

In the parish of High Wych , near Sawbridgeworth in east Hertfordshire , there is a small basic pub called the "Rising Sun" It has three small rooms - the bar , a 'best room' with a small serving hatch , and the room with the dart-board . There is no piped music , it doesn't do meals , and there is room for just about six cars to park in front as long as they all park sensibly

It used to belong to Chaplin's brewery of Harlow -about four miles away over the county border in Essex -which sold out to Barclay Perkins & Co in 1926 and eventually of course became a Courage house . Today it survives as a Free House . It has always sold Real Ale , and always served it straight out of the barrel - and it still does .

In 1929 just three years after Barclay Perkins took over from Chaplins , the Oakley family moved into the "Rising Sun" and 14 years later , in 1943 Iris Oakley married Sid Puncher .

Sid worked for his father in their Sawbridgeworth coal merchants business - also making their cart available to people who were moving house to convey their belongings . After the wedding , he moved into the 'Rising Sun' with Iris , but continued to work for his father as his main occupation . However in 1957 the license passed to Iris , and Sid began to divide his time between the coal business and the pub , especially the 'heavy' work of physically manhandling the casks into the bar and up on to the two-tier stillage at the right hand side .

Sid's father died in 1962, whereupon Sid decided that the time had come to devote much more of his time to help Iris run the pub . Nevertheless, he spent some of the ensuing years supplementing the family income by taking part - time employment as , for instance , a

gardener at the nearby Manor of Groves , and driving a school bus during term - time collecting and delivering handicapped children to and from home and their special schools . Eventually Sid became involved virtually full-time in the everyday running of the 'Rising Sun' However , Sid himself never actually held the license . It continued to be held year after year in Iris's name - right up to of their retirement , Sid often used to find it jokingly convenient to play down the major role he came to play in the life and the growing success of the pub by explaining that "I'm only the barman" .

By the early 1970s, the Rising Sun had become one of a mere handful , quite literally , of pubs within a large area of the country comprising East Hertfordshire and West Essex which still served real ale , and the only one to serve it by gravity dispense . Devotees of fine ale and good pubs regularly travelled miles for the pleasurable and memorable experience of sampling Sid's beautifully kept Best Bitter and Directors (brewed just over the south side of Tower Bridge in those days) , sampling the atmosphere of what had already become a unique , unspoilt , village pub and valuing the personalities and characters of the people they met , not least the character of 'mine host' , Sid himself . Already , by then , the pub was far more often referred to as 'Sid's' than by its real name . It is rather a sad fact that the 'Rising Sun' reputation was not sufficiently widely known in the earliest days of CAMRA for it to have found a place among those elite pubs which have appeared in every single edition of the Good Beer Guide , missing only from the first one

The Herts/Essex Borders Branch was one of the first to be formed in an attempt to break up the county of Essex , which started as a single county-wide CAMRA Branch , into

smaller areas in order to make campaigning more effective and more flexible , The Herts/Essex Borders Branch was officially launched at a meeting in High Wych Village hall , which is directly opposite 'the Rising Sun' and which was packed to the rafters with enthusiasts . It was launched by the National Chairman 'Chris Bruton', assisted by the Essex Area Organiser , Chris Caskmore . Sid had obtained 3 firkins of ale - which all went . The 'Rising Sun' and Sid , and Sid's family , thus occupy a special place in the history of CAMRA's influence in the area . It was an obvious and regular choice of venue for branch Committee Meetings , and has never ceased to be one of those "must visited" pubs which people are recommended not to miss .

Sid and Iris retired on October 29th ,1987 and the license was transferred to their nephew Stephen Prior, who has been there ever since , ensuring that the character of the pub and the quality of the beer continue to bring so much pleasure to all those who patronise it .

Iris died in 1988 , and Sid lasted another 10 years - but passed away , peacefully in his bed , on October 13th at the age of 85 . it must surly be a lasting tribute to him that 11 years after his retirement , the 'Rising Sun' is still referred to as "SIDS's" - in the 1999 edition of the Good Beer Guide , too!