



beer moos

Winter 2017-18

Issue Forty Three

HAPPY NEW YEAR FOR MK DRINKERS!

**2018 has got off to a great start for real ale and
cider drinkers in Milton Keynes**

NEW REAL ALE PUB OPENS

A new pub has opened in Bletchley. Wetherspoon's Captain Ridley's Shooting Party, like other outlets in this chain, will offer a good selection of real ales at competitive prices. The main Wetherspoon's in our area, near MK Central Station, has won CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year, so expectations are high for the new pub. More details in Pub News on page 8.



LOCAL BREWERY RE-OPENS

Stonebridge brewery Bucks Star, closed after fire damage in early 2016, planned as we went to press to re-open early in the New Year. This means that the brewery will again be producing its eco-friendly local ales. More details in Brewery News on page 6.

NEW BAR FOR MK SHOPPERS

A new craft beer bar, Grate, has opened in the centre:mk. See report on page 5.



MOBILE BAR ON THE MOVE

Wolverton micropub MK Biergarten has successfully crowdfunded a mobile bar. Housed in a second-hand van, the bar will offer four real and craft ales to functions in and around Milton Keynes. More details in Pub News on page 7.



The beer scene in our city is really taking off. Support it not only by enjoying the beer but by backing those who fight to keep the good news coming. Join the Campaign for Real Ale! Sign up on page 18.

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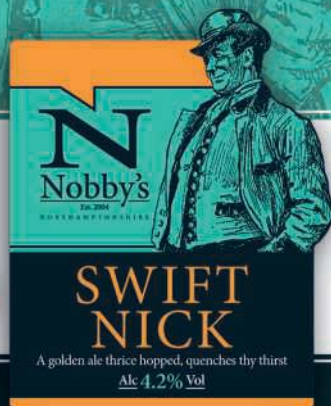
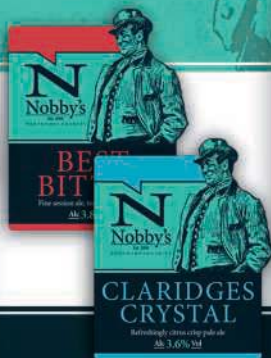
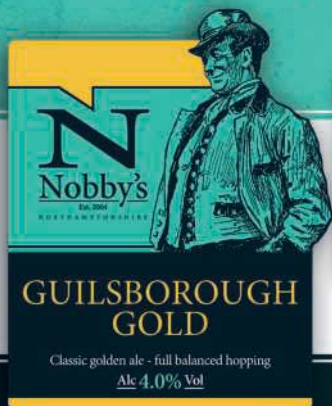
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HAND CRAFTED BREWING FOR THE DISCERNING DRINKER

Editor's Beef

With over twenty pubs closing every week across the UK, and global corporate megakeggeries tightening their grip on the international beer market, it is very easy for the thinking drinker to sink into gloom and doom.



But all is far from lost. Nationally, hard campaigning by CAMRA helped avert an expected further tax hike on beer and cider in the Autumn Budget. The rate relief on pubs – which we believe is being delivered in our area at least, but if anyone knows otherwise let us know – has been extended for another year and is now to be based on the more generous Consumer, rather than Retail, Price Index.

Locally, although the sight of former Good Beer Guide pub the Suffolk Punch being demolished to make way for housing is a depressing reminder that we cannot afford to slacken up on the fight to save our pubs as well as our ales and ciders, there is also much good news. As our front page highlights.

2017 saw new breweries and new pubs spring into life across our area. Blackpit and Blackened Sun, for example, added to the range of beers available to us, and the likes of Stony's Beer Bear and Bletchley's new Wetherspoon's, Captain Ridley's Shooting Party, gave us new venues in which to taste them.

Meanwhile across the country the number of breweries in Britain has broken through the 2,000 barrier for the first time since the 1930's, due to a combination of the craft beer boom and tax breaks for small breweries. Those brewing less than 5,000 hectolitres pay 50% less duty.

None of this is the slightest reason for complacency. Pubs, including much-loved long-established locals, are still closing down across North Bucks. The mega-keggeries are seeking to snap up successful small breweries in their endless bottom-line-driven imperative to, in the manner of Star Trek's Borg, "assimilate" all possible rivals and herd consumers back into the maw of their global greed machine.

However, that there is a steady flow of good news shows that resistance is not futile and that we can maintain diversity and choice in what we drink and where we drink it - IF we carry on campaigning.

Which is, of course, where CAMRA comes in. There is no doubt that there would be much less good news for drinkers, local and national, but for what our Campaign and its members have achieved in the past. It is equally certain that if we falter in our efforts in the future, there will be much less good news for drinkers. Keep the faith - keep up the fight!

NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of Beer Moos will be published on or around April 1st. We must have your stories, news and advertisements by: March 21st. Late copy cannot be guaranteed entry.

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It will be apparent that a number of Branch Offices remain vacant this year. If you are a member of MK & NB CAMRA and might be interested in filling any of them at the forthcoming AGM, please contact our Chairman, John McLaughlin (contact details above), who will be happy to advise what the posts involve.

Trading Standards

If you have a complaint about any unfair trading practice, such as short measures or misleading product promotion, contact Milton Keynes Trading Standards at PO BOX 105, Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes MK9 3HH Telephone 01908 252433. Email: tsd@milton-keynes.gov.uk or Buckingham Trading Standards at 5-7 Walton Street, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1UP, Tel: 08454 040506. Local Bus information & timetables are available at www.arrivabus.co.uk

To Advertise

To place an advert or enquire about our rate card please contact: Neil Richards - 01536 358670



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BEER BEAR TO HOST CRAFT BEER FESTIVAL IN STONY STRATFORD

On Saturday 10th March, Stony Stratford micropub **Beer Bear** and York House are collaborating to bring a true craft beer festival to Milton Keynes. Between 12pm and 10pm, the York House Community Centre will play host to craft beer and real ale, talks about brewing and beer, street food and music.

This year's spring festival, previously organised by the Bear's sister micropub **MK Biergarten**, hopes to present the best of the local and national brewing innovation in differently themed rooms all around York House. Modelled on other big craft beer festivals, breweries will have their own stalls at which they'll be serving special releases and old favourites. Real ale and craft beer will be featured side by side.

Since opening in spring 2017 on the Stony Stratford High Street, **Beer Bear** has been an advocate of independent craft beer as well as established local breweries and hopes to reach out to even more customers through this extensive one day event. Special

events and tastings are anticipated and will be announced closer to the time. Street food will be provided by Good Times Cafe and other Milton Keynes businesses.

Franzi Florack, the manager of **Beer Bear** told us: "We really enjoy running events at York House and look forward to returning in spring 2018. We've got lots of exciting plans up our sleeve and hope to reveal them in early 2018. We want to do our best to bring the best beer to Milton Keynes and hope to do our bit by running this cracking festival."

Entry is £10 and includes a commemorative glass and two half pints. Children are welcome until 8pm. A limited range of cider and wine as well as non-alcoholic drinks will be on sale for non-beer drinkers.

Diary Dates

Please note that diary information is always subject to change. Check online for latest information at www.mkcamra.org.uk

Branch meetings are held on a variable day in the first week of every month. For dates and venues see website.

JANUARY

Saturday 20th

Central Southern Regional Pub Crawl in London. Meet Southampton Arms, Kentish Town -139 Highgate Rd, Highgate,

London NW5 1LE, 10 minute walk from Tufnell Park Tube Station on the Northern Line - at noon.

Monday 29th

Milton Keynes and North Bucks Branch Annual General Meeting, 8pm, the Chequers, 48 Watling St, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK2 2BY

See website for further information.

If you would like to receive details of Branch events by email, please contact social@mkcamra.org.uk

Have you Scored yet?

CAMRA's National Beer Scoring System (NBSS) is an easy 0-5 point scale for judging beer quality. It is used to find out which pubs consistently sell well kept ale. The results help us to decide which pubs to consider for the Good Beer Guide. All CAMRA members can submit beer scores for any pub in the UK.

Please go to whatpub.com and log in using your membership number and password. Locate the pub's web page. If you are using the desktop version, Beer Scoring appears on the right hand side of the page. If you are using the mobile version, click on the *Submit Beer Scores* tab.

Enter the date that you visited the pub, the name of the brewery and the name of the beer. Using the scale to the right, select your score. Once complete, click on Submit Score.

If you would like more information on beer scoring, please contact database@mkcamra.org.uk

0	<i>No Real Ale</i>	<i>No cask-conditioned ale available</i>
1	Poor	<i>Beer that is anything from barely drinkable to drinkable with considerable resentment.</i>
2	Average	<i>Competently kept, drinkable pint but doesn't inspire in any way, not worth moving to another pub but you drink the beer without really noticing.</i>
3	Good	<i>Good beer in good form. You may cancel plans to move to the next pub. You want to stay for another pint and may seek out the beer again.</i>
4	Very Good	<i>Excellent beer in excellent condition.</i>
5	Perfect	<i>Probably the best you are ever likely to find. A seasoned drinker will award this score very rarely.</i>

Grate News for MK Shoppers

Readers of a certain age may remember the dim and distant past when the City Duck and the Rose & Castle gave pubs a presence in the town's main shopping centre. They are long gone, but the centre:mk now has a beer outlet within its walls once more following the opening of Grate in September 2017.



Styling itself as a craft beer shop and bar, Grate started out as an experiment in the Westfield shopping complex in Shepherd's Bush, but has made its first permanent home in Milton Keynes. 160 beers on offer as well as the wide choice of wines, gins, and other spirits, all at seriously competitive prices. The bar is located at the junction of Midsummer Arcade and Acorn Walk, next to House of Fraser, in the centre of the aisle, with a small seating area extending towards Pizza Hut.

It's not possible to offer cask ale at the site, but there are up to four keykeg / keg lines alongside bottles and cans, some of which are real ale. You'll find local breweries like Blackened Sun, Concrete Cow and Silverstone, plus popular UK craft brands such as Beavertown, Moor and Cloudwater, as well as an interesting selection of beer from around the world. There are plans to open further branches in



2018, but for now Grate is an MK exclusive! The new year will also bring an updated website that'll allow you to place orders online for delivery or collection. If you're a fan of the grape, look out for regular wine club events throughout the year.

Normal opening hours:

Sun-Wed 12:00-18:30;

Thu-Sat 12:00-20:00

Web: <http://gratebeer.com> – update due 2018

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GRATEBEERUK/>

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Brewery & Pub News

Hédoné Saison, from new Milton Keynes craft micro-brewery **Blackened Sun** was the first beer to sell out at the Concrete Pint Beer Festival in October, and was also voted KeyKeg Beer of the Festival, to the delight of brewer Gary Morse who was there to see this evidence of how well his first ever brew went down.

Blackened Sun pride themselves on using only natural ingredients, free from additives, so that their beer is suitable for vegans. They neither filter nor pasteurise their beers.

They launched their latest craft beer during a tap takeover at Stony Beer Bear on 21st November. Luna is a dark saison at 5.2%

ABV and joins Crossover, Collision and Hédoné. They also did a Meet the Brewer at MK Draft House on 8th December. Their next beer is due out in February and uses malt from Bletchley's Malting Box. Brewery news on <https://twitter.com/BlackenedSunBC>



Blackpit Brewery, between Stowe and Silverstone, continues to go from strength to strength. Since our last

issue they have held a successful Bonfire and Firework display at their brewery, featuring a bonfire shaped like a rocket in honour of their modern English IPA, Sky Rocket. On 23rd November they got nationwide publicity when BBC food-guru, Nigel Barden, used their Sky Rocket beer to

make his Beef & Ale pie on Simon Mayo's Drivetime show on Radio 2.



20 months after the fire which affected Milton Keynes' **Bucks Star Brewery**, the roof on the brewery building has now been replaced and internal works are taking place to have the brewery reopened for the New Year.

The founder of the brewery, Datis Gol, told us the challenges of the past 20 months have not only served to strengthen the character of the business and its offerings, but have also revealed how supportive members of the community have been during this time, especially those who have bought into the Growler Swap initiative. This initiative is the first of its kind and means two things: zero

waste and fresh, local beer. Bucks Star very much look forward to seeing customers, old and new, in 2018, to the brewery becoming a hub of great conversations and memories, and perhaps the start of an important zero-waste movement propelled by Growler Swap and great artisan beers.

The New Year will also see the launch of a separate Growler Swap website which will allow customers to place orders online for same day delivery of fresh beer to their home. Details on their website <http://buckinghamshirebeer.co.uk/>

Concrete Cow were well-represented at the Concrete Pint Beer Festival. Cloven Hoof, back after a two-year break, Old Bloomer, Pail Ale and Cock'n'Bull were on offer. They continue to collaborate with local maltsters Malting Box and Horne's to brew interesting ales, such as MK Amber No. 4, which went on sale at the Draft House in late October. They are also collaborating with Wharf Distillery of Potterspurty to produce Sacred Cow Single Malt.



Hornes of Bow Brickhill sponsored the festival T-shirts at this year's MK CAMRA Concrete Pint, at which brewer Ryan Horne was much in evidence.

The festival featured the brewery's new-ish beers; Greensands in cask and Ryestone in keykeg. Ryestone, ruby in colour and 4.0%, was originally produced as a one-off for the 40th Bedford Beer Festival, but has proved very popular and is likely to become one of the brewery's core beers. Plans are afoot to make it available in cans in early 2018. Greensands will be brewed once each year in September, with fresh green hops from the harvest.



In a collaboration with the Wharf Distillery, the wort from Horne's Black Antler smoked porter has been distilled into a malt spirit, Goats Against the Grain. This comes in two versions. One is direct from the distillation and retains

loads of the smoke character from the Black Antler porter. The other is barrel aged in a chestnut wood cask and is sweeter and less smoky.

Expansion work will commence in January 2018 on the

brewery - they will be adding additional fermenters to help keep up with production demands. Horne's are also hosting a tap take-over at the Stony Beer Bear in January where they will showcase five beers from key keg and another two from cask - look out for the dates on their Facebook and Twitter pages.

Horne's are also running the upstairs real ale bar at the Craft Beer Festival being held in Stony Stratford's York House on 10th March.

XT has been involved in a ground-breaking 'Wandering Brewer' project with Charles Wells. Following the sale of their original site Wells has joined up with a select group of independent brewers, including XT, to work on a new range of beers. In collaboration with Charles Well's head brewer, two special beers were brewed at XT, "Wet" a 3.7% Pale Ale and "Wild" a Speciality Amber Ale at 4.3%, and were available for a very limited period in Wells pubs in the autumn.



XT brewery owner Russ headed off to Italy to work with the innovative BBBirra brewery in Bosa. Part 1 of the collaboration saw the Animal 'Donkey' wheat beer brewed at XT last year. Part 2 got the two brewers working on a very unique Einkorn Bier made with the oldest variety of grain cultivated by man since the days of ancient Egypt. The "Pharaohs Ale" is chewy, smooth and very biscuity with a tart sourness from the Einkorn. The Sardinian brewery have their own farm and grow a wide spectrum of unusual barley and wheat strains along with local hop varieties, they even have a well for drawing the brewing liquor. They also worked on an Italian speciality beer - known as a "Doppio Malto" a very high gravity beer fermented using yeast from the strong local Malvasia Wine. This has a really rich malt flavour and big alcohol kick balanced with a citrus finish from the punchy Citra hop.

The annual Festive delight which is the XT-25 Xmas Ale returned - giving deep malty flavours from this slow and cold fermented German Alt Style beer. This was joined by the latest single hop edition of the XT-17 which is graced by the American Chinook hop - giving hints of grapefruit and lime.

The Animal range was joined by two new seasonal beers:



Red Herring 3.9% Hoppy IPA. This red herring is neither red nor filled with herrings. It is however packed full of Citra, Cascade and Mosaic for an intense initial tropical, citrus blast. Lightly toasted malts give a hint of sweetness which gives way to more hoppy goodness. Generous dry hop additions of Citra round the beer off with a hint of mango and lychees. A heap of flavour for one little fish!

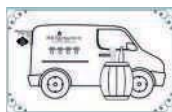


Snow Moo. 4.6% Milkshake IPA Brewed with lactose and high Alpha citrus flavoured hops (Summit, Dana and Chinook). Snow Moo has a pleasant grapefruit, lemon and lime aroma and is brewed with oats and lactose to give it loads of body and sweetness, not normally associated with IPAs. With a hoppy finish the Snow Moo is a real cold weather treat and proves festive beers do not have to be dark, while bringing out your inner child!

Wharf Distillery, producers of whisky, other spirits and ciders, formerly Virtual Orchard of Old Wolverton and now at the Wakefield Farm Courtyard off the A5 near Potterspury, are offering a free bottle of their cider in exchange for filling a 25-kilo bag with apples fit for cider production. They are collaborating with a number of local brewers to make interesting malt spirits distilled from their worts. Wharf also now have an online shop to go with their real shop and tasting room: <http://wharfdistillery.co.uk/shop/>

Pub News

On Monday December 11th the Biergarten in Wolverton held a special Christmas Bierclub, focussing on, amazingly, Christmas ales. Plus mince pies and stollen. Despite weather appreciated only on Christmas cards, a packed venue heard Franzi, Jenny and Charlotte introduce an interesting variety of festive ale from around the World. Future Bierclub themes include War of the Roses, Old Favourites, Eurovision and America. More info on their website.



That evening also saw the successful completion of the micropub's crowdfunding event launched to cover the cost of a mobile

bar, housed in a second-hand van. The crowdfunding significantly exceeded its target. The Biergarten team are planning four tap lines serving three craft beer and lager kegs and one local ale cask, as well as a small can fridge, cider and mulled wine lines. Artwork on the van will include a map of all breweries local to Milton Keynes. Franzi Florack, the owner and manager of the Biergarten, told Moos: "We were the first craft beer bottle shop in Milton Keynes in 2016 and would now love to expand the business. Our area has got a great number of fantastic breweries right on our doorstep as well as quick links to London's craft beer scene, so showcasing these brewers at fayres, festivals, parties and weddings will be an absolute privilege."

Greene King have just re-opened the Caldecotte Inn as the **Caldecotte Pub and Grill**. It has been extensively refurbished and redesigned. However it does not as yet have any real ale on tap.

Captain Ridley's Shooting Party, the new Wetherspoon's in Bletchley, opened in the first week of December. The pub reflects the cover name used for the delegation of staff from MI6 and the Government Code



and Cypher School which went to reconnoitre Bletchley Park as a secret codebreaking HQ in August 1938. On Saturday December 2nd the new pub treated Milton Keynes CAMRA members to an exclusive pre-opening free taster, which was much enjoyed.



The **Chequers** in Fenny Stratford is enjoying a new lease of life under enthusiastic landlord Tim Gilkes. Four cask ales on tap are supplemented by another four behind the bar on gravity dispense. The pub also offers a superb selection of Belgian and other interesting bottled beers to drink in or take-away, showcased beside the bar.



The **Craufurd Arms**, Wolverton, is now stocking bottled beers from the local Blackened Sun craft-microbrewery, whose produce went down very well, and swiftly, at the Concrete Pint Beer Festival.

The **Cross Keys**, Woolstone has been granted planning permission for a major refurbishment. The present restaurant will become the bar and a new extension will cover the small bar, the patio area and the barn to create a large restaurant. The pub will close for eight weeks from January 29th while building work takes place.



The **Draft House** in Central Milton Keynes continues to enhance its varied beer offerings with brewers' tap take-over evenings. Recent such events have included Blackened Sun and Brew York, plus a tap takeover and Meet The Brewer evening on November 23rd featuring Abbeydale Brewery.

The Good-Beer-Guide-listed **George** in Winslow is now under new management. We wish the new team every success and hope they will maintain the high standards set by outgoing managers Steve and Rachel.



An advertisement for conversion to a house appeared in the Bucks Advertiser in November in respect of the **Phoenix**, Steeple Claydon.

The **Red House**, Newport Pagnell, had three real ales on tap when our reporter called in the first week of December. The pub was well-used, with diners enjoying a tempting range of dishes.



The **Three Locks**, Stoke Hammond was recently purchased by Aspley Pubs, a small local Pubco. Apart from redecoration, very little has changed. It has the same helpful, friendly staff, excellent selection of LocAles and great food.



The refurbished **Wheatsheaf**, Bow Brickhill, is almost next door to Horne's Brewery. They offer a number of Horne's beers on hand pump.

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Snowy Site for Concrete Pint 2017



The Beer arrives

and unused. However, after much frantic searching by Festival Organiser Will Longmate and his team, we managed to find a venue in the Snozone complex, inside the Xscape that rises, like a baked bean tin thrust at an angle into the ground, out of Central Milton Keynes.

So on Monday 16th October Barworx set up our racking and the first of over 90 casks of real ale began to arrive. The Cellar team spent the next three days



Cider Bar manager Jim checks his offerings

racking, venting and tapping them ready to open on the Wednesday. Also installed were two key-keg dispensers, a refrigerated display of Belgian beers and the boxes of ciders and perries, to say nothing of the bars, the tombola, the posters and other Festival features set up by our eager team of volunteers.



The Cellar Team check the Beer

As opening time loomed on Wednesday 16th the Cellar team had the final critical task of tasting all the beers to ensure they were in fit condition to serve. A gruelling task, but someone has to do it! Then at 4pm Festival Organiser Will served the first pint to the first customer.



Festival Organiser Will serves the first pint



Roger Protz on IPA

The first evening saw a new feature that proved to be one of the Festival highlights. Respected beer writer and former editor of the CAMRA newspaper What's Brewing Roger Protz gave a tutored tasting on the theme of IPAs. This was both popular and interesting. After the tasting, Roger lingered long into the evening, sampling some of our beers and chatting to Festivalgoers whilst selling copies of his new book, entitled, by a strange coincidence, IPA.

Hédoné Saison, the first brew from new local brewery Blackened Sun and one of the KeyKegs, was the first beer to sell out, on Friday evening, to the delight of brewer Gary Morse who was there to see it. Others followed, but the fun of the festival carried on regardless,



The Tombola Team

with much conviviality. The Tombola, run by Branch stalwarts Anne and Fred, was as usual a favourite.

Drinkers voted Leighton Buzzard Chilli Porter as Beer of the Festival, and Blackened Sun Hédoné Saison as KeyKeg of the Festival.



Picking a winner

When the Festival ended on Saturday night, it proved to have been less well-attended than on previous years, probably due to the new venue and clashes with various other events that week. This may



Brewer Gary sees his beer sell out first



All the Fun of the Festival

as much as ever, and will be looking forward to next time.

present challenges for our next Concrete Pint, and suggestions for a venue would be most welcome. However, those who did attend, and those who volunteered, all enjoyed themselves



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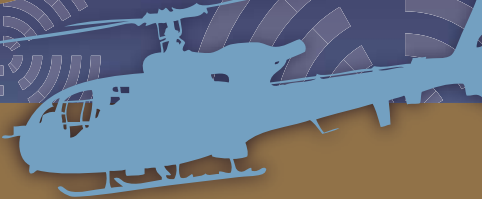
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**FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR 2017 MONTHLY SPECIALS AT
WWW.TRINGBREWERY.CO.UK**

Thank You and Welcome

On Wednesday 29th November Wetherspoon's near MK Central station played host to our annual social to say thank-you to the volunteers who made our Beer Festival possible and to welcome new members recruited at it.

Members old and new enjoyed a jovial evening with refreshments liquid and solid kindly provided by our gracious host, 'Spoons' manager Alex Jonas.



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Twenty Years of Fruity Delight

Like many CAMRA branches, Milton Keynes and North Bucks endeavours to promote locally produced beer, cider, and perry. Our branch is lucky in having a fine choice of local producers to call on, and none more so than **Windmill Hill** farm, whose cider and perry has long been a fixture in the cider bar at our Concrete Pint Beer and Cider Festivals, where the perry in particular has often been a rapid sell-out.



Tom and Doreen Hillier-Bird bought Windmill Hill, between Charwelton and Hellidon in west Northamptonshire, in 1984. The farm is based round a former windmill on a spectacular hilltop location with stunning views over the surrounding countryside. Previous owners had planted vines there in 1978, but these

had not been pruned for over three years, so when Tom and Doreen moved in they went to work with a hedge-cutter. This tamed the vines but, as Doreen wryly informed Beer Moos, the vines quickly shot up another ten or so feet, thus putting things effectively back to square one!

But after advice from other vineyard owners, the vines were pruned properly, and soon Windmill Hill Vineyard was up and running, producing finest Northamptonshire wines, so successfully that further vines were planted in 1990.

Then one day, while visiting a pick-your-own orchard in nearby Byfield, Tom noticed windfall apples lying ankle-deep and apparently unwanted. Thinking this to be rather a waste, he asked the orchard's owner if he could have some of them, and was offered the entire lot for ten pounds! The apples were transported back to Windmill Hill, and Windmill Hill cider was born. Initially it



was made using a mixture of Bramleys, Cox's, and crab-apples, but later, true cider varieties were bought in from Herefordshire, and then in 1990 Tom and Doreen planted their own orchard, which yielded its first harvest two years later.



Five cider-apple varieties are grown at Windmill Hill – Dabinett, Hereford Red Streak, Kingston Black, Monarch, and Bittersweet, and the perry-pear varieties are Early Helen and Huffcap. A huffcap is the name of the traditional headgear worn by Herefordshire pickers.

Orchards need bees to pollinate the blossoms, and Windmill Hill has its own hives, enabling them to make mead and cyser – apple-juice co-fermented with honey. Unfortunately, varroa mites and pesticides sprayed on the surrounding oilseed-rape fields have done the bees no favours, but they survive, and keep the flowers fertilised and the fruit growing, and honey filling the combs.

Sadly, Tom passed away in 2014, but Doreen is happily still with us, and still making delicious cider and perry.

On 29th November Milton Keynes and North Bucks CAMRA was happy to present Windmill Hill with a special award for supplying our festival with cider and perry for twenty years. We think they truly have deserved it!



Jim Scott

VENI, VIDI, BIBI A Beer Tour of St Albans

St. Albans, Roman Verulamium, is the location of the National Headquarters of the Campaign for Real Ale. Just how well-chosen this location is for the ale-lover became apparent when Milton Keynes and North Bucks CAMRA visited the town on Saturday 18th November.

After a swift rail trip to Watford Junction and a chug up the minuscule pre-Beeching-like branch line to St Albans Abbey, followed by a tramp in the dank mid-November gloom across parkland and through a wood, we found ourselves at Ye Olde Fighting Cocks.



Although I am always suspicious of establishments whose names obviously play to Ye Touriste Trayde, this is a superb old pub, rebuilt after a fire of 1599 and in which Oliver Cromwell allegedly once stayed a night. The bar centres on an octagonal mediaeval monastic dovecote. The pub is one of several claiming to be "The Oldest Pub in England" (or should that be "Ye Oldeste Pubbe inne Englande"), and certainly dates back to an association with St Alban's Abbey in the Middle Ages. It owes its current name to being a centre for gladiatorial combat amongst poultry in the Eighteenth Century.

However, as with most such establishments the evidence fades away beyond the last 800 years or so, and it is up to the drinker whether he or she credits the claims to antiquity whilst enjoying the selection of half-dozen interesting ales in fine condition on offer in front of the – very welcome on a cold autumn day - real fire.

Onward in the rain to the old village of St Michael's, now subsumed to the City of St Albans, where we found the Six Bells, also boasting a cosy fire and six solid ales. Popping in for a swift half to the nearby Rose and Crown, we proceeded to the Lower Red Lion. Again we were able to warm ourselves by the fire as we enjoyed a taste of the three real ales on offer and the duck crackling, the latter a first for our intrepid crew.

Thence into the maelstrom of the town centre, where we were joined at the busy Boot by Branch stalwart Jim Scott. Nearby we found the very upmarket Dylan's King's Arms, where the Titanic Plum Porter went down a treat.



In Depth Discussion in the Kings Arms



The Cider Offering in the Mermaid

Onward through the gathering dusk to the Mermaid, a fine no-nonsense pub much – and evidently deservedly – honoured by the local CAMRA

Branch, as much for its superb range of ciders and perries as for its excellent ales. Then we sampled the interesting range of pickled eggs and Sussex ales from Long Man and Harveys' breweries on offer at the Robin Hood.

After refuelling on fish and chips and saying goodbye to Jim at the mainline railway station our convivial company's next port of call, skipping the unimpressive Beehive after a quick reconnaissance, was the White Hart Tap, followed by a Fuller's House, the Garibaldi, and the White Lion. Our last port of call was the Goat, where the locals were friendly and the ale was on form.



The Merry Crew in the Goat

Tearing ourselves away by a mighty effort of will we just caught our last connection to Watford Junction. There we broke our journey to try the Flag by the station. A loud disco pub, this was not to our taste and we retired to a mainline train and a nightcap at Wetherspoon's near Milton Keynes Station.



The Final Tally

And so to bus home and bed, looking back fondly on what all agreed was a splendid and enjoyable day in CAMRA's home town. We shall do the like again soon. Why don't you enjoy it with us – details of our Branch crawls are on our Website?

Steve B



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Where to get Wrecked in Reykjavik

Iceland is a land settled by Norsemen in the 9th Century and preserves to this day their Old Norse language almost unchanged. So, given that Vikings were noted for swigging back foaming ale-horns when not committing serious public order offences in other peoples' countries, it is a place one would expect still to enjoy its beer. So indeed I and fellow MKCAMRA member Steve Rogers found it when we visited in September, with a thriving and diverse craft beer and bar scene.

It was not always so - dour Scandinavian attitudes to drink, of much more recent vintage, were reflected in the imposition of Prohibition on the island between 1915 and, for beer, 1989. Bizarrely, spirits, including the lethal local Brennivin, aka Black Death, were legalised in 1935. I can remember on my previous visit to the island in 1974 trying in vain, with a group of fellow students, to get merry on bottle after bottle of Egil's Pilsner, then a shandy-strength concoction even weaker than its contemporary Watney's Star Light. Today the lifting of Prohibition on 1st March is celebrated as Beer Day with many a runtur, the local term for pub crawl.

The killjoys haven't quite given up, however, as beer still attracts massive taxation, so that a half litre (a little under a pint) sets you back around 1200 Icelandic krona – about £9.50 at current exchange rates. The impact is mitigated by the almost universal custom of "Happy Hours" when prices drop as much as 50 %, usually in late afternoon/early evening. Happily there is an app for your phone, Android and i, "Apyy Hour" which points you to the nearest pubs in Reykjavik offering these.



Kaldi bar

There is another local quirk which affects writing about the local hostelries. Iceland has two ancient letters which English has lost – edh, pronounced like "th" in "this" and resembling a d with a cross-stroke, and thorn, pronounced like the "th" in "breath" and resembling a P with a slipped bosom halfway down the shaft. As I doubt our publisher can typeset these they will be spelled here as "th", but it's a point worth remembering when actually looking for the pub!

Our local for the stay, just up the



In the Kaldi Bar



street from our hotel, was the cosy Kaldi Bar, just off Reykjavik's main drag, Laugavegur. This is in effect the brewery tap for the craft brewery of the same name, even though that is 240 miles away in Akureyri on the north of the island. Their Doekkur Lager Bjor is a delicious local take on a German Dunkel Bier while Kaldi is a very quaffable pilsner. Music and lighting is subdued, so it is pleasant spot to start or end an evening and for a quiet chat.



Hlemmur Square

Further from the town centre along Laugarvegur, at the bus station, is Hlemmur Square, inside a youth hostel and opposite the ...unique...Penis Museum. This – the pub, not the museum! – offers a good range of local craft beers and a particularly generous Happy Hour, with beers half price (only £4.25 a pint!) between 4 and 8pm.

A little farther on, Bjoergarthurinn – which like our Biergarten means Beer Garden - is a swish bar inside the tower-block top-class Fosshotel. It has a really large range of first rate local



Bjoergarthurinn

and international beers in bottle and on tap.

Going back into the centre along Laugarvegur, past the statue of First Settler Ingolfur Arnarson standing majestically surveying a lot of construction sites, is Mikkeler and Friends, a cosy, microroomed establishment offering over twenty different beers from local microbreweries. It gets very noisy late at night.

Across busy Laekjargata is Oelsmithjan, best described as a basic back street boozier but friendly and (by local standards!) cheap. It's just across the road from the rather modest cottage which



Frederiksen Ale House



Fredericksen bar

which showcases the beers of the local Viking Brewery. Their Gylltur is a fine Pilsner. If you like the Einstok White (wheat) Beer also sold here it's available in bottles in Milton Keynes at a fraction of the price. They have a "rotating tap" but we never found out what it was.

It's worth stopping at the Saegreifinn (Sea Baron) café further on by the harbour for absolutely delicious lobster soup at a reasonable price, washed down by a selection of local craft ales.



Platter in Bryggjan

to the posh bit around Athalstraeti. Near here is Skuli Craft Bar, by Vikurgarthur Square. Should it ever stop raining in Reykjavik you can enjoy one of their interesting range of craft beers outside at a table in the square.

Not far away is the inevitable English Pub, and there is also an Irish Pub and a Public House. Not sure these establishments give much of an impression of the rich ale culture of our islands to the locals and there is little point to my mind in flying just over a thousand miles



Falkihusith and Saeta Svinith

is the Prime Minister's Office, if the PM fancies popping across for a quick one.

Heading down to the harbour along Tryggvagata you come to the Fredericksen Ale House,



Bryggjan Bruhus

Down by the harbour, near the fascinating Whale Museum, is the Bryggjan Bruhus, a modern airy brewpub where you can sample tasting platters of their rather fine range. Heading back inland takes us



Skuli Bar

to sit in an imitation of a pub at home.

However, on Ingolfstorg Square, on the corner of Athalstraeti and Hafnarstraeti, are the two best places, in our view, to eat and drink in Reykjavik.

The ancient red Falkihusith, the House of the Falcons, which once housed rare gyrfalcons en route to the mews of the King of Denmark, now holds the Saeta Svinith Restaurant and Bar. This



Saeta Svinith Beer Tours

offers excellent beer tours, which give you a good idea of the range of local microbrews on offer. You can also enjoy their Icelandic Journey, a culinary tour of such local delights as smoked puffin, horse carpaccio, Arctic char, and Minke Whale (very nice but I don't think I could eat a whole one!). The local lamb and the stew they make of it are, incidentally, delicious. Don't bother with the decomposing shark, which tastes as good as it sounds....

Round the back of the Falkihusith (and NOT in the City Center hotel

where the guide books tell you, because it has just moved!) is the superb subterranean Micro Bar, entered through an inconspicuous white door on a yellow building. This offers a really excellent selection of local microbrews in an affable ambience and was undoubtedly the Bar of the Visit.

The Viking Feast at Fjoerugarthurinn, in the untouristy, characterful little fishing port of Hafnarfjörður,



the Other Steve in Micro Bar

half an hour on the number one bus from central Reykjavik, is also worth a try. As of course are the whale watching, the Golden Circle tour of waterfalls and geysers – and the excellent Secret Lagoon hot baths, much better than the overtouristy Blue Lagoon – the Northern Lights



Micro Bar

(which we missed until we saw them from the bus on our way home via the airport) and, if you liked the TV series Vikings, the museums, especially the Saga Museum.

Iceland may be pricey, and it will never catch on for sunshine package holidays, but it's a fascinating place with spectacular scenery and a thriving craft beer and bar scene, with direct flights from Birmingham. It's worth a visit!

Steve Brady

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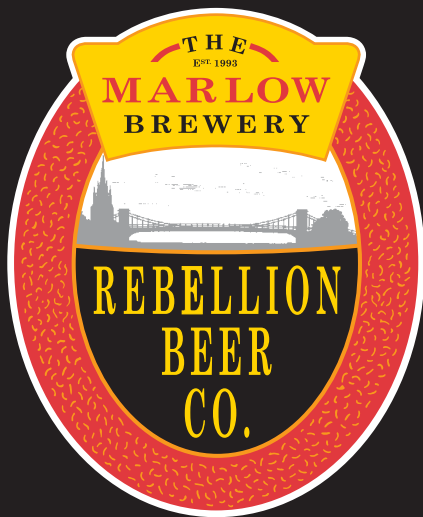
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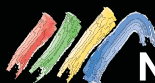
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