

Dear Member

**The fourtharch Old Boys Tankard Club
NEWSLETTER**



Annual Tour 9th - 11th September 2011

The Nutshell – Bury Saint Edmunds

The third fourtharch outing was held at the above establishment on the evening of the 10th September 2011 and was chosen by Richard. For any prospective new members this is an annual event to meet at a favourite hostelry discovered and chosen by one committee member anywhere in the UK and possibly continental Europe.

The Rule

There is only one rule and that is you must have had at least one pint of real ale in the chosen establishment and concluded that other committee members will enjoy your choice.

The Task [or reason for going]

Once the venue has been chosen and everyone is in attendance or on-site there is only one task to perform, apart from having a jolly good time and that is to decide where next year's venue will be.

Congratulations

Don't worry its nothing to do with Cliff Richard but its congratulations to committee members Gez, Richard and affiliated member Matt.

Gez was engaged to the lovely Johanna in July, Richard and equally as lovely Claire were blessed with new son William and affiliated member Matt and the equally as lovely Catherine were blessed with new daughter Emily.

This year's Report

**Friends, Normans, Countrymen,
I come to praise Saint Edmund not to bury him**

It only seems like yesterday that we were wishing the Bills of Portland goodbye at last September's annual outing in Weymouth, however new and affiliated member Matt freshened up the team by joining us for this year's venue, the Nutshell – perhaps Britain's smallest pub, Matt's application form was very interesting but what jumped out at all committee members was his favourite hobby - drinking beer.



Jolly Japery

No Matt, as an initiation ceremony you don't have to sit on a bollard for 5 hours

Day 1

It was the morning of 9th September and all team members had instructions from this year's team captain, Richard to open their envelopes before setting off on the journey to Bury Saint Edmunds. Mogi opened our envelope on platform 2 at Cardiff Central Station to reveal a full colour agenda if not a small version of a Lonely Planet guide for the whole weekend that included maps, menus and even a special section for things to do on the Monday in case Al joined us and arrived on the wrong day. All committee members were very impressed so well done Richard for a very professional touch; you win a jar of homemade marmalade.

Then it was all points north and east as Gez, Richard and Matt set off separately by car from Bath and Cambridgeshire while your writer and Mogieeeeeaaa boarded our train in first class [I tell you] The experience of travel in a first class compartment was so new that we missed out on the complimentary drinks trolley that we thought you still had to pay for but we did get him on the way back. We were soon passing through Paddington station in London where many fellow Welshmen have gone before gazing up opened mouthed at the huge glass roof wondering what the bright lights of the big city had in store for them while some cockney piece of trash picked their pockets – but we will not have any prejudice in this newsletter even though since Eastern Europeans have moved into the service industry in London the experience has gotten a whole lot better.

Mogieeeeeeeaaa and I soon found ourselves on the final leg of our journey in standard class on the train from Cambridge where we encountered our first frustrated comedian of the weekend - our own Alan Carr in the shape of the train manager. We had not realised that the Cambridge to Bury Saint Edmunds train had first class accommodation as it was about the size of a small wardrobe and asked the train manager if we could hop off the crowded train at the next station to then get back on again to squeeze into the first class section that our tickets were still good for. As with most frustrated comedians their major problem is finding an audience and for that moment Mogi and I were it.

“Oh, there is no time to do all that at the next station, it’s only a minute’s stop – I don’t know why we even bother stopping there because hardly anyone gets on and nobody ever gets off, this wouldn’t happen in Yorkshire where I come from”

If the lad had been wearing glasses he would have adjusted them a la Alan Carr after finishing this tirade.

“You’ll have to wait for Newmarket now” finally answering our question while throwing his eyes up into the air as if to question the reasons for siting the famous race course in the middle of his route through to Ipswich.

We did change class at Newmarket and hardly had time to enjoy the experience of sitting in an air conditioned travelling wardrobe as we were soon alighting the train [alighted – I don’t know why they use that word on stations either] at Bury Saint Edmunds, I couldn’t help but notice a platform full of schoolgirls waiting to now fill the train we had just left and felt rather sorry for our *camp* train manager who was not only in the wrong business but also now on the wrong train.

First on our itinerary was the Ramada Hotel just outside Bury Saint Edmunds and as Mogi and I walked down from the bus stop we met Gez in the hotel car park, we all arrived at reception just in time to find World War III kicking off between Richard, Ramada Hotels and lastminute.com. The conflict began over the fact that we had been promised two Double Rooms instead of Two Twin Doubles – it’s a whole another story but Richard had his laptop open on the reception desk for what I thought was awaiting eye recognition so that he could enable a nuclear strike on a Ramada Hotel in Clacton but the laptop was in fact displaying the proof of our lastminute.com booking - it all resulted happily in a successful resolve.

That sorted we had a chance before our scheduled 8pm appointment at the Cannon Brewery to visit the Six Bells pub at Bardwell [without the S] a small village 9 miles outside Bury Saint Edmunds and a location for many episodes of Dads Army. We are all fans of the programme and the vibes, beer garden, evening sun and beer were all good – the team resisted quoting the classic line from the series “you stupid boy” but I was tempted. It was then back to the hotel to pick up affiliated member Matt and into Bury Saint Edmunds to head straight for the Nutshell, Britain’s smallest pub [probably] there were 6 customers in the pub so it was packed already and the space inside was literally like standing in a shop window but we had to check the place out for our official meeting the following evening. There was just enough room inside for your writer to get to the bar leaving the rest of the team outside but it was only after ordering and paying for a round that the barman then told us that by law all drinks must be consumed inside the pub – it was a real squeeze but when it comes to men and drinking beer, anything is possible.

We were well on time for our scheduled appointment at the Cannon Brewery and soon sat at our table to be greeted by our waiter and the second frustrated comedian of the weekend who decided that we were to be his Friday night audience.

“Good evening folks and welcome to the Cannon Brewery restaurant” he announced but what he really wanted to say was welcome to my show and then began what sounded like a very impressive prologue that actually turned out to be instructions on how to read the brewery menu! He then announced that he would be back in part two after a short break, I presumed to take our order.

When our waiter returned his confidence was now so high that he proceeded to juggle with the sauces and dropped the lot under our table to where he quickly disappeared either through embarrassment, to pick the sauce containers up or as I was hoping to magically reappear as a sexy dancing girl.

The waiter obviously had dreams of becoming a famous comedian and I often find that people with any sort of delusion are the easiest to sell dreams back to so I decided to tell the waiter that amongst our party was a famous comedian in the shape of Mogi and for a split second the waiter [and Mogi] believed it. However the waiter was not as daft as some of his jokes and questioned the fact that he had not seen Mogi on any of the comedy channels. Someone said that he had been on TV and is a star of Babe Station to which our waiter replied “What, he’s one of the callers is he?” that I thought was quite witty.

A very pleasant evening was rounded off at the Hotel Bar and there is no need to guess who the last two into bed were.

Well done Mogi for remembering your writer’s birthday.

5 Points

Day 2

The next day was 9/11 even though it was the 10th September and everyone was on time for breakfast and looking amazingly bright [but not for long] Ramada hotels were on a charm offensive after the previous day’s room mix up, so much so that the breakfast waiter even apologized for the fact that I couldn’t remember my room number. But today was not only 9/11 it was also sports day and Gez and Mogi wanted to watch a game of rugger live from New Zealand that meant it was on TV after breakfast our time but what I couldn’t understand was that they were hoping that the team they specifically wanted to see would lose the game – I think the team was called England*

*Well done Matt for referring to half time at a rugger match as the intermission.

20 Points

We all then returned to our official weekend and began a rather pleasant country walk into Bury Saint Edmunds that was reconnoitred by team Captain, Richard + pram and family the previous weekend. The path brought us out at the Abbey gardens that were blooming with colour and just in time for a sit down at a rather pleasant little café.

We had time on our hands before our scheduled tour of the Greene King brewery whose dream enhancing aromas had been experienced on the bus into town the previous evening by your writer and Mogi, so amongst other things we decided to have a look at the Theatre Royal the last working Regency playhouse in Britain and owned by Greene King. We were lucky to arrive at the theatre on heritage day and we were allowed in free to see the auditorium – it is a real dolls house of a theatre and as we all sat in one of the tiny boxes and viewed the stage I was reminded of that poor woman back at the Gower in Cardiff who was convinced that we were all actors and that we all had small parts [in a play] - we were eventually barred from the place. Suddenly the lights went out – was this a sign? We feared that the lights would dull or the building might shudder at St. Edmundsbury Cathedral that we popped into earlier – was the Prince of Darkness amongst us or was it simply the lighting director who had fused the electrics once more?

Coming up to 2pm now and we were all gathered inside the Greene King Brewery for our scheduled tour and we had a bit of time to wander around the little museum that chronicles the history of brewing in the town and it was a real thrill to see life size mannequins of the usual brewing suspects beginning with the monks of course but the team was particularly impressed with a life size mannequin of a brewer sat on a chair behind a stack of barrels complete with ashen face, that trusting [for a brewer] belly full of beer and bloodshot eyes, however this turned out to be Mogi, desperate for some quiet time whilst nursing a hangover from the previous evening.

We were soon on our tour of a rabbit's warren of buildings one of which, the Brew House was built in the art deco style in 1938 and of great interest to your writer – not as extreme as some of those old cinemas from the time but a style that must have been revolutionary in Bury Saint Edmunds when it arrived in the 1930s.

The 90-year-old yeast, the talk of beer and the fumes of brewing freshened us all up as the tour group arrived at vat containing beer at 12%ABV that Greene King consider so strong that they only use it to add to weaker beers. Our rather attractive female guide of a certain age [don't knock it, you might appreciate it one day] asked for questions from the floor to which the young Mogi asked if the 12% stuff was added to the beer that he had spotted for sale the previous evening to which our guide told him that it was not and then went on to ask had he tried it.

“Yes” replied Mogi

“What was it like?” Asked the guide to which Mogi replied “I can't remember” with perfect comic timing that resulted in laughter from the whole group – that included a team of three, two of which were from Wales. Was it the hangover that finally not only gave Mogi that depressed *Leslie Nielsen* straight face that he so desired but also allowed him to find his Comedy Mojo? A second, third and fourth wave of laughter followed as Mogi now established himself as Bury Saint Edmunds favourite comedian and quite frankly he could have simply opened his mouth and said *flange* and got a laugh from his new friends from Wales [I think the other chap in the group was from Suffolk]

We finally ended up at the Greene King Brewery bar and while the rest of us enjoyed sampling the beer, Mogi continued to hold his new fans in the palm of his hand and as we left to return to the hotel the rest of the tour group, and especially the two other Welshmen looked really disappointed to see Mogi leave and if the comedy transfer window had been open that weekend I do think they would have bought him.....hmmmm! Hold that thought.

We walked back to the hotel via the paved cycle route so that we could pick up the cars to then pick up some beer from the Greene King brewery shop and of course be on time for the all-important announcement for next year's venue.

The Announcement

Tonight's commentator is John Motson*

* Note for the benefit of Matt and Richard – John Motson or Motty is an association football commentator.

No Points

“And you join me at the Nutshell here in Bury Saint Edmunds for tonight's game, where we have a capacity crowd - of six with just enough room inside the bar for the commentary box that is hanging from the ceiling next to the famous Nutshell mummified cat. Team fourtharch has been attempting to get in the bar for a good 15 minutes of play now and we have yet to hear any announcement for next year's venue – team captain Richard is talking to the linesman or barman at the moment and... oh, something's happening the team are moving towards the staircase and yes I do believe that they are moving upstairs, yes I can confirm that the team are moving to the upstairs room that quite frankly is not an official bar at all and there are only two tables and no chairs – let's see what the referee has got to say about this one!”

The room upstairs seemed to be even smaller than the bar but it had enough space for us to gather like some sort of secret society but without the raised trouser legs and indeed the pentangle marked out on the floor. While Richard settled on the window sill I noticed some photographs on the wall of some of the stars who had swung by the Nutshell over the years and some I had worked with that included Bernie Clifton [without the Ostrich] but as I turned to relate some of my show biz stories I could see that the rest of the team were not impressed at all with these faded z-list celebrities - sigh! How quickly the public forget.

When I spotted John Peel in the pub photographs Mogi shouted “Who?”

5 Points

“Something's happening, yes I can definitely see Gez removing something from his pocket, yes the envelope is out and he is now removing 4 sheets of A4 from the envelope – this is pure magic from the lad from Bath. He is now handing the sheets of A4 to each member of the team and – wait a minute, Gez is looking at Mogi as if something is desperately wrong here – I cannot quite see Mogi's face from this angle – but I don't believe it – Mogi has just done a Wayne Rooney [no, not kicked Gez in the Balls] he seems to have blown a fuse – something's upset the team logistics strategist. While we await a steward's enquiry its worth pondering over the possible problems down there on the field of play and I can tell you that the team were concerned about the 2012 venue choice that Gez might make and were worried that it would be that pub in Scotland that you could only access with a fe..... Oh! I have just been handed a piece of paper and that is unbelievable – the lad from Bath, the cryptic crossword king has changed the dates for next year's meeting – it's not going to be 9/11 it is in fact going to be November the 9th – quite frankly, now I'm confused!”

I thought this change of date for next year by Gez, the master of words, letters, numbers and puzzles was rather inspiring and it was for a good reason for next September will only be a few short weeks after his marriage to the lovely Johanna. As Richard pointed out, Mogi was mad because he had probably booked leave for every September 11th until the end of the century – which in fact, he had. Now for the good news for Gez had provided us with 2 options for next year, the Hollow Bottom in Guiting Power, Gloucestershire and the Teign House Inn near Doddiscombsleigh – and the winner was with an overwhelming vote – the Hollow Bottom with base camp Cheltenham. Motty, any thoughts?

“Well the announcement has been made and the team now know what they have to do, but for now it is simply a case of waiting for the final whistle andoh! The referee or landlord of the Nutshell has just appeared at the top of the staircase and has blown up for off side”*

*Note for Matt & Richard – The offside rule – A pub or restaurant has to have two doors between a dining or drinking area and the restroom, in the case of the Nutshell the upstairs room was between the two doors therefore team fourtharch were off side.

No Points

“...and the ref is reaching for his pocket and yes it is a yellow card for team fortharch and they have been told to leave the upstairs room and return to the bar downstairs – now Matt has stepped in to try to cool things down but no he has told the referee that he has been thrown out of bigger places than this – well to be quite frank there a very few places bigger than the Nutshell so he could make claim to a statement of fact rather than dissent – oh but the whole team has now been red carded”

We drank up and left some much needed space in the Nutshell and after the announcement for next year’s venue there is always that feeling of anti-climax but all that was forgotten as it was now time to eat. We had slightly gone off schedule at lunchtime and missed the Dog & Partridge so we decided to head for the rather pleasant new shopping area in town and a Frankie & Benny's and as we ate alfresco we were treated to a wonderful double rainbow. We were soon back to schedule and a brisk walk to the Old Dove and a fine welcome from its landlord who looked like Roy Wood out of Wizard*

*Note for Mogi – you are not claiming a point for this one as that irritation song is played in shops every Christmas.

No Points

We walked back to the cars parked outside the Greene King Brewery and said our goodbyes to Matt the evening was finished off with a few more drinks and more food – then some more drinks by guess who.

Day 3

Sunday was sports day once more and this involved racing down the A14 to Richard and Claire's home in Cambridge to sit on the sofa and watch the rugger live from New Zealand. Have you ever noticed that sports fans always have to watch the sport sat on sofas as if it's the law? Claire had popped out during this time to pick up the young William to then meet us later for a pub lunch while Richard sat with his back to the TV composing an email to lastminute.com not looking at the sport once.

Respect Richard – a consummate player, you care not a jot about sport.

50 points

Having watched a team yesterday hoping that they would lose, Mogi and Gez now wanted the team they were watching to win - I think the team was called Wales.

Post-match it was time for lunch and we were soon on our way to the Red Lion a great little pub in Grantchester to meet up with Claire, William and Matt who brought along the lovely Catherine and new daughter Emily. It was a great location in the beer garden and a perfect finish to a wonderful weekend but the true stars of the day of course were William and Emily who were both a joy to see. We were soon saying our goodbyes and as Gez, Matt, Catherine and Emily went in one direction, Richard, Claire and William kindly drove Mogi and your writer to Stansted airport for our flights to Spain and Portugal. As we approached the airport I discovered that Claire loved to see the planes taking off and later as I sat within the hustle and bustle that is every international airport I wondered if she would be looking up at my flight to Portugal later that evening [probably watching the Dragon's Den actually]



Next year's venue chosen by Gez [9th November]

The Hollow Bottom, Guiting Power, Gloucestershire.