

FREE



The Campaign for Real Ale

HERTFORDSHIRE

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 1981

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NUMBER 43

The Good The Bad and The Ugh!

Recent events and comments have prompted the Newsletter to give some thought to what could be the big problem for CAMRA in the coming years – beer quality.

Badly kept beer was one of the main causes for the keg revolution in the first place and the Campaign will have to work hard to try to ensure that it doesn't become the main reason for a reversal of the current success of traditionally served ales. The problem is essentially in two parts. Firstly, problems at the brewery, and second, bad cellar management in the pub. Benskins problems with their new brew are widely known, and these don't seem to have been ironed out yet. John Green, in his article on St. Albans last month, pointed out that Benskins was by far the most inconsistent of the beers tried. Rumours abound that Benskins may even switch production of the beer to another brewery if the trouble at Romford can't be rectified. All CAMRA can do is wish them luck and hope they find a cure soon.

The second area of the blame is less excusable though. Badly kept beer in pubs is certainly becoming more commonplace. In some areas it could almost be said to be the rule rather than the exception. A rough straw poll of around a dozen pubs visited recently revealed only 3 or 4 where the beer could be said to be consistently good. Free houses, tied houses, managed or tenanted – no particular area seems better, or worse than another. The quality of the product relies, in the end, on the pride the licensee has in his ale. Sadly, with the massive increase in the availability of real beer, there appears to have been a similarly massive increase in apathy of some members of the trade. The prospect of a fast buck to be made seems to be the sole motivation in some houses.

Fortunately – the picture isn't all gloom. We still have many pubs where you can get excellent beer. The answer, in the end, is for the public to seek these out and comment with their feet and their wallets on the purveyors of pond water.

QUICK ONES

Hook a ticket for Norton

North Hertfordshire's annual Autumn beer festival moves to Norton, near Letchworth this year – and organisers are hoping it will be the first festival ever to have beers from five different Hertfordshire breweries.

Local branch chairman Martyn Cornell said: "By October, with home-brew pubs opening up, there should actually be five breweries in Hertfordshire for the first time in nearly 20 years. We'd very much like to have beers from every one on sale."

The festival will be taking place in the hall at the back of the Three Horseshoes pub in Norton on Friday October 16 and Saturday October 17. Entry will be ticket only, at least ten other brews besides the Hertfordshire ones should be available, food and entertainment is being arranged, and tickets will be obtainable from the Three Horseshoes, Martyn Cornell, Stevenage 60675, or Martin Connelly, Hitchin 52907.

Prize draw

Many readers will know that, as part of South Herts branch's 10th Anniversary celebrations a prize draw was organised. The overall winner of £100 was David Chuck from the Golden Lion in London Colney. The remaining prize winners were:

Second – Mrs D. Allen, Caledon Road, London Colney (£50)

Third – Archie of the Abbot John, Wheathampstead (9 gallons of beer)

Fourth – M.T. Carrol, 27 Pemberton Close, St. Albans (9 gallons of beer)

Fifth – T. Edwards, 49 Digswell Park Road, Welwyn Garden City (4½ gallons of beer)

Sixth – Derrick of the Peahen, St. Albans (4½ gallons of beer)

Seventh – R Gray, Leaside Service Station, Harpenden (a commemorative T-shirt)

Eighth – Mr. John Phelan, Salisbury Cross, Essendon (a commemorative T-shirt).

Inn sign information

The Watford Museum, in the old Benskin brewery offices in Watford's Lower High Street, is running an exhibition of pub signs from September 19 to October 10.

Local signwriter Eric Miller, who worked for Benskins in the days when the now-demolished Cannon brewery still produced its own beer, has donated his collection of signs to the museum, as well as a series of photographs of the many signs in the area he painted, and collector John Ausden is also lending some of his local signs.

The museum is also running a competition for an inn sign for its own bar, where a display of breweriana is kept. Winning entries will have an exhibition of their own from December 19 to January 9.

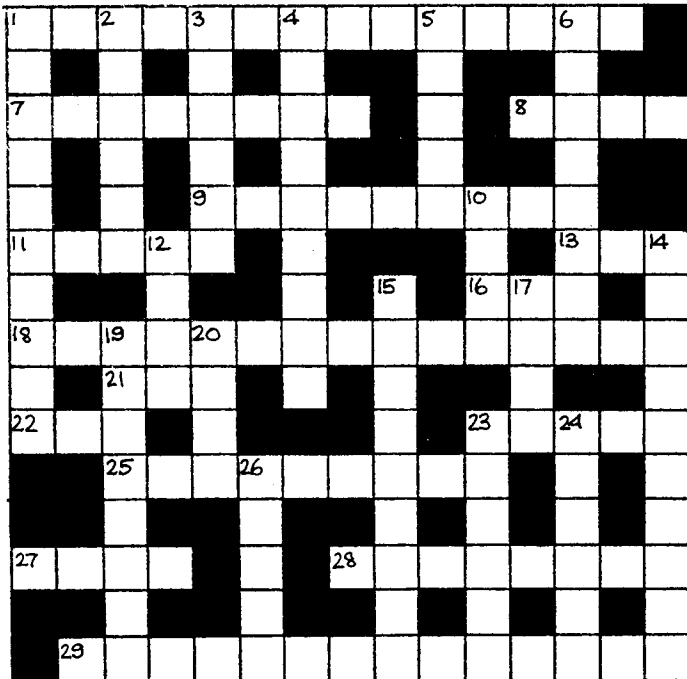
Getting it taped

One of the latest brainless crazes to sweep the nation is the current mania for carrying small pocket cassette recorders around and having your own personal muzak wherever you go – no those things fastened around peoples' heads are not to stop the two lobes of their brains from falling apart. Seeing them prompted an idea that space invader and fruit machine manufacturers could do well to use: personal sound effects. A set of earphones with each machine would spare the rest of the pub from the bleeping and squawking of nudges and exploding aliens. A simple extension could give us personal juke boxes and supermarket-style muzak. No doubt the thing would get out of hand – crazes like this usually do. Perhaps we'll end up with personal pre-recorded 'atmosphere', with the sound of clicking dominoes and witty banter, for the dull, unwelcoming pub. Or tapes of friendly conversation for the pub with a miserable landlord? However, while everyone else is sitting there in their own little worlds – just imagine the peace and quiet for the rest of us.

Continued on page 4

COMPETITION

Apologies to all those who attempted last month's competition which, through a severe attack of the gremlins, was impossible. The second sentence should have read: *One had one more pint than half the total number drunk.* However, one reader wrote in with an answer to how many were drunk – the three guys in the problem and the one who wrote it! Let's hope that things work out a little better this month. The prize is a copy of *Capital Ale*, by Roger Protz. Entries should be sent to the editor by 14th September – envelopes marked COMPETITION.



ACROSS

- 1 New local brew makes Albert's wife annoyed (8,6)
- 7 Proclaim what beer is sometimes in a Hampshire brewery (8)
- 8 Scrutinise contents of dubious canister (4)
- 9 However ale is brewed, guys swallow first of Watneys (9)
- 11 Record of the year (5)
- 13 Prosecute little girl (3)
- 16 Metal extract from interior excavation (3)
- 18 Heard occasionally in bars (10,5)
- 21 Fargo deserved its own poem (3)
- 22 Welcome sign might be here (3)
- 23 March past: voting system in trouble (5)
- 25 They derive from slick rime (or is it rhyme?) (9)
- 27 One has friend round to provide bucket (4)
- 28 Won with merit, but badly decayed (8)
- 29 Amusement in pubs could be phony flash, even (5,9)

DOWN

- 1 Original Italians' quarter of St Albans (10)
- 2 Where, we hear, this brewery used to be (6)
- 3 His predictions 3 years hence: gold in good shape (6)
- 4 Stingo Ali drunk is setting him apart (9)
- 5 Relative heads of (in Newcastle) Lorimer's and Whitbread (5)
- 6 More than one too many confuses sexes drinking a half of Bruce's
- 10 A cat's little bit (4) (8)
- 12 Eager to help imbibing Vaux at first (4)
- 14 Great merit of eminent person's address (10)
- 15 Poach rail position in local (9)
- 17 Soft drink? The reverse, i.e. backside (4)
- 19 Small bed, Lancashire town, or small beer from Devon (8)
- 20 Border mild contains skin (4)
- 23 After mixing ales, extra pints begin to make you fall ... (6)
- 24 Right dress up north made again (6)
- 26 Brenda loses her bra and bit of dress; another girl is to follow (5)

Copies of Real Draught Beer in Hertfordshire are still available from your local CAMRA branch (see Branch Contracts below), CAMRA HQ and bookshops. Price 60 pence. Please enclose a large stamped addressed envelope (20p stamp) if ordering by post.

THE CORNELL COLUMN

by Martyn Cornell

ALL ROADS ROAM TO LEEDS ...

Over 20,000 gallons of beer from more than 115 different breweries – call the Guinness Book of Records. There can't be a show in the world to match the 1981 Great British Beer Festival at Leeds for the range and diversity of the brews on sale.

This column spent five days in Leeds last month, helping behind the bars, and from a beer-stained and increasingly illegible notebook, these are a few impressions of a marvellous time.

The Inter-City 125 deposited me in West Yorkshire just over two hours after leaving Hertfordshire, and the Queen's Hall, where the festival was held, is only a few minutes' walk from Leeds Station – so the drinking started almost straight away. First half was Tetley's bitter, brewed less than a quarter of a mile away – and delicious it was, too, with the thick creamy head Yorkshiremen regard as a sign of high quality.

The vast variety meant there was everything that a good festival should have – long-time favourites, old friends from way back, passing acquaintances to renew, and brand-new strangers to get to know. Thus within a short distance of the Tetley stand I was able to have Benskin's – just like back home in the White Hart, but warmer! – Higson's mild from Liverpool, alas, not up to my fond memories. Blue Anchor Best from the Cornwall home brewery I have to confess I have never visited, and Cestrian Brewer's Bitter from a mini-brewery that only started this summer, a tasty, malty beer.

This quick lunchtime round-Britain beer tasting was completed with Woodforde's Wherry bitter, from another new brewer, this one in Norfolk, which I found astonishingly good when I drank it at the St. Neot's Riverside Festival in May. Stone's bitter from Sheffield – better than the keg version, but not as good as it is in pubs – and Hartley's bitter from Cumbria, straw-coloured like nearly all North Western bitters, but not so mouth-numbingly bitter as the same company's XB.

Wednesday

Wednesday evening I was actually serving behind the bars, but I still managed to get round, among others Moorhouses, from the Burnley hop-bitters company now brewing real beer, but if my glass was anything to go by, not one with a lot of taste; Powys Maldwyn bitter, yet one more new brewery which must take the prize for malty flavour – drinking was like biting into a handful of malt grains – Fuller's London Pride, maybe it's because I'm a Londoner, but this is always my favourite beer, and no exception here, flowery and delicious; Miner's Arms, the first time this old-established Somerset restaurant brewery has been available in anything except bottles, cloudy but with a good tang; and Simonds perry, real ale's answer to Babycham and much, much nicer – no bubbles – over which I had a southern chauvinist chuckle at the Yorkshire Post for saying in its report on the festival opening that in previous years it had taken place at Crystal Palace. Clearly the YP reporter was entertained too well.

Thursday

Thursday lunchtime I was serving on a bar largely consisting of Whitbread group beers, which gave me a chance to try BYB from the Kirkstall brewery, Leeds, Queen's Ale from Sheffield, Fremlin's bitter and Strong Country bitter, all old names revived by Whitbread, and generally very acceptable pints. Here two local landlords got very upset at a server, like me from outside Yorkshire, who was pulling a handpump and failing to get a "proper" head on it. "Fill it half-way, and then tighten your sparkler right up", they cried. Taking the hint I tried this, and was rewarded with being told by the drinker that it was the best-served pint he'd seen at the festival. "Just a knack", I said modestly.

In the afternoon I tramped off for a trip round Tetley's brewery, the first really large one I've been to – though they still manage to keep a marvellous selection of beautiful grey drayhorses. Tetleys still use the Yorkshire Square system of brewing, a two-storey fermenting vessel with the beer in the bottom and excess yeast bubbling into the top, and they actually have some genuine slate ones still in use, though most are stainless steel. Here I managed to get a pint of Gilmour's bitter, an old brew Tetley's have revived for the Sheffield area.

Thursday evening I was too busy to sample too much ale, though I did have some of the "new" Ansell's mild, brewed at Burton after the closure of the Aston brewery in Birmingham. I remember it as a tasteless and insipid pint before, and they certainly seemed to have captured its characteristics well! I also had a sip of Blue Anchor draught royal wedding ale, OG 1066 – urch!

Friday

By Friday morning several tons of ice were being used up in an attempt to keep the beer cool, as, amazingly, the sun continued to shine. What with

the melted ice behind the bar, the spilled beer and the sawdust being used to mop it up, the danger to the hundred or so bar staff was not so much from alcoholic poisoning as from trench foot. There was also a lady from Leeds University, doing research on infections of beer, looking for beer flies in the hall, with a big net – if it was bar flies she was after, she'd have found hundreds.

Leeds conservatism, or chauvinism, or both, meant that astoundingly the first beer to run out, on Friday lunchtime, was the Tetley bitter – despite its availability in nearly every pub for miles and miles around. Leeds drinkers, tight tykes all, were also very upset at having to pay 50p for a souvenir glass, and most wanted their money back at the end of each session.

Similar Northern attitudes continued over the Big Head question. "A pint o' Cornish Best Bitter, please, lad – wither 'ead on t'", said one middle-aged Leedsian, or Loiner. "You shouldn't really drink it like this", I said, pouring it for him. "They don't down in Cornwall". "Ah, lad – can I 'elp it if they 'avn't been eddicated?"

Still, that's not as bad as the several people who came up to the bar and, surrounded by a couple of hundred different varieties of the stuff, said: "A pint of bitter, please", and then wondered why I got upset. Or the German, who marched up and asked for "ein haff of lager, pliss". I gave him a half of Wethered's best, and he seemed happy enough. And there was a big bunch of guys – or gays – from San Francisco, who had discovered the festival by accident, and were having the time of their trip. "Everybody goes to London", they told me dismissively. "We came to Edinburgh, and York, and Leeds instead and we've LOVED it."

Meanwhile your column was trying Chudley, a new brewery near Lord's cricket ground – recommended for wicket takers – Chase Ale from the Malvern Chase brewery, so bad I had to throw it away, alas, the controversial new "unionless" draught Bass, which was actually one of the best beers at the festival, Felinfoel Double Dragon – which a customer actually bought me – Penrhos Porter, dark and bitter, unlike Taylor's porter, more like a strong mild, while a brass band played the Leeds National Anthem (On Ilkla Moor Bah't 'At) – which the crowd continued to sing until long, long past closing time.

Saturday

Saturday lunchtime I spent wandering round a few Leeds pubs and deciding, effete Southerner that I am, that I really don't like creamy heads on my pint – sorry Leeds. Saturday evening, being the last evening, was spent serving behind the bar and getting tired and over-emotional – people kept looking at my notes and asking me if I was writing in shorthand. No – just longhand with more than 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.

If my notes are to be trusted, therefore, I helped serve up 18 gallons of Exmoor Ale, last year's Festival Best Bitter award winner, in under half an hour, or a pint every 13 seconds – which is almost the time it takes to pour a pint from a barrel. I also tried Robinson's Best from Manchester – not as good as it is around Salford – Darley's best, tasty and bitter, and others which handwriting experts are still trying to decipher.

Sunday – at last

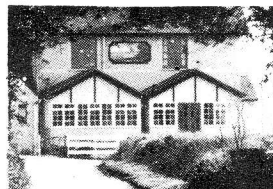
Sunday lunchtime, the very last session, few of the helpers turned up much on time, don't ask me why. I spent my time helping on the food stall

– why do Northerners call a ham roll a ham sandwich, by the way – and gently sipping at a few halves of beers I hadn't tried at the Festival yet. Some, like my Bateman's XB, ever so slightly vinegary, were showing the effects of almost a week in a sometimes very hot hall, but class will out – the Ruddle's County, almost the last drink I had, was still rich and smooth. All in all, from my point of view as a helper, the festival was a thoroughly enjoyable experience, and I'd like to think the drinkers of Leeds, and the many other parts of Britain from whence real ale fans trekked, enjoyed it as much as I did. The atmosphere among the people helping was great, there were plenty of laughs, the inevitable (few) cock-ups were shrugged aside, and there was plenty of good ale sipped. Without trying too hard I got round 58 different breweries. I'm sure it would have been possible to try beer from all 115 plus – but not, I think, all 200-odd different brews.

It had a strong campaigning side – there was nothing but a wreath on the John Smith's stand, and drinkers were encouraged to sign letters to the giant keg-only Northern arm of Courage and demand real ale in their John Smugs local. It had every type of draught British beer you can think of, from dark, sweet milds, to the hoppy bitters of Kent, from the pale Northern ales to draught barley wines, from porter to the ruddy-coloured beers of the West Country, from light milds to Scottish Heavy, from knock-out Winter Warmers to beer brewed with herbs as well as hops – and from breweries founded in Stuart times to those so new this was only their second or third brew. It was a great show – and wherever it is I'll be there next year.

THE BARLEY MOW

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OF LIFE



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14 REAL
ALES

TYTTEHANGER GREEN

In addition to our normal range there will always be a cask on the bar from our range of guest beers which could be one of the following: Eldridge Pope, Bourne Valley, Donnington, Arkell, Archers, St Austell or Brakspear's 6X.

It's barbecue season again!

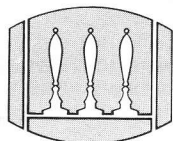
Come and cook for yourself:

Steak 75p, Sausage 12p, Hamburger 20p,
Rolls 12p, Butter 4p, Sauces 6p, Mustard 2p.

Salt and pepper free!

8.30-10.30 (Mon-Fri eves); 12.-2.30 and 8-11 (Sat)

Our aim is to sell the best beer in the county – if ever you are dissatisfied with it we will change it without question.



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(The Jug and Firkin is owned and managed by CAMRA (Real Ale) Investments plc)

PUB NEWS

In the far north-east of the county the **Jockey** at Royston, until 1963 the Black Boy – and before that the Red Cow, now has Wethered's bitter on handpump. The **Chequers** in Anstey, a marvellous one-bar pub full of genuine Hertfordshire yokels, has now been repainted, given a new inn sign – and a handpump for Ind Coope bitter.

On the other side of the county at Bourne End, near Hemel, the **White Horse** has been selling Adnams and Youngs beers, with others promised. Over in Tring the **Kings Arms**, formerly a fizzy Ind Coope pub, has been taken over by Charles Wells, while the **Royal Oak** at Tring Station – Edward VII stayed there – is now selling Chiltern bitter, Jennings bitter and Burton Ale. The **Bull** in Berkhamsted High Street – where the licence dates back to at least 1535 – which sold Benskins and KK on handpump has, sadly, been closed by owners Ind Coope because of the cost of required improvements.

The **Roebuck**, Stevenage, has Younger's No.3 on currently as it's guest beer – but not for much longer.

Farewell to Gavin and Von Clark of the **Red Lion**, Woolmer Green, who are leaving the pub, and the trade, in October. Many thanks for all you've done for real ale.

One pub that closed last year, the **Nags Head** at Moreton, has just reopened as the Moreton Massey. The, now, very plush, pub is selling Younger's No.3, Rayment's BBA, Wethered's bitter and Adnams – all on handpump and very well kept. A few miles away the **Talbot** at Tylers Green (near North Weald) now sells Wethered's bitter – doesn't everyone these days?

The **Woodman**, Water End (North Mymms) re-opened recently as a free house. When visited, Mac's Country and Greene King Abbot were on sale although there were some unused pumps so the range may increase.

Finally, rumours abound that yet another free house, this time in the north-east of the area, is about to start brewing its own beer – this would bring the total number of new brewing ventures in the county to four. Watch this space for more details.

It's all change at the **Baron of Ber** – old Welwyn where Ray and Annette Jones have moved in to take over from Alan and Grace Mabbett who retired recently. Alan and Grace will be missed by everyone but not too badly as Alan is often to be seen on the customers' side of the bar these days. Ray, who has been a regular of the Baron for some time and is well known to everyone in there, has set off to a good start by introducing handpumped Country bitter to the pub. The newsletter would like to wish him and Annette (and the soon-to-be-expected new arrival) the best of luck. The **Star**, Furneux Pelham has introduced Greene King KK mild on gravity during weekends only.

Quick Ones From page 1

Yeoman – is it a smash?

Definitely not brewed with potatoes, although it may cause hilarity amongst the little tin men that advertise Smash keg spud, Greene King's new keg bitter, Yeoman bitter, has recently arrived on the scene. The brew's name and 'packaging' are intended to show that the new brew is as close as possible to the real thing, and the Company are recommending that it be served with minimum carbonation and not too cold. In the range of 1036-40 gravity range Greene King describe it as "distinctly bitter as opposed to malty/sweet". And what's more you don't have to reconstitute it with boiling water!

John and Tess

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BRANCH DIARY

HERTFORDSHIRE SOUTH BRANCH

Saturday September 5th

Day trip to Oxford. See Branch Contact for details.

Sunday September 6th

Cricket match at Verulamium Park, St. Albans. Meet at ground 2.00pm or Farriers Arms, Lower Dagnall Street, beforehand.

Wednesday September 16th

BRANCH MEETING at the Old Bull's Head, Ware with an auction of breweriana afterwards. 8.00pm prompt. (Benskins).

Tuesday September 22nd

Bar billiards match versus Mid-Chilterns branch at the Red Lion, Little Missenden. 8.00pm.

HERTFORDSHIRE NORTH BRANCH

Wednesday September 2nd

BRANCH MEETING at the Raven, Hexton. Speaker from Whitbread (Luton) invited. A raffle of 'Celtic Fringe' bottles will follow. 8.00pm start. (Wethereds).

Wednesday September 9th

Social at the Plough, Ley Green, 8.00pm. (Greene King).

Wednesday September 23rd

Joint social with Hertfordshire South Branch at the Boot, Kimpton. 8.00pm. (Ind Coope).

Friday and Saturday, 16th and 17th October

Mini Beer Festival at the Three Horseshoes, Norton (See article in this edition).

HERTS-ESSEX BORDERS BRANCH

Monday September 14th

BRANCH MEETING at the Bell, Ongar. This pub has been sold and is due to close shortly. 8.00pm. (Charrington).

Tuesday September 22nd

Brewery trip to King and Barnes – all places taken. For details see Branch Contact.

Monday September 28th

Branch social at the Willow Beauty, Harlow. 8.00pm. (Rayments).

The next Hertfordshire interbranch meeting is to be held at the White Hart, Welwyn on **MONDAY 28th SEPTEMBER**. 8.00pm start. All members are welcome to attend.

LETTERS

From Steve Webster of Stevenage

Following the news in the August newsletter that **The Mallard** in Julians Road, Stevenage Old Town now has Wethered's bitter on hand-pump, I went to sample it this weekend. While I must acknowledge that the beer was in good condition, 62p per pint for a bitter with an OG of 1036 is certainly overpriced: even dearer than local prices for Abbot 1048. The Wethered's could surely be sold for 10p less and still make a respectable profit. The growth of outlets for Wethered's bitter and Ruddles bitter, as well as the occasional mild, in some of the central London free houses and Herts, sold at prices comparable with greater strength beers rather than relative to OGs gives publicans a bigger profit margin but, for the consumer, is perhaps the "unacceptable face of capitalism" in beer retail-pricing.

BRANCH CONTACTS

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Hertfordshire South Branch Eric Sim ☎ Hatfield 60647

Herts-Essex Borders Branch Terry Smith ☎ Epping 73677

The Hertfordshire Newsletter is produced by the Hertfordshire South, Hertfordshire North and Herts-Essex Borders branches of the Campaign for Real Ale Limited. The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor, CAMRA Ltd., or its branches. The Editor gratefully receives articles or letters for publication. THESE SHOULD PREFERABLY BE TYPEWRITTEN AND DOUBLE-SPACED; HANDWRITTEN ITEMS SHOULD ALSO BE DOUBLE-SPACED AND AS LEGIBLE AS POSSIBLE PLEASE. Send to D. Burns, 11 Turpins Chase, Oaklands, Welwyn, Hertfordshire.

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