

Draught Copy



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

Free Magazine

By Maidstone & Mid-Kent
CAMRA

incorporating Gravesend &
Darent Valley, Bexley,
Medway & West Kent
Branches

Winter 2023/24 No. 207

Website: www.mmk.camra.org.uk

Twitter: www.twitter.com/mmkcamra

Nelson Arms reaches the Top Four



DRAUGHT COPY

Draught Copy is the magazine of the Maidstone and Mid-Kent branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, also incorporating news from Bexley, Gravesend & Darent Valley, Medway and West Kent branches of CAMRA. It is published quarterly, in March, June, September and December and has a circulation of 3,500 copies. Opinions expressed are those of the author of the article, and need not represent those of CAMRA or its officials.

If you find a pub selling short measure, allowing smoking in the premises, or other illegal things in pubs, please have a quiet word with the landlord in the first instance. However, if you need to complain about a licensed premises in your area, report the problem to Trading Standards by contacting Citizens Advice, who will pass the details to your local Trading Standards service: Call the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline on 03454 04 05 06 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm). We should demand the very highest standards of service in our pubs.

Advertising rates: £100 / £60 / £35 for a full / half / quarter page respectively

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The copy date for the next issue is 21st January 2024.

For further information about all pubs mentioned in this publication (or indeed anywhere in the UK), please refer to CAMRA's national pub database: www.whatpub.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Our social diary changes faster than we can print it, so to keep up-to-date we suggest you use the below QR codes to access the branch meetings on our websites.



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THE NELSON ARMS



mon	3 - 10pm
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thurs	3 - 11pm
fri	12 - 11.30pm
sat	12 - 11.30pm
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ROASTS & PUB QUIZ



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NELSON ARMS REACHES THE TOP FOUR

The **Nelson Arms**, Tonbridge has secured its place in the top four pubs in the country as the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) announces the best four pubs in the UK as part of its national Pub of the Year 2023 competition.



Situated in a quiet residential area within easy walking distance of the railway station and high street, a range of six to eight beers across a range of styles representing national and local independent breweries is usually served. Up to 15 real ciders are also available along with craft keg beers.



Landlord of the Nelson, Matthew Rudd said: “Naturally we’re delighted to reach the final of CAMRA’s 2023 Pub of the Year competition. It’s great for our customers, the team and the community as a whole. But most importantly it’s great for the Barden Residents Association, who in

2018 after a year of closure put an Asset of Community Value (ACV) on the pub and fought off the threat of redevelopment.”



Tony Shea, West Kent CAMRA Branch Chair, commented: “It is such a welcoming pub with fantastic staff and a superb range of ales and ciders. It is an important part of the local community with something to offer for everyone.”

The other three finalists are:

Tamworth Tap, Tamworth (Winner 2022) – West Midlands

Trafalgar Hotel, Ramsey, Isle of Man – West Pennines

The Beer Engine, Skipton – Yorkshire

All the pubs in the competition are selected by CAMRA volunteers and judged on their atmosphere, decor, welcome, service, value for money, customer mix and most importantly – quality of beer & Cider.

National Pub of the Year Coordinator Andrea Briers said: “I am delighted to announce the finalists in our National Pub of the Year competition. Each pub holds a special place in their communities and all offer something unique to their customers. Pubs across the UK have faced many challenges, so it is wonderful to be able to recognise and celebrate the amazing pubs we have and to see them thrive.”

The overall winner will be announced in January 2024.

This article completes an article started in the last edition of Draught Copy (206). Please find this on the branch website (www.mmk.camra.org.uk).

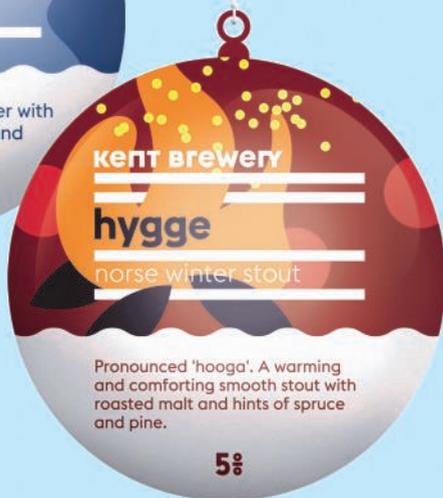
Day 3

Ate a bit too much breakfast again. We now had time for some sightseeing. We met at the bus station again - one member is off to visit Morecambe, the majority plan to visit Williamson Park and the Ashton Memorial with a promise of excellent views of the Fylde coast, Morecambe Bay and the fells of the Lake District, either by bus or a strenuous walk up a steep hill. Today's temperature was much cooler than the previous days so I elected to walk with three others. As well as the splendid gardens and Cafe there were other attractions such as the Butterfly House, a meerkat colony plus a mini beast Zoo. The Butterfly House was particularly good and well worth the very modest price.

After a coffee at the Cafe, it was time for today's main attraction, the **Lancaster Brewery**. Those at the park had a leisurely walk down the far side of the hill meeting up with two arriving by bus at the brewery. A quick glance at the bar while awaiting our tour guide they had all their core beers available being *Blond*, *Amber*, *Red*, *Black* and *IPA* along with four guest ales. We had to sign a disclaimer of what felt like several pages and a medical declaration before we were allowed to put on our white overalls and must have looked like a bunch of mad scientists. The 40-minute tour itself was made fairly interesting by our guide. He then served us at the bar as we had some tokens to use as part of the package. I went for the beers that were on gravity in the cool room being *Red* and *Black* but general consensus was that they were all in good form.

We all jumped on a bus back into town as we had planned to visit the **Accidental Brewery** but it had no cask ale available so after a rather hurried discussion, a decision was made to move on. The organiser had a plan B and we decamped to the **Golden Lion** to re-jig the evening's plans. The **Borough** was next on the list and is located near the town hall. This pub appeals to food lovers and ale enthusiasts alike. The front bar resembles a gentleman's club with deep buttoned chairs and chandeliers, the large back room is the restaurant and the bar placed between them. I couldn't help but notice a rather grand drawing room on a visit to the first floor. Myself and a few others chose the *Swift Best* from *Bowness Bay*.

We then walked along the Lancaster canal and found the first of two canal side pubs, this being the **Waterwitch**, so named after one of the express horse-pulled Packet canal boats that once plied its trade to Preston. The pub itself was a long narrow warehouse, with bare stone walls and floors. The seating on the towpath was busy, as was the pub, and there was mooring for up to three barges. Time



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for a beer. *Pennine Ambler* and *Devils Bridge IPA* from the *Kirby Lonsdale Brewery* plus *Top Knot* from the *Handsome Brewery* and *Wainwrights Gold* were today's offerings. I, along with others, asked for the *Top Knot* and it was pleasant enough. Some chose to eat here and the feedback was good.

On leaving here we had a slight deviation due to some building works on the towpath to reach the **White Cross**, a modern renovation of an old canal-side warehouse with an open-plan interior and light airy feel. There were an impressive 12 hand-pumps with around eight in use. I was tempted by the *Tirril Brewery Windermere Pale Ale*. Also available were *Red Gem* from *Pennine*, *Hawthorn Ale* from *Otter*, *Exmoor Gold*, *Wolf* from *Allendale Brewery* and a couple of national beers. The food looked impressive and was appreciated by the remaining hungry few. As some were eating, time enough for a second beer and I chose the *Wolf*. Something about sheep's clothing springs to mind but pleasant enough. Time to move back into the main city centre and bearing in mind it was Saturday night with a lot of the pubs providing music, availability of sufficient seating had a higher priority than the norm. After walking past a few we managed to squeeze into **Ye Old John O'Gaunt**. The music was average but not so loud you couldn't hear anything else. *Raspberry Pale* from *Titanic*, *Amarillo Gold* from *Wadworth*, *Theakston's Old Peculier* and *White Rat* from *Ossett* were spotted. I supped the latter and had a good look around. The WhatPub entry for this pub describes it as a handsome Edwardian frontage but narrow inside, walls are decorated with beer mats and photos of musicians, obviously a very busy music pub judging by their What's On event list.

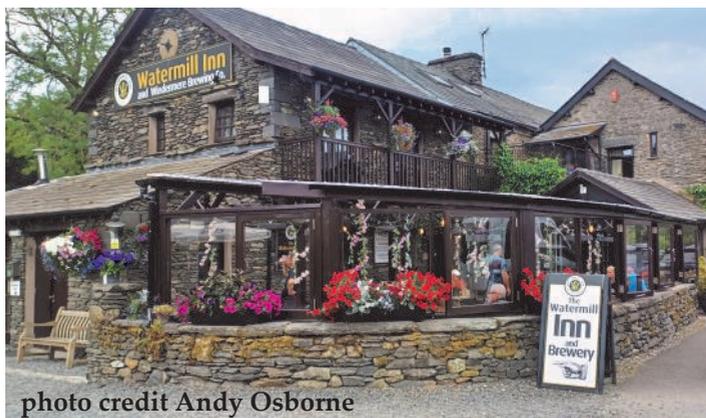
Some-time later, a few of our members decided they had enough noise and retired to their hotel for a quiet drink but should have stayed the course as the next pub was spookily quiet for a Saturday evening. **The Jailer's Barrel** is an ex-Hydes pub, now a free house but still selling their beers plus a couple from *Lancaster brewery*. It was converted from retail premises in 2007 and apparently has a collection of bottled beers, some quite rare, strong, and expensive. The *Hydes Dark Ruby Ale* was calling my name and I didn't like to disappoint. It certainly didn't.

Day 4

Breakfast was a bit chaotic this morning. Apparently, the chef had been in and prepared but had now disappeared. The waiting staff were very apologetic and plied us with as much toast and hot drinks as we could eat and drink, while a replacement chef could be sent for and arrive. We were concerned with the time as we had a planned train to catch, but the food arrived in time. We met the organiser in time for our train to Windermere. Upon arriving at the destination, we had a browse in the adjacent award-winning Booths supermarket followed by a walk around the town.

One other and I were the first to arrive at the **Crafty Baa**, a craft beer Mecca in the town, alongside ciders, perries and a varied range of world-wide beers. Regrettably, I didn't make a note of what I was drinking but it was enjoyable albeit a tad on the cold side. We sat outside the front on a small patio and watched the passers-by. Many also came in and we had to shuffle up. Next door was a venue called the **Pie and Pint**, too early for a pie, but a quick look inside revealed two hand-pumps. The fact it was all part of the craft bar, but with its own front door, meant that we were already drinking their beers! We were joined by a few more of our party and there was some talk of visiting Bowness, but time was tight and instead we walked to the **Elleray Hotel** close by. Now I don't normally drink cider, if good ale is available but I do like Rhubarb in any form, so my drinking companion from the first pub and I elected to go for this. It was rather pleasant sitting with it in the beer garden in the sunshine where we were joined by the rest of our group.

Time to move on by bus to the village of Ings and, to the award winning **Watermill Pub** and **Windermere Brewery** which had up to twelve hand-pumps. I believe it has been run by the same family for 30 years. The beers have dog themed names, such as *A Bit'er Ruff* and *Shih Tzu Faced*, being only two of them and as you imagine the latter being the strongest. This turned out to be the group's favourite pub and also had my favourite beer of the weekend, the aforementioned *A Bit'er Ruff*. We stayed for another but eventually had to leave



this great pub to get another bus to Staveley and firstly the **Hawkshead Brewery Beer Hall**.

I was particularly looking forward to this having visited it over a decade ago but sadly a Sunday afternoon wasn't the best time to visit as every man, woman, child and their dog also had the same idea. Very disappointing. We had a short walk to the **Eagle and Child**, an attractive riverside pub and a traditional village pub with rooms offered a selection of Cumbrian ales. *Loweswater Gold*, a *New Zealand pale ale* from *Togs* and *Swan Blond* from the *Bowness Brewery* were on. I, and others, enjoyed the *Loweswater Gold* and the *New Zealand pale* was equally popular. The food looked home-made and hearty. Unfortunately, the storm



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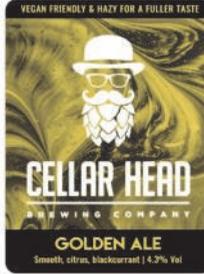
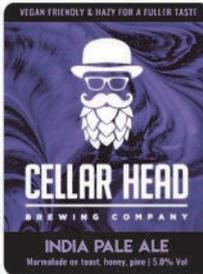
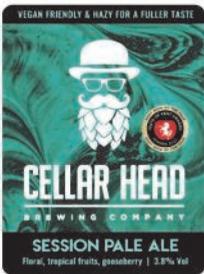
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clouds were gathering as we left here and made for the railway station. Those that had gambled on the weather and travelled light were severely punished and soaked through. Arriving back in Lancaster, we all felt ready for some food and walked quickly, for fear of more rain, to the **Sir Richard Owen**. I ordered the *Seville pale ale* from the *Lancaster brewery* and a katsu curry which were both much liked and appreciated. We walked back to our respective hotels and I opted for the *Cumbrian Way*, which was OK.

Day 5

Breakfast was drama free today and we were thanked for our understanding the previous day. We had some time to kill in the morning and I visited the Maritime Museum. It was much more interesting than I had expected and covered several different areas - the slave trade, canal boats, local fishing boats and more.

Some had left earlier but time for the remainder of us to meet and visit a couple of our favourite pubs near the station, before embarking on our journey home from a truly memorable and enjoyable long weekend.

I think I speak for all and would like to thank Peter for all his hard work and research to make it possible.

(Thanks go to the organiser and WhatPub website for additional information)

Quiz Night on Monday

Open 12 – 2.30 and 5 – 11 Monday – Thursday

12 – 11 Friday and Saturday

12 – 10.30 Sunday

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I visited Milan in the summer for three reasons:

- 1) They still have at least 100 trams dating from 1928 - 1930 in regular daily service.
- 2) They have some of the oldest trolleybuses in Western Europe.
- 3) Brewpubs.

Milan has a reputation for being an elegant city but, away from the tourist areas, it has a very rundown appearance, with unsightly graffiti plastered over every building, even on shops which are open. Finding any kind of bar which opens before 5.30pm is a challenge - I only found two in the entire city which were any good. The standard glass of beer in Milan is 0.4L, and costs between 6 and 7 Euros, so it works out at around £10 a pint!

My first port of call was **Bierfabrik**, off Corso Buenos Aires, where I had *Trini Blanche* 4.7% from *Renton* Brewery, which was a nice pale beer. *Unstable Vortex*, 6.4%, was the colour of Broadside, with a strong aftertaste. Ratebeer.com listed a pizza restaurant, **Pizzeria Spontini**, but they only had bottled beers. *Birrificio Milano La Veloce* 4.5% was 9.50 Euros for 660ml, but wasn't anything special. It was a 5-minute walk to **Brasserie Bruxelles**, selling Belgian beers, as expected. *Affligem Blond* was 5 EU for 0.3L, and very nice. Bars are not numerous by any means, but I found one near my B&B, which had 33cl bottles of *Ceres*, brewed in Denmark! Despite being 7.7%, it was gassy and disappointing.



Monday turned out to be a Public Holiday in Italy. This meant that no bar in the entire city seemed to be open. I had to make do with two bottles of an 8.5% Polish beer, to drink back at the B&B. They were 1.30 EU each, quite a difference.

Tuesday was back to normal, luckily. Ratebeer said that **Isola Della Birra** opened at 1pm. It didn't. I had noticed **Darsena Craft Beer** by the canal near the terminus of tram 10 earlier, when it was operating as a cafe. More later.



One pub which was open at lunchtime (actually at 6.30am!) was the **Walrus**, in Via Vigevano, passed by trams 9 and 10. Porta Genova Station is just up the road. Here they had 12 taps, including some German beers. *Bassa Marea* 5% was very nice, as was *Emis Fero Pacific IPA*, 5.7%.



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The bar front was fashioned out of luggage - most odd. From here it was a 3-minute walk to **Darsena**, which by now was selling beer. These were the only two bars I found open before 5.30. Most of the locals seemed to be drinking coffee, though. The **Darsena** had many draught beers, all of them Italian. I had *Muttnik Bolik* from *Monza*, a 5.4% American pale ale. Later in the day, I went to the suburb of Lambrate, which had two excellent brewpubs near to each other. **Birrificio Belgrano** had 12 taps. *Fuerte Apache IPA* 5.6% was wonderful. A range of free snacks appeared on the bar for customers to help themselves, so I had some salami and crisps. A few minutes' walk away is **Birrificio Lambrate**, which gets the highest score on Ratebeer, and I could see why. It looks a lot like an English pub inside, complete with a bank of three handpumps (not working), and 20 beers on tap, mostly their own. *LBR West Coast IPA* was rather nice, as was *Atomic* at 6.2%. This was easily the best pub in Milan. I left them 5 Draught Copy magazines, which they seemed quite chuffed about! I was given a lanyard in return.



So, if you go to Milan, The **Walrus** and the **Darsena** will keep you entertained until 5.30, then get the Metro to **Lambrate** for the evening. Take lots of money!

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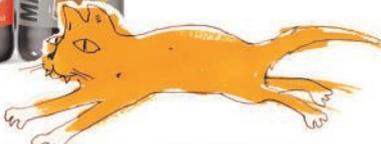
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CAMRA HQ Regional Review

The Regional Review recommendations to the National Executive included that Bexley Branch should be moved from Kent Region to Greater London Region. There had been some ambiguity about the Branch's location, as its Good Beer Guide allocation has been part of Greater London's and its Pub of the Year winner has been competing the Greater London Regional POTY competition. Further clarification about the review recommendations came from NE member Catherine Tonry, who attended a Kent Regional Meeting for that purpose. It was stated that Branches were autonomous and could determine their own fates. Consequently, the Branch committee met in special session to discuss the issue and subsequently discussed it at a regular committee meeting, before putting the matter to the Annual General Meeting on 11th October 2023. Gary Chester, the NE member responsible for the Regional Review, attended and addressed the AGM and answered members' questions. The AGM endorsed the committee's view that, the Branch, founded in 1975, had been part of Kent Region since Regions were established and should remain part of Kent Region now. In order to meet HQ's objectives of clarifying lines of responsibility, The Branch committee stated that Bexley's Good Beer Guide allocation should move from Greater London to Kent and Bexley Branch should be part of the Kent Regional Pub of the Year contests. The Branch has written to CAMRA HQ to notify it of the decision. Should the Regional Review's recommendation that Kent Region be merged with Surrey & Sussex Region, Bexley Branch would then be part of that merged KSS super-region.

Pub News

The Fold, Sidcup (independent) – Reported in the Spring 2023 edition (No. 204) that it had opened on 15th December 2022, the bricks & mortar site for an established local mobile bar business, The Horse and Box Ltd. Since then, no personal insights to relate, but the website shows that it has no cask ale – *Beavertown Neck Oil* and *Brixton Coldharbour Lager*. Bottled beers include beers from *Bexley Brewery*.

The Jolly Millers, Bexleyheath (Brakspear) – further to the report in the Spring 2023 issue (No. 204), the pub did re-open after a short period of closure, for new tenants in early 2023. The Branch committee met there in June, when a cask of *Brakspear Gravity* was available.

The **King's Head, Old Bexley** has replaced its pub sign with an effigy of our current monarch.

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The Millers Arms, Bexley Village (Punch/Heineken) – as reported in the Spring 2023 issue (No. 204), it was briefly closed in January/February, but did re-open and is still a favoured haunt of the Dartfordians RFC when they move to Bexley village on a Saturday night.

The Great Harry, Belvedere – work still halted on this site.

The Royal Standard/Celebrations, Bexleyheath – Kallars' site acquired for clients sign still up; no planning application yet.

The Belvedere Hotel, Belvedere – work on residential conversion continues.

The Leather Bottle, Belvedere – remains a demolition site.

The Wrong 'Un, Bexleyheath (J D Wetherspoon) – one of the tranche of pubs that Wetherspoon's put up for sale during 2022/23, Savills still have it on their website advertised as having a current rent of £75,000 per annum on a lease expiring in 2028 and an upwards-only review due on 25th March 2023. Savills are/were inviting offers for Wetherspoon's lease interest. However, it is believed to have been sold to a small pub chain based in Lancashire. A date for change of ownership is not yet announced.

King's Arms, Bexleyheath (Stonegate) – this Stonegate-owned pub has this year returned from the annual Great British Pubs Awards 2023 with the silverware for being the Best pub for Entertainment, in Manchester in October. Entered into the same category last year, along with others (as with this year, too), sadly they didn't win anything then. CAMRA Bexley Branch congratulates the management and staff for their success this year.

The Abbey Arms, Wilton Road, Abbey Wood (Stonegate) – the local NewsShopper paper reported in May that the pub was up for sale at an eye-watering £1.5M. It had been operated by Dirty Liquor, a pub company with several pubs mostly in East London and which had run into problems. On investigation, the pub is actually owned by Stonegate and their website showed it as in their leased and tenanted division and being offered for a new lease. So, it would appear that Dirty Liquor had simply reached the end of their lease and didn't want to renew. It's still on the Stonegate Pub Partners website being advertised for a "Retail Partnership Tenancy" and an expected annual turnover of £549K. No annual rental cost mentioned. Pub still open.

Kentish Belle, Bexleyheath (independent) – the Belle finally changed hands, with new owner, David Thaxton (pictured here, left) and his manager, Dean Killington, taking over on 19th September 2023. CAMRA Bexley Branch wishes them every success in the Belle, and thanks former owner and landlord Nick Hair for bringing excellent ales, cider and perry to the masses in Bexley Borough. Happy nuclear train driving!



Foresters Arms, East Wickham (Wellington) - everyone's friendly neighbourhood PubCo, Wellington Pub Company, owned by the uber-wealthy Reuben brothers and based in the Isle of Man, has previously applied for and received planning permission to build flats on the car park behind the pub. Bexley Council's planning department, which advised Wellington that including the pub itself in the application would definitely fail due to loss of community facility, then rejected the application, but the people at the Planning Inspectorate, on appeal, clearly thought a viable pub didn't need to have a car-park - or much of a garden - even if it is next to a busy through route (Wellington to Plumstead) and on the entrance to a housing estate, both environments being hostile to anyone seeking to find a legal space to plonk their car. Anyway, the approved plans haven't been acted on yet, but the NewsShopper reported in July that the pub had suddenly been closed, boarded and "gutted". No further application has been made, so it's not clear what's happening now. The paper reported the locals have formed an action group, local councillors are onside and an ACV listing application was apparently made. CAMRA Bexley Branch's Pubs Protection Officer has reached out to enquire if any assistance is wanted and a response (and ACV decision) is awaited.

The **Duke** (formerly **Duke Of Northumberland**), **Northumberland Heath** has now removed its hand-pumps .

The Plough and Harrow, Welling (Trust Inns) – still being advertised on the Trust Inns website as available to lease for a 1-year tenancy or 3 or 10-year business development lease. Annual rental £22,000 (+VAT), with two-bed accommodation, fixtures & fitting circa £12,000. Still open in the meantime, but no cask ale.

CAMRA members are encouraged to report any changes to the status of pubs they visit, such as hours of opening, availability of real ale, change of owner or management – or to provide any details missing from the existing data – using the WhatPub website/application: <https://whatpub.com> (search for the pub on the site, and at the bottom of the pub's entry, click on the link to "send an e-mail to the CAMRA branch" with your updates.



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Branch Socials

The Branch's recent socials have included a London Railway Termini Crawl, taking in pubs near the major London railway termini, a "less frequented pubs" crawl from Shooters Hill into Welling on 13th September, the Beer Festival Staff outing to Cambridge and Ely on 7th October (Pictures above), the Spa Valley Railway Beer Festival (Below) on the Friday (20th October) and a Blackheath Crawl on 25th October (visiting the **Green Goddess**, **Princess of Wales**, the **Railway** and the **Hare & Billett**). The next socials will be a Belvedere Pubs Crawl on 15th November and the traditional Twixtmas Crawl starting at the **Robin Hood & Little John** on 27th December. Check the branch website and Facebook page for details.



The 2024 Bexley Beer & Cider Festival will run from Thursday 9th May to Saturday 11th May at Dartfordians Community Sports Club.



Governance

Just a reminder to all Bexley Branch members, the 2023 New Year mail-out was the last to be sent by post (for those who have hitherto chosen "post" as their preferred comms method). At that time, in addition to the 11 branch members who had selected "post only", another 95 who had selected "post and e-mail" did not actually have a valid e-mail address on the database. Please check and update your contact details by logging onto the CAMRA website and clicking through to the "Members Area" and then "Edit membership details". You will need your CAMRA membership number and password to log on (or to register, if not already done).

Contact: Adrian Moss (01474 363102) email: adrian.moss49@btinternet.com

A vintage bus running day was held on the last Sunday in September, replicating local services in the Gravesend and Dartford areas. Talking to one of the organisers, it was possible to identify a number of pubs which could be reached by bus for visits of reasonable duration, with another bus back at a sensible time. Areas which could be reached in this way included Longfield, Cobham, Meopham and Swanley, apart from Dartford and Gravesend which had regular buses. Hopefully the event will be repeated as it seemed to be an opportunity to get to pubs you might not otherwise visit by a means of transport you probably hadn't seen for years.

There has been a change of management at the **Villager** at Vigo. The new manager is Jade McQueen, who had only been in charge a few days at the time of our report. They were serving *Fuller's London Pride*, *St Austell Proper Job* and *Timothy Taylor Landlord* and maybe local beers will be offered in due course. She hoped to continue the restaurant, having a standard menu with weekly specials.



Another such change has occurred at the **Chequers** at Crockenhill where Jackie and Neil have decided to retire and Louise and Tim are now the hosts. We wish them success in their venture. On a recent visit cask beers on offer were Rugby World Cup themed brews by *Southwark* and *Greene King*, alongside *Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter*. The pub also has a petanque club on Mondays and Fridays which plays against other Kent pubs.

The newly-extended **Cotton Mill** in Swanley was busy in early October with cask beers from *360°*, *Cloudwater* and *Pig & Porter*. A 10% discount is available on Thursday evenings on production of a CAMRA membership card. Also in Swanley, the **Pedham Place Golf Club**, which regularly sells real ale from *Shepherd Neame*, had *Late Red* as one of its two offerings.

The **Lads of the Village** at Stone Crossing is due to close on New Year's Eve when the landlord retires. Sean Holland has run the pub for 45 years, which we think makes him the longest-serving local licensee, and his barmaid, Gemma, has served 10. It's a traditional locals' pub with *Courage Best Bitter* on handpump. It has hosted a fair number of activities over the years, as the poster produced after a visit to the battlefields of the Somme in 2009 shows. Sean had previously been at the **Ivy Leaf** in Dartford for 6½ years.



After a branch visit to the **Lads of the Village** we moved on to the **Bull** at Horns

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Cross. This sells *Greene King IPA* and *Abbot* but neither was available at the time so we retired to the **Foresters** in Dartford where the guest beer was *Twickenham Naked Ladies*.

The **Rising Sun** at Cotmans Ash is now only open from 12 noon to 10pm on Thursday to Sunday. Michelle is still the owner and now only sells *Westerham* beers from minipins behind the bar. Recently *British Bulldog*, *Grasshopper*, *Spirit of Kent* and *1065* were available. At the same time the



Bell at Kemsing, the only surviving pub in the village, had *Greene King IPA* and their seasonal *Bonkers Conkers*. The **Woodman** at Otford had *Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter* and *St Austell Tribute* and the **Rising Sun** at Twitton, the busiest pub of the four, had *Dark Star Hophead*, *Musket Flash in the Pan*, *St Austell Cornish Best* and *Tonbridge Old Chestnut*.

The **Iron Pier Brewery Tap** can normally be expected to offer examples of their current production and in early October six cask beers were available: *Perry Street Pale*, *Bitter*, *American Gold* (a new brew), *Woodlands IPA*, *Rosherville Red* and *Whiteout*. The range of key keg beers included *Hopfenweisse* (an old brew newly revived) and *Windmill Hill Saison* (new).

An October crawl through Gravesend in search of green-hopped beers found *Canterbury Ales Green & Black* stout and *Kent Green Giant IPA* (6%) at the **Three**



Pillars, with award-winning green-hopped *Musket Flash in the Pan* to follow. The **Three Daws** (shown in its earlier guise as a Truman's pub) had *Green & Black* and *Mad Cat Long Tail* with 'a cellar full of green-hopped beers' to come. The **Compass** had *Kent Green Dwarf* (plus *Kent Valhalla IPA* with Norwegian yeast).

It was Wetherspoon's beer festival time in October and

customers of the **Robert Pocock** in Gravesend were able to have a preview as *Batemans Combined Harvest* and *Elgood's Warrior* were on sale two days before the official start. The **Echo** has reinstated its two regular real ales, *Gale's Seafarers* and *Sharp's Doom Bar*, having been down to one while trade recovered after Covid.

A report suggests that the **George** at Singlewell, outside Gravesend, is operated by Mitchell and Butler and is due to close in February for a refurbishment.



Contact: Kae Mendham

email: kmendham@aol.com

The **Sir John Falstaff** at Higham, owned by Punch Taverns is currently advertising for a new landlord.

From the 11th September, The **Crown** in Rochester, near to the bridge end of the High Street, a *Shephard Neame* pub, is closed for approximately 12 weeks for a £1.2 million makeover. Once reopened the pub will revert to its original name of The **Royal Crown**. Another pub which is currently closed for six weeks, from around the middle of September, and undergoing a refurbishment, is the **Old Ash Tree** in Gillingham, owned by *Greene King*.

As was mentioned in the last issue of Draught Copy, Piers Macdonald, owner of both *Nelson* and *Gemstone* Breweries in Chatham Dockyard, passed away on the 30th June. We now, with sad regret, announce that both breweries have since closed. As a consequence of the *Nelson* brewery closure, the **Scruffy Duck**, Gillingham, was recently seen to be serving *St. Austell Tribute*, as their one permanent ale on cask, previously this would have been *Nelson Mild*.

At an end of August, Medway branch held our AGM where only 11 members attended, out of nearly 500. In order to survive, the branch is looking for Medway members to fill both committee and non-committee posts to keep the branch active. These include the committee posts of chairman, pubs officer and secretary plus non committee posts of social secretary and pub preservation officer. Anyone wishing to apply for any of these posts should contact Kae Mendham at the email address listed above.

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Contact: *John Mills 01732 840603* or email *pubs.officer@mmk.camra.org.uk*

For more information on these pubs, see CAMRA's online pub database *whatpub.com*

Aylesford Village Club - This community run club sells *Robinsons Trooper*. There is a hall with a dance floor available for hire. A pool tournament is held every Thursday. Why not call in and pick up a membership request form.



Butchers Block at The Bell, Bearsted – Reopened with a new name in October following extensive refurbishment. New licensees Simon Rickwood & Joanna are hoping to have the restaurant operating by early December once the gas supply has been upgraded. Stocks *Timothy Taylor Landlord* as the permanent ale and hopes to be able to put on local guest ales.

Rose Inn, Bearsted – This busy music venue and curry house seems to have changed the *Harvey's* for *Adnams Southwold Bitter* but continues with *Sharp's Doom Bar*.



Red Lion, Biddenden – Stonegate has sold this, the last pub in the village. We understand work is progressing to upgrade the pub and it is expected to reopen in the first quarter of 2024.

Ridge Golf Club, Chartway Street, Sutton Valence – The bar and restaurant are open to non-members. *Goacher's Fine Light Ale* is kept in good condition.

Clubhouse at K Sports, Ditton – This has been renamed the K Sports Bar. A good size function room is available for hire.

Goudhurst Inn, Goudhurst – New manager Alex and chef Paul arrived in August at this large pub/restaurant. Dog friendly and has a large garden. *Cellar Head* beers are to be found on the bar.

Ringlestone, Harrietsham – *Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter* and a guest, recently reported as *Canterbury Ales Reeves Ale*. Both found to be in good order. The pub will shut for first three weeks of January.



Eight Bells, Hawkhurst – *Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter* is always available here and a visit by a reporter found *Only With Love Minstrel* as a guest.



Great House, Gills Green, Hawkhurst – A large eating house offering *Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter* and a *Cellar Head* or *Musket* beer as a guest.

Windmill, Hollingbourne – Now has five deluxe double bedrooms available. A beer from the *Musket* brewery is usually available.

Hook & Hatchet, Hucking – This is an isolated, dog-friendly pub with a large outdoor area. A camping area is to the rear and it is a good area for walking. *Musket* and *Bexley* beers have been found here recently.



Knoxbridge, Knoxbridge – There is now a cask of real ale that changes each week so that regulars can decide what they like. The price is kept very reasonable.

Chequers, Laddingford – The Sausage and Beer week was well supported by Maidstone branch as usual. Nine beers were on gravity and four on handpumps with 20 different types of sausage. We were well fed that day. Our thanks go to Charles and Tracey for another excellent event.

Wealden Hall, Larkfield – Tarnya Selby is the new manager here. *Greene King Abbot* and *IPA* beers are available on the bar.

Hare & Hounds, Maidstone – Following the tragic death of Mathew Bryant, his wife has now taken over the pub. *Adnams Ghost Ship* remains as a permanent ale.

Hop Pole, Nettlestead – New manager, Daniel Sutton, has had a change around with table tennis now in the games room, while pool and darts are in the bar with a small table football nearer the restaurant. *Wychwood Hobgoblin Gold* has been available for a while.



Harrow, Ulcombe - A planning application has been made for conversion to affordable housing. There appears to be insufficient support for the pub from the local residents.

Images from CAMRA's online pub database *whatpub.com*



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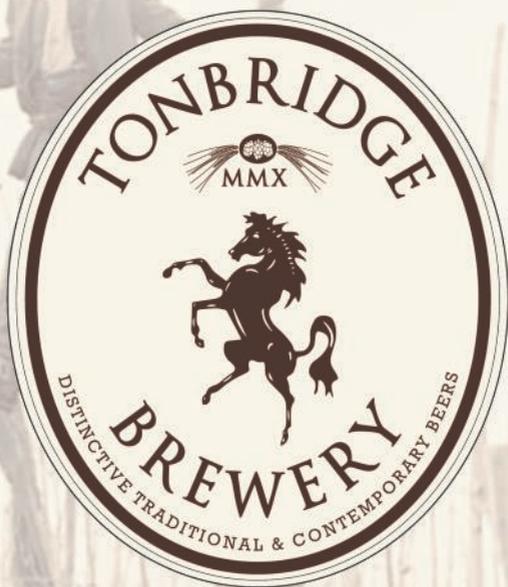
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KNOCKHOLT. The **Three Horseshoes** is a spacious and well-kept two-bar pub with a large well-appointed garden that has covered areas, plenty of tables and seating and a stage. Good food is served and jazz bands play here regularly, warming up on the road to Ronnie Scott's. The regular ales are *Larkins Traditional*, *Harvey's Best* and *Timothy Taylor's Landlord* found to be in good condition recently. Just down the road lies *Shepherd Neame* owned, the **Harrow** but time didn't permit a visit on this occasion.

PETTERIDGE. The **Hopbine** sits on a sloping plot in the centre of this hamlet, enabling the creation of a nicely landscaped tiered garden to the side with decking and covered area. There is additional outdoor seating round the other side. Inside the pub is fairly compact but serves the village well with its selection of beers, pizzas, burgers, etc. To find all six handpumps on would be a big ask but there are usually three ales, house beer *The Hopbine* from *Cellarhead*, *Harveys Best* and *Tonbridge Traditional*.



RUSTHALL. The **Beacon** is a charming Arts & Crafts style building in an elevated setting overlooking Happy Valley. The **Beacon** is very much focussed on being a wedding venue, but drinkers are welcome in the pleasant Garden Bar which has its own terrace. No real ale but there are two keg beers from *Cellar Head*.



LEIGH. Basking in the warmth of an Indian summer was the glorious beer garden at **The Plough**, Leigh. Good custom on a Saturday lunchtime in early October enjoying the highly rated food. Beers on offer in the cosy, beamed bar were *Tonbridge Coppernob* and *Pig & Porter Cosmic Jive*, the latter a 3.6% quencher perfect in the sun. A green hop beer was coming within the fortnight. Always check their website before venturing out as hours are erratic due to it hosting weddings.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS. Just on the edge of the main shopping area lies the **Guinea**, a spacious pub with a nice courtyard garden and covered area. Recent reports of 3 real ales in good nick prompted a visit for Thursday lunch. I must have been unlucky as only one ale was on, but it was "*Got The Face On*" from the local *Pig & Porter* brewery and it was in very good condition so I went back for more. The food was also very good.



Images from CAMRA's online pub database whatpub.com

Just outside of Tunbridge Wells at the monument known as High Rocks there is a building also called **High Rocks** that houses function rooms, a restaurant and a downstairs bar serving real ale. It was there I found a very nice pint of *Tonbridge Brewery Rustic* to accompany my lunch from a very Italian style menu. They sometimes have guest beers which are also normally from local breweries. **High Rocks** has its own stop on the Spa Valley Railway and is a licenced wedding venue.



PENSHURST – The current landlord of the *Brakspear* owned **Leicester Arms** will be leaving when the pub closes for necessary structural work at the end of October. It will be closed for six to eight weeks and when it reopens will be run by the Little and Large Pub Company.



CHARCOTT. The **Greyhound** continues to offer a varied selection of ales from mostly local breweries, it's good to see *Bexley Brewery* back again and a number of their brews have recently appeared on the bar.



CHIDDINGSTONE. The **Castle Inn** has been stocking *Lakedown Brewery* ales recently. They are planning to stock products from other brewers. *Larkin's* brews are always available in this excellent country pub.



CHIPSTEAD. The **Bricklayers Arms** (*Harvey's*) continues to be popular, the weekly Quiz night being well supported. Three well kept brews from Lewes are always stocked.

COWDEN. The **Fountain Inn** (*Harvey's*) is gaining in popularity, especially for those seeking good food. *Sussex Best* and *IPA* are always available, with whichever seasonal brew is current, the *Old Ale* was in fine form during a recent visit.



MARKBEECH. Some interesting guest ales have appeared at the **Kentish Horse** recently. *Skinner's Porthleven* was a surprise, also *Exmoor Fox*.



RIVERHEAD. The **Bullfinch** (*McMullens*) always has a couple of brews available, but sometimes one *Rivertown* beer might be available. *Nice Try*, which is a Rugby World Cup themed beer, was available during a recent visit.

SUNDRIDGE. Earlier this year it was reported that the **White Horse** was closed. After a few months it reopened, a recent midweek visit found the pub to be very quiet, the only ale available was *Timothy Taylor's Landlord*.



Something Bexley had not done for a long time was a pub crawl of London railway termini, so we met up at the **Sir John Hawkshaw** inside Cannon Street station, a JDW outlet, having 3 regular ales *Greene King IPA & Greene King Abbot, Sharps Doom Bar* and 3 guests. With no toilets, you have to use the station ones. The Underground took us to Liverpool Street and the **Hamilton Hall** (another JDW) with the same regulars but 7 guest ales. Then onto the **Parcel Yard** at Kings Cross, a *Fullers* outlet by platform 9 3/4, 3 regular *Fullers* beers, *ESB, London Pride* and *Dark Star Hophead* with the addition of *Gales Seafarers* and a couple of guests. Onward to the **Betjeman Arms** in St Pancras station. A *Youngs* outlet with *Youngs Original & Youngs Special* plus *St Austell Proper Job*. So to next door to Euston and the **West Lodge Euston Tap** with 7 ales and a card only policy. Marylebone has the **Victoria & Albert** serving *Greene King IPA* and *Sharp's Doom Bar* with 1 guest. On the upper level of Paddington you will find The **Mad Bishop & Bear**. A *Fullers* pub allowing CAMRA members 15% off, here we found a similar selection to the **Parcel Yard**. The day ended visiting Victoria Station and the **Beer House**, but as it only offered *Greene King IPA* and *Sharp's Doom Bar*, we finished at the **Wetherspoons** (which is its name) and found twelve hand pumps, although not all in use, but always an interesting choice.

A Welling crawl that started in the **We Anchor in Hope**, a *Greene King* establishment with *IPA, Abbot, Old Speckled Hen* and *Caledonian Deuchars IPA*. We then moved to the **Plough & Harrow** which has removed its hand pumps, followed by the **Hangar** in Welling, The **Hangar** is a micro-pub although more membrane Key Keg than cask, the quality was very good. The **Nags Head** had *Greene King IPA* and *Abbot*. We bypassed the **Rose** at Welling knowing, that there was no cask to be had and settled in nicely at the **Door Hinge**, Bexley's first micro-pub, and an interesting selection of ales to taste. Our last visit was to the **Guy Earl of Warwick**, another *Greene King* pub which had *Timothy Taylor Landlord* as its guest.



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THE HEAD AND FOOT OF THE DOWNS

by Nick Goodwin

With the temperature knocking on 30°C, the air conditioned respite of The **Stanhope Arms**, Brasted was very welcoming on this early September visit. It was post-lunch although there were a few people still eating (food is served all day) in each of the different areas (main bar, snug, restaurant, and garden). There were plenty of attentive and friendly staff on hand - no waiting around for anything in here. Recently added to the Good Beer Guide following the efforts of general manager, Matt, to enhance the offering, one can see why from the real ales on offer today: *Iron Pier US Pale Ale*, *Westerham Summer Perle* and *Brakspear Gravity*. A fourth pump clip was turned around possibly waiting for the weekend custom. I went for the *Iron*



Pier which was served in great condition, cellar cool, citrusy and refreshing on this scorcher of a day. We ate from the light bite menu, all items being of very high quality - a definite step or two up from 'pub grub'. Although we sat inside, the rear garden looked immaculate as we walked past on our way to the exit.



The **Stanhope** is situated at the foot of the North Downs in what is known as the Vale of Holmesdale. A short, yet steep, drive away takes you right to the top of the Downs and to the **Titsey Brewing Co. taproom**. Having moved to this purpose built site in June it is already proving popular, and at 4pm on a Friday, had at least 50 customers enjoying the stunning views south. Plenty of seating, indoors and out, comfortably soaked up



the punters - a mixture of couples, cyclists and post-work chaps. As with The **Stanhope** there was plenty of staff at the bar who helped me with my order as soon as I approached the counter. Given that the bar is about 10 yards from the brewing kit, it will come as no surprise that they sell many of their own beers, on both cask and keg. There were three cask (*Leveson Buck*, *North Downs Gold* and *California Spring*). I went for the latter and, again, no complaints on the quality of the condition and serve. They also did a couple of guest kegs, as well as three or four of their own, on the back keg wall.

Back down the hill took us to the last stop in our beer triangle, **Westerham Brewery**. Long-established in their own modern, purpose built brewery, they have a little more space than **Titsey**, with bar benches inside the air conditioned bar area, and at least 30 benches outside, all under cover. Eleven of their own beers were on draught (no guests), plus one real cider, all served from a back bar which, although giving the appearance of all beers being dispensed from keg, it should be noted that their printed beer menu describes four of them as 'Real Ale'. The beers were a mixture of their regulars such as *British Bulldog* and *Summer Perle*, and specials such as *Moravian Rhapsody* (a dark lager) and *Alt Ego* (an altbier). They have a soft spot for lager and brew many different styles, and the one that caught my eye, and which I went for, was *Blind Tiger*, a pre-prohibition lager. I was in need of something cold, given the heat, and this hit the spot - zesty and clean. There are also two low alcohol options in bottle/can (*Adnams* and *Gadds*). The staff were very helpful, a theme of the day, and gave me a taster of any beers I wished to try. There are a couple of quirks about the place - no service at the bar, and they don't sell halves (thirds, two-thirds and pints are available). With *Westerham Brewery*, as with today's outing, it seems that three is the magic number.



IRON PIER

BREWERY & TAPROOM

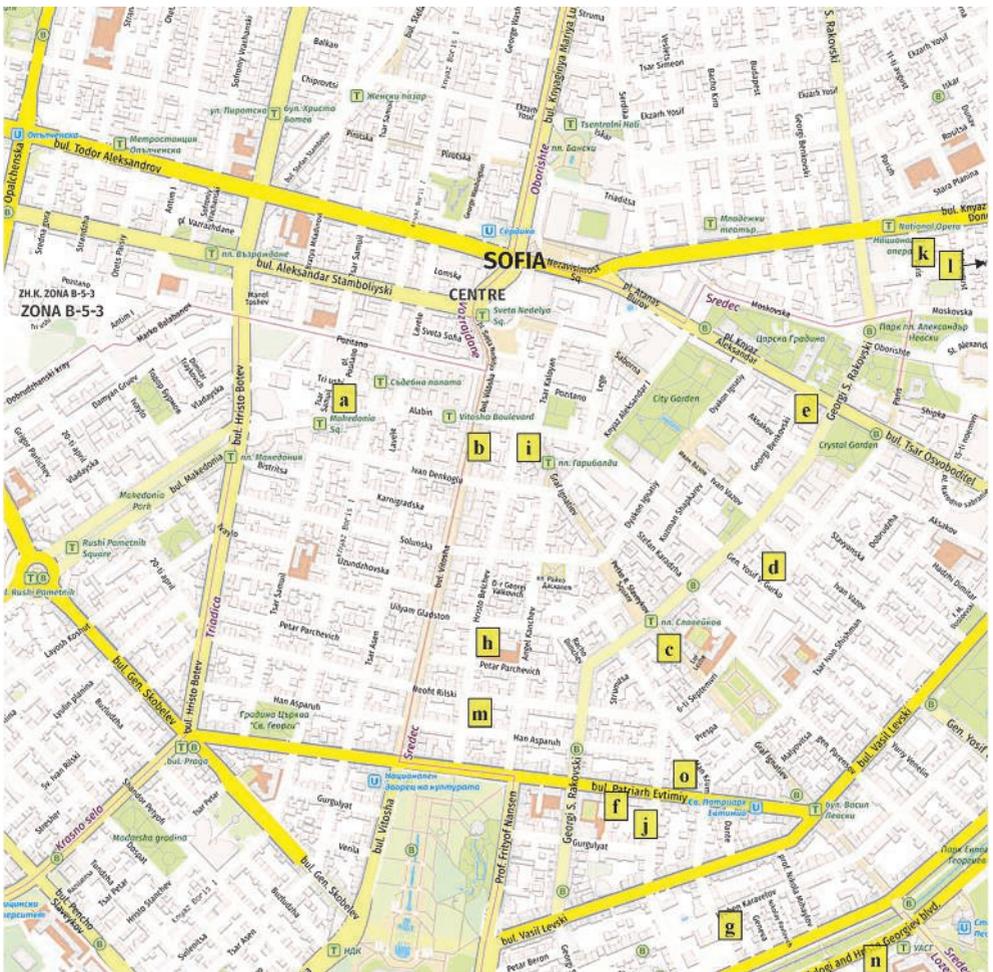
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On my third visit to Bulgaria this year (May 2023), I decided to investigate exactly what the capital city had in terms of decent beer houses. I'd already found three decent places earlier in March, on a whistle stop visit - more about those at the end of this article.

If you're just coming from the airport, the journey to the centre of Sofia is straightforward enough, providing you arrive at T2. However, most EasyJet flights up until 8pm drop at T1. This will require you to catch the free shuttle bus that operates every 30 minutes to T2. From T2, catch the Metro on the M4 yellow line and alight, in the centre of Sofia, at Serdika Station, journey time about 30 minutes. The good news about Sofia, is that you no longer need to master the Cyrillic script, as most street names are also in Latin text.





The first bar, **Halbite (a)** (Ul. Tri Ushi 13) was located about five minutes walk from my accommodation, with ten beers on tap (there are two of these venues in Sofia, the other is at Ul. Neofit Rilski 72). There are two bar areas in here, with a central serving room, and attractive stained glass windows in the entrance. I went for a Bulgarian beer



from Plovdiv, *Nash'to Pivo* 5%. Note that when ordering 6 half litres of most beer in



here, you are rewarded with a sharing bowl of fries. Next, it was on to **Beer Stop Bar (b)** (Ul. Vitosha 15), a narrow bar on a well-trodden pedestrianised street, with an outside enclosed smoking area. Just the one craft beer on in here (along with mainstream stuff), a *Divo Pivo* 4.5%



from *Brewery 359*. From here, close by is **Cosmic Craft Beer (c)** (Ul. Graf Ignatiev 34), basically a bottle shop with five beers on tap, four of which were German. I had the Bulgarian beer, *Pivo NEIPA* 5.3%, again from *Brewery 359*, and was offered a salt and vinegar flavour corn snack along with the



beer. A couple of streets away is **Nosferatu (f)** (Blv. Patriarh Evtimiy 28), a great little beer shop whose owners happen to be friends with **Pivoteka Bansko**, my go-to venue when I'm in the mountains in Bulgaria. The beer of choice in



here it was a *Mr Hops* 5.3% from *Meltum Brewery* in Lovech. In here it



was recommended that my next port of call should be **Dissident Bar (j)** (Ul. 6th Septemvri 36), that wasn't on my original list. Good choice! The ceiling in this bar is adorned with hundreds of beer mats, and I was led to believe that the barman had a part time job checking that there were no duplicates. I had a small sample of the *Baba Tonka Imperial Stout* 12% from *Põhjala Brewery* from Estonia, but went for the *Zichovic Juicy Lucy* 5.5% from the Czech Republic.

I was now halfway through the list of bars, so on the homeward run, and around a couple of corners was to be found **Pivoteka Craft Beer Shop (g)** (Ul. Lyuben Karavelov 53). This bar has not quite been open a year, and serves five beers. As the 5% plus drinks were starting to have an effect, I had a *Pivoteka Hala Lager* 4%, that is cuckoo brewed by *White Stork Brewery*. Back towards the centre of Sofia for the next one, **High Five Taproom (h)** (Ul. Hristo Belchev 29b). A bar smaller than the Nutshell in Bury St Edmunds (guessing everyone knows about that pub), it was



offering ten or so beers, and I chose the *Hopzland Sharolin* 5.5%. A weird coincidence in here, got talking to an American guy, and found out his name was Michael J Allen, although his J was Jack and not John! Only three bars left now, and the next one was only 300m away, **Crafter Bar (i)** (Ul. Hristo Belchev 6). What appears on the outside to be another small bar, quickly turns in to a much larger place when you step inside. Various beers are on sale in here, from Poland, Bulgaria, France, Latvia, Norway, Scotland, England, and Austria - probably the largest selection of the day. I had the *Buzz* 5.7%, a hazy IPA, from *Bevog Brewery* in Austria (only just, as it sits a kilometre from the River



Mur, that forms the border with Slovenia). It was now on to the penultimate spot of the day, **On the Rocks (d)** (Ul. 6th Septemvri 8). About twenty craft beers on in here. This venue has been open less than a year (originally as Trick Taproom), and is already carving out a reputation for quality craft beer. As I was coming to the end of



the evening, I decided to push the boat out here and go for the *Overflow* 6.7% from *Sofia Electric Brewing*, a dry hopped hazy NEIPA. The final stop for the night was **Tap Local (e)** (Ul. Georgi Benkovski 6). A great little bar, where you can request the music track of your choice (providing it's rock music!), in fact the brewery tap for the Sofia based *Kazan Artizan Brewery*. The first beer I tried in here was the *Kazan Stout* 5.3%, which turned out to be a free drink, as the barrel ran out whilst

being poured. Hoping for better luck, the last drink of the evening was the *Kazan Red Lager* 4.8% that went down nicely with a spicy sausage snack.

I mentioned at the start that I had already visited a few bars in March of this year. If you run out of choices with the ones above, they are:

Bira Bar (k) (Ul. Paris 8) - a bar on my must-visit-again list, a dozen or so craft beers available, and a bonus of cask beer on a couple of handpumps.

Vitamin B (l) (Ul. Ivats Voyvoda 2) - six craft beers on, mainly *Sofia Electric Brewing*.

Ale House - there are three of these venues in Sofia, **Central (m)** (Ul. Hristo Belchev 42), **Lozenets (n)** (Ul. Krum Popov 4) and **Quartal**, which is to be found 4 miles south of the centre. They all offer the same beers, with the selling point being that they offer a tap dispense lager at each table, where you pay-as-you-go.

All of the bars mentioned tended to do plenty of unusual bottles and cans, but I just concentrated on the draught beers, all of which were in the 6-14 Leva price range for 400ml.

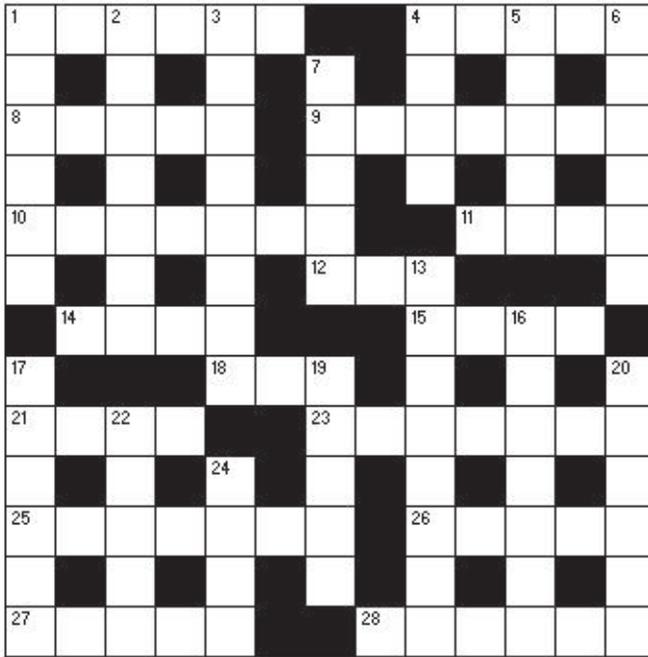
UPDATE - I returned to Sofia four months later in September, and thank the guys at the **Dissident Bar** for pointing me towards the **Cohones Bar (o)** (Ul. Han Krum 30), a brewery tap for the brewery of the same name, based about 5km away. This bar had 5 of its own beers on , and one from *Sofia Electric Brewing*. My choice was the *Nora Ampora Imperial Truffle Stout*, weighing in at a hefty 9% - Oh, and a free football table.



Enjoy Sofia!

CROSSWORD No. 42

compiled by MICK NORMAN



For a chance to win a crisp £10 drinking voucher please send your completed grid to our compiler:

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The italicised clues are of a kind, and not further defined.

Across

- 1 Whitbread at the Olympics (6)
- 4 Sports car in bloom (5)
- 8 Martin Curtis has run up a debt (5)
- 9 *E.g. not many inside* (7)
- 10 Caviar served with eels for starters, inducing greed (7)
- 11 *Misdial?* (4)
- 12 Pull to the west (3)
- 14 Not a misguided alliance of nations (4)
- 15 *Grandma's daily intake* (4)
- 18 Negative-sounding old Kent stumper? (3)
- 21 *Chickens here* (2-2)
- 23 Tea sets distributed in housing areas (7)
- 25 Unwanted pregnancy (7)
- 26 Endangered layer - one from Australia (5)
- 27 Famine relief for collier (5)
- 28 In the armchair, satisfied after taking drug (6)

Down

- 1 One in seven may be good (6)
- 2 'To p-pussy'. A Bach composition, maybe (7)
- 3 *Expensive car is consumed by heavenly body* (8)
- 4 Remaining option at the crossroads (4)
- 5 Wet oil skin prepared for use after a bath (5)
- 6 To thwart, my site is disturbed (6)
- 7 Donkey (alien) of Community Value, perhaps (5)
- 13 *Instruction to girl at red light?* (8)
- 16 Dettori, lost in the home of Tamla Motown (7)
- 17 Loud laughter? (6)
- 19 *To find the key inside* (5)
- 20 Arise from complex dances (6)
- 22 Eft on the move, frequently (5)
- 24 *Knocks back* (4)

Solution to Crossword No. 41

*Congratulations to
N. Goodwin, Tonbridge
who won last time.*





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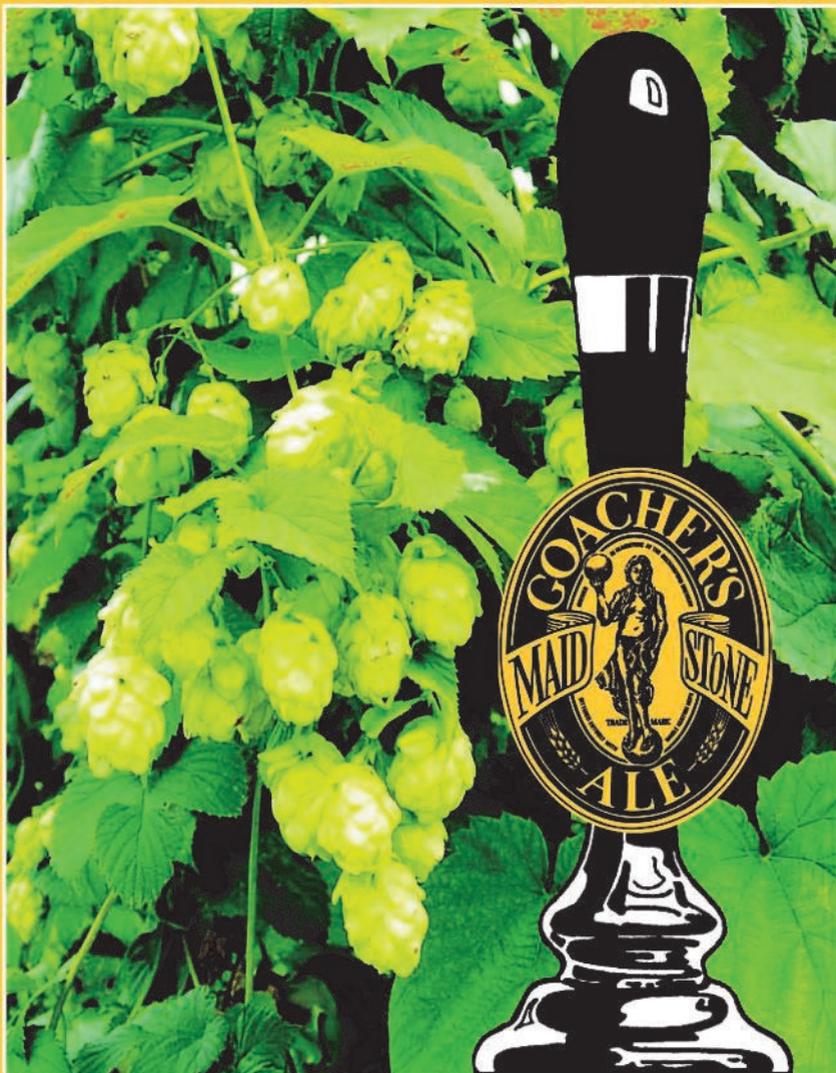
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