

the

Casket



East Bedfordshire

COMMUNITY PUBS WEEK 17TH TO 24TH FEBRUARY

The Campaign for Real Ale introduced National Pubs Week three years ago, and this ran for one week in February of each year. The promotion was extremely successful, and was backed by many Brewers and several thousand public Houses.



2006 celebrations

From 2007 we have decided to promote the community Pub, and to give as much publicity to this as possible. We all know what is happening to our village Pubs, Six a week are closing, lost for ever!

We need to highlight just what a community pub is, and to try and stem the rate of closures. The Pub is often the hub of the local community, where neighbours meet for a Chinwag and to put the world to rights. Lose this and some villages and small communities lose their soul!

See page 15

Driving the scenic route to Gt Yarmouth area,

we happened on a road sign outside Diss saying "Queen's Head, next right. Real Ales". It being lunchtime, seemed a good idea to stop. Turned out to be an EXCELLENT idea!

The Queen's Head is in Earsham, Suffolk - a traditional freehouse (it's in the 2007 GBG). It's also the home of the Waverley Brewery Proprietors, John and Lynda Hamps.

Earsham is a small village, and the Queen's Head its only pub.

It failed in the 1990's and was offered for sale with "change of use" to private dwelling, but bought and saved by a local businessman, who didn't want the pub closed. He rented it to John, a lifelong CAMRA member and enthusiastic home brewer, who gave up his trade (builder) to take on the pub with his wife.

Unbelievably, the original rent was £3.00 a week!

It offers his own Waverley beers, guest ales from other local breweries, plus lagers, cider, etc, and a very appetising menu.



John estimates that 15 - 20% of his trade comes from outside this fairly isolated village - a testament to his brewing skills, I venture to say.

it's a small friendly village pub, quite attractive, structurally, and can cater for about 60 customers inside. There's a lawned area with picnic tables and barbecue.

Waverley Brewery was built from scratch in what was originally a stand-alone flat-roofed double garage on the pub's

land. John has raised the roof and created storage to house the pumps, pipes, vessels and ingredients. It has a 5 barrel capacity, and there's a

"splitter" to permit 2 x 2.5 barrel mild and/or special brew runs. He brews once or twice a week, primarily to serve the pub's needs. He has no delivery capacity, so his beers are hard to find elsewhere. He "exchanges" with other local breweries, thus provides him and them with "guest" beers. The regular Waverley offerings are "Lightweight", ABV 3.9, "East Coast Mild", ABV 3.8, (Championship Mild at Norwich Beer Festival 2005)

THE SIR WILLIAM PEEL HIGH STREET, SANDY

A Very Warm Welcome Awaits you

An ever changing range of Real Ales

Just a five minute
walk from the Station!



and "Great White Hope", ABV 4.8. I can personally recommend the Lightweight, it's a truly superb session beer. Unfortunately, driving precluded further tasting!

Occasionally, there are seasonal "special" brews. One such incorporates a local hedgerow berry which is a cross between a sloe and a damson. Another is flavoured honey from Perpignon, France John discovered this honey when supplying his Waverley beer for a French beer festival, and successfully experimented to produce an excellent beer of exceptional character nose and taste.

If you happen to be in the Earsham area, this is a "must" for beer-lovers. Excellent beer, and mine host is more than happy to entertain and discuss all matters, beer-related or otherwise. It's a real gem of a pub!

Len Dolby



Stock exchange listed brewer **Greene King** certainly knows how to talk the talk when it comes to keeping alive the traditional British pub.

It sponsors the annual Perfect Pub award, currently being promoted in the Daily Telegraph, and earlier this year it hosted the launch of The Publican trade paper's Proud of Pubs campaign at the house of Commons, which was attended by scores of thirsty MPs.

Greene King's chief executive, Rooney Anand, told the honourable members it was a "great start" in the battle to keep pubs alive and at the centre of local communities. "It's about time society started standing up for pubs, and recognising them as one of our nation's greatest assets," he said. Greene King marketing director Fiona Hope said: "The pub and the pint are great institutions that play a positive role in millions of people's lives."

All of which has a somewhat hollow ring to thousands of customers of locals up and down Britain who have experienced the way Greene King stands up for local pubs and communities at first hand.

In recent years, Greede(sic) King, which owns 2,600 pubs and made an operating profit of £191m last year, has bought - and closed - three local traditional breweries, Morlands, Riddleys and Hardys & Hansons. In September it paid £217m for Hardys & Hansons' Victorian Kimberley brewery in Nottingham, plus 250 pubs.

In October it announced it was closing the brewery and transferring production to Bury St Edmunds, by the end of the year, with the loss of 80 jobs.

GK also announced last month that it was putting 150 pubs across Britain up for sale. Most are likely to be redeveloped as flats or turned into restaurants, because GK can make quicker short-term profits that way.

In Lewes, East Sussex, more than 1000 people, including local MP Norman Baker, have signed a petition against GK's decision to stop selling Harveys, the award-winning ale that has been brewed by an independent family company in the town for more than 200 years, at the Lewes Arms, the town's foremost "community" pub.

The 207 year-old pub, a warren of small rooms and wonky stairs, is home to dozens of clubs and societies and all manner of charitable events, such as the World Pea-Throwing Championships. Its regulars are devoted to their local brew, which outsells all other beers, including Greene King's, by at least four to one. They fear that the ban on Harveys is but the first step in a process which would see their beloved local, like scores of others owned by Greede(sic) King, turned into flats, or even a gastropub - and sod the locals.

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Potton win again!

For the second time in recent years Potton Brewery has won the CAMRA award for the best beer in Bedfordshire. Once again “the Village Bike” scooped the award ahead of the other breweries in what was a close run contest.

The award is voted for by all three of the Bedfordshire branches and our picture shows the presentation being made to assistant brewer Nick Hutson, whilst joint owner Clive Towner looks on.

Many congratulations to all the team at Potton for this excellent achievement.



Q U I Z answers

- 1: John Wayne
2. 112
3. 1994
4. 1971
5. 4
6. 2
7. Rainbow warrior
8. 21
9. Oakham
10. Stag, Stotfold
11. John O’Gaunt, Sutton
12. Cock, Broom



The Potton Brewery Co.

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**BREWERS OF BEDFORDSHIRE
BEER OF THE YEAR 2003/2006
THE VILLAGE BIKE**



Chairman's Address

East Bedfordshire CAMRA branch has had a busy period during the summer, organizing and manning the CAMRA stand at the Bedford Beer Festival and Bromham Apple Day when 147 gallons of cider or Perry were consumed. I'd like to thank all the members who helped with these activities.

We have made visits to Oakham Brewery in Peterborough and to two local home brewers, Malcolm Lloyd from Langford and Mark Richards from Clifton who brewed many enjoyable different beers for the visits. Also several members visited Young's Brewery in Wandsworth before its closure during September. This visit was organized by Howard at The Half Moon in Hitchin.

Young's beers are now being brewed at Bedford and initial tasting has been favourable. With the addition of Young's beers I am sure that more choice of beers will be available at Charles Wells public houses which will be a good thing as their beers have been very limited in the past with mainly Eagle and Bombardier.

Our branch will be supporting Community Pubs Week which will be held from the 17th to 24th February. The aim of this week is to persuade people that local pubs are at the heart of their communities and if they are taken for granted then they will be lost.

Good news has been the saving of the Admiral at Clifton from imminent closure by Greene King after a long fight by the villagers. Greene King are also supporting community pubs week which surely means they would want to keep pubs open which in the past has not been the case. Greene King has also reduced their cask Old Speckled Hen beer from an ABV of 5.2 to 4.5 surely now a different beer from the one we all loved from

Morlands.

With the publishing of the New Good Beer Guide 84 new breweries are now listed bringing the number of small craft or microbreweries to more than 600.

I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Clifford Luff



THE RISING SUN Biggleswade



*Large selection of wines, lagers
& beers.*

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Friendly local pub with separate lounge & public bar (pool table, darts, jukebox)

Sky Sports shown.

Quiz night – first Sunday of the month

8pm start max 6 per team, cash prizes to be won.



*Sun Street,
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Beds, SG18 0BP.
01767 220088*

Q U I Z

1. How do we better know Marion Morrisson?
2. What is the worldwide emergency number to dial from a mobile 'phone?
3. In which year did the channel tunnel open?
4. In what year was the first e-mail sent?
5. How many teaspoons make a tablespoon?
6. What is the fewest number of moves a person can make to win a game of chess?
7. Name the Greenpeace ship sunk in July 1985
8. What is the legal drinking age in the USA?
9. Who brews a beer called Bishops Farewell?
10. Where was the home of the Abel Brown brewery?
11. In which local Pub would you find the village quilt?
12. Which is the only local Pub to appear in the CAMRA National inventory of historical Pubs?

Admiral Taverns.

Now the third largest Pub owner in the UK, Admiral bought several Pubs from Enterprise Inns. One of these Pubs, just over our border, was the Half Moon in Hitchin, another, and well known to all of us in east Beds was the Brown Bear in Biggleswade. More recently Admiral has purchased 155 Pubs from Greene King. The only one we are aware of within our borders is the John O'Gaunt at Sutton, a long time good beer guide regular.

Les and Heleena Ivall wife have been here for thirty years and were given just 24 hours notice by Greene King of the sale!

Far from being annoyed at being sold on by Greene King, Les is overjoyed.

He now has access to around 200 different beers instead of the "guest" ales brewed at Bury St. Edmunds.

We know the quality of the beer at the John O'Gaunt is always superb, now we will have the variety as well!



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LEISUREWEAR WORKWEAR ANYWEAR

*I've mastered at
Twelve Degrees
....but any more
and I fall over!*

Bromham Apple Day.

Recipe.

- 1 large: Sprinkling of John Walsh.
- 1 hob: To boil mulled cider.
- 1: Large tent or small marquee.
- A Quantity: Of tables. (At least 5).
- 1: Corner for CAMRA product stall.
- 1: Mr MerryLegs with a van and loads of cider & Perry.
- A Quantity: Of direction signs.
- A Quantity: Of CAMRA propaganda.
(Mostly referred to now as information).
- 1: Jackie Binnington mulled cider mixer.
- 1: Alan Binnington because he would be upset if he is not mentioned but his
wife is.
- 10 to 12: CAMRA members to initially get things ready then serve.
- 1: Fine day.
- Loads: Of People.

Take the John Walsh and get him to run around organising things such as licenses, insurance etc, here a pinch of Alan Binnington is useful. Arrive at tent or small marquee on day set up tables, hob and product stall. John Walsh to organise a party of Josling and Lloyd to go around putting up direction posters. While this is happening make sure the Jackie Binnington is preparing the mulled cider with the help of a sprinkling of Brita. The John Walsh to express the opinion that the Josling and Lloyd have cocked up the direction posters and send out a further party with a sprinkling of Luff . Make sure the Alan Binnington has finally organised hanging T shirts on hangers in his corner, make sure he stays in said corner. Willing CAMRA members to help put cider in place and John Walsh to put up prices and explain how things work. Wait for gates to open ,hope for a sunny day and loads of people, then just keep pouring the cider and Perry, try to achieve selling at least 157 gallons. All stand around at end of day saying what a successful day it has been and that the move from the barn was not too bad after all. Quickly clear up and make way back to your home or refuge for deserved sleep.

Peter Josling.

Memo from CAMRA Headquarters

If you have Greene King pubs in your area (and most of us now do) you may have noticed that their traditional pub signs are being replaced by a boring, standardised corporate sign.

Given the importance of pub signs to our pub heritage, many members have asked what can be done about this.

Firstly the legal position. If the pub is a listed building and the sign is attached to it, then Listed Building Consent is needed to replace it. Pub signs elsewhere come under the Advertisement Consent Regulations. Planning consent is always needed if the sign is illuminated. Where a sign is replaced on an existing free standing pole then should the Council consider it unsuitable they can ask for an Advertisement Consent Application.

Where the signage is in their view unacceptable, they could serve a "Discontinuance Notice" if it isn't taken down. Much here depends though on the policies and practices of individual Councils, particularly their enforcement sections.

Secondly, Branches can campaign on this. CAMRA will be taking the issue up nationally with Greene King but this will be helped if both Branches and pubgoers voice their protests to the brewery.

Should any of your local pubs be despoiled in this way, please write to GK and ask for the old sign back. Check with the pub's locals what they think and encourage them to object as well. If you have a Branch newsletter, please use it to highlight this unacceptable practice; GK are sensitive to bad publicity (believe it or not - you think they'd be used to it by now).

Standardisation of pub signs is another step towards blandifying our pubs; please help stop it.

New Licensing Laws one year on

Despite all the prophets of doom when the new licensing laws came into force in time for Christmas 2005, the "problems", and lawlessness that would follow, (according to a well known National newspaper), just have not happened.

In most areas the relaxed closing hours have seen a marked fall in alcohol related incidents.

Many police forces are reporting far less trouble as "kicking out time" is staggered so not all Pubs and clubs close at the same time, and crowds are not milling around waiting for taxis.

CAMRA predicted that the longer opening hours would bring more people into the Pubs which has also come true. A YouGov poll found that 23% of pubgoers are more likely to stay in a favoured local Pub in the evening now that they are not forced to go into town to find a late night bar. This trend is even more pronounced in the 18-29 year old age groups, with 36% saying they now stay in there local for longer.

The 24 hour license has only been applied to around 2% of the total Pubs, with most staying open until around midnight, and a little longer at weekends.

At least pubs now have the flexibility to open and close at their busiest times.

Lobby your MP to protect local communities

Landmark Bill takes giant leap closer to success

THE Sustainable Communities Bill took a major step closer to becoming reality last month – and it could be landmark in CAMRA's history.

For it has found a sponsor in Nick Hurd, Conservative MP for Ruislip Northwood, who came top of the Private Members' Bills ballot. And he has shown that the Bill has all-party support by recruiting seven Labour MPs, three Conservatives, and a Liberal Democrat as the first signatories.

The Bill aims to force the Government to produce a strategy for supporting and promoting local independent businesses such as shops, post offices and pubs. It is the result of three years' work by more than 80 pressure groups that include CAMRA, Friends of the Earth, the Society of Independent Brewers, the New Economics Foundation, Womens' Institutes, Pub is the Hub and dozens of other small business, farming, con-

by **TED BRUNING**

sumer and ecological organisations.

And it is aimed not just at reviving communal life in villages, but in inner cities and suburbs too.

CAMRA Public Affairs Manager Jonathan Mail said the Bill would empower local communities through more active consultation on issues like business rates and planning policy. However it did not itself contain a package of measures but instead required the Government to come up with a strategy.

"Once the Bill has become law – hopefully next May – organisations like CAMRA would then come forward with policy proposals," he said. "It gives us a powerful lever to pull in support of local communities, local services, and local businesses."

Mr Mail said the fact Mr Hurd had come top of the ballot, along with the all-party support and the

range of groups behind it, gave it a far better chance of success than most PMBs.

But he warned it faced one big hurdle, which CAMRA members could help it overcome.

"We need 100 MPs to vote for it at the second reading on 19 January," he said. "But that's a Friday, when many MPs are in their constituencies. We need them to be there to vote. We know we have the support – we just need to get it out on the day. We will be lobbying key MPs from HQ, but we need members to write to their own MPs to make sure they stay at Westminster for the vote.

"This is essential, and I must stress that the Bill isn't only relevant to people in villages whose pub is threatened with closure. It's about inner cities and suburbs as well. And it isn't just about pubs. It's about shops, post offices, bus services – everything, in fact, that sustains and enriches community life."

1st July is clean air day!

The no smoking ban for enclosed spaces in England is due to come into force on July 1st 2007. This will make it an offence to smoke in any Public House or club, including private member's clubs.

Many Pubcos seem to be off-loading landlocked Pubs where there is no garden or facility to provide outside shelter for smokers.

Government guidelines have now been published as to what is considered enclosed spaces, but as usual they are so badly worded that it will be up to each local authority as to how they interpret the legislation.

There is a very mixed consensus of opinion of both the rights and wrongs of this legislation and also how it will affect pubs. Will smokers desert the local, or will they visit anyway,? Will more people visit the local because it is no longer filled with smoke, and they can go home and not stink of tobacco?

We would like to know your views, please contact the editor and we will see what the people of Mid-Bedfordshire think.

Are you a publican?, what are your views, and what steps are you taking before the law is changed? Please let us know.

EAST BEDS CAMRA CALENDAR

2007.

FEB.

17th – 24th. Community pub week. Vintage Lorry Trip to Community Pubs 18th.. Further Details of other events to follow

APRIL.

10th Hook Norton Brewery Trip/ Joint with Engineers.

Day to be announced, AGM. Engineers Arms.

JUNE.

15th – 16th Small Norfolk Breweries overnight in Norwich (Details to Follow).

JULY.

Possibly a craft home brewers day or just Malcolm & Mark again. (Details to Follow).

OCT.

14th. Bromham Apple Day.

NOV.

24th Eurostar Trip to Brussels start Arlesey (Starts operating from St Pancras 14th) overnight Brussels plus brewery trip to Cantillion Brewery. 16 places please advise Peter Josling ASAP if interested a deposit will be required to secure a place.

DEC.

Christmas Dinner. Potton Brewery Trip followed by dinner at the Old Coach House Potton.

For Info of events please contact either Tony Morris on 07786 248666 or tonymorris@rspb.org.uk, Peter Josling on 07749 834318 or peterjosling@hotmail.com. Or John Walsh on 01462 850979 or secretary@eastbedscamra.org.uk.

PLEASE PRINT DETAILS

I/We wish to join the **Campaign for Real Ale** and agree to abide by its rules

Title Surname

Forename(s)

Date of Birth

E-mail

Address

Postcode Date

Telephone Number(s)

Where did you get this leaflet from? E.g. name of pub, beer festival etc

I DO wish to receive occasional information about CAMRA's activities
(any contact you will receive will come direct from CAMRA and at no point will your details be passed on to a third party without your permission)

(Partner - if joint membership)

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Nov 06



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EVENTS

We are planning a week of events as we did last year. At the Engineers Arms there will be a meet the Brewer



For latest details contact

**Peter Josling:
07749 834318.**

**Tony Morris:
07737 807365**

**or visit our website:
eastbedscamra.org.uk**

Night, day to be confirmed. We will again have a quiz night, and the Big event of the week will be our trip around several Community Pubs. This will be by vintage lorry and takes place on Sunday 18th February, and as last year is open to all local CAMRA members free of charge, you just pay for your own beer and food. This will fill up very quickly so please, to be certain of your place contact John as soon as possible. If you cannot make the whole day you are welcome to join us at any of the Pubs on route. Details still being finalised so please do contact 01462 850979 for latest update.

THE STAG TAVERN - STOTFOLD

Paul and Lynn would like to offer you a warm welcome.

QUIZ NIGHT - Last Sunday of every month

8.00pm start - Maximum of 6 people per team - £1 entry per person
The winning team gets the chance to win the pot. If it is not won there will be a rollover.

CURRY/CHILLI NIGHT - Every Thursday 7.30 - 9.00pm

A choice of curry or chilli served with rice and an alcoholic drink for £5.
Occasional Caribbean cooking.

DISCO/BAND - Last Saturday of every month

We hold a disco or band from 8.30pm to midnight. Bar til midnight.

**Functions catered for.
Buffets from £3 per head.**

Outside bar available.

*The Stag Tavern, 35 Brook Street,
Stotfold, SG5 4LA*

**Tel: 01462 730261, Fax: 01462 639411
www.thestagpub.co.uk**



TWO BREWERS VISIT.

I forget how the idea came about but Malcolm Lloyd, Mark Richards and myself were talking at the meeting we had at The William Peel in Sandy to commiserate with the passing of The Old Stables Brewery.

Anyway it was agreed that we would have a social in the future at Malcolm and Mark's houses on the same day, I should here point out that they both brew their own beer and not from a Boots brewery kit, these boys are just that, children with their own serious craft breweries. We agreed a date the 18th November. I got some posters made with pictures of Malcolm and Mark on, looked a bit like a Wild West wanted poster with Mark portraying the Wild. Made arrangements through Colin, 'I am a coach driver not a bus driver', for a mini bus to shuttle us between Clifton, Mark's brewery and Langford Malcolm's Brewery.

All that done, all we needed now was people, this as always was the difficult bit and involved numerous trips to the pub to catch people, it was horrible having to keep consuming vast quantities of beer, but eventually we had a willing and able drinking crew of 14 people.

At last everyone had arrived, only two people had decided not to come on the coach from the Engineers, Chairman Cliff was to meet us at Malcolm's and Membership officer Alan Binnington had phoned to inform me that he was now super fit and would be cycling, meeting us first at Mark's, more about that later.

From this point we split into two parties. On arrival at Malcolm's he and wife Chris gave us a warm greeting. The brewing equipment was identical to that found in larger breweries only scaled down, this equipment brews real beer and not plastic beer. Malcolm had decided to go under the name of 'Ivel Valley Ales' The three ales he had brewed were 'Ivel golden' at 3.6 A.B.V. 'Hertfordshire Way' at 4.0 A.B.V. and 'Chiltern Way' at 4.1 A.B.V. All three beers were of the highest quality and as good as many commercial brews.

Malcolm explained how his equipment worked, went through his brewing process and discussed the different recipes he used to obtain. Unfortunately our esteemed Chairman had to leave at this point to visit a friend who was in hospital. It was also noted that Alan Binnington arrived with the coach party, some lame excuse that Lorraine would not let him ride his bike, more about that later.

As usual with all bus journeys, everyone knew a different route to Mark's, but eventually we arrived. Yet again a very warm welcome with Mark and Lorraine ushering us to the rear of the house to the 'Clifton Brewery' Mark had also laid on three beers 'Cirrus', a pale hoppy beer, 'Cumulus', a dark bitter, and 'Cumulonimbus', a porter'. Mark's equipment was newer than Malcolm's and



larger, as you would expect from a younger man, but the set up was the same apart from Mark's approach to joining the equipment together and his control methods which are always, even in larger breweries, open to individual interpretation. But when Mark explained the process this remains essentially the same. All to soon it is back in the bus to go to the Engineers, it is noticed that Alan Binnington remains firmly seated on the bus, obviously not wanting to endure the wrath of Lorraine by taking his cycle.

So the happy rabble of drinkers arrive at home port for more beer and to await the Fish and Chips. Whilst the logistics of getting the food to the Engineers is being sorted out all the participants agreed that it had been a good day and were grateful to Mark and Lorraine and Malcolm and Chris for being such good hosts.

One member of the group a Mr John Crass, a personal friend of the Duke of Edinburgh was heard to comment that he would be seeking a Royal Warrant for the two brewers. So the Fish and Chips arrived thus ending the day.

One small footnote, three weeks later Mark and Lorraine were enquiring when Alan would be picking up his bicycle.

Peter Josling.



The John O'Gaunt Inn

30 High Street, Sutton

Les and Heleena Ivall welcome both old and new customers

We are now able to offer much more variety in our Real Ales, currently Adnams, Black Sheep, Potton, Tim Taylor.

**Good home cooked food served Mon to Sunday Lunch,
Mon to Sat evenings.
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Now an Admiral Tavern Inn

The Things You Hear In The Pub.....

We've all heard the proverbial "I heard it from a bloke dahanna pub" inserted into a conversation at some point, and generally we accept that whatever saying it precedes or follows is a *FOAF* (Friend Of A Friend story).

However, when you get to a pub where conversation and not the juke box or theme night is the main form of entertainment, then it's surprising the stories you hear.

The names have been changed to protect the innocent.....

I was sitting in The Bull in Ambridge talking with one of the Old Regulars. He was telling of his time in the forces during the last war, not in the vein of heroic tales – he's not that sort of bloke – but as statements of fact that happened and the relation that it would have on a 21st century incumbent. It so happened that the O.R. had been posted to the Far East and found himself in Madras, peckish, and in a Chinese Restaurant. What a Chinese restaurant was doing in India, I have no idea, but nonetheless the O.R. took a seat and proceeded to order. Not being over enamoured with Chinese cuisine, he promptly ordered eggs and chips, which were devoured soon thereafter.

Remember that this occurred in 1945 – eggs were on ration, and powdered egg doesn't make for a particularly delicious repast, so then you were looking at a luxury item. And chips? Well, these were the days before oven chips, so cooking them required fat, which was not only rationed, but incredibly difficult to obtain.

So what started out as a bit of a giggle about the Brit Abroad got turned on its head and became the story of the man who ordered luxury. Funny how time can cast a different perspective, eh?

You may well be lucky enough to be in a pub that has the profound good taste to sell Potton Brewery's "John Cunningham – Night Fighter", a rather flavoursome, dark coloured bitter, and you may notice that the pump clip sports a propeller driven aeroplane. It so happens that I was conversing on the pump clip design with an authority on the subject. So put your anoraks on and be amazed:-

I've mentioned before about "FOAF's", or Urban Legends, and there are plenty of them. Most of us have heard the old one about carrots helping you see in the dark, but did you know that it was John Cunningham who perpetuated the myth?

John Cunningham was a night fighter pilot and he flew an aircraft that was fitted with a top secret device – airborne radar. Such was his success in his use of this new device for locating and then shooting down enemy planes that his fame preceded him and he was much decorated, to the extent that the wartime press became involved with what would now be termed a celebrity. However, how to explain his morale-boosting success without revealing top secret information? Carrots. No, true I tell you! It was JC himself in an interview for the wartime newsreels who swore that eating carrots improved his night vision, and so the myth was born.

Then there was the bloke at the bar, sitting on a bar stool, looking glum. His mate walked in, bought a pint for them both and started to chat. It became immediately apparent that the bloke on the stool was pretty refreshed, and had caught an ear'ole full from his missus, and he began to wax lyrical on his description of her, venting his spleen in safety. The one classic line I remember being – "She talks through her nose you know. Has to. She's worn her mouth out....."

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It's not only in the traditional British Pub that you hear great stories – albeit rarer abroad (unless you're fluent in other languages), but on a recent holiday in Greece, the Scottish barmaid/waitress told me the following little cracker –

In the bar she worked in, there are various measures that are available for the serving of beer; 250 & 500 ml, half yard, yard, metre and boot being some of the variants.

It came to pass that one day, there were a bunch of German lads sinking a few, and, as was their wont, a boot of beer was ordered and subsequently drained. Upon the return of our Scottish heroine to take the next order, one of the party asked “Haff you any other footwear ve can drink from?” Quick as a flash, our lassie said “Aye son – we’ve a sandal for the tee-totallers.”

A few years ago, I was lucky enough to be slaking my thirst in a bar in Majorca and got to talking to the owner. “You can always tell a British drinker, even if they don’t speak”, he said. I asked how this feat was possible. “Easy”, he said. “Spanish, German, Dutch, French – they have a glass of beer and always leave a little drop in the bottom of the glass. You lot – if it’s coming out of your *ears* you’ll drain the last bit!”

That’s why we had an Empire.....

Chris Bunyan

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