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MAY/JUNE 2018 | ISSUE 17

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# BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

*Nestled between motorways, and sheltered by the Chiltern Hills, the beautiful unspoilt rural Vale Of Aylesbury, North Buckinghamshire, holds the key to the Cotswolds and the Midlands.*



Pictured opposite page: Pretty cottages and Crendon Church in Long Crendon.  
Pictured on this page:  
The Butchers and The Pointer, Brill



## WHERE TO STAY

### THE POINTER, BRILL

In the south-west corner of the Vale, on the crest of a low hill, sits one of the charming villages for which the area is renowned. Brill boasts 1100+ residents, a parish church dating back 900 years, two shops, two pubs and a restored windmill. Although it was a Royalist stronghold during the 17th century English Civil War, it is an unlikely site for a 21st century gastronomic revolution but here you can find The Pointer, the 2018 Michelin Eating-Out Pub of the Year. Since buying the pub in 2011, David and Fiona Howden's enthusiastic development and investment in both staff and the fabric of the building has brought commercial and award-winning success, culminating in their most recent accolade. Not content with transforming the fortunes of the pub, they opened a nostalgically-tiny old-fashioned butcher's shop near the church (nowhere is far away!) and, from this year, can offer first-rate accommodation, encouraging pub/restaurant goers to relax and enjoy, without the worry of the journey home. There are just four en-suite rooms in a converted 18th century cottage, opposite the pub, but each is beautifully appointed and marvellously

comfortable, with Hypnos beds and White Company linen. Don't be deceived, when entering the flag-floored, low-ceilinged bar, thronged with local customers, that The Pointer is just another country-pub. I can confirm that the beer, locally-brewed, is good, and very welcome after a day's drive, but it is the lure of the restaurant, separately-sited away from the bar and accessed via the open-fired lounge, which draws in the patrons. Warm, home-baked bread is brought to the table, in a linen bag, with a choice of butters. The locally-churned organic version is saltily delicious but, if you get the chance, lose yourself in the decadent flavour of their beef-dripping butter, dreamily reminiscent of roast beef and Sunday lunches. A succession of top-quality dishes follows and each reaches the quality-bar set high by that humble butter. With most of the raw materials used by Head Chef, James Graham, and his team emanating from the Howdens' own organic farm, freshness and flavour are to be expected but my 50-day aged, Longhorn rib-eye steak was sensational. [thepointerbrill.co.uk](http://thepointerbrill.co.uk)

**T**HE GREAT ARTERIAL ROUTES of the M1 and M40, away from London, neatly bypass this 350sq miles of gently rolling, largely agricultural landscape, familiar to followers of the Midsomer Murders TV series, as they carry traffic to the north and west of the capital. Taking advantage of the resulting tranquillity, the Vale has retained that indefinable charm which has been its historic essence. Although the county takes its name from the small town of Buckingham, Henry VIII awarded the title of 'county town' to ancient Aylesbury, in 1529, in an apparent attempt to curry favour with Thomas Boleyn, father of Anne, Henry's ill-fated second wife. Regrettably, little of the medieval centre still stands, a notable exception being the King's Head, a timber-framed coaching-inn survivor from the 15th century and well worth a visit. Fans of David Bowie will be drawn to the Market Place to see the newly-installed bronze sculpture of the pop icon, in the town because the first appearance of his ▷



Pigs at The Pointer's Farm.



### HARTWELL HOUSE HOTEL AND SPA, AYLESBURY

The long, illustrious history of the Hartwell House estate, in years gone by the seat of kings of both England and France, can be enjoyed by all who stay in the excellent Historic House Hotel into which it has been sympathetically transformed.

Naturally, this great house has seen many architectural changes, over the centuries, and what you now have is an early-Georgian mansion with exquisite interiors of Jacobean, Baroque and Rococo influence, sitting in 94-acres of landscaped parkland, dotted with arboreal features, classic buildings and statuary.

After a meticulous six year programme of restoration and modernisation, it opened as a 30-roomed hotel in 1989 and was given into the care of the National Trust in 2008. Since then, it has maintained its standing as a 4 AA Red Star hotel and has become an honoured member of the 'Relais & Chateaux' and prestigious 'Pride of Britain' organisations, its appeal evolving, as fashions change. The abandoned orangery, coach-house and stable block was stripped out and now hosts the generously-proportioned indoor swimming-pool, gymnasium, sauna and steamroom of the Hartwell Spa, where, in immaculate treatment rooms, all manner of therapies and beauty routines are administered by skilled professionals. The increasing demand for accommodation for larger parties, and families, is also answered – the Old Rectory, within the estate, can take up to 10 guests, in private (self-catered, if you wish) luxury and with a manicured, two acre garden in which to play or relax. Even our four-legged friends can be equally pampered, staying in one of the 16 suites and bedrooms making up Hartwell Court (formerly estate officers' quarters), in superb comfort.

Such a great setting deserves a restaurant to match and, in the Sir John Soane-inspired dining-room, Executive Head Chef, Daniel Richardson, presents seriously good, imaginative dishes, perfectly served. In recent time, awards and recognition, for both the food and the extensive wine-list, have been a regular feature and, based on my experience, this magnificent house, just an hour's drive from Central London (quicker by train), will surely receive many more.

[historichousehotels.com/hartwell-house.com](http://historichousehotels.com/hartwell-house.com)



'alter-ego', Ziggy Stardust, took place in a nearby club.

Away from such modern culture, the Vale is home to a multitude of sleepy villages and hamlets and it must have been this bucolic air which attracted the great and good to invest in grand stately homes and estates. Buckinghamshire boasts more National Trust properties than any other county and south of the Chilterns lie great Thames-side houses like Cliveden and Stoke Park. Further north, you will find magnificent architectural gems like Florence Nightingale's

Claydon House, Stowe and, unmissably, VisitEngland's 2017 'Large Visitor Attraction of the Year', Waddesdon Manor. This was built, in French style, between 1874-89 to house Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild's fine art collections and given to the nation, complete with all contents, in 1957. Sadly, James Callaghan, in 1977, refused the opportunity to acquire another great Rothschild 'treasure-house', Mentmore Towers and its extraordinary contents, for a modest £2m. After years of indecision, the contents were auctioned, raising over £6m, and the house and park sold separately.

Sadly, it now stands empty and neglected, in danger of dereliction. On the outskirts of Aylesbury, a kinder fate befell Hartwell Hall, a less ostentatious pile but one with an illustrious history going back to the 11th century. In the 19th century, it became a refuge for the exiled king of France, Louis XVIII, and his large entourage before finally being painstakingly restored in the late 20th century and opened as a perfectly presented country-house hotel.

Peacefully nestled between Luton, to the east, and Oxford, to the West, The Vale of Aylesbury gives visitors a taste of a quieter England, unhurried and sedate, with country roads and lanes blissfully free of heavy traffic, except for tractors. As a relaxing tourist base, it's ideally situated to give access to a bewildering choice of attractions, whatever the preference. Great houses abound but alternatives include the famous zoo at Whipsnade, for steam buffs, the Railway Centre at Quainton and, for the energetic the exciting challenge of the North Bucks Way. While not, strictly, within the Vale, the irresistible appeal of the Bicester Shopping Village cannot be ignored. This shrine to retail therapy brings together, in one cobbled street, outlets for 160 of the biggest brands in Britain, including Armani, Burberry, DKNY, Prada and Versace, and all at discounted prices. Just over the 'border', also, is fabulous Oxford, bustling 'city of dreaming spires' and historic home to the many colleges making up the world-renowned university. □



# The Great British Escape

Stoke Park is a luxury 5 AA Red Star Hotel, Spa and Country Club set within 300 acres of beautiful parkland and offers world-class sporting and leisure facilities.



### Facilities include:

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- 13 Tennis Courts (indoor, grass and artificial clay)
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- Crèche
- Games Room
- Playground

35 minutes from London, 7 miles from Heathrow Airport and a short drive from Windsor makes Stoke Park an ideal location and perfect setting for stopovers and luxury breaks.



For more information or to book, please contact our Reservations Team on 01753 717172 or email [reservations@stokepark.com](mailto:reservations@stokepark.com)

[www.stokepark.com](http://www.stokepark.com)

