

Cask Calling



Issue 3 Spring 2026



Haddenham's Rose & Thistle, closed, but residents seek to re-establish it as a local thriving licensed venue and pub through the group Rose & Thistle Reborn

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S PUBS NEED THE PLANNING PROCESS TO DO ITS JOB

Without clear, enforceable policies protecting pubs as community assets, they are perilously vulnerable.

Buckinghamshire Council is currently drafting its first Local Plan since the county's district councils were merged into a single unitary authority — a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get this right.

When the draft was published for consultation, Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe CAMRA, working alongside Milton Keynes and North Bucks branch,

found it said virtually nothing about pubs as community facilities deserving protection in their own right.

Given our previous success in securing meaningful pub protection in Wycombe District Council's local plan, and, given that national planning policy already gives pubs significant protections that the draft had simply failed to reflect, that omission needed challenging. Branch volunteers put together a comprehensive consultation response and

Continued on page 16

Newsletter of the Aylesbury Vale & Wycombe Branch of CAMRA

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This is Number Three and ...

The hospitality industry, and pubs in particular, have seen much media focus this year, with one national broadsheet having a particularly active campaign in support of our national heritage of public houses.

CAMRA, as most members are aware, is not just for old men drinking flat brown liquid (we're not, besides, if an ale is flat it is out of condition and we wouldn't be drinking it) but also very much a campaigning organization for pubs and the hospitality industry.

You cannot get our drink of choice (cask-conditioned real ales) from your local supermarket chain for less than the cost of a pint of milk. Cask-conditioned ales are only available in that most supervised of drinking environments, the pub, club, or hotel bar of licensed premises (the licensee and other staff have to pass rigorous exams to obtain a licence to sell alcohol).

Many pubs, often the livelihood and business of an individual, sometimes part of a smaller pubco, have been suffering under economic conditions imposed by external actors, from vastly increased energy prices, though crippling increases in rates, the costs of employment ... the list goes on ..., often making these businesses unviable. CAMRA nationally campaigns actively to support the industry in its fights against these pressures.

CAMRA is of course a volunteer organization, with a social aspect as well. One of the branch's social highlights is the popular annual Black Country trip: members' views on last year's trip are featured, and more members and non-members are welcome to join us on future trips. This year, the trip has been postponed from the summer, with the likelihood of being rearranged for September. With two further issues planned this year (see below) more details should be available in our summer issue.

Branch magazines play a significant role in campaigning, and our present iteration has received some notice: CAMRA has a Magazine of the Year competition, into which we were unwittingly

entered, and judged fifth from our group of eight. The judges' independent comments were heartening: *"This is only the second edition of Cask Calling and the branch has done a great job of providing lots of interesting and varied content from local news to national campaigns. It is called a newsletter but the content lends itself to more of a magazine layout with a proper front cover with a clearer masthead, main photo and minimal text. Some other design aspects of its design let the excellent content down a little e.g. the mixture of heading styles, some areas of rather small text. It would be good to have more content about branch activities and social events and some more photos of people having fun in the pub to help convey the social side of CAMRA."*

We are grateful for any feedback from our readers, welcome letters (or emails) to the editor, and will incorporate appropriate comments where we can.

The magazine relies on input from volunteers, and whilst still nascent, we aim to produce two further issues in 2026, Summer and Autumn/Winter. The final copy dates for these issues are respectively 1 July and 27 October. With increased input from within the branch and externally, the eventual aim would be to produce the magazine at least quarterly and possibly even every two months, as we develop. All without dedicated staff.

Red Acteur

Did you know?

An analysis of 34 scientific studies found that moderate drinkers lived longer than other groups



Source: Castelnuovo, S. et al. "Alcohol dosing and total mortality in men and women" (2006)



AV & W's Black Country Trip 2025

Some Members' Views

My Overview

By *Elvis Evans*

Once again the AV&W branch of CAMRA organised a coach trip to the Black Country in the West Midlands. This year there were a few new destinations to spice things up a bit. The first stop was Bearwood. This worked very well as there were about six pubs within walking distance so we were able to split up, visit one of them and none of the pubs got too overcrowded.



My first choice was the **Midland** which was (or still is) a pub under threat of closure. It was superb. I had *Black Country Bradley's Finest Golden* which was good and then *Settle Ernie's Milk Stout* which was even better. I also made a visit to the **Bear Tavern** pub but this was not as good. I had *Enville Ginger Beer* which was fine but nothing to write home about.



Other places in Bearwood are **O'Ryan's Cocktail Bar** (a restaurant where drink can only be bought if food is bought as well), the **Abbey** (a lovely building but no real beer), **Craft Inn** (keg only) and the **1000 Trades**. I didn't try any of these last four. Bearwood seems a good place to start our trip out.

Next stop was in the Blackheath / Halesowen area but somewhat north of our old stopping place at the **Waggon & Horses** in Halesowen. I think the official stop this time was the **Swan** in North Halesowen but we had been there before so a few of us went off to the *Fixed Wheel Brewery* tap which is nearer to Blackheath. I had the *Blackbeath Stout* and it was excellent.

The next stop was Wordsley and the official stop was the **Bird in Hand**. But Carl and I decided to walk to the next town first so our next stop was the **Red Lion** at Amblecote. I had *Holden's Golden Glow* which was pleasant rather than wonderful. Then we walked back to the **Bird in Hand** where I had a couple of quick halves: the *Enville Ale* and the *Bristol Beer Factory Milk Stout*. Both, again, pleasant but not wonderful.

Then to Upper Gornal and the **Jolly Crispin**. I had the *Three Tuns XXX* but, again, nothing amazing. What there was at the **Jolly Crispin** was an alleyway where, with a bit of walking, some lovely panoramic

views could be found. Also, in hindsight, the **Britannia** and its lovely beer engines was not far away but I did not know that at the time so did not go there.

Then to Lower Gornal where the official stop was the **Fountain**. Again some of us decided to visit somewhere else first and went to the **Bull's Head**. Here I had *Black Country Pig on the Wall* which was a slight improvement on the last few pubs I had gone to. Then to the **Fountain** where I had *Castle Rock Oatmeal Stout* which was excellent. The range of beers at the **Fountain** was most impressive.

On to Brierley Hill. First port of call was the **Rose & Crown** where, sad to say, the *Holden's Special* was the least wonderful beer of the day. For a pub in the *Good Beer Guide* I would have expected something a little better.



Then to the **Vine** (also known as the **Bull & Bladder**). A truly lovely pub and I had a great pint of *Batham's Mild*. Not enough time to walk the Delph locks this year which is a thing I usually do when at this pub. But never mind.

Last stop was in Sedgley at the **Beacon Hotel** and, of course, the lovely *Sarah Hughes Ruby Mild*. Without any doubt the best beer of the day. It's just a shame that Sedgley is so late on the tour when our taste buds are becoming tired. If it was the first or second stop we could really enjoy the flavour of the beer. Also a longer stop in Sedgley would work well as there are about ten other decent pubs that we don't have time to visit. Come to that, we could make Sedgley our only stop and just tour the pubs and eateries there.

Then it's back on the coach for the long run back to Buckinghamshire. This year the coach driver didn't make a long and unplanned stop at the motorway services so we got back to Wycombe only a bit late. The coach dropped us at Wycombe at midnight; there is a ten-minute walk from the drop-off point to the bus station and the last bus of the day leaves Wycombe at 24.00. So there was no chance of catching that!

Luckily the bus was also late and I reached the bus station just as the bus was leaving and so managed to get the bus home.

All in all a good day out with quite a few new pubs to try. Certainly worth it.

Black Country Outing 2025

By Tony Gabriel

Fortunately the weather was kind to us in 2025.

A new venue was chosen to start at this year, the **Bear Tavern** a community local in Bearwood, owned by *Greene King*. It

featured six real ales and a large food menu for soaking up the alcohol, as well as an outside patio area.

Close by was the **Midland**, a superb establishment, formerly an HSBC bank and owned by Amber Taverns. Friendly and comfortable it featured nine real ales.

Next came the **Swan** in Halesowen, a former Halesowen branch POTY, owned by Black Country Inns. It was very busy with locals, plus dogs were welcome.



We moved on to the **Bird in Hand**, Wordsley, which we had visited in 2024. Currently operated by RoJo Pub Co., it has a large patio garden with many pot plants, and featured six real ales.



The pub won the Dudley & South Staffs branch POTY in 2023. Wordsley is known as the birthplace of 'Our Canal Age'.

From Wordsley we went on to Upper Gornal and the **Jolly Crispin**, another pub regularly visited by us. Also under RoJo Pub Co. stewardship, it had many cask ales.

Our sixth venue was the **Fountain Inn** in Lower Gornal, another of our regularly visited venues, it is a free house with 10 changing beers, and a reputation for home-cooked food.

We moved on to Brierley Hill and initially the **Rose & Crown**, a *Holden's Brewery* pub which also serves guest ales.



From there, we moved on to the **Vine**, *Batham's Brewery* tap, also known as the **Bull and Bladder**. The pub is famed for its Mild and Bitter beers, pork scratchings and pork pies.

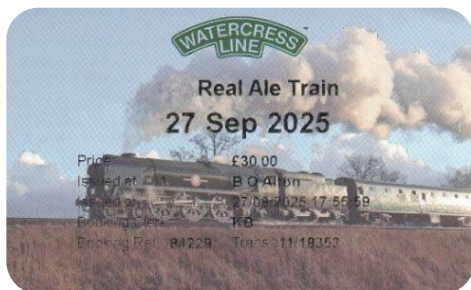
Our last port of call, we moved on to the **Beacon Hotel** in Sedgley, the outstandingly large pub, with *Sarah Hughes* tower brewery and its large garden. My choice of beer was of course the dangerously drinkable *Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild*.

And Finally

By Carl Griffin

I wouldn't be able to go into anywhere near the detail about the day that Tony and Elvis have. I didn't make notes about the beers or pubs themselves. All I can add is that I believed the day to be a vast improvement on previous editions where we spent an inordinate amount of time at the first stop (**White Horse** in Weatheroak Hill) which is itself outside of the Black Country.

The 'RAT' – Real Ale Train



On 27 September 1825 the Stockton & Darlington Railway opened — the world's first public railway to use steam locomotives. In 2025 there were many celebrations around the country of the 200th anniversary of that pioneering inaugural first journey by *Locomotion 1*.

My own tribute was a ride on the Watercress Line 'RAT' — it really was just the ticket...

The £30.00 ticket price covered two circuits of the line and a first pint. One could also order in advance from a choice of 'take-away' type food offerings to be ready for collection on first arrival at Alresford.



The Watercress Line is a heritage railway which runs throughout the year along the 10 miles from Alton to Alresford travelling through Hampshire countryside. They hold a great variety of special events including regular 'RAT' runs but for me the prospect of a beer festival on a steam train on the 200th anniversary date itself was irresistible.

The train was not due to depart until 7pm from Alton so the first challenge was to find something to do during the day ... bearing in mind it was close to my wife's birthday and she is teetotal...

... Alton, an attractive market town with a population of some 20,000, boasts at least ten pubs, four of which are listed in the *Good Beer Guide 2026*, so problem solved!

My two favourites are the **Eight Bells**, what I call a 'proper pub', where the Alresford-based *Flower Pots Perridge Pale* is unfailingly a particular joy, rubbing shoulders with a selection from four other handpumps, and the **Railway Arms** which always has a fine range including from local brewery *Triple fff*.

The latter pub, with its quirky model of a steam locomotive emerging from a tunnel above the main entrance, is appropriately within earshot of the steam whistles marking the arrival of the trains at the 'heritage side' of the station.

There's plenty of room in the four passenger carriages; the compartment seats are unallocated, but unsurprisingly the carriage next to the 'bar car' fills up quickly!



The bar car is staffed by a friendly team of volunteers working in what rather has the agreeable feel of a pub cellar (see picture). Understandably due to the constant 'locomotion' the beer has to be racked bright. The selection available on my trip comprised three from *Hop Back: Crop Circle, Citra*

and *Entire Stout* brewed in Downton, Salisbury and *Alfred's Brewery, Cipber* from Winchester, just 18 miles away from Alton — all sort of 'LocoAle'.



The ride to Alresford set off sharp at 7pm with what seemed like a full complement of passengers. It's essential to book promptly once the trips are advertised on the Watercress Line website, as tickets

soon sell out. There's a leisurely stop at Alresford station where one's pre-ordered food can be both collected and eaten before setting off on the first return trip to Alton. The two round trips take about 3½ hours with the return to Alton by 10.30pm in time for South Western Railways services to London Waterloo and other places.

We had booked to stay in Alton for a couple of days so it was for us just a short walk back to the hotel.

Incidentally, there is another, little-known, nano-brewery in the vicinity worth mentioning: *Gilbert White's Brewery* located in a 1765 brewhouse at the garden and home of the eponymous 18th century naturalist in Selborne, about 11 miles to the south of Alton. They brew small batches of about a dozen crafted ales which are all available bottle-conditioned usually in packs of three different ales — well worth seeking out.

Giles Du Boulay

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Neil Richards MBE – 01536358670

n.richards@btinternet.com

Matt Richards – paperredmedia@outlook.com

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EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

Michael Clarke (*Contributing Editor*)

pubsoffice@avw.camra.org.uk

Giles du Boulay (*Sub-editing and proofreading*)

Andrew Eastwood (*On-line News and On-line updates*)

databasCOORD@avw.camra.org.uk

Elvis Evans

Carl Griffin

Simon Heap

Richard Palmer (*Editorial Coordinator*)

editor@avw.camra.org.uk

BRANCH CONTACTS

Chairman; Pubs Officer; Social Secretary: Michael Clarke

chairman@avw.camra.org.uk;

pubsoffice@avw.camra.org.uk;

socialsecretary@avw.camra.org.uk

Secretary: Simon Heap secretary@avw.camra.org.uk

Deputy Chairman; Cider Rep: Elvis Evans

deputychairman@avw.camra.org.uk;

ciderrep@avw.camra.org.uk

Treasurer: David Roe treasurer@avw.camra.org.uk

Membership Secretary: membersec@avw.camra.org.uk

Pubs Data Coordinator; Website Coordinator:

Andrew Eastwood

databasCOORD@avw.camra.org.uk;

webmaster@avw.camra.org.uk

Cask Calling Editor: Richard Palmer

editor@avw.camra.org.uk

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Christine Harman; Eddie Harman; Tony Gabriel; Simon

Isted

Home Brewing The Next Stage

Alright, so you've now made a couple of beer kits using stuff that comes in tins. Actually, maybe you haven't but let's pretend that you have. The next step, as mentioned last time, is to make a beer using malt extract but using a recipe from a book or, maybe, looked up online.

If you haven't done that yet then I recommend you start with the *Fuller's ESB* recipe from David Line's book called *Brewing Beers Like Those You Buy*. It's a simple recipe and it works well.

Follow the instructions in the book, except that you probably won't easily find a dixie boiler these days. What you can buy is an Electrim plastic bucket with electric element to do the boiling and heating stages. This costs about £100 which is a lot for a plastic bucket with an electric kettle element inside it. It also includes a thermostat but that isn't truly necessary.

It is possible to make your own boiler using a good-quality plastic bucket, a kettle element and a tap to release the liquid. On the other hand, these boilers do sometimes appear on a well-known online auction and selling site. Certainly it's worth having a look there.

Another route is to have two or more vessels — one for the boiling stage (which could be just a very big saucepan) and also a simple plastic bucket for the fermentation stage and a third simple plastic bucket (with no kettle element or thermostat) for the mashing stage. Of course you don't need to think about any mashing stage. Yet . . .

So, to finish this thing off, here is a malt extract recipe of mine. It's for a dark mild and I know it works because I have done it.



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Home Brewing The Next Stage

You will need 2 kg medium malt extract + 200 g crushed crystal malt + 150 g crushed roast barley + 50 g Fuggles hops + 250 g ordinary white cane sugar. This results in about 20 litres with an original gravity of about 1038. The procedure is as given in any decent home-brewing book.

The malt extract and the two types of crushed grain are put into a bucket containing pre-heated water. The temperature should be about 65°C (or about 150°F). Leave for about an hour and then strain the wort into another vessel (or the same vessel cleaned out if using the very big saucepan). Add the hops and boil for at least an hour, preferably more. Strain again into the fermenting vessel and add the sugar. Wait until the temperature is down to 18°C (or 65°F) and then pitch the yeast.

About a week later the beer should be ready for bottling. If you are really clever you will spot when the fermentation switches between aerobic and anaerobic fermentation and, at that point, switch from an open fermenting vessel to a closed fermenting vessel with an air-lock on it. No, I didn't understand that bit either.

One thing to remember is that your first beers will probably not be that wonderful. Experience is needed to refine and improve the techniques. And always ask around other home brewers. Join a home brew club. Look things up online on the computer. Home brewers use the old OG method for strength because we can measure that with our hydrometers. We do not have the equipment for working out the alcohol by volume (ABV).

Elvis Evans

Letter to the Editor

I enjoyed the article by Elvis Evans on Home Brewing in the last edition of *Cask Calling*. It took me back to my first experimental brews using Boots and Tom Caxton kits. The results were drinkable and suited the limited means of a postgraduate student.

However, it was not long before I moved on to full mash brews, using crushed malts and a variety of

hops, my favourites being Fuggles and Goldings. Having started with recipes from some of the books Elvis mentioned, I soon moved on to experimenting with my own recipes and produced some quite respectable Pale Ales, Bitters, Winter Warmers and even Barley Wines.

In the process I acquired a fair amount of brewing equipment together with pressure barrels and a number of quart bottles with ceramic screw stoppers — remember those? I would be happy to pass on this equipment to any budding enthusiasts for a small charge.

I also have a collection of beer mats and labels, many from breweries sadly no longer with us, which I'd be happy to give away to an enthusiast, rather than consign them to the recycling bin. I look forward to Elvis' future articles with great interest.

Gary Wartew, High Wycombe, Bucks

Thank you for your input Gary, very much appreciated by the Editorial team. As requested, we will be happy to forward any interest from others re your offer, if sent to editor@avw.camra.org.uk.

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Caskiteers

Part 17

One morning in the tough business environment of 2026, Harry was trying to work out what that minus sign meant on the balance of the *Eaten Trifles* microbrewery bank account.

“Jakes, it looks like there’s a number 1 here that’s visited us and had too many pints of *Beard Oil Slick IPA*,” Harry said, pointing the symbol out with amused curiosity as he sat at his salvaged school desk.

“It’s a minus sign”, Jacob snapped. “Like your IQ. It means we owe the bank money.”

Harry’s fingers fondled his man-bun. “Erm, aren’t banks just convenient places for our families to store our piles of money?”

“In the good old days, my old chap, before this microbrewery started to bleed our blue blood dry”, Jacob replied, scrolling through his mobile phone. “But we’re better off than Zac, his *Sparge Hound* empire has just collapsed.”

“It was all so much better in the old days”, Harry looked wistfully into the distance at the fermenting tanks behind the bar. “Before lockdowns, the cost-of-living crisis and Mumford and Sons becoming completely uncool. Remember when Zac told us how easy it had been for him to make his first million out of craft beer ...?”

“Maybe the Hunter wellington boot is now on the other foot, he’s just messaged to say he’s popping in at twelve.”

A minuscule whiff of kiwi fruit from the mash tun took Harry’s mind back to those crazy, innocent days when Zac had tried to get them signed up to his get-even-richer-quicker way of doing business.

It was 2019 and Zac Cholmondeley, a fellow chum from public school, had opened his microbrewery, *Sparge Hound*, further along Shackney High Street. Although Zac was late to the craft beer game, his microbrewery had grown at a rapid rate, expanding next door into the **Smashed Avocado** café and opening a canning line that kept half of Shackney’s graphic artists employed to come up with wacky, lurid street-art-inspired designs of alien canines for *Sparge Hound’s* canned beers.

Zac had invited Jacob and Harry, as well as all the other Shackney craft beer bar owners who’d been to his school, for a brand bootcamp. Zac leapt

around the stage by the bar, yelling about his “blooming bonkers” personal brand, screaming that it translated into “lunatic beers that literally rewire your noggin”, using ten times the normal quantity of “blow-your-brains-out” hops.

Jacob was enraptured but Harry was bored stiff, wondering whether Zac’s success was less to do with any of this branding nonsense and more

attributable to his glamorous influencer girlfriend, Tilly. He’d spotted her pink-clad figure stalking around the brewery equipment at the back. Harry slipped off to test his best chat-up patter on Tilly.

“Erm, I know what that is you’re taking photos of, it’s a smash tun”, Harry said, sauntering up to Tilly. “I’m a craft beer brewer too.”

“Oh dear, I thought you might be something more interesting”, Tilly replied, holding her phone in her hand and filming the stainless-steel vessel. “But I do like the way these metal things — mash tun by the way — are so shiny I can see my reflection in them, and film it for my Insta.” She pouted,

The Caskiteers



Caskiteers - Part 17

admiring her blonde hair, large hoop earrings and blindingly white trainers, and speaking to Harry via her likeness in the mash tun.

“I expect you’ll be making a video about whatever’s brewing in here.” Harry knocked his knuckles on the vessel, which produced a hollow ring. “Cripes. It’s empty.”

“Oh, silly man.” Tilly gave Harry an affectionate tap on the arm. “They’re all empty. Zac doesn’t know a bean about brewing beer. This whole set-up is just for me and my awesome videography skills. Zac gets his beer tankered down from *Blandweiser*, doesn’t everyone?”

Harry knew he was well and truly back in 2026 when Zac downed his third *Twitter Pilon Quintuple Sour* in 20 minutes.

“All on the house, mate”, Harry said. “You’ve been through hell losing your business.”

“Maybe slow down a little”, Jacob cautioned, “or we’ll be losing ours.”

Tilly sat with Jacob, Harry and Zac on *Eaten Trifles*’ battered antique oak communal table. “This beer — it’s so Insta!” she squealed.

“The *Flemish Phlegm Gose*?” Ruthie the Glaswegian brewer grunted, pouring more of the green liquid into Tilly’s glass and topping up Zac’s.

“Totes”, Tilly replied, filming herself downing the drink with a selfie stick. “Now to business, Zac, remember why we’re here.”

Zac looked even more confused than four pints of *Twitter Pilon Quintuple Sour* could explain. “Cadge a few beers off my old muckers?”

“No”, Tilly replied, “Project Humble. For the blog?”

“Youse should be humble”, Ruthie said, “all those people in your company thrown out on the dole.” She returned to the brewery to fetch even more beer.

“Do you mind if I borrow that?” Zac replied, stroking his beard.

Zac immediately switched into presentation mode, Tilly filming on her phone, and burst into tears. Between sobs he managed to utter the words “truly sorry”, “being helped out by my good mates”, “public didn’t understand our ambition to redefine the taste of beer”, and “more gutted than the haddock we can’t serve in our pubs anymore”.

Jacob broke into a round of applause after Tilly finished filming. “Zac, let us help, come and work here at *Eaten Trifles*.”

Ruthie was taken aback so much she poured a half of *Power Bank USB ESB* straight into Tilly’s lap. “Aye, must be awfy hard, losin aw youse’s siller — when youse were used tae havin so much o’ the stuff.”

“Well, it’s tough but it certainly helps to have the fifty million still in my father’s bank from when I sold out to the venture capitalists three years ago” Zac declared.

“Naturally”, Jacob oozed.

Ruthie grabbed Zac by his rugby shirt lapels and dunked him into the next batch of fermenting *Flemish Phlegm Gose*.

Tilly followed, phone aloft. “That’s sooo Insta!”

Charlie Mackle



A TOUR AT CHILTERN BREWERY



Last year *Chiltern Brewery* resumed their monthly tours after a lengthy gap. With their 45th anniversary year coming to a close I decided to sign up for their last tour of the year which took place in November.

I arrived at the brewery 30 minutes early and was the first to arrive. I was offered a complimentary drink, so I went for their *Dark Cask Special* (4.5%) their November small batch release, it was a glorious chorus of malts (Lager, Maris Otter, Munich and Chocolate) which helped give its distinct roasty character profile, loosely inspired by Dunkel lagers.

Before long, the tour commenced with the current brewery co-director, Tom Jenkinson, acting as our guide.



The brewery site was formerly a farm, and over the years the brewing facilities have expanded, until it covered the whole site in 2010. They generally produce 10,000–12,000 pints a week, six beers at a time.

Tom took us to the mash tun. He informed us that when his father, Richard, set up the brewery back in 1980, he had to source equipment from the milk industry and former breweries. One vessel which he acquired from Bass was 80ft high, which he had to cut down to size so it could fit inside.

Tom stated in recent years, the malt they source is grown regeneratively and locally from the nearby Waddesdon Estate, and all their beers use a Maris Otter malt base. Meanwhile, the hops are mainly from the Herefordshire/Worcestershire border, where the likes of Fuggles, Goldings and Challenger hops are primarily utilized for most of their beers.

Other hop varieties are used for their small batch releases, that they produce using their pilot kit which creates enough beer for 10 firkins.

After guiding us through the intricacies of the mashing and boiling process, Tom took us to the newly-built warehouse that was completed two years ago, which houses a range of square fermenters and six conditioning tanks of different sizes. Apparently, during fermentation they always overshoot the strength of their beers a little so they can work their way down to the required ABV by flushing through excess sparge/liquor, which usually takes 2–3 attempts. After a week in the fermenters the liquor is transferred to the conditioning tanks with more yeast added for secondary fermentation and carbonation.

Before long the guided tour of the brewery was over, and we were brought to the function room for a beer and food tasting.

Four beers were presented to us, along with a range of their beer infused food products, such as their two cheeses, Terrick Truckle made with their beer mustard and Beechwood Beer Cheese blended with *Beechwood Best Bitter* (4.2%), a chutney infused with their *Three Hundred's Dark Old Ale* (5%) and a cake made with *Bodger's Barley Wine* (8.5%).

A TOUR AT CHILTERN BREWERY

The first beer we drank was *Chiltern Ale* (3.7%), which ironically was their first ever release from 1980. Light and sessional, with a simple blend of Maris Otter malt and Goldings hops that gives a gentle honeyed flavour, making it an ideal aperitif for the tasting session.

Next, we sampled some *Beechwood Best Bitter* (4.2%), their landmark product which made its debut in 1982 and helped put the brewery on the map. Profoundly bitter, with hints of fruit and oak that helps the beer live up to its name, while the aftertaste was warming and slightly spicy due to the use of Fuggles in the brew.



Out of all the beers I tried that day, this was the best pairing with the cheeses and chutney as it had the right balance of flavour.

We soon took things up a notch and tried some *Dear Mr. Porter* (6.3%) one of their latest small batch releases, an export style India porter made from four types of malt, and a blend of classic and new English hops. Upon sipping, I was met with a prominent combination of roasted malt and a dry bitterness on the palate followed by a kaleidoscope of flavours including chocolate, grapes, caramel, coffee and burnt toast followed by a warming alcoholic hit that blended well with the other flavours.

Tom informed us that by adding more ingredients it helped to give it more strength and character in flavour.

For our last beer we tasted some *Bodger's Barley Wine* (8.5%) which was first brewed in 1990 to mark the brewery's 10th anniversary. A barley wine

in the classical sense, it is a homage to the estate brewers of the 18th and 19th centuries who brewed beers to a high strength, in the absence of wine. It had a big malt kick with double the ingredients of *Beechwood Best Bitter* (4.2%). Although pale in colour it was deceptively powerful in strength, viscous in mouthfeel, along with a noticeable fruity element offset by a bitter lacing of Fuggles and Goldings. This was rounded off with a warming aftertaste. It was close to wine as you can get with a beer and made an ideal pairing with their Bodger's-infused fruit cake.

The tour overall was memorable and enjoyable. Tom was an incredibly informative and knowledgeable host, the food and beer tasting session that followed helped give us a deeper understanding about what goes into their glorious range of beers.

Mike Goldwater
Enfield & Barnet CAMRA

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British Real Ale Pub Adventure Goes Local

Simon “Si” Everitt a.k.a. BRAPA (British Real Ale Pub Adventure) is a man on a mission. That mission; which he chose to accept on the 6 April 2014, was to visit every pub in the *Good Beer Guide* (GBG). No mean feat, considering it’s only been accomplished twice before.

When a Twitter post linking to Si’s blog showed a green-highlighted map of Oxfordshire with mere freckles of white and the names Chinnor and Thame standing out like the Statues of Gondor, I knew I had to make contact with him to assist him on a potentially tricky tick-path which included Bledlow, Lewknor, Watlington and Chearsley.

Reliant on public transport and the odd Uber, Simon has occasionally had the help of a small number of fans and followers who have ferried him around their locales in order to ease his quest to visit pubs in further reaches.

And so it was on a blustery Saturday morning in earlier October, as the clocks struck thirteen (10:57am), that he alighted at Princes Risborough station meeting me, his ‘Des’ for the day to escort him around the south-westernmost parts of the Aylesbury Vale & Wycombe branch.

The plan was to begin at the day’s early opener and pub closest to the station, the **Lions of Bledlow**. The website and Google stated 11:30am opening, so after a brief wait, we stood outside, but realising there was little life occurring within, we decided to enact Plan B.

Chinnor’s **Red Lion** wouldn’t open until midday, which would necessitate a further wait, so we decided to hotfoot it all the way to Watlington and the **Spire & Spoke**, which became the first pub of the day.

The other side of the M40, in South Oxfordshire CAMRA branch’s patch, older readers will remember this as the **Carriers Arms**, an old-school pub with a super beer garden view of the Chiltern Hills. Modernised inside and out, this was busy at

midday with cyclists and families enjoying coffee and cake. Simon put this back to where it should be by selecting his first pint of the day — **Amwell Springs Chairman** — from an impressive five local ale line-up. As it was too busy inside to find a seat, we chose one of the covered outdoor booths which granted respite from the residual effects of Storm Amy, which plagued us for most of the day.

Working our way back whence we came, we stopped off at Lewknor’s **Leathern Bottel**, a food-oriented **Brakspear** pub which has only missed entry in a solitary GBG (1980 according to a scribe on Twitter), and that being due to a change of licensee which precluded selection. **Brakspear Gravity** plus two **Young’s** beers (*Original* and *Special*) were on offer. Simon opted for the former, which appeared more than well-kept, with some impressive-looking lacings as he made his way through it sip by sip, while we marvelled at the horseracing badges hanging from the ceiling beams.

Back in the car, and onto Chinnor where we stopped at the **Red Lion** and were served by, and were able to chat to, landlady Nichola Dixon. A robust four-ale line-up with **Brains Rev James Reserve**, **XT 3**, **Kent Brewery Goldings Bitter** and national beer du jour **Bass**. Simon had a **Rev James** and I joined him with just a half. Although not a big fan of malty beers, the condition was superb, as you would expect from an Oak Taverns pub, and Simon found this his highlight so far, being enviable of it being my local!

Returning to the **Lions of Bledlow**, now firmly opened, we parked out the back and wended our way through the garden. A Midsomer Murders favourite, Simon was impressed with the timeless quality of the interior, as well as a firmly local special beer — **Chiltern Kop Hill Ale** — which I explained the background too. We agreed that this was the kind of pub you’d take an American friend to, to demonstrate a traditional British pub, albeit the ambience was somewhat lacking on this visit.

British Real Ale Pub Adventure Goes Local

Thame was our next stop, and one of *Hook Norton's* most southerly houses, the **Falcon**. Parking isn't the easiest here, and the front of the pub was coned off; as we arrived, a band was setting up to play out the front of the pub. This was because it was the pub's last day of trading under the outgoing tenants, who had been *in situ* for 20 years, and were now opting for a well-earned rest! (The *Falcon* has since re-opened following refurbishment.) Busy with a throng of locals, we managed to grab a table away from the bar; Simon opted for a pint of *Hook Norton Hooky Mild* from a choice which included *Hook Norton Hooky Gold* and *Vale VPA*, though he struggled, as the quality was a little on the tired side. His disappointment took a further turn when he ventured into the Gents and saw a man seated in the sole cubicle, trousers half-mast and the door wide open!

We made an exit and took the short drive down Park Street to the **Cross Keys**, parking outside the elegant War Memorial gardens. This pub turned out to be the pub of the day, its reputation perhaps preceding it as a former regional Pub of the Year and having previously made the National final sixteen. As in the **Red Lion**, we were able to chat to the bar staff and locals more than amiably — one of the former, being Nicki from the **Red Lion's** daughter. With an eight-ale line-up, Simon chose a pint of *Oakham Citra* which went down well after the pint at the **Falcon**, and like the **Red Lion**, we agreed that this was a pub we would have happily stayed at a lot longer. I had my first non-alcoholic beer here — *Adnam's Ghost Ship* 0.5% — after having previously been on Coke Zero or Diet Coke (a reason why I didn't sleep that well that night!),

part of a generous alcohol-free selection, a thing I've noticed pubs are starting to pay more attention to.


The next stop was a pub that hadn't made the cut for GBG 2026, despite being in the previous edition, that I'd suggested visiting as we were close. One of three **Fuller's** pubs, in close(ish) proximity, along with the **Six Bells** in Thame and **Crown** in Cuddington, the **Bell** in Chearsley is a cosy thatched-roof pub-restaurant set back from a triangular village green; this is another village pub that we are extremely lucky to have in our branch, combining a real community feel with traditional home-cooked food. *Dark Star Hophead* did the trick for Simon here.

Simon's final pub on the day's tick list was Haddenham's **Kings Head** where I dropped him off, the call of the wife beckoning me back home. I subsequently learned that he enjoyed a *Timothy Taylor Landlord* before a sobering walk to Thame and Haddenham Parkway for his train back into London, where he managed further refreshment at Kings Cross Station's **Parcel Yard** with a *Fuller's ESB*, before his train northward to York and a nightcap at the **York Tap**. I was content with a pint of *Bass* back at the **Red Lion** later on, but we agreed on a Part 2 in the New Year, with Cadsden, Oakley and Brill yet to be ticked, so watch this space...

David Slade

BRAPA's exploits can be followed at www.simeyeveritt.nix.site/brapa, @StymieSi on Twitter/X and @StymieSi on Untappd

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BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S PUBS NEED THE PLANNING PROCESS TO DO ITS JOB

Continued from page 1

distributed it widely — to MPs, councillors and parish councils across the county. Supportive replies came back from all directions.

FIGHTING FOR THE LOCAL: CAMRA HAS ITS SAY

Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe branch wrote directly to Greg Smith MP, and his office helped arrange what followed: a face-to-face meeting on 2nd December with Mr Steve Bambrick, Corporate Director for Planning, Growth and Sustainability, and Cllr Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning. We made the case for clear and enforceable pub protection policies — the kind that deter developers from making applications in the first place, rather than leaving communities to fight each battle pub by pub.

Both Mr Bambrick and Cllr Strachan listened carefully and indicated they would give serious consideration to our arguments. The next draft of the Local Plan will show whether that sympathy translates into action. It won't be finalised until 2028, but the direction it takes in the coming months matters enormously.

WHAT PLANNING DECISIONS HAVE COST US

The cost of many planning decisions can be counted in lost pubs.

The **Rose and Thistle** in Haddenham — reputedly the largest village in England — was granted change of use in March 2024, using a viability report challenged by the local CAMRA branch in its objection to the application. It leaves a community of that size with just two pubs. Nearby Wendover sustains six thriving pubs, Aston Clinton has four. A local campaign group is still fighting to reopen the building.

The **Rose and Crown** in Stone was that village's only pub; change of use was granted in July 2023, with unviability argued partly on the back of a previous planning permission that had already

allowed the kitchen to be demolished and the car park built over.

The **Bottle and Glass** in Gibraltar received conversion approval in July 2025 despite local objections.

The **Bernard Arms** in Great Kimble closed in 2013. Over the years that followed, the building fell into serious disrepair — and by the time a change of use application for housing came forward, that very deterioration was cited as evidence that restoration was impractical.



Boarded up Bernard Arms before demolition

Permission was granted within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the building was demolished in 2019, and the site still sits empty with the promised housing unbuilt. The parish has lost three of its four pubs in the last 25 years.

Across the border in South Oxfordshire, the **Shepherd's Crook** at Crowell had an initial change of use application refused on community grounds, only for a near-identical application to be granted two years later in November 2023, with very little appearing to have changed except the length of the closure. Overturning a previous refusal of planning permission so easily undermines the authority of the whole process.

There should be no reward for a strategy of keeping a pub closed long enough, or opening it only sporadically, so that the lack of trade becomes

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S PUBS NEED THE PLANNING PROCESS TO DO ITS JOB

evidence of unviability. Let the building deteriorate and the cost of restoration becomes an argument for conversion.

The **King William IV** in Speen has been closed since 2015. Change of use has been refused, a local campaign group has lobbied hard, the local MP has been involved — and still it sits closed, with no trading attempted.

The **Mash Inn** in Radnage has survived planning challenges but remains shut. The **Derehams Inn** in Loudwater — a former *Good Beer Guide* regular — has resisted change of use applications, though whether a recent approval retaining some pub element will result in an actual reopening remains to be seen. The **Unicorn** in Cublington is a 17th-century building whose local community raised enough funds to offer its market value as a pub — yet it has been closed for over a year.

The **Pink and Lily** in Lacey Green closed in March 2025. The **Frog** at Skirmett closed in January 2024, citing refurbishment, and remained shut throughout the year. The **Prince Albert** in Frieth has been closed since August 2025. Our branch has recorded 18 long-term closures of licensed premises in the last two years alone.

THE GOOD NEWS

The **Chandos Arms** in Oakley was purchased by the Parish Council. The **Ash Tree** in Ashendon was bought by local residents. The **Seven Stars** in Dinton and the **Russell Arms** in Butler's Cross are both community-run. These pubs are open because their communities refused to wait, and they demonstrate something important: given the chance, people will fight for their local.

Viability assessments must take these models seriously rather than treating them as theoretical footnotes. And when the right people take on a pub, the results can confound any assessment. The **Cross Keys** in Thame was widely written off as a lost cause. Peter and Trudi Lambert took it on and turned it around within months, and it's standing room only most evenings. Our recent branch Pubs of the Year tell a similar story — the **Bird in Hand** in Princes Risborough and the

Rose and Crown in High Wycombe among them. Pubs live and die on the energy of the people running them, something a viability report compiled at a desk will never fully capture.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING FOR

Our submission calls for the Local Plan to establish that change of use should only be granted in exceptional circumstances, after genuine examination of all alternatives including community ownership, and with assessments that draw on real hospitality expertise rather than property valuation alone. We want stronger policies addressing buildings kept out of use for extended periods. And we want those policies enforced — not left as well-intentioned but toothless words that developers learn to wait out.

CAMRA nationally has produced strong resources to support exactly this kind of campaign — a model planning policy and guidance on challenging viability reports, both available through the CAMRA website.

All this work — the consultation response, the lobbying, the meetings, the years of accumulated casework that makes arguments like these possible — is done by unpaid volunteers who care about pubs and the communities they serve. It is painstaking, unglamorous work that rarely makes the front page, even of CAMRA branch magazines.

The next draft of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan will be the test. Our area has already lost too many pubs to planning decisions that failed to weigh their value to the communities they served. The meeting in December was encouraging — but encouragement is not policy, and policy without enforcement changes nothing.

Your local CAMRA branches are fighting for your local — and your support in lobbying the council and local planning officers when pubs are threatened is also vital.

Aylesbury Vale & Wycombe CAMRA

Branch Annual General Meeting 2026

The Branch held its Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 18 March 2026 at the **Hop Pole** in Aylesbury.

The 12 Branch members attending heard from Mike Clarke, the Branch Chairman whose report is summarised below.

The meeting elected the Branch Committee for 2026/27 along with its officers.

Mike Clarke was re-elected as the Branch Chairman, Elvis Evans the Vice-Chairman, Dave Roe the Treasurer and Simon Heap as Secretary. A full list of officers and committee members can be seen below:

- (a) Chairman—Mike Clarke
- (b) Vice-Chairman—Elvis Evans
- (c) Secretary—Simon Heap
- (d) Treasurer—David Roe
- (e) Membership Secretary
- (f) Pubs Data Co-ordinator—Andrew Eastwood
- (g) Good Beer Guide Submissions Co-ordinator—Mike Clarke
- (h) Pub Protection Officer—Mike Clarke
- (i) Pub Promotions and Awards Co-ordinator—Mike Clarke
- (j) Cider Representative—Elvis Evans
- (k) Clubs Co-ordinator—Carl Griffin
- (l) Social Secretary—Mike Clarke
- (m) Branch Contact—Mike Clarke
- (n) Website Co-ordinator—Andrew Eastwood
- (o) Eddie Harman
- (p) Christine Harman
- (q) Tony Gabriel
- (r) Simon Isted

One of the highlights of the evening was the announcement of the results of the online poll for the Branch Pub of the Year 2026 which saw the **Hop Pole**, Aylesbury and the **Lions of Bledlow** crowned Joint Winners with the **King's Head**, Aylesbury being named runner up.

Chairman's Report: Summary

The branch faces another challenging year for pubs and breweries, with tough economic conditions showing no sign of easing. Nationally, the picture is bleak: *Black Sheep* has gone into administration, *Sharp's* has been closed by its multinational parent *Molson Coors*, and even *BrewDog* has imploded. Locally, *Brazenors* has closed its Cressex tap room. Against this, the branch is fortunate to retain outstanding local breweries in *Chiltern*, *Rebellion*, *Vale* and *XT*, with *Chiltern's* expansion producing an increasing range of one-off and short-run brews.

Pubs continue to face threats from both economic pressures and predatory developers. Business rates remain a significant burden, with further inflationary pressures predicted. Planning protection is the critical line of defence, including the ability to designate pubs as Assets of Community Value, though this legislation remains weaker than campaigners would like. The branch took direct action on this front, joining Milton Keynes and North Bucks branch in a face-to-face meeting with Buckinghamshire Council in December, pressing Corporate Director Steve Bambrick and Cabinet Member Cllr Peter Strachan for stronger pub protection in the emerging local plan. The meeting was constructive and the branch hopes to see meaningful improvements when the plan is published.

This kind of advocacy — reviewing council documents, drafting consultation responses, attending meetings — illustrates how much personal time volunteers contribute. They do so, the chairman noted, because of genuine belief in CAMRA's cause: a love of pubs and real ale, and a commitment to continuing the fight to preserve both.

Despite relatively modest numbers of active members, the branch continues to punch above its weight. Many so-called invisible members contribute quietly through pub updates and beer scores, while email engagement with the wider membership

Branch Annual General Meeting 2026

remains exceptionally high. The branch maintains strong relationships with the local press, particularly the *Bucks Free Press*, and receives a steady stream of enquiries from communities seeking to save threatened locals. Particular thanks were extended to Andrew Eastwood for his ongoing work maintaining the Pubzilla database and to Simon Heap for secretarial duties.

Two branch initiatives are progressing. A beer festival in Aylesbury is under active discussion, and the new magazine *Cask Calling* has now published two well-received issues, with a third due by the end of March.

On branch pubs, several remain closed with uncertain futures, including the **Derehams Inn** in Loudwater, the **Pink and Lily**, and the **Unicorn** in Cublington. However, the **Old Millwrights Arms** takes the Most Improved Pub award, and two long-closed pubs — the **Old Ship** in Cadmore End and the **Bell** in Hardwick, reopened by former **Whip** landlord Nick Smith — are set to welcome drinkers again.

The branch remembers with sadness two friends lost this year: long-time active member Mike Clemence of Wendover, and Colin Staines, a member from the branch's earliest days.

Ruby Anniversary Ale, 2025 brew, Bottle No. 1!

Chiltern Brewery's Ruby Anniversary Ale (7.2% ABV, bottle-conditioned) was brewed in 2013 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of CAMRA. The Ale was such a success that a special individually numbered, limited edition was re-brewed for the brewery's own 45-year celebrations in 2025.

On Sunday 8 March at 9am Chiltern released online a special allocation of Ruby Anniversary Ale from the 2025 brew, being the low and special-numbered bottles, just 108 of them, which they had specially set aside.

As CAMRA Brewery Liaison Officer for Chiltern Brewery I was keen to obtain a special collectors' bottle for myself and to my delight was successful in securing bottle no. 1.

In the picture above Tom Jenkinson, partner in the brewery, is seen handing over the bottle, whilst for a bit of fun I brought along a bottle of the original 2013 CAMRA 40th anniversary brew from my beer cellar ...

Giles du Boulay



A VOLUNTEER'S VIEW

I volunteer to work at a couple of CAMRA beer festivals, mainly GBBF (the Great British Beer Festival) when being held, and the Cambridge Beer Festival. I also volunteer at the Marlow FC beer festival (which is not a CAMRA festival).

Personally, I volunteer as a steward at the CAMRA festivals. At the Marlow FC festival I am part of the organising committee.

At CAMRA festivals there are various roles available, so if you don't fancy working behind a bar there are other jobs just as vital. Glasses is one, Stewarding is another (you do not need a SIA (Security Industry Authority) badge, though having one does make the experience better in my opinion). On your time off at most CAMRA festivals your entry to the festival is free.

If you feel like volunteering, look up the festival online and fill in the application form that is usually to be found there. You will also normally find a list of roles available at each festival.

You can volunteer for one session or the whole festival if you wish. It's voluntary so there is no pressure to volunteer for the whole festival.

Some festivals help with the cost of accommodation with a subsidy. Some also give food and drink tokens to staff depending on the hours you work.

In my experience you will always find a warm welcome and you will learn skills that may be useful in your everyday life.

I would also say that at most festivals you will find that you are part of a family.

I have over the years made lots of friends who I may only see once a year, but we always have a laugh. The most important thing to remember: enjoy yourself and never be afraid to ask. As I have said before we are a family and look after each other. Another benefit, after the festival closes there

is often a chance to socialise and sample some beer or cider.

It is something I recommend as a way of meeting new people who love real ale and cider.

For some CAMRA beer festivals you do need to be a CAMRA member, and a list of CAMRA festivals is available on the CAMRA website.

At the Marlow FC beer festival the only role available to volunteers is serving behind the bar, which can be a useful and fulfilling experience for a first-time volunteer. If you work more than 4 hours you will get some food and a pint or two. To volunteer for the Marlow FC beer festival which is on 29–30 May, please email: simonisted@icloud.com.

Other ways of volunteering within CAMRA include being a distributor for the Branch magazine, *Cask Calling*. This usually involves taking copies to a few pubs in your vicinity, sometimes to refill a stand that we can provide, often an opportunity for a chat with the publican and others present, also (heaven forbid) have a jar or two. If this form of volunteering is of interest, initially please contact the Branch Secretary at: secretary@avw.camra.org.uk.

Simon Isted

Did you know?

Almost three-quarters of UK drinkers have tried a low or no alcohol product, with 32% choosing these products 'semi-regularly'



Source: portmangroup.org.uk. "Consumer views on Low and No Alcohol products" (2022)



Mike Clemence

(1939–2025)

It was with great sadness that we learned last October of the passing, shortly before his 86th birthday, of Mike Clemence (see photo on a trip to Belgium in 2008).

Mike was a much respected and popular member of our local CAMRA group for many years.

He delivered our then branch magazine *Swan Supping* to some 20 pubs and venues around Wendover (where he lived), Weston Turville and Aston Clinton.

He sponsored casks at our branch beer festivals in aid of the Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity. Mike was a keen participant in socials and beer trips all round the UK and abroad.

He especially loved combining such jaunts with trips on heritage lines like the Severn Valley Railway, the Watercress Line, the Llangollen Railway and the North Yorkshire Moors Railway.

Mike had a lifelong passion for steam engines — he even had a model one running round his back garden!



He was an active member of both the Vale of Aylesbury Model Engineering Society (VAMES) and the Quanton Railway Society at the Buckinghamshire Railway centre where he not only ran his G-scale trains to entertain visitors but also drove one of the miniature locos on the VAMES track (see photo below left, taken in 2001).

Mike, a lifelong bachelor, enjoyed a long and successful career at The Equitable Life Assurance Society in London at first and then in Aylesbury. Amongst tributes paid by his former

colleagues such phrases as ‘a true gentleman’, ‘always had a smile for everyone’, ‘fair-minded’ and ‘fondly remembered’ sum up the affection they had for him.

Mike’s other interests were wide-ranging including photography, the history of recorded sound, cinema and theatre organs including of course *Wurlitzers* (or mighty ‘Whirlytisers’ as he used to call them with his characteristic wordplay humour) and music of all kinds. He even took up guitar lessons in his seventies.

Whether as a member, chairman, secretary or treasurer of the fair number of societies and groups he belonged to over the years Mike was always sociable, ready to join in and to help. He is much missed by his wide circle of friends.

Giles Du Boulay

Pub and Brewery News

Aylesbury

The **Old Millwrights Arms** reopened in mid-February having been closed for a month for refurbishment. See elsewhere in this issue for news of an award made to the pub.

The recently refurbished **Honey Bee** in Fairford Leys has been awarded Marston's Partnership Pub of the Year.

Charter which closed in June 2025 has reopened as **Peg & Grill** an Indian grill restaurant. This is their second site following the original in Birmingham.

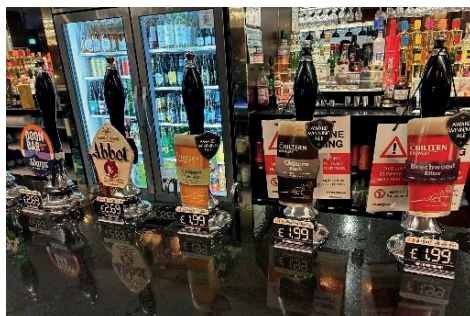
Beaconsfield

The **Lion of Beaconsfield**, formerly the **Red Lion** in Knotty Green, purchased by a local community group (Richie, Daniel and Charles) from developers who had secured it from **Punch Taverns** in 2020, have indicated in an open letter (available on their website) their appreciation of the letters they received in support of their ACV application, announced their plans for 'gentle improvements to the space in the near future' and introduced their new General Manager, Jessie Tsang.



The Lion of Beaconsfield

With many years experience in hospitality, when at the **Old Garrison** in Shoeburyness, Jessie received the 2018 Casque Marque Award and was previously at the **Green Man**, Denham, a GBG entry, from 2019 to 2022. Currently the **Lion** features three changing cask ales, with plans to introduce a fourth, **Carlsberg Marston's Hobgoblin Ruby**.



The Chiltern Beaconsfield's real ale range

The **White Horse** in the old town closed in January. The pub is part of the Bunning & Price group of pub restaurants.

A new JD Wetherspoon, the **Chiltern**, opened on 13 of January in the new town. The building was originally a cinema but had most recently been a Prezzo restaurant.

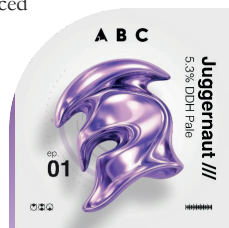
In connection to this the **Hope & Champion** at Beaconsfield services is up for let. JD Wetherspoon had put it up for sale in 2022, but it was removed from sale in August 2023. The pub closed at the beginning of January with all the staff remaining with Wetherspoons, the majority going to the **Chiltern**.

Bovingdon Green

The **Royal Oak** closed at the end of September. The lease was advertised in July 2025 by Fleurets and is now showing as sold subject to contract on their website.

Brill

Vale Brewery have announced an upgrade to the design and identity of ABC, their monthly beer series, with the ethos 'if Vale is the classics, ABC is the lab', with new formats will all be rolled out over the next 12 months.



Pub and Brewery News

The first beer will be *Juggernaut*, a 5.3% DDH Pale loaded with Simcoe, El Dorado and Krush, so expect tropical fruit, citrus peel and sticky pine.

Cadmore End

A planning application to convert the **Tree House Hotel** (formerly the **Bluebell**) into a yoga retreat and Hindu spirituality centre has been submitted to Buckinghamshire Council.

Cadsden

The **Plough** closed in late October. This was originally said to be as a result of a family wedding, but the pub's website now says it is closed for refurbishment.

Flackwell Heath

The **Stag** reopened, after a short closure for refurbishment, at the end of October. The new landlord was most recently the head barman at the **Spade Oak**.

New tenants have taken over the **Three Horseshoes**.

A planning application to demolish the **British Legion** building and replace it with a three-storey block of nine flats has been refused by Buckinghamshire Council. The club closed in September 2020.

Frieth

The **Prince Albert** has been put up for sale by *Brakspears*. The pub closed suddenly at the end of August 2025.

Gibraltar

A planning application for the **Bottle & Glass** has been approved by Buckinghamshire Council for a change of use to a single dwelling house. Further planning and listed building applications are awaiting a decision. The pub closed in October 2023.

Haddenham

A campaign has been launched to reopen the **Rose & Thistle** under community ownership. The pub closed in March 2019, and Buckinghamshire

Council approved a change of use to a single dwelling-house in March 2024.

Hazelmere

The **Crown** reopened in November following a six-week closure for internal and external refurbishment. It now operates under *Greene King's* Hive brand.

High Wycombe

The **Antelope** in Church Square and the **Three Tuns** in the High Street have been sold by RedCat Hospitality to Admiral Taverns, who describe themselves as the UK's leading community (not community-owned) pub group. The **Antelope**, whose website describes it as a pub & nightclub closed 21 February with no indication of reopening after the tenants moving to the **Beech Tree**.

Star Pubs advertised the lease of the **Beech Tree** in conjunction with a major internal and external refurbishment. Buckinghamshire Council approved a planning application for the work in August 2025. The pub reopened on 6 March run by the former tenants of the **Antelope**.

The **Spindle & Thread** closed for a month in mid-February for refurbishment. It reopened in March following the refurbishment, with the 'Locals' Bar' offering Sky and TNT sports, pool and darts, quiz nights and themed parties. The 'Family Lounge' is a relaxed place for grown-ups and kids, for mid-week treats and special occasions.

The **Snug** closed on 21st February. It had opened in 2011 following the closure of the **Glass House** which had replaced the **Anchor** in 2005.

The **High Wycombe Social Club** reopened on 2nd February having been extensively refurbished. The upper floor is due to house the Wycombe museum. The club originally closed in January 2025.

Long Crendon

It is understood that *XT Brewery* is now under new ownership. More details will follow in the next edition of *Cask Calling*.

Pub and Brewery News

XT has also announced the release of two new *Animal* bottled beers. *Golden Fleece*, a 4.3% Golden Ale and *Soul of the Tiger*, a 4.3 Amber Ale.

Loudwater

Good Beer Guide regular the **General Havelock** has had an internal refurbishment.

A planning application in respect of the **Derehams Inn** to demolish the existing sheds at the rear, and construct a single-storey rear and side extension to accommodate further seating to the existing public house, first floor rear and side extension to add one more self-contained unit with associated internal alterations, bin and cycle stores and outside seating area has been approved by Buckinghamshire Council. The pub has been closed since August 2021.

An appeal against the refusal of a planning application to convert the **Happy Union** into a 16-bed HMO was successful with conditions. The pub closed in May 2021.

Marlow

The Royal British Legion club voted for closure at a Special General Meeting in September. This meant the closure of their bar which had recently been rebranded as the **General**. The club reopened in December as the **Rose Club**, which describes itself as ‘a warm, community-focused venue offering live events, fresh homemade food and a great atmosphere. It’s a place where anyone of any age is welcome. Family friendly and full of local spirit, the perfect spot to relax and connect’. The club will normally have one real ale available, *Rebellion IPA*.

Marlow Bottom

Rebellion Brewery received retrospective planning permission for change of use to three storage buildings, Stores 1, 5, and 6, previously used for agricultural machinery maintenance, fertilizer storage, and farm workshop/vehicle storage until being taken into brewery use in 2015, 2019, and 2021 respectively.

The freehold of the **Three Horseshoes** has been advertised for sale by Fleurets. It had reopened as

a Pan Asian restaurant called **Agnii** but has been closed since June 2025.

Medmenham

The **Dog & Badger** has been bought by Amarone Bar and Restaurant Limited and reopened just prior to Christmas styled as the **Dog & Badger by Amarone**. An Italian restaurant, combined with a modern bar area. The pub had been closed since March 2024. Currently no ales or other beers are listed as being available.

Oakley

The **Chandos Arms** closed in October following difficulties with the previous tenant. While the community-owned pub seeks a new tenant, the local community volunteers have come forward to clean, restock and reopen on an *ad hoc* basis, with visits from local food trucks, and favoured televised national sports events such as the recent Six Nations competition. Details are updated on their Facebook page.

Penn

Midsomer Murder fans may have recognized another of our local pubs, which appeared in an episode (Series 24, Episode 2), which aired on ITV1 December 30.

So, a challenge for Branch members that are also fans: when you recognize a featured pub in any of the many episodes, new or on catch-up, try to visit the venue with a copy of *Cask Calling*, get a photograph of yourself with the magazine, and cite if possible the episode it was seen in. Let’s see how many we can get.

Princes Risborough

Local residents have petitioned Buckinghamshire Council to remove newly installed bollards from the grass verge opposite the **Bird in Hand** and to turn the verge into an official parking area, to resolve parking issues faced by customers and residents.

Radnage

The **Crown** reopened in December having been closed for a year.

Pub and Brewery News

Thame

The **Falcon** reopened before Christmas under new tenants, following a short closure for much needed refurbishment by **Hook Norton Brewery**.

New tenants, Sarah and Steve Payne hit the ground running from their opening night which was extremely busy with returning regulars and the couples many friends from around the area.



Opening from 3.00pm Monday through Thursday and noon Friday through Sunday, it is a family-friendly pub in the afternoons and dogs are welcomed if on a lead. The couple run many regular events, including weekend discos and a monthly charity quiz.

The parent company of the Peach Pubs brand the Revel Collective went into administration at the end of January. Peach Pubs run the **James Figg** and the **Thatch**. Both pubs are among those sold to the Coral Pub Company set up by Ted Kennedy former managing director of Whitbread's managed pubs division.

Westcott

The **Boobytrap Craft Brewery** which was established in 2021 has announced that it hopes to brew its first cask ale within the next four months.

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Branch Awards 2025–2026

In addition to the Pub of The Year annual award to the overall winner and runners-up, Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe Branch make a variety of other awards to deserving pubs across the year. Whilst these are published on the branch website, and in local newspapers, relevant awards are included here.

Winter Pub of the Year

Awarded Monday 29 December 2025.

Our Winter Pub of the Year was the **Clifden Arms** in Worminghall.

It was nominated by local member, Paul Kilpin. He says of the pub: ‘three well-kept real ales and a log fire in each bar to sit by, the perfect location for winter drinking.’

Congratulations to the pub and staff. Chair, Mike Clarke, presented the award to KENZA PAGE, general manager of the **Clifden Arms**.



Kenza Page receiving the Winter Pub award from the branch chairman and committee members)

The **Clifden Arms** is a timber-framed building with an older medieval section complemented by a 17th-century wing.

The LocAle-accredited pub offers real ales from local breweries including (in the recent past) **Rebellion**, **XT**, **Vale**, and **Chiltern**, with **Rebellion IPA** and **Vale VPA** available on our visit. These are served in a quintessential English country pub setting complete with low beams and roaring fires.

Best Illuminated Pub

The **Cross Keys** in Thame claimed top honours in the branch’s inaugural Best Illuminated Pub competition for Christmas 2025. Nominated by Simon Heap, the pub’s spectacular moving Christmas tree light display stood out among entries from across the branch area.



Christmas display at the Cross Keys, Thame

Landlord Peter Lambert constructed the virtual Christmas tree himself and personally programmed the light sequence featuring 1,000 LEDs, demonstrating exceptional dedication and technical skill. Peter said he was delighted to accept the award recognising his personal innovation in spreading festive cheer.

The **Cross Keys** is renowned for its occasional themed decorations, with October’s extensive Hallowe’en celebrations providing a talking point for the whole community in late October.

The competition, inspired by festive displays at pubs throughout the region, recognised pubs making sterling efforts to brighten the dark winter nights. Commendations were awarded to the **Crown** in Chinnor and the **Lion of Beaconsfield** in Knotty Green, with the **Swan** at Great Kimble taking third place and the **Lion** in Waddesdon as runner-up.

Branch Awards 2025–2026

Branch organisers noted that while many pubs displayed no Christmas decorations — possibly reflecting challenging economic conditions — those that participated demonstrated exceptional community spirit.

‘A still photo doesn’t do justice to this wonder,’ chairman, Mike Clarke, said of the **Cross Keys**’ winning display. ‘It provided many minutes of entertainment and was a great contribution to the jollity of the local community. We look forward to its return next year.’

Most Improved Pub 2025–2026

On Thursday 12 March 2026 the Aylesbury Vale & Wycombe branch of CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale) presented Pam and Alan Ford, the publicans of the **Old Millwrights Arms**, Walton Road, Aylesbury with an award for the Most Improved Pub 2025–2026.



Left to right: Giles du Boulay, Pam and Alan Ford, with the award

Giles du Boulay from AV&W Branch presented Pam and Alan with the award. The couple, from Durham, took the pub over in July 2025 and, as Giles said in his presentation speech, through their sheer hard work and determination together with their team of dedicated staff they set about turning the **Old Millwrights Arms** into a thriving community hub. The pub now has seven real ales including many from local breweries on offer, a

wide range of other drinks to suit all tastes as well as basket food.

The pub was closed for a much-needed, thorough refurbishment for a few weeks in January/February and it reopened buzzing with excitement. The pub has regular quiz and vinyl nights which are extremely popular. It has been a joy to see how improved the pub has become under the management of Pam and Alan, and the well-deserved award to them by CAMRA was acknowledged with acclaim in the packed pub.

Answers to *Calling's* Crossword No. 2

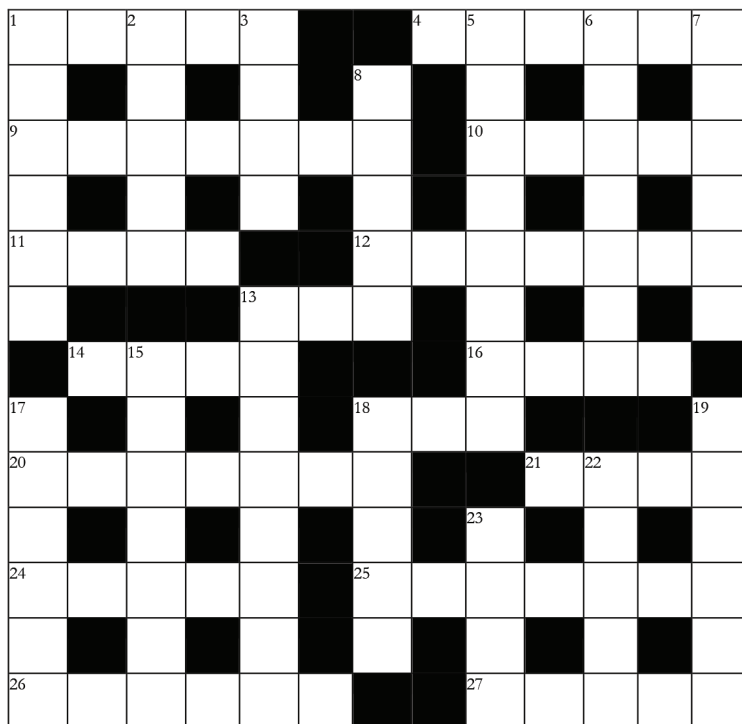
ACROSS

1. Morse
4. Unable
9. Browser
10. Eagle
11. Lose
12. Soldier
13. Zip
14. Sty
16. Sash
18. Gas
20. On Paper
21. Seal
24. Tonal
25. Iberian
26. Rating
27. Reeve

DOWN

1. Mobile
2. Riots
3. Easy
5. Needless
6. Bigwigs
7. Exedra
8. Grasp
13. Zeppelin
15. Topknot
17. Porter
18. Grain
19. Blonde
22. Elite
23. Bear

Calling's Crossword No. 3



ACROSS

1. Force? Perhaps! (5)
4. How old is the water barrier and what cost? (6)
9. Number five girl is a short story (7)
10. Parliamentary class at the bottom of the rostrum (5)
11. Alien goes to USA and finds a volcano (4)
12. I want an arch and a former ultimate weapon (7)
13. Saucy, also you hide it (3)
14. A city that sounds like it's nearly a sports car (4)
16. Ken and I, without number, will inherit the Earth (4)
18. Use laminated wood (3)
20. Kylie doesn't want to be this in love (7)
21. Brick; sounds like a release is wanted (4)
24. To do with ships but not stomachs (5)
25. Take ore to a Quercus (3,4)
26. Confused watcher gives the bloodiest steak (6)
27. A light that helps to invade French North Africa (5)

DOWN

1. A way of being sounds like a large house (6)
2. Presented an obvious fact (5)
3. You must pay for the bell to ring (4)
5. Self-government for the price of a car with no drug (8)
6. A French friend can be pleasant (7)
7. Kill the confused pig and leaves a bequest (6)
8. She attacks from the castle (5)
13. Chains with the shed ahead of the French (8)
15. The Rolling Stones said this is now (3,4)
17. An athlete, old bean? (6)
18. Only quietly mixed up to support power (5)
19. Man with a multi-colour coat (6)
22. Mistake that hesitates right on the gold (5)
23. Kit's parody (4)

(For Answers see issue 4)

Branch Events, Beer Festivals and Social Diary

APRIL

Wednesday 22nd

7pm, Reopened Pub Social, **Old Ship**, Cadmore End, HP14 3PN

Wednesday 29th

6.30pm (tbc), Meet the Manager Social, **Chiltern**, 12 Station Road, Beaconsfield HP9 1QR.

MAY

Saturday 2nd

12 noon, Reopened Pub Social, **Bell**, Lower Road, Hardwick HP22 4DZ (tbc)

Round Table Witney Beer Festival, St Mary's Church, Church Green, Witney OX28 4AW, 12.00–9.00pm.

Thursday 7th

High Wycombe Social, 5pm **Falcon**, 9 Cornmarket, HP11 2AX; 6pm **Rose and Crown**, Desborough Road, HP11 2PR

Monday 11th

7pm, Branch Meeting, **Bird in Hand**, 47 Station Road, Princes Risborough HP27 9DE.

Sunday 17th

Marlow Social, 12.30pm, start **Grand Assembly**, 2–3 Market Square, Marlow SL7 3HH.

Tuesday 19th

7pm, Branch Social, **Crown**, City Road, Radnage HP14 4DW; 8pm **Fleur de Lys**, The Common, Stokenchurch HP14 3TZ.

Friday 22nd–Monday 25th

White Horse, Village Lane, Hedgerley, SL2 3UY, Hedgerley Beer Festival (Fri 11.00–23.00, Sat 11.00–23.00, Sun 12.00–22.00, Mon 11.00–22.00)

Sunday 24th

High Wycombe 26th Annual Beer and Music Festival, 87 Watchet Lane, Holmer Green, High Wycombe, HP15 6UF, 13.00–20.00

Friday 29th–Saturday 30th

Marlow FC Beer Festival, Marlow Football Club, Oaktree Road, Marlow SL7 3ED

Saturday 30th

Driving Social, Great Hampden/Bryants Bottom/Hughenden Valley

JUNE

Fri 12th–Sun 14th

26th Gloucestershire & Warwickshire Railway Ale & Steam Festival, Winchcombe & Toddington GWR Stations, Winchcombe & Toddington, GL54 5LD, 11.00am. This is a CAMRA event, entry free to members, though train or platform tickets required on the day.

JULY

Saturday 4th

Chipping Norton Rugby Club Beer Festival, Greystones, Burford Road, Chipping Norton OX75UY

AUGUST

Friday 28th–Monday 31st

White Horse, Village Lane, Hedgerley, SL2 3UY, Hedgerley Beer Festival (Fri 11.00–23.00, Sat 11.00–23.00, Sun 12.00–22.00, Mon 11.00–22.00)

DECEMBER

Saturday 12th

Haddenham Winterfest, 12 pm to 6 pm, Last entry 5pm, Banks Park, by Village Hall, Haddenham HP17 8EE (Summerfest has been paused for 2026)

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