

Dear Member

**The fourtharch Old Boys Tankard Club  
NEWSLETTER**



**Annual Tour 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

**The Hollow Bottom, Guiting Power, Gloucestershire.**

The fourth fourtharch outing was held at the above establishment on the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2012 and was chosen by Gez. 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 now not\* possibly continental Europe.

\*See AGM minutes.

**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**

Congratulations to committee member Gez for a great stag do in Bath back in June – and there was something else as well – Oh yes, Gez and Johanna were married in July, best of luck to you both from the whole team.

**This year's Report**

It was Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of November – in effect 9/11 and yes, I know for anyone new to the newsletter you will be thinking how ridiculous to hold what has now become known as the fourtharch 9/11 weekend on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, but this year's weekend was proposed and planned by team captain Gez, the Word Wizard, Count of conundrums, maths magician, not forgetting the Everton of event organisers and the controversy is now over so move on Mogi. It was again from Cardiff, Cambridge, Bath plus Bristol this time that all members and new affiliated member Dave, would converge on this year's venue – Cheltenham and as I stood on Heath High Level station waiting for committee member Mogi I began contemplating and filling my mind with the wonderful regency architecture of the Gloucestershire spa town – little knowing that I was to face possible mind pollution resulting from an unscheduled change of train in .....*Newport!*

Dear reader it was not only Mogi and I who would face travel challenges and possible delays but also Gez who would become stuck in his proverbial traffic jam leaving Bath and Richard who before even leaving the house was delayed and would have to negotiate with a large brightly coloured lorry with plastic wheels that had to be positioned very precisely on young William's a food tray before he would begin to think about never mind eating his breaky.

Back in Wales Mogi and I had alighted at Cardiff Central station to connect with the Nottingham train that would take us all the way to Cheltenham, a ride we were both looking forward to as the railway line not only hugs the bank of the Severn all the way to Gloucester but also passes right under the first road bridge, I suggested we consult the information screens to find out the platform our train would leave from and as we both looked upwards like two excited schoolboys we were faced with the information displayed in Welsh only. The Welsh for Nottingham was Nottingham and our platform was Wedi'i Ganslo, we were on a tight schedule so I suggested we find one of those helpful station porters who are always eager to help the weary traveller or wait for the information to be displayed in English that most of the population of Wales can read and we only have this nonsensical welsh translation everywhere to keep a few ignorant Groggles happy in a small introverted village in North Wales where they are all sleeping with their sisters! But there was no time for politics or finding a helpful station porter as the information display board had now wiped to the English translation so there now was Nottingham in English and Wedi'i Ganslo had been translated to 'Cancelled'

***Don't panic, don't panic*** I shouted while spinning around like a cornered rat looking for a way out – that Mogi soon found as we both hurriedly scurried down the staircase on platform 5, along the corridor where we saw a lovely poster of top Welsh personality, Jason Mohammed then up the stairs again to platform 2 and straight onto the train for Plymouth.

“If there is ever a problem always head for platform 2” said Mogi, sounding like a character from a Harry Potter film as the train pulled out of the station and we settled into our seats. We suddenly found ourselves in need of a new travel plan so Mogi pulled his tablet out of his bag while I took one to calm my nerves and then brought out my Bradshaw's Guide and as we both made various suggestions for a reconfigured route to Cheltenham an announcement was made by the train manager that we should now pick up the Nottingham train in .....Newport.

The Harry Potter theme continued as the train pulled into Newport at platform 0 where a bridge over the line would take us across to platform 1 and the Nottingham train meaning that I would have a panoramic [not scenic] view of Newport – for someone who had filled his mind and was very much looking forward to the delights of regency Cheltenham the thought of polluting this image with a view of Newport was something I was not looking forward to. How forward thinking then of the Shakers and Mormons of Newport to cover this new elevated walkway with opaque Perspex so that the 2010 Rider Cup golfers, who it was originally constructed for, would not have to look at Newport either – *remarkable!*

We were Cheltenham bound and for the first of many instances in this newsletter we must congratulate Gez on choosing a wonderful day weather wise as the Nottingham train hugged the banks of the Severn as promised all the way to Gloucester.

The railway station is quite a way out of the centre of Cheltenham but after a brisk walk and passing our first choice pub, the Adam and Eve we were soon at the reception desk of our hotel for the weekend – the Holiday Inn Rubbish Breakfast. The helpful young man at reception had soon got us checked in and before directing us towards the lifts he pointed out the area where tomorrow morning we would indeed be tucking into our rubbish breakfast.



“According to my Bradshaw’s guide I read that your rubbish breakfast used to be called the tragic breakfast” I pointed out.

“That was before we had our PR make over” replied the reception operative “but don’t worry the breakfast is still the same old crap”

It was now late afternoon and that time of day when the light begins to fail, not if it was September of course, we had time to spare before committee members Richard, Matt, Gez and affiliated member Dave would be arriving so we decided to take a look at Cheltenham.....in the dark! We headed for the centre to take a wander down the real jewel in Cheltenham’s crown, the Promenade.....in the dark, the town hall... in the dark, the statue of local lad Gustav Holst...in the dark, we then decided to walk almost ¾ of a mile to the Pittville Pump Room the last and largest of the spa buildings to be built in Cheltenham...also in the dark.

“**Right, that’s it**” I exclaimed “Mogi will you please stop saying *in the dark* after everything I write and get over the fact that we are here in November – in the dark and not in September”

What man would not rearrange his life for a beautiful bride like Johanna, I went on to explain while looking in through the windows of the brightly lit interior of the Pump room that was locked up for the evening because it was November and would have still been open had this been September of course. The Pump room is now used as an events venue for weddings, exhibitions, dances and conferences and inside under the glittering chandeliers was a young man moving the furniture around a ball room size floor space to make ready for the next event. If the Pump room was the Titanic of course this young man would be ridiculed as the subject of politician’s favourite metaphor to describe a doomed government policy – *the right honourable gentleman is simply moving the furniture around on the Titanic!*

“I feel sorry for this once proud profession of furniture movers that like air ships since the Hindenburg disaster in 1937 never really recovered from some really bad PR – maybe they should have had a furniture mover on the Hindenburg and filled the Titanic with Hydrogen – history could have been so different”

**The above is an example of the stuff that men talk about when they have a weekend of drinking beer to look forward to.**

Back to the weekend now and like Welsh sports writer Dewi Bearing, we now had an eye for a pint and Mogi and I decided to kick off in the first choice pub of the evening – the Adam and Eve, we had to more or less retrace our steps back towards the railway station to find the pub in one of those 19<sup>th</sup> century housing estates that you find in every major British city. The Adam and Eve is set in a row of terraced houses and is quite the little gem of a find and unique in its own special way, the pub takes up two house lengths of the terrace and you step into a corridor linking the bar to the lounge immediately upon entering through the front door. A separate bar and lounge area is a rapidly disappearing social arrangement from a different era and unlike boarding a British Airways 747 we turned left to enter the bar where Mogi popped his head around the door to discover it empty so we headed down the corridor to try the lounge. As we opened the door into the lounge we both felt like we were entering someone's front room, the television was on and the 5 people inside with an average age of at least 75 were looking up at it, one of these people was in fact the landlady who immediately stood up, gave us a warm welcome and took her place behind the beer pumps that backed onto the corridor we had just entered through. We ordered and picked up our drinks and found a seat under the trophy cabinet and near the traditional dart board; the interior had been slightly tweaked in the early 1970s and had been left there ever since, the pub could have been used as a location for the TV show *Life on Mars*, I could easily imagine DCI Gene Hunt bursting in through the door, pushing one of the customers up against the wall, slapping him around the face and shouting “Sorry Guv, wrong pub – give us a scotch darling” before storming out.

A frail short elderly gent was standing looking up at the television screen, were it not for him the average age in the pub would probably have dropped from 75 to 60 – I imagined that this gentleman may have grown up in a street near the pub and lived in the same house all his life – what would he have witnessed through the pub windows over such a long lifetime. The landlady on her way out to the beer garden stopped for a moment to talk to us and we found out that she was in her 80s and would soon be leaving the pub after serving behind the bar for 35 years, she went on to tell us that the pub still thrives on skittles teams three evenings a week. What can I say about this lady but to adopt her as the favourite granny that I never had and encourage anyone passing through Cheltenham to call in and wish her a very happy and long retirement.

The other committee members were now closing in on Cheltenham so we decided to return to our hotel to take up position at the reception bar and welcome everyone to town. Richard and Matt arrived first, then it was affiliated member Dave followed by this year's team leader – Gez.

The Friday is always the precursor to the Saturday on the 9/11 weekends and a kind of meet and greet and get to know each other once more, so we all had a quick one at the hotel bar and once everyone was checked in we were off to the Bar and Wok for a Chinese, Richard looked like a small child about to begin – well a foutharch 9/11 weekend while Matt looked the reserved, calm perfect English gentleman as always.

The Bar and Wok is set out like your regular Wagamama and we were soon all sat around one of the bench style dining tables and now that we were all together we could relax into the annual 9/11 weekend – suddenly rumours began to abound about Matt's announcement for next year's choice of venue to be revealed the next day at this year's venue the Hollow Bottom at Guiting Power.

“Well at least 9/11 will be back to September next year” stated Mogi, at which point Matts eyes rolled around secretively behind those trademark spectacles and looking knowingly at Richard said “Mmmmmmm! Not necessarily”

Mogi who as we know has booked leave for the weekend nearest September 11<sup>th</sup> up until retirement suddenly looked like he was going to either explode or take inspiration from the duck that had just been delivered to our table and run up and down the restaurant hopping, quacking and flapping his arms violently a la Birdie song. Matt seeing the possibility of a blown gasket cooled the situation down by adding that there would be a choice of two possible dates for next year one of them definitely September, Mogi calmed down as even more food arrived for everyone else while I waited for just the one course.

We finished the evening at the Swan, a pub full of young Friday night people and then returned to the Hotel for a nightcap to find something very familiar about the young man behind the hotel bar and our suspicions were confirmed when he asked us if we were from the land that he called Wales. His accent was obviously Welsh and I don't know about you but I found his voice full of the same nervous anticipation and curiosity as that of Sir Henry Morton Stanley asking the now famous question "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

We later learned that this man was from Port Talbot and was one of those typical Welshman who appears lost outside his comfort zone – or in his case Port Talbot but maybe this man had a point for Cheltenham is not the most welcoming of towns to foreigners and I'm talking even anyone from nearby Gloucester.

“Do you know of a place called Ely” was the Welsh reception/bar person's next question asked this time in the style of Scott of the Antarctic so we firstly confirmed that 5 of us were Welsh and had indeed travelled great distances through the land of Middle-earth to arrive at the Holiday Inn Rubbish Breakfast.

“What is this Ely you talk of” I asked, for I know of two such lands” I continued.

“It is the Ely that I have heard of where I have a friend” he replied

“I know of only one Ely where I also did come upon a friend who like myself was a follower of the Normans and we all did scale the Octagon including the pregnant Claire and it is written that the only man not to scale the great tower was Xela the physician also known as La the miser, for when we did reach the top of the tower we looked down upon Xela and did see him sleeping peacefully upon his pot of gold” I told him

“Who's this fella called Norman then?” the barman asked as Mogi chipped in and asked him to top up his pint.

We took our seats at which point Gez, this year's team captain got Mogi, this year's secretary to announce that tomorrow's tour of the Hook Norton brewery would be at 10.30am and not as planned in the afternoon, we all then retired to hang our Hook Norton stockings at the end of our beds knowing that tomorrow there was to be lots of beer tasting to do.

## Day 2

It was Saturday morning and we were all looking forward to our brewery tour but first we had an appointment with the Holiday Inn rubbish breakfast that certainly well lived up to its reputation then we were soon away to the multi-storey car park [the place where the cars are kept] to pick up the cars for the ride out to Hook Norton. I took a ride with affiliated member Dave while everyone else went with Richard, I suddenly realised what a mistake I had made and the laughter I was missing out on as Mogi would have had a field day with his humorous play on place names as both cars travelled through Bishop's Cleeve, Puckham woods, Ham, Whalley Farm, Lower & Upper Swell, Milkwell covert and Great Rollright. Still I always have the repeat to look forward to and many times over.

We arrived at the brewery dead on 10.30 the time for the start of our booked tour [I must say when Gez plans something it is really very precise – congratulations once more] the brewery building is one of the prettiest I think any of us have seen but there was no time to stand around and we were soon away on our tour of a brewery that began life in 1849. We were firstly introduced to the steam engine on the ground floor that was installed in 1899 and had been working away for 100 years or the duration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until that thing called modernisation came long in the 21<sup>st</sup> however the actual brewing process never changes and as we climbed the stairs our guide took us through 5 floors of brewing heaven. At the top of the building is the cold liquor tank filled with water pumped from a well below the brewery then the now brewer's liquor makes its way back down the five floors via malt crushing, the grist hopper, mashing, copper hoping, cooling, fermentation, storing and finally cask racking to eventually end up in your pint of beer – surely the nearest a man can get to feeling pregnant and giving birth!

But forget about all that, it was the tasting we were looking forward to and we were soon sat around two tables in the brewery bar along with the group of 4 other beer lovers who were also part of the same 10.30 tour, we all listened intently as our female tour guide brought samples of beer to our table providing commentary as she went – does life get any better than this? As the very generous beer samples began to mount up both groups began to exchange views and background information and we discovered that our group of 4 fellow beer lovers were from the nearby Lydney area who then began to want to know more about the fourtharch 9/11 annual weekends – it was at this very table and in the Hook Norton brewery bar on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2012 @ 11.59am that the fourtharch was reborn. We suddenly realised that as with the group we met at the Greene King Brewery last year our new friends at Hook Norton also wanted to know more about us and how simple it would be to refer all our new beer drinking fans to a fourtharch 9/11 weekend website. The similarities with last year's tour did not stop there for where the group of fellow beer loving guys at Greene King found Mogi's jokes funny, this year's group also took a liking to him and gave our Mogi a round of applause – his transfer fee just became even more attractive.

Excitement was now building as our next port of call was going to be this year's chosen pub, the Hollow Bottom, we were all feeling warmed up after our beer tasting except for Richard our designated driver and affiliated member Dave who was leaving us to drive to Cardiff – thanks for joining us Dave and hope to see you again soon. We all then piled into Richard's car and for some strange reason someone had set the satnav a course that would avoid all village names with Mogi style comic opportunities – what a shame I was so looking forward to a bit of a laugh.

We were soon cruising through the village of Guiting Power and into a space in the pub car park tailor made for Richard's car and as we entered the pub via the rear entrance we were immediately hit with the Hollow Bottom's theme for the walls were covered throughout with equine memorabilia, oh no it's not just horse brasses hanging in this pub – this is horse racing central. We were soon shown to our table and were straight down to business and at the top of the agenda for our first ever Annual General Meeting was a clarification of the rules – well there is only one rule but it does clearly state that:-

**“Members 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 key word up for debate was ‘pint’ and for example if you were to choose a venue overseas like one of those Spanish bars where the waitresses wear very little [so I have heard] then do you still have to have had a ‘pint’ even though beer is served in completely different measures and sometimes in bottles by some foreigners in their own countries. This point was first taken up by committee members Richard and Mogi out in Benalmádena in Spain back in April when indeed a Spanish venue was being considered for Mogi's possible choice in 2015 [I think Claire and William rather wisely went to bed early that night] The issue was then taken back to Cardiff by Mogi to debate with your writer at the Albany and to Cambridge by Richard to debate with Matt. Many suggestions were put forward to somehow circumnavigate the rule like taking a pint glass with you to Spain to even asking Spanish bar staff to measure out a pint to be drunk in a series of smaller glasses – meanwhile back at the AGM we asked for input from the only committee member who had not yet been canvassed for his views and asked “So what's your take on this Gez?”

Gez looked up from a place with an expression on his face that suggested that he was a little bemused by all this and wanted to move onto something far more important very very soon and replied.

“If you cannot get a pint in a pint glass then you cannot chose the place”

And that was it, so after almost 6 months of debate about a word in a rule we all wondered why we didn't ask Gez in the first place, he truly is the Slayer of Jason.

We then discussed the Camra campaign to scrap the beer duty escalator that automatically increases beer by 2% above inflation every year and finally third on the agenda was the naming [your writer] of the member to make the venue choice for 2014 then we all braced ourselves for Matt's announcement for 2013.

### **The Announcement**

As he held his main course knife like a conductor's baton the focus was now firmly on Matt and a deathly silence fell not only upon our table but the whole dining area as the low and bright November sun shone directly through the pub window straight onto Matt's face – is it any wonder they call him the Archbishop of acoustics? The stage was well and truly set for Matt's exciting announcement and as he began to speak I thought I should faint with the tension of the moment as he announced.

“Sorry chaps I left next year's proposals on the photocopier at school”

The bubble of tension was burst but Matt as cool and collected as Sargent Wilson in Dad's Army already had his backup plan in place and we were to witness the first ever 9/11 i-pad presentation that revealed the exciting news that next year we are all to travel to Windsor and what we didn't know at the time is that we could be there to celebrate the birth of the new Royal Baby.

The food at the Hollow Bottom was excellent and I really enjoyed my steak, we were told by the landlord who reminded me of Kenneth Conner from the Carry-on films that all food was locally sourced and cooked fresh. Lunch was over so we asked a kindly barmaid to take our usual snap standing outside this year's pub – everyone looked like they had a good time and now that the business was over it was time for a wander, Richard and Matt were eager to call into the parish church of St Michael and All Angels to discover a little more about the hymn tune by John Barnard "Christ triumphant, ever reigning" named after Guiting Power. These small villages always throw up something of interest and before we knew it we were looking at a 16<sup>th</sup> Century phone booth – housed within the walls of the old post office, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott must have taken inspiration when designing the now famous red telephone booths K2 and K3 that we all grew up with before the mobile phone came along. Who would believe that the same architect was responsible for not only Battersea power station, Liverpool cathedral, The Cathedral Church of St Columba in Oban that your writer visited shortly before the fourtharch tour of Spain in April, but also K9, the robotic dog in Dr Who [the character with more personality than any of the other actors]

As we made our way towards St Michael and All Angels the bright November sun was now setting, creating some wonderful photographic opportunities with dramatically lit cloud formations and long shadows stretching across the Gloucestershire hills. It was a wonderful backdrop and could have been lit by Lighting Director Matt but unfortunately under this wonderful sky we found the church locked as is most of Gloucestershire on the weekends so we had to make do with Richard and Matt singing *Christ triumphant* as we made our way back down the quiet lanes of Guiting Power – not a bad alternative.



**"Christ triumphant"**



We made our way back to Cheltenham [avoiding Peasewell & lark wood, Granny's Bank coppice and Swell Wold Pumhouse covert] to pick up on a few attractions in town but as with the rest of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham was also closed and the Gustav Holst Museum would also be shut on the Sunday.

We all agreed that after a busy morning tasting beer and a wonderful lunch at the Hollow Bottom that it would be a good idea to have a power nap at the Hotel so we did and regrouped at 7pm for a wander around Cheltenham hoping that the pubs were not also closed for the weekend that they were not.

Mogi and I decided to show Gez, Richard and Matt the Adam & Eve where we kicked off on the Friday evening and sure enough we were all welcomed by the little old lady and made a fuss of, I would really like to think that the fourtharch revival was finally decided upon in this pub.

We then did our traditional Saturday night pub crawl striking out right across town all the way beyond the Promenade for everyone's favourite of the evening, the Jolly Brewmaster and while everyone else seemed to be busy rebooting the fourtharch on their mobile phones I decided to do some people watching to see if I could put a tag on this rather large Gloucestershire town. I noticed that a lot of punters were bringing their dogs into the pub with no complaints from the staff and that there was certainly a taste, just a little taste of a bohemian atmosphere with those military jackets that were so popular in the 1960s worn by some drinkers, I think I also spotted a few 1950s Ban the Bomb badgers. Gustav Holst may be well celebrated in Cheltenham with his *closed for the weekend's* birthplace museum however another even more famous musician born here is completely shunned – Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones. Jones was not only a member of a rock group that made a musical and cultural sea change in the 1960s but he was also a major player in dragging Britain out of the strict almost Edwardian period of the early 60s and into the youth culture that we still see today.

Jones is also buried in Cheltenham after being found dead floating face down in his swimming pool in 1969 aged 27 that also qualifies him as a member of the now notorious club of dead rock stars who all passed away at the same age, these include: - Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, Kurt Cobain and more recently Amy Winehouse. Even before forming the Stones, Jones was one of those original 1960s bohemians who lived an alternative lifestyle to the Victorian values and attitudes that ran right through to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and would have been very much out of place in regimented Cheltenham.

Meanwhile back at the Jolly Brewmaster I wonder if the town's latest generation of trendy young locals with their 1960s retro fashions and long out of date protest badges will be the generation to finally recognise local lad Brian Jones and give him his own birthplace museum and like Gustav Holst's – be also closed on Sundays.

Via the Bath Tavern we meandered back to the Hotel bar for a port at Matt's suggestion and then off to bed after a very very enjoyable day, as I made my way by the hotel bar and reception desk I noticed that our welsh bar person was again on duty and thought that maybe this slightly unwelcoming town is not really for him but he had other matters on his mind and asked me.

"Do you have any more news of Xela the Miser?"

"I fear not my friend" I told him" for La the physician got married in the summer and his new wife keeps him on a short leash – goodnight!"

Sunday was 11<sup>th</sup> of November - Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday fell on the same date, meanwhile back at the Holiday Inn we were all down slightly later for our rubbish breakfast and I noted that the food was so good that many of the guests were going back for more or was it that they had not had enough the first time round? Suddenly someone shouted "Hey, there are sausages here" I thought we would all get trampled in the stampede! Through the haze of everyone's slight hangover that Cath took every sympathy with when given a call by Matt later that morning, I suggested we head for the town centre and the war memorial to see what's happening – and wow, was it just.

We checked out of the hotel and Mogi and I placed our luggage in Richard's car for safe keeping that then gave Richard an opportunity to pull out from his boot his latest piece of kit that I thought was one of William's toys but it was a small helicopter with an on board camera that Richard then proceeded to fly around the space of the empty car park using his mobile phone – he is truly Gadget man. We then headed for the centre of town to find what looked like the whole population of Cheltenham stretched along the length of the promenade in readiness for the Remembrance day service, we arrived just in time to see the beginning of the traditional military parade that included a foot tapping brass band and we were all handed the order of service as we tried to get as close to the war memorial as possible. As the service began I am sure the hymn singing was very much enhanced by Richard, Matt and Gez then the 2 minutes silence and to the echoing sound of only a distant dog's bark, I took the opportunity for quiet contemplation. I looked up through the branches of the tree we were standing under with those last few autumn leaves still yet to fall all backed by a cloudless blue sky, the sun lit perfectly the white classical provincial buildings making a wonderful backdrop for the various gathered dignitaries and there surrounding it all were hundreds of people of all ages frozen in silence paying homage to our fallen heroes. What we witnessed in Cheltenham that day would also have been happening in every city, town and village around the whole of the United Kingdom and I thought what a great country we are.

We began to disperse along with the crowds and it was time to say our goodbyes to Gez who was off to meet up with a friend he had bumped into the previous evening at the Jolly Brewmaster leaving us with one final task to perform - finding the Disney store so that Matt could buy a Tigger for young daughter Emily, he believed this would go down well for the flight to Spain the following week.

Every year I try to introduce a new bit of business that might become a regular feature of the fourtharch 9/11 weekends – last time I tried a Dad's Army theme by dragging everyone to the Six Bells pub at Bardwell a small village 9 miles outside Bury Saint Edmunds used as a location for many episodes of the show. So in the week that actor Clive Dunn passed away I thought that we could continue this theme by taking part in some sort of tribute to Corporal Jones but no, it was to be Richard's idea from 2011 that caught on. If you recall last year when Gez, Mogi and I arrived at the Ramada hotel *good breakfast* in Bury St Edmunds, Richard was at the hotel reception desk not only threatening to close down the Ramada hotel chain but also lastminute.com because of a mix up with our bookings, he would continue the theme on to this year and take on an even bigger challenge – the Disney corporation.

We found the Disney store nearby and before entering the shop with Richard, Matt made his usual acoustics checks and along with the cuddly toys inside should have helped Richard reach a perfect Kama, however when Richard emerged from the store he looked nothing like one of the cuddly Disney characters but more like Yosemite Sam from the Warner Brothers cartoons. In between waving his arms around in the air, Richard explained that he had just been in another Ramada Hotel style argument with the Disney shop check out girl because not only do you now have to pay for the box that your cuddly Disney toy goes into but also the carrier bag that you then carry around Cheltenham as an unpaid human sandwich board. Mogi calmed the situation down by taking the Disney carrier bag from Richard and turning it inside out – I wonder what the target will be next year – Starbucks?

To further calm Richard down we found a pub on the high street for a pint of appropriately named for the day Armistice Ale and a little something to eat, Richard and Matt kindly dropped Mogi and me off at the railway station and we said our goodbyes. We were soon on our way back to Cardiff and while I immersed myself in the view I noticed that Mogi looked so content after a wonderful weekend with friends, beer, brewery tours and good food he failed to notice the comic opportunities passing him by as the train rattled through Moreton [Holly] Valence, Pillowell, Portskewett, Undy, St Mellons and finally Splott.

The whole weekend was so well planned and executed you would almost believe that Gez had asked Entertainments manager, Mogi to do it all for him.



**Next year's venue chosen by Matt [definitely September 2013]**

Windsor – details to follow when Matt retrieves proposals from school photocopier.