



THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

# THE HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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## AFTER RAYMENT'S BIGGLESWADE

Greene King have announced their intention to stop brewing real ale at another of their breweries. Hard on the heels of the closure of Rayments brewery, comes the news that the Biggleswade brewery is to brew only lager.

The company are to invest £2.4 million on converting their Biggleswade brewery into a lager only plant, with the production of their cask beers being switched to their Bury St. Edmunds brewery. This leaves Bury as Greene King's sole source of real ale. Although not surprising (the Biggleswade brewery has been rumoured to have been under threat for some time), following so closely after their closure of Rayments it is further disappointing news.

The plans are for them to manufacture Harp at Biggleswade from October 1989. Greene King have a 25% share of the Harp Lager Company but up to now have taken supplies from other breweries who have been brewing the product under licence.

The move looks to be a defensive measure against a possible take over bid from Elders who were recently thwarted in their attempts to get Greene King to supply Fosters lager to their pubs (Elders were more successful in a similar attempt with Mansfield where they offered the tenancy of 20 John Smith pubs in exchange). Elders, who have built up a 13.1% stake in GK, have said they will not make a take over bid for them in the next six months. City analysts have commented that with their sizable band of family and friendly investors Greene King have a good chance of remaining independent.

The Biggleswade brewery dates from 1764 and came under Greene King's ownership when they took over Wells & Winch in 1961. This latter company was run for a long time by the Redman family and their influence is now felt at Greene King where Simon Redman is the MD. The Biggleswade brewery is not unassociated with lager, Tuborg was being bottled there in the fifties, as was Skol in the early sixties.

It is not currently known when brewing of Abbot, IPA and KK will cease at Biggleswade, and there is further concern as to how long KK will survive the move, particularly as it is being replaced in some pubs by the Bury produced Rayments BBA.

## DOUBLE TIME

An amendment to the new Licensing Bill will, when it becomes law, increase drinking-up time from 10 to 20 minutes. The bill which seeks to allow pubs in England and Wales to open between 11am and 11pm Monday to Saturday is currently at the committee stage and the change proposed by Labour MPs was accepted by the government in preference to a Tory backbench proposal for a 30 minute period.

The government has already rejected proposals to extend the general closing time to midnight, and their acceptance of a longer drinking-up period is seen as giving extra flexibility at the end of opening hours. It was argued that the 30 minute proposal would lead to stockpiling of drinks at last orders.



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Draught Beer  
in Olde-World  
surroundings*

Hot food *always* available  
Large selection of collectors Ales for sale.

# NEW BBA A FLOP, SAYS SURVEY

The new "Rayment's BBA", brewed by Greene King at Bury St Edmunds, following the closure of Rayment's brewery at Furneux Pelham, isn't going down at all well with local drinkers, according to a survey carried out in local pubs.

CAMRA questioned 200 beer drinkers in 20 former Rayment's pubs about the replacement brew, and found that only 11% thought the new beer very good or excellent, compared with 73% for the old version. Indeed, 65% of those questioned thought the new BBA to be either bad or average. Only 27% of those asked, thought the new brew would be a success.

When asked whether it was honest for Greene King to name the new, Suffolk-brewed beer "Rayment's BBA", although Rayment's Brewery is closed, 83% of those asked said it was not. An even larger proportion, 92%, said they would like to see the Furneux Pelham brewery re-opened.

It wasn't just the old-timers who wished BBA could still be as it used to be. Only 12% of the 18 to 30-year olds questioned considered the new brew to be either good or excellent, compared with 73% for the old version.

The Newsletter asked CAMRA's Research Officer Danny Blyth, who organised the survey, if he felt it contained any message for Greene King. He answered: "The survey showed that people would much prefer to have their old Rayment's back. If Greene King are responsive to consumer demand, then they will re-open the brewery — or, failing that, cease to use the name Rayment's."

## TAKEAWAY NEWS

Pints'n'Litres have sold their real ale off-licence in St. Albans Road, Watford and the new owners have renamed it The Flagon of Hops. It is now being advertised as a 'Draught Beer Off Licence'. The range of beers available is largely unchanged as are the prices eg St. Albans Ale 69p a pint, Ruddles County 89p (29p a pit cheaper than the local Berni Inn!).

Meanwhile, Pints'n'Litres have opened their own new off licence in central St Albans, where the George Street shop dispenses St Albans Ale from Banks and Taylors, Adnams Bitter and a number of other brews, as well as some interesting continental bottled beers.

Also in St Albans, the Bottoms Up off-licence in Victoria Street advertises polypins of Berkhamsted Brewery's Bitter as available with a few days' notice.

**YOUR LOCALS 'BEST'**

**BENSKINS BEST BITTER**

CASK CONDITIONED

ESTABLISHED AT WATFORD IN 1751

Your Inn for the Best

**BENSKINS**

Allied Lyons

## PUB NEWS

Hatfield's *Robin Hood* has undergone a transformation and has re-opened as *Legends*, advertising continental lager and a light show. It remains to be seen whether it will be as successful as Hitchin's *Jeans*, now sadly forlorn and boarded-up.

Fuller's have obtained planning permission to build a new pub on the site of the *Boat* in Ravens Lane, Berkhamsted, which has been closed since 1978. The new pub will have a canalside bar and outside drinking area, and should be complete by the summer.

Benskins Best has replaced Ind Coope Bitter at the *Bell*, Two Waters, whilst Tetley's Bitter has been added to the range of beers at the *White Lion*, St Albans.

Licensee Kay Goad and her regulars at the *Stag*, Merry Hill Road, Bushey are champion fund-raisers. They have just handed a cheque to the Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood, which will pay for a hospital bed, the second to be paid for by the pub. The money has been raised by raffles and coffee mornings, a splendid achievement for a small pub.

Three pubs in Ware are recent converts to the real ale cause. The *Bell* serves Flowers IPA and Original, whilst the superb little *Albion* also serves Flowers IPA. The *Plough and Harrow* now serves handpumped Benskins Best.

Recently re-opened after major refurbishment, the *Blacksmith's Arms* in St Albans now has Flowers Original and Wethered's Bitter available.

## DANGER BLOW

Beware of personal breathalyser machines — that was the message from a recent "Which" magazine report which tested four of these increasingly popular devices. Between 10 and 20 per cent of the readings were found to have given drinkers the go-ahead drive, despite the people having consumed well over the legal limit. "They are not only a waste of money — they could be a personal danger", says the report.

## YOUNG'S MORE SPECIAL

Young's brewery are changing the recipe of their famous Young's Special, following declining sales. The beer which was once the *Sunday Mirror* champion beer of Britain, and more recently won two CAMRA awards, is to have a fresher, hoppier flavour. Said Young's Head Brewer Ken Don: "The Directors felt that Young's Special should have a special character to make it stand out from the often bland taste of other strong beers."

## PUB OF THE YEAR

Hertfordshire South Branch of CAMRA have voted, as their Pub of the Year, for the *White Horse*, the popular free house in Castle Street, in the county town of Hertford.

A tiny two-bar pub, the *White Horse* is famous for the range of unusual guest beers, and its traditional and unspoilt character. Come and see for yourself what makes a pub of the year, when the pub is presented with its special award on Tuesday 23rd February from 8pm.

## WATCH OUT FOR SHORT MEASURES

A national survey has shown that the average pint of beer served in a pub is half an ounce short of full measure. This means that for every 40 pints of beer pulled by a publican, he drinks one free, or pockets the profits. More than 9 billion pub pints were drunk in 1986, which means that publicans creamed off an illicit £225 million.

Wine drinkers have things little better than beer drinkers. There is no standard sized glass of wine in pubs, and a glass of red might cost you from 50p to £2.25. Surveyors said that some of the wine sold was "revolting".

The survey was carried out by the Institute of Trading Standards Administration across 71 local authorities in England and Wales.

## YAWN...

The 16th-century *Three Hammers* at Chiswell Green has re-opened with, according to the local press, a 15,000 book library, the brainchild of designer David Henderson. This is described in the newspaper as "a novel idea", and the licensees of this Benskins pub are shown seated in what looks like a Victorian colonial gentleman's reading room.

Well, readers, sorry to disappoint you, but there must be several score of other pubs in the country with "libraries" (old books bought by the yard), some of which are also Benskins pubs, and some of which are in Hertfordshire. We saw our first some seven years ago, when it was indeed a novel idea.

What in any case, one wonders is a responsible brewery doing turning a genuine historic Tudor residence into an imitation gentlemen's club, and how can they possibly justify spending the quoted £200,000 doing this? Aren't there any designers left at Benskins who can treat a 16th-century building with respect?

## BEER FESTIVALS

CAMRA's second Beer on Broadway Beer Festival will be held on 5th and 6th February at Ealing Town Hall. The festival is open for lunchtime and evening sessions on both days. Admission is free at lunchtimes, but costs £1 for evenings. There will be over 30 draught beers, including a selection of winter brews, as well as cider and foreign beers, and special commemorative glasses.

Further ahead is the London Drinker Beer Festival at Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London WC1 on 23rd to 25th March. Again there will be over 30 real ales, together with Belgian beers, cider and perry, hot and cold food and live entertainment. Admission is £1 to evening sessions (5 to 10.30pm); lunchtimes (11.30 to 3pm) free. Card-carrying CAMRA members are admitted free at all sessions: another good reason for joining CAMRA.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

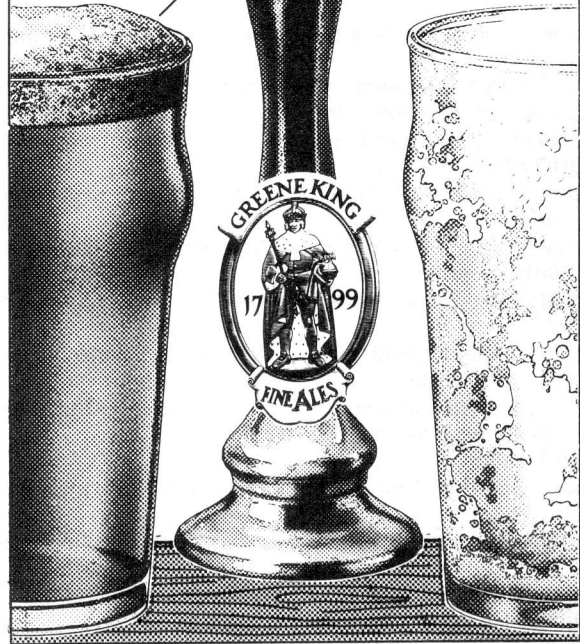
Dear Editor,

The report in the Newsletter (Number 106) that the Chequers, Potters Bar has re-opened after alteration requires further comment. It is now one of the best, if not the best, pubs in South Hertfordshire.

The beer is consistently good. There is no music of any kind except live music every Tuesday evening. The staff are very

"Did you know that every pint of Greene King ale contains only the sturdiest hops and the finest malt barley?"

"Mine doesn't."



polite and make customers feel welcome.

Yours sincerely,  
W.C. Broadley,  
Cuffley, Potters Bar.

Dear CAMRA,

Reading through the latest news-sheet to be found on the corner of many bars of the hostelrys I frequent, I was quite concerned after digesting the article (Newsletter 106) on re-vamped pubs in the area.

A couple of points made, quite shocked me and with good reason. Firstly, The Crown Hotel. There's mention of the re-furb. To be quite honest, is it that bad? I stopped using The Crown about two years ago. When it was shut down for the re-furb, I awaited the transformation with bated breath. A free house is normally a treasure to savour. Born in the year of the cat my curiosity got the better of me and I stalked the door as if a mouse-hole that hid a tasty morsel. I know it's all new and mock-tudor but it was a pleasant change to see everything clean.

I can understand the new owner's reason for the low ceilings. 1) it halves the cost of decorating, 2) also the heating and finally, unless you're over 20ft tall, what the hell does it matter so long as the beer and atmosphere are good? On reflection, it is nice to have Olde Worlde pubs, but with the breweries paying for the re-furbs with the sort of money that talks, THEY do what THEY want and a team of runaway drey-horses won't halt their progress.

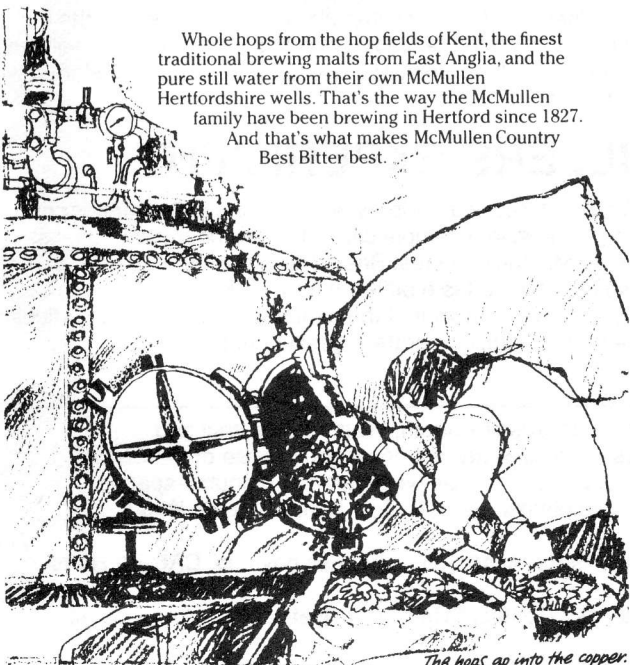
Secondly, the Blacksmith's Arms. In your article it goes on about "tastefully refurbished premises". It's not the old "Blackies" that it was 15 years ago with darts and doms either. Looks a bit to me like it's been "re-vamped", but in a different style to "mock Tudor". Plus the fact, there's a hostile welcome. I, being a chap with long hair and a beard and, owing to a bike accident 18 years ago, suffer a weak ankle and always wear boots. It being a particularly cold evening, I was wearing a heavy "lumberjack" styled sheepskin. A matter of seconds after my entry, I was confronted by a white shirt with a butterfly round its throat. "Can't come here in working gear pal" to which I replied "I'm not working". "No, and you're not xxxxxx drinking either, get out".

So much for the good ol' Blackies tastefully refurbished and all. Looks like you'll be drinking in the Blackies and I'll start to use the Crown again.

Cheers,  
D.J. Messer,  
St Albans

## McMullen Country - McMullen Best

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# BRANCH DIARY

## NORTH HERTS

10 February: Social at Axe and Compasses, *Braughing*. 8pm.

26 February: Pub Crawl of *Baldock* starting White Hart, 8pm.

Contact Jonathan Fynn, Royston 44043.

## SOUTH HERTS

1 February: Committee Meeting at the Harpenden Arms, *Harpenden*. 8pm.

16 February: Branch Meeting at the Crooked Billet, *Colney Heath*. 8pm.

23 February: Pub of the Year celebration at the White Horse, *Hertford*. 8pm.

7 March: Committee Meeting at the Chequers, *Potters Bar*. 8pm.

22 March: Branch Meeting at the Garibaldi, *St Albans*. 8pm.

Contact Neil Steff, Welwyn Garden 335911.

## WATFORD AND DISTRICT

2 February: Darts Match at the Hit and Miss, Lower High Street, *Watford*. 8pm.

10 February: Branch Meeting at the Wheatsheaf, Lower High Street, *Watford*. 8pm.

24 February: Anti-Social/Survey around *Garston* and *Leavesden*. 8pm.

28 February: Committee Meeting at West Herts Sports Club. 8pm.

9 March: Branch Meeting, venue to be arranged.

27 March: Committee Meeting at West Herts Sports Club. 8pm.

Contact: Martin Few, Watford 52412.

## MID-CHILTERNERS

2 February: Social at Boars Head, *Piccotts End*. 8.30pm, then Hemel Old Town.

12 February: Social at Plough, *Hyde Heath*. 8.30pm, then Barley Mow.

22 February: Social at Rising Sun, *Berkhamsted*. 8.30pm.

Contact: Roy Humphrey, Hemel Hempstead 833451.

# FOLK IN PUBS

Here is an up-to-date guide to the Hertfordshire pubs which host folk music clubs. The information has been obtained from "Unicorn", the local folk magazine.

**HARPENDEN:** The Engineer, Cravells Road. Wednesdays.

Contact Linda Fryd, Harpenden 64418.

**HITCHIN:** Sun Hotel, Sun Street. Sundays. Contact Maureen Jones, Letchworth 672893.

**HODDESDON:** The Crown, Stanstead Abbots. Fridays. Contact Bob Smith, Bayford 425.

**ROYSTON:** The Old Bull, High Street. Thursday (fortnightly).

Contact Howard Simpson, Royston 42518.

**WARE:** The Brewery Tap, High Street. Sundays. Contact Ian Bembridge. 0992 552192.

**Peter & Lesley Reynolds welcome you to**



## THE STAR INN

### FURNEUX PELHAM



**Rayments BBA ★ Greene King IPA & Abbot**

**GOOD HOME COOKED FOOD  
MONDAY TO SATURDAY**

☎ Brent Pelham 227

# POTTERS BAR NEWS

A recent visit to the *Two Brewers* at Northaw to sample the recently installed Youngs bitter it was noted that this fine old pub was in an advanced state of neglect with paint and wallpaper peeling away.

This usually means that its owners, Ind Coope — Benskins, wish to perform drastic surgery on the premises, as in the case of the *Strafford Arms*, which would totally alter the character of the pub, and not always to the good.

Suspensions were confirmed when two young men of the upwardly mobile variety were seen brandishing plans for extensive alterations, including a restaurant.

This is a splendid old local, with many rooms, which would much more benefit from a simple redecoration than a major reconstruction that would drive away the regulars, push up prices, and create a major source of disturbance in this small village.

Congratulations to Richard and Rosemary Brown on the reopened *Chequers* in Potters Bar. Those who know their other pub the *Monken Holt* in Hadley Common can expect the same high standard of service. Look at the inn sign. It's not what you might expect. Courage Best Bitter and Directors on handpump. Throughout the Spring Benskins spent 70,000 pounds on renovating the *Lion* in Barnet Road, Potters Bar. It would appear that the tied house department did not know what the property department were doing as soon after refurbishment was completed it was announced that with some reluctance the planning committee of Hertsmere Council had granted permission for an office block with underground car park to be built on the car park, and the *Lion* to be converted to building society offices.

Needless to say the manager was kept in the dark by Benskins, and only found out through the *Potters Bar Times*.

The result is that Potters Bar is losing a fine old pub which, if surplus to Benskin's requirements could have been sold to another, preferably independent, brewer or as a free house, congestion on the High Street will be worse than it is now and Potters Bar will look more like Birmingham City Centre.

Hertsmere Council have proved themselves spineless in bowing to pressure from the developers in approving plans they obviously had reservations about and Benskins have wasted 70,000 pounds which no doubt will be recovered in the usual way, through the price of a pint.

# LICENSEES FORECAST PRICIER PINT

Pub licensees meeting at Watford recently forecast that the price of beer could soon go up by up to 20p per pint. Pub tenants fear that future rate revaluations, together with rocketing overheads, will make such increases a necessity.

A licensee told the meeting of Licensed Victuallers Associations, at the *Tudor Arms*, Watford, that the brewers would be earning more money while the licensees were paying more rates.

It is not clear whether any sympathy was expressed for the poor customer, who on top of also having to pay higher rates, will have to fork out more for a drink at the local. It seems the customer will lose all ways.

# FULLERS EXPERIMENT

The *Valiant Trooper* at Aldbury was just one of the number of pubs recently to receive a sample cask of a new beer from Fuller's, known as Mr Harry's Guest Beer. The brew has a gravity of 1048, and was brewed to taste different from ESB and London Pride. The strange name indicates that the experiment was aimed particularly at free houses which operate a guest beer policy.

The Hertfordshire Newsletter is produced by the Hertfordshire North, Hertfordshire South, Watford & District and Mid-Chilterns branches of the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor, CAMRA Ltd or its Branches. Any articles or letters for publication should preferably be typewritten and double-spaced; handwritten items should also be well spaced and as legible as possible please. Send to: Eric Sim, 10 Heron Way, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 8QL.

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