of his truly organic product. Incidentally, what also seems to change over time is the name of this mercurial ale - currently going under the name of Tarka Special but previously known as English Standard, and as rumour has it, can even be found masquerading around the holiday resorts of North Devon under the name of Puffin Beer. But whatever the name, I can testify that weighing in at 4.1% it's always dammed good beer!



In short, Lawrence and Yelland Manor are unique in the literal sense of the word. They are different, they are distinct, they are a little bit quirky maybe, but they are special and certainly worth a try if you see Yelland ale on sale - or better still - why not pop down to the brewery tap one weekend - I can guarantee you won't be disappointed! (Oh - and let's not forget his micro-restaurant's to-die-for Fish and Chips and just guess what he puts in the batter???)

Current opening times at the Yelland Manor brewery are as follows: Fri: 2pm – 5.30pm

Fri: 2pm – 5.30pm Sat: 12pm – 5.30pm Sun: 12 pm – 5.30pm

Peter Thompson Editor



What on earth have lightsabers got to do with brewing beer?

It may seem a little excessive, but we check every last cask with what we call our lightsaber. But it's not from a galaxy far, far away. It's an ultraviolet light used by our brewing team to inspect our casks for absolute cleanliness. Only when it has passed the lightsaber test is a cask considered worthy of becoming home to 72 pints of freshly brewed Landlord. With a beer as finely balanced in flavour as Taylor's, coaxed from the purest Pennine spring water, aromatic hops and finest barley, we can't help being just a little picky.

All for that taste of Taylor's



Congratulations to...

COUNTRY LIFE BREWERY NORTH DEVON BREWERY OF THE YEAR 2018

Following a close run race, **Country Life Brewery** has emerged as winner of this year's branch Brewery of the Year award. This accolade celebrates a brewery which not only offers a range of consistently outstanding ales but who's activities have reflected well on the whole North Devon brewing fraternity over a long period. As ever, this has been a difficult decision with over a dozen eligible breweries currently operating in our area, but by a process of nomination from branch Brewery Liaison Officers (BLOs) followed by the democratic vote of all branch members, Country Life has been chosen as the clear winner.



As one of North Devon's largest and oldest breweries, celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year, Country Life is in every sense of the word a worthy winner. Based at the Big Sheep near Abbotsham, their core range of six ales caters for all palates, with multiple awards from both CAMRA and SIBA testifying to their quality. From their early days in a converted milking parlour and using kit from the former Lundy Island Brewery, CLB have gone on to brew over 5 million pints - that's over 15,000 pints a week - as well as bottling their own beers. More recently, owners Simon and Anna Lacey have branched out into the gin distilling business with the launch of the Atlantic Spirit distillery at this year's North Devon Beer Festival in May.

Country Life have enjoyed a busy year supporting various beer festivals and local events, including our own branch Campaigning Day, the North Devon Show beer tent and more recently organising the very successful RHS Rosemoor Real Ale and Gin Festival. Long time supporters of CAMRA and its ideals, this award is surely a mark of the esteem with which Country Life is rightly held amongst branch members in North Devon.

Having said this, congratulations too must go to both runners-up in this year's awards - to **GT Ales** for coming a close second after winning this much coveted prize in 2017, and to the **Fat Belly Brewery** who over the past year have managed to establish a very firm following since their set up only two years ago. We wish these three and all our other North Devon breweries the very best for 2019 - and who knows what the future might bring?

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL NEW GBG ENTRIES

A hearty congratulations to all North Devon pubs featuring in the 2019 Good Beer Guide. Given that the strength of competition increases year on year, and that our branch allocation is restricted to just 27 entries, there will always be many good pubs which miss out. Nonetheless the prestige which comes with being included in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide (the only pub guide where a place can't be bought!) should rightly be celebrated. This year however, the following nine pubs merit a special mention:



First, there are three pubs (to the best of our knowledge) making their maiden appearance, having never before featured in the GBG – the **Hip and Pistol** at Ilfracombe, the **White Lion** at Braunton, and the **Beggars Roost** at Barbrook.



Next, special mention should be made of the three pubs making a long awaited return to the GBG after an absence of several years – these are the **Castle** at George Nympton, the **Cyder Presse** at Weare Giffard, and the **Post**

Inn at Whiddon Down. Finally, there are those pubs previously listed but now under new management or leadership - these include the Wellington Arms in Ilfracombe, the Globe Inn at Beaford, and the Champ in Appledore. So well done to everyone - and who knows what the 2020 Good Beer Guide might bring?

CONGRATULATIONS TO BREWDOG FOR RETURNING TO DRAFT ALE

Congratulations to BrewDog for their decision to start producing Draft Ale once more after a period of almost ten years. The brewery which has since built up an impressive reputation in the Craft Ale market explained that they had stopped brewing Draft Ale over quality concerns with their beers all too often poorly stored and incorrectly served. Although initially limited to BrewDog Draft Houses in the London area, and starting with their Dead Pony Club session Pale Ale, if successful the Draft re-launch will be rolled out over the rest of the country.

GT ALES

From all of us, it's a very big thank you to Gary and Toby for hosting a most enjoyable branch social gathering at the GT Ales brewery in Chivenor in November.



Pub News from around the Branch



The freehold of **The Globe** at **Berrynarbor** has been sold, with a new tenancy agreement now having been made with the previous manager there. **The Seafood Grill & Pub** on Ilfracombe High Street (formerly 'The Lamb') is set to close. Unfortunately, despite its appearance in the new Michelin Guide together with some excellent local reviews, operator Thomas Carr has announced that it has not proved commercially viable. His other business, The Olive Table, a "Michelin Star" restaurant and guest house in Fore Street, will however remain



open. Meanwhile the **Wellington Arms** in Ilfracombe continues to do well and has been running 'Tap & Go', a ruby ale made for them by GT Ales, during the autumn rugby internationals. The pub will once again run a

Christmas Beer Festival throughout December, featuring some 14 real ales, including a good

localcontingent.ThePierGrill &Tap is now keepingthree Wizard Beersas standard.LundyGold,Druid'sFluidandYoungApprenticehave



latterly been found in excellent condition. Wizard is also now supplying beers regularly to the **Hip & Pistol** in Ilfracombe and **The Sawmills** at Berrynarbor. There are new leaseholders at the **Ebrington Arms** in Knowle, just outside Braunton.

The Seven Stars in South Tawton closed in September for what were said to be "refurbishments". At the time of writing it remains closed. Not far from there, at Wonson near Throwleigh, Julie and Ray Knight have left the **Northmoor Arms.** In other news from the south of our branch, we discovered recently that the **Bearslake Inn** at Lake changed hands earlier this year and that it is now encouragingly real ale oriented. At Chapman's Well, between Holsworthy and Launceston, **The Arscott Arms** reopened in November. This followed an almost 18 month period of closure, with extensive renovations and refurbishments to the property having taken place during the past six months.

Two other significant re-openings took place earlier in the autumn. CAMRA members Michael and Rachel Sanders, were able to welcome us to **The Bell at Parkham** on our recent branch Campaigning Day, just 20 months after the disastrous fire there in February of last year. It was really good to be able to visit this former GBG regular again, and to see the tasteful and sympathetic restoration that has taken place there. Meanwhile the **Farmers Arms** in Woolsery opened its doors after a much longer closure of almost seven years. The restorations, enhancements and improvements made have been to a very high standard, now making the

interior of this former village local almost unrecognisable. **The Hart Inn,** in Hartland, reopened under local ownership earlier in the



year. This former Enterprise pub is now doing well under the management of Laura Franks, who was previously assistant manager at the nearby **Hartland Quay Hotel.**

In the extreme east of our branch, Rackenford has always been a good drinking village. A recent trip there found **The Stag Inn** now doing well under new owners. Alterations made to this ancient inn, prior to it re-opening last Spring, have made it even more attractive and cosy. With a growing reputation for high quality food, there is also a strong commitment to local real ales and ciders. The busy **Rackenford Club** meanwhile, was found to have no less than seven locally produced, boxed real ciders available.

Nigel Higley is once more running our current branch Cider Pub of the Year, **The Cyder Presse** at Weare Giffard, following the departure of his tenant . New licensees took over recently



both the at First In Last Out in Bideford and the Kings Arms in South Molton. The Muddiford Inn at Muddiford has

suffered once again from the effects of another prolonged road closure affecting the village

this autumn. **The Jack Russell** at Swimbridge were, unfortunately, unable to hold their Annual Halloween Cider Festival this year, although they are promising that it will be "back, bigger and better, next year".

The Exeter Inn at Chittlehamholt remains closed, having been withdrawn from auction in October, and is now being advertised again. Other pubs being heavily advertised at present include: The Coach & Horses in Buckland Brewer, Old George High Bickington, Exmoor Manor Hotel & Beggars Roost Inn, Barbrook, Blue Ball Inn, Countisbury, Crown & Sceptre and Old Market Inn, both in Holsworthy, The West Country Inn on Bursdon Moor, Green Dragon at Langtree and the Village Inn at Ashwater. Most of these have been on the market for some time with many now being offered at significantly lower prices than previously.

Bob Goddard

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Campaigning Day 2018

Not even the 80mph winds of storm Callum could dent the enthusiasm of members who turned out in October to support the annual branch Campaigning Day. Designed to highlight the paucity of public transport to so many of our pubs in rural areas, this year our spotlight was on the more westerly reaches of our area. With pick-ups at Braunton, Barnstaple, Fremington and High Bickington our dedicated minibus driver Alan soon had us on our way although a planned visit to the Cyder Presse in Weare Giffard had to be abandoned after overnight storm damage to the pub. So our first port of call was to the Bell at Monkleigh where we received a very warm welcome at this traditional 400 year old thatched Devonshire free house. Predictably, both Palmer's IPA and Dartmoor Legend were in fine form.



Reluctantly moving on, our next visit was to the **Coach** and **Horses** at **Buckland Brewer** - yet another thatched Devonshire inn, although this one dating to back to

the 13th century. Forge Litehouse and Moorland's Old Speckled Hen were the ales of choice for most members there. Now well into our stride, it was only a short hop to (yes, you've guessed it!) another 13th century traditional thatched inn - this time the **Bell at Parkham** - although now looking remarkably spic and span having only recently reopened after their devastating fire of February 2017. Dartmoor Jail Ale, Country Life's Old Appledore and Tamar Source from Forge were all excellent - as indeed was Mike's

superb home cooking for which members were most appreciative.

Ever onward, the next stop was at the Hoops at Horns Cross (just how many traditional 13th century thatched pubs can there be in this part of Devon I hear you ask?) where the hospitality was once more outstanding - not to mention the ales: Barn Owl. Cotleigh's Clearwater Honey Beer



and *St Austell's Tribute* were all sampled. But with no time to waste (our driver being limited to an 8 hour shift!) we were once more heading west until eventually reaching the Cornish borderland around the coastal village of **Welcombe** where we were welcomed like old friends by Murrough and Grainne, new licensees at the **Old Smithy** (and yes, this too is yet another 13th century traditional thatched inn). *Bay's Devon Dumpling, Exeter Brewery's 'Fraid Not* and *Tamar Source from Forge* were all on superb form - and I'm reminded not to forget Lynne's favourite tipple of the day - the Rhubarb cider!

Weary but not downhearted, we still had time for one more quick stop on our return journey - the **Coach and Horses** back at **Horns Cross.** Alas not quite thatched, but nonetheless a cosy 17th century roadside inn with a warm welcome for all travellers on the A39 close to Peppercombe beach. Now under new management, but still upholding the high standards of the previous licensee, we enjoyed a final glass from an offering of Dartmoor Legend, Moorland's Old Speckled Hen and Sharpe's Doombar.



After such a full day everyone was more than satisfied, particularly with the welcome and hospitality shown by all our landlords which was truly outstanding, and for which many thanks. Public transport in rural areas may be in a poor way but clearly there are many excellent pubs out there in more remote locations managing to maintain the very highest standards. Finally, it would be remiss not to also mention and give thanks to **Country Life, Clearwater** and **Timothy Taylor** breweries who so kindly donated ales to assist this year's campaigning while helping raise funds for the various local charities.

Witterings from the **Branch President**



I am often asked 'Why are so many pubs closing?' and I have to admit that my response is often 'Good pubs don't close.' But I must admit that some good pubs are forced to close by unscrupulous business practices. However, I still maintain that good pubs don't close. This then begs the question what is a good pub? Of course this may be a matter of opinion but as President I feel my opinion is worth voicing!

A good pub is one where you can always get a full pint of good real ale in good condition; it will be a nice place to be in and you will be welcomed promptly, efficiently and in a friendly way whether you are a regular visitor or just popping in; you will feel valued as a human being not just a source of revenue. We have heard a great deal about our pubs being the hub of the community. The pub should suit the community and of course the community will get the pub it deserves. And of course it should be good value for money – in other words, having made the effort to go there how good an 'experience' have you had?

I worry when I hear people talking about taking on a pub as a 'nice little earner' or an 'easy way of life'. In my experience it is neither. Of course, like a great many pub goers I have never been a landlord. I've done my fair share of 'pub sitting' and bar work but there is oh so much more to being a landlord than this.

Going back to the issue of community pubs I have witnessed a rise in community owned or community run pubs. Three cheers for the community, especially when they have worked hard to keep their local up and running despite the opposition of the 'company'. But I also hear of pubs closing because they are not viable. In other words not being frequented. And you have to ask why no one goes in. The answer, of course, is that that pub is not offering what the people want. You would be foolish to take on a pub and expect people to flock in, even if you are the only one for miles. If your beer is excellent and there's no-one there to drink it think about the other issues mentioned before.

I am so fortunate to live in a community where I am spoilt for choice for pubs that meet all my criteria. Yet they are all very different from each other. So there is no 'one size fits all'. The great British drinker is a complex fellow.

Thankfully the Campaign for Real Ale recognises this variety and does all it can to support publicans, pubs and of course good real ale. I am proud to be a member and to do my duty in supporting CamRA and pubs wherever and whenever I can.

Happy grumbling.

Morris Elsworth (Aka Grumbledore)





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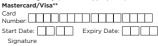
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