

Fuller's Earth and full of ale - a drinker's public transport guide

For this public transport guide, we're letting the train take the strain. At 16.5 miles long, the Marston Vale line is a short east-west link between Bedford and Bletchley. It cuts through an area rich in mineral resources; the scars on the landscape and the place names reflecting the raw materials and the products produced. There are four stations on the line within Milton Keynes and North Bucks CAMRA branch area, putting 15 varied pubs within your reach.



We start at the most easterly point, Woburn Sands, where you'll find the **Station Hotel** (above) alongside the station. One small room is taken up by a pool table and can be served from hatch in the corridor. The main area of the pub contains a curved bar, with the main dining area towards the rear. The pub is well known for its breakfasts, with fish 'n' chips suppers featuring towards the weekend. Beers tend to be from regional breweries, with LocAles showing up on occasion. The pub's regulars tend to set

the beer choice, but you never know exactly what to expect.

For the other pubs in Woburn Sands hop on a bus for a few minutes or take a 20 minute stroll to the centre of the village. You'll pass the **Weathercock** on the way, but it isn't in Milton Keynes branch area as the boundary (and that of the county) runs down the centre of the road. The same goes for the **Fir Tree Hotel**, a good Wells and Young's house and the Greene King tied **Royal Oak** to the south of the village centre.

The **Swan** is in MK though, a much extended building on a busy corner, offering up to four ales. Once again it is the regional breweries that dominate, with Adnams frequently being the most unusual offering. The pub has a modern stylish interior mainly catering for their food trade, so it can be standing room only when things get busy.

If you are feeling energetic, there are a variety of fairly long walking options to get to our next pub. However, the train will take you to Bow Brickhill station which is a 10 minute amble from the **Wheatsheaf** (below) nestling discreetly amongst the houses, tucked back from the road a little with only it's signage to give it away.



There are two spacious rooms served by a single long bar. The two hand pulls offer Young's Bitter and Eagle IPA, always in good condition. It is an oasis of calm and well worth seeking out.

Next stop is Fenny Stratford, on the edge of Bletchley's urban sprawl. It boasts six pubs in total, and all usually offer some real ale.



Heading away from the main streets and down Lock View Lane towards the Grand Union Canal, you'll quickly find the **Red Lion** (above). This lock-side hostelry was the local CAMRA branch pub of the year in 2010 and continues to serve excellent quality beers. There are usually two, sometimes three, to choose from, with traditional brown bitters being particularly popular.

Wandering up Lock View Lane and back through the level crossing by the station towards old A5 – Watling Street of Roman renown – will bring you to the **Swan Hotel**, another spacious bar although considerably less modern. Beer from Adnams is regularly available from the U-shaped bar that serves the single

room. The hotel does a steady trade, keeping the bar fairly busy.



Crossing the road, a short walk along Aylesbury Street will bring you to a traditional two-roomed pub, the **Bull & Butcher**, which usually offers one or two ales. The front room is popular with locals watching sports on the TV. The **Maltsters Arms** opposite on the same street usually has one real ale on offer. Turn up Denmark Street, and on the corner of Victoria Road is the **Foundry Arms**, a pub popular with the local Irish community and which has recently begun to sell Wells and Young's real ale.

Heading back towards the station again you'll find the **Chequers** (below.) This small locals' pub is owned by Vale Brewery, so it is their ale you'll find on the pumps. Although there is only a single room, it is split into three distinct and quite cosy areas. Exit through the car park at the rear for the swiftest route back to the station.



Final stop on the line is Bletchley and the closest pub to the station is the **Park**, (below) down a steep set of steps and across a busy main road.



The pub is in the shadow of the railway bridge and partially hidden by large trees. The interior is best described as odd - a split level bar with modern décor covering what is clearly not a new building. You'll

find a beer or two tucked away at the back of the bar.

If you're looking for a bigger selection of ales, including a few surprises, take the short walk across the bus station and past the fast food outlet to the **Enigma Tavern**. It has the look and feel of a large housing estate pub, but braving the bland exterior will reward you with a choice of around four ales.

If you want to end on a bang, take a train one stop up the main line from Bletchley to Milton Keynes Central where, on Midsummer Boulevard, the biggest of the four **JD Wetherspoons** outlets in Milton Keynes offers the best local selection of ales and would be a good place to relax and look back on an enjoyable crawl.



- *Jason Jarratt*