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BEER & CIDER
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Issue 86
October - November 2014



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

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The **Oxford Drinker** is the newsletter of the Oxford and White Horse branches of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

5000 copies are distributed free of charge to pubs across the two branches' area, including Oxford, Abingdon, Witney, Faringdon, Eynsham, 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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Valuable contributions have been received for this issue from Richard Queralt, Stuart Bull, Michael Corlett, Tony Goulding, Jon Tillson, Dick Bosley, and all those who have provided pub and brewery news.

Please send contributions to the editor at the above email address.

Pub news can be sent to
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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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The Oxford Drinker could be renamed, so we're seeking your ideas




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Welcome

...boom time for breweries, but what about pubs?

AS YOU can see from the photograph below, our magazine is now being seen in high places! I met David Cameron at an event in the Red Lion in Northmoor, and pointed out to him that this community-owned pub is one of the lucky ones. Pub closures are now running at over 30 a week as many are converted into convenience stores, so I took the opportunity of telling him about CAMRA's campaign to require planning permission whenever a pub is bought for conversion.

CAMRA has already achieved cuts in beer duty, and has had major input into legislation now going through Parliament to make the breweries and pub owning companies give landlords a better deal. Hopefully the Government will listen to our latest campaign, but it will come too late to save many more pubs from falling to Tesco and others.

You can read more about the campaign in this issue, but better news is that there are now 1,285 breweries in Britain, a net increase of 170 in only 12 months, meaning that we now have more breweries per person than anywhere in the world. When launching the

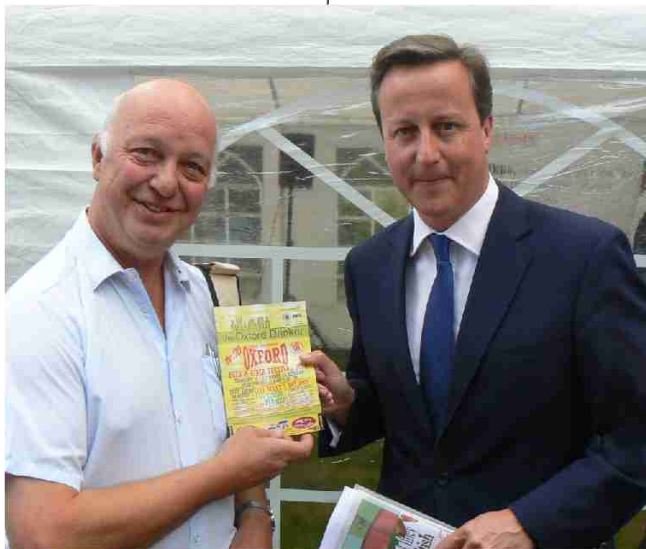
Good Beer Guide 2015, CAMRA also revealed research showing that over a third of young people aged 18-24 have tried real ale and that 87% would drink it again. We see plenty of young people at our beer festival (16-18 October, Oxford Town Hall) but it's a shame we rarely see them at socials and branch meetings. Congratulations to all pubs in our branch area who are in the 2015 guide and commiserations to a few that have dropped out.

In this issue we have the first of

a series of columns by Stuart Bull, landlord of the Cricketer's Arms at Littleworth; and the first feature-length article by Michael Corlett, looking at Wheatley's pubs.

My "Pint of the Month" has to be Side Pocket for a Toad, a 3.6% session bitter from Tring Brewery enjoyed in the traditional and welcoming ambience of the New Inn in Witney. Thanks to landlord Martin Cornish for seeking out beers like this.

DAVE RICHARDSON



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
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/mailling-lists

To receive copies of the *Oxford Drinker* by post, please send A5 sized, self addressed envelopes with postage to cover 100g letter to: **Oxford Drinker, 25 Chamberlain Place, Kidlington OX5 1SG** and we will send you as many issues as you send envelopes.

Time to change the planning laws

Dave Richardson looks at CAMRA's campaign to stop pubs being converted to other uses without planning permission

CAMRA'S new Pubs Matter campaign to close loopholes in the planning laws will resonate with people all over the country who have watched helplessly as their beloved local has been closed and converted, usually to a supermarket. While some pubs were clearly failing and had no future as such, many others were viable or even thriving but not delivering enough profit to cash-hungry big breweries or pub owning companies keen to reduce their estates.

Tesco's name comes up again and again in this sorry story, as it seeks to expand its Express stores which compete directly with local corner shops. A list of nine pubs where local communities are fighting pub closures, issued by CAMRA recently, included no fewer than eight pubs targeted by Tesco plus one set to become a Morrisons.

In CAMRA's Oxford branch area at least four former pubs

have given way to Tesco, including the Fox and Hounds in Abingdon Road, Oxford; and the Ox and Fitzharris Arms in Abingdon. The former Friar pub in Marston, Oxford has now been demolished to be replaced by a Tesco, and in some cases these closures were bitterly resented by locals. Planning permission is only needed when a building is demolished and replaced, not when the existing building is adapted.

CAMRA says pub closures are now running at 31 per week, and the Pubs Matter campaign calls on the Government to make a simple change to the law in England so a planning application is always required before a pub is demolished or converted into another use. Pubs have been demolished and converted not only into supermarkets, but also estate agents, pet shops, dry cleaners and even funeral parlours, all without planning permission.

"Popular and profitable pubs are

being left vulnerable by gaps in English planning legislation, as pubs are increasingly being targeted by those wishing to take advantage of the absence of proper planning control," says Tom Stainer, CAMRA head of communications. "It is utterly perverse that developers are able to demolish or convert a pub into a convenience store or many other uses without any requirement to apply for planning permission. A pub is an entirely different proposition to a convenience store, estate agent or funeral directors and the planning system needs updating to reflect this fact. It is wrong that communities are left powerless when a popular local pub is threatened with demolition or conversion into a Tesco store."

Research by CAMRA indicates that two pubs were converted into supermarkets every week between January 2012 and January 2014. Yet research shows that 69% of pub-goers believe that a well-run



LEFT: Tesco operate from the site of the Fox and Hounds in Oxford

TOP LEFT: The boarded up Queen's Arms in Goring

TOP RIGHT: Crowds turn up for a Stop Tesco in Goring meeting

RIGHT: The Friar, New Marston

community pub is as important to community life as a post office, local shop or community centre, while 75% of all adults believe that pubs make a valuable contribution to life in Britain. Nearly 70 MPs have backed Pubs Matter, and over 40 MPs have already signed a Parliamentary Early Day Motion in support of closing the planning loopholes. You can sign the e-petition at <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/66572> - about 7,000 had signed up by the end of September.

For further information on the Pubs Matter campaign or to submit your campaign as a case study visit www.pubsmatter.org.uk

Opposition to Tesco mounts

Opposition to Tesco can be furious, and not necessarily because a pub is threatened with closure. The Tescopoly Alliance was launched in June 2005 to highlight and challenge

the negative impacts of Tesco's behaviour along its supply chains both in the UK and internationally, on small businesses, on communities and the environment. The campaign also advocates national and international legislation to curb the power of all the major British supermarkets, using the slogan "Every Little Hurts".

At Goring, in South Oxfordshire, villagers are conducting the Stop Tesco in Goring (STIG) campaign, which has been featured on BBC TV news. Tesco is trying to take over the Queen's Arms pub in the village after closure by Greene King last December, although STIG spokesman Emrhys Barrell said there were four other pubs in Goring and it may have no future as a pub.

"The whole future of the pub was kept very quiet, as Greene King put in a planning application to extend it but then let it be run down," he says.

"We believe they must either run with this or put in a new application. Our campaign is to not necessarily retain the Queen's Head as a pub, but to stop Tesco which would not be appropriate for this village."

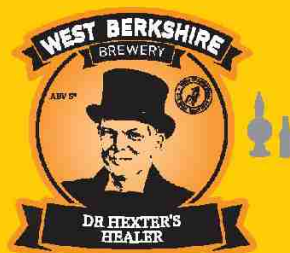
More than 600 people came to a meeting in the village hall and over 2,000 have signed a petition. The website says: "The arrival of Tesco will undoubtedly have a severe and negative impact on the existing local businesses, many of which are family run and go back several generations. Without local support, many of these shops will die, leaving a high street boarded up as in many other locations where supermarket chains have been allowed to infiltrate and suck the life out of a village."

For more information see www.tescopoly.org and www.stoptescoingoring.org



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Pub and Restaurant Review:

The Red Lion at Northmoor

Dave Richardson continues his series on real ale pubs with good food by visiting a village in West Oxfordshire



THE RED LION became a community-owned pub earlier this year after Greene King failed to find a new tenant, and since then the range of real ales and choice and quality of food have improved enormously. Once I had driven off the A415 Abingdon to Witney road and found Northmoor – some local wag had helpfully turned around the signpost – I was not only very thirsty but very hungry.

Being a free house the Red Lion can now serve whatever ales it chooses, and as Wychwood Brewery helped set up the cellar, at least one of the four hand pumps is usually dispensing a beer from Witney including Hobgoblin and Brakspear Bitter, on this occasion. Hook Norton is also a regular supplier with my half-pint of Lion proving this was kept in tip-top condition. Moving on to a pint to enjoy with my meal, I chose Cotswold Brewing Co's Cask ale, which proved it can produce very quaffable bitter in addition to its home-produced lagers.

Food is a very important part of the offer here, and new tenants Lisa Lyne and Ian Neale (above) previously worked at The Newbury, a major dining pub in the town of that name. This is the first time they have

run their own business and they are determined to make it work, with plans to grow their own fruit and vegetables as well as baking their own bread.

The pub was already busy at 1pm on a summer Tuesday afternoon, and having seen the size of the starters I sadly decided against despite the temptations on the blackboard. These included soup of the day at £5.50 and an unusual crab dish at £7.50, with a Ploughman's Lunch (£8.50) and sandwiches with chips (£6.50) also on offer.

I decided to try the Red Lion Burger, and this did certainly not include some of the dubious meat served up by the high street chains. It is made with very expensive but tasty wagyu beef, a breed originating in Japan with intense flavour and marbling. Served on a brioche with caramelised onion, red onion, lettuce and gherkin, it really melted in the mouth although I found the accompanying chips too large, hard and unappetising. My lunch companion's Caesar Salad looked equally good, with fresh leaves, moist chicken and anchovies. The burger at £12 and Caesar Salad at £8.50 were good value in this part of the world, with most main

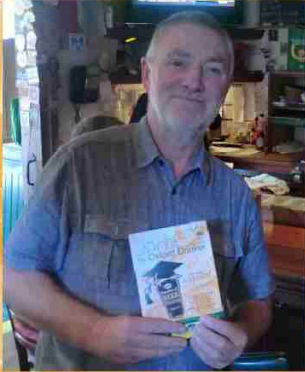
courses costing around £10-£12 except for the rump steak at £16.50.

The burger was so filling that I also wanted to pass on desserts, which was bad form on my part. A good choice was available from £4.50 to £6 but I was eventually persuaded to try the Hazelnut Affogato – two scoops of ice-cream with a small jug of coffee to pour over, and a small glass of hazelnut liqueur. It gave me a shot of caffeine and a sweet taste to end the meal, and contemplate the drive back and another look at that damned signpost.....

The Red Lion is an ancient building that's been nicely adapted as a modern restaurant and pub, and it's highly recommended. Community-owned ventures deserve our every support.

The Red Lion
Standlake Road
Northmoor
OX29 5SX
01865 300301
www.theredlionnorthmoor.com

The editor would welcome approaches from real ale pubs with a better than average menu to feature in this column. Anywhere in Oxfordshire would be considered.



Tony's travels

Branch Chairman **Tony Goulding** gets out and about

Oxford – Jericho

The Anchor in Hayfield Road has now become an up-market restaurant that serves a couple of Wadworths beers. This 1937-built corner pub still looks a superb building although a lot of the interior has lost its pub feeling. A good walk down to Walton Street will turn up another super boozer, the Marstons-owned Victoria. Two beers from the Marstons stable including Jennings or Ringwood are served in good form, along with half a dozen interesting bottles. The only original upper bar in a pub in Oxford would be a superb setting for their simple but tasty speciality pie meals. The good times go on with a walk around the corner to The Gardeners Arms in Plantation Road, another good boozer and former Morrells pub now serving two beers from the Marstons range and two guest beers along with very good and popular vegetarian food. Visiting during their beer festival was a tasty treat with 14 beers in good form, the garden atmosphere adding to the sunny afternoon.

Oxford City Centre

The splendid Lamb and Flag is now a pick-up point for volunteers delivering the Oxford

10 the Oxford Drinker

Drinker, and always has two real ciders on dispense in addition to the wide range of ales at this popular free house. Across St Giles from the Lamb and Flag is the Eagle and Child, another busy need-to-visit pub with four beers including Brakspear Bitter, a real cider and good pub food. A major refurbishment by owners St John's College will take place in the future. It was now time to deliver copies to the Royal Oak, the only pub on Woodstock Road. Four beers are on hand pump here including Brakspear Bitter.

Tucked away behind McDonald's is the Crown, serving up to seven beers and a cider with good pub food in comfortable surroundings refurbished a couple of years ago. A short walk into the High Street and tucked away down a narrow passageway is one of the city's top pubs, The Chequers, again serving Brakspear Bitter, many guest beers and two ciders, in this multi-level, ancient sprawling building. A major refurbishment has just taken place – see Pub News.

A good walk down the High and over the bridge brought me to the Cape of Good Hope, a

former Morrells two-level corner pub. This is another well-run but different house, a major student haunt. The beer range and food is of the same high standard as the city centre pubs with a good range of bottled ales here too.

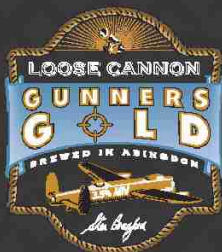
Witney

The Carpenter's Arms has been purchased by a local businessman who assured me that he will continue to operate the pub as now with a lick of new paint. Running it as a free house must be a better prospect than the previous pub group owners, and as Wychwood has helped with set-up it will have two of its beers on plus a guest.

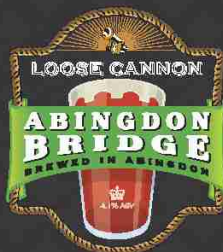
At the Red Lion, Greene King has promised a more comfortable food offer with up to three beers on the bar. But GK's Robin Hood seems doomed, as I spoke to a couple of their regulars who now drink in the Elm Tree who stated that nobody in the immediate vicinity has any thoughts of trying to save the only pub on Hailey Road with a wide catchment area. The Saddlers in nearby New Yatt has been closed for a few years but may have a future as an unlicensed community centre.

LOOSE CANNON

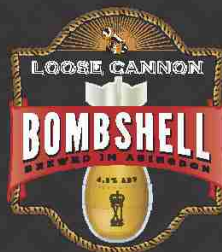
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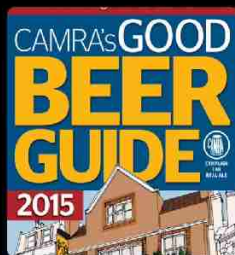
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Pub News

Abingdon

NAG'S HEAD: A new loyalty card costing £10 entitles you to a free half pint at the Thursday Ale Club, a 30p discount on pints at other times, 5% of food, and other discounts.

Islip

RED LION: Punch Taverns is advertising for a new tenant with incoming costs of £16,675 and annual rent of £34,500.

Oxford

CHESTER ARMS: The long-delayed re-opening of this traditional pub in Chester Street, off Iffley Road, finally happened in September with full opening of the kitchen planned for 1 October. Owned by an independent businessman and run on a 15-year-lease by local entrepreneurs Drew Brammer and Becky Webb, the former Chester Arms had been closed for about two years. Major

work has been done to upgrade the kitchen and toilets, plus new floors and ceilings, and part of the deal when sold by Punch Taverns is a plan to build two houses on the former car park. The pub is now back at the heart of its local community with real ale a major part of its appeal, and a long-term deal with Loose Cannon which is providing most of the beer. On offer just after opening were Abingdon Bridge, Gunners Gold and a special called Leathered 1860, with plans to bring in a porter by the end of October. Loose Cannon will also help source guest ales with plans to move through the alphabet from A to Z – Atom, a natural wheat beer, was available soon after opening. Food is also served, with the emphasis on sharing platters (starters from £4, mains from £9.50), and the pub has a large garden. “We won’t stray far away from our pub roots,” says Drew. “It’s only bad pubs that are failing, while good pubs are thriving. We are also operating a small shop to sell everyday items like bread and

eggs, and we will serve breakfast on Fridays and Saturdays. You never know how things will turn out, and the people who use it will dictate the kind of pub we are.”

CHEQUERS: This popular Nicholson’s pub on an alleyway off the high street has had a major refurbishment which includes installing a separate bar on the upper level, which is now laid out as a restaurant. It has 10 hand pumps in the lower bar and three, offering duplicate brews, in the restaurant, which has tables smartly laid out with crockery, cutlery and wine glasses. A new leaflet has been produced, “A Pub with a Story”, saying that it dates from the 1500s when a tenement occupied by a moneylender was turned into a pub. A chequerboard was the symbol of a moneylender, hence the name.

THE DUKE: Previously known as the Duke of Edinburgh, this St Clements pub has been closed on and off but has now re-opened as a bar called J. Perks & Co, but does not serve real ale.

DUKE’S CUT: This pub in Park End Street was closed for a major refurbishment as we went to press. Some cryptic quotations appeared in the windows along with an appeal for staff, but whether it will continue to be a traditional pub is not clear. Formerly trading as an Irish bar, the Marston’s tenancy is in a major nightlife area.



LEFT: Drew Brammer (left) and George Harwood-Dallyn at the Chester Arms

NELSON: The Cowley Centre pub closed in August, having had a bad reputation latterly following incidents of violence and a drug raid. Spirit Pub Company had announced the closure a couple of months earlier and it is likely to be permanent.

NUFFIELD ARMS: This large former Halls and latterly Punch Taverns pub on Littlemore Road, Cowley was due to close by October. It is understood it has been sold to the Co-op supermarket chain.

ST ALDATE'S TAVERN: A new entry in the Good Beer Guide for 2015, the pub celebrated two years since re-opening in September, having become established as a leading real ale venue. Six hand pumps are available with the regular brews coming from Hook Norton (usually Lion), XT (6 and 13 were available recently), Box Steam Brewery (Funnel Blower and Well Oiled, from its Box Clever Ales guest range) and Dark Star. The two guest ales rotate regularly, being sourced mainly via XT and Box. Rudgate's Grain Storm, from Yorkshire, was available on a recent visit. The pub has also gained a good reputation for food, and has quickly established one of the most popular function spaces in Oxford at the Blue Room upstairs, seating around 40 people and having its own bar with two hand pumps – a rarity for a function room. Assistant manager Amy Howard says: "Getting into the Good Beer Guide really sums up the transformation of our pub. We spend a lot of time and effort in maintaining our beers and offering varieties from pale to dark guest ales." The free house belongs to the City Pub Company which also has seven other pubs

in London, Cambridge, Norwich and Stratford-upon-Avon.

South Hinksey

GENERAL ELLIOT: Closed for several years, the new local owners have been busy finishing off refurbishment of the former Vale Brewery pub which is planned to re-open in October.

East Hanney

BLACK HORSE: It is reported that the Black Horse in East Hanney is another about to be let by Punch, which states in the particulars: "At present, it's a little tired though a forthcoming investment of £130,000 will see a substantial improvement of the facilities, décor and layout, improving the customer experience while making life easier for the new publican." It is due to reopen after refurbishment as a food-led establishment.

Eaton

EIGHT BELLS: We are pleased to report that the Eight Bells has reopened, after temporary closure to enable extensive refurbishment to its kitchen.

Wantage

ABINGDON ARMS: This pub, which was recently sold by Greene King, along with the King's Arms and the Blue Boar, has now closed – but as we go to press we understand that it should be re-opening after some remedial interior work.

City Pub of the Year voting opens

Voting is now under way for this prestigious award, and members can get a form in participating pubs. They must visit the six pubs listed and get the form stamped by each pub, and when they have visited them all rank the pubs in order of preference with "1" for the favourite and "6" for the least favourite. Put a score beside each pub and use each number from 1 to 6 only once. Please remember the criteria for the competition when voting. As well as the quality and range of the beers, consider the ambience, the service, and sympathy with CAMRA's aims and values.

The six pubs are:

Chequers

130a High Street OX1 4DH

Lamb & Flag

12 St Giles OX1 3JU

Masons Arms

2 Quarry School Place OX3 8LH

Rose & Crown

14 North Parade Avenue OX2 6LX

Royal Blenheim

13 St Ebbes Street OX1 1PT

St Aldate's Tavern

108 St Aldate's OX1 1BU

Once completed, please return the form to the address to arrive by 2 December or bring it to the branch meeting on Wednesday 3 December. You can also give it to someone who is going to the meeting or scan and email to contact@oxfordcamra.org.uk

OXFORD BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL



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Friday 17 October: 11am-11pm

Saturday 18 October: 11am-8pm

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News in brief

Lion Tamer



What a fellow! Branch member Ray Borrett from West Oxfordshire looks the part at the Great British Beer Festival's Lion Tamer bar back in August.

Help Wanted

With over 150 pubs on our Oxford Drinker delivery list, we're always on the look-out for help. If you fancy getting involved every two months, by delivering our publication to a few pubs near you, then do get in touch with us. You'll find it's a very rewarding hobby. Contact Tony Goulding if you feel you'd like to help - the contact details are to the right.

Happy Birthday

A number of Oxford branch members were very grateful to the St Aldate's Tavern for an invitation to the pub's second birthday party in September.

The new Good Beer Guide entry threw a party in the Blue Room upstairs, where a fine selection of beers and nibbles was offered. Branch member Matt Bullock is seen celebrating with the pub's management team of Amy Howard and Ez Parkin.



Find out what CAMRA does

Not everybody can make it to the National AGM, so CAMRA has organised a number of super-regional conferences to allow members to find out more about how the campaign is structured, to be updated on key campaigns, and to meet some of the key personnel involved.

The Central Southern Region's conference is being held at Oxford Town Hall on Saturday 1 November. All members are welcome and are encouraged to attend, but you need to register beforehand on the CAMRA website or by calling 01727 867201. A full agenda for the meeting is also available on the website. We're hopeful that some liquid refreshment will be available after the meeting.

Oxford Branch Diary

Wednesday 15 - Sunday 19 October Oxford Beer Festival

Our annual event at the Town Hall. Help always needed from CAMRA volunteers.
staffing@oxfordcamra.org.uk

Saturday 1 November Super Regional Conference

CAMRA's regional event being held at the Town Hall. A chance for members to find out about campaigns and to meet members of the National Executive (see left for more details)

Tuesday 4 November Branch Meeting

Brewery Tap, Abingdon
18.30 Crown & Thistle
19.00 King's Head & Bell
19.30 Brewery Tap
Regular monthly meeting. All welcome.

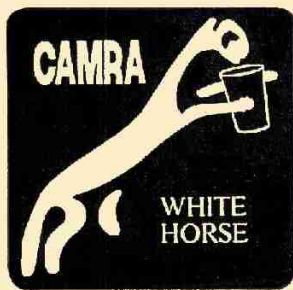
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Pubs under pressure

VILLAGERS in West Hendred are campaigning hard to raise the money to save their only pub, The Hare. It has been closed and put on the market by Greene King, as part of a strategy to reduce the size of its tenanted and leased estate. The villagers say the only way to be sure of securing the 200-year-old pub for the future is to buy it and turn it into a community-owned free house. The Vale of White Horse District Council is due to consider an application for the pub to be registered as an Asset of Community Value, which would give villagers more time to raise the funds. Oxfordshire has the largest number of community pubs in the country and so far each has been a success.

The pub was put on the market for £425,000 and a substantial sum has already been raised with contributions from as far away as Manchester and Birmingham. West Hendred needs just a few more investors to make the scheme viable – and anyone can invest. If you are interested in helping to save The Hare, would like to know more and see the business plan, then visit the website: www.savethehare.co.uk. You can follow the campaign on: Twitter: [Savethehare](#) or on Facebook: www.facebook.com/savethehare.

Punch Taverns has also put The Plough in West Hanney on the market for £375,000. A regular Good Beer Guide entry, and former runner-up as White Horse Pub of the Year, the Plough is a historic 16th century thatched building with an attractive garden. Following an initial meeting which demonstrated a wealth of local support to keep the Plough open as a pub, West Hanney villagers and other local drinkers have set up a Save the Plough committee, with the support of Cllr Matthew Barber. It is supported with campaigns on Facebook www.facebook.com/SaveThePlough and Twitter www.twitter.com/savetheplough

People are being encouraged to sign up for regular updates on the progress of the campaign, and the Parish Council has applied to Vale of White Horse District Council to have the pub defined as an Asset of Community Value. If successful, this will put a halt on the sale of the freehold by Punch Taverns for six months. In the meantime, villagers would appreciate it if people would continue to use The Plough as it remains open whilst they raise the funds to purchase the freehold.

Hayle and pace

Dick Bosley tries a few pubs in Cornwall



A FAMILY holiday in St Agnes, Cornwall gave me the opportunity to do a long walk to St Ives and so tick off another stretch of the South West Coast Path. Here the path is surrounded by heather and gorse and is an ideal spot for bird-watching. I would have been chuffed to see a chough but had to make do with fulmars, willow tits and peregrines.

An early start meant that all of the pubs I passed in Towan Cross, Portowan and Portreath were closed, no matter how much I wanted a pint for breakfast, but I had high hopes of hitting Gwithian at opening time. In fact the Red River Inn had six hand-pumps with Jail Ale, Waggledance and Brown Willy available. The only drawback was the midday opening time, meaning I was 40 minutes too early and so I had to push on to Hayle.

Here the Cornubia was a little disappointing, offering only Dartmoor Best and St Austell Tribute, but the latter was in good condition and refuelled me sufficiently for the next stretch, on to the Badger Inn at Lelant. Dartmoor and Tribute were again available but for the sake of variety I tried the HSD which,

although a little sweet for my taste, was very reviving.

Although it's only a couple of miles to St Ives from here the final stretch seemed interminable, possibly because there are no pubs. However, on reaching my destination I was spoiled for choice with two Wetherspoons and at least half a dozen other pubs to choose from. I started at the Sloop, which overlooks the harbour and dates back to 1312, making it one of Cornwall's oldest pubs. It stocks four real ales, mainly from local brewers, and three ciders. My Doom Bar from Sharp's was very good and very, very welcome. Next stop was the Union and I was disappointed to only find only Doom Bar and Betty Stoggs (from Skinners). I tried the latter and soon moved on to the Castle Inn.

Here, the friendly and welcoming staff were pleased to tell me that, with eight ales available, they had the biggest range in town. It was here that I finally saw a chough, albeit on a pump clip. There were two beers from the Cornish Chough brewery: the Lizard Storm, a dark and spicy beer, and my choice the lighter Cornish Crabber which was excellent.

Trains, a bus and a short walk – as well as a couple of pasties – saw me back to St Agnes where there is plenty of pub choice too. The Railway advertises Sky Sports but the TV is tucked away in a back room so that you can enjoy the four changing local ales in peace – and the GK Abbot Ale if you are so inclined. At the bottom of the village is the Peterville which had New World from Marston's, which was very good, as well as Tribute, Atlantic (Sharp's), Betty Stoggs and Courage Best.

Half a mile away at Trevaunance Cove is the Driftwood Spars Hotel with its own Driftwood brewery (and a new visitor centre to open soon). They had three local guests as well as three of their own ales – Blue Hills, Bowden Rock and Badlands. To be honest I didn't find their beer very inspiring until the last day of the holiday when Dek was on, this being an excellent, hoppy 3.8% pale ale. However, for consistently good beer I would recommend the St Agnes Hotel which had a full range of St Austell beers available, including my favourite – Proper Job.

DICK BOSLEY

Whizzing down to Wheatley

Michael Corlett catches up with Wheatley's pubs as he delivers the Oxford Drinker

WHEATLEY is a large village to the east of Oxford with excellent transport links, lying alongside the M40 and served by bus routes U1, 280 (through to Thame and Aylesbury) and the 103/104 via Cowley Road and Horspath. It has a long history going back more than 1,000 years and is a thriving modern community but, more importantly, it is home to a half dozen pubs with real ale on tap.

One sunny August Saturday afternoon, knowing that exercise sharpens the appetite for refreshment, I put the bus timetables to one side and unlocked the bicycle, taking it up the path that runs alongside the A40. Sooner than expected I was dropping down into the Wheatley valley and up the other side to my first port of call, the Railway on Station Road. This pub owned by Fullers is a Thai restaurant, but unlike some places that have undergone a similar conversion, there is still space to sit or stand at the bar and there were a few drinkers scattered around the tables.

I tried the Summer Ale, light coloured with lots of hop flavour, but without being exceptionally bitter, served in

good condition as you would expect from a Cask Marque pub. London Pride, the regular ale, was the alternative, and my overall impression was that drinkers are welcome here. TV sports are shown and below the screen is a large fireplace which would be inviting during the winter months. The walls display a range of paintings for sale by local artists, and although the whistles of trains are no longer heard, the pub still serves as a place for locals and travellers alike to eat and drink.

Heading back down the hill into the valley, I turned right onto the high street. This is indeed a valley but in modern times the river runs below the road rather than above it, and on the left is the King and Queen, an old coaching inn. The front bar was already busy when I entered, with music playing and a turntable set up for an evening event. Disconcertingly, at first sight, there seemed to be no hand pumps – but there are four in the back bar with three in action serving Greene King IPA, Old Speckled Hen and Abbot, which was my choice for a half pint. This is a cosy bar with beams, a wood burner in the

central fireplace and curious artefacts around the walls. Falling into conversation at the bar, I discovered that the pub is currently under temporary management with Greene King apparently looking for a new tenant. Hopefully they will find somebody to do justice to this historic hostelry at the centre of the village.

Leaving the King and Queen through the car park and turning right, you come to the Kings Arms. Food is obviously an important part of the offering here, with tables being set up for the evening as I came in. Nevertheless, a small band of locals were gathered at the bar with a lively debate in progress. Judging by the contribution that the staff were making to the discussion, this is certainly not one of the 'diners only please' establishments that are becoming depressingly common. Of the three Greene King ales on offer, I choose the Morland Original which turned out to be very drinkable.

From here, I headed to the east along the bus route of the 280 to the Plough. Stepping inside, I had to admit to feeling rather underdressed not wearing



ABOVE: The King and Queen
RIGHT: The Cricketers Arms at Littleworth
FAR RIGHT: The Sun Inn



either a formal suit or designer frock, as a wedding party was celebrating in the marquee set up in the garden. But the bar staff were more than happy to welcome a slightly perspiring cyclist among the regulars. The Plough is owned by Mobbs, the local coal merchants, and is run as a free house and restaurant. A refurbishment three years ago provides a light and airy space to either side of the central bar for both dining and drinking, and the pub is much changed from its previous incarnation.

Despite the focus on food, the commitment to drinkers is reinforced by the range of ales, with three rotating beers available from local breweries. I had a very pleasant drop of XT6 to go with the easy banter flowing back and forth across the bar, and this is certainly a place worth calling into for local ale.

With afternoon turning to evening I decided to press on, and so headed back up the slight gradient westwards through the village and out the other side to the Sun Inn. Of all the pubs on this trip, the Sun is probably the one that most gives the impression of being a restaurant first and foremost.

However there is an impressive array of five hand-pumps as you walk through the door, but only one appeared to be in use and this was serving Doom Bar, never one of my favourites regardless of its national popularity. But it turned out that there was a cask of Shotover Prospect in the cellar, and the landlady very kindly went to the trouble of climbing down and back up again to allow me to sample it. The Prospect lived up to my expectations, and I was very grateful for her efforts.

The last visit of the day was to the Cricketer's Arms, slightly further to the west and technically in the adjoining village of Littleworth. The Cricketer's will be familiar to many as the first pub in the branch area with LocAle accreditation, and home of the twice-yearly Beer and Sausage festivals. With four hand pumps (three ales, always local, and one cider which is also locally produced), my inclination was to opt for one of the guests. But a regular tipped me off that the Hooky Bitter was in particularly good order and having ordered a pint, I wasn't disappointed. To my mind there are few better pints to slake the thirst after a

hard day's labour than Hooky when it is in top form. You may argue that an afternoon visiting pubs is not exactly what you would call labour, but at this point my legs begged to differ!

The Cricketer's has a reputation for home-made, no-nonsense food, with Angie's Steak and Ale being something of a reference point for me when it comes to pies. This is a local pub in the greatest tradition and the bar, as usual, was populated on both sides by friendly faces eager to engage all comers in the free flowing conversation. It seemed like no time at all before I was looking at the bottom of my glass and contemplating a refill, beginning to wish that I had taken the bus. But discretion proved the better part of valour and I peddled my way homewards, taking the scenic route across the top of Shotover. I mused that even if there are many reasons why Wheatley has continued to thrive through so many centuries, the quality of its community-focused pubs must certainly be one of them.

MICHAEL CORLETT

Beer Festival Diary

Further details of festivals in the area can be found on the Oxford CAMRA website
www.oxfordcamra.org.uk/festivals.php

Wednesday 15 -

Saturday 18 October

Concrete Pint Beer Festival
 Buszy, opp Milton Keynes Central rail station, Elder Gate, Central Milton Keynes
 90 beers plus 20 ciders & perries
www.mkcamra.org.uk

Friday 17 October -

Sunday 2 November

Wetherspoon Real Ale Festival

All JD Wetherspoon pubs & Lloyds No1 bars
www.jdwetherspoon.co.uk

Thursday 16 - Saturday 18 October

Oxford Beer & Cider Festival

Oxford Town Hall, St Aldate's, Oxford
 140 beers plus 60 ciders & perries. 40 duplicate barrels for Saturday morning.
 CAMRA members who wish to help out should contact Steve at staffing@oxfordcamra.org.uk
www.oxfordcamra.org.uk



17TH OXFORD BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL



2014

Friday 17 - Saturday 18

October

Bath Beer Festival

The Pavilion, North Parade Road, Bath
 70 beers plus cider & perry
www.bathpavilion.org

Saturday 18 - Tuesday 21 October

Autumn Cider Festival

Far from the Madding Crowd, Friars Entry, Oxford
 01865 240900
www.maddingcrowd.co.uk

Friday 24 - Saturday 25

October

Aylesbury Vale Beer Festival

Bucks County Council Sports & Social Club, Lower Road, Aylesbury
 25 beers plus 5 ciders
www.aylesburybeerfestival.org.uk

Thursday 23 - Saturday 25 October

Swindon Beer Festival

STEAM Museum, Kemble Drive, Swindon
 100+ beers plus cider & perry
 Friday evening - entry by advance ticket only
www.swindoncamra.org.uk

Wednesday 29 October -

Saturday 1 November

Birmingham Beer & Cider Festival

New Bingley Hall, Hockley Circus, Birmingham
 300+ beers, 100+ ciders
 Wednesday - trade & CAMRA members only
birminghambeerfestival.org.uk

Thursday 30 October -

Sunday 2 November

3rd Beer & Cider Festival

The Swan, Faringdon
 On the 66 bus rout from Oxford and Swindon.
 14 real ales and 6 ciders

Thursday 27 - Saturday 29 November

Dudley Winter Ales Fayre

Dudley Town Hall, St James's Road, Dudley
www.dudleycamra.org.uk

Tuesday 2 - Saturday 6

December

Pig's Ear Beer & Cider Festival

Round Chapel, Glenarm Road, Hackney, London
 230+ beers plus cider & perry
www.pigsear.org.uk

Tuesday 9 - Saturday 13

December

Winter Ale Festival

Far from the Madding Crowd, Friars Entry, Oxford
 01865 240900
www.maddingcrowd.co.uk

Saturday 13 December

Haddenham Winterfest

Banks Park, Banks Road, Haddenham
 12 noon to 5pm only
 24 beers plus cider
www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk

Friday 20 - Sunday 22

February 2015

Beer & Sausage Festival

Cricketers Arms, Littleworth, near Wheatley

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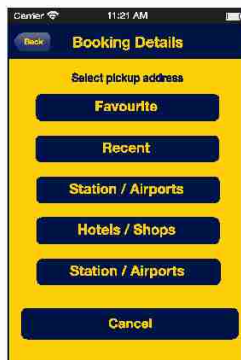
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Regional Pub of the Year

Tony Goulding describes the Pub of the Year voting process and visits the three finalists in the Central Southern region

THE NATIONAL CAMRA Pub of the Year award has its origins with every branch choosing its own local winner early in the year. The Oxford branch encourages all its members to vote for a City and then a Country Pub of the Year which then go forward to a county-wide vote. This year the short list for Oxfordshire included The Chequers at Churchill for North Oxfordshire; The Bird in Hand in Henley for South Oxfordshire; The Nag's Head in Abingdon for our branch; and The Shoulder of Mutton in Wantage for The Vale of White Horse. A very pleasant Sunday afternoon was had sampling the beer in these pubs with The Shoulder of Mutton being voted top by members who had visited each pub.

The next stage is for branches in each county of the Central Southern region to travel about and enjoy themselves sampling more beer in the Regional final. Half a dozen of us with the chairman driving (three half-pints only please!) spent a fine Saturday afternoon visiting The Shoulder of Mutton in Wantage, Berkshire finalist The Five Bells at Wickham, near Newbury; and finally The Rising Sun at Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire.

Even though regular visits to The Shoulder of Mutton are a norm, there are always surprises. Peter Fowler, the

more than capable boss, was there with his permanent smile giving us news of a forthcoming Wantage beer festival. On the bar at this must-visit locals' pub were 10 beers from the following diverse choice of breweries: Chard, Waen (from Wales), Green Jack, Steel City, Dixy Spring, Son of Sid, Dark Star and Vale. The amazing cellar capacity of this pub, up to 90 (yes 90!) firkins, must be the envy of most publicans and contained tubs of well matured Shotover Porter for Christmas along with a very rare Fullers Old Ale and occasionally a beer from Peter's own micro-brewery Betjeman. To my pleasure there were also 10 boxes of real cider, many of which were from wonderful Tutts Clump, stacked on the bar. The future will include some Craft Keg.

An hour later we were on our way to Berkshire finalist The Five Bells at Wickham, near Newbury. To say I was blown away by this pub is almost embarrassing, what a super find! Nine beers were on the bar, each accompanied by a small jam-jar displaying the colour of the beer. These were from the following breweries: Bristol, Wild Weather, Nottingham, Magic Rock, Red Willow, Arbor, Two Cocks, Fallen and Loose Cannon. We haven't finished yet, as there were eight ciders from all over,

20-plus Belgian bottled beers (some of the party took take-aways including world beating Hercule Stout) and about 20 malt whiskies, along with very good pub food. To round off, this lovely old thatched tavern with a sun-trap garden and accommodation will be introducing its own micro-brewery by the time you read this.

We then travelled for an hour along the Chilterns ridge to The Rising Sun at Berkhamsted, the Hertfordshire winner. This was another no-frills, snacks-only traditional boozer, with friendly and very knowledgeable staff serving five beers from Atomic, Tring, Black Sheep, Nelson and Potbelly breweries, along with 20 ciders again from all over the country. The Rising Sun is one of the country's top cider pubs and very much worth a visit, with scores of people sitting on the canal-side by a litter-free lock.

It's a shame I was somewhat overawed by the previous two pubs. It is always difficult to choose a winner from the high standards now seen, but after voting was collated it's The Five Bells that is now going through to the finals. The final judging is done by people from CAMRA HQ – so look out, the national winner might just be this one.

A bridge too far?

Dave Richardson explores pubs around Milton and Steventon, to the south of Oxford

Plum Pudding, Milton

What's in a name? Plenty, in the case of this delightful village free house a few miles from Didcot and next door to stately home Milton Manor. It was formerly named the Admiral Benbow and before that the Red Lion, with previous owners including Morland and then, inevitably, Greene King. Now it is a new entry in the 2015 Good Beer Guide, with the prospect that many more real ale drinkers will pay a visit.

The pub was put up for sale last year and attracted the attention of Jez and Mandy Hill, who managed Wadworths house the Cherry Tree in nearby Steventon for seven years. They then became tenants at the Blue Boar in Aldbourne, Wiltshire for eight years before moving back into this area.

"We were paying a lot of rent and high prices for the beer, so we were getting disheartened," says Jez. "We bought the pub in August last year and re-opened it in October, as if you can raise the money, running a free

house is much better. We aim to be a pub that does good food, not a restaurant. Since we opened, a lot of people in the village have got to know each other who didn't know each other before."

Two permanent real ales are available – its own Plum Pudding Best Bitter, brewed by Ringwood; and Oxford Gold from Brakspear. Also on offer on the night were Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge, and Forester from Acorn Brewery in Barnsley, one of a series of guest ales provided through brewery swaps. Box Steam Brewery, XT and Butts also supply the pub on a regular basis.

This is a large, L-shaped pub with a flagged floor and a great display of bottles around the walls, and a real fire with a great pile of logs outside ready for the winter. The garden is even larger with a lawn, plenty of seating and Aunt Sally. You won't generally find plum pudding on the menu, but alongside pub staples such as sausage and mash and fish and

chips, you will find more expensive gourmet choices such as Cullen Skink – smoked haddock soup from a Scottish recipe. So where does the name come from?

"We had to change the name because we wanted to start afresh," says Jez. "A friend of mine has a pub called the Old Spot in Gloucestershire, named after a pig. Plum Pudding is an alternative name of the Sandy and Black Oxfordshire pig, and we do feature it on the menu."

Fox, Steventon

A major concern for the new team at this Greene King pub is closure of the road bridge over the railway line at the edge of the village, due to last for several months in 2015 as the Great Western main line is electrified. This means customers from the Milton Park industrial estate and Didcot face a lengthy detour to reach Steventon, potentially hitting lunchtime trade.

The Fox is a large, traditional pub with five hand pumps, but



LEFT: Jez and Mandy Hill at the Plum Pudding
ABOVE: The Fox at Steventon

only two were in use dispensing IPA and Morland Original, the latter tasting good. Manageress Sandy Waters came from The Hare at West Hendred which is currently subject to a community buy-out bid – see news from the White Horse branch in this edition. A third hand pump may be brought into use to serve guest ales, but in the meantime it serves beers commonly available in Oxfordshire.

Cherry Tree, Steventon

Next door to the Fox – and equally concerned about effects of the bridge closure – is this large Wadworth house with a fine array of eight hand pumps, two of which are duplicated. On offer tonight were 6X, Horizon Golden Ale, Bishop's Tipple, Swordfish and Farmer's Glory, all from the Wadworth stable and giving customers a wide range of tastes. Advertised as coming soon was Malt & Hops, a 4.5% brew using newly harvested hops and available for a limited period.

This is a rambling old building

with wooden and stone floors and a brick-built bar, which looked very cosy with candles on the tables and plenty of quiet corners to sit in. Food is a major part of the offer and it has a large covered patio. I tried the Horizon Golden Ale but didn't particularly like it – I'll stick to my old favourite 6X in future.

North Star, Steventon

Tucked away down a side road unlike the two other pubs in the centre of Steventon, this quaint old pub is a real find if you like old-fashioned character. It's rather lucky to be still with us, as the North Star hit the headlines after an escapade on New Year's Eve in 2002 when owner Robert Tyrrell drove a JCB into it after being denied a drink in his own pub. The 400-year-old, listed building was badly damaged but that incident is behind it now, and much of its old world character remains.

Most unusually, all beers are still dispensed by gravity rather than by pump, and with no bar as such you order through a doorway. Morland Original is

always available due to its strong following in this area, and the guest on this occasion was Sharp's Wolf Rock (4.1%), an interesting alternative to the staple fare of Doom Bar. Loose Cannon and Loddon are also regulars.

What makes the interior so unusual are the small, snug-type bar and small alcove with table, and I imagine it gets very crowded at busy times. No food is served, but the pub was advertising a vegetable growing competition with a weigh-in planned for October. Railway scenes depict the walls, recalling that the North Star was a famous Great Western locomotive.

It became a free house after Greene King's buy-out of Morlands, and has been in the same family for nearly 200 years. Kerry Tyrrell did the honours in serving us, and hopes to one day win again the White Horse branch Pub of the Year award.

Brewery News

Bellinger's

In the last edition we mistakenly linked Bellinger's to Peter Fowler, landlord of The Shoulder of Mutton in Wantage, who in fact runs the Betjeman micro-brewery. Matthew Rosum of Bellinger's says that the brewery does use the same brewhouse and site of the former Pitstop brewery, which sometimes causes a little confusion, and also uses casks with the Pitstop name embossed on them.

Bellinger's was formed in late 2010 and the first ale went on sale in April 2011 aptly named Original 4.1%, and it still brews this very popular ale today. More ales quickly followed, including Summer Ale (a 3.7% session beer), Brown Porter, Moonlight and IPA. There is now a range of nine ales. The brewery uses the image of Les Bellinger, an RAF pilot in the Second World War. The two new First World War centennial beers use images of the partners' great grandfathers. Gallipoli (5.3%) Stout has Charles Thomas Rosum, Royal Engineer, who was injured in the Gallipoli Campaign. Cavalry 4.6% pale ale has Harry Simmonds, of the Surrey Yeomanry, who was gassed in northern France.

Shotover

Shotover has produced a special celebration ale to mark Oxford Brookes University's 150th anniversary. Oxford School of Art which was to become Oxford Polytechnic, then Oxford Brookes University, first opened its doors in 1865. Proprietor Ed Murray said: "I attended both Oxford Polytechnic and Brookes University and we wanted to brew something very special. Our Head

Brewer Josh and I went to the history books and came up with an 1864 Export India Pale Ale recipe that we have replicated. It has turned out as a tremendously hoppy 7.1% ABV pale amber bottle-conditioned IPA, made with masses of Kent Goldings and Herefordshire Bramling Cross hops. It will be sold directly by Brookes University in 750ml bottles as a limited edition of 600 individually numbered bottles in special packaging."

Shotover brewed its 250th batch of beer in August, 1,300 litres of Trinity destined for both bottle and cask. Ed added: "That's 325 tonnes of beer made since we opened in November 2009, or 325,000 litres or 572,000 pints. Mind you, that's only about four pints for each person in Oxford, so we'd better pick up the pace!"

Oxford Porter (5%) was brewed on 12 September for the first time this year, for both bottle and cask. It should be ready for release from the 20 October. The picture below shows Josh Walker and Ed Murray on the 250th brew day.

West Berkshire

Has won six highly acclaimed awards this year, meaning it has now racked up over 40 awards across its range of beers. Good Old Boy (4%) has scooped Best Bottled Bitter at the Farm Produce Awards; a Silver Award for Best Bottled Bitter (up to 4.9%) at the SIBA SE Region Awards; a Bronze Award at the International Beer Challenge; and one Gold Star at the Great Taste Awards.

These two additions take Good Old Boy to a total of nine awards.

Dr Hexter's Healer (5%) has achieved the Gold Award for Best Bottled Bitter (5% and over) at the SIBA SE Region Awards, and two Gold Stars at the Great Taste Awards. Dr Hexter's now boasts 11 awards, including Champion Beer of Britain, and it will be entered into the National Finals at the SIBA Beer Ex in March.

Head Brewer, Will Twomey, says: "We're chuffed to have won these awards. We have achieved



national recognition for our cask beers but have never entered into the bottle competitions before. To have to bagged a gold, a silver, a couple of stars, an overall winner and international recognition in our first ever bottle competition is amazing. We know that our beers rock, and it's great to hear that others do too."

XT

September is hop harvest time and brings the once-a-year opportunity to brew with ultra-fresh hops. Normally hops have to be dried and vacuum packed to preserve them, but at harvest time you can brew fresh so XT has brewed Fresh Hop ONE, with the hops picked and rushed back to the brewery and added within 12 hours to a new brew. This is the beer equivalent of Beaulonais nouveau – the beer is super fresh and best enjoyed while those delicate hop flavours are still young. The beer uses the same basic recipe as the regular XT-ONE but using new English Goldings Hops throughout. This is a limited edition beer only available for a few weeks so look out for it before it's gone.

The Animal beer range is joined by two new additions. The Mole is a 4.6% Californian Pale Ale brewed with American West Coast yeast – crisp and citrusy. The Mole is joined on the pumps by the Hiss which is a 4.6% Amber Ale using speciality Belgian malt, giving a traditional malty backbone with a contemporary hop finish. Following this year's hop harvest, there are some new Animal beers in development using some all-new varieties of English hops. Look out for them later this year.

The XT beer club is growing, and

at the latest club night in September members enjoying a couple of special club-only beers and locally produced beery sausages. The club nights are only open to members plus two of their guests, and if you fancy joining up take a look at the XT website.

Last year the Lest We Forget Poppy Appeal beer helped raise £3,000 with the Royal British Legion. XT will be brewing the beer again this year from early October and hopes to raise more for the appeal this year.

Wychwood

Hobgoblin's Season of Mischief is nigh... so look out for his legendary flashing pump clips on bars up and down the country during his ninth consecutive year as the Unofficial Beer of Halloween. Head to the Hobgoblin's ancestral home, Wychwood Brewery, on 31 October for the annual Grand Lighting of the Pumpkins. With lots of spooktacular family fun on offer, and a complimentary glass of the legendary Hobgoblin beer for every adult, you would be certainly be in for a treat. Gates open at 6pm and all monies raised on the night will be donated to local Oxfordshire charity Special Effect.

Back for October is Wychwood Pumpking (3.8%), a rich ruby ale brewed with pumpkin and mace to add a gently warming seasonal spiciness. Hints of toffee and a luscious depth of dried fruit and caramel are perfectly balanced by complex hop flavours. Wychwood has teamed up with Seattle-based brewery Elysian to brew its famous Night Owl pumpkin beer available exclusively in JD Wetherspoon outlets. This 6.5%

dark ale is certainly one to tantalise the taste buds as it's brewed with seven and a half pounds of pumpkin per barrel and spiced in with ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and allspice. It is available throughout the JD Wetherspoon Autumn beer festival (24 October-11 November).

Finally, congratulations to Jon Tillson, Second Brewer at Wychwood Brewery, who has recently completed his Master Brewer qualification. Jon started work for Wychwood on a two-week work experience placement from school in 1992 when he was 15. Following this he worked after school, at weekends and during school holidays undertaking general duties in what at the time was an eight-barrel micro-brewery. After a short sabbatical obtaining a business degree and working in an accounts office, Jon decided sitting at a desk was not for him and returned to Wychwood as a brewer in 2001.

The most recognised brewing qualifications are managed by the Institute of Brewing and Distilling and come in the form of General Brewing Certificate, Diploma in Brewing and the Master Brewer. Having spent three years obtaining the Diploma in brewing, Jon began the Master Brewer qualification. The next four years involved the successful completion of four exams in Materials and Wort Production, Fermentation and Beer Processing, Packaging of Beer, and Resource Management and Regulatory Compliance. Finally came completion of a dissertation on a subject of his choice, and Jon now receives the honour of using "M Brew" after his name.



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HOWZAT!

Stuart Bull, owner of the Cricketer's Arms in Littleworth, near Wheatley, starts a regular column with some festival planning



AS I WRITE this, The Cricketer's Arms is less than seven days away from the start of another Beer and Sausage Festival, our 11th. It always amazes me the sheer number of people that attend, and how they can come from some of the most faraway places. One chap comes over to the UK on business from Canada twice a year: in the third week of February and the third week of September, when we have our festivals.

So, how do you get started if you want to run a beer festival? Buy a few firkins of ale and tell a few friends? Close. But it involves a little more than that, and it really all starts not with ale, but with marketing. Running two a year, we now have rolling adverts in this magazine and our local parish newsletter. As the date nears, we then publicise on social networks, on posters, with a banner on the front of the pub, through our mailing list, Oxford's *Daily Info*, and many websites. You can never do enough marketing as however good an event you put on, if you don't tell people then they'll definitely not come.

The next major step, around a

month before, is selecting breweries whose ales we'd like to showcase. The Cricketer's Arms was the first pub in the Oxford CAMRA branch area to receive LocAle accreditation, and local ale is the only ale we sell, bought direct from the brewery. Beer festivals are an opportunity to try out any new breweries that have appeared on the scene in the last six months or so and if they do well, there's a good chance of getting their beers on the bar. Festivals are also an opportunity to have some more unusual ales. Being a little village pub we never ordinarily go over 4.5% ABV, but that all changes at a beer festival.

Marketing done and ale ordered, there are a few other things to sort out: Our sausage menu, the real ciders, the festival programme, and setting the whole event up. Not being a full-time landlord (I have a "proper" job during the week too), I take a day off work and get it all set up on the day before the festival opens. It's an early start involving a complete move around of all the pub furniture, bringing in the stillage which we had specially

fabricated, and positioning the firkins. I try and get most of the beer delivered on this day so that it can be put straight onto our stillage.

In the evening, after our weekly quiz, the firkins are all vented and tapped so early samples can be had. At this point many of the ales will not be fully settled, so it's fingers crossed until the next morning. When the day of the festival comes around, all of the ales have to be sampled again; and believe me, this is not as glamorous as it sounds.

Then it's time to open the pub, and wait – the most nerve-racking time of all. What can go wrong? Maybe we haven't done enough marketing and no-one turns up. What if the weather's bad and the whole weekend is a wash-out? What if no-one is interested in the beer selection? As beer festivals become more popular and the number of breweries increases, the risks seem to get higher every year.

But we haven't had a bad one yet. Touch wood.

The Nag's Head

on the Thames



Within its first year of opening, The Nag's Head became the winner of CAMRA Town and Country 'Pub of the Year' 2013 and is featured in The Good Beer Guide 2014!

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ordering 2 courses
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Shortlisted for
the Oxfordshire
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Renaming the Oxford Drinker - have your say

Editor **Dave Richardson** puts forward his and other members' proposals – and we welcome your input

A LIVELY debate on renaming the branch magazine was held at our AGM in September, but reached no conclusion. The *Oxford Drinker* was effectively re-launched last year under a new team and has introduced several innovations ranging from competitions to features on national and local trends, and – starting with this edition – a new regular columnist from the local pubs scene. But I feel that further growth and development is held back by the very basic title. It might “do what it says on the can”, but what exactly does it say? It says it's about drinking, with possible negative connotations; it says nothing about beer or pubs.

My proposed new name is Beer InSpires (or Beer InnSpires), with the words Oxford, Abingdon, Witney and White Horse underneath. This tells readers and potential advertisers that it's about beer and pubs, while acknowledging Oxford's heritage as “the city of dreaming spires” and the areas covered by CAMRA's Oxford and White Horse branches. It would continue to have the strap-line “formerly the Oxford Drinker” under the new name for at least two years.

Although there are many other CAMRA magazines with un-inspiring titles (one is the London Drinker), many have more attractive names. Examples are Swan Supping (Aylesbury

Vale), Beer & Ragged Staff (Warwickshire), Beer on Tap (North Oxon), MerseyAle (Liverpool), Ales & Tales (Stourbridge), The Tippler (Gloucestershire), Witch Ale (East Lancs), Mine's a Pint (Reading), Hop Press (South Hants) and Shakesbeer (Stratford).

Another suggestion, made by Helene Augar at the AGM, was Oxtale – although this is the name of a PR agency. Mark Robinson has suggested Thirst Draft – any more ideas? Opinion about changing the name seems evenly divided, but former joint editor Steven Green agrees that change should come.

“There are two problems with the current name: ‘Oxford’ is too specific, so it is not obvious that towns like Witney and Abingdon are included; and ‘Drinker’ is a negative word that makes you think of binge drinking and alcoholics,” he says. “However, coming up with a clever punny title that is not immediately obvious could be worse, as people who may be interested in pubs and real ale in Oxfordshire could overlook it.”

So what do you think? We hope to reach a decision by the end of the year, so do contact me (editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk) if you are for or against a renaming, or have ideas for a new name yourself.

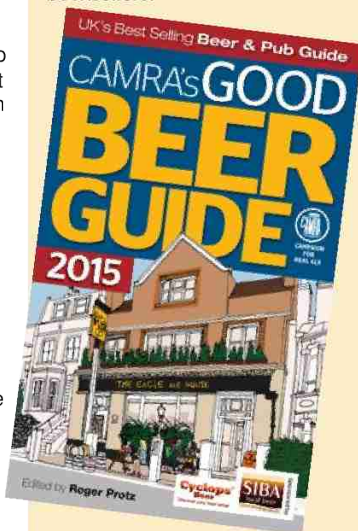
New Guide launched

The UK now boasts more breweries per head than any other country, according to the latest edition of CAMRA's flagship publication, the Good Beer Guide.

The 2015 edition, which was launched in September, lists 1285 breweries, the largest number since before the Second World War. In the past 12 months alone, 170 new breweries have opened up giving a wider choice of real ales for drinkers and for pubs.

The Guide also features the best pubs in the UK to drink real ale, and we congratulate those in our branch area that have made it into the final selection this time.

The Good Beer Guide 2015 is available from CAMRA at a discounted rate, and from other booksellers.



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