

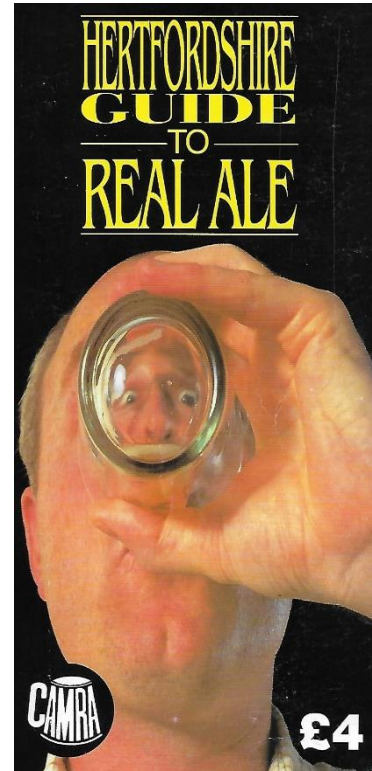
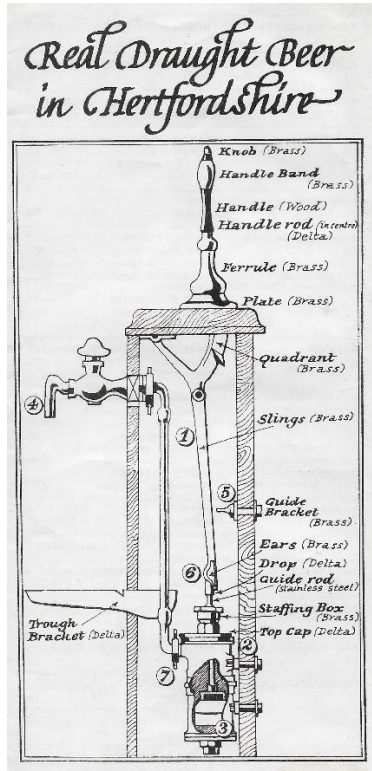
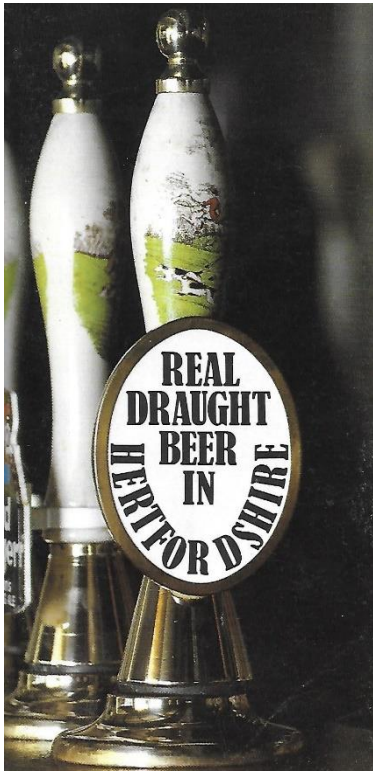


50
YEARS

Classic British Ale

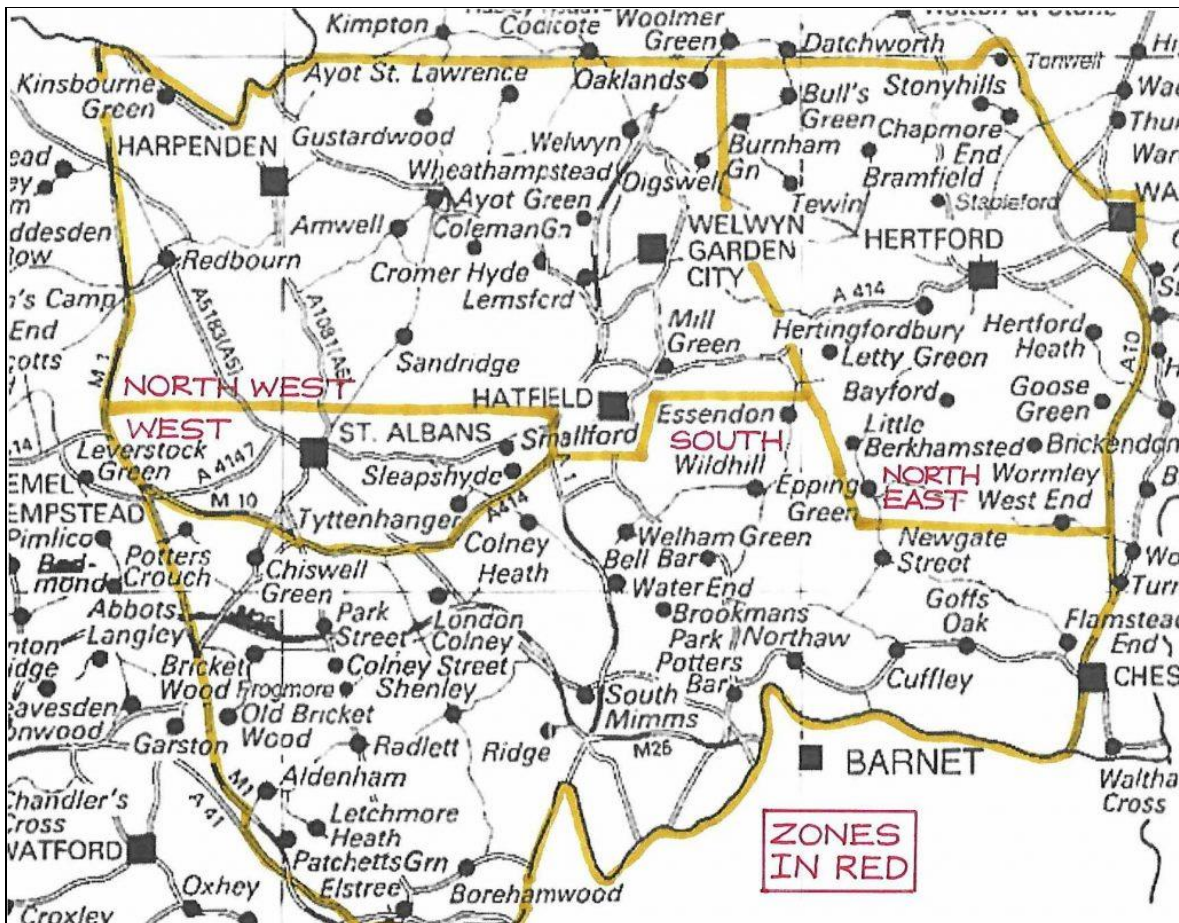
Real Ale in South Herts – 50 Years

The Story of Local Cask Ale Campaigning



Above: Hertfordshire Real Ale Guides from (l-r) 1983, 1975 and 2000

A map of the South Herts Branch Area and Its Four Zones:



Introduction

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) was formed in 1971 by four journalists, with a mission to press for an improvement in quality and choice in Britain's beer. A chord was soon struck with beer drinkers that would shake the existing brewing establishment and gather legions of supporters who would, against apparent odds, change the face of beer and brewing in Britain for the better and forever. Bland and insipid keg beers would be consigned to history and a new brewing landscape would be created where cask ale blossomed bringing back integrity, pride and skill to brewing, unearthing and illuminating the country's hidden brewing heritage and shining a new path ahead.

CAMRA defined real ale as being brewed from water, malted barley, hops and yeast – still able to ferment in the cask – a living product. It should not be filtered or pasteurised and it should not be served by methods that involve carbon dioxide pressure.

Faced with a secretive and protective industry, largely dominated by huge brewing conglomerations who dictated trends, the remaining smaller brewers were up against it – so many had not survived the takeovers and closures that had blighted the previous seventy years. Cask ale, its flavours often destroyed by top pressure - an injection of CO₂ that likened its characteristics to keg beer - was in a declining state with an ever-shrinking market but this type of beer was to define what CAMRA was seeking for the future. The door that effective campaigning opened allowed a brewing landscape that not only saved and promoted cask ale but allowed it to thrive and diversify into today's exceptional scene.

The history, life and future direction of the national Campaign is well documented elsewhere – how CAMRA developed its ideals to include pub preservation, giving the beer consumer a voice, promoting cider. CAMRA has had many successes and celebrated its 50th year in 2021. In 2022, South Hertfordshire Branch celebrates its own 50th milestone. The ensuing pages are a brief attempt to display the road taken by local CAMRA enthusiasts to promote the national ideals and bring their own stamp on the local Hertfordshire (and ultimately South Hertfordshire) beer and pub scene.

The Hertfordshire Branch is formed

An all-Hertfordshire Branch was officially formed on 20 November 1972 when a large number of its initial members met at the Farriers Arms in St.Albans, a real ale pub in a city brimming with pubs but with no alternative real ale outlets.

In a Hertfordshire Newsletter article of August 1976, John Green, a founder Branch member, said "Two groups of people formed the initial hard core of local campaigners, one a bunch of largely indiscriminate drinkers previously assembled under the banner of the "Herts and Bucks Full Timers" who realised that beer from the barrel was better than the likes of Double Diamond, Tartan and Tankard (but needed CAMRA's early experts to explain exactly why); the other



**Herts South Branch
With Compliments**

2

comprising employees of the printing industry in Watford.” One of the four CAMRA founders had relocated to St.Albans to work on a local evening newspaper and was spreading the word.

Informal social gatherings of beer drinkers had been meeting at the Fox and Hounds in Croxley Green and at the Builders Arms in New Barnet but when a more formal and campaigning arrangement was demanded at the meeting at the Farriers, a Hertfordshire Branch was born. In December 1972 CAMRA’s newspaper What’s Brewing reported “Members in Hertfordshire, one of the staunchest CAMRA counties in Britain, are to form a Branch”. Instigated by John Hanscomb, the then Area



Organiser for CAMRA, who lived in Croxley Green, the first minuted meeting of the new Branch was held on 21 December. John said “The idea of a Branch is two-fold. It will be partly social, for people who like drinking with others who appreciate good real beer but, more important we can, as a Branch, become more effective campaigners”. A tour of Brakspear brewery pubs around Berkshire and Oxfordshire soon followed.

Pictured left, The Farriers Arms in St.Albans, where South Herts held its first official meeting

The real ale scene in Hertfordshire was concerning. Of the (approximately) 1,000 pubs in the county, far less than 100 sold real ale and there were further losses of these pubs before there were many gains. However, this never dampened campaigning spirits and members took their voice to the pubs. By 1974 things were beginning to improve. In St.Albans the first welcome addition was the Lower Red Lion. In Hertford the White Horse, then a Free House, was offering a good selection of ales direct from the cask. Only two brewers remained in the county – McMullens the long-established Family Brewers from Hertford and Rayment’s of Furneux Pelham, effectively a subsidiary of Greene King. Both brewed good real ale – often blighted in their pubs with the use of CO2 top pressure, though each still had a fair number of pubs selling handpumped cask ale or beer direct from the cask.

As more and more members attended Branch meetings the Farriers was soon outgrown and by the end of 1973 the Two Brewers in Chipperfield became a more suitable venue. The White Hart, Welwyn and Pinks Hotel in Shenley followed.

By July 1973 Hertfordshire Branch was keenly looking for a venue to hold CAMRA’s first-ever Beer Festival and was already achieving success in promoting the real ale cause in the local press. In March 1974 that quest was accomplished when the Festival opened in St.Albans’ Old Market Hall – see article on pages 8 - 10.

As the Campaign membership grew more branches were being formed and in Hertfordshire, Mid-Chilterns (early 1974), North Hertfordshire (late 1974), Herts & Essex Borders (early 1976) and Watford and District (1983) seceded from Hertfordshire Branch, leaving the original branch as South Hertfordshire Branch, based on a boundary of approximately St.Albans in the west, Ware in the east, Greater London to the south and Harpenden to the north. *See map on Inside Front Cover*

An early campaigning foray away from Hertfordshire was for Members to join the march in September 1974 to save Barnsley Bitter. The march around the town in torrential rain bemused local souls who were puzzled why 1,000 bedraggled people would attend the march and bother to come from all over Britain. That battle was lost but the Branch was a regular supporter of such events. There was a Hertfordshire CAMRA banner to march behind and similar events took place to oppose planned brewery closures in other parts of England.

Today, South Hertfordshire Branch proudly holds the title of being CAMRA's oldest surviving Branch.

Pictured right, a blue plaque on the outside wall of the Farriers Arms commemorates that first 1972 meeting in Hertfordshire.

Of some of the early Branch members, John Hanscomb went on to edit the first official Good Beer Guide in 1974. St.Albans resident and beer writer, Roger Protz edited many more and he and Steve Bury were listed in the Campaign's top 40 list of all-time campaigners when it was published in 2011.



Pubs of Mention

In the first years of the Campaign the Branch found a mixture of responses from landlords. A few were very positive, some put up with us, some were quizzical and some quite hostile.

Pubs of mention in those early years included the Brocket Arms in Ayot St.Lawrence, the White Horse at Burnham Green, the Swan in Bushey, the Woodman at Chapmore End, the Bell and Crown and the White Horse in Hertford, the Builders Arms and Railway Bell in New Barnet (in Greater London), the Cricketers in Redbourn, the Cabinet in Reed, the Farriers Arms and the Lower Red Lion in St.Albans, Pinks Hotel in Shenley, the Windmill at Thundridge, the Barley Mow at Tyttenhanger, the Crown and Sceptre at Bridens Camp, West Herts Sports and Social Club in Watford, the White Hart, Welwyn and the Woodman at Wildhill.

At the Farriers Arms the irascible landlord, George Vardy, could ban you at lunchtime for not drinking up on time but allow you back at evening opening time as if nothing had happened.

At the White Hart, when a Branch member announced the birth of his first child, landlord Fred Cox delivered celebratory cask beer to the meeting in two foaming watering cans.

Pictured right, the White Horse Hertford, in its early Free House days



Early South Herts Branch Campaigning

There was a vigorous approach to campaigning from the start. Branch members spoke to and cajoled landlords to try real ale. Sometimes this was a barrel on the bar to sit alongside the keg beers, members turning up en masse to drink it, talking to the locals, persuading them to try it too. Former Chairman, Bob Norrish says “We were given some handpump parts by a St Albans antique dealer and spent time creating workable sets of handpumps which we then pedalled around the pubs – a landlord could have them for three months to see if real ale would take off and then either give them back or buy them for £30.” A set went to the Red Lion in Nash Mills and a set to the Coach and Horses in Newgate Street though getting that set back was a story and a half – fortunately the landlord eventually bought his own set.

In Hertford the Bell and Crown, a small McMullen local, became home to the Branch darts team which surprised themselves with an initial ten-match undefeated run.

Early committee meetings were often held in small interesting venues. Les Middlewood remembers “One of worthy mention was the Windmill in Thundridge. John and Joan Fish let us use their upstairs front room. Joan would ferry regular supplies



of AK up to us. John was a great real ale supporter. He said of keg beers that he had once heard that a CO2 cylinder in a pub in the Midlands had exploded. “Why would I want any of that stuff?” he said, refusing to have any at the pub at all. The only lager was from bottles on a cold shelf but who wanted that when John’s AK was kept in top condition”.

Pictured left, sadly now closed, the Windmill in Thundridge,

Two early beer tents at Dobbs Weir and Knebworth Park were setbacks – the former because the Waterways Authority told us to expect 3,000 people but only 300 turned up – much beer remained unsold - the latter because the weekend was a total wash-out. But the skills learnt of setting up and keeping the beer were invaluable if at a sorry financial loss to the Campaign. As the real ale campaign took hold, some brewers heads were being turned – a game-changing gain was in 1976 when Ind Coope fitted handpumps to over 75 Hertfordshire pubs for their new Burton Ale, headlined in the July issue of a new monthly South Herts Newsletter - see pages 11 - 12 - enabling the Branch to communicate with a wider set of beer drinkers, many who joined CAMRA.

Real Draught Beer in Hertfordshire Beer Guide

In 1975 our first “Real Draught Beer in Hertfordshire” Guide, in essence a fold out pamphlet (two similar editions followed in 1976) listed some 100 Hertfordshire real ale pubs. Further book editions followed in quick succession, all edited by South Herts members, first Dave Burns and then Roger Filler. A total of 12 editions of the Guide were made, up to the year 2000, it having by then grown to 145 pages, all assembled by a dedicated South Herts team with information provided by CAMRA Branches and members from all over Herts. Today a pub database feeds into the national on-line WhatPub guide. See *some of the Guide covers on the inside front cover of this booklet.*

The Hertfordshire Beer Festivals

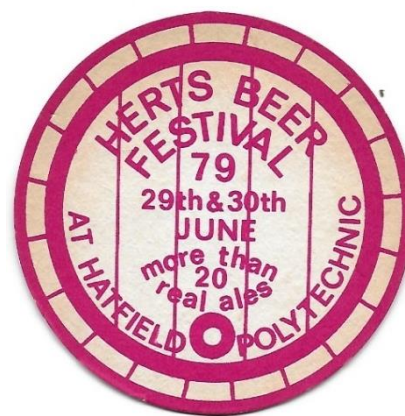
In 1977 (and until 1980) the Branch organised and ran the Hertfordshire Beer Festivals held at the Students Union Hall at Hatfield Polytechnic (now on part of the University of Hertfordshire). The initial Festival featured 20 beers from the Adnams, Arkell, Boddington, Brakspear, Fuller's, Greene King, Hoskins, Ind Coope, McMullen's, Paine's, Pollard's, Rayment's, Theakston and Thwaites breweries.

By 1980 the number of beers had increased to 30 beers. 1978 organiser, Adrian Green remarked "The Festival was the biggest annual event for the Branch. We worked closely with the Students Union who seemed to have autonomy to make decisions."



Right, beer selling out quickly at the 1980 festival.

Adrian continued "In 1977 a Branch member loaned us a Luton van and we travelled the country picking up casks for the Festival. In the later years much of the beer was supplied by John Blackwell of the Barley Mow in Tyttenhanger, a rural pub that was fast-becoming a real ale icon, with 18 handpumps and known by real ale aficionados all over Britain. John also supplied the licences. It was a social event as well as a campaigning one and with help from members from all over Hertfordshire and elsewhere we really felt we had achieved something. And with Hatfield town almost being a real ale desert many people were drinking real ale for the first time. It was hard but enjoyable work and although the Festival was only open for a weekend it took three months of planning, preparation and completion." One year, former Branch Chairman Bob Norrish remembers clocking up 400 miles returning empty casks to far-flung brewing outposts in Wales, the West Country and the Midlands. *Right, a beer mat from the 1979 festival*



Covent Garden and Alexandra Palace

At least two Branch members worked at the first national beer exhibition held at Covent Garden in 1975. When the chant of "We hate Watneys" bellowed through the former flower market, it was obvious that CAMRA was on to something really big and unstoppable. Half a dozen Branch members became an intrinsic part of the first Great British Beer Festivals at Alexandra Palace from 1977 to 1980 and the forerunner GLC Silver Jubilee Beer Festival also held at Ally Pally in 1977, taking roles as Bar Managers, Entertainment Co-ordinator and Site Manager. A trusty best tool for spiling a cask was found to be a Ford Cortina valve rod which, when hit with a mallet, had the perfect diameter and length to broach the shive.

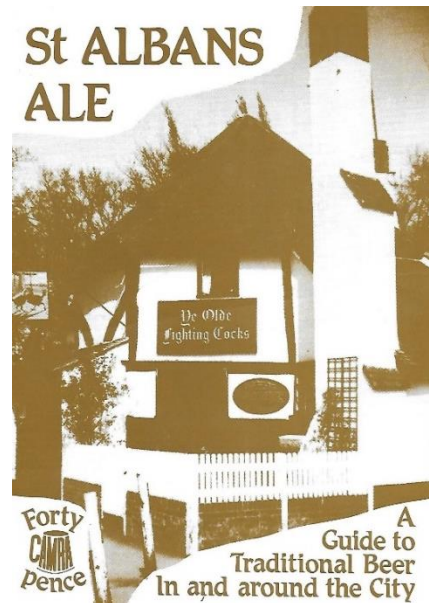


Time To Party

Christmas real ale parties, usually organised by Branch founder member Richard Steward and mostly held at Bramfield village hall, ran for 22 years from 1974. It was a great way to unwind after a campaigning year and brought new people to the Branch. Tickets were like gold dust for the popular event which simply consisted of real ale, cider, bread & cheese and a live band. One year, having watched three naked men on TV do a balloon dance, three naked Branch members attempted the same thing with some optimism and determination but without the same co-ordination and precision, with predictable results! And with smoking still allowed inside the building cigarettes were soon popping strategic balloons with outrageous results. Branch weekend away trips – with the first organised by Enfield and Barnet Branch to Batemans in Lincolnshire - were ever popular, taking us to breweries and pubs in Scotland, Wales, and all over England. See the places visited on page 13.

First City Guide

In July 1981 we marked CAMRA's 10th anniversary in a shared event with the St.Albans Licensed Victuallers Association – South Herts Branch overseeing a pub passport scheme involving 39 pubs, a mini-beer festival and publishing "St.Albans Ale" – the first real ale guide to the city.



Preserving Brewing Styles

The Branch was in the vanguard of promoting Mild – in 1979 fighting for Greene King to retain XX Dark Mild – which due largely to CAMRA publicising efforts is still available to today – and Ind Coope KK Light Mild, a battle which was lost. As the years have passed local brewers have taken up the mantle – many now producing milds, stouts and porters as well as the golden ales and American-style IPAs which have grown in popularity in the last 25 years. All these years later Hertford and Ware members still celebrate mild, a pint worth fighting for, at an annual May mild pub trail through Hertford town centre.



As the years have passed local brewers have taken up the mantle – many now producing milds, stouts and porters as well as the golden ales and American-style IPAs which have grown in popularity in the last 25 years. All these years later Hertford and Ware members still celebrate mild, a pint worth fighting for, at an annual May mild pub trail through Hertford town centre.

There's a Badge for it

The Branch purchased a badge-making machine to create badges (*some shown here*) to assist in campaigning against brewery and pub closures and to promote beer styles under threat, such as dark mild. The machine was loaned out to other Herts Branches



to help them back some of their own campaigning missions – the badges being an easily visible talking point. Festival organisers also borrowed the machine to make badges for their staff.

Mac's and Rayments follow the Real Ale Trend

As the tide turned in CAMRA's favour, local brewers McMullen's and Rayment's were installing handpumps in most of their pubs and the 1981 edition of Real Draught Beer in Hertfordshire included 520 outlets with both companies well represented.

As real ale took its hold McMullen's began to experiment with seasonal beers at first under the banner "Special Reserve" but now often under the name Rivertown, a rebranding for some of Mac's beers. Both AK and Country Bitter pre-date CAMRA, the former sometimes changed in ABV strength over the years and veering between being labelled a bitter or a light mild – now AK Original Mild – and two other permanent beers have come and gone, Cask Ale and Gladstone. IPA is now a third permanent beer. The ABV7.0% Stronghart a fantastic winter beer is now rarely available in cask, replaced at Christmas time by Bootwarmer, a less potent cousin.

In 2003 the company fought through internal hardships that might have destroyed it and although the original landmark Victorian brewery building was sold a brand new brewery was constructed sending cask beer to almost all of Mac's pubs.

The loss of Rayment's of Furneux Pelham – closed by Greene King in 1987 - was deeply felt. The local CAMRA Branches had fought a significant campaign with marches, protests and petitions but it was all to no avail and with the closure of the brewery went the fine BBA bitter, Rayment's single cask beer, its own AK light mild having been withdrawn in 1978. It was a lesson that, in the end, CAMRA could only influence business to a certain extent but that it could, along the way, make life difficult with bad publicity to try and make owners think again.



Start of the Brewing Bonanza

Some CAMRA members got involved with home brewing but, in 1982, Tony Burns and Alan Swannell, with the help from many other South Herts members, set up their own brewery in Ware, at the Victoria Maltings. Early pioneers you could say, in a vanguard of new small brewers. As the brewery found its feet excellent beers were being produced but success only stretched to four years, financial difficulties forcing its close.

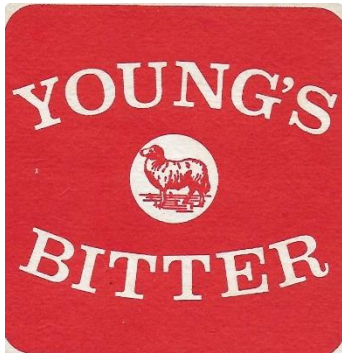
The Dark Horse brewery, originally based in the White Horse, Hertford operated between 1994 and 2002 and the Verulam/Alecraft brewery operated for many years next to the Farmers Boy in St.Albans. Later on, micro-breweries could be found in the Fledgling and Firkin and the Old Cross Tavern in Hertford and the Philanthropist and Firkin and the White Hart Tap and Verulam Arms in St.Albans.



Later county additions included Tring brewery, whose quality beers are available all over South Herts and Red Squirrel, initially based in Hertford but now Potten End, rebranded as Mad Squirrel. On the South Herts Branch patch today are 3 Brewers of St Albans and Farrbrew. Hadham, New River, Paradigm and Buntingford are nearby.

Hertfordshire – Home of *the* 1st CAMRA Real Ale Festival

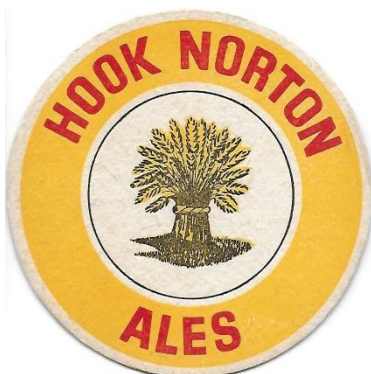
When words are spoken about CAMRA's first Beer Festival, they almost inevitably relate to the famous Beer Exhibition that CAMRA held at the old flower market at Covent Garden, in the heart of London in 1975. An amazing event it was too, with 40,000 drinkers, 50 beers, bread and cheese and for CAMRA the encouraging surprise of the enormous queue of thirsty drinkers stringing around the atmospheric building, all waiting for opening time, not knowing quite what to expect – except that real ale was on the up and that the campaign was beginning to capture the heart of the British beer drinking public.



Yet it wasn't the first Beer Festival open to the public held by CAMRA – that was much closer to home. The honour goes to the Beer Exhibition held in St.Albans on Saturday 30 March 1974 which was arranged by the young Hertfordshire Branch of CAMRA. Two accounts of this ground-breaking event were written some years later, both for the Hertfordshire Newsletter, the forerunner of Pints of View. One was written by current Pints of View editor, Steve Bury in 1976 and one by Neil Campbell, a former Branch Treasurer, composed in 1981.

There sadly doesn't appear to be a photographic collection to give us a visual record of the event, nor promotional material with which to illuminate a further account – neither would have seemed important at the time - but what follows below is an amalgamation of the two articles with some additional facts – testament to an event which would be replicated and grown in towns all over Britain in the following 45 years.

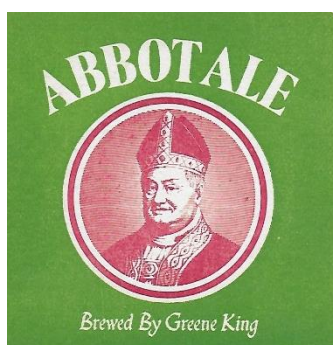
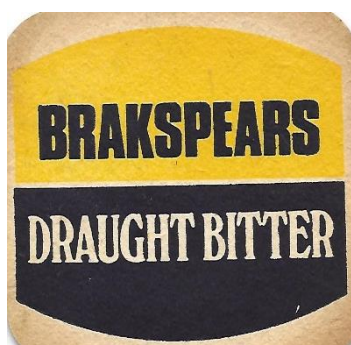
The Hertfordshire Branch of the Campaign had been formed in November 1972 and by February 1973 early campaigning exuberance and drive in the Branch was asking the question, “why shouldn't we hold a beer exhibition here to promote real cask ale?”. In March 1973 a small article in What's Brewing read “Hertfordshire members may stage a beer exhibition later this year. A meeting of the Herts Branch in St.Albans last month decided to look for a venue for the exhibition which will probably include several different real draught beers.” A Branch Sub-committee of six members was given the



task of finding a home which soon became a tough assignment. In September 1973 a follow-up article stated eight brewers had shown an interest in exhibiting their beers but that the Branch was now appealing for its members to help find a venue “anywhere in the county.” But by December the search had settled on the Old Market Hall in St.Albans, (since demolished). Initially the concept of an Exhibition was hardly causing a stir beyond CAMRA and there were concerns over whether a licence would be required or not.

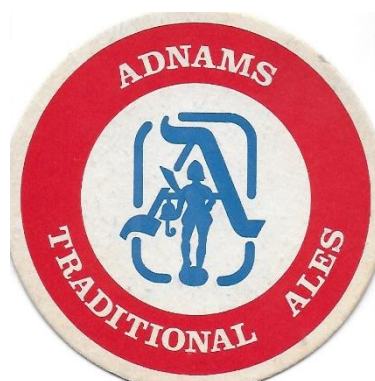
At the time Branch Chairman Steve Warnes said in What's Brewing "Twelve breweries have told us they'd like to exhibit their beers and we're expecting more to follow."

We must remember that in 1974 real ale outlets were at a premium – just two pubs in St.Albans (The Farriers Arms and the Lower Red Lion) and by now fewer than 90 in the whole of Hertfordshire. But CAMRA's headquarters (which was by now based in St.Albans) lent support and the planning of the event slowly gathered pace, as did interest from brewers. In his article Steve Bury remembered "We had the generous offer of a licence from Bill Quincy, the landlord of the Crown and Sceptre at Bridens Camp but it initially appeared that it wouldn't be needed because we were planning to give the beer away." However on the eve of the event the police changed their mind and at a special hastily-arranged sitting of St.Albans Magistrates, Bill presented his application at 5pm, the branch praying for a positive result and paying Bill's taxi journey to and from the Crown and Sceptre. Fortunately, the event was given the green light.



In the lead-in to the event there was the not inconsiderable burden of collecting the beer. Neil said "I spent most of the week before the Exhibition travelling around the country collecting beers that breweries had agreed to let us have, but would not deliver". Steve said "Some other beers were collected by members in a hired van, using a list of loading points like a drinker's dream".

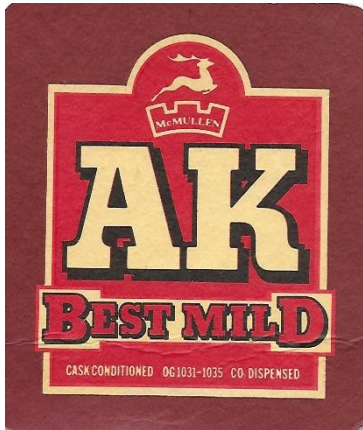
One member collected from Rayment's at Furneux Pelham in east Hertfordshire arranging a personal brewery trip while he was there. The county was further represented by beers from McMullen's of Hertford. Steve continued "Anyway, all the beer had arrived safely by Friday, all donated free, except for two firkins. We thought we had written to every brewery (including Watney's who politely declined) but as the beer was being stillaged we had a surprise visit from one of the directors of Charrington's who had heard from someone at Young's about the event. He had requisitioned a kilderkin of Charrington IPA and driven with it from the Mile End brewery in London to make sure that Charrington's were there." By the close of Friday



evening 26 barrels were all tapped and spiled – a range of beers from 14 brewers. The taps (brass and wood) had been begged and borrowed and the hall was decorated with mats, towels, posters and guides from the participating brewers.

The Exhibition had received good prior publicity in local newspapers – even in some of the national daily papers - and the tickets were eagerly snapped up. Neil explained “A decision was eventually taken to charge for the beer and so we sold it for an unbelievable 2p per half. I still feel at that stage that for the Campaign it was a major achievement.....my only disappointment was that admission had to be by ticket only and that all the tickets were sold in advance, many to CAMRA members. We were preaching to the converted and were unable to let in many of the locals to see what CAMRA was about.....due to the restrictions placed on numbers allowed in the hall by the local council.”

On the morning of the event Steve Bury remembers the Branch’s organising team checking how well the beers had settled, though he still found time to slip away to the Farriers and Lower Red Lion for a pint or two ahead of the Grand Opening of the Exhibition. Steve said “Soon the hall was filled with drinkers and deep discussion on the merits and qualities of the ales. Fuller’s, Adnams, Brakspear’s and Hook Norton were gaining the most interest as they were not then available anywhere in the county.”



The event was given extra life and sound by the local Morris side. First beer to sell out was the strong Fuller’s ESB. People who arrived late made up for that loss by supping Greene King Abbot Ale and the beers were conveniently beginning to run out to meet the 9.30pm closing time that was demanded by Magistrates. As the last drinkers left the building it was noted that souvenir hunters had taken everything – posters, mats, the lot – even including the hand-produced barrel signs saying “2p per half pint”.

For the Campaign and Hertfordshire Branch it was a great encouraging success, indicating that such events could be a brilliant campaigning tool – bringing traditional cask beer to the drinkers. Feedback from the brewers was excellent, it had certainly impressed them and helped to convince them that there was a good future and demand for cask-conditioned beer. Festivals in Cambridge and Cardiff followed soon after in that same year.

As word spread of the Exhibition’s full attendance, some local landlords gained the courage and confidence to take the real ale plunge, to put a barrel on the bar or fit handpumps.

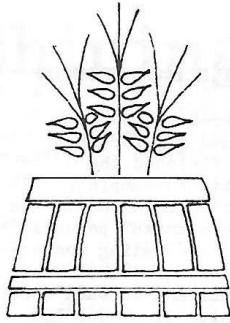
It had all been a great accomplishment but any further local event would need to be bigger. It would take another three years of anticipation and hard work before the Branch was in a position to launch the first Hertfordshire Beer Festival at the Student Union Hall at Hatfield Polytechnic in Hatfield and it took until 1996 before CAMRA’s prestigious St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival opened its familiar doors at the Arena in St.Albans city centre.

CAMRA’s South Hertfordshire Home

In 1974 CAMRA moved its Head Office from Salford to rooms at 94 Victoria Street in St.Albans which it soon outgrew. In 1978 a further move took place to nearby 34 Alma Road, a house really, CAMRA staying there until 1995, before relocating to a more functional and substantial building at 230 Hatfield Road. In 2021 CAMRA announced that it was looking for new premises, probably still in (or close to) St.Albans.

Pints of View – From its Origins to the Present Day

By 1976 a number of CAMRA's Branches had begun to communicate with the fast-emerging real ale campaigning fraternity through Newsletters produced by their Branch members. Les Middlewood says "I was in my early twenties and was asked to draft something as a possible South Hertfordshire Newsletter." It was quickly approved by the then Branch committee and a first edition was rushed out in July 1976, distributed to some of the early real ale pubs such as the White Horse in Hertford, the Jolly Sailor in St.Albans and the Barley Mow at Tyttenhanger.



In comparison to today's professionally-presented Pints of View, its ancestor was somewhat rudimentary – a double-sided typed and printed A3 sheet (folded to A4 size). The tools, techniques and funds were just not available (or invented) to produce much more. In line with the simplicity, purity and punch of the Campaign's message, the Newsletter was to include no adverts and was to be produced monthly sitting squarely behind national and Hertfordshire campaigning and to promote Branch social activity. It would log pub and brewery changes. The aim was to spread the real ale word to a wider drinking public.

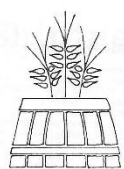


THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE
**SOUTH HERTS.
NEWSLETTER**
FEBRUARY 1977 NUMBER 8

How Long To The 50p. Pint?

Les continues "Fortunately, I had access to a typewriter with a wide carriage and I put together a Newsletter in a newspaper format, each page with two columns and with bold headings painstakingly applied in Letraset – a laborious process if ever there was one. The final typed version was taken, each month, to Kenmar Press in Wood Green, North London, for production. Printing from typed copy was not always easy, nor was the journey home on the crowded rush-hour double-decker bus, armed with the heavy packages of unfolded Newsletters. Folding itself would take an hour and the Newsletters were then taken to Branch Meetings and events for distribution by keen members."

Our first edition of 500 copies was headlined "Big Boost to Real Ale in Hertfordshire" heralding the introduction of Ind Coope's game-changing Burton Ale – Hertfordshire was to gain a further 75 real ale outlets almost overnight. But it was the February 1977 edition with its shocking banner headline "How Long To the 50p Pint?" that first attracted many readers. Outrageous - 50p for a pint, just imagine.



The Campaign For Real Ale
**HERTFORDSHIRE
NEWSLETTER**
March, 1978 Number 2

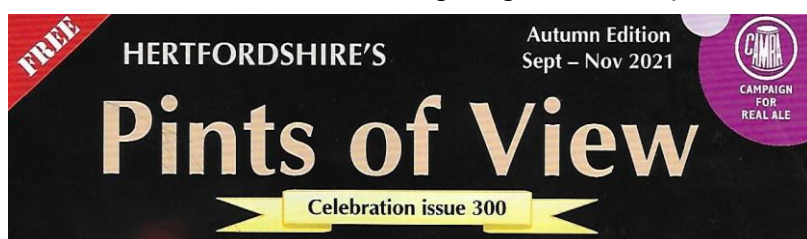
Big Brewers Collar Market

In February 1978, the other Hertfordshire Branches came on board and the publication was renamed The Hertfordshire Newsletter. It now had a wider distribution and included content - campaigning, historical and social - from some excellent contributors. And in the years that followed the Newsletter gained an A5 booklet format, full colour, photographs and a new name – Pints of View. The Newsletter had a strong and uncomplicated message – real ale was what we wanted and we were out to change the demoralising brewing scene of the day. With our actions and words we needed to convince an older generation of brewers and beer drinking public – who often talked of the "good old days" – that, in this case, the "good old days" were definitely worth

cherishing and preserving, not the terrible keg beers that the, mainly, larger brewers were producing, nor the favour for the use of top pressure on excellent cask ales that had spread to many a Family Brewer – even to Hertfordshire’s very own McMullens.

After 33 issues the editorship passed to Nick and Val Page and subsequently other editors from the South Herts (Dave Burns and Eric Sim), North Herts and Watford and District Branches. The Hertfordshire Newsletter changed to an A5 format at edition 161 (February 1997). At edition 180 (April 2000) Pints of View was adopted as the newsletter’s new name and at 207 (in October 2004) it became fully colour - the current glossy format of the magazine had arrived, as it continues to this day. Edited and produced, now for over 20 years by Steve Bury of South Herts Branch, his period of tenure has been closely matched by the production team of John Kemp, John Bishop and proof reader John Green. With a circulation, since 2012, of 8,750 copies, Pints of View is funded by South Herts, North Herts, Herts & Essex Borders and Watford & District Branches and is stocked by pubs, libraries, tourist offices and at some railway stations. Steve says “My first contribution was in 1976 - a write up of a branch trip to Young’s brewery. Years later I took over editorship and subsequently was joint-editor with Bill Austin, Roger Filler and Moray Taylor, before taking the sole role again. In my view a good newsletter is a strong campaigning tool, hence our regular “Bitter End” lead article. It must also get behind local campaigning for the pubs and clubs that support the cask ale cause. I like to think that Pints of View is a good read with some fun pieces and a lively “Readers Write” letters page. It wouldn’t be as good with too much advertising, it’s a balance, and we have to raise funds to cover publication costs.”

During the coronavirus pandemic, with pubs being closed, production of Pints of View was suspended, tantalisingly at edition 299. An on-line replacement called Hertfordshire’s CAMRA Pulling Together was produced, using the familiar format of



Pints of View. This ran for nine editions before, finally, edition 300 of Pints of View could return - in September 2021 – *the masthead pictured left.*

The editions of Pints of View, Pulling Together and their predecessors are not only informative but collectively they also now offer an important archive of Hertfordshire pub and brewery information and activity over 45 years. Every edition of the magazine has been scanned and can be found on the South Herts Branch website southherts.camra.org.uk/news/newsletter-archive/

The Good Beer Guide

Since its commercial inception in 1974 over 150 South Herts pubs have featured at least once in the Guide. To date, of the pubs that are still open, the following have amassed the most entries (those with over 25 entries). All selections have been made by members. The Branch organises its selection process in four Zones – see *map on inside front cover.*

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 39 Crooked Billet, Colney Heath | 32 Lower Red Lion, St.Albans |
| 37 Woodman, Wildhill | 30 Elephant and Castle, Amwell |
| 36 Woodman, Chapmore End | 27 Garibaldi, St.Albans |
| 35 White Horse, Hertford | 26 Cricketers, Redbourn |
| 35 Farriers Arms, St.Albans | |

Weekend Away Trips

Branch members enjoyed Weekend Away Brewery Trips between 1976 and 1997. The trips centred on breweries and/or cider makers and over the three days gave plenty of opportunity to explore the pubs in nearby towns and villages and those found on the journeys to and from Hertfordshire. The enjoyable weekends were not without their japes and misdemeanours – the culprit of the worst rewarded with the much sought after “Slob of the Trip” award. To save blushes, the recipients are not listed here. The initial trip was organised by Enfield and Barnet Branch, with subsequent ones arranged by South Hertfordshire and Watford and District members:

| Year | Base | Breweries/Cider Makers Visited |
|------|------------------------|---|
| 1976 | Skegness (Lincs.) | Bateman's |
| 1977 | Ecclefechan (Scotland) | Theakston's |
| 1978 | Skegness (Lincs.) | Bateman's |
| 1979 | Kington (Herefords) | Penhros Court; Bulmer's Cider; Three Tuns |
| 1980 | Dunbar (Scotland) | Belhaven |
| 1981 | Bo'ness (Cumbria) | Jennings |
| 1982 | ? (Hants) | Eldridge Pope; Cider Mill |
| 1983 | Cowbridge (Sth Wales) | Crown; Gwent |
| 1984 | Buxton (Derbyshire) | Robinson's; Failsworth |
| 1985 | Leominster (Herefords) | Wye Valley; Weston's Cider; Norbury Cider |
| 1986 | Devizes (Wiltshire) | Wadworth's; Archer's |
| 1987 | Morecambe (Lancs) | Mitchell's |
| 1988 | Dudley (W.Midlands) | Banks'; Mystery brewery |
| 1989 | Easingwold (N.Yorks) | Theakston's; Big End; Malton's |
| 1990 | Lewes (East Sussex) | Harvey's |
| 1991 | Kingscote (Gloucs) | Uley; Wickwar |
| 1992 | Burnham (Somerset) | Cotleigh; Exmoor; Hop Back |
| 1993 | Blackpool (Lancs) | Moorhouse |
| 1994 | Southwold (Suffolk) | Tolly Cobbold; Woodforde's |
| 1995 | Keswick (Cumbria) | Jenning's; Church End; Dent; Blencathra; Porter |
| 1996 | ? (Dorset or Hants) | Ringwood; Palmer's; Poole; Hall & Woodhouse |
| 1997 | Halifax (W.Yorkshire) | Ryburn; Grainstore |

NB. In 2017 a commemorative trip was organised by Ian Turvey to Bewdley in Worcestershire and the Black Country - a chance for those that enjoyed the original trips to meet old friends, relive stories and scrapes and to drink some fine cask ale.

The Branch Chair

Since its founding in 1972 twelve members have served time in the Chair. By far the longest has been Phil Defriez with 20 years to his name. Past Chairs with approximate dates of tenure are shown below:

| Name | Chair Dates | Name | Chair Dates |
|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Steve Warnes | 1972 - 1975 | Peter Lerner | 1985 |
| Bill Maloney | 1975 (part) | Bob Norrish | 1986 - 1987 |
| Bob Norrish | 1975 - 1977 | Steve Bury | 1988 - 1996 |
| Jim Axford | 1978 | Phil Defriez | 1997 - 2016 |
| Dave Burns | 1979 | Les Middlewood | 2017 - 2019 |
| Eric Sim | 1980 - 1981 | Iain Loe | 2020 - 2021 |
| Dave Andrews | 1982 - 1984 | | |

Pub of The Year

The initial South Herts Pub of the Year competition took place in 1986 and it has been repeated annually ever since, now feeding into County, Regional and National competitions. The most successful South Herts pub has been the Woodman at Wildhill which has amassed 12 Golds, 6 Silvers and 2 Bronzes. It has also won the county competition. The Old Cross Tavern in Hertford has 6 Golds, 3 Silvers and 3 Bronzes; The Lower Red Lion in St.Albans 2 Golds and 3 Silvers. In 2021 the winner was the Robin Hood, St.Albans, with Silver for the Crooked Billet in Ware and Bronze for the Woodman in Wildhill.

| Year | Winner/Gold | Year | Winner/Gold |
|------|---------------------------------|------|-------------------------------|
| 1986 | Woodman, Wildhill | 2004 | Carpenters Arms, Harpenden |
| 1987 | White Horse, Hertford | 2005 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1988 | Farriers Arms, St.Albans | 2006 | White Lion, St.Albans |
| 1989 | John Bunyan, Coleman Green | 2007 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1990 | Garibaldi, St.Albans | 2008 | Old Cross Tavern, Hertford |
| 1991 | Plough, Tyttenhanger | 2009 | Six Bells, St.Albans |
| 1992 | Gibraltar Castle, Harpenden | 2010 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1993 | Lower Red Lion, St.Albans | 2011 | Old Cross Tavern, Hertford |
| 1994 | White Horse, Hertford | 2012 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1995 | Lower Red Lion, St.Albans | 2013 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1996 | Woodman, Chapmore End | 2014 | Crooked Billet, Ware |
| 1997 | Woodman, Wildhill | 2015 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1998 | Farmers Boy, St.Albans | 2016 | <i>Competition Re-aligned</i> |
| 1999 | Old Cross Tavern, Hertford | 2017 | Mermaid, St.Albans |
| 2000 | Old Cross Tavern, Hertford & | 2018 | Old Cross Tavern, Hertford |
| 2000 | Woodman, Wildhill - joint award | 2019 | Woodman, Wildhill |
| 2001 | Carpenters Arms, Harpenden | 2020 | Old Cross Tavern, Hertford |
| 2002 | Woodman, Wildhill | 2021 | Robin Hood, St.Albans |
| 2003 | Woodman, Wildhill | | |

Cider & Perry Pub of the Year. The annual Branch competition has been dominated, since its instigation in 2013, by the Mermaid in St.Albans – it has won the competition every year up to and including 2021.

Club of the Year. There are around 25 clubs in the Branch area that offer at least one real ale. The competition commenced in 2014, won until 2020 by the Hertford Club, Hertford. In 2021 it shared the award with the Royston Club in St.Albans.

Most Improved Pub Award. This Branch award was introduced in 2013 to reward pubs which had taken great strides forward with real ale and other changes. In 2013 it was awarded to the Black Horse in Hertford. Then, the Garibaldi (2014), the Great Northern (2016), the Prae Wood Arms (2017) and Robin Hood (2018), all in St.Albans.

The National Inventory: Pub Interiors of Special Historic Interest

The South Herts Branch area does not have any pubs on the main National list but the following are listed as of Regional Importance or Some Regional Importance:

Cross Keys, Harpenden; Horse and Groom, Hatfield; Great Eastern Tavern, Hertford; Salisbury Arms, Hertford; White Horse, Hertford; Coach and Horses, Newgate Street; Farriers Arms, St.Albans; White Hart Hotel, St.Albans; Albion, Ware.

The Dave Burns Memorial Award

The DBMA has been awarded since 1997. Dave died suddenly in 1995 and had been a driving force in the Branch throughout the mid-1970s and 1980's, a former Chair and Secretary and editor of the Hertfordshire Newsletter. A keen campaigner Dave had been a bar manager at the GBBF and was a key member of the Branch team that organised the Hertfordshire Beer Festivals of 1977-1980. The Branch set up the award to honour individuals who have made a significant contribution to the real ale cause:

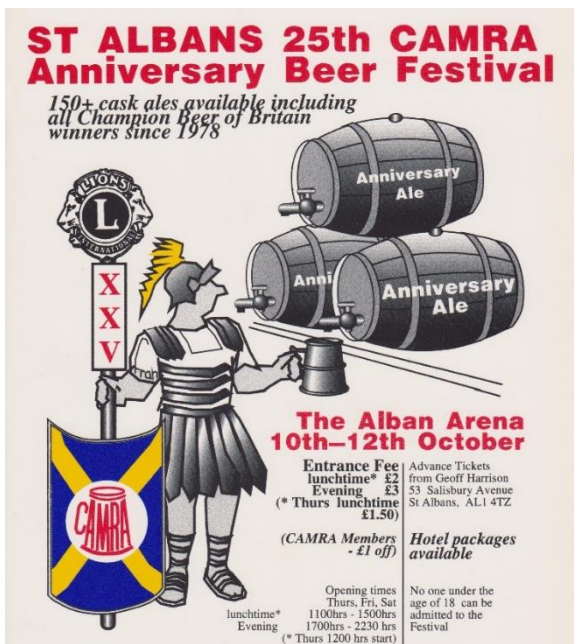
| Year | Award Winner | Summary of Citation |
|------|--------------------|---|
| 1997 | Graham & Ros Craig | Landlords. For stalwart promotion of real ale at the Woodman, Wildhill |
| 1998 | Richard Steward | Branch Member & McMullen's Brewery Liaison Officer. For 16 years in the role. |
| 1999 | Eric Sim | Retiring Branch Chairman. For long campaigning service |
| 2000 | Denis Rutledge | McMullen's Public Relations Officer & Tour Guide. Friend of the Campaign |
| 2001 | John Tibble | Landlord. For promoting good beer and mild in particular at the Carpenters Arms, Harpenden |
| 2002 | Paul Ruane | Branch Member. For services to the Branch and CAMRA |
| 2007 | Steve Bury | Branch Member. For 35 year's campaigning for real ale in Hertfordshire and beyond. Pints of View editor |
| 2009 | Bob Muir | Landlord. For services to real ale and the trade at the Elephant & Castle, Amwell |
| 2012 | John Green | Branch Member. For over 40 year's service to the Branch and at CAMRA HQ |
| 2012 | Tony Dawes | Branch Member. For Committee work and work on the Branch website and pub database |
| 2017 | Phil Defriez | Retiring Branch Chairman with 20 years in the role; 19 years as St.Albans Beer Festival organiser |
| 2018 | Iain Loe | Branch Member. For services at CAMRA head office & South Herts; for the formation of the EBCU |
| 2020 | Tom Blakemore | Branch Member. For award-winning work on the Branch website and Branch and national work |
| 2021 | John Bishop | Branch Member. For 25 year's dedicated work in the Branch and at the St.Albans Beer Festival |

The St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival 1996 – 2021

In preparing for CAMRA's 25th anniversary in 1996, the Branch was approached by CAMRA centrally, to hold a celebratory beer festival in St.Albans. The Branch had not held a major Festival since 1980 and there had been a growing desire and resolve amongst the Branch membership to hold such a Festival, to rival some of the big East Anglian regional festivals already successfully held in places such as Bedford, Cambridge, Norwich and Peterborough. This approach from CAMRA was the spur and it was soon snapped up, taken forward by Mary Hamilton of the Lower Red Lion in the city and Geoff Hamilton of the St.Albans Lions Club. A committee was set up comprising mainly of local



ST ALBANS
BEER & CIDER
FESTIVAL 2017



CAMRA members but also representatives from St.Albans City Council and the Arena theatre in St.Peter's Street – the suggested venue. With all parties keen to proceed further meetings were held to work out the practicalities and on 10 October 1996 the doors opened on the “St.Albans Anniversary Beer Festival” with 150 ales and, a week before, a remarkable parade of brewery drays in the city centre.

Former Festival Organiser, Phil Defriez, who served for 19 years in the role, says “That first festival was a great success, all the more remarkable as most of the volunteers were new to running and working at beer festivals. The 1997

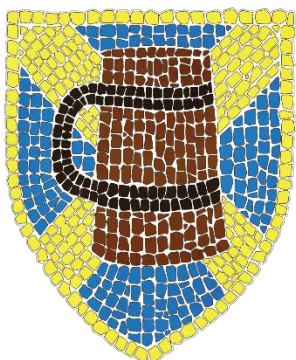
Festival was not so successful, blighted with poor publicity and an excessive beer order, but we learnt from our mistakes and in ensuing years the Festival went from strength to strength. Initially the Festival lasted for two to three days but eventually spread to four full days and all-day opening. Attendances rose from about 4,000 initially to a peak in 2013 of 10,000.”



After the first Festival, in subsequent years the St.Albans Beer Festival became a fully CAMRA-organised event, though St.Albans Leos have continued to give their valuable support by running the glasses stand in the main foyer and other charities have also helped. Since those starting years, the Festival has grown to utilise every available inch of the Arena with more bars added, outside seating and a range of catering stands. The Hertfordshire Bar is a regular feature – with beer from all the county's cask brewers and the annual Hertfordshire Beer of the Year competition takes place at the Festival – the most

recent winner, in 2019, being Hoddesdon's New River Brewery with their beer Five Inch Drop. CAMRA has regularly chosen the Festival for a beer tasting panel to judge and select beers as part of its annual Champion Beer of Britain competition.

ST ALBANS BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL 2019



At times the Festival has attracted TV interest - it featured in an episode of “The Apprentice” and in “Sophie Grigson In The Home Counties”. And a number of Branch representatives have taken to the airwaves, being interviewed on Three Counties Radio and other local radio stations. Certainly, entertainment has become an important feature. Well known bands such as Nine Below Zero, Dr Feelgood, the Hamsters, the Climax Blues Band and the inimitable John Otway have graced the stage but there is also a strong commitment to hire local bands and musicians. It is known by many as the “The Friendly Festival” and has the reputation of being one of England's foremost regional Festivals offering 350 cask beers 50 ciders and perries together, 50 bottle conditioned beers and 80 foreign beers and a range of food options and live music.

Held annually, still at the St.Albans Arena, it attracts a high and welcome level of volunteer support from CAMRA members from all over the county and beyond. Like Phil Defriez, a number of the Festival organising team have been involved in the management of the Festival for many years. Festival Organiser between 2017 and 2019, John Bishop, adds “I always strove, even before I became Organiser, to make the Festival bigger and better each year - to expand it further, so that there was always a fresh feel and vibe, with at least one further event or attraction every year, supporting and engaging with pubs, brewers and drinkers. Campaigning on unfair Business rates for pubs has been just one of the successes – it helped CAMRA HQ, along with others, make it a national issue and ended with positive results. This type of campaigning, whilst enjoying a quality pint, is what the Festival is all about”. And John Tubridy, the Branch’s long-serving Site Manager says “The common thread is the warm and positive atmosphere, created by the thousands of drinkers who visit, making it the prestige Festival that it is. This could not happen without the great team behind the Festival and more importantly, our brilliant volunteers, giving freely of their time”.

In its years St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival has been able to attract a welcome level of sponsorship from brewers, pubs and local businesses, proving to be not only a campaigning success but also a financial one. Festival Treasurer, John Lightfoot, says “In total we’ve managed to donate over £250,000 to CAMRA central campaigning as well as to fund Branch activities in South Herts”. Take a bow Festival volunteers!

The Festival has had just four organisers – Geoff Harrison (1996), Steve Bury (1997), Phil Defriez (1998-2016) and John Bishop (2017-2019) - and celebrated its 24th year in 2019 continuing with its regular end of September/early October slot until 2020 and 2021 when, like a bolt from the blue, the Coronavirus pandemic caused its cancellation. It is hoped to resume activities with a new “25th” St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival in September 2022.

Below, a typical view over the Festival at St.Albans Arena with the Main Bar in the foreground, the Hertfordshire Bar on the stage and the Cider Bar off picture to the left.



The Social Side

As well as the darts team and annual Weekends away trips, Branch Socials were held every month, sometimes weekly, at pubs throughout the Branch patch – engaging with customers, enjoying a pint and showing support to landlords. Over the years a number of pub passport trails have been devised, sometimes with beer-related prizes.

In Ware, a summer trail of real ale pubs, the Summer Saunter, running since 2006, has attracted a good number of members and friends. The Hertford Ale Trail takes place annually in late November and has attracted as many as 75 people to the town pubs, seeking out an interesting range of ales, some available especially for the event.



In the 1980s there were Branch cricket and football teams playing matches against pub and friendly teams. On one freezing Sunday with the ground still covered with snow the football team arrived in St.Albans only to find a snowman in the left-back position. With the team being a man short, a shirt was soon attached to the snowman who won a surprising number of key tackles – though he was constantly offside in the second half.

For a few years the Branch entered teams into the Old Bulls Head (Ware) charity 24-hour pub marathons – great, except that shove ha’penny takes a hell of a long time at 4am on a Sunday morning and when you can’t buy a Sunday paper until 6.30am.



Annual conkers competitions lightened the more serious task of convincing landlords that real ale was worth a gamble.

Consuming a yard of ale was not out of the question but was usually reserved for a special occasion. One member, not pleased with his time, asked for a pint to wash it down and then completed a second yard at a faster time than the first!

Pictured left, Dave Wright, St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival Staffing Manager confirming that real ale is not only cool but also fun on the Hertford Autumn Ale Trail in 2014.

CAMRA has always been a mixture of fun and of serious campaigning work. Many members have met friends for life and gained a love for real ale that is unbreakable.

The Members Weekend and AGM

The Branch has always taken a strong contingent of members to CAMRA national Annual General Meetings, to place and argue motions, helping to shape the future of the organisation – except in 2010 that is. On arrival at the London City airport for a morning flight to the Isle of Man the team were told that all flights were currently cancelled. With the situation rapidly unfolding, something was said about an Icelandic volcanic ash cloud making flying difficult. At this point there was talk of an afternoon flight but it soon became apparent that the situation was getting worse not better. With no practical way of getting to Douglas, matters soon turned to thirst. And there commenced one of the Branch’s legendary pub crawls. With many members familiar with central London, a tour of some of the city’s most characterful pubs ensued with each member suggesting a next classic pub to visit. One or two members did make the trip to Douglas by train and sea and so held the torch for South Herts at the AGM. Some missed an AGM, some missed an unforgettable pub crawl!

Into a new Millennium

By the end of the 20th century, great strides had been made by the Campaign. Real ale was no longer a rarity. There was much more openness in beer production and the declaration of brewing and beer information. The brewery landscape had changed considerably with many new breweries and a break-up of the big brewing companies. Handpumps featured in about 80% of Hertfordshire's pubs although not every publican seemed capable of keeping beer in A1 condition. Real ale was no longer mainly bitter in style – golden beers were here to stay and milds and stronger winter beers had regained some stature. The Campaign itself had gained in stature with a reputation as a purposeful and influential consumer organisation now seen as an advisory group in much wider fields such as consumer protection and pub preservation. South Herts Branch was doing its bit to back national CAMRA initiatives and this continued into the new century, though things needed attention closer to home.

In 2002-2003 McMullen's fought through internal hardships that might have destroyed the company. South Herts raised its concern with a "Save Mac's" campaign, reasonably short-lived because it soon became apparent that Mac's were themselves finding a mechanism that would save their brewing tradition and tied estate, if not their landmark Victorian tower brewery which was sold. Mac's constructed a modern and smaller purpose-built brewery in existing buildings nearby. It opened in 2006.



Pub Passports Schemes

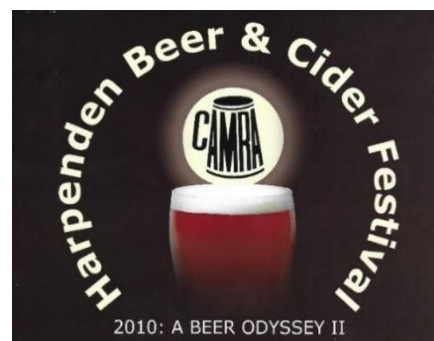
To encourage members and Pints of View readers to visit pubs, a number of passport schemes have been launched by the Branch over the years. Perhaps the most wide-ranging was the a cross-county All-Branches Hertfordshire Real Ale Passport – part of Hertfordshire Pubs Week, centre-folded in Pints of View during 2009 – a chance to visit thirty pubs in all corners of the newsletter's distribution area. Rubber stamps were produced for all participating pubs and all beer drinkers needed to do was have the passport franked in ten pubs to win free pints and other prizes at one of the CAMRA-run Hertfordshire festivals.

The Campaign Comes Alive in Hertford and Ware

New emphasis was given to campaigning in Hertford and Ware from 2006 onwards with the introduction of the annual May Mild Night and the Autumn Ale Trail in Hertford and the annual Summer Saunter in Ware, events which will continue in 2022 - well-attended with the Saturday Ale Trail in the past attracting large numbers.

Two Harpenden Beer Festivals

In 2009 the Branch held a popular Festival at the Eric Morecambe Hall in Harpenden – featuring 60 real ales plus ciders, perries and foreign beers. The event was repeated in 2010, showing World Cup football on a large TV screen. The mantle of the Festival has since been taken up by the publicans in the town who hold a festival every year at the town's British Legion club.



Cider Gazebos

CAMRA has embraced traditional cider and perry for decades. Whilst cider-making in Hertfordshire is not so prominent as in, say, Herefordshire or Suffolk, the county has a number of excellent producers and these were to the fore at a Cider and Perry bar that the Branch organised at Highfield Park, St.Albans in 2013 and 2014.



40th Year Celebrations

To celebrate the Branch's 40th year, during 2012 the Branch produced pennants (*pictured left*) which were presented on brewery trips and to key real ale pubs in the Branch area. Many are still hanging in pubs today.

A Pub Database – surveying

The Branch have been giving every South Herts pub a full information-gathering survey at least every three years. With the pandemic putting matters on hold this process needs to be re-energised to ensure that our WhatPub entries are up to date. In 2020 a Friendly Face scheme

was set up where a member volunteer becomes the Branch link to a pub. Over 100 pubs are now covered and attempts are being made to increase this figure.

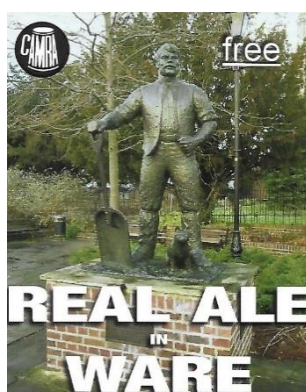
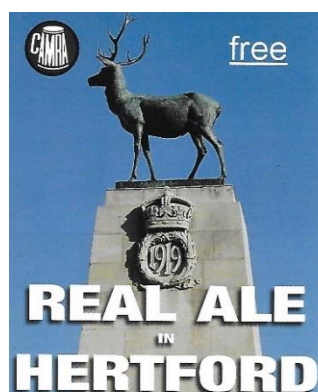


South Herts Branch Website

A first Branch website was developed in 1998 by Simon Polovina, taken forward by Graham Skeggs and then Tony Dawes. It was replaced in 2016 by a new site devised by Tom Blakemore and is now an award-winning website – CAMRA's Gold winning Branch website in both 2019 and 2020. In his 2019 acceptance speech Tom said "It's very much a Branch award - we have a good range of articles and news provided by local members."

South Herts City and Town Guides

In 2005 a first Hertford and Ware beer guide, listing all local outlets, was produced in leaflet form. Batches were distributed to all pubs, public buildings and railway stations in the area. In 2014 it was time to prepare a second guide to St.Albans pubs, similarly distributed and quickly devoured at the St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival.



Pub Protection and Pub Losses and Gains

Despite some success in this area, the Branch, as it is in Britain as a whole, has lost a significant number of pubs in the Campaign's 50 years. Put down to social changes, cheap supermarket beer, tough government taxation, onerous business rates, the smoking ban, you name it....., it sometimes feels that the world has been set against the survival of our pubs – the great English institution that is still a great daily draw to many in the community, for celebratory events and to foreign visitors who still see the pub as quintessentially English and on their bucket list. Many pubs are surviving on the edge, many by the provision of food. And several city and town centre pubs have reinvented themselves many times over. But sustained efforts are still required to enable and provide a fair ground on which they can survive. There are many sad South Herts losses. To list just a few: the Salisbury Crest in Essendon, the Three Tuns, Bell & Crown and Unicorn in Hertford, Tin Pot in Gustard Wood, Three Horseshoes in Harpenden, White Hart in South Mimms, Cock in Colney Heath, Station Hotel in Ware, Abbot John in Wheathampstead and the, Barley Mow at Tyttenhanger.....

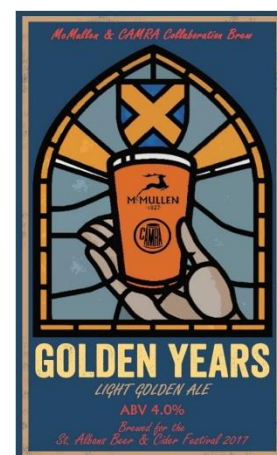
Nevertheless, the Branch has been instrumental in securing a number of Asset of Community Value awards for South Herts pubs both with its own submissions and support and advice given to other applicants.

On the plus side the Branch has gained a small number of micro-pubs which offer a range of cask ales – examples being the Reading Rooms in Wheathampstead and the Crafty Duck in Hertford. Examples of brand new pubs are rare but include the Kings Mead new build by McMullen's at Chadwell Spring, the new build Bakehouse by Marston's in Welwyn Garden City and the large shop conversion of the Alban's Well in St.Albans. Further town centre conversions are underway.



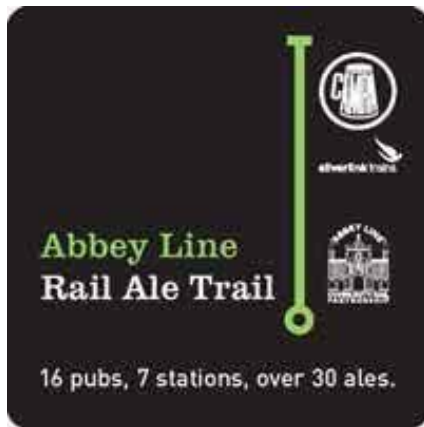
Ale Collaborations

Over the years a number of beers have been brewed to support Branch events or celebrations – often to be tasted at the St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival. Brewers have included McMullen's, Oakham and Verulam, the latter who once brewed an Iron Age beer for the Festival. In 2016 the Branch were offered a chance to plan and design a brew on the McMullen micro-brewery in Hertford. This marked Mac's 190th year and CAMRA's 45th. Up stepped CAMRA's Mac's Brewery Liaison Officer Les Middlewood for the task. The result, Golden Years, was a light golden ale which sold at the Festival and in some local pubs.



The Changing Brewing Scene

It might be seen as an oddity that nationally we have far fewer pubs than at any time in the last 100 years, yet we have more small breweries – more in Hertfordshire too. Not all of these are producing real ale, many specialising in craft keg beers, the best of which are often being brewed using advanced and innovative techniques and with fine and sometimes surprising ingredients, tuning into a wave of beer styles crossing the Atlantic from America and elsewhere. Many small breweries are also tapping into these styles using their skills to bring a new choice of cask beers to the bar.



Transport

The withdrawal of community and rural bus services has not helped with pub survival, nor with how pubgoers can move between towns and villages. Poor east-west evening services in the Branch area have been a particular long-term issue. In 2005 the Branch published a transport-based Good Beer Guide to real pubs. In 2006 the guide to 16 pubs on the Abbey Line, south-west of St.Albans, was the result of a collaboration with the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership.

Brewery Visits

The Branch has made over 100 brewery visits including 15 visits to McMullens, 5 visits to Hook Norton and Fuller's and 4 to Ridleys and Harveys. Visits have been made to breweries in Scotland, Wales and all over England. It is sad that so many of those breweries are now gone.



Above, Smiling Branch members quenching a thirst at Hertfordshire's Mad Squirrel Brewery, Potten End, near Hemel Hempstead, in March 2019.

Left, a similar gathering of Branch members plus Old Cross Tavern (Hertford) regulars on a shared trip to Mighty Oak brewery, Maldon, in August 2018

Branch Members on the National Stage

A number of Branch Members have featured on the national CAMRA stage: As well as John Hanscomb, Steve Bury and Good Beer Guide editor Roger Protz – see page 3 - Tom Blakemore won Joint National Campaigner of the Year in 2014, Iain Loe's organising work led to the founding of the European Beer Consumers Union in 1990; Iain Dobson, in 1992, was awarded an MBE for work when CAMRA's National Secretary; Ben Wilkinson is currently a member of CAMRA's National Executive.

The Coronavirus Pandemic

The pandemic has not only wreaked havoc and sadness in personal lives but has also had a dramatic effect on the brewery and pub scene. The Branch has rewarded breweries and pubs which have gone the extra mile to support their communities with South Herts Lockdown Heroes awards. Iain Loe, Branch Chairman in 2020 and 2021 (and therefore during the first 20 months of restrictions and Lockdown) summarises the position "It has been tough, not only for our local pubs and breweries, coping with the changing government rules and regulations, but also for the Branch which had to cope without being able to hold meetings until we discovered the joys of Zoom or how to keep a check on what our pubs were doing".

Right, a Lockdown Heroes award being made by South Herts branch, in 2020, to Farrbrew, at their brewery tap room, near Wheathampstead



Right, McMullens opened a shop selling fresh food for NHS staff at cost price and hastily set up a take-away beer shop in the yard at their Hertford brewery. For a time, the yard also became home to an NHS vaccination marquee.



Iain continues "We found ways with which to keep up with our campaigning and made efforts to support South Herts local pubs and breweries. And they came up with new ways of keeping afloat, introducing beer take-away and delivery services. We published our Pints of View magazine as the online "Pulling Together" magazine. And with the cancellation of the St.Albans Beer and Cider Festival in both 2020 and 2021, the Branch instigated a St.Albans Beer and Pub Festival based in the city pubs, to promote and support them as they came out of the final Lockdown of 2021".

We are 50 – Ahead to the Future

The Campaign will no doubt need to win many foreseen and unforeseen battles in 2022 and beyond – the reform of beer duty and VAT, an overhaul of business rates, the championing of the needs of pub goers and perhaps most of all, pub protection and beer quality at the point of dispense. And we need to redouble efforts to convince beer drinkers that cask ale is worth drinking and enjoying.



South Herts Branch enters a second half-century. Some Branch members have made the entire journey so far, others have joined and departed along the way. A quick countback reveals that approximately 75 members have, at some point, sat on the Branch Committee, mostly men it has to be said. The Branch needs to do its best to help shape and support CAMRA's aims. We need to get behind our local brewers and pubs. We need to keep the Branch strong. We need a determined and purposeful Branch Committee. We will continue with a good range of campaigning ideas and a range of social events and we invite members – men and women, young and old - to engage with us to help with these. It's going to need new faces as well as familiar ones. Let's keep real ale at the top of our agenda. Let's celebrate 50 years of great Hertfordshire campaigning and now turn to the future.

Join the Campaign

From its humble beginning in 1972 the branch membership has climbed to over 2,000. Some members have been participatory in Branch events, others have just paid their subscription fees knowing that their contribution is helping the Campaign to go forward with its drive to keep real ale alive and flowing, standing for a better deal for drinkers, publicans and brewers. Why not consider joining the Campaign and South Hertfordshire Branch? Membership details can be found at camra.org.uk/join



Left, Branch members enjoying the hospitality at New River brewery, Hoddesdon, in October 2017



Your Branch Reminiscences

The Branch is aiming to prepare an on-line South Herts archive during 2022, accessed through its website. Why not write down some of your own stories from the last 50 years, or attach a photograph of your own?

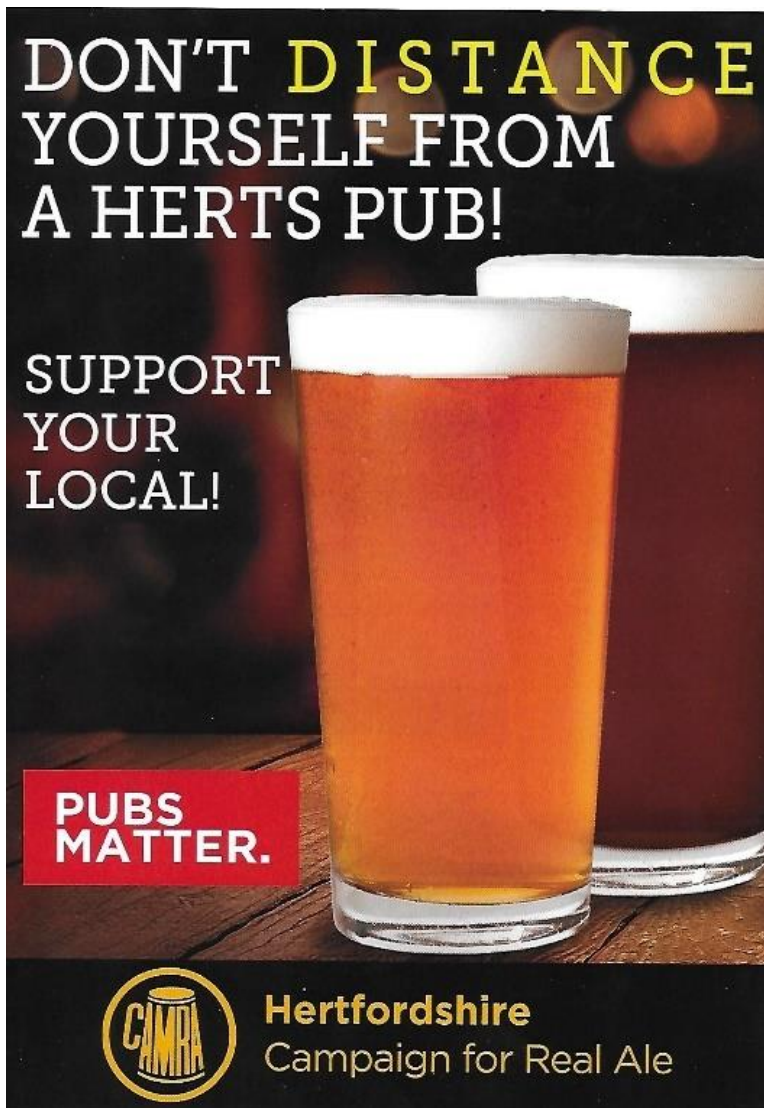
Acknowledgements

On behalf of South Herts Branch this booklet has been researched and written by Les Middlewood with thanks to Tom Blakemore for design advice. Apologies for any errors or significant omissions – 50 years is a long time – things become hazy! The message as we move into our second Branch half-century is that real ale – cask-conditioned ale – is as worth fighting for now as it was in 1972. Enabling the tradition to flourish, supporting and promoting the brewers, enjoying the brilliant array of beers and supporting our cask ale-selling pubs. We must play our part.

And finally, the Branch would like to thank all of the members and volunteers that have given their time, spirit, fun and purpose, over the years, to make our Branch events successful. Our beer festivals, local campaigns, brewery visits and socials have all furthered the aims of the Campaign.

Time for a pint! Cheers to you all.





In 2021 the above poster was produced by Hertfordshire CAMRA Branches to support pubs post-Lockdown.



southherts.camra.org.uk

January 2022