



All About Our Branch

- We formed in 1972, initially as an all-Hertfordshire branch, later becoming South Hertfordshire Branch (after a number of other branches were formed in the county). We are the oldest CAMRA Branch in Britain, 50 years old in 2022. A booklet "Real ale in South Herts – the Story of Local Cask Ale Campaigning 1972 – 2022" describing those 50 years was published in 2022.
- Our first Branch meeting was held on 20 November 1972 at the Farriers Arms in St.Albans – marked today by a blue plaque mounted on the pub's frontage. Our first social gathering was held one month earlier at the Builders Arms in New Barnet. Branch meetings were minuted from December 1972 and continue to be held monthly – at pubs across the Branch area.
- In March 1974 we organised Britain's first Beer Exhibition, held at the Market Hall in St.Albans – so new was the concept that the brewers donated the beer for free! The beer sold at 2p per half.
- We organised the initial all-Hertfordshire Beer festivals which were held at Hatfield Polytechnic between 1977 and 1980.
- Today, its local successor, the St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival (annual since 1996 at St.Albans Arena), is one of CAMRA's most prominent provincial beer festivals, offering over 350 beers and 50 ciders and where 35,000 pints are consumed. For further information: www.stalbansbeerfestival.com. With a two-year gap due to the pandemic, the festival reappeared in 2022 and continues in 2024.
- In 2009 and 2010 the branch held successful beer festivals in Harpenden.
- Our campaigning Newsletter, Pints of View (circulation 8750), has an unbroken pedigree dating back to July 1976, when it was founded as the Campaign's monthly Hertfordshire Newsletter and subsequently the South Hertfordshire Newsletter. During the Covid-19 pandemic a temporary on-line version was devised, called Hertfordshire Pulling Together.
- There have been twelve printed editions of the Hertfordshire Real Ale Guide (all organised, edited and produced by this branch with information provided from all Hertfordshire branches) – first published in 1974; the latest edition in 2000. Since, we have published local guides to pubs in Hertford, Ware and St.Albans.
- In 2007 the branch launched its Hertfordshire on-line pub guide, now subsumed into the national CAMRA What Pub? database – whatpub.com
- We encourage publicans to stock real ale, rewarding the best pubs with our annual Pub of the Year award. Recent winners have included the Robin Hood, St.Albans (2024), Woodman, Wildhill which has also won the county award, the Old Cross Tavern, Hertford, Mermaid, St.Albans and the Crooked Billet, Ware.
- A branch Cider Pub of the Year competition was introduced in 2013 – the winners have been the Mermaid in St.Albans (2013-2022). The 2023 & 2024 winner is the Robin Hood, St.Albans.
- A branch Club of the Year competition was introduced in 2014 – the 2024 the winner is the Royston Club in St.Albans. 2nd The Hertford Club, 3rd the North Mymms Social Club. 40 clubs sit within the Branch area.
- The branch has a Most Improved Pub award utilised on an as and when basis. The latest winners are the White Lion, St.Albans and Cask and Stillage, Potters Bar – both in 2022.
- We are supporters of CAMRA's LocAle Scheme, promoting local breweries and beers.

- In the mid-1970s we were instrumental in real ale being re-introduced into many local pubs with our handpump refurbishment and loan scheme.
- The Dave Burns Memorial Award is presented to individuals who have made notable efforts in the furthering of the Campaign's ideals, including publicans, campaigners and brewery officials. A Lifetime Achievement Award was made to Steve Bury in 2022.
- The South Herts Branch area is bordered approximately by St.Albans and the M1 in the west, Ware and the A10 in the east, the Greater London boundary to the south and Redbourn, Harpenden, Welwyn, Oaklands and Chapmore End to the north.
- We actively support Hertfordshire brewers in the production of cask-conditioned beer and campaigned to save McMullens during their troubles in 2003. The Branch spearheaded the 1987 campaign to save Rayment's Furneux Pelham brewery. Branch members formed the Victoria Brewery in Ware, which operated between 1981 and 1985. Forty members took part in the famous march to save Barnsley brewery in 1974.
- Around 2,000 CAMRA members currently reside within the branch area.
- Of the 850 pubs in Hertfordshire, 250 are in the South Herts area.
- South Hertfordshire is home to one long-standing family brewer, McMullens of Hertford plus the independent brewers, 3 Brewers of St.Albans and Farr Brew of Wheathampstead.
- When CAMRA was formed in Hertfordshire, only 90 pubs sold real ale. We lost a further fifteen before we could reverse the trend. Today around 75% of Hertfordshire's pubs offer real ale.
- We fight pub closures (actively taking part in planning processes) and oppose the desecration of traditional pub interiors. We provide information on and back applications to list pubs as Assets of Community Value.
- Each May, the Branch puts on events to actively promote mild. In 1979 we successfully campaigned for Greene King XX Dark Mild to be retained. The Mild pub crawl in Hertford is an annual May fixture with an 18-year pedigree. A Mild crawl in St.Albans now also takes place.
- Our Branch committee currently comprises 16 members and is elected, each year in January, at the Branch AGM. Branch meetings often include a speaker – brewers, publicans, politicians, campaigners, maltsters, historians etc.
- The Branch is currently allocated 26 pubs in the Good Beer Guide.
- Our website, relaunched in 2017 and awarded "Best Branch Website of the Year" in 2019 and 2020, gives information on the Branch, its events and campaigns and has an on-line version of Pints of View. Look for www.southherts.camra.org.uk.
- Branch Social events include the annual Hertford Autumn Ale Tour and the Ware Summer Saunter. Branch Socials have included visits to over 100 UK breweries.
- Branch members are available to give talks to local clubs and organisations.
- In 1992 branch member, Iain Dobson, was awarded the MBE for his work when the Campaign's National Secretary.
- During the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020-22 we continued to champion local pubs and breweries with newsletter and website publicity, and the lobbying of MPs.
- In 2023 the Branch published a new Hertford and Ware Real Ale leaflet. In 2024 it collaborated with Hertfordshire County Council and Anglia Rail to produce a New River Line Rail Ale Guide.
- Information on South Herts Branch events can be found at ask@southherts.camra.org.uk