





Oxford CAMRA visits "the other place"

plus Black Country Trip, the pubs of Woodstock, communities buying pubs, beer festivals and all the local pub and brewery news

The free newsletter of the Oxford and White Horse Branches of CAMRA www.oxfordcamra.org.uk www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk



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5000 copies are distributed free of charge to pubs across the two branches' area, including Oxford. Abingdon, Witney, Faringdon, Evnsham, Kidlington, Bampton, Wheatley and Wantage and most of the villages in between.

This newsletter is also available to download in pdf format from our website oxfordcamra.org.uk/drinker

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of Oxford or White Horse Branches of CAMRA, or of CAMRA Limited

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An atmospheric shot of the inside of the Elm Tree in Cambridge; see the report on page 6 Photograph: Michael Corlett

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The best things in life are three

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Welcome

...to a bright new era for pubs?

WHATEVER the make-up of the new Government after 7 May. recent changes in legislation have paved the way for what will hopefully be a brighter future for our pubs. As part of the Small Business Act. a new law gives tenants tied to the large pub companies and breweries the opportunity to opt for a rent-only deal, allowing them to buy drinks on the open market at competitive prices rather than the inflated prices they have often paid in the past.

Beer prices could fall substantially at pub tenancies which go down this route, but there are potential dangers too as the pubcos, who also face restrictions on putting up rents, decide to sell off pubs that they don't regard as profitable. Tesco and other supermarkets might be reining back expansion plans which all too often involve converting pubs, but the threat to pubs is still real.

CAMRA campaigned not only for pub reform but for another change in legislation, which took effect on 6 April, New laws to protect pubs listed as Assets of Community Value (ACVs) in England mean that the owners of any pub listed as an ACV must apply for planning permission before going ahead

with a change of use, whereas previously a pub could become a supermarket with no planning procedure at all.

Advice on designating a pub as an ACV appears on the CAMRA website, and basically you need to get 21 local people together to register, meaning a six-month period of grace before a sale can go through, when the community can explore putting up its own bid. What's more. branches of CAMRA are now regarded as valid nominating bodies and can nominate pubs to be listed as Assets of Community Value in their name.

Coupled with a third consecutive cut in beer duty in the last budget, these are good times for CAMRA and for pubs generally - but we must remain



on our quard. You might not notice prices going down, but independent research indicates that the price of a pint will now be more than 20p lower than it would have been had the beer duty escalator remained in place.

So much for legislation - it will soon be time to welcome summer! I particularly liked this sign which I spotted outside a pub in Lancashire, and hope that lady shoppers will bear it in mind when out and about with their menfolk

In this edition there's another innovation as we welcome Oxford barman Kriss Sprules as a new regular columnist - read his views on the rise of real ale on page 25.

In the meantime I am continuing research into my book Oxford Pubs, to be produced by Amberley Publishing in August. More of this in the next issue. but if you have any historic photographs, please contact me at editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk And finally, you may or may not be pleased to know that this magazine continues to be called the Oxford Drinker, after a proposal to change its name to Beer InSpires was lost by 10 votes to six.

DAVE RICHARDSON



REAL ALE

Keeping in touch with Oxford Branch:

Get all the latest news and events, and share information about what's happening in your area. Sign up to our e-mail list at: www.oxfordcamra.org.uk/mailing-lists

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Ale trails in that 'other' University City

Michael Corlett defects to Cambridge

AN ANNUAL TREAT for me is the Oxford Beer Festival helpers' trip. Every year, as a thank you to everybody who gave up their time to make a success of the beer festival in October, the organisers arrange a day trip to a location with, as you would expect, a reputation for real ale. Seats on the coach are free to volunteers, and if room is available, guests can be accommodated for a small charge.

This year the destination was Cambridge, somewhere I was keen to visit as I had not been there for many years and was interested to see how it might have changed. So, on a slightly overcast day in late February, and fortified by a breakfast butty, myself and my companion boarded the coach at Oxford rail station and were whisked away. Shortly after midday we reached our dropping off point and set out eagerly towards our first pub.

Making good use of the maps

provided, we had planned a route around the city cleverly organised to start at one of the furthest pubs, and then bring us back gradually to the pick-up point, avoiding a long walk at the end of the day. Relying on my previous knowledge of the city I charged merrily ahead. ignoring the map, making for the market square. With characteristic patience, my companion waited until it became obvious that we had somehow turned round and were heading back in exactly the wrong direction, before taking control and steering us back on course. Whether it was the effect of the passage of time on my memory, or whether the city really has changed, it all seemed strangely unfamiliar. Certainly, there seemed to be more shops than I remember and my overall impression throughout the day was that it seemed more prosperous than it used to be.

We passed through the square with its bustling market, up

Bridge Street and across through Portugal Place to our first stop, the Maypole, only to find that a beer festival was in full swing. With eight pumps on the front bar, the same again at the back and a stillage in the back room, the choice was impressive. The landlord, Mario Castiglione, was celebrating 33 years in charge, and had laid on 33 beers to celebrate the occasion. Extremely tempting strong ales on offer included Dirty Goulash from Three Blind Mice at 8.2%, but for the first one of the day I opted for the more sensible Big Hop Little Beer, at 3.8%, a very nice hoppy number to start things rolling. My companion chose Indian Summer Dark and Spicy. which she took a great liking to. although it was a bit too heavy on the spice for my palate. The Maypole is also notable for having a full Italian menu, which I haven't come across before in a pub, and it would have been tempting to order something if it hadn't been quite so early. Mario gave us a warm







ABOVE: The Hopbine on Fair Street

TOP RIGHT: The Maypole, venue for one of the beer festivals in

Cambridge that day

BOTTOM RIGHT: Brewery at the Cambridge Brew House

welcome, and if this was to be the standard for the day we were in for a treat.

At this point, our carefully laid plans went the way that most plans do, and we decided to take a detour up the hill to the Castle. This is a traditional pub which has had a refurbishment in the style similar to many food -led pubs with paintwork in light colours and jazz playing over the speakers. The bar staff were very friendly and interested in making sure we found the beers that we wanted. Between the two of us we tried Portobello Market Porter, dark and smooth with a distinctive vanilla character, and Adnams Old Ale. I hadn't come across this particular old ale before, but it had all the character I was expecting from the name and I thought I could even detect a hint of sea-side saltiness, but that may have been my imagination working overtime. Having met with two of our fellow beer tourists from the bus, we enjoyed a pleasant half

-hour in conversation and while they ordered food (which looked excellent), we were keen to get back to our plan and pressed on.

After a ten-minute walk, we found ourselves at the Cambridge Brew House. Situated in the corner of a nondescript row of shops, and part of the same group as our own St Aldate's Tavern, the pub has been furnished in a very modern style but using old and reclaimed materials - for example the vaulting horse that provides seating for one of the tables. The on-site brewery is visible at the side of the bar and from their range we tried both the King's Parade (a traditional bitter) and the Night Porter, both very good indeed. The place was full, serving a younger crowd than some pubs, with one end dedicated to food, and the two upstairs rooms given over to a private party and the Six Nations tournament respectively. We squeezed into a table downstairs overlooking

the Cambridge School of Performing Arts where some kind of installation and/or performance was in progress behind the large plate glass windows (the building used to be a furniture showroom), which was entertaining, if slightly baffling.

Moving on up the street, we came to the Hop Bine, which would look exactly like a traditional city boozer if it wasn't for being painted bright orange. Inside, the atmosphere was instantly recognisable as "proper pub", and we soon settled down to enjoy our selection of Milton Dionysus and Indian Summer Hop and Soul porter, having been asked without prompting if we wanted the CAMBA discount. Either the astute bartender had clocked that we knew some of the group that were already there, or as CAMRA members, we are more easily identifiable than we thought!Nice touches included the Victorian fireplace, brass elephants holding up the bar





ABOVE: The Elm Tree on Orchard Street **RIGHT:** The Kingston Arms on Kingston Street

rail, and wooden screens with stained glass insets. This was somewhere we could easily have spent the rest of the afternoon, but with a mission to fulfil we said our goodbyes and headed on

Our next port of call was to be the St Radegund, at the far end of King's Street, which I had been looking forward to, but on arrival we found the doors locked and sounds of purposeful hammering and drilling coming from the inside. There were no signs up, but we later found out that this was due to a refurbishment rather than anything more sinister.

We moved on instead to the Elm Tree, a Charles Wells house with an immaculately kept exterior and an impressive range of guest beers. Of all the pubs we visited, this one felt as if we could have arrived at any time in the last hundred years or so. On closer inspection, many of the pictures on the walls were

of recent events. I'm quessing that there is an active band of regulars that contribute to the pub's success, and the hats nailed to the ceiling must be relatively recent arrivals, but the overall impression is one of cosy conversation and enduring timelessness. I chose the Colchester Mild which went down a treat, and my companion the Banks and Taylor stout, whose prominent bitterness was not really much to her taste. Luckily for me it was very much to mine, and I didn't need any encouragement to finish it up. If I ever need to find a place to live in Cambridge, I suspect it won't be very far from this pub.

Tearing ourselves away, we made tracks for the Kingston Street Arms -- another traditional pub with a slightly modern cast to it and with food prominent. We ordered, and in no time were served with a plate of ham, egg and chips each which disappeared almost

as quickly as they had arrived -- a tribute to the quality as well as our appetite. This was accompanied by Dark Star Revelation for me, and Windy Miller Malt Oat Stout for my companion. Although the Revelation was good, the stout was better and as I was unable to persuade any of it out of her hands, I had to make another trip to the bar in order to sample it properly myself.

This delayed our departure slightly and as the clock was now counting down, we set off at a brisk pace in what we hoped was the right direction for the pick-up point. Reassuringly, as we came closer to the city centre, like tributaries joining a river, we gathered together with familiar faces heading in the same direction. Soon we were back on the bus with another day of excellent beer, pubs and happy memories behind us.

MICHAEL CORLETT



THE Bear Inn

The Bear Inn is the oldest pub in Oxford and is a hidden gem, just off the hustle and bustle of the busy High Street.

The pub is popular with students, locals and tourists alike, who enjoy a warm welcome, a range of real ales and bottled conditioned beers and traditional, home-cooked food by the fire.

The pub is most famous
for its collection of ties dating back to the early 1900's and
representing clubs in the Oxford
area and, more recently, around the globe.

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Tony's travels

Branch Chairman **Tony Goulding** returns to Woodstock and North Leigh

Woodstock Waddle

Woodstock may only be eight miles north of Oxford, but it is part of the North Oxford branch of CAMRA so little is ever reported in this magazine. A Woodstock Waddle was required, starting at the Crown a former Courage house and almost the first building on the left as you enter the town. For many years it was very much a locals' haunt, then a change of character resulted in closure for six months and finally an 18-month refurbishment creating the present café-bar style of pub. A tasty Old Hooky is the regular beer and on the night Wadworth Henry's IPA was the guest.

Across the road the Arkell'sowned Punch Bowl used to be a lively, rough-and-ready drinkers' den run as a managed house, but after a refurbishment, what a transformation. Now a comfortable, bright and airv food venue run by tenants, it offers 3B and a seasonal ale from Arkell's with Hoperation IPA being a sharp and hoppy beer in very good nick. Good quality accommodation is offered and the present tenants have been in the trade for over 20 years, half of them with Wetherspoon. In 1980 I went to a beer festival here and back at Gloucester Green had to be

helped from the bus - such times!

A short walk will take you into a fine old hotel, the Marlborough Arms, which would have served you Hooky Bitter 30 years ago, but sadly there's no real ale now in this splendid 13th century building. Another short walk brings you to the private Woodstock Social Club, the venue for at least two beer festivals 10 or more years ago. Over the years the number of beers has dwindled, so what a surprise then to find three handpumps with a fourth to come. Doom Bar is the regular with two quests, these being a very drinkable Climate brewery (never heard of them) Cyclone along with Three Castles King Alfred's Gold. Being a private club you will be signed in with no problem, and there is plenty going on here with pub games and sports along with the quieter old clientele. You can get two good Sunday roasts for a tenner, which would upset people desperate to part with that for one meal!

Across the busy road is the well-established Kings Arms Hotel which is described in the 1983 Oxfordshire beer guide as a large, quiet, street corner hotel and restaurant. Now it's a busy and sometimes vibrant café-bar style of house that serves

quality food, but beer for the regular band of locals is not forgotten. This private hotel or free house serves Brakspear Bitter along with guests which on the night were a very fine Hook Norton Lion, microbrewery Hogget along with Wychwood Imperial Red, but the Bass of 30 years ago is long gone. I bet none of you are interested but Wednesday on nights it offers half-price champagne.

A short stroll past the very upmarket Feathers Hotel, with no real ale, found a former Morrells pub. the Woodstock Arms. where I was invited to the opening after Morrells acquired the pub from Bass Charrington. It's now a Greene King house with Olde Trip, Old Speckled Hen and St Edmunds, but despite the friendly staff I did not sample anything. Across the street is the ever popular Star, a Charles Wells (of Bedford) pub very well run with good quality food and beer in fine condition. Eagle Bitter, Bombardier and Courage Directors were the beers available.

Across the road is a very upmarket hotel, The Bear, and to my surprise it had Hooky Bitter on which is their regular beer. My last port of call was the Kings Head, first licensed in 1696 and one of the two Halls "Spud Pubs" of 30 years ago. Now very well run by Mevlan, a hard working Albanian, this food house incorporates the famous Luna Caprese Italian restaurant formerly of North Parade in north Oxford. It is going from strength to strength and two beers are served, Black Sheep in very good form and Fuller's London Pride.

The Black Prince is my favourite in Woodstock and a regular GBG entry, and this has been covered in previous columns. It is worth the roll down the hill, but don't forget the last bus home. Buses from Oxford to Woodstock operate every 30 minutes daytime and hourly evenings and Sundays so get out there, with 19 different beers to enjoy.

North Leigh Meander

A visit to the Mason's Arms in North Leigh by any CAMRA member may be a rarity, but this former Bass Charrington house was quite a surprise. With Courage Bitter and Directors on the bar nothing has changed here in the 27 years the landlord has run the place. many as a freehouse, and it's like stepping into his front room. a bit of a time warp. After a very friendly reception an interesting tour of this rambling, 200-yearold former workhouse was quite an eye opener.

The large front bar was furnished to just the right level of comfort, while a games room contained a (rare these days) bar billiards table along with a super old jukebox (I am about 30th on the list to purchase). Out the back is another very rare Skittle alley which doubles in the winter as an indoor Aunt Sally pitch. It would make pubco reps weep that such a place still exists to entertain some of the community. This place is not about beer choice, but worth a visit to see how most country pubs were run all those years ago.

A few yards along the road is the Woodman, a Punch Taverns house and for many vears previously a free house. Well known over the past 20odd years for beers festivals at Easter and August bank holiday, it is very much a sports pub. A young John Birch was retiring and leaving a week after Easter to enjoy his other passion, trains, and he has run the pub very well for the past eight years and will be very much missed. Basic pub grub is served with up to three beers from the Punch range and on the bar were Doom Bar (surely very soon Doom Bar-free pub awards will arrive!), Marston's Pedigree and a very drinkable St Austell Tribute. North Leigh is a lucky village to have two very different and prospering pubs to visit

Why not tell us of your drinking delights and keep us up to date with your local pub news? A great vison for the future would be for some of you out there to adopt a pub, and we look forward to your proposal to review pubs in your local area.



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A Belgian Beer Night

UNDER THE expert management of Kabi Pulyadi, the University Club bar on Mansfield Road in Oxford has developed quite a reputation of late for its beerthemed evenings, including "meet the brewer" nights or themed bottled beer promotions. Its latest venture, a Belgian beer and food matching night, held in February, was billed as something a little different and turned out to be a fantastic occasion.

The arrangement was quite straightforward - this was an all -ticket event, and for your money you got to taste six beers, which were matched with six different foods, all under the expert tuition of Bart Verhaeghe. Bart is well known to some members of Oxford CAMRA, as he used to supply and run a Belgian beer stand at the Oxford Beer Festival until space restrictions made this impossible. He now uses his expertise running a beer business in the UK, sourcing and supplying rare beers from his native Belgium and a few other select locations including the United States.

The beers were all served in large 750ml bottles, which Bart had carefully turned to mix the yeast sediment in with the beer. Our first beer was Troubadour blond (6.5%) which was served (like all the beers, in generous quantities) with smoked mackerel, a combination that actually worked well. Our next three beers were all served with cheese; the brown and bitter Brugse zot bruin (7.5%) with

creamy Camembert; a potent, bitter blonde beer La Chouffe (8%) with Taleggio, a semi-soft Italian cheese with a strong flavour: and the sweet and sour cherry Lindeman's Kriek Cuvee Renee (7%) with a strong Stilton, which cut well through the sweetness and was a good choice. We also sampled St Feuillien Saison (6%), a farmhouse-style blonde ale paired with honey glazed ham. and finished - or so we thought - with a dark beer, Delirium Nocturnum (8.5%) paired most unexpectedly but quite successfully with a chocolate brownie!

The finale of the night was a surprise beer, a Flanders red ale called Duchesse de Bourgogne, brewed by the Verhaeghe brewery in Vichte. which is a blend of an eightmonth-old brew with an older 18 -month-old version giving an unusual sour but fruity flavour. Bart had fetched the beer personally from the brewery that week, and it went down very well with the goat's cheese that accompanied it. Bart's family connections had also allowed him to bring a rare aged version of the beer, in a jeroboam bottle (it may have been a magnum, but it was very big!) so we were privileged in being able to taste this too.

A chilli supper, followed by a raffle to win bottles of the beers we had tasted, rounded off a wonderful evening. If an event like this is repeated, then it comes highly recommended.

MATT BULLOCK

Branch Diary

Saturday 18 April Social St Clements and Cowley Road

Meet at the Angel & Greyhound at 12 noon

Saturday 25 April Social at Nag's Head Beer Festival

Nag's Head, Abingdon, from 12 noon until late

Tuesday 5 May Branch Meeting

Wychwood Brewery, Witney 0X28 4DP

Starts at 19.30 Regular monthly meeting Pre-meeting social at the Cross Keys (18.30) and the Eagle Tavern (19.00)

Saturday 16 May Brewery Visit and Minibus Trip

Visit to Loddon Brewery and some excellent pubs in South Oxfordshire. Call Tony to book a seat 07588 181313

Wednesday 3 June

Branch Meeting

General Eliott, South Hinksey Starts at 19.30 Regular monthly meeting Pre-meeting social at the Berkshire House, Abingdon Road (18.30) before the walk across to South Hinksey.

Back to the Black

Matt Bullock joins our annual Black Country minibus trip in March

THIS PROVED to be another great day out, thanks in no small part to some decent weather and to our chairman, Tony Goulding, who was once again our chauffeur for the day. We started just before midday at an old favourite, the Great Western in Wolverhampton, so often "out of bounds" for us on a Saturday when Wolverhampton Wanderers are at home Fortunately on this occasion they were not, so we were able to tuck into a lunch of filled rolls and Holden's ales, with the welcome addition of quest beers including the very pleasant Welbeck Abbey Calvoso (5.4%), an American IPA. My choice here was less exotic but probably more appropriate to our day: the very drinkable, straw-coloured Holden's Black Country Bitter (3.9%).

From Wolverhampton we took the short drive to another favourite of ours, the Beacon Hotel in Sedgley. Home of the Sarah Hughes brewery and their legendary Dark Ruby Mild (6%), no day out in the Black Country would be complete without a visit here. Once again there were guest beers on offer (from Ossett, Rat Brewery and Stewart) but most plumped for the Ruby or for the equally pleasant Sedgley Surprise (5.0%). The pub itself is a classic, with glazed screens around the central bar, which serves a corridor, a front parlour and a busy back room. There are other rooms too, and it's worth exploring if you get the chance. The brewery itself is in a tower at the rear of the pub.

Sedgley does have other Good Beer Guide entries, the most recent of which is the White Lion, opposite the Beacon. which offers beers from Church End and Oakham, The Bull's Head (Holden's) down the street is also worth a look. Time did not allow us to do justice to the Beacon, let alone its neighbours, as we headed for our next port of call, Lower Gornal. Here the group split between two pubs, the first being the Black Bear on Deepdale Lane. The friendly landlord, who has owned the pub for 22 years, has an unusually strong house beer

brewed by Kinver (Black Bear IPA, 6.0%), and this seems to be what his customers like as all the beers were pale and hoppy -- beers from Kelham Island, Salopian and Barnsley breweries, plus the excellentlynamed 24 Carrot IPA from Fugale Bunny brewery (6.0%). The rest of the party went to the Fountain, another excellent free house with a range of guest beers. There was just time for a half pint of Hobson's Town Crier for me before the bus was due to depart for Netherton.

Our destination will need little introduction. The Old Swan. more commonly known as Ma Pardoe's after a former landlady, was one of four surviving brew pubs in the country when CAMRA was formed in 1971. It hasn't brewed continuously since then but today it is the home of the Old Swan brewery, and sells four of its own beers. The front bar here is a gem, unaltered since Victorian times (apart from the bright red paint), the most striking feature being an enamel ceiling which bears a picture of





LEFT: The tower brewery at The Beacon **ABOVE:** Ken and Michael peruse the menu at the Fountain

a swan amongst the intricate decoration. There is also a stove in the middle of the room, which is used in the winter, and at other times provides a convenient place to stand and rest your drinks. My chosen beer here was the Entire (4.5%); amongst the others there was a special beer, Netherton Pale Ale (4.8%), which we had not tasted before.

Our route had not yet taken in a Batham's pub, so we corrected this by visiting not one but two, the first of which was the Unicorn in Wollaston, This was a vibrant former brew pub. comprising two very busy rooms and a back corridor drinking area, which is where most of us ended up. As with most Batham's houses, two beers are sold at this time of year, the sweet Mild (3.5%) and Bitter (4.3%), which is also sweet but finishes with a bitter, dry and lingering aftertaste. In winter you can get XXX (6.3%), but sadly we were out of season for this one.

A few of us hopped off the bus on the edge of Stourbridge town centre to visit a second Batham's pub, the Royal Exchange. Again, this was busy and welcoming and had the same beers in equally excellent condition. Those who staved on the bus went directly to the Duke William, home of Craddock's brewery. David Craddock acquired this Edwardian corner pub from Marston's in 2009, transforming the pub into a respected beer venue, which he capped by opening the brewery here in 2011. They brew a range of beers, from the best-selling session beer Saxon Gold (4.0%) to the strong and aromatic Troll (5.4%), with a stout, a honey beer and an amber ale available for good measure.

Once again, time did not allow us to try all the beers, and our next destination, agreed by consensus on the bus from a choice of two, was the Waterfall in Blackheath. Situated at the top of a steep hill, the Waterfall is a Holden's pub which offers a range of guest beers, including Enville and Batham's, and also Dark Ruby Mild for those that

needed another fix. The views from the terrace are extensive and impressive (though it was getting dark now), and the pubitself is always busy and affords a warm welcome to all; the food here seemed to be very popular and very good value.

We had to turn down the temptation to eat in order to get to our final pub, the everpopular Waggon & Horses in Halesowen, Our arrival coincided with the end of the England versus France Six Nations game, so the pub was buzzing with excitement, though the overall result meant the mood was not celebratory! I'd be lying if I said I could remember any of the beers here - and there are 16 to choose from displayed on a menu on the wall (which I forgot to photograph), so I will have to conclude that the beer choice and quality was as excellent as ever. The time it took to round everyone back onto the bus was probably testament to this!

MATT BULLOCK

Pub News

Abingdon

BROAD FAGE: The pub re-opened on 7 March after being closed for several months, with Morland Original its main real ale. The previous landlord's popular music events attracted some complaints.



Beckley

ABINGDON ARMS: It recently received Cask Marque 5-star accreditation, and to celebrate had a mini-beer festival with Brakspear Bitter, Ringwood 49er and Boondoggle, Jennings Cumberland and Marston Shipyard (keg). Landlord Steve Vaughan and his wife are members of CAMRA, owning the business but being tied to Brakspear.



Binsey



PERCH: Planned re-opening date after major refurbishment is April 23, St George's Day. It will now have four hand pumps with a frequently rotating selection of local and national ales on tap.

Iffley

PRINCE OF WALES: Following a major refurbishment by Wiltshire brewer Wadworth, The Prince of Wales is set to fully re-open in early May. It is offering a range of six quality real ales with core and guest ales available. The investment costing circa £150,000 included an overhaul of the cellar and a brand new extension for the new team in charge, Sue and Steve Bant.



Oxford

BEAR INN: One of Oxford's bestloved historic pubs has gained two Air Bears made by Airstream as part of a game encouraging people to carry an object as far as they can. The wooden models arrived after a 5,000-mile journey from Minnesota in the US.

CHESTER ARMS: The first annual beer festival since re-opening of the pub, off Iffley Road, is planned for 22-25May, featuring 12 craft brews and ciders from Oxfordshire Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. Those already confirmed are XT Brewing, Loose Cannon, Rebellion Brewery in Marlow and Two Cocks Brewery. An unusual feature for a beer festival is food matching, and it also promises guest speakers on beer and brewing, A £12 pass bought in advance gives you three pints and a "Hop Up the Chester" pint glass.

FRIAR, MARSTON: Tesco has announced it is abandoning plans to convert the Marston Road pub into a supermarket. What next for this site?

HOLLYBUSH, OSNEY: This pub is closed at the time of writing.

NUFFIELD ARMS: There's no such luck for this closed and shuttered pub in Cowley which could become an outlet for The Cooperative Food. It was closed in September and the supermarket will occupy the ground floor under alease agreement with Punch Taverns.

If you have any pub news, please send it too pub-news@oxfordcamra.org.uk

South Hinksey

GENERAL ELIOTT: The recently revived country pub and free house is planning a beer festival this summer, with details to appear in the next edition. The pub was acquired from Vale Brewery by local couple Cass and Helen Hazlewood and has built up a great reputation for its beer and food in just a few months, and will host an Oxford CAMRA branch meeting on Tuesday 2 June. Vale beers continue to feature prominently with Brill Gold and Gravitas available on a recent visit, but also on were two from Prescott Brewery near Cheltenham - Hill Climb, and the darker ale Grand Prix, Weston's Wyld Wood organic still cider was being dispensed by the fifth hand pump



Wheatley

KING & OUEEN: Tracie Lafford has taken on the lease, after it had been under a management company. She was landlady at the Railway in Wheatley for 18 years until taking a break from the pub trade about five years ago. It is serving Greene King IPA and Morland Old Speckled Hen. but she will look to add another ale, and food will be served once the kitchen has been refitted. A refurbishment is planned, but not to alter its appealing character. She intends to promote the King & Queen as a community pub, with support for Aunt Sally (among other games), and her chosen local charity, the John Watson School in Wheatley



Wytham

WHITE HART: Baz Butcher has taken over as a tenant of Wadworth, having also run the St Giles Café in Oxford. In his earlier. life he was an area rep for Watney, Mann & Truman.

Wantage

SHOULDER OF MUTTON: Peter Fowler, who built up this pub as a very characterful real ale oasis and won the White Horse Pub of the Year award several times, has announced that he is leaving "for personal reasons" when a new landlord is found. But he promises to return to Wantage soon

BELOW: Peter Fowler at the bar of the Shoulder of Mutton in Wantage, a multiple White Horse CAMRA Pub of the Year winner and regional Pub of the Year finalist



Brewery News

Hook Norton

A finalist in the Best Brewing Company category in the Morning Advertiser Publican Awards in London, it was pipped to the post by Joules Brewery in Shropshire but thrilled to be winner of Best Dressed Male award for operations manager Bruce Benyon's fabulous socks!

Hooky beer has appeared in the Houses of Parliament. It was responsible for setting up and running a bar at an event for members of both Houses organised by the British Beer and Pub Association to help them understand the roles breweries and pubs play, as well as to sample some excellent beers from across the Midlands.

Hooky has announced sponsorship of the Cornbury Music Festival for the third year. It takes place on 10-12 July at Great Tew, near Chipping Norton, with Tom Jones the headline act. "This is a fantastic opportunity for Hook Norton to link core beer Lion with Tom singing What's New Pussy Cat?" it roars.



XT

The brewery notes how tastes have moved on in the last few vears as The Bastard Bunny -Double IPA at 7.2% - sold extremely fast and to a wide range of pubs, which a few years ago would have been rather more cautious of a full-strength extra hoppy beer. It was a collaboration between XT Brewery, Moog Brew and the artist Dave Anderson. brewed at XT and using multiple additions of full flavoured American aromatic hops, Both the cask and keg versions sold well and a bottled version will be available

The annual special beer for 2015 is Fifteen, an English IPA to celebrate the English hop growers who have been working hard to develop new varieties to compete with the strong aromatic and fruity New World hops.

The Animal range has been joined by two new beers for the spring: Big Bang (4.6%), a dark amber ale with coffee-toast flavours evolving into an Anglo-American hop finish; and Woosh! (4.6%), an amber beer layered with light biscuity Vienna malts and a rich fruity filling of New World of hops.

XT Brewery will be holding its Spring Open Day on Saturday 25 April from 10:30 with free entry, local food, and a wide range of beers all at just £2 a pint.

Shotover

96 cases of John Henry 7.1% ABV Export India Pale Ale were delivered to Oxford Brookes University late last month and it is now on sale in the Headington campus collonade shop at £3.99

a bottle. Last October's batch sold out in three weeks! A small amount from the same batch has been put into casks and it is hoped that we will have one of these at the Oxford Beer Festival in October, by which time it will have aged for nine months.

Jamie O'Sullivan, is the new Trainee Brewer here, as not as printed last time.

West Berkshire

It found success at the BeerX National Beer Competition 2015 organised by SIBA (the Society of Independent Brewers). Dr Hexter's Healer earned its place at the national finals by winning



an award in the regional SIBA beer competition, being judged against beers of the same style from all across the country, and won a silver award. Tommy Atkins Traditional Ale was recognised at BeerX with an award for Best Marketing and Communications.

Good Old Boy, the official beer of Reading FC, has been redesigned with a special pump clip to celebrate The Royals' recent FA Cup quarter final win. This is a limited edition pump clip and it will be used in various outlets across the Reading and Berkshire area. The Madjeski Stadium will also be using the special badge in the Good Old Boy bar. Reading will take on Arsenal in the semifinals at Wembley on 18 April.

To celebrate its 20th year, WBB is to bring back a selection of old favourites for the 2015 monthly cask ale specials and one such is Coolship which was first brewed in 2006. Traditionally a Coolship was the uppermost part of the brewery used for cooling and ventilation.

Wychwood

Fiddlers Elbow makes a welcome return in cask as the seasonal beer for May. A 3.9% lighter style wheat infused ale, the addition of the choicest English Wheat malt complements the flavoursome Styrian Goldings hops. The end result is a wonderful combination of citrus and floral aroma, with tart citric fruit flavours and a long hoppy fruity finish.

Hobgoblin has been named as the Gold award winner in the International Keg Ale competition, Class 2 (4.5-6.9%), at the International Brewing Awards. You can now join the Hobgoblin's "21st Century Crusade to Bring Taste to the Nation" and indulge yourself with a packet of his new and legendary Hobgoblin Spit Roast Potato chips made with smoky barbecue, roasted steak and Hobgoblin beer. The crisps have been produced in association with Burt's Crips and are available across of all the Marston's pub estate.

Do you remember when and where you experienced your first Wychwood beer? Take a trip down memory lane by visiting the Wychwood Ancestry page online. Re-live your fondest memory and mark your place on the family tree at www.wychwood.co.uk/competitions/ancestry

Beer Festival Diary

Wednesday 22 - Sunday 26 April

Royal Blenheim St George's Day Beer Festival

St Ebbe's Street, Oxford 20+ beers 01865 242355 www.royalblenheim.co.uk

Friday 24 - Sunday 26 April Spring Beer Festival

The Nag's Head, Bridge Street, Abingdon 33 beers plus 12 ciders 01235 524516

Thursday 30 April - Sunday

Reading Beer & Cider Festival

King's Meadow, Reading 550 beers & 150 ciders & perries www.readingbeerfestival.org.uk

Saturday 2 May Witney Beer Festival

St Mary's Church, Church Green, Witney

www.witneybeerfestival.com

Thursday 7 - Saturday 9 May

Banbury Beer Festival TA Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury

TA Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury 80+ beers & 20 ciders/perries www.northoxoncamra.org.uk

Friday 15 - Sunday 17 May White Hart Beer Festival

St Andrew's Road, Headington 40+ beers & ciders 01865 761737

Friday 22 - Sunday 24 May

Rokefest Beer and Music Festival

Home Sweet Home, Roke, nr

Wallingford www.rokefest.com

Friday 22 - Monday 25 May

Chester Arms Beer Fest

Chester Street, Oxford 12 beers plus ciders

Saturday 30 May

Chadlington Beer Festival

Chadlington Memorial Hall, Chapel Row, Chadlington www.chadlingtonbeerfestival.com

Friday 12 - Saturday 13

Wallingford Blues and Beer Festival

Regal Centre, off St Martin's Street, Wallingford www.bluesandbeer.co.uk

Saturday 13 June Fringford Beer Festival

Cricket Green, Main Street, Fringford, nr Bicester www.fringfordcricketclub.co.uk

Friday 19 - Saturday 20 June

Rugfest - Wallingford's Summer Music Festival

Wallingford Sports Park, Hithercroft Road, Wallingford www.rugfest.co.uk

Saturday 27 June Charlbury Beer Festival

Charlbury Cricket Club, Dyers Hill 60+ beers, ciders & perries www.charlburybeerfestival.org

Friday 3 - Sunday 5 July

Seven Stars Beer Festival

The Green, Marsh Baldon, 25-30 beers 01865 343337 www.sevenstarsonthegreen.co.uk

HOWZAT!

Stuart Bull, owner of the Cricketer's Arms in Littleworth, near Wheatley, reviews his latest beer and sausage festival

IWROTE last time about beer quality and our "No cloudy beer" rule. This is as true for beer festivals as at any other time. and at our bi-annual beer and sausage festivals many anxious hours can be spent waiting for ales to drop bright (although a recently racked ale is usually cloudy for the right reasons and not because there is anything bad going on). But I am continually amazed by the fantastic quality of our local ales, and how small brewers seem to be pushing the boundaries of taste all the time.

I also believe that ale should not have to travel too far from brewery to pub. Our range is 36 miles (we originally referred to it as our Six Sixes Ale Portfolio, six sixes being the best you can get in an over of cricket and us being The Cricketer's Arms) and we have stuck to that policy, more or less, for the last seven years. You can tell by the quality of the ales that were on offer at the beer festival how that policy has paid off.

With such incredibly strong competition, choosing a beer of the festival was a very difficult task at the February festival. XT15, Cats Tabby, Animal Croak, Hook Norton Red Rye and the last festival winner Two

Cocks Viscount, all scored superbly well. But in the end, they were pipped by the fantastic Gun Dog Booze Hound, making brewers James and Sarah very happy indeed. With all the competition, it was nice to see other new breweries doing so well; Cats brewery and Wild Weather brewery are producing some very good ales indeed and it can only be a matter of time before one of theirs takes the top spot.

The full list of ales included Wild Weather Sundowner 3.4%, Cats Mog 3.8%, Wild Weather Big Muddy 3.8%, Yubberton Yubby 3.8%, Indigenous Forager's Gold 4%, Cats Tabby4.1%, Gun



Dog Booze Hound 4.2%, Indigenous Old Cadger 4.5%, North Cotswold Winter Solstice 4.5%, XT 10 4.5%, XT 15 4.5%, Animal Croak 4.6%, Hook Norton Red Rye 4.7%, Goffs Black Knight 5.3%, Two Cocks Viscount 5.6% and Compass Tannenbaum 6%. Real Cider included Tutts Clump Special Reserve, Tutts Clump Original Farmhouse, and Tutts Clump Farmhouse Perry.

There were a dozen different types of sausage on the menu, all from the fantastic O'Hagans of Chichester. The sausage menu included Satan's Sausage, Oxford Herb, Drunken Duck, Venison, Redcurrant &



Surprised by Craft?

Ian Winfield was, at Siren Craft Brew's Anniversary Party

Port. Malaysian Chicken and a host of other fascinating flavour combinations.

A good turnout at Friday lunchtime was followed by a busy Friday night, with the dark ales from XT, Goffs and Compass making themselves firm favourites. The Saturday afternoon session was a cracker, with excellent support coming from numerous CAMRA branches, but especially our own Oxford branch and West Berkshire CAMRA, who made their way up on public transport en-masse (I have to say that I have never seen the Heyfordian 103 bus that comes past the pub quite so full!). Trade continued to be busy throughout the evening and drinkers stayed late into the night to listen to local Delta Blues musician Paul "Mud Slide" Morris.

The first ales to sell out were Hook Norton Red Rve and Gun Dog Booze Hound, as well as several sausage varieties and all of the cider. Sunday lunchtime was again busy, with a pleasant February day meaning that the record of people eating outside in February was upheld. By close of play on Sunday, there was precious little left on the bar and not a sausage to be found.

ON 7 MARCH a handful of White Horse branch members visited Siren Craft Brew for its third anniversary party. Although a free taxi shuttle was operating from Wokingham Station, on arrival at 2.15pm there was already a line of 20 people waiting and it was particularly noticeable - to a 44-year-old how very young they all were.

On joining the queue, I spoke to a young couple who had come from Boston. Near Skegness I assumed, but on realising they had American accents I asked them if they had come especially and they said they had, as they loved craft beer. On arrival I joined another queue and asked for a pint glass, but was told politely that they only had third-pint glasses. So off I set with a third of a pint wine glass, and after joining up with the other branch members I discovered that there were only four cask beers available all the other beers were keg! The choice of beer was

amazing and the Cigar City beer from the USA brought back fond memories of Baltimore. However, the beers were not cheap, averaging around £3 for a third.

Although Siren Craft Brew is only three years old it has a healthy export market and is known worldwide. The storage area was full of wooden barrels. all containing beer being conditioned, which gave the appearance more of a distillery than a brewery. The beers available at the festival included Siren Maiden 2014 (11.0%), cask: Siren Love of Work (3.6%), cask; Adnams Solera Broadside (6.0%), cask; and Cigar City The Dark Woods (8.8%), keg.

What struck me most was that the event attracted over 500 predominantly young people during the course of the afternoon, who all were enjoying this festival of craft beers. A lesson for CAMRA?

White Horse POTY

Neil Crook, White Horse Branch chairman (right), presents a certificate and the Bob Sumner Memorial Trophy to Paul Hexter. landlord of the Royal Oak in Wantage, which deservedly regained its crown as White Horse CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year.



Starting a Community Pub

Dick Bosley attends a seminar organised by the Plunkett Foundation at the Bear Hotel in Woodstock

THE Plunkett Foundation (PF) was founded 96 years ago, originally to take forward its founder, Sir Horace Plunkett's, work in helping rural communities set up cooperative agricultural projects. It has now expanded into helping rural groups form many other enterprises, particularly community shops and cooperative pubs.

The growth in interest in community pubs has been exponential, with a 64% increase in such pubs in 2013 alone, and to date no cooperatively owned pub has had to close. Readers will be aware of the high number of pub closures in recent years, but more and more communities are taking this opportunity to take over their own local pub.

There are different routes to starting a community pub, but the PF recommends taking the co-operative route which allows the pub to be owned and run by the members on the basis of one member, one vote. This encourages all sections of the community to become involved and means that profits from the pub are then used to help other local community projects. Anyone and everyone who thinks that their local is at risk should contact the foundation as below.

Our seminar was chaired by Julian Ross who was instrumental in setting up the Old Crown in Heskett Newmarket, Cumbria, one of the first co-operative pubs in the UK. He was ably assisted by several members of the Foundation team and there were attendees from all across the UK and one from Finland.

We started by discussing the importance of pubs to the local community. In simple economic terms the presence of a pub in a village can increase house prices by up to 10% as well as giving the community a centre and meeting point. This should not be underestimated as recent World Health Organisation figures show that loneliness can be more harmful to health than smoking.



If you think that your local is at risk, the first step is to have it listed by your local district council as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). This involves filling in a fairly simple form and getting 21 local residents to sign up in support. There are over 600 pubs listed as ACVs, more than any other type of building. Put simply, this listing gives the community group first refusal to purchase should it come on the market during the following five years. The White Horse Branch already has three pubs listed as ACVs.

If this situation arises the group has six months to organise and fund a bid for the pub. The first step should be contacting the Plunkett Foundation for comprehensive advice, and you should also form a Community Benefit Society, to organise the issuing of shares and arrange finances. Generally speaking investors can buy one share but can invest more money, with a reasonable return being allowed on their investment.

To be successful you must expect to find a committee of people, with a wide range of skills, who are prepared to put in a lot of time and effort. Enlisting the support of a parish or town council is important but, owing to legal restraints on them, it is not practicable to rely

on them to do all the work. This management committee can then respond quickly to issues as they arise, while keeping all members up to date with progress. This also gives a framework for running the pub when the purchase is completed.

For a practical example we were taken to the Bull at Great Milton, a 17th century pub in south east Oxfordshire that has appeared in Midsomer Murders as the Blacksmiths Arms. The sign features a Welsh Black bull, affectionately known as Gilbert. Greene King put this pub on the market in December 2012 and a group of villagers completed the purchase in 2013. The committee

appointed a tenant to run the pub business – usually the best route – but retains the ownership of the building. Beers on offer during our visit were London Pride and Front Row from Fullers, and Sharp's Doom Bar.

We then moved on for supper at the Seven Stars in Marsh Baldon, also south-east of Oxford. This pub overlooks the largest village green in the UK, possibly the largest in Europe. There is a long history of a pub on this site but three closures in four years led to a community buy-out and its reopening in 2013. The village group invested heavily initially in improving the property, and has also opted for a tenant to run

the pub. There is a thriving food part of the business as well as good use by community groups and villagers. Beers available here were Reading Best and Whirlwind from Loddon, Fullness of Time from West Berkshire, and London Pride

Both of these pubs received support from PF during their purchase and setting up as community ventures. I hope this brief summary gives you ideas about how to join the 4,000+ people who now have some ownership of their local pub so please contact the Plunkett Foundation for more complete information and guidance. Tel: 01993 810730 or email info@plunkett.co.org



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Bar Man

Kriss Sprules, a barman at the Chequers in Oxford High Street, starts a regular column by considering the rise of real ale in the city

WHEN I first started out as a barman over a decade ago, the concept of "real ale" was as alien to me as the Klingons on Star Trek. It wasn't nonexistent, of course - I'm not that old - but looking back today it feels like a different world. That darker, seemingly mythological time before such things as a smoking ban and "health and safety" became so very prominent in the trade. A time when it was absolutely normal (and allowed!) for the barman to be smoking a cigarette behind the bar whilst chatting away to regulars, without a thought for paperwork and other such nonsense. But I'm not just writing this to wax nostalgic; it's amazing to me that real ale has really become such a phenomenon as it is now, in such a relatively short time span.

In those early days, it was incredibly rare for anyone to order, much less enquire about, anything to do with real ale. Sure, we served Brakspear, maybe Oxford Gold, and we'd have a smooth on tap – but the vast majority of our trade was always lagers and ciders (well, Strongbow.) The guys asking for Brakspear were always the

weird old men that nobody wanted to talk to. How times have changed!

For a guy who learned the trade in those times, aettina acclimatised to the real ale scene took longer than most would expect: learning to keep a perfect pint is an underappreciated art form. But I'm proud to say that with the help of some patient teachers, and an excellent course run by the British Institute of Innkeeping (BII). I was eventually able to get to grips with it. But nobody in the days I started out would ever have predicted the explosion in popularity that real ale would enjoy.

I've had the opportunity to see things change throughout the country as a well-travelled journeyman bartender, with a tour of duty that started at The Bell in Wantage and moved on through bars in Middlesbrough. West Lancashire and brought me back to Oxford to work at the much-missed Far from the Madding Crowd. I originally learned to pull ale the Northern way, where head was seen as a virtue, and it took me some time to adapt to the range of ales as they came through. Working at

the Madding, however, was a different experience. A constant rotation of new ales to learn about, to test, to enjoy and to talk about. It was a whole new world, but one that I (obviously) threw myself into and really got to love. I developed a dangerous love of the dark side, too. Lord Vader would be proud of me!

Right now, however, I'm gearing up for one of my favourite things about the ale revolution: The Spring Ale Festival, running from 24 April to 10 May, at my current home. The Chequers on High Street. I'm really looking forward to seeing what comes up on that list, and what weird and wonderful things that the brewers involved have managed to come up with. As I kid, I wouldn't drink "bitter" that was Granddad's thing but, as I always tell the newcomers, we're in a whole new world now, and this isn't iust an old man's game anymore (thank you! - Ed.) Come and join us, have a chat about the offerings (we're always happy to talk beer) and raise a glass in toast to the revolution. We never saw it coming but I, for one, am more than glad that it did!

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Oxfordshire's Charlbury Beer Festival

VOTING IS now underway for the county's Pub of the Year involving the top pubs chosen by the four Oxfordshire branches. The winner goes forward to the Central Southern regional final, with the winner of that proceeding to the national finals and a possibility of becoming CAMRA's national Pub of the Year

The four finalists are: Oxford: Mason's Arms, Headington North Oxfordshire:

Red Lion, Horley South Oxfordshire: Plum Pudding, Milton White Horse: Royal Oak, Wantage

In a change to voting procedures this year, members cannot vote for their own branch Pub of the Year but only for the

three others. Voting forms are on the CAMBA website and all three Oxfordshire pubs apart from your own Pub of the Year must be visited. Deadline for completing the voting and returning the form to CAMRA is

White Horse branch member Dick Bosley advises that the X1 bus service from Oxford/ Abingdon can be used to visit two of the pubs as it takes you to Wantage via Milton. The Royal Oak in Wantage is open between noon and 2pm on Saturday and Sunday lunchtimes, leaving plenty of time on your return journey to call into the Plum Pudding. This pub is having a beer festival on 24/25 April to include the village brewery Lovebeer, which will be operating from a pub outbuilding for the weekend.



ABOVE: Oxford's winner is the Masons Arms, Headington Quarry

THE COUNTRY'S biggest

independent one-day beer festival will take place on Saturday 27 June at Charlbury Cricket Club. Oxfordshire from 12 noon to 10pm, Previous festivals have attracted around 3.000 visitors (including Prime Minister David Cameron, as widely reported in the national press), and raised over £130,000 for community projects, both in the local area and overseas

The 18th Annual Charlbury Beer Festival will again appeal to everyone, ranging from local mums and dads whose kids come to enjoy the children's entertainment, to serious beer. cider and wine lovers, who, alerted by CAMRA, visit from as far away as London and the Midlands, and even overseas. It will feature 50 real ales, a range of ciders and perries, wine and Pimm's. A great selection of food; live music throughout; the Culture Club tent: children's entertainment: plus the Fifth World Aunt Sally Singles Championships, make this a great day out.

Charlbury Cricket Club provides a glorious setting, barely two minutes from Charlbury Station with regular trains from Oxford. An excellent all-day (including late night) bus service also operates from Oxford, and there are also buses from Chipping Norton and Witney.

Fair deal on beet



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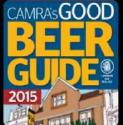
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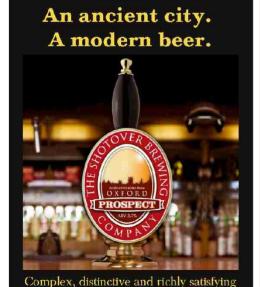
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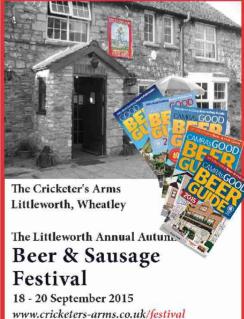
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The Hobgoblin orders you to come and browse his selection of gifts and merchandise with exclusive in-store offers and promotions on bottled and cask beers.

Brewery tours operate every Friday, Saturday and Sunday offering a two hour experience for those interested in seeing mischief in the making.

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(*pre booking essential)

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