

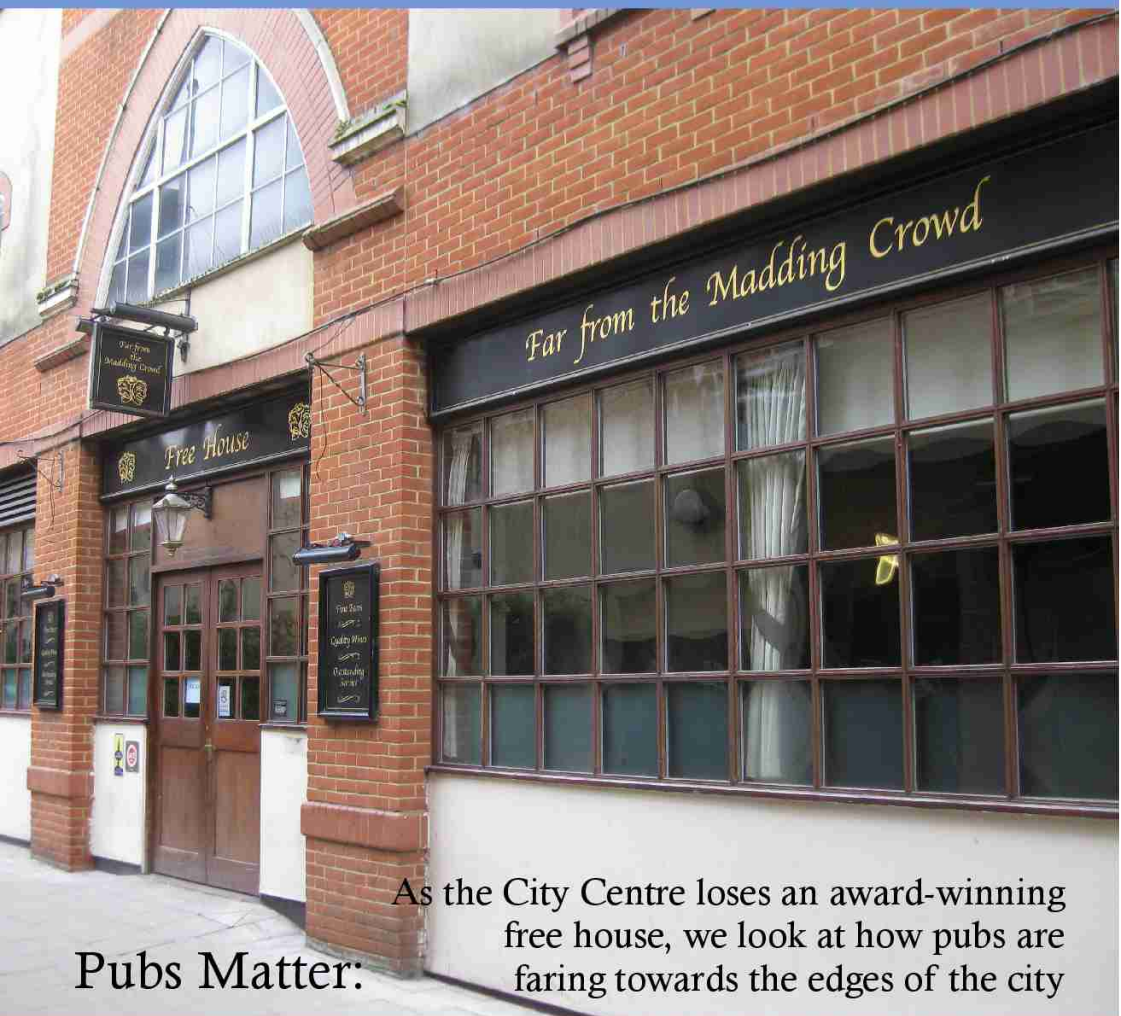


CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Issue 88
February - March 2015

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the Oxford Drinker



Pubs Matter:

As the City Centre loses an award-winning free house, we look at how pubs are faring towards the edges of the city

The free newsletter of the **Oxford** and **White Horse** Branches of CAMRA
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RIGHT: The Masons Arms was crowned Oxford CAMRA City Pub of the Year in December. Branch Chairman Tony Goulding (right) is seen presenting the certificate to (l-r) Andy, Matt and Chris Meeson. Read more about the pub and its neighbours on page 6.

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

Editorial team:

Editor: Dave Richardson
editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk

Advertising: Tony Goulding or Matt Bullock
advertising@oxfordcamra.org.uk
Tony: 07588 181313
Matt: 07977 517514

Layout/Design: Matt Bullock

Valuable contributions have been received for this issue from Richard Queralt, Stuart Bull, Andrew Loutit, Tony Goulding, 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
pub-news@oxfordcamra.org.uk

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.

Printed by Leachprint, Abingdon
www.leachprint.co.uk

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Welcome

...as the fight to save pubs goes on

A PARLIAMENTARY move to force the buyers of pubs to apply for planning permission before demolishing them or turning them into supermarkets or other uses has failed. But the Government is now proposing that planning permission should be needed to convert any pub listed as an Asset of Community Value, which gives local people six months to save a pub before it falls to developers.

CAMRA chief executive Tim Page said: "We will be pressing Ministers to fulfil their promise to enact this change before Parliament dissolves for the General Election. As it stands today, there are around 600 pubs already listed as Assets of Community Value which are set to benefit from this protection. But clearly we are disappointed that the Government has not heeded our call for planning protection to be given to all pubs."

Many CAMRA members must have smiled wryly at the news that Tesco – main player in converting pubs to supermarkets – is closing over 40 stores around the country, including 18 Express and 12 Metro stores. Some of these are likely to be former pubs, which continue to close at a rate of 29

per week according to latest CAMRA research. Look online at our Pubs Matter campaign for more information on how to save your local.

One of our favourite locals, Far From the Madding Crowd in Oxford, closed suddenly in January for reasons unconnected with supermarkets – see Pub News. How sad it was to be in this busy, apparently thriving pub on its final night, knowing it would be an empty shell within days.

Meanwhile legislation which means pubs can choose to opt out of the beer tie, which gives them lower rents but higher beer purchase costs, is making

its way through Parliament. It's a contentious issue, and Hook Norton brewery boss James Clarke's views make interesting reading in this issue.

A new book....

I am working on a new publication called *Oxford Pubs* to be published by Amberley Books in August, concentrating on the stories behind our most historic hostelrys. If you have an interesting story to tell about your Oxford pub, or have old photographs to share, please contact me at editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk

.... And a new name?

A proposal to rename the Oxford Drinker as Beer Inn Spires, with our branch areas of Oxford, Abingdon, Witney and White Horse highlighted under the new name, will be put to the branch meeting at St Aldate's Tavern in Oxford on 3 March. It has won the support of major advertisers including Wychwood, Hook Norton and West Berkshire Brewery, so do come along and have your say. We also want to involve more volunteers – see the article in this issue.

DAVE RICHARDSON



**CAMPAIGN
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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.

Heading for Headington...part 1

With the Mason's Arms winning Oxford CAMRA's City Pub of the Year award for the fourth time, **Dave Richardson** looks at all the pubs in and around Headington Quarry

THE HEADINGTON QUARRY area, so-called because stone to build many Oxford colleges was excavated here until the 18th century, still has four pubs despite closure of the Quarry Gate in Wharton Road and Crown & Thistle in Old Road in the past few years. Many CAMRA members might be happy to spend all evening at the Mason's Arms, but what are the others like?

Ampleforth, Risinghurst

I started the evening with a visit to a rather troubled Punch Taverns pub which has been closed off and on for some time, but now looks set for revival under its enthusiastic new manageress, Becky Donald. Becky works for John Hartly who also runs the Gardiner Arms at Tackley and Boat Inn at Thrupp, and she moved here at short notice in December so that the pub could serve its regulars over Christmas. It is the only pub on the 1930s-built Risinghurst estate, on the opposite side of the ring road to Headington Quarry. Two real ales are served and these were Wells Bombardier (which tasted good) and Sharp's Doom Bar, so there's nothing unusual on offer. But there's no doubting the importance of the pub to some locals, and Becky is setting about making it a welcoming place and re-establishing it as a

sports-led pub with occasional live music (next gigs are on 13 February and 14 March). She hopes to re-introduce a food service by the spring.

"The 'Amp' has so much potential – it just needs some TLC," she says. "People are willing to support a pub in Risinghurst but need a reason to come in. We have Sky TV, darts and Aunt Sally teams, and the Risinghurst Yellows fans of Oxford United meet here. We had only Tetley bitter when I arrived, but I have already chosen four real ales and customers can help choose others."

It normally opens at 2pm (12.00 at weekends) but will open earlier when food returns.

Six Bells

This is a standard Greene King Meet and Eat food pub, being a large establishment visible from the ring road with Sky Sports, slot machines and a busy atmosphere. Three of the four hand pumps are in use and there were no surprises here – only the GK regulars IPA, Old Speckled Hen and Abbot. It recently gained Cask Marque accreditation and the Abbot certainly tasted good.

The pub is seeking darts and pool teams for league matches starting in May, but with nothing

to detain me I soon moved on.

Chequers Inn

My first visit to this old pub proved to be something of a disappointment, as among nearly 20 taps selling lagers, keg beer and cider was only one hand pump. That was selling Cornish brewer Sharp's Doom Bar which you can find all over Oxfordshire and indeed all over the country, as Sharp's is owned by multi-national conglomerate Molson Coors which produces beers such as Carling and Cobra, and distributes Heineken.

More local ales such as Old Hooky and Hobgoblin occasionally appear, and the pub runs a successful cider festival each summer – it has a large garden. Only the bar now functions as a pub with the lounge operating independently as the Royal India restaurant. Sky Sports and slot machines make it busy at times, but with the Mason's just around the corner I didn't linger long.

Mason's Arms

It previously won the Oxford CAMRA City Pub of the Year award in 2004, 2005 and 2010, and with consistently high standards and a great range of ales, it's no surprise to see it reclaim the crown. The Mason's is a free house that is traditional in every respect, and as it

RIGHT: Becky Donald at the Ampleforth Arms

FAR RIGHT: Pippa and Paul Hitchcock at the Butchers Arms



doesn't serve food it's free to concentrate on "wet" sales with real ale taking centre stage. It even brews its own (the Old Bog brewery, in an outhouse, is the former Gents toilet!), although this has very limited production at present. The Headington Beer Festival has been held in its very large function suite every September for the last 13 years.

Five hand pumps are normally in use with West Berkshire Brewery's Good Old Boy (usually my choice), Dark Star's Hophead and Rebellion's Mutiny being regulars, supplemented on this occasion by Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge and Timothy Taylor's Boltmaker. You can enjoy these ales while chatting in quiet corners or watching Sky Sports, and the pub also has games including darts and poker. It reckons it is the only pub (as opposed to club) in Oxford still in the bar billiards league. Chris Meeson runs the pub with brother Matt, while another brother Andy does the brewing usually at weekends. "We try to keep things old-fashioned here and are very lucky with the support we get from the local community," said Chris. "The Mason's has had only two landlords in over 50 years, as Cliff Gurl was here for a very long time and we have been here since 1997. I was manager

at the Chequers 25 years ago when we had a lot of lunchtime trade from local factories and businesses, but that has all gone and we are not open at lunchtimes during the week."

The Mason's has four to five guest ales every week, and often picks up recommendations from customers. Pale citrus beers are increasingly popular, but so too are porters and stouts. It's a worthy winner of City Pub of the Year, but don't arrive before 5pm on weekdays (7pm on Mondays).

Butchers Arms

If the Mason's is the top real ale pub in Headington Quarry, the Ampleforth is a work in progress and nothing of note is available at the Six Bells or Chequers, what would I find at this Fuller's pub tucked away down a side street between Windmill Road and New High Street? I was pleasantly surprised, as you know this is a nice pub run by nice people as soon as you go in the door. Six hand pumps are available and one serves a guest beer – on this occasion, Butcombe's Brunel Atlantic IPA, brewed in Somerset, which was very tasty. Two pumps were serving London Pride (which I still drink, though it tastes very different to when I first knew it 40 years ago), while the others had

Seafarer, Bengal Lancer and a Rugby-themed special ready for the Six Nations tournament, Front Row, all from the Fuller's range. The deal here is that as long as it has three pumps selling Fuller's, others can be sourced from its extensive guest range. Castle Rock, Brains, Adnams, St Austell and Wainwright are among the other breweries whose ales may be sampled.

Pippa and Paul Hitchcock are an enterprising couple who arrived in January 2013 and this is their first pub. They wanted to do something different and have made a success of it, aiming for "a pub like we would want to go to" with very soft music, a wood burning stove, darts and a mix of pub classics and specials on the menu, all of which are home made with small and full-size plates for different appetites. They reckon they are selling three times as much ale as the pub has ever sold before, which is some achievement.

There's one other thing I liked about the Butchers – their cat, Geri, bit Oxford CAMRA chairman, Tony Goulding. Not only Pippa and Paul have good taste.....

DAVE RICHARDSON

See the April/May edition for a review of pubs along London Road and in Old Headington.

HOWZAT!

Stuart Bull, owner of the Cricketer's Arms in Littleworth, near Wheatley, continues his regular column by reflecting on his core values



A CUSTOMER came into the pub the other week with his wife. No, it's true, and not the start of bad joke. He had driven all the way from Moffat, a small town in Scotland, 312 miles or so away. Of course, it wasn't as simple as that; he hadn't just decided to get in his car with his wife and his dogs and drive here on the spur of the moment. He had called two weeks before and booked a table and checked that we didn't mind entertaining dogs.

After he had arrived, settled the pooches (two very well behaved border collies) and ordered himself and his wife pints of Hooky, we got chatting. He was born in Wheatley but had left decades ago, seeking fame and fortune. His travels had taken him all over the country, and indeed, the world. He knew my adopted hometown, Sheffield, very well, and a great many other places. But after almost 40 years, he had never forgotten this quaint little pub at the end of the village of his birth. When the time came to return, to meet his brother on family business, he chose us as the meeting spot.

He did say that he thought it unlikely that the pub still existed, as up in Scotland and other places he had been, many a small village pub had ceased trading, but by checking the Good Beer Guide and locating our website, he had found us and was pleasantly surprised that it was still on the go. Wheatley, he said, had changed beyond all recognition. He remembered it as a village of reasonable size, but not the place that it is now, with its motorway services, Asda supermarket and just about everything you could expect from a town, never mind a village.

But The Cricketer's Arms, he said, had changed very little. Although sympathetically renovated in the early 1980s with the front door having moved and the pub opened up internally, it still retained its old-style charm and character. In fact, he echoed something from our website – that the pub looks the same on the inside as it does on the outside, and that is a very rare thing indeed these days.

I explained our core values: Our four cornerstones, as I like to

call them. Cleanliness, Quality, Tradition and Range. The first two are very closely related. Without cleanliness, you can't have quality. And cleanliness is more than just making sure that the cobwebs are cleared, as it's about hygiene and maintenance. Quality can be summed up beer-wise as "no cloudy beer". If we had one core value, one immutable rule, that would be it. Tradition is all about observing the past and upholding its best bits. Serving local ale comes under this banner. It's also about not selling drinks we don't like because they attract the wrong type of customer, not having a big TV on all the time and not having gaming machines. Range is about choice. We endeavour to have at least one of your favourite drinks. Our drinks menu, though not huge, is largely driven by our customers.

The one thing not mentioned as part of our philosophy is value. But if you can achieve our four cornerstones and still deliver great value, then I think we're onto something good. I think that The Cricketer's continued existence is testament to our ability to offer great value. We

Beer Festival Diary

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

may not be the cheapest, but neither are we the most expensive. But we keep people coming back because they know they will get a good pint.

We may not do premium steak at premium prices, but we do offer a consistently great steak and ale pie made with prime steak and local ale, with hand-cut chips,

for well under a tenner. We don't have a massive wine list, quite the opposite. We stock one red wine, but it is a very good Merlot that will not cost you the earth. We set out to provide a quality experience that's great value and I think we achieve that. We're not trendy; just hardworking and friendly, and I for one am proud to have added to the longevity of The Cricketer's Arms, Littleworth.

At the end of their evening, the table of four were well satiated, having had three courses, coffees and a round of drinks. Not bad for £65. And of course, they thoroughly enjoyed it and promised to be back -- although hopefully sooner than last time!

STUART BULL

Wednesday 11 - Saturday 14 February CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival

The Roundhouse, Roundhouse Road, Pride Park, Derby
400+ beers plus cider & perry
Includes 'Champion Winter Beer of Britain Competition'
www.nwaf.org.uk

Friday 20 - Sunday 22 February Littleworth Original Beer & Sausage Festival

Cricketers Arms, Littleworth, nr Wheatley
01865 872738
www.cricketers-arms.co.uk

Friday 27 - Saturday 28 February

Merton Beer Festival
Merton Village Hall, Islip Road, Merton, nr Bicester
20+ beers, ciders & perries

Wednesday 11 - Friday 13 March London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Camden Centre, London
150 beers, ciders & perries
www.northlondon.camra.org.uk

Friday 13 - Sunday 29 March Wetherspoon Real Ale Festival

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

Friday 20 - Sunday 22 March Spring Beer & Cider Festival

The Brewery Tap, Ock Street, Abingdon
30+ beers & ciders
01235 521655
www.thebrewerytap.net

Thursday 2 - Monday 6 April Woodman Easter Beer Festival

New Yatt Road, North Leigh, nr Witney
15 beers & 5 ciders
01993 881790

Wednesday 22 - Sunday 26 April St George's Day Weekend Beer Festival

Royal Blenheim, St Ebbes Street, Oxford
20+ beers
01865 242355
Royalblenheim.co.uk

Thursday 7 - Saturday 9 May Banbury Beer Festival

TA Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury
100 beers, ciders & perries
www.northoxoncamra.org.uk

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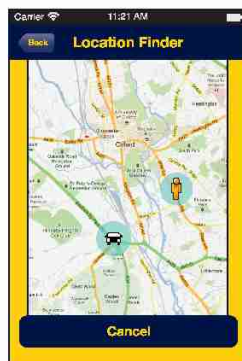
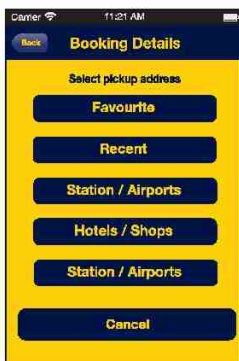
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Letter to the Editor

I WAS very surprised to read in both the *Oxford Drinker* and *Beer on Tap* (North Oxfordshire CAMRA) that the beer tie had been abolished. My understanding is somewhat different, in that some of the agreements for tenants and lessees of larger (500+) pub companies will have an option to go for a market rent, with no beer tie. The tie has certainly not been abolished. It is always an emotive and difficult subject when the beer tie is discussed, and there is no denying that there has probably been some abuse of the arrangement, but no different to activity in other business sectors. For us as a family brewery we believe the tie has mutual benefit, and whilst not always perfect, it does provide a robust and effective business model. The articles in *What's Brewing* had a much clearer picture of the situation, and it is a concern this differs so much from reporting in regional publications.

It was interesting in the immediate aftermath of this, how people approached me with one of two views; either how this is going to affect us, with the beer tie going, or thinking we would be exempt as we have well under 500 pubs. Well anyone who can remember the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report from 1989 will hopefully recall the unintended consequences, which effectively created the pubcos we see today. Glass

ceilings in legislation never work, and Progressive Beer Duty is a fine example of this.

A lot of people seem to be challenging how free houses can buy beer cheaper than tied houses. There really is no secret here; yes they can. But my experience of retail prices is that free houses do not sell beer at a lower price than tied houses. Perhaps this is because in a tied house, major property repairs are handled by the owning company, be it pubco or brewery; freeholders have little option but to maintain the property themselves.

It is regrettable that this whole debate has been very personal, with some behaviour being questionable. Just look at my Twitter feed, where very personal attacks were made after my open comments.

It is in all of our interests to have a vibrant pub and beer economy, and I look forward to us perhaps celebrating success, growing interest in beers, and massively improving beer choice in pubs and bars. There will be fallout from this legislation, and some will be not what we wish for, but can we start celebrating some positive things? The world is changing, so let's embrace and help shape the future.

James Clarke
Managing director
Hook Norton Brewery

Oxford Branch Diary

Saturday 21 February Social at Littleworth Beer Festival

Cricketers Arms, Littleworth, nr Wheatley

Friday 27 February Social at Merton Beer Festival

Merton Village Hall, Islip Road, Merton, nr Bicester
Travel there by bus (Charlton Services from St Giles, dep 18.10) and return using taxis

Saturday 28 February Beer Festival Helpers' Trip

Free to those who helped at the Beer Festival, a small charge to others subject to space being available. Contact Steve Lawrence to book a seat.
Pick up 9.30am Abingdon Stratton Way, 10.00am Oxford Railway Station

Tuesday 3 March AGM and Branch Meeting

The Blue Room, St Aldates Tavern, St Aldates, Oxford OX1 1BU
Starts at 19.30
Regular monthly meeting preceded by Annual General Meeting. All members welcome.

Saturday 21 March Black Country Minibus Trip

The annual all-day trip; places are limited, contact Matt to book yours. Departure times and places will be confirmed.
theoxfordrinker@yahoo.co.uk

Country roads, take me....to the pub

Dave Richardson joins a branch minibus tour to villages south of Oxford

Black Horse, Standlake

This old pub dates from the 17th century and while it concentrates very successfully on food, it still offers a pub environment for ale drinkers. With stone walls, low beams and a wood burner it exudes the atmosphere of a typical country pub, with a creative approach to gourmet food including the opportunity to order in delicacies such as crab and lobster.

Beers are sourced from the Punch Taverns range and my choice was Wells Bombardier Burning Gold, a zesty pale ale at 4.1%. Unfortunately, although the pub had just had its Cask Marque accreditation renewed, this was served far too cold for a December day and I simply didn't enjoy it. Hook Norton's Hooky and Adnams Ghost Ship were also available but will have to wait for another day.

Eight Bells, Eaton

I enjoyed my first visit to this out

-of-the-way country pub so much that I was keen to return, and I wasn't disappointed. A coal fire was blazing in the bar and the locals looked settled in for the day – cosy is the word. The small lounge has a log fire and a restaurant, in an extension to the original pub, was due to open early in 2015 to further add to the pub's appeal.

Landlord Tommy O'Sullivan has run it as a free house for over six years, but the pub was closed for a couple of years before he revived it. He previously ran two pubs called the Butcher's Arms, at Fringford near Bicester and at Headington, Oxford – and said he would no longer be in the trade if he couldn't source his own beers.

This being the festive season, Loose Cannon's Christmas Cannon (4.5%) slipped down extremely well, followed by a half of Mr Chubb's Lunchtime Bitter (3.7%) from West Berkshire Brewery. Loose

Cannon's Abingdon Bridge (4.1%) is always available with the fourth hand pump today dispensing Vale Brewery's Brill Gold (3.5%). Highly recommended!

Waggon and Horses, Culham

I had driven past this large pub on the A415 leading east out of Abingdon many times, without ever stopping to have a look. As it's a free house I had high expectations, and found five hand pumps offering Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge (4.1%), Box Steam Brewery's Golden Bolt (3.8%), West Berkshire's Good Old Boy (4%) and Rebellion's Roasted Nuts (4.6%). By this time I was up for something different so tried the Roasted Nuts, which was very nutty and an inspired choice for a winter's day.

This is a very large and rambling establishment with open fires and good value food, trying to be all things to all men, and women. Pool, darts, slot machines and piped music give



LEFT: Tony O'Sullivan at the Eight Bells;



RIGHT: Hamish and Valerie Forsyth at the Waggon & Horses, Culham;

it a busy atmosphere, with Rugby memorabilia on the walls reflecting one of the passions of landlord Hamish Forsyth who runs the pub with wife Valerie.

With a name like Hamish I might have expected tartan and bagpipes, but the zebra and leopardskin patterns on the chairs hint at an altogether different background. Hamish hails from South Africa and was retail manager for Scottish and Newcastle in his home country, moving to the UK three years ago to successfully re-open the Waggon and Horses. It's definitely worth stopping here, and some of the food has a South African twist too including bobotie, a traditional fruit curry.

Railway Inn, Culham

Tucked away beside Culham station, which has a limited service on the Oxford-Didcot route, is another free house which isn't visible from the A415 so is easily missed. Formerly the Jolly Porter when run by Oxford's long defunct Morrells

Brewery, it is certainly worth seeking out with four real ales available.

Today these were Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge (4.1%), West Berkshire's Good Old Boy (4%) and two from Vale Brewery – so all sourced from a radius of about 25 miles. The Vale bitters on offer were Brill Gold (3.5%) and a porter, Black Beauty, at 4.4%. This was sweet and also nutty and slipped down a treat.

Landlord Roy Davidson has run the pub for over five years but was previously a builder. This was his first pub venture, turning it back into a pub having functioned as an Indian restaurant for a couple of years. The large railway-themed restaurant does good trade, and with nine rooms available for bed-and-breakfast, the Railway is a multi-faceted business. With two pool tables in a large games room with darts board, it is also a thoroughly traditional pub, so hop on a train and pay it a visit.

Seven Stars, Marsh Baldon

This is one of my favourite country pubs around Oxford, and it was good to see that my fellow minibus passengers who weren't familiar with it came away suitably impressed. It scores highly not just because of the quality of its beer, but because it became the first community-owned pub in the Oxford area in March 2013 and has been revived as the focal point of the local community.

As a free house it sources most of its beers from Oxfordshire or neighbouring counties, although it has had a long relationship with Fuller's whose London Pride is usually available. The five hand pumps were also offering Loddon's Hoppit (3.5%), this being another regular supplier; Thwaites' seasonal ale Yule Love It; and my choice, White Horse's Tenth Anniversary Pale Ale (TAP – 4.4%), which was served in good condition but I didn't particularly like.



ABOVE: The exterior of the Waggon & Horses at Culham

TOP RIGHT: Jane Gaul at the Queens Head in Horspath

BOTTOM RIGHT: Roy Davidson behind the bar at the Railway Inn, Culham



You can still buy shares in the company if you want to be part of the community ownership trend, which will at least ensure you visit regularly even if you're not a local. The Seven Stars has gone from strength to strength over the last two years, opening a restaurant in a former barn and holding regular events including quiz nights and live music. The real fire is very welcoming and there are board games available to while away the time, and at weekends and on fine evenings you can enjoy Marsh Baldon's enormous green that is right outside. It has Cask Marque accreditation and 4½ stars from TripAdvisor, and hopes to make it into the Good Beer Guide soon.

Bat and Ball, Cuddesdon

This is very much a dining pub but with up to three real ales to choose from, and if you like cricket you can drink and dine in style as the walls are covered with all sorts of cricketing memorabilia including bats, wickets, ties and portraits of

famous figures such as Grace and Bradman. It also has seven en suite guest rooms if you want to make a night of it, with special events including monthly French and steak nights.

As Shotover is the local brewery it was good to see Trinity on the bar, along with Brakspear's Oxford Gold and Ringwood's Boon Doggle. The Bat and Ball is a free house with limited room for drinkers, but for a meal out in an unusual setting it can certainly be recommended.

Queen's Head, Horspath

Our final stop after a fairly long day proved interesting, as this is another free house which changed hands towards the end of 2014 and is continuing a strong focus on real ale. It effectively functions as the brewery tap for Shotover, which is very close, and both Prospect and Trinity are usually available. Fullers' London Pride is also a regular, but having already sampled Trinity at the Bat and

Ball I opted for Fullers' Bengal Lancer (5%) which is a golden-brown IPA with a tangy finish.

New landlady Jane Gaul is enthusiastic about real ale although she has moved from the Jolly Postboys in Cowley which did not sell it. Now about 60% of its beer sales are real ale, and the previous landlord and Shotover Brewery have helped her learn all about it. "I wanted to run a traditional English pub and this is ideal," said Jane. "Real ale is something I really wanted to offer and I'm delighted it is such a big part of our sales."

The Queen's Head is a large, busy pub with Sky TV and pool, being situated off the main road through the village and with a large car park. It has separate bar and lounge/restaurant, and three en suite guest rooms. We wish Jane and her team all the best in her new venture – and promise to visit often.

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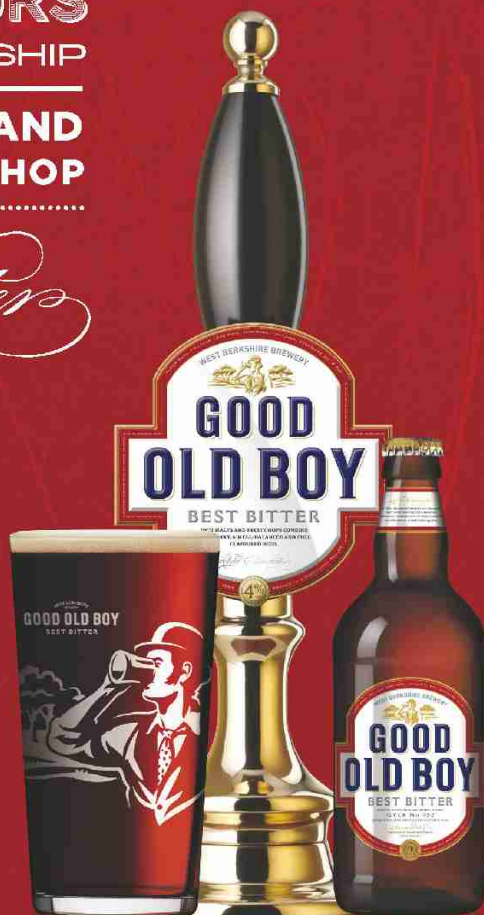
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Pub News

Abingdon

BROAD FACE: The pub, situated on Bridge Street between the Crown & Thistle Hotel and Nag's Head, was closed at the time of writing. The Cross Keys was also due to close pending conversion into flats, while the Saxton Arms is also closed but expected to re-open.

WHITE HORSE: The pub's 10% discount for CAMRA members – probably the most generous discount in this branch area – is now operational, with up to nine hand pumps serving ale from the Greene King guest range or SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers). The GK-managed house is required to sell IPA and Morlands Original but otherwise the choice varies. On a recent visit beers included Thwaites' 13 Guns (5.5%), Oakham Ales Citra, GK's Suffolk Porter (very tasty), Tolly Cobbold Phoenix (4.2%), Sharp's Cornish Coaster (3.7%), Moorhouse White Witch (3.9) and the pub's own badged White Horse Bitter (3.9%), which costs only £2.79 a pint with the discount included. Top priced beer costs £3.24 including discount.

Landlord Darren Fowler (pictured above) met his wife Sharon when both worked behind the bar at the Great Western Hotel, Swindon, but this is his first pub as landlord and it has ramped up real ale sales steadily since he arrived in November 2013. Third pints are also sold and he reports increased interest in real ale from ladies.

A beer festival will be held in July.



Binsey

PERCH: A major refurbishment is under way which means the Thames-side pub will not re-open until April.

Marsh Baldon

SEVEN STARS: The community-owned free house will hold its first major beer festival over the weekend of 3-5 July. It normally has up to four real ales on the bar, and on a recent visit these included Butcombe's Brunel Atlantic IPA.

Oxford

ADVENTURER: This is the new name for the Honeypot on Hollybush Row near the railway station. A complete refurbishment has taken place and the pub reopened in January. There is one handpump which I have yet to find in use. The pu only opens from 4.30pm daily and is open late.

BERKSHIRE: This is the new, or rather old name of the Crooked Pot in Abingdon Road, which was previously known as the Berkshire House (for fuller description, see Tony's Travels in this edition). Although advertised as a free house, it is owned by Hawthorn Leisure which has a beer deal with previous owner Greene King. IPA and IPA Reserve are the usual brews, with occasional guests.

CITY ARMS: A high-tech revamp of this Cowley Road pub completed in January allows patrons to choose the pub's music using a mobile app, while students may appreciate being able to use a wifi printer.

DEW DROP: The only pub in Summertown has been sold by Orchid Pub Company to Mitchells and Butlers. The long serving landlord is set to continue and the range of real ales may increase from the current three, which were Fuller's London Pride, Courage Best Bitter and Old Hooky on a recent visit.

OXFORD BLUE: This pub on Marston Street, off Iffley Road, had been closed for several weeks at the time of writing, and its future is unclear. A notice pinned in the window, dated 8 January, states that Enterprise Inns had entered the pub to make it safe "AND NOT to bring the lease to an end".



East Challow

GOODLAKE ARMS: It was put up for sale by Punch Taverns last year, with a guide price of £275,000 + VAT, with -- according to the particulars -- "potential for conversion or redevelopment subject to necessary consents". We are glad to report that the pub has reopened, but currently has no real ale on offer.

Gozzards Ford

BLACK HORSE: A new landlady, Dawn Neil, arrived towards the end of last year at this country pub near Abingdon, on the road leading from the A415 to Cothill. She took over from Russell Worsley, who had run the pub for 18 years. Despite being a Greene King pub it is held on a Morlands lease, offering greater freedom to choose ales as long as Morlands Original is sold. Apart from this the pub was offering two beers from Loose Cannon on a recent visit, Abingdon Bridge and Gunners Gold. It is a large pub split between a bar with darts,

pool, TV and games machines, and a restaurant with a growing reputation where everything is cooked fresh, including winter specialities such as rabbit pie. Dawn, pictured below, runs an events and hospitality business that has bought the lease, and will be organising events here with the help of a large garden and car park. A beer festival will take place over the Easter weekend with 20-plus ales from all over Oxfordshire, and this will be used to pick ales for the bar for the rest of this year. "This is a destination pub, and I want to use my events background to get people here," she said. "Craft fairs and family fun days are two of my ideas."



West Hanney

PLOUGH: The community buy-out is under way with Hanney Community Pub Ltd making an offer to buy the pub from Punch Taverns in January. It needs to raise £400,000 but is already over halfway there, and updates are available on its website: www.hanneycommunitypub.co.uk

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

A rent rise too *Far?*

Sudden closure of the Far From the Madding Crowd in Oxford on 24 January came as a shock to regulars and CAMRA members from far and wide, as it was Oxford CAMRA's City Pub of the Year in 2009, 2011 and 2012 and was justly renowned for the range and quality of its real ale.

The pub - named after a Thomas Hardy novel - had a short life span as it opened only in 2002 as a conversion from two shop units in Friars Entry. A free house which held regular beer festivals, it was owned by Charles Eld who was managing director of Morrells Brewery which closed in 1998, many of its pubs being acquired by Greene King. He comes from the sixth generation of the Morrells family which had run the brewery for over 200 years, his mother being Margaret Morrell.

"The problem was that this whole complex is owned by the Strathclyde Pension Fund which wants to maximise its income, and we were paying a commercial rent which was out of kilter with running a successful pub," he said. "As with most pubs trade dropped off over the last two years, and the younger people who used to come in before going to nightclubs now have cheap supermarket drinks at home before going out. I could not pay the rent being asked, and I got a call on 13 January saying they wanted us out by the end of the month."

Charles is unlikely to remain in the trade, and whether the building continues as a pub remains to be seen. The high rent may put off potential pub operators, but one well-known Oxfordshire brewery wanting a pub in the city will be taking a look.

Brewery News

Shotover

It brewed John Henry Export India Pale Ale from a historic recipe for the second time in January, and the production run of 96 cases of 500ml bottles should be available from the Brookes University Colonnade shop at the Headington campus in time for the university's 150th anniversary celebrations in May.

Head brewer Josh Walker is leaving in February to travel to Australia after spending over two years at Shotover. Trainee brewer Jamie O'Neill is joining at the beginning of February.

Hook Norton

It has been shortlisted in the prestigious Morning Advertiser and Publican awards (commonly regarded as the Oscars of the Pub Trade), in the Brewery with Pubs category, with the results to be announced in March. As part of the judging it welcomed beer writer Pete Brown, and managing director James Clarke is optimistic about his chances. "Pete emphasised to us that the core of what the judges were looking for was how the pub and brewery relationship benefits both parties," he said. "At Hook Norton, we see the people who run our pubs as part of the brewery family so whether it's us investing money, supporting their charity work or them being the shop window for our beers, we try to work together for everyone's benefit."

After a major re-building project last year, the original boiler chimney has been painstakingly restored. It is an important feature of the original William Bradford brew house, and Hook

Norton received a Heritage Lottery Grant towards the cost.

Winter special ale Greedy Goose (4.2%) proved to be a great success, and the special for February is Nice Try (3.8%) to mark the Six Nations Rugby tournament.

Boathouse

This is the name of a proposed new craft brewery in the centre of Oxford, which hopes to be operational by the end of the year if it succeeds in raising £185,000 through a crowd-funding online appeal. It aims to take over the cellar of the Post Office in St Aldate's to start brewing craft and bottled beers, and then hopes to add a second premises with visitor centre where real ale will be brewed. Managing director and head brewer Steve Chrosicki worked for the Parisa cafe bar chain as head brewer before he took on the Chequers Inn near the North Norfolk coast, starting the Front Street Brewery there a couple of years later. After winning several awards for both cask and bottled beers, Steve was asked to become East Region Director and Trustee for SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers). Steve and his wife Alex decided it was time to move on after 10 years, and sold their pub business to prepare for the start-up of the Oxford concept.

"Cask ale is planned for the second stage of the project, but we aim to produce beer in all its forms and invite the public to watch the process," said Steve. "We chose Oxford because it is so vibrant and gets so many visitors – it makes sense, business-wise."

An video is available online at www.boathousebrewery.co.uk

West Berkshire

Upcoming specials are Fullness of Time (4.3%) for February, a pale and spicy bitter with a floral hoppy finish that was first brewed 2006. In March comes March Hare (4.3%), a light amber ale with robust bitterness and a full and rounded flavour, first brewed 2000. In April comes Coolship (4%), a gloriously golden beer with a rounded bitterness and delicate hop finish also first brewed in 2006. Special for May is Skiff (3.6%), a pale bitter with a floral hop finish, first brewed 1996.

The brewery has made a deal with Reading FC to provide real ales on match days, starting with Good Old Boy.

Wychwood

It is marking the start of the Six Nations Rugby tournament with a new monthly seasonal for February – Toothless Hooker, a 3.9% chestnut coloured beer: "Prop up the bar with the Wychwood Toothless Hooker! The biscuit and raisin flavours will sidestep the opposition. A cheeky slap of three hop additions converts to a floral, orange peel citrus and almost spicy aroma. A moderate bitterness provides the



perfect result." In March another new Wychwood seasonal hits the hand pulls, and as the name suggests Imperial Red is a 4.3% rich russet ale. "Do not fear the Imperial Red who comes in peace to liberate your taste buds with his robust yet succulent beer. A toasted malt flavour balanced by a bold pronounced hop delivered in a rich russet beer. Enjoy the imperial majesty and raise the red standard in celebration." We couldn't have put it better ourselves.....

Meanwhile Brakspear Special makes a welcome return in March and will be available exclusively in Brakspear pubs. This truly classic English beer is golden red in colour with a well-balanced aroma and a hint of sweetness.

XT

The first new beer released for 2015 was Animal Brewing's Aghhh (Spider), a 4.6% abbey-style beer using a specialist Belgian Ale yeast. The Beer Club night in December had some unplanned entertainment thanks to this, as the vessels holding the fermenting beer were hissing and bubbling out over the sides of the tanks and across the floor! The XT poppy appeal beer Lest We Forget sold very well and matched 2013's fund raising. The annual special beer for 2015 is Fifteen, an English IPA to celebrate English hop growers who have been working hard to develop new varieties to compete with the strong, aromatic and fruity New World hops. 2015 is a year of major anniversaries including the battles of Agincourt and Waterloo, and of the Magna Carta. XT is planning seasonal specials to mark these.

A cure for Winter blues

Matt Bullock reports from a winter beer festival

THE WINTER Beer Festival at the Rose and Crown in Charlbury has become an annual event, and is a much-anticipated highlight of the long, dark month of January. The award-winning Rose and Crown is always something of a mecca for beer lovers, offering a choice of eight ales at any one time, as well as real cider, continental draught beers and bottled Belgian ales, and past festivals have further enhanced its reputation.

During beer festivals, around 20 beers are available; the eight pumps on the bar are supplemented by a stillage of a dozen beers in the back room. I arrived on Friday evening and the pub was already buzzing. The bar was featuring a number of beers from a relatively new local brewery, Turpin, based in Hook Norton, and two of its new beers, Mandarina Bavaria (4.8%), brewed with a German hop that imparts an orange flavour and aroma, and Moka Porter (4.2%), a rich, dark beer with chocolate and coffee notes, were selling well, as was the ever-popular Golden Citrus (4.2%). Not surprisingly, the Citrus and the Mandarina were the first to sell out, although brewer John Romer was conveniently on hand to organise a Saturday morning delivery to ensure they would reappear over the weekend.

Other beers of note were Anderson's Best Scotch, from Maxim, a brewery in the North

East started by former Vaux and Wards employees, Killer Cat Manga (5%) from Malmesbury Brewery's experimental range, and another Turpin beer, a strong IPA, called The Devil's Advocate at an appropriate 6.66%. I chose the excellent but potent Battledown Black (7.2%), a complex Russian Imperial Stout, to finish on Friday night; this beer finished quite a few people's nights off during the weekend, some prematurely!

On Saturday a large contingent of CAMRA members from Oxford, Abingdon and Witney converged on the pub for an afternoon social. This gave me the chance to try the remainder of the beers, including a couple of replacements that had been put on overnight; Charnwood Vixen (4%), a copper-coloured best bitter from Leicestershire was the pick of these. There were interesting beers too from Firebrand in Cornwall, Scarborough brewery and Walsall-based Backyard. The beer with the most impressive name, Green Duck Hank Schrader's Coconut and Cardamom Porter, failed to deliver as much coconut flavour as its name promised, but was nevertheless a pleasant beer.

An excellent beer range, good company and convivial surroundings contributed to an excellent weekend. January need not be a dull month after all!

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Brewpubs in faraway places

White Horse member **Andrew Loutit** visits Lincolnshire

THERE IS something rather exciting about stopping for lunch on one's travels at a brewpub; the thrill of anticipation as one arrives, about the range of beers on offer and of the quality. I wonder if Dr Johnson had similar hopes and fears as he travelled the turnpikes in the 18th century? The overnight stops at coaching inns between London and Ashbourne must have led to many highs and lows on the food and ale front. I also wonder if the lunchtime stop for a change of horses allowed him time to nip round the corner to a favourite watering hole?

Two recent trips to Yorkshire have allowed me the opportunity to sample two brewpubs in Lincolnshire, one in Leicestershire and one in Warwickshire. The latter two may form the subject of a second article. The GBG led us on the way north to the village of Willingham by Stow, near Gainsborough, where the Half Moon is home to the Grangers Brewery started by landlord Phil Troop in 2007 with a 2.5-barrel plant, subsequently upgraded to a 10-barrel plant in 2013. He says the name evolved because his customers were always moaning that he was never behind the bar of his own pub, to which his response was that he was too busy grafting on their behalf in his converted garage!

That grafting has produced some wonderfully hoppy beers, just up my street. You could say I was 'Over The Moon', one of their regulars at 4.0% ABV with a lovely long finish for quite a malty beer. Also tried was Moonlight (3.6%) and citrusy, and Traditional (3.7%), a good session beer, well balanced between malty and hoppy.

All these beers are hopped in the usual way but also late hopped for extra aroma, and the effect on me was quite noticeable - I liked them all for their pronounced hoppiness, something that I find missing in so many beers today. He brews seven regular ales and a number of seasonal ales, of which I tried Hopful (5.0%), an IPA-style beer but with too sweet a finish for my taste.

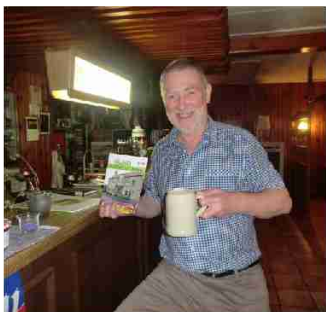
All his beers seem to have torried wheat mixed with the malt (spellchecker insists this should be terrified!). The grain has been heat-treated to break down the cellular structure and this allows the enzymes from the malted barley to attack the starches. The benefit appears to be that it improves the head retention of the beer, something we know to be very important in the North of England.

On the way back from the East Riding we found another brewpub quite by accident, although the GBG mentions just

an ordinary pub. It appears as a new entry in the 2015 edition under Greg's Brewery at the Dambusters Inn at Scampton, just off the end of the runway from the RAF station. This struck me as more of a museum that happened to have a drinks licence than a pub, but it was very popular at Sunday lunchtime and because we hadn't booked for food we could only sample the beer, Greg's Just Bomber (4.2%), described as a well-balanced session beer which I found a bit too sweet for my taste. Not surprisingly, it also had Thwaites Lancaster Bomber as a regular, plus Poachers Shy Talk Bitter which I didn't try.

However, the beauty of the place was the Dambusters memorabilia festooned throughout the pub, of much interest to my cousin who had a family connection to one of the officers involved. Nearly everything seemed original (photos, signatures, clothing, maps, instruments, logbooks etc), with only the medals being reproductions. Quite priceless, though, were the mural designs in the gents' toilet of scenes from 1940s life in the RAF, and I was given a tour of the equally delightful designs in the ladies' toilet of life in the WAAF.

ANDREW LOUITT



Tony's travels

Branch Chairman **Tony Goulding** gets out and about along Abingdon Road

TWENTY YEARS ago there were nine pubs on the main road and in the side streets leading off it, and now there are only three. At the Duke of Monmouth, a former Halls of Oxford then Marston's and now a Greene King Meet and Eat house, the very prominent Halls initials (HB) are still carved on the upper front wall. A warm welcome awaited us on entry and immediately three beers were spotted – the regular IPA at £2.65 and two GK guests, a superb tasting Oakham Citra at £2.90 and Purity Ubu at £3.10, with Sharp's Cornish Coaster to follow, not a bad range for a GK pub and good value. I was served my half pint in a Wadworth stem glass in a GK pub! The Duke used to be a cosy main road local years ago, but good value food and a sprawling, family-friendly interior are part of today's pub scene. The manager, Simon Foster, has worked for GK for eight years including a couple at the Wig and Pen, and he definitely has this pub running well. There is a small sports area down the far end of the pub with a pool table and darts board, with comfortable outdoor patio gardens front and rear.

A five-minute walk up the road takes you to the recently renamed Berkshire, a former Morrells, then GK pub which is now owned by property

company Hawthorne Leisure. It was originally named the Berkshire House, being in Berkshire rather than Oxfordshire before the 1970s boundary changes. For a few years it has been called the Crooked Pot, which was meant to establish a more up-market style than the then cosy local. Again a pleasant welcome came our way with Angie and Thomas Furrer doing a very firm job of running this pub, and as they used to be the managers at the Duke of Monmouth, they moved just down the road. This large open plan house is very much a locals' haunt with some passing custom. At the rear of the pub is a games area with pool, crib and darts, and there's Aunt Sally in the garden. Ales were limited to GK's IPA at £2.50 and a very nice tasting IPA Reserve (5.4%) at £3 – very good value but served in a half-pint Carling glass (aaah!) Food is served very much in the old style from 12 noon till 2pm and from 6pm to 9pm.

Another short stroll towards the city centre led us to the front doors of Wadworth's White House, which has reverted to this name from the Folly Bridge Inn. The three regular beers are Henry's IPA, 6X and a very tasty Bishop's Tipple, which used to be brewed by a family brewery called Gibbs Mew from Salisbury. This former Morrells

house was sold to Wadworth at the same time that the then adjacent Oxford City football team was forced to move to make way for a large old folks' development about 20 years ago. The present managers Keith and Yvonne have been in the trade for 42 years and came here about two years ago as relief managers, and are now back again as reliefs. Simple food is available, and darts and Aunt Sally are catered for with pleasant gardens front and rear.

I did not visit the Four Pillars Hotel along Abingdon Road, as a customer in the Berkshire stated that real ale was available but not in the last couple of weeks.

Walking across Folly Bridge, the Head of the River looms into view. This, the largest pub in Oxford, was a former riverside warehouse built in the 1800s and converted to the present use by Halls in 1977. Fuller's acquired the pub at the turn of the century and continues to provide good service at a price to the tourists and students who throng in their hundreds on the large patio. I did not sample the beers (Fuller's London Pride, ESB, Seafarers and Gales HSB) because of the queue, but they are always in good order.

TONY GOULDING



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Pub and Restaurant Review: The General Elliott, South Hinksey

Dave Richardson continues his series on real ale pubs with good food by visiting a recently re-opened pub just off the A34

RE-OPENING of the General Elliott in November was one of the best news stories on the Oxford pubs scene last year, and having sampled its range of mainly Vale Brewery beers a couple of times, I was keen to try its food. Owners Helen and Cass Hazlewood, who bought it from Vale Brewery as a free house, have employed an English chef with experience in France, Paul Dixon (pictured above with Helen), and the food is much in demand especially on Sunday lunchtimes.

The General Elliott has a real pub feel about it, with a single L-shaped bar with roaring fire at one end, stone and carpeted floor, and very relaxed ambience. I could have done without the piped music (popular with young people, it's said) but in every other respect find it a very pleasant place to visit. On the bar this time were three Vale beers – Gravitas (4.8%), Red Kite (4%) and Wychert (3.9%), and the tawny Red Kite is now a firm favourite of mine. But as a free house the pub isn't tied to Vale Brewery, and the range might vary more in future. The fourth hand pump on this occasion was dispensing White Horse's Village Idiot. All

cost between £3.60 and £3.80, the price of a pint having been cut by 20p since re-opening.

"Fish and Fizz Friday" offers a wide range of fish dishes, and as this was a Friday lunchtime we started with seafood gratin (£6.95) and deep fried calamari (£6.75). The gratin was a rich and creamy mixture of smoked haddock, prawns and cod in a cheesy sauce topped with breadcrumbs – excellent. Victoria's calamari were good too but I would have liked them crisper.

It was tempting to stay on fish dishes (fish and chips, £11.50; smoked haddock risotto £12), but I had been told in advance that the General's pies were to die for (in a nice way, that is!) Pie of the Day costs £11.50 and today it was steak, being deep-filled with lots of gravy and absolutely delicious. It came with mashed potato and a side order of vegetables which included green beans, broccoli and most unusual purple carrots. Victoria's steak burger (£11.95) with slaw, relish and chips was also very good, medium rare and moist to her liking, all food being cooked from fresh rather than frozen.



We moved to seats by the fire and nearly dozed off – that's how good (and warm) it was. We only just managed a sticky toffee pudding between us, knowing we wouldn't need to eat again until tomorrow. Chef Paul aims for "bistro not gastro" with a mix of English favourites and dishes with a French touch such as coq au vin, and there's also an unusually extensive children's menu with all dishes at £6.95.

The General Elliott appeals to beer lovers and people who like good food and a traditional but peaceful pub atmosphere, but most importantly the villagers have got their pub back after nearly six years of dereliction. What a success story this could turn out to be, and with planned improvements (new toilets are coming soon), it can only get better.

The General Elliott
37 Manor Road, South Hinksey,
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www.thegeneralelliott.co.uk

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.

Wandering around Wolvercote

Dave Richardson gets up-to-date on the pubs around Port Meadow

Plough Inn, Upper Wolvercote

It's by no means unusual for a Greene King house to offer a better-than-average choice of beers, and so it is here where landlord Tim Bowring will soon clock up 20 years at the pub on a lease which allows him to sell any bitter in the GK or guest range. Up to three ales are usually available and tonight I enjoyed a fine pint of VPA from Vale Brewery, with Hooky being the alternative. The core bitter is Hardy's & Hanson's (3.9%) but Reverend James, and St Austell's Tribute and Proper Job, also feature regularly.

The main part of the building, at the front, overlooks Wolvercote Green, the canal, railway and meadow beyond, and is Grade II listed dating back about 150 years. The rear extension has character too as it houses around 750 books and is known as the library, and Tim assured me all the books are real and not the "book wallpaper" favoured by some pubs as decorations. The pub was once used by farmers (hence the name) and later by barge people said to be fond of brawling, but it is altogether more civilised nowadays. Good value food is provided with pub classics dishes all costing under £10.

This is a great place to start a tour of Wolvercote, which is

served by the number 6 bus from the city centre. But it's a fair walk across the canal and railway until you reach the others, so a visit to the Gents or Ladies might now be in order....

White Hart, Lower Wolvercote

This is the nearest community-owned pub to the centre of Oxford, having changed hands in December 2013. A former Punch Taverns pub which then became a free house, it was saved from probable closure by people determined to retain a good value traditional pub at a time when some pubs around here are increasingly focusing on food.

The range of ales is ever-changing with Vale's Gravitas (4.8%) and White Horse Bitter (3.7%) being offered on this occasion, and Skinner's Betty Stogs (4%) coming on soon. Shotover and Loose Cannon beers are also regulars, plus Ramsbury Bitter from Wiltshire which is a long established locals' favourite. Beers generally cost around £3.40 a pint with a 40p discount during happy hour from 5pm-7pm Mondays to Thursdays.

The pub does not serve food at present but may do so in future, and is very traditional in atmosphere with a large L-shaped bar and plans to

develop a function room with special events. Monthly live music already happens, and beer festivals in spring and autumn.

The White Hart is owned by a private limited company subscribed to by local people, and director Henry Morgan told me that it will seek further investment shortly.

Jacob's Inn, Lower Wolvercote

Just a few yards from the White Hart is the former Red Lion, which was rebranded a couple of years ago reflecting the new incumbents who own the Jacobs & Field delicatessen in Headington. They have since transformed it into a gastro-pub, while retaining a more traditional pub atmosphere in the front bar which is laid out with sofas and armchairs.

The pub belongs to Marston's with all beers sourced from there, and the range was wide for a gastro-pub with regulars Brakspear Bitter and Hobgoblin (4.5%) from nearby Wychwood Brewery in Witney; Jennings Bitter (3.5%); and Ringwood's Boon Doggle (4.2%), plus Thatcher's cider. The downside of being a gastro-pub is that all beers cost £3.90 a pint, pushing them perilously close to the £4 mark that is a psychological barrier for many drinkers.



RIGHT: Tim Bowring and daughter Kate (right) with regular Jess Casey at the Plough

Food is served throughout the day starting with breakfast from 9am, a full English costing £12.50. Separate lunch, evening and weekend menus are available in the extensive dining room, and Jacob's Inn keeps its own pigs and chickens. All food suppliers are listed, with fish coming directly from Brixham in Devon.

Trout Inn, Godstow

The number 6 bus takes you to Upper and Lower Wolvercote, but to visit one of the most famous and scenic pubs around Oxford you must either drive or walk. Fortunately the Trout is only a 5- to 10-minute walk from Jacob's Inn or the White Hart, close to the remains of Godstow Abbey and overlooking a fast flowing stream that branches off from the nearby Thames.

There's no denying that this is one of the pleasantest pubs around Oxford for a summer's day, and it has plenty of history too as it dates from the 17th century and is thought to be on the site of an abbey house. More recently it has appeared in episodes of Inspector Morse, and framed front covers of a dozen Colin Dexter novels, on which the series was based, appear on the walls.

Although it is now open-plan, the low beams, flagged floors and open fires still give parts of

it a cosy atmosphere. It functions mainly as a restaurant, and although you may be asked if you've booked a table when you walk in at busy times, you can make your way to the bar and simply enjoy a drink if you want to.

The Trout is owned by Mitchells & Butlers, and the ubiquitous Sharp's Doom Bar and Brakspear Bitter are the regular ales. But one or two guest ales also appear each month, and I enjoyed a half of Purity UBU (4.5%). Other guests include Hook Norton's Lion, Black Sheep, and Hopback Brewery's Summer and Winter Lightning, but with about 20 taps serving lagers, ciders and branded keg beers, it isn't exactly a real ale pub.

White Hart, Wytham

The picture postcard village of Wytham, though somewhat blighted by noise from the nearby A34, is a further 10-minute walk from the Trout so is maybe better visited on another day. It has no public transport so you'll probably visit by car or taxi, but it is worth making the trip as here you'll find a Wadworth pub, also called the White Hart, where new tenants have just taken over. We hope to include an update in the next issue.

DAVE RICHARDSON

White Horse Branch Diary

Tuesday 10 February Branch Meeting

7.45pm

Swan, Wantage – to decide Good Beer Guide entries.

Tuesday 10 March AGM

7.30pm

Royal Oak, Wantage

Oxford Branch Contacts:

Chairman

Tony Goulding
07588 181313
chair@oxfordcamra.org.uk

Secretary

Steve Lawrence
01235 525436
contact@oxfordcamra.org.uk

Treasurer

Grahame Allen
treasurer@oxfordcamra.org.uk

Vice-Chair and Chairman of the Pubs Group

Dennis Brown
vice-chair@oxfordcamra.org.uk

White Horse Branch Contact:

contact@whitehorsecamra.org.uk

Oxfordshire Trading Standards Service:

Graham Hill House
Electric Avenue
Ferry Hinksey Road
Oxford
OX2 0BY
Tel: 01865 815000
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

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Thanks to the Volunteers!

Volunteers at the Oxford Beer Festival in October are treated to a free coach trip to somewhere famous for real ale, and this year we have decided to go to Cambridge on Saturday 28 February. Cambridge has 10 Good Beer Guide pubs and many others worth a visit, and provisional arrangements are to pick up in Abingdon at 0930 and Oxford Station at 1000 which should get us to Cambridge around midday. We leave to come back at 1830.

This trip is free to members who helped at the festival, but sadly you have to buy your own beer. We usually get a 50-plusseater coach so there may be some places available for non-helpers at a small charge. Let branch secretary Steve Lawrence know if you want a place, and whether helpers or non-helpers. If we fill up preference will be given to helpers.

Email:
contact@oxfordcamra.org.uk

More volunteers needed!

LIKE MANY organisations, Oxford CAMRA has a large number of members (over 900) but only a small number (not more than 40-50) who get involved on a regular basis or as volunteers. With our AGM coming up (Wednesday 3 March, upstairs at St Aldate's Tavern in Oxford) we are looking for more active members including those prepared to stand as regional officers.

Volunteering should be fun and could include the following:

- Surveying local pubs for the Good Beer Guide and Pub of the Year competitions
- Pulling a few pints at our beer festival in October
- Distributing campaigns publicity material to local pubs
- Writing to your MP to encourage him/her to sign one of CAMRA's petitions
- Writing articles for this magazine and sending pub and brewery news

A great way to get to know other local members is to attend one of our socials (see branch diary online or in this magazine) which include pub crawls in Oxford, Abingdon and Witney, minibus tours to rural areas, and socials prior to branch meetings.

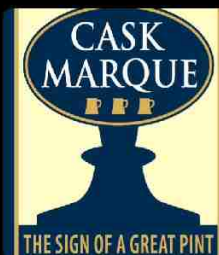
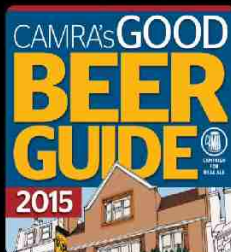
Each branch has lots of jobs that need doing and offer a great way of using your skills or gaining new ones. Some take a reasonable time commitment, others not so much. Besides the usual chair, secretary and treasurer, typical posts include: press officer, public affairs officer, LocAle co-ordinator, pubs officer, webmaster, magazine editor and contributors, cider co-ordinator, social secretary, membership secretary and young members' rep. Details can be found on the volunteers' section of the CAMRA website:

[www.camra.org.uk/
jobguidelines](http://www.camra.org.uk/jobguidelines)

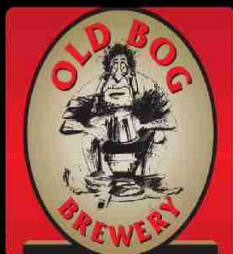
You can also become a brewery liaison or pubs group liaison officer, which entails meeting representatives, writing reports to keep the rest of CAMRA up to date and giving relevant information to the representatives. Later in the year we will be looking for people to join the Beer Festival Committee, and regional and national committees also need new members. Some committees are on the lookout for people with specialist skills including IT, planning, finance, marketing, sales, PR, publishing and lots more, so if you think this might be for you, see [www.camra.org.uk/
nationalcommittees](http://www.camra.org.uk/nationalcommittees).

The Masons Arms

2, Quarry School Place Headington Oxford
01865 764579

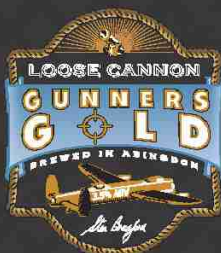


Oxford CAMRA City pub of the year
2004, 2005, 2010 & 2014

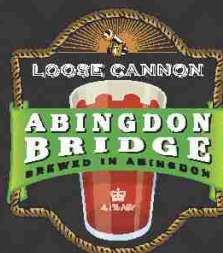


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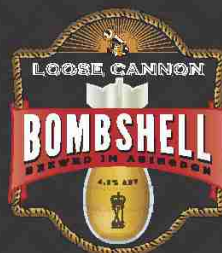
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