

FREE



The Campaign for Real Ale

HERTFORDSHIRE NEWSLETTER

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CHEQUERS TO CLOSE?

One of our most unspoilt rural pubs in North Hertfordshire looks as if it may be due to close.....

Elsie Smith, the landlady of the Chequers, in the hamlet of Wood End near Ardeley, is due to retire after over 20 years at the pub. It was hoped that her daughter and son in law, Beverley and Michael, would then carry on at the Chequers, but Greene King will not allow them, or anyone else, to apply for the tenancy, yet at the same time will not confirm or deny the closure of the pub. This situation has lasted for some months, with Elsie and her family still waiting for news from the brewery before making any plans for the future.

Children's haven

The Chequerers is a very small two room pub serving Greene King IPA and Abbot on gravity from one bar. It appeared in the Good Beer Guides for 1976, 1977 and 1978 and was only left out of this year's edition because of the uncertainty over the future. Popular with all ages, there is a very keen darts team drawing members from a wide area, while the room without a bar has a well used pool table. Diving flonking is a popular event during the summer. For animal lovers there is always a selection of cats and dogs around the place, including Harry the Siamese, and hutches full of rabbits out the back. The pub also acts as the village sweet shop, making it a children's haven. Elsie reckons that of 55 adults living locally only three never use the Chequers at all. She also has many regulars who are not local, but come from a wide area of the county and just over the border in Bedfordshire.

Great disappointment

Whilst it cannot be denied that the pub is run down, in terms of fittings and decorations, it would be a great disappointment to a great many people if it closed. Greene King may say it would cost too much to do the place up, therefore it must close, but I am sure Elsie's customers are quite happy with the place anyway, and would be quite content with perhaps a lick of paint and some new toilets. Indeed, anything more elaborate may not be welcomed.

Beverley and Michael, who are very keen to take over the Chequers, would not be total newcomers. They are often in the pub either giving a hand with the serving or as customers. Who better to take over? They know all the regulars already and are full of energy and plans to make a success of their venture, — if it is allowed to happen. All they can do is wait to hear from Greene King.

In the meantime Elsie and her family have started a petition to save the pub, amongst their regular customers.

You are recommended to visit this unique pub as soon as possible, — it may be your last chance. Better still, why not attend the CAMRA Herts North Social at the Chequers on Friday, 5 October, when the Branch will challenge the resident Darts Team at an informal get-together to drum up interest and support concerning the fate of the pub.

Sandie Lerner

DRINKERS BEWARE!

No, it's not another case of fake handpumps, but one of characterless gassy beer being served through real ones.

The venue...Freehouse in beautiful Hertfordshire countryside with an impressive range of beers but a small cellar.

The objective...to be selling the morning's delivery of draught beer the same evening, or possibly even the same lunchtime.

As the beer rolls to a halt at the foot of the cellar steps, pub manager smarmy Ron Grease connects a CO₂ cylinder to the cask. This forces the sediment in the cask to settle and after a few hours — a fraction of the normal time — the gas is removed and hand pumps connected. "You get a beautifully clear pint", said Ron sipping his G and T in the lounge bar. "The first half of the barrel might be a bit gassy, but nobody notices."

No short cuts

Sorry Ron, we do notice, as unfortunately there are no short cuts to a good pint. With this practice, the beer, apart from being extremely gassy, has not been allowed to mature, i.e. undergo its natural secondary fermentation. It will therefore never be able to attain its full flavour.

CAMRA members would rather be told that a beer was not yet ready rather than receive an inferior product which can be as undrinkable as a pint of vinegar, or as gassy as a pint of D.D. Hopefully, any potential Ron Grease's may be deterred, and the innocent drinker warned.

Apologies to anyone called Ron Grease and the majority of free-houses and pub managers.

Free trade publicans are not the only culprits when it comes to selling 'unreal beer' through normal handpumps. A converted pump clip displaying 'Dark Mild' has been spotted in the Angel in Ware, — an Ind Coope pub where the brew is obviously the keg 'Drum mild'. And another Ind Coope house, the White Swan in St. Albans, also has had a converted clip, this one displaying 'Pale Ale'.

OLD AND MILD—FORDHAM'S OF ASHWELL

Round about the turn of the century, when there were more than 30 independent brewing companies in Hertfordshire, close to the top of the list in terms of reputation and influence would have been E.K. and H. Fordham Ltd of Ashwell. Fordham's remained from start to finish a family firm; their ales were renowned, and their trade extended into Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, and as far afield as Suffolk and London. Today nothing remains of Fordham's; their brewery is demolished, and their pubs which once proudly advertised "Ashwell Ales and Stout" are in other hands.

Natural step forward



The beginning of Fordham's brewing business is obscure. A Fordham once brewed in Hertford, and the family is closely connected with the Flower family of brewers, who also have Hertfordshire links. It is known that the Fordham family purchased Odsey Grange, a country house near Ashwell, from the Duke of Devonshire in 1793, and in common with many land-

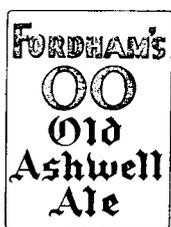
owners and farmers at the time, they began to brew their own beer on the premises. In the late 1830's the family decided to transfer their brewing interests to Ashwell, and built a new brewery there. Ashwell is a beautiful village, which grew around the natural springs which are the source of the River Cam. These springs provided exceptionally clean and pure water, and were tapped by the Fordhams to supply their brewery — the "Ash at the Well" becoming the company's trademark.

Steaming ahead

The Fordham family exercised strict but benevolent control over their business, paid their workers well and kept their brewery up to date and pubs in good order. They were always on the look-out to increase their trade by buying pubs from other breweries, and were not slow to realise the potential of Ashwell's position on a main railway line, supplying the holiday trade of East Anglia and the pub and club trade of North London — for many years Fordham's owned a bottling stores at Haringay. At the brewery the latest in machinery was installed, being one of the first in the area to pasteurise bottled beer, and Fordham's were also one of the earliest to deliver to their pubs by steam wagon and petrol engined drays. The company's Minute Book for November 1919 records a resolution that three employees "be dismissed forewith for being drunk when in charge of the 3-ton Foden in Henlow and doing damage to private property". Nevertheless, a replacement driver was soon appointed, at wage of £3-5s-0d per week plus a six shilling beer allowance!



Tied estate to housing estate



Before the second world war Fordham's brewed no less than 7 bottled and 8 draught beers, including the famous "OO" Old Ashwell Ale. "Old and Mild" was a favourite order in Fordham's pubs. For many years local farmworkers were supplied at the appropriate time with a specially brewed Harvest Ale. Guinness, Bass and Worthington were bottled at

Ashwell, and Fordhams at one stage supplied their pubs with Red Tower, "A British Lager Brewed at Manchester".

Many of these beers were discontinued during and after the second war in the period of austerity, and the company had ceased malting at Ashwell sometime previously. Nevertheless, the company entered the 1950s in the same determined spirit as ever, with a thriving estate of some 90 pubs and an enviable reputation for good ale. Disaster then struck quickly.

A principal family shareholder died, and the Fordhams' unity was shattered. Shares in the company were sold outside the family, and during 1952 the company was taken over by the ambitious and expanding rival firm of J.W. Green of Luton. Brewing ceased almost immediately, although bottling continued at Ashwell into the mid 1960's, during which time Greens became Flowers and were themselves taken over by Whitbread. In 1972 Whitbread had built a huge new brewery at Luton, capable of supplying most of southern England, and there was no further use for Fordham's neat little Victorian Brewery. So it was demolished, and there now stands on the site a housing estate.



Cruelly ironic

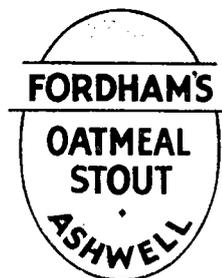


Neither has time been particularly kind to Fordham's former pubs. Many have been closed, in pursuit of the big breweries "Rationalisation" plans. Some have been fortunate to become free houses, such as the Chaise and Pair at Barkway, Jolly Sailors at Buntingford and Red Lion (now Countryman) at Chipping, which

between them sell a choice of real ales to rival Fordham's range.

Things are travelling in a cruelly ironic circle. The demand for an individual, quality real ale, is great, but it can no longer be satisfied by Fordham's. Instead, enterprising Whitbread houses once owned by Fordham's, such as the Sailor Boy at Waisworth, can only please the real ale drinker by selling the excellent Wethered's beer that has to come all the way from Marlow in Buckinghamshire. Wethered's Victorian brewery sheltered under the Whitbread 'umbrella', but was one of the fortunate few that didn't later get pushed out into the rain to get washed away — a Fordham's that survived.

by Peter Lerner (with acknowledgements to D.P. Kingsley & K. Osborne).



DID YOU KNOW.....

that there are now 42 home, or small scale, breweries currently operating in the British Isles? Hertfordshire is still waiting for its first 'new wave' brewery....watch this space for news of prospective candidates.

TRADITIONAL JAZZ AND ALE

I suspect that the reason the Editor asked me to write an article on Traditional Jazz and Ale was that he was convinced I was around when Nick LaRocca first brought the Original Dixieland Jazz Band over to England. This I strongly deny but will admit to being keen on jazz in the early fifties when all the pubs that put on jazz were "Real".

My first quest in search of a double trad. pub was to take me up the old A1 through Welwyn to Woolmer Green where on the left at the bottom of the hill lies the Chequers. Here on Wednesday nights one can relax in the friendly, candlelit atmosphere of the function bar and listen to the Crescent City Jazz Band playing, as their name implies, mostly New Orleans style music.

The price of admission is a modest 50p and one gets the impression that they play for the love of music which appears to get better as the beer flows. The beer available on handpump in the bar is Ind Coope Bitter and Burton but they do have KK mild on handpump in the public bar.

So if you are fed up with megawatt music and flashing lights and fancy some real music with your real ale then the Chequers on Wednesday night is worth a try.

In addition

On our travels, the editor and I have come across the following trad jazz & ale pubs in the county, in addition to the Chequers:—

Hatfield — The Red Lion (McMullen). Guest bands on Monday evenings at 8.00pm. Entrance £1.50p.

St. Albans — The Goat Inn (Free House). The Leaside Jazzmen on alternate Sunday lunchtimes. Entrance free.

Barnet — The Salisbury (Courage). The Bernie Tyrrell's Salisbury Stompers on Sunday lunchtimes. Entrance free (but membership 10p).

Letchworth — The Wilbury Hotel (Greene King). Guest bands on Sunday evenings at 8.00pm. Entrance £1.00.

Harpenden — The Queens Head (Ind Coope). The New Pretoria Jazz Band on Thursday evenings at 8.00pm. Entrance free.

This is by no means a comprehensive list, and any information on other known bands and pubs is always welcome. Good listening! Eric Sim

GREAT BRITISH SUCCESS

Last month's third Great British Beer Festival was visited by well over 80,000 visitors, with the excellent entertainment attracting a far wider sphere than in previous years. 'I'm overwhelmed it's worked so well', said organiser Denis Palmer. 'We even made a profit running into a few thousands', he added.

By Friday the beer was sometimes going at a rate of 150 pints every 60 seconds, with £4,000 once being taken in 50 minutes over the bars alone. The last pint was drunk at 10.10 on the Saturday — 50 minutes before the close.

● London brewers Fullers almost swept the board in the 'Beer of the Year' competition, with their ESB winning the 'Strong Ale' section and London Pride taking the 'Draught Bitter' prize. 'If they'd had cask Hock along, they might have won the Draught Mild section as well', said one judge. This prize went to Dudley brewers Hansons, who brew an excellent dark mild.

CONTACTS : Hertfordshire South Branch
Dave Burns ☎ Welwyn 7805

Hertfordshire North Branch Borders Branch
Peter Lerner ☎ Ware 830616 John Hurrell ☎ 01-529 7495

SURVEYING THE FACTS

More than 50 per cent of young men aged 16 to 24 prefer to drink draught lager.

And nearly threequarters of drinkers are satisfied with the variety of beers available at their local.

These are two of the results to emerge from a survey conducted on behalf of the Brewer's Society among 2,000 adults throughout Great Britain.

But although some of the findings spell bad news for CAMRA and its attempts to educate the drinking public into what they are missing, others are encouraging.

Not surprisingly, since the survey was made on behalf of the big brewers, it asks no questions about preferences for real over keg beer. Out of 37 statements to be arranged in order for the ideal pub, "has real ale" was not included in the list by the compilers — though "allows dogs in the bar" was!

But 65 per cent of all drinkers, the survey showed, prefer to drink in the public bar — one in the eye for the Big Six and their carpet-everywhere, one bar pubs.

A quarter of men drinkers prefer to drink in a free house with a wide variety of beers.

Older drinkers — less influenced by TV advertising, perhaps — overwhelmingly prefer draught mild and bitter to draught lager. Only 25 per cent, on average, of men aged 25 and over drink lager.

More than 80 per cent of the people in the survey had visited a pub once in the previous 12 months, with 50 per cent of the men going at least once a week.

And only 18 per cent of men — and one per cent of women — thought it important that a pub should have pretty barmaids!!

Martyn Cornell

WHAT'S BEEN ON

The final cricket match of the season saw a combined Herts North & South team of superstars inflict a heavy defeat on a Farriers Arms XI despite the pub's ploy of providing during-match 'refreshment' which they hoped would further inebriate their opposition. Herts CAMRA piled up an excellent 140 runs off their 40 overs, and then proceeded to bowl the Farriers side out for a paltry 64 runs (satisfactory revenge for the defeat by the pub's ladies darts team over South Herts Ladies).

An under strength Herts South mixed darts side were unlucky in going down 7-0 to a British Aerospace Dynamics Club team, and it proved fortunate that Greene King XX was only 26p a pint as they lost 2 beer matches as well! An all-Herts side suffered a narrow defeat against the White Horse, Kimpton. The availability of the real Mac's on sale obviously spurred the home side.

In a splendid CAMRA Treasure Hunt, the experience of Dave and Tony Burns, plus crew, saw them safely at the finish — the Rest & Welcome at Haultwick — bang on opening time and ahead of the rest of the field. However, even they needed a slice of luck — only finding one of the clues when vacating their vehicle to relieve themselves! A thanks go to organisers Wendy Casey Bob Norrish and Tony King, and to the Rest & Welcome for their refreshments and good beer.

Aunt Sally was the feature of a joint social between South Herts and South Oxon at the excellent White Hart Hotel in Benson, Oxon. A Dave McKercher side scraped to a 7-6 win in this fine outdoor pub game, unfortunately not found in Hertfordshire.

PUB NEWS

Gosmore — The Bird in Hand now has Greene King Abbot on gravity.

Harpenden — The Gibraltar Castle is another outlet for Wethered's Bitter.

Hertford (Bengeo) — The Warren House has added McMullen's AK and Wethered's Bitter on handpumps.

Hitchin — The Three Moorhens also has Greene King KK mild on electric pump.

WHERE IS KK OK?

If you want a good value for money pint and don't want to risk your license, try Ind Coopes's KK Mild....it's still available in the following pubs:—

NORTH HERTS: Goat, Codicote; Coach & Horses, Royston; Greyhound, St. Ippollitts; Chequers, Sandon; Fox & Duck, Therfield; Chequers, Woolmer Green.

SOUTH HERTS: Gate, Bricket Wood; White Horse, Burnham Green; Swan, Bushey; Waggon & Horses, Elstree; Rose & Crown, Essendon; Wrestlers, Hatfield; Three Horseshoes, Letchmore Heath; Old Fox, Old Bricket Wood; Villiers Arms, Oxhey; Garibaldi, St. Albans; Verulam Arms, St. Albans.

WEST HERTS: Plough, Belsize; Bull, Berkhamstead; George, Berkhamstead; Three Blackbirds, Boxmore; Green Dragon, Flaunden; Crab Tree, Hemel Hempstead; George & Dragon, Northchurch; Boars Head, Piccotts End; George, Tring; Half Moon, Wilstone.

EAST HERTS: Rose & Crown, Cheshunt; George, Hoddesdon; Bull, Much Hadham; Hand & Crown, Sawbridgeworth.

If you find that a pub in this list no longer sells the brew, or you find an additional one that does, please contact Jim Axford, 117 Queens Road, Watford.

Steve Barber

LOCAL GUIDES

Make sure that you can find every real ale outlet for miles around! **New** editions of the following local county guides to all known traditional beer outlets (at the time of going to press) are now available.....

BEDFORDSHIRE — 35p from John Savage, 12 Malezeard Court, Malezeard Road, Luton Beds. (cheques — 'Real Ale in Bedfordshire')

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE — 45p from Dick Chapman, Sharnley, 34 Manor Way, Chesham, Bucks. (cheques — 'Real Ale in Buckinghamshire')

ESSEX — 50p from Terry Jeffries, 35 Hartford End, Pitsea, Basildon, Essex. (cheques — 'CAMRA Essex')

HERTFORDSHIRE — 45p from Dave Burns, 11 Turpins Chase, Oaklands, Welwyn, Herts., or from any good pub. (cheques — CAMRA Herts South Branch')

LONDON — Listing 1600 pubs selling 66 different beers. £1 from Real Beer in London, Flat 5, Talbot Road, London W2 5LH (cheques — 'CAMRA London')

Please include a stamped self addressed envelope with any order.

THIS EDITION

The Hertfordshire Newsletter is produced monthly by the Herts North, Herts South and Herts/Essex Borders branches of CAMRA. The editors would gratefully receive any item of news for future editions, but due to the improvement in type layout of late, may we ask for typed articles if possible to help shorten production time. We are now considering applications for ¼ page advertisements (current newsletter distribution is 3000) and can be contacted at the following address for further discussion Val or Nick Page, 28 Inkerman Road, St. Albans ☎ 33810.

WHAT'S ON

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Tuesday October 9th

Joint social and dominoes match with Herts/Essex Borders at the Bell & Crown, Hertford. 8.00pm Food provided. (McMullen)

Wednesday October 17th

Joint social with Mid-Chilterns at the Royal Oak, West Hyde. 8.00pm (Wethered)

Tuesday October 23rd

BRANCH MEETING at the Sportsman, Croxley Green. 8.00pm (Ind Coop).

Thursday October 25th

Joint social and darts with Enfield and Barnet and Herts/Essex Borders at the Plough Cuffley. 8.00pm (McMullen).

Tuesday November 6th

Social and darts at the Hope & Anchor, Welham Green. 8.00pm (Courage).

Tuesday November 20th

BRANCH MEETING at the Plough, Cuffley. 8.00pm (To be confirmed)

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

Friday October 5th

Social and darts at the chequers. Wood End. 8.00pm (Greene King) See page 1 for details.

Saturday October 6th

Visit to Stamford Brewery Museum and joint social with Doncaster Branch. Note — This fine museum is under threat of closure by owners Samuel Smith, the Tadcaster brewers. On the site of the old Melbourn's brewery, the museum, complete with Sam Smith's horse & dray and its own bar, is surpassed only by the Bass Museum, Burton-on-Trent in the field of brewing exhibits. Pay Stamford a visit before it's too late.

Tuesday October 9th

BRANCH MEETING at the Sun, Hitchin. 8.00pm (Charrington).

Wednesday October 17th

Social at the Crooked Billet, Symonds Green. 8.00pm (Green King inc. XX)

Wednesday October 24th

Campaigning social at the Green Man, Great Wymondley. 8.00pm (Greene King inc. XX).

Wednesday October 31st

Social at the Golden Fleece, Braughing. 8.00pm (Ind Coope).

Saturday November 3rd

BEER FESTIVAL at Knebworth Village Hall. Admission by ticket only. Contact Steve Done on Stevenage 721960 for more details.

Wednesday November 14th

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING at the Wilbury Hotel Letchworth 8.00pm (Greene King inc. XX) Includes auction of breweriana.

HERTS/ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH

Tuesday October 10th

Joint social — see Herts South

Monday October 15th

Joint social and shove halfpenny with South-West Essex at the Welsh Harp, Waltham Abbey. 8.00pm (McMullen) To be confirmed.

Monday October 22nd

BRANCH MEETING at the Bull, Theydon Bois. 8.00pm (Ind Coope).

Thursday October 25th

Joint social — see Herts South.