

Beer Tiz

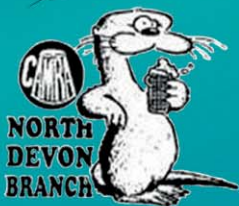


CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Issue 22

Spring 2019

FREE



CAMRA North Devon Branch



For the very latest news of this year's North
Devon Pub and Cider Pub of the Year Awards

See Inside!





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View from the Chair



Real Ale drinkers never know what interesting situations they are going to encounter when they set out for a pint.

I recently stopped at a roadside pub that I had never been in before and was delighted when having asked for a pint of the only ale they had on that day the landlady without any prompting immediately poured off a couple of pints before serving me. Rightly or wrongly I had already sensed this was a good pub and so was hoping for a good pint, and I was not disappointed!!!

Looking at the other side of the coin (and I'm sure this has happened to others too) there is no worse feeling than having to send back a pint served from near the bottom of the barrel or one that's just turned, only to have the landlord say "well everyone else is drinking it", or "no-one else has complained". I never enjoy having to explain that perhaps that was because the pint was OK then but it's not now, and that after all Real Ale is a live product that can change quite quickly. Thankfully most landlords are more than happy to change a pint if it's past its best, and even better when you're in a pub and see the landlord racing out from behind the bar to take a pint back from a customer before they've even had time to taste it because they've just noticed it's cloudy! Perhaps this is the sign of a great pub or landlord - and we all know it can be a challenging job at times. But no wonder then that some people would rather settle for a pint of some tasteless mass produced product that's sure to be served on the cold side but at least is predictable, rather than opt for a tasty Real Ale but run the risk of getting into an argument with a less than accommodating landlord - after all - most of us go to the pub to relax.

And while I'm talking about temperature and Real Ale, I do find it slightly odd to read that

so many younger drinkers appear to prefer a colder pint these days, but is that so wrong if that's the way they like it, even if it does open up the debate about lack of flavour etc? Having said this, there are limits - when the pint is so cold there's condensation on the outside of the glass and you wish you'd worn your gloves, or a cheeky member of the bar staff offers to put it in the microwave for you! (Perhaps that's an argument for keeping Ale glasses at a slightly higher temperature?)

Finally, are craft ales and craft gins having an impact on sales of Real Ale I ask myself, or is it simply that with lower profit margins on Real Ale that some landlords prefer to sell craft or keg beers which generally take less looking after? And does this mean we will inevitably move to a smaller number of more specialised Real Ale pubs serving a high quality product - particularly where there's a landlord or cellarman who loves to drink Real Ale - at least in our towns and cities where choice and diversity will drive an increasingly competitive market? Or perhaps we should all raise a glass to the craft ale fraternity for helping more people (especially younger drinkers) appreciate the rich variety of all ales?

I hope I have left you with something to think about when you're drinking your next pint!

Mark Partridge

(Branch Chairman and Social Secretary)

The Farmers Arms at Woolsery

Pub News in the previous edition of Beer Tiz gave mention to the Farmers Arms at Woolsery opening again after standing empty for almost seven years. With so many rural pubs these days reported to be under threat of closure it is perhaps worth expanding on just how the relatively small settlement of Woolsery has somehow managed to buck this unwelcome trend.

The simple answer in a nutshell is that the villagers have been fortunate enough to find someone with deep enough pockets not only to rescue the pub and restore it to the highest standards, but also to finance a series of other major restoration works in the village. These include the next door Fish and Chip shop, the Village Store and Post Office, a number of period cottages to be converted as guest lodges, a local farm (sourcing fresh food for the pub's kitchens), and what promises to be the jewel in the village's new crown - a fully restored Grade 2 listed Georgian manor house just across the road from the Farmers Arms which is set to open as an up-market hotel once work has been completed in a few years time.



Like many villages faced with the loss of their local pub, Woolsery residents first sought the protection of ACV status (Asset of Community Value) but without the financial clout required to purchase and manage the pub as a community venture this strategy appeared to fail. Only then, in 2014, was the Farmers Arms rescued from

near certain oblivion by the timely intervention of Michael and Xochi Birch. Having fond childhood memories of visiting his grandmother who once lived in the village, Michael had since moved to the United States where he set up Bebo – a dot.com phenomenon which he very astutely sold in 2008 for a figure reputed to be around half a billion pounds! (\$850 million). So what better way to repay the hospitality and pleasure of those impressionable times spent with family and friends at Woolsery than invest just a small portion of this fabulous wealth back in the village?

But while there are going to be very few threatened village pubs fortunate enough to be rescued by their very own multi-millionaire, thankfully there are other options – as both the George and Dragon and the Packhorse Inn have shown us elsewhere in this edition.

A photograph of three people (two men and one woman) sitting at a table outdoors, enjoying beer. The woman is in the center, smiling, and the two men are on either side of her, also smiling. They are all holding glasses of beer. The background shows trees and foliage.

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Branch Calendar

APRIL

Fri 5th - Sat 6th:

Appledore Sausage and Ale Festival,
St Mary's Hall, Appledore, EX39 1RL

Fri 5th - Sat 7th:

CAMRA Members' Weekend and Conference –
Caird Hall, City Square, Dundee, DD13BB

Thu 11th - Sat 13th:

The Maltings Beer Festival – Osborne Park,
Teign Rd, Newton Abbot, TQ12 4AA

Sat 13th:

Branch Meeting – The Tors Inn,
Belstone, EX20 1QZ

Thu 18th – Mon 22nd:

Wellington Arms Beer Festival,
Ilfracombe, EX34 9QE

Tue 16th:

Branch Committee Meeting – Venue TBC

MAY

nb. CAMRA National Cider Promotion Month

Sat 11th:

Branch Meeting – Venue TBA

Sun 26th - Mon 27th:

North Devon Beer Festival - Pannier Market,
Barnstaple, EX31 1SY

JUNE

Sat 8th:

Branch Meeting – Venue TBA

Sat 8th:

South West Regional CAMRA meeting – St Austell,
Venue TBA

JULY

Sat 13th:

Branch Meeting – Venue TBA

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North Devon Home Brewers' Group



(Artisan Brewers, allegedly)!

It all started aeons ago when the ale-wife took her twigs down from above the door and stirred them into the cooling wort to produce that magical potion we've all come to know and love. Fast forward a few thousand years and the old wives are still at it, although we may prefer to be gender-neutral nowadays and adopt the dictionary name of ale artisans – ones skilled in their craft!

The art, magic and science of brewing have certainly come a long way, with home brewing



providing the springboard for many new craft brewing set-ups (locally including GT Ales, Madrigal and Fat Belly to name

but a few) to move on to successful commercial brewing. As home brewers, we have the freedom to brew whatever we like, with no set rules (well, there's obviously sterilisation and temperature control etc), but without the need to chase the market and only brew what sells, the home brewer's choice is limitless. Just as an example, we might choose to recreate a historic 1895 Porter at 8% ABV using the original Amber and Brown malts, and so produce a tremendous tasting beer that will keep for a year!

The arrival of newer hop varieties from around the world has meant we can now add truly unique flavours, although in truth some hops can be very expensive. The artisan brewer also has the liberty to multi-hop and dry hop his ales. For example he can create a 'proper' IPA by using a massive amount of hops in a strong beer

and leaving it to mature for up to 6 months, so allowing the excess bitterness to subside and meld with the malts – the result being a match made in heaven. So move over 4% IPAs – you are pale Imposters!

The Barnstaple home brewing group have been going for over 9 years now. We meet monthly and organise brewing challenges, tasting and food matching events. We share our knowledge and brew just about everything going – cloned beers, wheat beers, historic beers no longer found in pubs, and yes, lagers



too! We critique one another's beers and offer suggestions both good and bad. However, we do need to be aware of our own prejudices when objectively tasting. We even award a Beer of the Month trophy, made by one of our members, known as Grave Danger (just try swapping around the initial letters to guess who made it?). Given the wide range of hops, malts and specialist yeasts available nowadays from around the world, the only limiting factors are our wallets and our imagination!

The group was set up in 2010 by Graham Kingham since when he has led and inspired us with his ideas and challenges. It is fair to say that we have all become immeasurably more confident and skilled brewers under his mentorship. For some years we met on a quiet week night at the Rolle Quay in Barnstaple where landlord Peter was happy for us to taste and consume our own produce, providing this was supplemented

with a few pints purchased from the bar. One or two members have since moved away but we still meet regularly in different venues, or often just meeting in someone's house. Brewery visits have also been part of our agenda along with rail excursions to Exeter where the craft beer bar offerings are duly sampled for further inspiration.

Forty years ago home brewing was often a matter of buying a ready made kit containing malt extract and cheap, generic yeasts. Many an aspiring drinker was deterred by limited availability of genuine ingredients, resulting in poor quality brews and even the odd explosion in a cupboard under the stairs. All this has radically changed now as the 21st century home brewing enthusiast can research and buy almost anything on-line. Equipment, new world hops, scientifically produced yeasts, and the most up to date know-how have all helped revolutionise the domestic brewing process to the point where the amateur home brewer can

now produce beers to rival the ales of even the most well established brand names familiar to us all.

So - are you up for the challenge? Do you want to try tickling your taste buds with some really unique beers? Well, then why not come along to one of our Home Brew Club meetings to sample a range of our brews? You never know - you might just not want to go back to drinking expensive mass produced beer ever again!!!

Alan White and Graham Kingham

(Contact details available on request from Editor)

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BRANCH PUB OF THE YEAR 2019

WINNER:

The Bell Inn at Chittlehampton



Highly Commended Finalists:

The Grove Inn at Kings Nympton; the Railway Inn at North Tawton; and the Globe Inn at Beaford.

BRANCH CIDER OF THE YEAR 2019

WINNER:

The Cyder Presse at Weare Giffard

Highly Commended Finalist: the Grove Inn at Kings Nympton

(Presentation certificates will be made at all the above pubs over the coming months – see website for further information)

THE PACKHORSE INN SOUTH STOKE



The **Packhorse Inn** at South Stoke in Somerset on being awarded CAMRA's prestigious Pub Saving Award in recognition of all the hard work by the local community to raise funds and help restore this 400 year old village pub. Under threat of closure since 2012, this is just one more example of a community banding together to thwart plans to convert their much loved pub into housing. Raising over half a million pounds, the Packhorse Inn is now the property of the 430 shareholders and hopefully will act as an inspiration to other communities facing the same threat of losing such a real asset of community value.

THE ANCIENT BRITS!

It seems that the earliest evidence of beer being brewed in Britain has been unearthed in Cambridgeshire. Believed to date as far back as 400 BC – archaeologists have identified the charred residual remains from what can only have been the result of fermentation in the beer making process. Purifying water by making ale was well known to primitive communities – far safer (and more enjoyable!) than risking polluted water – and so it's good to know that at least some things haven't changed in the last two thousand years!

REFLECTIONS OF A CIDER LOVER

We recently visited Ilfracombe on a beautiful and warm pre-Spring day. As usual the first call was to the Admiral Collingwood. Then we tried two more of Ilfracombe's finest pubs before making our final call at the Hip and Pistol.

I have to say that as a seasoned cider drinker this for me is definitely the best pub in the town as they seem to consistently have new and interesting ciders on offer. Also, I already knew from past experience that the landlord (Nick) has a wide knowledge and understanding of cider which he is always more than happy to share with his customers – guiding me with his expertise to help identify new and interesting ciders I might like the pleasure of trying – although on this particular day there were only two on offer: **Sam's Cider** and a totally new one as far as I was concerned, **Buckshot Dry Cider**.

Normally I prefer a medium cider but thought I would try the Buckshot just for a change. The cider is produced in Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, a county which as far as I know is not renowned for its cider production. Nick the landlord explained that the Cider Maker only ferments a limited amount of Buckshot dry and for some unknown reason only distributes it to the chosen outlets during school holidays, so it clearly is not a cider seen too often in these parts. Unknowingly we had actually passed the Cider Maker outside the pub as he got back into his small and rather nondescript white van.

Presenting as a flat clear cider but with an almost green tinge of colour to it, the taste was light and fruity and with a most definite tang - quite different to anything I've previously tasted in Devon - and I would be interested to know which apples were used in making it? But I have to say it was a lovely refreshing drink and would be my drink of choice for any warm summer's day.

Lynne Barlow

UPCOMING BEER FESTIVALS THIS SPRING!

Now into its 4th year, the **Appledore Sausage and Ale Festival** is being held at St Mary's Hall on Fri 5th and Sat 6th April where no less than 12 regional ales, 8 ciders and 6 types of sausage will be on sale. Live music and childrens' entertainment daily.

In Ilfracombe, the **Wellington Arms** will be holding a 5 day beer festival over the Easter period beginning Thursday 18th April and featuring no less than 12 locally sourced real ales.

And don't forget this year's 13th annual **North Devon Beer Festival** to be held at the Barnstaple Pannier Market on Sunday 26th and Monday 27th May - once more featuring a wide selection of Real Ales exclusively from North Devon brewers together with locally sourced food and live music - a must for all the family!



North Devon's CAMRA Brewery of the Year 2019

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Pub News

from around the Branch



The early weeks of each year always find members of our Pubs Officer Group busy assessing and surveying pubs for possible inclusion in the next Good Beer Guide. This is always a pleasure, as it generally entails visiting the very best pubs within the branch, and this year has been no exception. Every year the competition seems to be greater for the precious 27 places in the Guide that are allocated to our North Devon branch.

It is the case though, that sometimes this is not the ideal time of year to make the surveying visits involved, but unfortunately this cannot be avoided. Dark evenings and winter weather are obvious challenges, but another, even less predictable factor seems to affect our trips more and more each January and February, particularly in what might be described as our more “touristy” areas; Can we be sure to find that the pubs are actually open?

Of course it makes great sense for some of our establishments to restrict their opening hours, or even to close for a few weeks at this quieter time of year, while they take holidays or carry out refurbishments. In a number of cases this is an established practice, thus enabling us to advise these regular adjustments on WhatPub. It is the arbitrary and unadvertised variation of opening times that present problems. Almost by definition, the pubs concerned invariably rely heavily on non-locals for most of the year, so almost all have websites anyway. The problem is, that all too often, the information shown there is not regularly updated to reflect any seasonally adjusted variations in the opening times concerned. It being better to travel hopefully than to arrive is all too often becoming a maxim proved true. Although no one should presume to tell any business when it should or should not be open for business, I am sure that in most instances the disappointment of potential

customers, in finding pubs unexpectedly closed, could sensibly be avoided. We are always keen to help with this ourselves by publishing any temporary changes on WhatPub. Come on you pubs, and indeed locals, please just let us know!

Current GBG entry The **Wellington Arms** in Ilfracombe is holding a beer festival over 5 days at Easter, beginning on Thursday 18th April. All beers will be sourced from North Devon breweries, with customers invited to vote for their favourites. A total of at least 12 real ales will be available throughout the festival, while revenue from the sales of glasses and other merchandise is to be donated to Devon Air Ambulance. Also in Ilfracombe, The **Bunch of Grapes** re-opened in early March after a closure of more than six months. At Knowle, just outside Branton, a loyalty card scheme has been introduced at The **Ebrington Arms**. This entitles a free pint in respect of every five purchased. Meanwhile, at nearby Wrafton, the Branton Inn has reverted to its former name of **Heanton Court**.



In Barnstaple The **Cork & Bottle** on the High Street is reported to have ceased offering real ale. After a short closure, Alfie Brown's has been re-incarnated as **Lush**, while also on Boutport Street it appears to be the case that The White Horse has finally gone, with what appears to be a major conversion job now taking place there. More positively, an interesting development

within the town has seen **Escape Down The Rabbit Hole**, which opened early last year, add a licensed bar to this film-themed café and



restaurant. Run by enterprising brothers Jason and Luke Matthews, a micro-brewery has also been installed and has now started selling two of their own brews: Live Long and Prosper - a very tasty IPA, and Memphis Belle - an interesting EPA, both at 4%. Set close to the Pannier Market on Market Street, in addition to the spacious bar area, adjacent restaurant and attractive courtyard, it also has two “escape rooms”, where teams can participate in a series of puzzles and challenges to complete a quest.

The **Copper Key** at North Tawton is reported to be closed and up for sale, as also is the case also with The **Earl of Portsmouth** in Chawleigh. These have now joined a number of pubs which have been closed for longer periods of time and are still on the market, including The **Exeter Inn** Chittlehamholt and The **Barnstaple Inn** in Burrington. Meanwhile a number of other premises have continued to be quite heavily marketed for sale, often in excess of a year or more now, but fortunately have remained open while they continue to seek buyers.

Bob Goddard

Chawleigh



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Community Ownership

Could this be the way forward for our threatened pubs?



The announcement by CAMRA in March 2017 that its most prestigious National Pub of the Year award was to go to the **George and Dragon** in Hudswell,



North Yorkshire, was truly remarkable. A small village pub, well off the beaten track, the George and Dragon like many other pubs in rural areas had been forced to close back in 2008, leaving villagers with no community facilities other than the small village hall. Not prepared to

take this lying down, within two years the Hudswell Community Pub Ltd had been formed to buy back the pub in a co-operative venture for the benefit of locals. A further two years and a lot of hard work later, the newly renovated pub was finally re-opened in June 2010, bigger and better than before. Quite apart from serving a wide range of quality real ales and ciders, it now houses the village library, a local shop staffed by volunteers, and provides a community space offering free internet access for patrons. Landlord Sue Miller is proud to run this small Yorkshire Dales pub, owned by the village and run for the benefit of that wider community.

Bringing a pub under the collective ownership of the local community has a great deal to recommend it. Not only does it preserve a precious asset for the benefit of those who value a tipples in their local without having to drive elsewhere, but in doing so can also serve a wider social function by offering a focal point where villagers can come together in what are often quite isolated communities. Providing space for local enterprise such as small retail outlets, or preserving a threatened service like a Post Office or even a Bank, community owned pubs can bring a wealth

of advantages, not least in providing volunteering opportunities for those with time and skills to share. By giving local people a greater sense of ownership (quite literally) in where they live, community owned pubs can also have a direct impact on the collective mental well-being of the entire community.

And so, with dozens of pubs across the country closing each month, could community ownership provide a solution for pubs under threat in North Devon? While thankfully the vast majority of pubs remain profitable despite today's market forces, for some hard pressed communities the answer may well be a resounding 'yes', in which case there is good news on the horizon. Building on the success of the **More than a Pub** programme which has already resulted in the opening of 26 pubs nationwide under community ownership since 2016, a major new funding programme said to be worth in excess of £2 million has now been announced. Under the umbrella of **Power to Change**, and with leadership from the Plunkett Foundation (with a successful record of nurturing community businesses since 1919) and with the full support of CAMRA, financial support will now be available from Summer 2019 to help galvanise community support and put in place the necessary legal, financial and community structures to ensure the viability and sustainability of each new venture. Whereas securing AVC (Asset of Community Value) status may be helpful in buying time when a local pub is threatened with closure, having the benefit of experienced and expert advice, not to mention financial support, can make all the difference.

And so, if you are supping comfortably at your favorite local, wondering whether or not it's still going to be there this time next year, then maybe you too need to consider whether the Power to Change programme can help preserve that very precious fabric of your local community and join the growing band of pubs (currently 96 and increasing steadily) owned by their local communities?

Peter Thompson

Witterings (or a real good grumble) from the **Branch President**



Why did I join CAMRA? Recently I have found myself asking this question. I am no longer able to be the active CAMRA member I used to be and health issues prevent me from being physically involved in national events, although I am fortunate that with Fiona being Secretary for CAMRA South West Region I am still able to be involved at this level. So what is there for me?

It is unfortunate that North Devon Branch covers such a large area and with such limited public transport it is a challenge for those of us in the south of the branch to enjoy the social events and branch meetings available as they are generally in the mid and north.

But being a member of CAMRA is so much more than this. I want to know what is going on nationally, regionally and locally. I eagerly read meeting minutes to find out what new strategies are being put in place and how we, a branch campaigning membership, can make a difference. I have to ask the question 'Where are we heading and why?' and I worry that members are not informed and therefore cannot be active. I consider myself to be 'armchair active' now. I follow trends and can (and do) have active discussions with other people, members and non-members. I would love to be able to share this with other members. I am fortunate that, after all these years of being actively involved I have friends who continue to be active in CAMRA strategies and decision making at Regional and National level.

Perhaps I should consider broadening my role as Branch President and Witterings author to include facilitating members' access to CAMRA discussions at a Regional and National level whilst our branch continues to thrive on a more social level. What do you think? Do you read your What's Brewing? Do you ask your branch committee questions about national directives

and strategies? Do you feel consulted about regional actions? Do you contact your Regional Secretary putting forward your point of view? Do you know when your Regional and National meetings are and that you are welcome to attend?

If you can't or won't get out of your armchair don't let that stop you having a voice. You pay your subs the same as every other member from National Executive to festival organiser to committee member to inactive member. But CAMRA needs more than your money and you deserve more than to just to pay up and shut up!

Morris – El Presidente!
(Aka Grumbledore)

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The brewery's first beer and winner at GBBF 1980, Best Bitter. Pale brown beer, with a malty aroma, a full dry taste and malty bitter finish. A classic session bitter.

EXMOOR FOX • ABV 4.2%
Curiously crafted from a blend of several hops and malts to produce a mid-brown beer of unusual subtlety and taste. Slight maltness on the tongue is followed by a burst of hops and a lingering bitter-sweet aftertaste.

EXMOOR GOLD • ABV 4.5%
The original and first single malt "Golden Ale". Golden in colour with a malty aroma and flavour, a slight sweetness is complemented by its long hoppiness resulting in a remarkable, well rounded beer.

EXMOOR STAG • ABV 5.2%
Strong copper-coloured premium bitter, with a good malty taste, full hopped aroma and long dry finish. Originally brewed for Somerset County Cricket Clubs Centenary celebrations...to popular the brew became permanent.

EXMOOR BEAST • ABV 6.6%
Remarkably drinkable strong "Punter" style ale. Once a "Winter Warmer", now year round. Brewed making liberal use of chocolate and crystal malts. A smooth and complex beer with hints of fructose, rum, coffee and chocolate.

T: 01984 623798 • E: info@exmoorales.co.uk • www.exmoorales.co.uk

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