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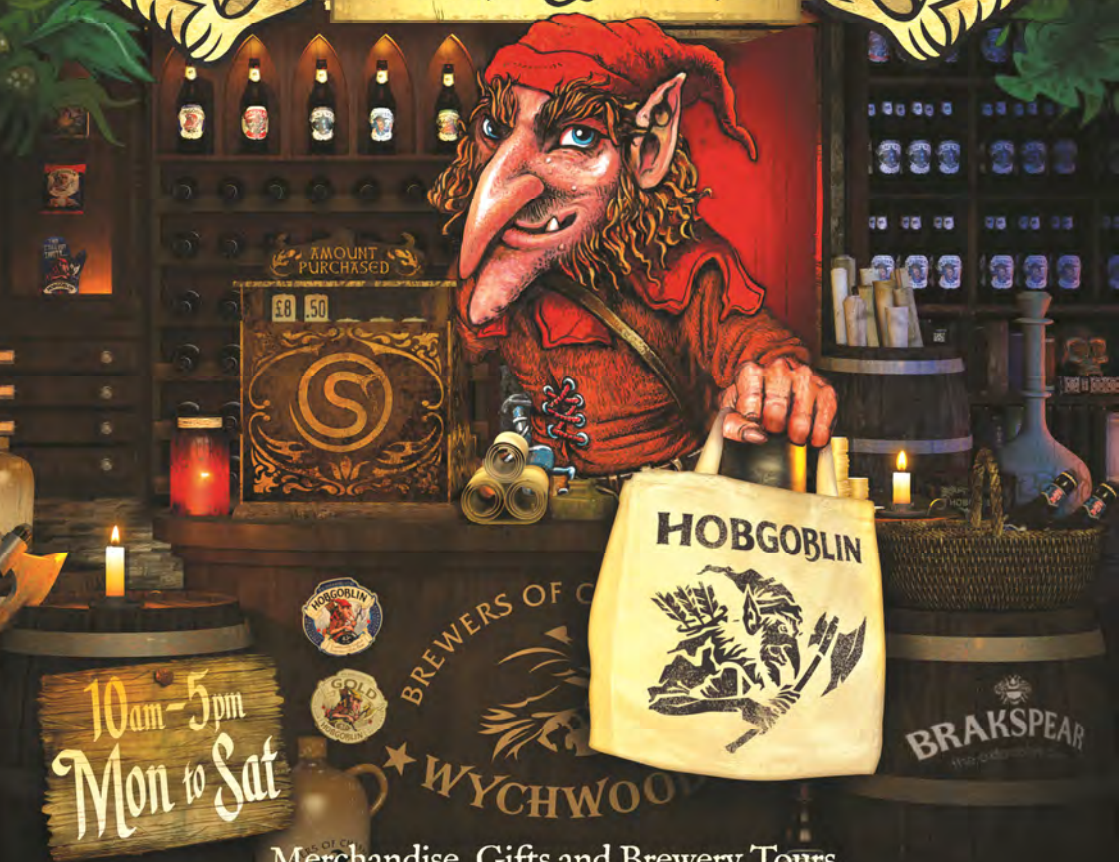
the Oxford Drinker



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Contents

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.

We have recently relaunched our website and pdf downloads are now available there once again.

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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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5 Welcome

New pubs, and new columnists

6 Brewery Focus

An in-depth look at Loose Cannon of Abingdon



10 Faringdon

A crawl around the pubs of Faringdon



13 Gardener's World

Paul Silcock gives a publican's view

14 Memory Lane

Oxford's Riverside pubs recalled

16 Festival Diary

A selection of autumn festivals to enjoy

17 White Horse

White Horse branch news and diary

19 2017 Guide

New entries into the 2017 Good Beer Guide

20 Pub News

A round-up of all the latest news locally



24 Tony's Travels

Looking at the pubs of Otmoor and the West

27 Brewery News

New beers and new breweries

29 Roarsome!

Graham Shelton on life at the Red Lion

30 Abingdon visited

Pete's guide to Abingdon pubs - part 2



The Nag's Head



on the Thames



Stunning riverside bar & restaurant in Abingdon-on-Thames



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Welcome

..... to our very own "good beer guide", and more signs of the times

WHEN CAMRA'S *Good Beer Guide* for the following year is published in September, it's always an opportunity to reflect on national trends as well as what's happening in our neck of the woods. I like to think of the *Oxford Drinker* as your own guide to good real ale drinking in and around Oxford and sometimes further afield, and of course we reflect national trends in our ever-changing pub scene.

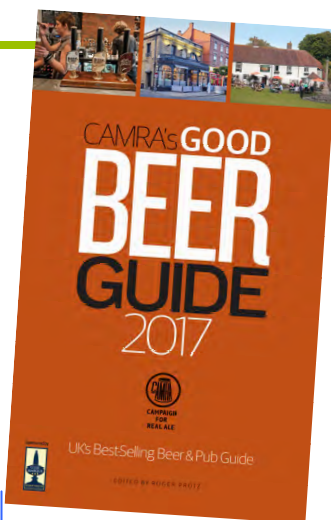
From the *Good Beer Guide* we learn that real ale now accounts for 55% of the total ale market and that share is projected to grow to 70% by 2020. The ever-growing range of independent breweries (200 new in the last year, total now over 1,500) has revived old styles such as porter and India Pale Ale (IPA), and taking in European styles such as Belgian farmhouse and sour beers.

But there's also a warning that global brewing giants are moving into the cask ale sector, buying up some of the most successful independents for often highly inflated prices – such as the purchase of Meantime brewery in London by SABMiller – which has since sold it on to Asahi of Japan.

Another trend is the growth of craft keg ales, resisted by some CAMRA members although this is what they rave about when visiting the Continent. There's no doubt that craft keg is now a very strong market, as witnessed by the arrival in Oxford of Pint Shop (see Pub News). But it's a shame that Beerd (formerly the Grapes), just a few doors away from Pint Shop, could close despite its mix of keg and cask ales. We wish manager James and his team all the best, whatever happens.

I'm always fascinated by how changes in society are reflected in our pubs, with Pint Shop being one example and the re-opening of the Jolly Post Boys, in the Oxford district of Florence Park, being another. This was a failed traditional pub that is now a trendy, stylish bistro pub with a great range of ales both cask and keg. Is East Oxford ready for a pub serving wild rabbit rillettes, I wonder (and how do they know the rabbits are wild)? The new tenants certainly think so, and if they succeed more failed pubs could go this way.

In this edition of our own "good beer guide" we report on who's new in the real guide, mention a



new brewery in Kennington (*not* the editor's house!) and venture to far-out Faringdon, plus another trip Down Memory Lane. We also start a regular in-depth look at a local brewery with a focus on Loose Cannon.

We also introduce two new regular columnists – Graham Shelton of the Red Lion in Northmoor, and Paul Silcock of the Gardeners Arms in Plantation Road, North Oxford. I'm especially pleased to recruit them both as the Red Lion is a super community-owned pub, and the Gardeners Arms is another pub at the very heart of its community which happened to be my local when I first moved to Oxford in 1980.

If you want to make your "good beer guide" even better, get in touch with your news, views and ideas using the contact details on page 19. And if you're one of the thousands coming to the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival at the Town Hall from 13-15 October, look out for me and say hello.

DAVE RICHARDSON



LOOSE CANNON

BREWERY • ABINGDON

P*ss-up* in a Brewery – Loose Cannon

In the first of a series of in-depth articles on local breweries, **Dave Richardson** visits Loose Cannon in Abingdon

I HAVE ENJOYED Loose Cannon beers since the brewery opened in 2010, without ever visiting its modern premises in an industrial estate on the edge of Abingdon. But before arriving I got a rather different taste of the company through its website.

Its chairman and founder, Will Laithwaite, we are told, “cooked up some half decent recipes for our award winning ales. OK he had some highly gifted staff to help him with this, but his benevolent nature forces him to carry the burden of glory all by himself. He is the ‘Boss’ though and we will continue to treat him with the reverence he deserves on a daily basis. Future plans will see a four times life size bronze statue of his good self, erected on the roundabout outside the brewery entrance, which all workers will have to salute as they arrive and leave. Not to do so would result in more beatings. Please help.”

Or this on head brewer Chris Ward: “Chris W began his career in brewing in New Zealand, and following his creation of ‘Ward’s Wonderful Wobbly Water’, a 8.9% tour-de force for the taste-buds, he was

deported back to the old country for health reasons as most of New Zealand’s brewers wanted him shot. We found him wandering the old docks of Portsmouth with only a shilling in his pocket, cold damp hands and a pained expression. Being a practising philanthropist, Will immediately asked him to join Loose Cannon as part of the Government-funded ‘Foreign Lick-Spittle’ placement scheme.”

Sales manager Chris Harrison, I learned from the website, “joined Loose Cannon as the drayman, where with his keenly honed knowledge of the local roads and pubs would be put to good use – who can forget his numerous appearances on ‘Police, Camera, Action?’ In a further role change Chris took up the reins of brewery sales where his tenure has seen new sales records being set, with nominations outstanding for ‘Sales Person of the Year’, ‘Person Most Women Want to Take Home (to unblock drains)’, ‘UK’s Greatest Tea Drinker’ and ‘Most Creative Use of the Word Futtuck in Everyday Conversation’.”



UPPER: Sales Manager Chris Harrison

LOWER: Head Brewer Chris Ward

So they certainly have a sense of humour as well as great beer down at Loose Cannon, and I came along as guest of CAMRA branch chairman Pete Flynn to one of the monthly open evenings to find out more. It turns out that head brewer Chris Ward is indeed a New Zealander, having worked for major brewer Speight's, but he arrived in the UK via his wife's job at Oxford University rather than the Portsmouth dockside.

"There's been a big craft beer scene in New Zealand for 15-20 years, but we don't have cask ales in the same quality or quantity there," he says. "It's been fantastic to develop cask ales here and to create different beers, and there are lots more to come. We create monthly specials for our shop and for

pubs, and try to provide as much variety as we can in a safe drinking environment."

Will Laithwaite – from the well-known wine merchant family of the same name – started his brewing career at Rebellion in Marlow in 2004, and Rebellion helped him to set up Loose Cannon as the new kid wasn't on its doorstep. But why choose Abingdon, and why that name?

"Loose Cannon was my nickname in the university Rugby club, and the name just stuck," says Will, 33. "Abingdon is a town known for its beer, and there had been a 10-year gap between Morlands closing and us opening. I'm so happy we chose Abingdon, and a lot of people who used to work at Morlands come to our shop."

Links with the town were strengthened by the names of its core beers. The dark best bitter Abingdon Bridge was the first brew, while Gunners Gold, its session bitter, is named after World War Two fighter pilot Stan Bradford who pulled the first pint, and still lives in the town.

"We are responding to consumer trends with craft keg, but we will never abandon cask ales," says Will. "People's tastes are changing, and kegs give us another option as it gets more and more competitive with cask ales. In six years we have grown to produce up to 50 brewers' barrels (which each contain 288 pints or four firkins) each week. In the longer term we would like to partner with a pub to showcase all our beers,

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and it could be with a current landlord, or a pub we run ourselves. It would preferably be in a town where we don't have a presence – somewhere like Didcot."

Abingdon Bridge (4.1%) and Gunners Gold (3.5%) remain the core cask and bottled ales, which can be found widely around the county and beyond with the Brewery Tap in Abingdon, and the Chester and newly re-opened Jolly Post Boys in Oxford, having long-term relationships with the brewery. But sales manager Chris Harrison – taking time off from *Police, Camera, Action!* to talk to me – says establishing such relationships is getting more and more difficult.

"Our core business is the guest beer market, and there's such variety now that it doesn't work for many landlords to have a

regular beer any more," says Chris, who did indeed start as a drayman after a career in architecture and at RAF Benson. "We try to be pro-active and ring about 100 pubs a day, and while 75% might say no, most have regular rotations. But even when a beer is selling well it will be rotated – familiarity breeds contempt, I suppose.

"When we started a monthly special ale, things really opened up for us. But the pubs market is quite polarised – some landlords say you must continue with the same thing, while others keep changing."

A special cask ale is produced each month, and these have included Red Ale (a 3.2% bitter produced for August), English Dark, Black IPA, Chocolate Ale and Flanders Ale, with Christmas Cannon coming soon. And then there are the

seasonal brews – primarily Bombshell, Dark Horse and Recoil.

So there's always plenty of variety at Loose Cannon, and many ales can be sampled on brewery tours (£15) held on the first Tuesday of each month, usually sold out well in advance despite a capacity of 150 people. It also has a members' club, with people who have sampled all the beers in a calendar year having their names displayed in a hall of fame.

I'm already looking forward to my next tour, and seeing that four times life size statue of Will appearing on the roundabout. Bring it on!

** Pass-up is an old English expression which, contrarily, means accepting whatever beer you are offered. (Or not.....)*



Chairman and founder,
Will Laithwaite



THE BEAR INN

The Bear Inn is the oldest pub in Oxford and is a hidden gem, just off the hustle and bustle of the busy High Street.

◆ ◆

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Far Out in Faringdon

Dave Richardson tours the pubs in an Oxfordshire market town



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The Folly Inn; The Swan; The Volunteer; The Swan, home of Faringdon Brewery; The Bell Hotel

NEXT PAGE: Tony Kelly and Caroline Wood at the Old Crown Coaching Inn

WITH ONLY ONE pub currently featuring in the *Good Beer Guide*, Faringdon is not generally considered one of the best places in the county for real ale drinkers. But there's always something worth looking into, so I set out with Tony and Marie Goulding – and White Horse branch chairman Ian Winfield – to discover it for ourselves.

We had considered saving what's probably the best pub until last, but as we took the regular 66 express bus service from Oxford which stops across the road, we started at that GBG regular, the Swan. It also has a micro-brewery, where the brewer is Stuart Bruton who runs the pub with his wife, Debbie.

Limited production means you won't always find Faringdon Brewery's beers available, as was the case tonight. For the record these are Folly Ale (4%), a copper coloured bitter; PGA (also 4%), an amber bitter; and Lord Berners, named the man who built the Faringdon Folly (the tower, not the pub!). But the five ales available (from six pumps) certainly compensated, these being Skinners' Betty Stogs, St Austell Trelawny, Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Exmoor Ale, and Blacksmith's Gold – the latter produced just a few miles away at the Old Forge Brewery, adjacent to the Radnor Arms pub in Coleshill. A

real cider, Thatcher's Big Apple, was also on the bar.

The Exmoor Ale and Blacksmith's Gold were so good that after a half of each, I had two more thirds along with a third of Betty Stogs. This pub really serves its beer well in a relaxed environment decorated with real hops, and with four of its old pub signs displayed in the rear room, each depicting – naturally – a swan. Two of these date from the time when the pub was owned by Salisbury brewer Gibbs Mew.

The Swan was built around 1848 when the railway came to town, but this closed in the 1960s although one of the station buildings survives as a nursery. We thoroughly enjoyed our time at this free house – where live music is a regular feature – and could easily have settled in for the night. But it was time to move on.

The Swan stands apart from Faringdon's other pubs, which are all clustered around Market Place about 5-10 minutes' walk away. Two imposing old coaching inns face each other across Market Place, and we started at the Bell – which, like the Old Crown opposite, is still a hotel.

The Bell is owned by Wadworth and had three of that brewery's real ales available – IPA, 6X and Swordfish. My half of a very



nutty Swordfish went down well as I explored the historic interior, which dates from the 17th century and includes some faded murals in the bar on the left, said to portray the Three Blind Mice.

It has three bars and a fine cobbled courtyard where you can imagine the coaching horses trotting in, but is somewhat dingy and doesn't seem to know what face to present to the public with a gaming machine at odds with its historic appeal. A plaque outside reveals that an inn here was once owned by the Cistercian Abbey of Beaulieu in Hampshire, and it also has an enormous "real" bell outside – quite the largest I've ever seen on a pub.

Curiosity satisfied, we crossed Market Place to the Old Crown Coaching Inn where another plaque reveals that Royalist troops were billeted here in 1644-46 during the Civil War, while in the 19th century it was used as a courtroom. This pub/hotel also presents a confusing image with many old features such a half-timbered ceiling and old fireplace, spoilt by sports TV.

Landlord Tony Kelly, who has recently arrived, apologised that Sharp's Doom Bar was his only real ale, due to problems in the cellar, but assured us that three real ales are usually available

with Hancock's, Butcombe, Black Sheep and Hook Norton being typical. He clearly has plans for the Old Crown and took pride in showing us the original entrance for horses and an ancient "priest run", a passage that allowed priests to escape their pursuers from adjacent St Stephen's Church.

The restaurant is named after infamous "hanging judge" Jeffreys, who also held court here. The Old Crown is part of Relax Innz, whose other historic properties include the George in Dorchester-on-Thames. It is investing in an additional eight bedrooms converted from stables (to make a total of 15), and the rooms once used as a

court are now a luxury suite.

Unusually, the same building houses a bar that is a totally separate business, once called Portwell Cellar Bar but now called Ruby Jacks. This is a modern bar where cocktails are a speciality but it did offer one real ale, Greene King IPA Gold.

Next I headed up the hill along London Street to visit another free house, the Folly, named after a tower just outside town. The pub is another very old building whose interior has recently been changed, without affecting its traditional charm. Brakspear Bitter, now brewed

continued over.....



.....continued from previous page

by Wychwood Brewery in Witney, is the regular ale, while I chose the rotating guest beer which on this occasion was Wickwar's bitter from Gloucestershire. Box Steam, XT/Animal and Prescott are among other regular suppliers to this one-room pub with garden, which is definitely worth a stop.

Time constraints ruled out a sojourn in Faringdon's other three pubs, but all serve real ale. The Volunteer is a small, rather lively pub serving Doom Bar, while Greene King's Wheatsheaf, a former Morlands pub, serves the regulation IPA, Abbot and Old Speckled Hen and is popular with youngsters.

The Red Lion was more inviting although, despite it being a Thursday night, this large Punch-owned pub was notably short of customers. I enjoyed a half of Prescott's Hill Climb

(appropriately, bearing in mind I'd just gone up the hill to the Folly), wondering if the two other hand pumps see much use. A presentation on the wall details the Red Lion's history, and it's thought to date from soon after Cromwell's visit in 1645-46 when much of the town was reduced to rubble and the inn was built using some of this.

As we made our way homewards on the 66 bus, which stops just outside the Old Crown, I reflected that the Red Lion rather sums up Faringdon's pubs – with lots of history, but rather down-at-heel. The Swan alone makes a visit worthwhile, but tonight's total of only 16 real ales on offer in seven pubs is less than remarkable. I would also go back to the Bell, the Old Crown and the Folly, but most of Faringdon's pubs are in need of some TLC.

DAVE RICHARDSON

THE FIRST BENEFIT of becoming a free house three years ago wasn't slipping the mantle of a large brewery, but the freedom to shop around the local breweries for all the exceptional local ales they had to offer. I try to have a constantly changing selection of ales on the bar, so there's always something different for the ale enthusiast from one week to the next. This does mean one of the most common questions I get asked over the bar is how I choose which ales to have on sale.

My stock answer is usually something about trying to give a



Gardeners' World

Paul Silcock, landlord of the Gardeners Arms in Plantation Road, North Oxford, starts a new regular column

balanced selection for the customer and trying to have a wide range, something for every taste. Something dark, something pale, maybe one strong ale to balance a mild, and a traditional best bitter to offset that experimental smoked raspberry wheat beer limited edition brew from a nano-brewery, but the truth is much simpler than that. It's whichever brewery gets the phone call in first.

Thanks to the proliferation of micro-breweries in the UK, keeping a turnover of interesting beers has never been easier. The Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) lists over 750 micro-breweries in the country, quite an increase from the 20 that were listed when SIBA started in 1980. That's a

fantastic growth rate in less than 40 years. With each local brewery having at least two or three regular beers on, plus seasonal brews, the real trick is not going crazy and ordering one of everything. After all, what good would the freedom to choose such fantastic beers be if it meant I was overstocked and the beer sat in the cellar, slowly souring while waiting for a chance to be served?

Just to give an example, this week three regular suppliers, White Horse Brewery, XT and Loose Cannon (all within 20 miles of the pub), had over 20 ales available. And then there were all the guest beers they had to offer as part of their dray sharing, which more than doubled that number again. So that's over 60 beers, and I have

only four beer pumps on the bar. Not to mention the many other breweries who are phoning up to see what they could deliver. Every week!

Of course, an obvious solution would seem to simply buy another beer pump or two. If there are so many beers out there to buy, but only four pumps to serve them with, why not get more pumps? Sadly, I'd just be spreading myself too thinly. Anyone who's ever had a pint of flat, stale beer knows how important it is to keep beer fresh. And to make sure beer is fresh means not having a barrel open for too long, which can happen if you have more beer on offer than you have punters. Then you can get into a Catch-22 situation.

Every now and then I get a beer on the bar that for some reason or other doesn't sell well. People just don't want it, so they choose one of the other three bitters on offer. The poor, unwanted beer doesn't sell, and starts to get a little tired, so when people do try it, it doesn't taste as fresh as the other beers. So it doesn't sell, and becomes a little more tired, and so on until I have to take it off the bar because it's no longer up to a standard I would serve. The only real solution is patience. I will keep serving the best quality beer I can, and hope that seasonal brew is still on next week.



Down Memory Lane

FOR THIS EDITION'S dip into my book *Oxford Pubs*, let's look at the history of some of the best-known – the riverside inns that are as popular with locals as tourists. Oxford is very fortunate in having six of them, and if we start in the north along the Thames (or Isis), we come to the Trout at Godstow, just outside Wolvercote.

Much beloved of Inspector Morse fans, the Trout is today a dining pub run by Mitchells & Butlers where you can still just have a drink (two or three real ales are usually on), but feel you're not really what this pub's all about. It's all about the setting as well as the food, with a lovely outside terrace beside a weir, the river being on the other side of some trees. The present building is thought to date from 1737, although an inn has stood here since 1625. It makes the most of its Morse connections by displaying the front covers of a dozen of Colin Dexter's novels, on which the TV series was based, although only two episodes were filmed here.

It has always been a fashionable venue, with the *Oxford Mail* warning in 1963 that: "If you crave tranquillity, avoid it at weekends.... It is full of the youngest, brightest crowd of Oxford undergraduates and their girl-friends" – no mention of female undergraduates, at that time! It suffered a serious fire in 1961, and during restoration a visitors' book was found from the 1920s signed by Edward, Prince of Wales; King Hussein of Jordan; and Evelyn Waugh. One of my favourite pictures in the book –

reproduced here courtesy of the *Oxford Mail/Oxford Times* – was taken in 1933 showing a group of people, including Santa Claus, standing on water which was frozen solid.

If you head down the Thames path towards the city you come to the Perch in Binsey after about a mile, and although its lush garden stretches down to the river, the riverside isn't actually visible from the pub. The Perch has really come alive again since new owners, led by Jon Ellse who runs restaurants in Oxford, took over in 2015. Jon has pubs in his blood as he is the son of Wally Ellse, long-term landlord of the Turf Tavern. Jon's plan was to make the Perch a pub again, albeit a gastro-pub, and it has proved very successful especially in summer when an outside bar is also open to dispense drinks and fast food. Two real ales and a real cider are usually available at the stone-flagged bar inside, along with the full menu.

The Perch is a picturesque, partly thatched building dating back several hundred years, but this has been the cause of some major problems as serious fires closed it down twice, in 1977 and 2007. It isn't the cheapest riverside pub, but a fine venue for a drink and excellent food even in winter, when a fire is lit.

Diverting now to the River Cherwell, but still on the north side of Oxford, we come to the Victoria Arms at Old Marston, another beautifully situated pub which is popular for riverside walks or punting from the city centre. This is a Wadworth pub which usually has at least four of its real ales on, and has a good reputation for dining.

A stone cottage, which forms the oldest part of the pub today, stood on the site from the 17th century and became a pub by 1871 when it was known as the Ferry Inn. A passenger ferry operated here for hundreds of years right up to 1971, when it



was made redundant by construction of Marston Ferry Road. The ferryman was also the pub's landlord, who came down to the riverside when a prospective passenger rang a bell.

In 1900 it was renamed the Victoria Arms but by 1958 the pub was closed and derelict, being purchased in 1959 by the Oxford Preservation Trust. It was later greatly extended, and the "Vicky", as it is known, is very popular with Inspector Morse fans as it appears in three episodes including the final one. Pictures of actor John Thaw filming at the pub appear on the walls, and a plaque above the bar reads: "Near this spot Inspector Morse recited *The Remorseful Day* to Sergeant Lewis in the episode of that name. This plaque was unveiled by Colin Dexter OBE on 5 April 2013."

Moving on to the city centre now, the Head of the River beside the Thames at Folly Bridge is a historic building although it has only been a pub since 1977. It has a long history as a warehouse in the days when Oxford had a substantial river trade, and a crane from the 1800s is retained as a feature on the large riverside patio which is very popular during the summer. By the 1970s it was disused and considered an eyesore, and at this time – unlike today – it was a radical step to turn a disused building into a pub. It might appear that the pub, run by Fuller's, is indeed at the head of the river, but the "Head of the River" is in fact the victorious rowing team in the "bumping races".

A pleasant stroll down the Thames path south of the city leads you, in about 20 minutes, to the Isis Farmhouse near Iffley Lock, a curiosity not only for Oxford but for anywhere in Britain. This is a pub with no public road access, as although supplies are delivered along a private track leading through a nature reserve, the only way for patrons to approach is along the river. If coming from Iffley village, via the lock, at least the path is lit!

When a group of farm buildings grew into a pub is not certain, but this was probably around 1842 and it was owned by Morrells Brewery from 1855 to the brewery's demise in 1999. Delivering supplies has always been a challenge, and sometimes these arrived by punt along the river (see picture below – also courtesy of the *Oxford Mail/Oxford Times*). More usually, Morrells used a light horse-drawn cart that could navigate the path.

One family, the Roses, ran the pub for Morrells for over half a century from 1927, with Tom Rose in charge from then until 1949. On his sixtieth birthday,

Oxford student Lord Douglas Hamilton fired sixty rockets from the pub. Bill Rose was landlord from 1949-1977, having previously operated a foot passenger ferry (1d.) across the river at nearby Donnington, before Donnington Bridge Road was opened in 1962. After the closure of Morrells in 1999 came a period of decline under Greene King until the present owner, Jonathan Price, took over in 2008 and it became a free house. It usually serves a couple of real ales and rustic-style food is popular in its large riverside garden, but opening times are limited so check before going.

Another riverside pub had to be omitted from my book due to shortage of space, but this is the Punter in Osney, formerly the Waterman's Arms, a Greene King pub whose origins go back to the days when the Thames was a working river.

If you have memories you'd like to share, contact me at editor@oxford.camra.org.uk. To buy a signed copy of *Oxford Pubs*, email me at this address or visit www.oxfordpubhistory.co.uk



Beer Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

Further details can be found on our website www.oxford.camra.org.uk

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**Wednesday 19 - Saturday 22
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www.mkcamra.org.uk

**Thursday 27 - Saturday 29
October**

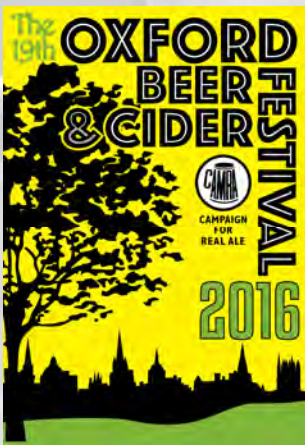
Birmingham Beer & Cider Festival

New Bingley Hall, Hockley Circus,
250+ beers, 70+ ciders & perries
www.birminghambeerfestival.org.uk

**Thursday 27 - Saturday 29
October**

Swindon Beer Festival

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



**Friday 28 - Saturday 29
October**

Aylesbury Beer Festival

Bucks County Council Sports & Social Club, Lower Road, Stoke Mandeville, Aylesbury
Includes Saturday Sausage Festival
www.aylesburybeerfestival.org.uk

**Friday 28 - Saturday 29
October**

Wycombe Swan Beer & Cider Festival

Old Town Hall, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe
01494 512000
www.wycombeswan.co.uk

**Friday 18 - Saturday 19
November**

Banbury Winter Beer & Cider Festival

Army Reserve Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury
www.northoxon.camra.org.uk

**Thursday 24 - Saturday 26
November**

Dudley Winter Ales Fayre

Dudley Town Hall, St James's Road, Dudley
70 beers, ciders & perries
www.dudleycamra.org.uk

**Friday 25 - Saturday 26
November**

1st Bath Winter Ale Festival

Widcombe Social Club,
Widcombe Hill, Bath
Note new venue
30+ beers plus cider & perry
www.bathandborderscamra.org.uk

**Tuesday 29 November -
Saturday 3 December**

Pig's Ear Beer & Cider Festival

Round Chapel, Glenarm Road,
Hackney, London
www.pigsear.org.uk

Saturday 10 December

Haddenham Winterfest

Banks Park, Banks Road,
Haddenham
40 beers plus cider & perry
Open Noon to 5pm
www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk

**Friday 16 - Saturday 17
December**

Portsmouth Beer Festival

Portsmouth Guildhall, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth

New team at The Rose and Crown



A new team (pictured) has taken over at the Rose & Crown in Ashbury, near Wantage. Paul and Michelle Gilbert; and Neil and Sheena Hislop (above, Sheena not pictured) took over the Arkells inn on 6 June, Neil and Sheena having previously managed the Prince of Wales in nearby Shrivenham.

The Rose & Crown is a 16th century coaching inn located in the heart of Ashbury village, very close to the Ridgeway

national walking trail. Ashbury lies at the foot of the Berkshire Downs, and in the 9th century it bore the Saxon name Aescaesbyries (the Camp of the Ash Trees).

The inn has eight en-suite rooms and a function room, and specialises in local, home-made pub fare to match the local ales from Arkells of Swindon seven miles away. A seasonal ale is always available as well as the core range.

Branch Diary

Tuesday 11 October Branch Meeting

7.45pm

At the Cherry Tree, 33 High Street, Stevenon, OX13 6RZ.

Saturday 5 November Branch Social

2pm

A visit to the newest brewery in the branch - all branch members are welcome at the Barn Owl Brewery, Buildings Farm, Faringdon Road, Gozzards Ford, Oxon OX13 6QH.

White Horse Pub and Brewery News

Two pubs in the branch area appear for the first time in the 2017 edition of the Good Beer Guide – the **Swan in Wantage** and the **Boar's Head at Ardington**, outside Wantage. The Shoulder of Mutton in the same town is a re-entry after an absence of one year.

Old Forge Brewery at Coleshill has produced three new ales – a Dark Ruby, a Best and a Summer Ale. All have been seen in the Royal Oak at Wantage.

Bellinger's Brewery has completed rebranding of the labels, pump clips etc., and one of its beers is often available at the Volunteer in Grove.

Bloomfields deli in the High Street of Shrivenham is selling locally bottled beers, a good addition to the village.

White Horse CAMRA has arranged a visit to the newest brewery in the branch at 2pm on Saturday 5 November. All branch members are welcome at the **Barn Owl Brewery**, Buildings Farm, Faringdon Road, Gozzards Ford, Oxon OX13 6QH.

The **Wantage Beer Festival** is being planned for 17-18 March 2017 – more news in the next edition.

	<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Masons Arms</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">2, Quarry School Place Headington Oxford 01865 764579</p>	
<p><i>Oxford CAMRA pub of the year 2004, 2005, 2010 & 2014</i></p>		<p><i>Home of the The Old Bog Brewey</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">www.themasonsarmsbq.co.uk</p>	
<p><i>Large beer garden. Sky & BT Sports</i></p>		<p><i>Function Room. Comedy in the Quarry Live Music</i></p>

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Four pubs new in Good Beer Guide

FOUR PUBS in the Oxford branch have come into the 2017 edition of the *Good Beer Guide*, published in September, while four pubs go out to keep to the strict limit of 17 currently imposed by CAMRA headquarters.

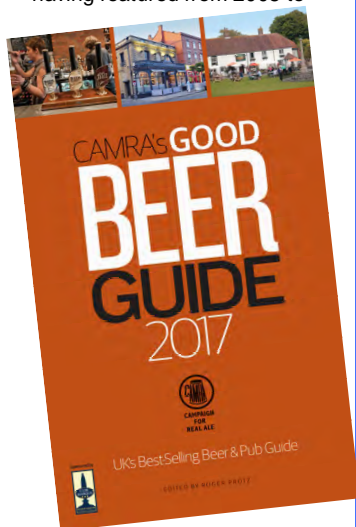
Newcomers are the community-owned Red Lion in Northmoor in rural West Oxfordshire; the Chester, off Iffley Road in Oxford; and the White Rabbit in the city centre (pictured below); while the King's Arms in Kidlington returns to the guide after a few years' absence having featured from 2008 to

some branches have a higher proportion of pubs listed than here.

The Brewery Tap in Abingdon, Lamb & Flag in central Oxford and Mason's Arms in Headington Quarry have all been in the GBG continuously since at least 2008, as has the Rose and Crown in North Oxford except for dropping out briefly in 2012. The Lamb & Flag, current holder of the City Pub of the Year title, has been in continuously for 17 years – a great achievement.

The four pubs dropping out for 2017 are the Cricketer's at Littleworth (which is for sale), the King's Head and Bell in Abingdon, the Black Horse in Standlake, and Beerd (formerly the Grapes) on George Street in Oxford.

The Cross Keys in Thame has won CAMRA's regional Pub of the Year award, putting it in the running to be National Pub of the Year in 2017.



2012. The Red Lion, the Chester and the White Rabbit have all changed hands in the last few years, and all are free houses.

Only 17 out of about 300 pubs in this branch area are listed, but the branch is pushing hard to get a bigger allocation as



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REAL ALE**

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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. To join send an e-mail with 'subscribe' as the subject to events-request@oxford.camra.org.uk

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.

Pub News

Abingdon

BLUE BOAR: The Punch-owned pub has had a revamp costing over £150,000, and is now focusing on food. News of its ales will appear next time.

BROAD FACE: Re-opening following a major revamp is planned for the autumn.

Eynsham

JOLLY SPORTSMAN: A £75,000 facelift has transformed the pub, which plans to introduce poker nights.

Oxford

AMPLEFORTH ARMS: This pub in Risinghurst, which closed in June 2015 and was advertised for sale by Punch Taverns, is the subject of a community buy-out bid after being listed as an Asset of Community Value. A community group is hoping to negotiate a new temporary lease while funds are raised, and hopes to re-open it in the New Year.

BEERD: Widely regarded as the last traditional and long-established pub on George Street, but surrounded by new competitors, Beerd is one of 11 pubs owned by Bath Ales which was taken over by St Austell Brewery in July, and this means its future is sadly uncertain. Bath Ales took over the pub, known as the Grapes since the 19th century, from Greene King in 2012, and it was rebranded as Beerd last September with a focus on craft kegs and a pizza menu, while still retaining a range of cask ales. George Street is otherwise known for contemporary bars including the

new Pint Shop (see opposite), O'Neill's, the Wig and Pen (currently being refurbished), George Street Social and Wetherspoon's Four Candles, all opened in recent years.

FAIRVIEW INN: An application has been made to the council to turn this long-closed pub, the only one in the Lye Valley area of Headington, into a house. No buyers came forward to keep it as a pub, and according to a viability report quoted by the *Oxford Mail*, "the Fairview Inn has historically traded as an estate community pub, but this trading model is the one which has suffered most from lifestyle changes over the past 20 to 30 years as there is a tendency to buy alcohol from supermarkets".

JACK RUSSELL: Efforts are continuing to save this derelict pub from demolition, with many letters being sent in to the city council following applications to convert it into housing or replace it with flats. It was the only pub in this part of New Marston.

JOLLY POSTBOYS: The only pub on the Florence Park estate in East Oxford – closed off and on for some time – has re-opened after a total revamp, under new tenants who have secured a deal from Greene King which allows them to sell no Greene King beers at all. It has been taken over by George Harwood-Dallin (below, with Jade Konz), who used to manage the Chester, and his business partner Drew Brammer, who remains involved with the Chester. The pair also run a restaurant in Magdalen Road called GAF, with a vegetarian menu in the evenings, and the focus on unusual food has been extended to the Jolly Post Boys along with a good range of real ales and craft kegs.

Real ales available during opening week in September were Animal's Cluck (4.6%, brewed by XT); Hopfest (3.8%) by Hertfordshire brewer Red Squirrel; Good Old Boy by West Berkshire Brewery; and Gunner's Gold by Loose Cannon. All the beers, including lagers, are



British brands – Dark Star Hophead being one of the kegs. Food is locally sourced, including a la carte dishes such as wild rabbit rillettes and cider glazed pig cheeks, deli boards for sharing, and bar snacks. It also serves coffee and cakes at the bar.

George, who has managed pubs in venues ranging from Fremantle (Australia) to Witney, says: “In Florence Park we have two types of customers – the working people the estate was built for, and a more gentrified type. This used to be a dodgy pub and quite a hostile environment, but now it is very welcoming and we can make as much money in one day as it used to make in a week. There are plenty of potential customers within easy walking distance, and a lot from this area go to the Chester. Now a good pub has come to their community, and we also have plans for a micro-brewery that could open in the New Year.”

He adds: “We are a Greene King tenancy but entirely free of tie. We just rent the property, and there are more similar failed pubs like this available to take on.”

KITE: This West Oxford pub has been put under the temporary charge of yet another Greene King tenancy, the third in less than three years, who is part of the team running the nearby Punter. The tenant who gave up in summer had an arrangement allowing him to sell a wide range of XT ales alongside Greene King guests, while the previous tenant had introduced a wide range of real ales under the brewery’s “Local Hero” initiative. GK’s Old Golden Hen and Morland Original are now among the staple ales.

MASON’S ARMS: The Headington Quarry pub hosted another successful beer festival from 2-4 September, although wet weather reduced attendance on the Saturday. The pub’s function room hosted 45 real ales, 12 ciders and 10 Belgian bottled beers, with nearly 1,000 visitors expected by closing time on Sunday. Landlord Chris Meeson (below) said the first ales to sell out were Bingham’s Vanilla Stout, which won the gold medal as CAMRA’s Champion Beer of Britain 2016, and Franklin’s English Garden. The pub’s own-brewed Old Bog ales were in evidence with four types, and the strongest ales were Oakham Aged and Vintage Ales’ Attila (7.5%) and Dreamcatcher (6.9%).

OXFORD RETREAT: This elegant looking city centre pub is now under the same management as the nearby Lighthouse, and was being revamped at the time of writing into an “ultra-modern” bar.

OLD BOOKBINDERS: Landlady Jacky Sadones died suddenly in late September, and Oxford CAMRA would like to express its condolences to the Sadones family which took over the Greene King tenancy in 2011 and restored it as a traditional ale house but with a French approach to cuisine. The family also took over the tenancy of the Three Horseshoes at Garsington earlier this year.

PINT SHOP: A huge new drinking and dining establishment, with room for 110 of each, has opened on George Street just a few doors down from the soon-to-be-closed Beerd. It is setting out its stall to appeal to craft keg drinkers with no fewer than 21 taps, only three of which serve cask ales. The Oxford Pint Shop, in a former building society building but with a large cellar for dining, follows on from a successful but much smaller venture in Cambridge which is in the 2016 Good Beer Guide.

continued over.....





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No cask ales were available when the editor attended a preview evening with a limited range of drinks and food, and many of the craft keg brewers may be unfamiliar to cask ale drinkers. All the ales are marked up on a blackboard with name of beer, name of brewer, style, region, ABV and cost for a pint, two-thirds, or half. Among those tried were Hoog and Droog (5.2%), a joint venture between Pint Shop and Dutch brewer De Molen,



KEG.	BEER.	BREWER.
1.	ORGANIC PURE BEER	SAM SMITHS
2.	SUPERSONIC	PINT SHOP x N.V.B
3.	NOR. HOP	MOOR BEER
4.	HOOG+DROOG	PINT SHOP x DE MOLEN
5.	AXE EDGE	BURTON
6.	RINDABARRELLA	MAK ROCK
7.	SALSON 14	WEEDE BEER
8.	10 106	BENO
9.	BLOODY NOTORIOUS	BENKERTON x BONEYARD
10.	BARLEY WINE BLEND	EVEL TWIN
11.	YOUR FATHER SHEET OF EGGSCULPTS	STONE BREWING
12.	INK	CAMDEN TOWN
13.	MANNES CRY FOR RICHES	BEERSBOTEK
14.	SOPPEN IN DARKNESS	LEWIS / HOPPIN FROG
15.	SANGRIA SOUR	EDGE BREWING
16.	GREAT EASTERN IPA	REDCHURCH
17.	JUST THE TICKET	FALLEN BEER CO.
18.	DRY HOPPED	ADNAMS
C	18.	

which was tasty, cold and gassy. The more familiar names supplying kegs included Adnams with Dry Hopped Lager, and Sam Smiths with Organic Pure Brew. Pint Shop also serves around 100 whiskies and nearly 100 gins, plus a range of wines.

According to a press release, "Pint Shop specialises in meat, bread and beer, and takes its inspiration from the beer houses of the 1830s". The Cambridge venue made it into *The Times*' 25 Coolest Restaurants 2015.

General manager Owen McCole – who has managed pubs in the Cotswolds – is a welcome addition to the city's licensees and we will watch his progress with interest.

Sutton Courtenay

PLOUGH: Residents have mounted a determined effort to try to save this South Oxfordshire pub after plans were submitted to convert it into housing following retirement of the landlord. It is owned by Hawthorn Leisure which acquired a large number of pubs from Greene King.

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Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding gets out and about on branch minibus trips to Otmoor and West Oxfordshire



FROM TOP: The Bell at Ducklington; The Talk House, Stanton St John; The Clanfield Tavern

DRIVING AROUND a group of committed local members on one of our regular minibus tours, we were off to Otmoor with Islip the first port of call. The Swan, a former Morrells local, was sold by Greene King (GK) as a free house and now sadly is a bed-and-breakfast with drinks only for guests. The Punch Taverns-owned Red Lion now flies the village flag and serves the community well with two distinctive bars, one for good food, the other for locals and passers-by. Beers served on the day were Marston's Pedigree, Brakspear Bitter and Black Sheep Bitter, all tasted and in fine form. The pub has a large rear garden and a recently refurbished barn for functions.

About 10 minutes later we arrived at the Michelin star rated and super Nut Tree in Murrcott. Although very much a top quality food house, beer drinkers are well looked after hence it sometimes appears in the Good Beer Guide. A very comfortable rear garden sits alongside the extensive pub vegetable patch. Imogen and Mike have worked hard in the last 10 years to merge diners with drinkers, and the beers available on the day were a malty Banks's Bitter, Hobgoblin Gold and Vale's Nut Tree IPA, all in top form. The beers change frequently with a local ale always on the bar.

Five minutes down the road found us at another former Morrells local also sold by GK

as a free house, the Crown at Charlton-on-Otmoor. Saved from closure, this very friendly locals' two-bar inn serves very good pub grub and, again in fine form, Brakspear Bitter alongside Vale's Brill Gold. Ever-changing local beers are the focus here.

Next up, after 10 minutes' travel, was the Abingdon Arms at Beckley, a former Halls house now for sale by Brakspear Pub Co. This nice old pub with a fine garden affording great views over Otmoor has served good quality food for decades, along with – on the day – Brakspear Bitter and Shotover Prospect, both in top form. A lot of interest has come from local people to acquire and run the pub as a community venture, and we wish them well.

It was nice to see the Star at Stanton St John, owned by St John's College, now open again, and serving villagers and visitors with quality food and beer. Formerly run by Wadworth for many years and once a regular in the Good Beer Guide, it had three beers in fine form being Shotover Prospect, GK IPA and a Pug Ale. The Star has three spacious and differing bars along with a very comfortable rear garden.

The Fuller's-owned Talk House sits on the main road outside Stanton St John, and this very well-run top quality food house again still serves the local

drinker. On the bar were a very drinkable London Pride alongside Oliver's Island. A good selection of Fuller's fine bottled beers is always available.

It was a shame that the White Horse in Forest Hill was closed until evening as the pub is known to serve two real ales alongside very good Thai food. This former Morrells local is now a free house and will be visited shortly.

Moving on to West Oxfordshire on another well-supported minibus trip, first stop was at the Red Lion in Northmoor, a first-time entry into the 2017 Good Beer Guide (see news elsewhere in this issue). The Bell at Langford wasn't yet open on passing by, so we went on to the Plough at Kelmscott, another busy pub popular with visitors to the nearby manor house which was owned by William Morris. Again quality food was being served along with four beers – Loose Cannon Abingdon Bridge, Sharp's Doom Bar, Butcombe Bitter and a Hook Norton craft brewery product, Plough Bitter. The Plough now looks better than ever, being run by the team from the nearby Five Ales.

The Clanfield Tavern at Clanfield, run by Marston's, is always worth a visit, but we were a week early for its popular beer festival. This fine old rambling building again serves quality food along with,

on the day, Wychwood's Hoptathlon, Brakspear Gold and a Marston's Razor Black stout.

During a very stormy hour, the new micro-pub in a former shop in Carterton, the Siege of Orleans, was visited. What a find, just the basics but all you need in a proper drinking pub. West Berkshire's Maggs' Magnificent Mild, a Beerd ale and Mad Dog's Third Eye Blind were all tasted, and super. Outside under cover were six ciders forming a local cider festival. Do not pass this pub by!

With the Strickland Arms now a private house, Ducklington's only pub is now a former Morlands house, the Bell, owned by GK and with a friendly and proper pub atmosphere. Very much a locals' haunt, it serves good food along with three beers from the GK or guest range which on the day were Otter Ale, Morland Original and IPA, all in good nick.

A very pleasant pub to visit was the Newlands Inn in Eynsham, surprisingly a non-food outlet. This locals' freehouse in the old part of the town was serving Wychwood Hobgoblin, Brakspear Bitter and Ringwood Bitter, again all sampled and very tasty.

Do check the Branch Diary and join us on a future minibus tour, as these outings are an enjoyable and convivial day out.



CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

The CAMRA Pub Discount Scheme gives licensees the chance to promote their real ale offering to card carrying CAMRA members by offering them money of a pint or half pint.

The pubs in our area that offer a discount are listed below:

Abingdon

Brewery Tap
Broad Face
Kings Head & Bell
Nags Head on the Thames
Narrows *
White Horse

Oxford

Britannia, Headington
Chequers, High Street
Four Candles *
Rose and Crown
Royal Blenheim
Swan and Castle *
William Morris, Cowley *

Witney

Company of Weavers *
Ye Olde Cross Keys *

Pubs offer different discounts, and some discounts are available only at certain times or on certain beers. Please ask at the pub to find out what is offered. An asterisk (*) indicates that the discount is in Wetherspoons vouchers that are sent to all CAMRA members - note that Ye Olde Cross Keys is not a Wetherspoon pub but does accept the vouchers.

If you know of a pub that offers a discount on beer to CAMRA members then please let us know at pub-news@oxfordcamra.org.uk

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Brewery News

Hook Norton

The brewery has announced its seasonal specials for the rest of this year, starting with the 3.9% tawny ale Copper Head for September/October. Flagship IPA (5.3%) returns in October, having won silver in the International Beer Challenge 2015.

Playing Hooky, a 4.7% amber ale, comes to the bar in November, by which time the focus is starting to switch to the festive season. The dark and richly flavoured Greedy Goose (4.2%) also starts honking in November, while the eagerly anticipated Christmas ale Twelve Days arrives in December having been voted Best Strong Dark Beer in the 2015 World Beer Awards.

Meanwhile, Hook Norton Brewery has expanded its shire horse and dray team with the arrival of Winston and Roger, two black, pure-bred shires aged 10 and 8 respectively. Standing at over 18 hands they work alongside the existing pair of Major and Nelson.

The shires deliver Hooky beer to local pubs on Thursdays and



Fridays (weather permitting) and are due to appear outside Oxford Town Hall when the beer festival opens on 13 October. Shire horses have been an integral part of brewery life since day one and are looked after by long serving drayman, Roger Hughes, along with new groom Elizabeth Csak. They make their home in the brewery stables and can be seen on brewery tours.

LAM

Full production has started at this new brewery, formerly in private premises but now at the Sandford Lane Industrial Estate in Kennington, near Oxford. It concentrates on unfiltered, unpasteurised and bottle-conditioned "real" beer with three main varieties – Happily Indian Summer, a light session pale ale; Happily Amba, a bitter ale using Maris Otter and Black malts; and Happily Nyk, a mix of American IPA and a Belgian Saison styles.

LAM – which apparently means "laugh a minute" – has invested heavily in the venture and plans a brewery shop and tours. Bottles have already appeared at Wetherspoon's Swan and Castle in Oxford, and at farmers' markets.

XT

The latest Animal creation is the Chimp – Rauch Bier – brewed with German smoked malts and a Bamberg classic. Its smoky flavour is achieved by exposing the malt to the intense, aromatic smoke of burning beech wood logs.

The Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) has launched two new initiatives, and XT was one of

the first to join its Assured Independent British Craft Brewer scheme. This attempts to define the term "craft brewery" and provide greater clarity for consumers looking to purchase beer from genuinely independent craft breweries.

Assured Safety and Quality is a new SIBA accreditation process involving detailed third party auditing of all stages of beer production, including raw material selection, packaging, brewing processes, health and safety, record keeping, and ecological and sustainability practices. XT was one of the first breweries to have been awarded this new accreditation.

The next open day is set for Saturday 1 October for the annual "OXToberfest".

Wychwood

The Witney brewery is preparing for Hallowe'en on 31 October when it will again stage the Grand Lighting of the Pumpkins. Gates will open from 6pm until 9pm and all money raised will be donated to its adopted charity, Special Effect. There will be free entry, live music and lots of beer!

Special for November is Wychwood Wicker Man at 5.2%, with a pump clip celebrating the famous horror film. This is a traditional Pale Ale with a punchy hop finish and aroma, using the finest quality roasted malts to provide a subtle, but full, malty background to showcase the honey and berry flavours from traditional English hop varieties.

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Roarsome!

Graham Shelton, chairman of the company that bought the Red Lion at Northmoor for the community, starts a new regular column



THE LATEST *Oxford English Dictionary* contains pages of new words, from “bracketology” to “uptalk”. The etymologists’ method is based on listening to what people are actually saying to each other as they go about their 21st century lives. It turns out that our language is evolving very rapidly to enable us to express exactly what we want to say when none of the existing 200,000 English words exactly fits the new need.

One word that hasn’t made it yet onto the official list is “roarsome”. I heard this used for the first time the other day by the talented young team at the Red Lion in Northmoor to describe their lovely, thriving community-owned pub.

Like so many small country pubs, the Red Lion was struggling under the Greene King banner. Despite all the hard work of the landlord and landlady at the time, it just wasn’t attracting enough people to pay the wages and leave enough to live on. The old business model wasn’t working any more, and it looked like the pub would close forever, leaving a huge hole in the heart and soul of our village.

The story of the rebirth of the Red Lion as a community pub has been told before in these pages, so suffice to say that the

villagers of Northmoor sprang into action, set up a company, raised money by selling shares (in the teeth of a lot of people saying it couldn’t be done), negotiated with Greene King and bought the pub for the village. Simple!

Job done? Not really, because none of us on the village pub team knew anything about the small matter of actually running a full-on pub business! Finding the right people with the knowledge, skills, personalities and relentless drive to forge a new business in such a tough environment was not easy, but none of the really worthwhile things ever are.

After a pretty extensive search involving advertising, open days, interviews and pub visits, the choice was made: Ian Neale and Lisa Lyne. Young, talented and with a vision for the future (Ian in the kitchen, Lisa front of house), these guys made everyone sit up from the moment they arrived. The inside was recreated to be clean, fresh and inviting, the beer was cooled and kept to perfection, and the kitchen took on a whole new life creating the best food that the pub had ever seen in its long history.

Fast forward to today, and Ian and Lisa are married (brilliant country wedding in the local

church) and they are heading a team of 15! From the outside the pub still looks much the same, but now it also has a lovely and productive kitchen garden and lots of room for children to play. Inside, the experience is transformed. Everyone is welcomed with a wonderful warm smile, four good local ales from independent brewers within a 30-mile radius are always on tap, and there is a grand selection of freshly made bar food as well as a delicious full dining option featuring local lamb and beef from the fields around the pub.

So, if you are suffering from a not very nice pub where no-one goes because it has a grumpy landlord, a swirly carpet, a funny smell, and the food is barely edible, know that there is another way: the roarsome way!

I’d love to hear about your roarsome pub, so do let me know and I’ll feature it next time graham.shelton@pharmagenesis.com.

**Bracketology: a term for the practice of filling in the gaps in an old manuscript with one’s best guess at the missing words.*

Uptalk: that rise in voice that suggests a question.

Roarsome: Come to the Red Lion Northmoor to find out!

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman
Pete Flynn's
 Amble in Abingdon
 – Part 2



ABINGDON HAS 14 pubs, and having reported on some of them in the previous issue it remained for me to try to complete the task. For the purposes of sobriety I completed the assignment over two visits.

As I strolled the short distance to the nearest pub to my house, the Spread Eagle in Northcourt, I stopped to chat to my neighbour who was cutting his hedge. He asked where I was going and I mentioned that I was visiting local pubs as part of my regular column. He laughed and I told him that someone had to undertake this arduous commitment.

The Spread Eagle is a wonderful community pub featuring both men's and women's darts teams; it also has a picturesque, almost timeless setting at the rear which incorporates an Aunt Sally pitch. Northcourt was once a thriving farming community to the north of the town where the

old barns, now listed buildings, have been tastefully converted into a modern café thereby reviving the vitally important community spirit.

The pub featured four real ales and I opted for Robinson's Dizzy Blonde which is a sassy, friendly, great company and easy drinking summer ale.

A 20-minute walk took me to my next venue, the Narrows, which is our local Weatherspoon pub. The building was once the local telephone exchange and, for the record, was the last to close in England. All credit to Wetherspoon for maintaining the historical integrity of the building which features numerous regalia. No less than 10 real ales were available and I chose Moon from local brewery Vale. I found this to be a quaffable and refreshing beer which uses Pilsner-style lager malts.

My next stop was the Punchbowl – a true pub, in every sense of the word, catering for the beer drinker with interesting photos on the wall featuring previous landlords from the 1950s. Part of the Greene King (GK) empire it incorporates a back bar known as “the snug”. I chose former CAMRA Champion Beer of Great Britain, Workie Ticket, a tasty, complex beer with malt and hops throughout and a long, satisfying, bitter finish.

A short walk brought me to a 500-year-old former coaching inn, the King's Head and Bell. This lively pub has been tastefully updated yet parts of it

still reflect the charm that inspired Handel to compose part of his iconic Water Music suite on this site. A beer festival had been held over the weekend and on the day of my visit (Monday) there were still 25 beers available (there are usually three or four real ales on the bar). I opted for the fine-tasting, smooth Hooky Mild, a malt-flavoured beer complemented by superb dry-hop aromas from English Goldings.

Now, any visit to my next pub fills me with excitable anticipation, and, when I approach Abingdon Bridge to reach Nag's Island, I always feel a little euphoric, or maybe it's the effects of the beers I had imbibed? The Nag's Head has been Oxford CAMRA's Town and Country Pub of the Year for two consecutive years, and always offers a formidable choice of local real ales as well as a fine selection from around the UK.

You get the impression that the team selecting the beers are very passionate and knowledgeable, and know the techniques involved in looking after the perfect pint. I would go as far to say that this pub provides a template for cellar management similar to the Brewery Tap (reviewed in the last issue). I selected a beer from Moonstone Brewery called Black Pearl, one of nine available, and I was not disappointed. This is a beautifully crafted and very tasty stout with sweet overtones and a dry finish.

I continued my journey, retracing my steps over the bridge, to the next venue.

Dating from around 1605, the Crown & Thistle Hotel is a meandering 400-year-old Grade II listed coaching inn – one that's been immaculately refurbished for 21st century tastes. It even boasts a classic cobblestone courtyard where rogues and scoundrels were once placed in the stocks as a punishment for their misdemeanours. Three real ales were available and I opted for Bombshell from local brewery Loose Cannon – a splendid and refreshing blonde summer beer with wonderful grapefruit overtones. For beer drinkers who opt for lager, you should try this as a flavoursome alternative.

My last visit involved a 15-minute walk north-east to the College Oak, a sports pub situated on the Peachcroft estate. This recently refurbished GK pub opened in the 1970s as a Bass tenancy, prior to being absorbed by the Morland merger during the 1990s. Four real ales were available and I chose a guest ale, St Peter's, a ruby red beer which afforded subtle malt undertones and a distinctive spicy hop aroma from Styrian Goldings. It was rather fitting to end with the tastiest beer from my travels; well done GK.

It's a pity that I was not able to include all of the town's real ale pubs, but space did not allow. Maybe, on another occasion, I can include the Boundary House, the Grapes, the Blue Boar and the Black Swan.

That's all from me until next time. The large selection of beers available from a handful of local pubs never ceases to amaze me.



Oxford Branch Diary

Thursday 13 - Saturday 15 October

Oxford Beer & Cider Festival

Helpers always wanted, especially for set-up on Wednesday 12 October from 9am, for take down on Saturday morning from 8am and on Sunday from 10am.

Tuesday 1 November Branch Meeting

At the Kings Arms, The Moors, Kidlington at 7.30pm. Meet beforehand at the Six Bells on Mill Street from 6.30pm for a pre-meeting chat.

Saturday 19 November Branch Social

At Banbury Winter Beer Festival, the same venue (TA Centre) but at a different time of year.

·THE·
4th Annual



10th - 16th OCTOBER BEER FESTIVAL
St Aledates Tavern

Join us in celebration of the CAMRA ale festival at the Town Hall
as we host the 4th Annual St Aledates Festival

REAL ALES / REAL CIDERS
CRAFT BEERS / CRAFT CANS & BOTTLES

Monday 10th Tap the barrel on the bar

*Competition to tap the first barrel to start the festival off!
All you have to do is be at the Tavern for 5pm for a chance to win.*

Tuesday 11th Live music from 8pm

Wednesday 12th Beer and Burger night. 7pm-9.30pm

Any ale & a burger for £10.

Thursday 13th Meet the Brewer night

XT - Bingham's - Castle Combe.

Friday 14th Prize give away!

*Range of prizes from; Brewery tours, free beer,
wooden spoons, branded glassware.*

Saturday 15th More prize giveaways

& all the weekend's top sporting fixtures.

Special
Events:

Advance tickets for Meet the Brewer night:
£5 or £3 for CAMRA members; also includes
1st pint. Tickets on door £7 or £5 for
CAMRA members. Branded glassware
£4 each or £2 for CAMRA members