

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. An additional plaque was unveiled in April 2026. Our first social gathering was held on October 1972 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 (now Hertfordshire University) 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 COVID-19 pandemic, the festival re-emerged in 2022 and continues in 2026.
- In 2009 and 2010 the branch held successful beer festivals in Harpenden.
- Our campaigning magazine, Hertfordshire Pints of View (circulation 8750), has an unbroken pedigree dating back to July 1976, when it was founded as the Campaign’s Hertfordshire Newsletter and subsequently the South Hertfordshire Newsletter. During the COVID-19 pandemic a temporary on-line version was produced 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 editions of 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 pub database.
- We encourage publicans to stock real ale, rewarding the best pubs with our annual Pub of the Year award. Recent winners have included the Old Cross Tavern, Hertford (2026), Woodman, Wildhill which has also won the county award, the Robin Hood and Mermaid, both in St Albans.
- A branch Cider Pub of the Year competition was introduced in 2013 – the current winner is the Mermaid in St Albans (2025 & 2026), the Robin Hood, St Albans (2003 & 2004).
- A branch Club of the Year competition was inaugurated in 2014. The current holder is the Hertford Club in Hertford (2025), the Royston Club, St Albans in 2024.
- The branch has a Highly Improved Pub award, the most recent winner being the Hare and Hounds in St Albans.
- 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 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 sit in CAMRA's East Central Region.
- We actively support Hertfordshire brewers in the production of cask-conditioned beer and campaigned to save McMullen's 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 marches to save the Joules and Barnsley breweries in the early 1970s.
- Over 1900 CAMRA members currently reside in the South Herts branch area.
- Of the 850 pubs in Hertfordshire, 250 are in the South Herts area.
- South Hertfordshire is home to long-standing family brewer, McMullen & Sons of Hertford (celebrating their 200-year anniversary in 2027), plus independent brewers 3 Brewers of St Albans and Farrbrew.
- When CAMRA was formed in Hertfordshire fewer than 90 pubs sold cask ale. Today 75% of the county's pubs offer real ale.
- We fight pub closures and back applications to list pubs as Assets of Community Value.
- Each May, the branch puts on events to promote mild. In 1979 we successfully campaigned for Greene King XX Mild to be retained. The Hertford Mild pub trail celebrates 20 years in 2026. A weekend mild trail in St Albans also now takes place.
- Our branch committee comprises 14 members and is elected each year in January at the branch AGM.
- The branch is currently allocated 26 pubs in the Good Beer Guide.
- Our wide-ranging website was awarded 'Best Branch Website of the Year' in 2019 and 2020. Look for www.southherts.camra.org.uk
- Branch social events include the annual Hertford Autumn Ale Tour held since 2006 in November. The Sopwell Sweep in St Albans is held in December. The branch has visited over 100 breweries. Branch members have collaborated in brewing beers with McMullen's.
- In 1992 branch member, Iain Dobson, was awarded the MBE for his work when CAMRA's national secretary.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic we recognised deserving pubs with our Lockdown Hero awards.
- In 2023 the branch published a Hertford and Ware Real Ale guide. In 2024 it collaborated with Herts Essex Borders Branch, Hertfordshire County Council and Anglia Rail to produce a New River Line Rail Ale guide, following it in 2025 working with Enfield & Barnet branch on a Hertford Loop Line Rail Ale Guide, and in 2026 with Watford Branch on an Abbey Line Rail Ale guide.
- In 2025 and 2026 we have spearheaded the production of two Bus Real Ale guides, first for the 314/5 bus route (Welwyn Garden City – Hitchin), then the 331 route (Hertford - Buntingford).
- We are hosts of the CAMRA National Members Weekend and AGM at the Alban Arena in 2026.

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