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REAL ALE

Issue 98  
December 2016 - January 2017

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# the Oxford Drinker




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

5000 copies are distributed free of charge to pubs across the two branches' area, including Oxford, Abingdon, Witney, Faringdon, Eynsham, Kidlington, Bampton, Wheatley and Wantage and most of the villages in between.

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

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# Welcome

..... to an end-of-year review  
marked  
'Satisfactory'

**ALL SCHOOLCHILDREN** await their end-of-year reports with some trepidation, but if I was marking Oxford CAMRA's report I would declare that we are doing fairly well but could always do better. The local brewing scene is thriving, and while some pubs continue to struggle we have lost fewer pubs than in previous years, and even welcomed some newcomers.

We need to be vigilant in trying to prevent and opposing pub closures, while acknowledging that some pubs have reached the end of the road. Both Oxford CAMRA and the neighbouring White Horse branch which also contributes to the *Oxford Drinker* have been pro-active in listing threatened pubs as Assets of Community Value, while local communities can do the same. All being well, ACV listing of the Abingdon Arms in Beckley will lead to its re-opening as a community-owned venture.

The range of beers produced by our local breweries never ceases to amaze me, and there are literally hundreds of real ales available in and around Oxford at any given time. It's in stark contrast to 40 years ago as the first Rail Ale Ramble visited Oxford (see page 24), when nearly 600 thirsty people

found only 10 breweries represented on a visit to city pubs.

But we should never be complacent, as some people in the brewing industry warn that there are simply too many breweries and that some will disappear, while others will be merged into bigger concerns. Real ale would seem to be very well established but the increasing demand for craft kegs, especially among younger people, indicates that tastes may be changing. This is why CAMRA is currently conducting a thorough review of its aims and priorities.

The 2016 Oxford Beer and Cider Festival also indicates



that we shouldn't be complacent, as the number attending was significantly down this year and some beer and cider had to be poured away. We are not overly concerned about this as people found it a nicer environment, especially on the Saturday when more tables were put out. But we need to be aware of changes in demand, and respond to them as appropriate.

In this issue you can read about Rail Ale Rambles and focuses on various pubs around our area, plus an in-depth look at Wychwood brewery in Witney. All our regular columnists are present if not correct, and you will again find Paul Silcock of the Gardeners Arms in Plantation Road, Oxford and Graham Shelton of the Red Lion in Northmoor full of interesting comment.

We are also looking forward to our first gala night in February, an initiative by our chairman, Pete Flynn. Your news and views are always welcome in the *Oxford Drinker*, so please email me at [editor@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxford.camra.org.uk)

Season's Greetings from all of us to all of you.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**



## P\*ss-up\* in a Brewery – Wychwood

In the second of a series of in-depth articles on local breweries, **Dave Richardson** visits Wychwood in Witney

**WYCHWOOD BREWERY** has a special place in my affections because I attended my first CAMRA meeting here, and also because of a dreamy album called *From the Wychwood* by the 1970s progressive rock band, The Strawbs. I had no idea there was a real Wychwood until moving to Oxfordshire, where I found it was an ancient forest.

The brewery may have no link with The Strawbs, but it has plenty of links with the music industry. Not only did it produce a beer for rock band Status Quo in 2014 – Piledriver – but it also sponsors local bands and markets its Hobgoblin beer extensively at music festivals. I was surprised and pleased to find it at Butlin's Skegness for the Great British Folk Festival, and Hobgoblin now turns up at music and comedy festivals – and also sports grounds – throughout the country.

If you wonder how an Oxfordshire brewery could have such marketing clout, that's because Wychwood is part of major group Marston's. This leads some people to think it isn't an independent brewery, but I would beg to differ as it has a great deal of autonomy within the Marston's family which also includes brands

such as Banks's, Jennings and Ringwood.

The Witney Eagle brewery occupies a site first used as a maltings by Clinch's brewery in 1841, but Clinch's closed down in 1961 after take-over by Courage. In 1983 Glenney Brewery started at this site, renamed Wychwood in 1990. Refresh UK bought Wychwood in 2002 and that in turn was bought by Marston's in 2009.

The year 2002 was doubly significant as this was when Brakspear Brewery in Henley-on-Thames – in operation since 1711 – closed down. Brakspear Bitter had a huge following in the county but this wasn't the end, as production moved to Witney in 2004 including the original fermenters and "double drop" fermenting system. Bitter and Oxford Gold are still produced under the Brakspear name, with the bitter tasting more like the original than many beers that have moved away from their birthplace. The Brakspear Pub Company remains separate.

As a fan of dark ales I always appreciate Hobgoblin, but even if it's not to your taste you must admit that it's a highly successful brand. The hobgoblin himself is instantly



**PHOTO OPPOSITE:** Alex Harrison (left) and Jon Tillson at Wychwood brewery

recognisable on pump clips, bottles and other marketing, and the advertising campaign challenging lager drinkers was a great success as he asks, "What's the matter, lagerboy, afraid you might taste something?"

I visited the brewery just a few days after Hallowe'en, a major date in the calendar for Wychwood when it stages the Grand Lighting of the Pumpkins. More than 700 adults and 400 children attended this year, proof of Wychwood's strong community focus.

There to meet me were second brewer Jon Tillson and Alex Harrison, who is marketing brand manager for Hobgoblin and Brakspear. They explained that Wychwood is operating at full capacity brewing about 50,000 barrels a year, but there are still plenty of specials produced in response to changing tastes. The introduction of Hobgoblin Gold (4.2%) in 2014 was in response to consumer demand, but that is now a permanent fixture alongside the original Hobgoblin (4.5%). The stronger King Goblin (6.6%) also appears in bottles.

"Demand for golden beers started about five years ago, and every major brewer now has a gold beer alongside its session bitter," says Alex. "We were one of the first. Historically, dark beers were only drunk in winter and golden beers in summer, but that's bunk. Supermarkets led that trend. The original Hobgoblin is still our best distributed product."

"This is a very interesting time for brewing," adds Jon. "The

key thing to remember is that a huge majority still want traditional high-quality beers, but we must respond to other trends. There are lots of crossover styles in our 2017 specials list, such as steam beer fermented at a higher temperature which creates a fruity flavour.

"Very hoppy IPAs came over with the craft beer movement, and single hop beers also became very popular. Beer drinkers are increasingly knowledgeable and looking to push the boundaries, and as a lot drink keg as well as cask, there is an expectation that some of these flavours will come into cask beer too."

Many new hop varieties are coming into the market, but Jon also expects more experimentation with different types of yeasts, and new varieties of malt such as Vienna and Imperial. Part of the fun of brewing is trial and error.

"Breweries will look to differentiate with different

ingredients," says Alex. "Barrel ageing is an interesting development for short runs, but we are also moving into craft lagers with King Star in cans, and have produced a gluten-free bottled beer called Gratis."

This year's Christmas special is again Bah Humbug, with a hint of cinnamon, available in cask as well as bottles. Although Marston's owns few pubs in Oxfordshire, Hobgoblin and the specials are widely available as guest ales, while Brakspear continues to have a strong following.

Wychwood – which sponsors the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival – is going from strength to strength. Its brewery tours have been voted among the top 10 in the whole world by TripAdvisor, so get over to Witney and see for yourself.

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





# Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** reviews the 'Scholastic Pubs of Oxford'



**ABOVE:** The Kings Arms (top) and the Turf Tavern

**NEXT PAGE:** The Lamb and Flag in St Giles

**FROM THE TITLE** you would probably have guessed that these pubs are the ones relating to the world of academia, although when you enter the Turf Tavern, which you will find tucked away in St Helen's Passage, you are greeted by a sign stating "An Education in Intoxication". Countless students over the years would have graduated with honours!

The name originated from bookmakers (turf accountants) who used to meet on the site dating back to around 1850. The pub was built on a dry moat that used to run around the City Walls which were built to defend Oxford against Viking raids. The high wall, which dominates the pub, forms the boundary between the pub and New College. I often enjoy sitting here in summer wondering at the micro-climate, as moss seems to grow all year round whilst plants grow out of the wall. On this fine autumn lunchtime I entered the pub reminding myself to stoop as the entrance is very unaccommodating for anyone taller than 5' 6". Seven real ales were available plus two ciders and I chose Cottage Brewery's Black Diamond Traditional Mild.

Black Diamond is what I would definitely call a mild in the traditional mild style, and I've always appreciated mild style beers. It was perhaps a bit high on the ABV (alcohol by volume) but otherwise all of the characteristics were there: very dark brown yet not heavy, middle sweet, big on malt, low on hops, with big flavours of

coffee liqueur. It's got some smoky winter fruits stuff going on and some very subtle spice. Nutmeg would be the closest thing to describe it.

So on to my next pub which was the King's Arms in Holywell, Street aka the KA. It's just around the corner from the Turf and adjacent to Wadham College, the freehold owner, which leases it to Young's. This busy city centre establishment is adorned with photos of its regular visitors over the years, which says a lot about its popularity. Allegedly, out of all the pubs forming part of the Young's estate, this has the highest turnover of beer. Furthermore, it is said to have the highest IQ count per square foot of any pub in the world based upon its student population at any time. I have to say that the moment I crossed the threshold the average would have reduced markedly!

Six real ales were available and I selected St Austell Brewery's Tribute Ale which is a light, hoppy, zesty, easy-to-drink beer. The zesty orange and grapefruit flavours are balanced with biscuit malt for this superb Cornish classic.

My next stop was the White Horse in Broad Street, which is Oxford's smallest pub and sells a good selection of mostly local ales. It is famous for featuring in three episodes of Inspector Morse and the landlady has the photos to prove this accolade. Being opposite the Sheldonian Theatre it is popular with tourists and students alike. It is



a real gem of a pub and not much has changed over the years with its wooden panelling and lack of modern amenities such as TV or jukebox. The beer is £3.90 a pint which is a tad expensive compared with other bars in the city, but settle down if you can find a seat and enjoy the ambience. No fewer than five real ales were available and I opted for White Horse Wayland Smithy, a tasty amber coloured beer with a thin white top offering an aroma of hop soft fruits and undertones of caramel.

My last pub was the Lamb and Flag in St Giles, which is owned by St John's College and features oars and shields from various colleges on its walls. It has a timeless quality and is popular with students and

tourists alike as it is en route to the Pitt Rivers Museum. It's a free house and on my visit offered a choice of six real ales and two ciders. Out of all the pubs on my tour today, this



offered in my opinion the best kept real ale, and if you are considering running a pub then visit this one to gauge what quality is all about. I had a pint of Tring Brewery's Squadron Scramble. Brewed to commemorate the Battle of Britain, this ale is characterised by a debonair medium light colour and a dare-devil maltiness that compliments a courageous hop aroma from the best Mount Hood hops. It was very tasty.

I could have stayed in this pub but time did not allow so until another time it's farewell from me. I would like to acknowledge Dave Richardson's book *Oxford Pubs* for information about pub history.

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# Tony's Travels

**Tony Goulding** gets out and about in and around Oxford

**ONE OF OXFORD'S** top riverside pubs, the Victoria Arms beside the Cherwell in Old Marston, is preparing the "sympathetic" development of a conservatory which will increase seating and dining space by about 40%. The pub will stay open during the work this winter, and it should be completed by the spring. Wadworth ales are the order of the day here, and I particularly enjoyed my pint of Swordfish.

Varying fortunes face five closed pubs around the eastern edge of the city, with the Ampleforth Arms in Risinghurst looking to have the best chance of re-opening. The community group battling to save the "Amp" is in dialogue with Punch Taverns to take on the lease rather than attempt to buy it outright. Also on the edges of Headington, the long-closed Crown and Thistle in Old Road looks increasingly derelict although the owner still hopes to lease it out.

The locals battle on to try to save the Jack Russell in New Marston, but it looks unlikely to re-open as a pub although plans to redevelop the site with flats have apparently been withdrawn. It is however curtains for the also long-closed Fairview, as permission has been granted for it to become a private house (see Pub News). Also closed is the Somerset in Marston Road, leaving a big gap between pubs in the area.

The Kite in West Oxford is now back serving only ales from Greene King and its guest range, following the end of an agreement with the previous tenant to serve a range of XT beers. This is the kind of local that deserves our support as West Oxford couldn't afford to lose yet another pub.

## Wolvercote

Heading to the northern edge of the city now, the community-owned White Hart appears to be thriving with up to three real ales usually available, including a very tasty Vale Brewery Red Kite which I enjoyed on a recent visit. Music nights include folk, jazz and shanties, and there is regular bingo plus a Farmers Market on Sundays. This is another traditional pub we want to succeed as its closest neighbours are more restaurants than pubs. The White Hart hopes to be serving a pub menu next year.

## Eynsham

Peter Jones (pictured, right) has finally hung up the towels for the last time at the Queen's Head, after a highly impressive 33 years of service to the village community. He told us on an earlier visit that he couldn't make the pub pay any longer, but Admiral Taverns has found new tenants and the pub is expected to re-open by the end of November. Peter was serving

Courage Best Bitter when he started, and that was his last real ale on the day he moved on.

## Besselsleigh

My "Pub of the Month" for November was definitely the Greyhound, which sits alongside the busy A420 road a few miles west of Oxford. Going in for the first time in about 20 years I was surprised and pleased to find eight real ales and two real ciders available, mainly from local producers including Hook Norton, West Berkshire, Goff, Vale and Loddon. This is a large, sprawling pub with a garden, and it serves plenty of food. As it is on the 66 bus route (every 30 minutes during the day), why not give it a try? The range of beers, customer service and ambience are all excellent.





# 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.

◆ ◆

The pub is popular with students, locals and tourists alike, who enjoy a warm welcome, a range of real ales and bottled conditioned beers and traditional, home-cooked food by the fire.

◆ ◆

The pub is most famous for its collection of ties - dating back to the early 1900's and representing clubs in the Oxford area and, more recently, around the globe.

◆ ◆

A great place to unwind, take off your own tie, and enjoy looking at everyone else's!



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# Border Reiver

**Dave Richardson** discovers the pubs around Long Hanborough and Freeland

**CAMRA BRANCH BORDERS**, being set by postcodes, can be erratic. If you drive between Oxford and Witney via the A44/A4095 you pass North Oxfordshire branch territory in between, but as I didn't know the pubs in these villages, I set out to discover them one evening with Tony Goulding.

First stop was meant to be the White House in Bladon, a village known to millions as the burial place of Sir Winston Churchill in St Martin's churchyard, opposite the pub. Whether he drank in the White House, close to Blenheim Palace, I don't know – but I wouldn't be surprised. I couldn't find out any more as this food-oriented Greene King pub is closed on Mondays, so had to content myself with peering through the windows. All I could see was an IPA hand pump, indicating I hadn't missed much beer-wise.

So it was on to the George and Dragon in nearby Long Hanborough which, curiously, appears in Vodafone's Christmas TV ad complete with fake snow. This pub makes the most of its Churchill connections with various photos, and it was from the nearby railway station that his funeral train arrived from London in 1965.

This is a Charles Wells house with three of its ales available – Eagle IPA (3.6%) and the more widespread and ever-reliable Bombardier (4.1%), plus a

guest ale also from the same stable – on this occasion, Golden Cauldron (4.1%), brewed with American hops in honour of Hallowe'en. The guest ale is priced at only £2.95 a pint which is a snip for these parts, so I opted for that and found it tasty, but not more-ish.

The George and Dragon is a very old, stone-built pub with an ancient fireplace and wood-burning stove, and inglenook to one side. It clearly fitted the bill for Vodafone as a characterful old pub, and the extension housing a restaurant has been done tastefully. Manager Matt explained that it is one of five pubs leased from CharlesWells by a small company, the others including the Star at Woodstock and Flowing Well at Sunningwell, near Abingdon.

It was now time to move on to the Three Horseshoes, by the roundabout in Long Hanborough, which immediately catches the eye because of the sign of long-closed Usher's brewery of Trowbridge. Today it is owned by Punch Taverns, but although it had just the one real ale available – Old Hooky (4.6%) – I found our visit interesting.

While the George and Dragon is food oriented, the Three Horseshoes is a very traditional drinkers' pub with the usual games and jukebox – although burgers are served from a 'grill shack' outside from Thursdays to Saturdays. There doesn't appear to be enough demand



**ABOVE FROM TOP:** The Three Horseshoes with its Usher's sign; Oxfordshire Yeoman; George and Dragon

**OPPOSITE:** The Hand and Shears at Church Hanborough

for the other two hand pumps to be brought into use, but local Darren Turner and his partner Sarb Pall are making a go of it and keeping the flag flying for traditional pubs.

Turning off the main road now, we headed for Freeland and, appropriately, another free house – the grandly named Oxfordshire Yeoman, commemorating a long-gone regiment. This former Morrells and Greene King pub is the only one left in the village, having been rescued from closure by Trevor Johnson, former landlord of the Talbot in Eynsham.

It proved to be a revelation with four hand pumps in use. These were dispensing Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge (4.1%), Goff Brewery's Lancer (3.8%), a hard-to-find Hooky Mild (2.8%) from Hook Norton, and Rosie's Pig Cider. I hadn't seen Hooky Mild outside of the brewery and was curious about the taste, although it tasted weak as it's been a long time since I drank anything under 3.5%.

Marston's supplies the ales here, and others from the guest list available recently include brews from Cotleigh and North Cotswold, plus others from the Marston's stable including Wychwood, Jennings, Ringwood and Banks's.

Built in 1842, the pub has a very friendly feel and an eclectic menu, with pins in a map of the world indicating countries

whose cuisine has featured on theme nights. The outside (but under cover) pool table is another odd feature, and as I followed up my Hooky Mild with a very hoppy half of Lancer, I decided this is a pub worth a second visit.

Our final stop was at another Charles Wells pub, the Hand and Shears in Church Hanborough, the pub sign recalling the wool industry which was once important in these parts. The village now has its own micro-brewery, Church Hanbrewery, whose beers featured at Oxford Beer Festival but not, unfortunately, in the local pub.

This pub dates from the 17th century and is very much a family affair, run by Chris and Lynn Parry with their son Mark in charge of the extensive dining room. Eagle IPA and

Bombardier were again the real ales available, and there is sometimes a third from Charles Wells. Oddly there are no Charles Wells pubs in Oxford, but three close together in this part of the world.

A sign over the wall reads, "When you are here we are in good company", and that certainly applies to Chris and Lynn. A list on the wall, taken from an old book, includes the Hand and Shears among the Oxfordshire pubs licensed in 1775 – and four in Church Hanborough! Apparently it is one of only two pubs with this name in Britain, the other being in Smithfield, London. It may refer to glove manufacture rather than sheep shearing – and that is very much a West Oxfordshire tradition.

*Reiver – Scottish dialect for robber or plunderer.*



# Pub News

## Abingdon

**BREWERY TAP:** It has been given permission to replace its traditional pub sign with a three-dimensional barrel with the name underneath, the latest Abingdon pub to lose its old-fashioned image.

**BROAD FACE:** Several short-term changes of management have afflicted this town centre Greene King pub, but it has now re-opened under an enthusiastic new landlord with an emphasis on real ale. The stories behind the unique pub name have been written on the outside wall but the most likely explanation is that it was previously called the Saracen's Head and the sign got painted over. Regular ales are Belhaven Prison Break, West Berkshire Good Old Boy and a Loose Cannon beer; while guests at five more pumps have included Skinner's Betty Stogs, Springhead and Oakham Green Devil IPA.



**SAXTON ARMS:** Closed since 2014, this derelict estate pub was ravaged by a fire which was investigated by the police. It was acquired from Greene King by property company Hawthorn Leisure but sold on this year, and its future is more likely to be as a shop or residential rather than a pub.

## Beckley

**ABINGDON ARMS:** Another community-owned pub might re-open soon as the Beckley and Area Community Benefit Society has raised £475,750 to acquire it from Brakspear and has been advertising a tenancy. The 300-year-old pub will be the third rural pub in this branch to become community-owned, and will probably become a free house.

## Faringdon

**RED LION:** The pub has a new manager as Kirk Ward took over in August. The Crown in Faringdon also has new managers with Matthew and Karla Townsend taking over on 24 October.

## Oxford

**AMPLEFORTH ARMS:** A meeting which may decide the future of the only pub in Risinghurst was scheduled at the time of writing, with The Amp Community group hoping to acquire the lease from Punch. The asking price was £625,000.

**ANGEL & GREYHOUND:** Landlords Richard and Kathryn Gibson (below) have discovered a remarkable treasure trove of over 50 bottles of Young's beer while renovating her parents' house. It seems her father collected two of each brew, drinking one and storing the other, and gems





include Chairman's Ale from 2006 (the year the London brewery closed), D-Day Ale (celebrating the 50th anniversary in 1994) and Victory Ale (ditto, 1995). The couple met while working at the King's Arms in Oxford in the 1990s, taking over here in 2003. The closure of the brewery – Young's ales have since been brewed by Charles Wells in Bedford – was much lamented. Chairman John Young died just a few days beforehand and his ale was served at the funeral.

**BEERD:** The last traditional pub on George Street, formerly the Grapes, was still open at the time of writing although its future was uncertain as St Austell Brewery, which had acquired Beerd owner Bath Ales, wants to reduce its pub estate. Landlord James Dixon has moved on to the Hop Pole in Bath.

**FAIRVIEW INN:** Council approval for conversion of this Headington pub into a private house ends efforts to save it. The 1950s pub was bought by someone who had no intention of running it as a pub and stripped out the 1950s interior, which led to its listing on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors.

**SOMERSET:** The fight is on to save and re-open the Marston Road pub whose closure has left a large area of Oxford without a drinking hole, led by local councillor Mick Haines. It has seen various incarnations

**TEMPLARS BAR AND KITCHEN:** A new pub and eatery has opened in Barns Road, Cowley at a former post office and latterly fish and chips restaurant premises. Fuller's and Greene King (IPA) are the regular beers and a third pump is available for a guest beer.

**UNIVERSITY CLUB:** The Mansfield Road sports and leisure club, which welcomes CAMRA members, holds regular theme nights as well as serving several real ales on the bar. For 2017 these will include: 27 January – Chorlton Brewing of Manchester (sour beer specialists, kegs and cans); and 10 February – Thornbridge of Bakewell, with four casks, four kegs and 10-12 bottles. Provisional dates to be confirmed are 10 March – Tiny Rebel of Newport, whose Cwtch was the 2015 Champion Beer of Britain winner; and 28 April – Roosters Brewing of Yorkshire.

## Watchfield

**EAGLE:** Is now offering 40p off a pint off real ale on production of a CAMRA membership card.

## Wheatley

**RAILWAY HITEL:** According to estate agency Fleurets, the closed Fuller's pub's freehold is up for sale, a "potential refurbishment opportunity for licensed use" but also "potential development opportunity". Whether it re-opens as a pub remains to be seen.



## 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](mailto:pub-news@oxfordcamra.org.uk)

# A South Oxfordshire Real Ale Ramble

**Dick Bosley** dusts off  
his walking boots

**THE LATEST OUTING** of the “Steventon Drinking Club with a Walking Problem” was a trip into South Oxfordshire branch territory. The least said about the Steventon to Didcot stretch the better, so sensible people will start this walk in Didcot, where they may want to add the Prince of Wales to their list of stops. It is opposite the station and in addition to the obligatory two Greene King beers are a couple of guests, some of which have been excellent recently.

Heading towards Wallingford from Didcot, rather than taking the road under the rail bridge, follow Marsh Lane to the right, which is signed as a cycle route to South Moreton where you turn right to North Moreton, past the house where my grandfather kept his share of a wartime pig – in fact the whole pig was kept there -- for the first stop at the Bear at Home.

Awarded Pub of the Season last summer, this hosts the excellent Beer and Cricket festival every July with normally four ales on, and I chose the Timothy Taylor Landlord. The others on offer were Vermont Tea Party from Siren, Copperhead from Hook Norton, and Bear Beer brewed for the pub by West Berkshire. The Bear has a focus on the food trade but the drinking area

is very welcoming and the beer very good.

From the Bear carry on through the village, turning right at the T junction until you see a path on your right signed for Mackney. Follow this, left through several fields until you reach Mackney, from where there are several paths to Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. I chose to follow the road past many attractive houses into a short stretch of countryside before reaching more attractive houses in B-c-S – the most attractive in my view being the Red Lion.

A former South Oxon Pub of The Year (2012) it also had four ales – Dr Hexter’s Healer and Good Old Boy from West Berkshire, Hoppit from Lodden and Fuller’s London Pride. The pub has a reputation for good food but still keeps the character of a village local with adverts for many events etc on display. It also has works for sale from the local Artist of the Month.

Turning right from the pub until the road bends left, you carry straight on onto a tarmac path between houses and open fields. There is one track to cross and a very short stretch on the road before another footpath, behind a cottage,

leads you on towards Wallingford. Carefully crossing the A4130 and through a gate leads to a clear path coming out by Fir Tree Avenue near the middle of town. On reaching a mini roundabout you will see the Cross Keys (an old Brakspear house) on your left and across the Kinecroft a Fuller’s pub, the Coach & Horses. The Kinecroft itself is one of the finest examples of an Anglo-Saxon town green in the country. I carried straight on to the crossroads in the middle of town, and here I turned left into Castle Street to reach the Keep.

Describing itself as an Ale, Gin and Wine Bar (there are 40+ gins available), this micro-pub opened in May 2016 in a shop previously used as a record store. There are normally three beers from Loose Cannon available, with others from local brewers added when there are functions on.

Returning to the crossroads I turned left again towards the river on the High Street to reach the Town Arms. This re-opened in May 2016 (what a good month for the town!) after refurbishment. I first used this pub in the late 1970s and it would not have been described as salubrious then, but now it is a very welcoming and



comfortable. Sadly, owing to a party the night before, only two of the six hand pumps were in use for Honey Monster from Butts Brewery and, my choice, Surrender from White Horse.

Again heading back to the crossroads, turn left onto St Martin's Street to find the Dolphin. This is a very busy pub and a regular Good Beer Guide entry, a Greene King pub that often has several guest ales. I tried and approved Belhaven Gold.

From Wallingford there is a good bus service returning to Abingdon, Oxford and Stevenon... or you can get off at Milton to visit the 2015 Pub of the Year, the Plum Pudding. Abingdon Bridge and Plum Pudding Ale are regulars and the two guests were Deuchars IPA and Innocence from Plain Ales, which were both excellent. If you are that way inclined there were also four ciders available.

Should you prefer a circular walk there is a path direct from the Hithercroft part of Wallingford to North Moreton when you can then pick up this pub-crawl. So come you Oxford and Abingdon drinkers – dust off your walking boots and/or bus passes, and head south.

## Pubs nominated as Assets of Community Value (ACVs) in Vale of White Horse

**THE WHITE HORSE** branch has been working with parish councils to protect pubs in the area and so far seven pubs have been nominated as ACVs:

**The Flowing Well, Sunningwell**  
**The Hare, West Hendred**  
**The Hatchet, Childrey**  
**The Plough, West Hanney**  
**North Star, Stevenon**  
**The Plough, Appleton**  
**The Eight Bells, Eaton**  
**Blowing Stone, Kingston Lisle**

A further 15 are in the process

of nomination, which will provide:

Removal of permitted development rights for demolition and change of use.  
 Material planning consideration.  
 Community right to bid.  
 Compulsory purchase powers if threatened with long-term loss.

ACV listing is a lengthy process supported well by some parish councils, and CAMRA has the legal right to nominate pubs on its own initiative.

**IAN WINFIELD**

## Branch Diary

### Saturday 7 January Branch Social

The branch will visit Bingham's brewery at Ruscombe, Berkshire, winner of the Champion Beer of Britain 2016. The cost of £25 includes transport from Shrivenham, Faringdon or Wantage, and three pints at the brewery. The return trip will call at the Nag's Head in Reading and the Plum Pudding in Milton. Departure will be around 10.30am and return around 8pm, and to book please contact

Ian Winfield at  
[ian.winfield@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:ian.winfield@networkrail.co.uk)

### Saturday 18 February Regional Meeting

The first Central Southern regional meeting in 2017 will take place from 12 noon-4pm at the Bear Hotel, 14 Market Place, Wantage OX12 8AB. All members are welcome to meet the regional director and chairs from local branches in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

## Wantage Beer Festival

The 7th Wantage Beer Festival will take place from 11am-11pm on Friday 17 and Saturday 18 March, 2017 at the Beacon arts and leisure centre. White Horse branch intends to provide 28 cask ales representing the best of those produced both locally and from afar, including festival specials. It will also offer about four local ciders and perries.

The festival has moved from November to March, which will be the regular slot as the venue has been secured for the next five years.



# Brewery News

## Hook Norton

The first of its Christmas beers to be produced was Greedy Goose (4.2%), the baby (gosling) brother of the bigger, stronger Twelve Days. This dark copper red ale has an aroma of soft dark fruits with hints of blackcurrant, a delightfully full flavoured beer for both the goose and the gander!

The latest limited edition seasonal cask ale, Playing Hooky (4.7%), is a fruity blend of six hops and four malts, first brewed in 2015 in collaboration with Ballast Point Brewery from San Diego, California. This latest brew is a tweak on the original recipe with Pale Milled, CaraMalt, Premium English CaraMalt, Light Crystal and Wheat Milled malts combining with Centennial, Jester, UK Chinook, UK Cascade, US Cascade and Fuggles hops.

Hooky is on the lookout for local ingredients to use in brewing and you can't get much more local than the backyard of a Banbury pub! Back in January, Jem at Ye Olde *Reindeer* Inn in *Banbury* decided to plant some hops in troughs, but after three months he realised that he'd planted them upside down. The ghost of Oliver Cromwell was rumoured to have been seen shaking his head and preparing the Globe Room for Jem's trial, but after putting them the right way up, they were harvested and the result is Hopsidedown (4%), the pub-grown Prima Donna hops being combined with Fuggles, Goldings and Challenger hops along with Maris Otter, Crystal and Enzymic Malt. Look out for it on the bar at Ye Olde *Reindeer*.

## Loddon

With winter having arrived, Hocus Pocus is back on draught. This hugely popular old ale is rich, ruby red and delicious – everything a winter warmer should be – brewed using English Goldings and Fuggle Hops, pale and dark malts, and a small amount of invert sugar, to create a rich, smooth traditional dark ale. It was tasted recently at the Red Lion, Northmoor – and pronounced excellent.

## Loose Cannon

It is gearing up for Christmas and as usual planning to deliver a whole range of treats for everyone. Top of the list will be the fourth rendition of the Christmas Cannon series, keeping away from the mainstream spiced ales so prevalent at this time of year and delivering something special for the discerning drinker.

Loose Cannon's first venture into canning happened in late November as the six-hop 4.1% session IPA was produced in 330ml cans. Following this will be the 5% Pilsner and then others.

It has taken delivery of a new clothing range featuring some great looking and limited edition Christmas T-shirts. Every year it does something unique so get down to the shop as soon as possible to not miss out on this year's offer.

The brewery has joined forces with the Friends of Abingdon to organise a brand-new event, the annual Christmas Beer Festival on Friday/Saturday 9-10 December. The location will be

the Medieval Abbey Buildings and there will be a great range of local brewers' real ale, food, music and guided tours of these incredible buildings throughout the event. It's a brilliant opportunity to drink beer on the site of the original Abbey Brewery and soak up some of the centuries-old atmosphere these buildings offer.

Monthly special for November was Scottish Smokehouse Ale. The next brewery tour is on Tuesday 12 December.

## Vale/ABC

Vale beers coming soon include Paradise Lost, a 4% golden beer for December which "aims to offer a taste of summer in the depths of winter". Christmas Star at 3.6% is a roasted malty Christmas ale while Good King Senseless (5%) is a classic Christmas Ale brewed with Pale, Crystal and Chocolate Malt, and whole cone hops.

Aylesbury Brewhouse Co (ABC) is also keeping busy. S\*M\*A\*S\*H is a 4.3% pale and hoppy beer with a single malt (Maris Otter) and a single hop, Simcoe. Inertia is a 4.1% traditional copper bitter.

Mutant Ale is a 4.7% dark and hoppy ale which is part of the Artist's Edition range, inspired by artwork from up and coming artist Tom Rees. How on earth can you have a black IPA? Things mutate but call it what you want – it's going to be a good one, with £2 from every cask sold going directly to art therapy.

For Christmas, the ABC range includes Reindeer (a 4.6% red



hoppy ale); and Lord of Yule (a 4.2% light copper seasonal ale). The Hop Pole pub in Aylesbury acts as ABC's brewery tap but beers can often be found around Oxford.

## West Berkshire

Planning permission has been granted for its new brewing site, and the barns have been cleared of old cow stalls and a partition wall and packaging line created. The old roof will be coming off and the whole site steam cleaned before a new roof is put on.

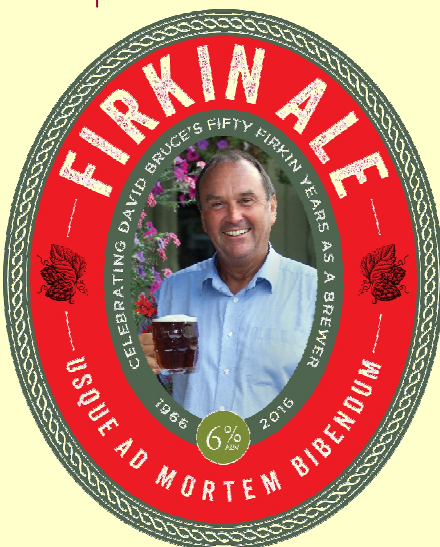
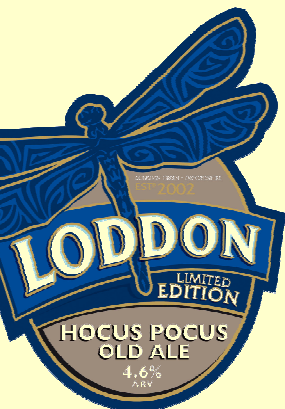
Two of its flagship beers, Good Old Boy and Maggs' Magnificent Mild, have won Gold in the London and South East Area Champion Beer of Britain awards. Classic bitter Good Old Boy (4%) won Gold to top the bitter category while Maggs' Magnificent Mild (3.8%) was also named category winner. Maggs has been the highest award winning beer for the brewery, receiving 19 awards since it was first made by brewery founder, Dave Maggs.

Both beers now go forward to the Champion Beer of Britain finals which will be held at the Great British Beer Festival in August 2017.

The latest special is Firkin Ale, celebrating the half century since David Bruce first learned to brew in 1966 at Simonds Brewery in Reading. After 50 firkin years, his entrepreneurial, international brewing career has brought him back to Berkshire as chairman of West Berkshire Brewery.

This traditional strong ale has an original gravity of 1060° giving it an ABV of 6%. Rich ruby in colour and packed with malt flavour thanks to marris otter, crystal and black malts, it uses English goldings hops to give a balanced bitterness and pleasant hoppy character.

Yule Fuel (4.3%) is a full-bodied strong beer perfect for long winter evenings by the fire. Deep red in colour with plenty of caramel sweetness to balance a full berry-fruit hop flavour with



**CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
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](mailto:events-request@oxford.camra.org.uk)

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# Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

Further details can be found on our website [www.oxford.camra.org.uk](http://www.oxford.camra.org.uk)

Tuesday 29 November -  
Saturday 3 December

## Pig's Ear Beer & Cider Festival

Round Chapel, Glenarm Road,  
Hackney, London  
[www.pigsear.org.uk](http://www.pigsear.org.uk)

Friday 9 - Saturday 10  
December

## Abingdon Abbey Christmas Beerfest

Abingdon Abbey Buildings,  
Checker Walk, Abingdon  
[www.friendsofabingdon.org.uk](http://www.friendsofabingdon.org.uk)

Saturday 10 December  
(noon - 5pm)

## Haddenham Winterfest

Banks Park, Banks Road,  
Haddenham  
40 beers plus cider & perry  
[www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk](http://www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk)

Friday 16 - Saturday 17  
December

## Portsmouth Beer Festival

Portsmouth Guildhall, Guildhall  
Square, Portsmouth  
[www.pompeybeerfestival.co.uk](http://www.pompeybeerfestival.co.uk)

Friday 27 - Saturday 28  
January

## Bristol Cider Festival

Brunel's Old Passenger Shed,  
Temple Meads Station, Bristol  
Advance ticket purchase  
recommended  
100+ ciders & perries  
[www.clstickets.co.uk](http://www.clstickets.co.uk)

Friday 27 - Saturday 28  
January

## Salisbury Winterfest

British Legion Club, Endless  
Street, Salisbury

24 beers plus 2 ciders  
[www.salisburycamra.org.uk](http://www.salisburycamra.org.uk)

Friday 27 - Sunday 29  
January

## Rose & Crown Beer Festival

Market Street, Charlbury  
01608 810103  
[www.roseandcrown.charlbury.com](http://www.roseandcrown.charlbury.com)

Thursday 2 - Saturday 4  
February

## Tewkesbury Winter Ales Festival

George Watson Hall, Barton  
Street, Tewkesbury  
80 beers plus cider & perry  
[www.tewkesbury.camra.org.uk](http://www.tewkesbury.camra.org.uk)

Wednesday 22 - Saturday  
25 February

## National Winter Ales Festival

Blackfriars Hall, St Andrews Plain,  
Norwich  
[www.nwaf.org.uk](http://www.nwaf.org.uk)

Friday 24 - Saturday 25  
February

## Bath Cider Festival

Bath Pavilion, North Parade  
Road, Bath  
100+ ciders & perries  
[www.clstickets.co.uk](http://www.clstickets.co.uk)

Friday 17 - Saturday 18  
March

## Wantage Beer Festival

The Beacon, Portway, Wantage  
28 beers plus ciders & perries  
[www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk](http://www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk)

**EVERYBODY READING** this is probably well aware of the many problems facing a pub in these modern times. CAMRA's latest published figures say that 27 pubs a week are closing. The good news is that's down from 29 pubs a week in 2014; the bad news is it's still 27 pubs a week. That's over 1,400 pubs in a year closing for good.

Supermarkets can still massively undercut our beer prices as we are forced to raise ours to cover the ever increasing energy bills, rates and rents we have to pay, and customers have less to spend due to their own rising energy bills, rates and rents. Not just that but beer drinking isn't as popular as it once was either. Fifteen years ago the average adult drank 218 pints a year, now it's less than 150. Our brewing industry pays a whopping 52.2p beer tax, over three times higher than



# Gardeners' World

**Paul Silcock**, landlord of the Gardeners Arms in Plantation Road, North Oxford, continues his regular column

the Netherlands, the country with the next highest brewing figures (although anyone who's ever bought a pint in Holland might be a bit surprised by that). On top of all these problems, though, a new and bigger threat is emerging. Being patronised out of business.

Seriously. Big business has found a strange new way to try and sell us products we don't want or need. By patronising us. The first example I encountered was when BT sent me a letter telling me I had been selected for The Quiet Pub Guide. The what guide? It's a nonsense dreamt up by some advertising exec. BT is trying to peddle BT Sport to me because I need BT Sport in my pub. Because without BT Sport my business is doomed, obviously. Without blaring TV screens, no-one wants to go to a pub. BT's letter

goes on to point out that without BT Sport I will have no crowds, no noise, just a delightfully empty pub.

I've always aimed to keep my pub TV-free. One of the best pieces of advice I was ever given when I started in this business was to run the kind of pub you would want to go to yourself, so I kept TV screens out of my pub. That's not to say there's anything wrong with TVs in pubs, far from it, and that's what's so annoying about BT's advertising method. It utterly ignores the idea of pubs serving different purposes for different people.

Everybody has their favourite pub, but everyone has different reasons for their choice. For some it's purely for the range of beer on offer, others like the particular atmosphere. On a

sunny day maybe you want a pub with a great beer garden, or a real fire on a cold winter evening. Your regular might not show sport, but sometimes you want that crowded pub atmosphere for certain events – cup finals, a specific event or occasion. Honestly I had a really great night in the Royal Blenheim watching the Eurovision Song Contest (although I'm happy to put this down to their excellent beer more than anything).

It's not just BT who've adopted this method of patronising publicans and failing to grasp the fundamental nature of our business. I received a call from Sky Sports which showed an even more bewildering ignorance of the nature of pubs. Sky's representative, in response to me saying I had no interest in having TVs in my pub, asked the question: "Well, what do your customers do for entertainment in your pub then?" When I replied, "They talk to each other and drink beer," she hung up on me. I was furious, she beat me to it!

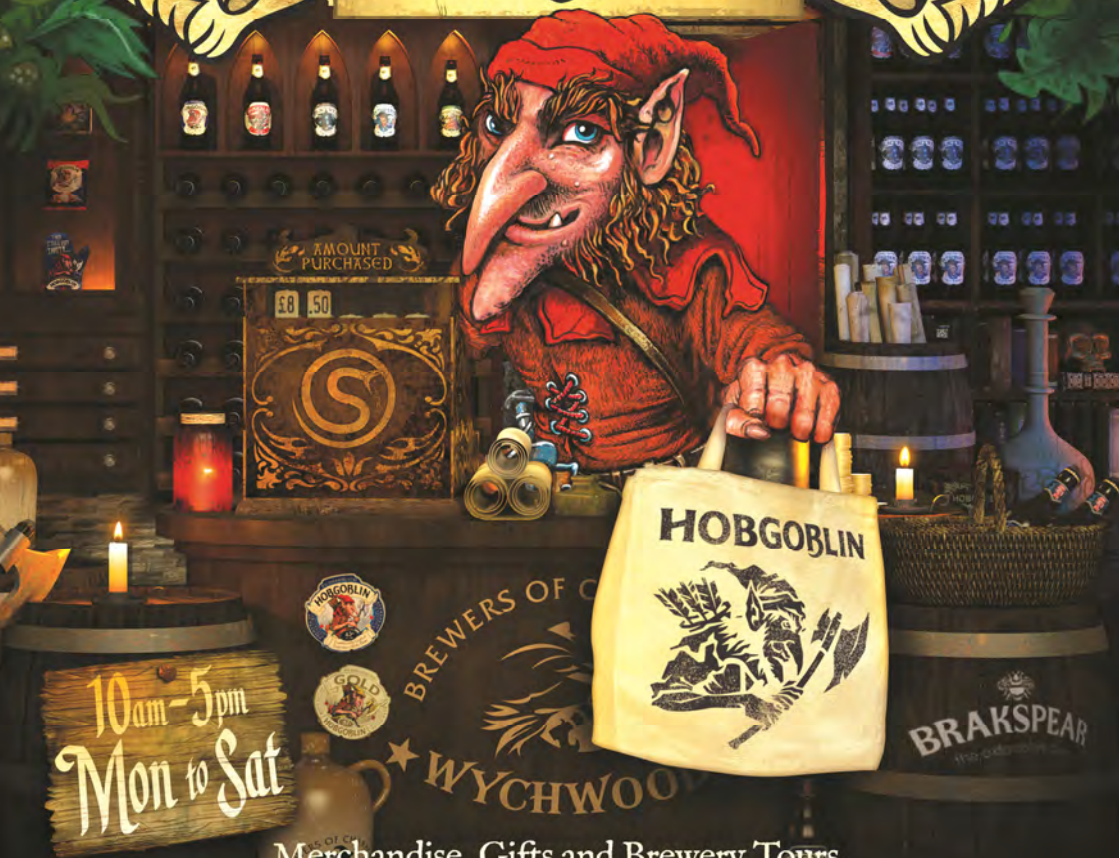
But it just goes to show this new threat from patronising business is spreading. I'll be expecting a call from a karaoke company next telling me that 80% of my customer base just wants to sing with their beer, and without their karaoke machines in every corner I run the risk of retaining all of my regular customers. And possibly attracting some new ones.





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# 40 years of Rail Ale Rambles

**Dave Richardson** joins a commemorative tour of five breweries marking a major milestone for the company that brought real ale and rail travel together



**FROM TOP:** Gerald Daniels (left) and Stuart Bateman at Bateman's Brewery; Recalling the seventh Ramble – the "Timothy Taylor Taste" to Keighley in 1979; The steam engine at Hook Norton

**IN APRIL 1978**, while living in London, I spent £4.50 (£25 in today's money) and enjoyed a day out with a difference. I joined 419 other people on a specially chartered train heading for Macclesfield, Stockport and Manchester, where at each stop we took our pub maps and descended on all kinds of boozers to drink real ale.

Why did we do this? Real ale was in danger of extinction in the 1970s, which is why CAMRA was formed in 1971. London in particular was a real ale desert unless you lived in the south-west suburbs around the Fuller's and Young's breweries, but there was more to be enjoyed in provincial towns and cities.

The day was a great success. I discovered a back street pub in Ancoats, Manchester – Hyde's Jolly Angler– which is, amazingly, still going strong today – as is Hyde's. I wrote up the trip for my then employer, *Travel Trade Gazette*, noting that there were lots of empty seats on the train home. The ale was so good that many passengers were never seen again!

I didn't know it then, but my trip to Manchester was number three in a series of Rail Ale Rambles (RARs) devised by a CAMRA member called Gerald Daniels. Gerald was a British

Rail manager at the time, who knew there were plenty of spare trains to charter at weekends at a very attractive price. RAR number one operated in October 1977 to Bath and Oxford, taking no fewer than 596 people on a drinking spree – and what they found in Oxford will be the subject of an article in the next edition. These two cities may have coped with the crowds quite well, but when RARs visited smaller places such as Weymouth, they literally drank the town dry of real ale as sometimes reported in local newspapers!

The idea proved an instant hit, as the numbers going – all recorded in Gerald's archive – prove. Operating by Crookham Travel, the Hampshire village where he lived, RARs soon started to visit breweries at a time when few of them welcomed visitors. The first brewery visit was to Buckley's in South Wales in 1978, and in 1980 visits were made to Ruddle's and Oxfordshire's own Hook Norton.

The logistics were sometimes very challenging, but Gerald is a great organiser. Transporting no fewer than 579 people from Banbury railway station to Hook Norton, and getting them all round the historic brewery safely, is a case in point – with a fleet of coaches called into action. Hook Norton is in fact the brewery that RARs have

visited most often, with 10 visits taking nearly 3,500 participants to rural north Oxfordshire over the last 36 years.

So it was appropriate that for a commemorative tour to start Crookham Travel's 40th anniversary celebrations, Hook Norton was one of the five breweries visited. Its managing director James Clarke and his mother Paula welcomed a party of 79 one Sunday in October, James recalling how, as a boy, he had gone down to Banbury station to greet the special train from London. Fortunately, 79 was a rather more manageable visitor number than 579.

RARs soon expanded to cover the whole country, including overnight trips as far afield as Scotland. Nearly 900 brewery visits have been made over the years to 788 breweries, and there are very few that have failed to welcome one of Gerald's tours.

Over the years the style of operation changed. Real ale became more widely available by the 1990s and the numbers going on each tour fell away, while privatisation of British Rail meant that there were soon very few spare trains to charter even if there were enough people to fill them. Crookham Travel started using regular service trains instead, but even into the 21st century, some tours were attracting over 100

people. To date there have been 177 RARs, with trains normally used for the longer sections of a journey and coach travel to visit breweries, with a railway or industrial heritage attraction often included.

Weekend Explorers including overnight accommodation started in 1979 and in 1986 came the first overseas tour, to Lyon in France. Crookham Travel has now taken beer enthusiasts to no fewer than 38 countries as far afield as Hong Kong and Australia, although most of its foreign tours are by rail into Europe.

Every RAR or longer tour is researched meticulously by Gerald. Although long retired from British Rail and a hale and hearty 78, he has no plans to hang up the whistle summoning people together which is a familiar sound on his tours.

"I research, book, organise and act as courier on every tour, and research is paramount," he says. "I will carry on as long as I enjoy doing it, and the support is there. We have managed to arrange tours to some breweries never normally open to visitors such as Donnington in Gloucestershire, which is often considered the 'the holy grail of unvisited breweries'. Timothy Taylor in Keighley and Lees in Manchester are among those we still want to visit, as in March 1979 a full train of 420

**PHOTOS ON PAGE 27:** Gerald Daniels with his infamous whistle; Paula and James Clarke at Hook Norton with Gerald Daniels, recalling the first Rail Ale Ramble to visit the brewery in 1980.

people had to be repeated as another 420 souls wanted to go to Keighley to try the 'Timothy Taylor Taste' in local pubs. Hopefully, these breweries will agree to a visit soon."

Gerald founded Crookham Travel with Sheridan Hughes, who is no longer involved, but is now assisted by Tony Fox-Griffiths who became a customer in the 1980s and now helps run the tours.

"I first read about Rail Ale Rambles in *What's Brewing*, and they seemed a great way of visiting pubs and breweries," recalls Tony. "My first trip was an overnight tour to Wigan and Edinburgh, where we had the same compartment out and back. There were six in the compartment going up but the other four never made it back – there was often a high attrition rate! Sheridan was good company and had a knack of getting back just in time for the train, but once we left him behind on the platform with arms full of fish and chips as the train pulled out.

"I have now been on 109 RARs and also some weekend tours, and seen a lot of changes. Some people did used to get totally wrecked in the old days, but over the years our clientele have aged and mellowed. People now fall asleep rather than get rowdy, but it can be difficult attracting new



customers and the best way is by word of mouth.

"Crookham Travel is less of a business, more of a club. There's great camaraderie, and going on a tour is like being part of an extended and very welcoming family."

The 2017 programme has not been finalised but will include several RARs, which usually start in London but can often be joined at other places. Longer Explorer holidays will operate to Slovakia, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and weekends to South West Wales and Nurnberg in Germany, for the Christmas market. CAMRA members will be made most welcome and full details are at [www.crookhamtravel.co.uk](http://www.crookhamtravel.co.uk) (01252 665652).

The 40th anniversary tour

Five breweries were visited on the "Looking Forward to Forty" tour in October, three of these being very much "old friends" as they had been visited on RARs many times before. All the breweries presented commemorative bottles of beer to everyone on the tour, with snacks, meals and plenty of draught ale included in the tour price.

The party of 79 met at King's Cross station on a Saturday morning to travel to Downham Market in Norfolk where two coaches awaited. First stop was at Elgood's in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, which was staging a Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) festival on the same day.

Brewing started on this riverside site in 1795, with the Elgood family taking over in 1878. Nigel Elgood and head brewer Alan

Pateman were on hand to tell us about its range of 12 real ales, although it also produces kegs and owns about 30 pubs in East Anglia. The party got stuck in early, although one poor soul regretted (or maybe didn't!) ordering a pint of Winter Warmer when he discovered the ABV was 9% -- it was only 11am. My choices were the best bitter Russet Gold at 3.9% and Black Dog mild at 3.6%, which I enjoyed rather more than the bottle of sour fruit beer we were given to take home.

Elgood's is unusual in claiming to be the only brewery still using a pair of giant copper cooling trays, essential for producing Lambic-style Belgian beers. These were duly inspected on the tour, as Alan explained the process. Real ale still accounts for 60% of Elgood's production, and I got the impression that he didn't fully approve of some of the more gimmicky developments in brewing. Elgood's has had its own micro-brewery equipment for 25 years, long before this became fashionable.

We now drove around The Wash and into Lincolnshire to visit Bateman's brewery in Wainfleet, near Skegness, passing pubs along the A52 with the brewery's "good honest ales" slogan. Some participants on this tour – including a few who went on that first trip to Bath and Oxford nearly 40 years ago – recalled previous visits to Bateman's, when every passenger on the special train arriving at Wainfleet station was welcomed with a handshake.

Stuart Bateman from the fourth generation of the family is now in charge and welcomed us in the old windmill where the visitor centre is located, tracing

its history back to 1874. His great grandfather started brewing mainly to supply local farmers who often paid their workers partly in ale – hence the expression "harvest beers".

More than 6,000 bottles decorate the premises, thought to be the largest collection in the world, and we had a ploughman's lunch before touring the brewery, which still uses some of the original equipment. Stuart told us that Bateman's had been lucky to survive in the 1980s due to a family dispute that nearly saw it taken over, but as a result it had to sell off many of its pubs. Its best-known beers today are XB and XXXB, both tried with great enthusiasm.

Bateman's still has 68 pubs, but Stuart told us that middle-ranking breweries such as this sometimes had to cut production – in this case from 16,000 barrels last year to 8,000 for 2017 – to avoid punitive taxes. He hoped his son and daughter would continue in the family tradition, but clearly there are many challenges.

We departed with commemorative bottles of a 7.5% Vintage Ale brewed to a 50-year-old recipe, and quite a few passengers were asleep as we crossed into Leicestershire for our final brewery visit, to Belvoir at Old Dalby. We didn't tour this modern brewery but could view it from the visitor centre and dining room where we enjoyed a much appreciated steak pie dinner.

Belvoir brewery started in 1995 in other premises, but moved to the present site nine years ago. Manageress Di Login explained that its beers were now

available in nearly 300 pubs and retail outlets, but had a cautionary tale about a certain well-known supermarket which welcomed its beers at first but then “made life difficult”. The beers we tried were a rather puny tasting Whipping at 3.6%, and the much more palatable Beaver Bitter at 4.3% and Old Dalby ruby ale at 5.1%.

By the time we reached our hotel in Leicester it was nearly 9pm, and there were few takers for more beer despite the undoubted delights of the city's pubs. We enjoyed a good breakfast in the morning prior to two more brewery visits as we headed towards my home territory.

First stop however was at Toddington in Gloucestershire, for the usual railway or industrial heritage attraction included on most tours. Here we travelled on the narrow gauge North Gloucestershire Light Railway rather than the standard gauge Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Railway which also operates here. After our “fix” of steam we headed to the only pub we would visit all weekend, the Pheasant Inn at Toddington, run by Donnington Brewery which had been visited for the first time on tour (it doesn't usually accept visitors) only in 2016.

It was then on to the highlight for many visitors, Hook Norton, for a sandwich and pork pie lunch before touring the “tower” brewery, claimed to be the finest example of this Victorian design still extant. Brewing started on a farm here in 1856, the tower brewery being built in 1872, and the original chimney was restored in 2014 with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. Originally it was powered by

steam, and the 1899-built steam engine still works on special occasions, such as our visit. An integral part of the tour is a visit to the stables where the giant shire horses can be admired – they still deliver beer to pubs in the village once a week.

The principle of a tower brewery is that all the ingredients are hoisted or pumped to the top and then come down by gravity – an ecological and cost-effective method. According to English Heritage, the mill for processing malted barley is the last of its kind.

There had been plans for a Hook Norton Brass Band concert at the Pear Tree pub in the village, but apparently the pub didn't want to host this so



the band with all their instruments came to our final stop a few miles away, Clouded Minds brewery just over the border in Warwickshire, in Lower Brailes village. The band was superb but I found the small brewery, in a modern industrial unit, rather a disappointment after the glory of Hook Norton.

Clouded Minds moved here from London to premises previously occupied by Whale Ale, and a brewer called Oddly also makes beers here. I didn't particularly like the Clouded Minds beers I tried, these being Hazelnutter (5%) and Luppol (4.2%), the former flavoured with Italian hazelnuts. But I daresay these quirky drinks are popular with some younger drinkers, and local free houses including the Chester may offer them.

Gerald's whistle sounded announcing it was time to head to the station for the trip home, leaving us all to reflect on a very enjoyable and indeed historic weekend. Do give Crookham Travel a try – the combination of great ales, good company and rail travel will appeal to many as it certainly did to me.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**

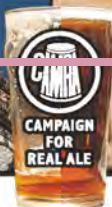


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# Roarsome!

**Graham Shelton**, chairman of the company that bought the Red Lion at Northmoor for the community, continues his regular column



**IS THERE MAGIC** still in the world? I'm writing this on All Hallows Eve, when the curtain between the living and the dead parts for a moment and chilling spirits slip through to stalk the world. ....

All this spooky stuff set me thinking about some of the awesome (should that be roarsome?\*) things that impact on our lives. Everyone knows that Father Christmas visits every child in the world on Christmas Eve (approximately 233 million visits, apparently), and travels a distance of some 510 million km in so doing. Heaven knows how many mince pies he gets through, or gallons of whisky and sherry. Never mind those poor reindeer travelling at rocket speed.

Personally, I've never had a problem with any of this, as it obviously involves some potent magic, and us mere mortals can just stand back and marvel at a constitution that can accommodate that amount of whisky without turning nasty.

But when it comes to saving your pub, standing back and marvelling will not be enough; we can't magic every Asset of Community Value (ACV) into a thriving community venture. This is a shame because it's generally fairly easy to designate a failing pub as an ACV, giving the community six months to raise the money to put in a bid. It's those pesky

steps that are so difficult, from beer-fuelled idea to the hard reality of raising several hundred thousand pounds by selling shares to local people, and finding a way to manage the whole process through to a legal and successful live business.

There is some help to be had. All the community pubs that I know are doing well (some exceptionally so) and are peopled with real enthusiasts very keen to share their knowledge and experience. I'm aware of the following in or near our area:

The Seven Stars, Marsh Baldon  
The Red Lion, Northmoor  
The Bull, Great Milton  
The Plough, Great Haseley  
The Plough, West Hanney  
The White Hart, Wolvercote

If you know of more do let me know, via the editor. I have in mind to organise some sort of community pub get-together before too long, and those with a desire to start a community pub will certainly be welcome to come.

District Councils are often very helpful, and organisations such as the Plunkett Foundation also offer advice, help and even some government money (albeit with strings).

It's an arduous journey utterly reliant on grit, unfailing energy, good fortune, good leadership,

the right building, the right expertise and the right circumstances to succeed. Even with all of those not everyone makes it, so it was really exciting to hear from my friend Mike Hobbs that he and his team in Beckley have just raised a staggering £440,000 and will be putting in an offer for the Abingdon Arms with just two weeks to go before its ACV expires. Hopefully by the time this is published their efforts will be crowned with success and they will be embarking on the next phase of refurbishing the building and finding the right people and the right processes to re-open their beloved local. Can't wait to give it a try.

Our own experience at the Red Lion in Northmoor shows that while the brewery business model often doesn't work any more in a small pub, a community business model most definitely can. A warm welcome, good beer, good food and good company are a seductive and potentially profitable combination. Importantly, there are lots more pubs out there with the potential to become the thriving community hubs we all love so much.

Let's make it happen. You can borrow my magic wand if you like!

*Roarsome: even more awesome than awesome! (See The Oxford Drinker Number 97).*



# Brewer for a day

**Pete Flynn** tries his hand at brewing real ale

**TO SAY I** was absolutely delighted, and surprised, when my neighbour asked me if I wanted to join him at our local brewery, Loose Cannon, for the day would have been an understatement – especially when it involved brewing and sampling the beers. Ironically, the background to this opportunity arose from my unsuccessful bid for tickets at a charity auction where, unbeknown to me, my neighbour, sitting several rows behind, was prepared to pay a little more than I had budgeted.

Brewing involves an early start. Head brewer Chris Ward was there to meet us upon our arrival at 8am, and had already been preparing the process and ingredients for the first brew which was a seasonal beer “42 Pounder”. Chris explained that creating a brew involves a consistent approach coupled with using the finest quality ingredients, so you always end up with a great tasting beer. There are several skill sets involved which to my simple approach included knowledge of chemistry cookery and engineering.

My first job involved pouring bags of Maris Otter malt, and various salts, into the vessel containing the hot water which has to be at a precise temperature when the magic starts to happen. The heat from the water (referred to as liquor in breweries) activates the enzymes within the barley.

These enzymes then begin to convert the starches in the grains into sugars.

The next step in the brewing process is to take the mash, and separate out the spent grain from the sugary liquid known as wort (pronounced wurt). This process is called lautering. I had fun shovelling the spent mash into the truck which is then given to farmers for animal feed. It was hard work but I was grateful as it was a cold day and I began to feel quite hot on this cold Monday morning, with steam from the wort rendering my glasses useless.

Chris told us that once the sweet wort has been separated from the grains, it is brought to a strong, prolonged boil for 90 minutes to sterilise the beer and also to break down hops which can be added at the start to provide bitterness. Chris added that hops later in the boil don't bitter the beer all that much, but instead lend flavour and aroma. This is because in addition to alpha acids, hops also contain highly volatile, and very pungent oils, which break down quickly in boiling water. However if only exposed to the boiling wort for a short period of time, or at lower temperatures, hops will release these oils and lend aromatics and flavour to the beer which is the preferred method at Loose Cannon; historically Loose Cannon beers tend to have a certain sweetness.



The 90 minutes were up so the wort was then sent to a whirlpool to collect any hop matter and coagulated proteins that have accumulated, whilst adding aromatic hops – the best bit in my opinion, that intoxicating smell! The wort is then immediately cooled since the beer will begin to oxidise and produce off flavours almost immediately at these temperatures. It's quite amazing to see how the different processes are fully automated, and for a novice like myself it would be a formidable task to have to memorise the procedure.

Once the wort has been cooled, it is moved to a fermenter, which is usually just a large stainless steel vat. Chris had checked the yeast earlier using a microscope and dye to

establish if the yeast was effective, as yeast cells have a tendency to die after successive usage. From the moment the yeast is added it gets to work eating the sugars that were created during the mash. As they consume the sugar, the yeast expels carbon dioxide and alcohol, as well as a variety of flavour compounds that vary greatly depending on the specific strain of yeast, and fermentation temperature of the beer.

Let the fermentation process begin; it was time for a beer and also to visit front of the brewery to pick up a free sample. I would like to thank Chris and his team for a fantastic time, and hopefully they will offer similar tours to like-minded individuals.

**PETE FLYNN**



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# Oxford Branch Diary

## Monday 9 January Branch Meeting

7.30pm  
At the The Newlands Inn, Newland Street, Eynsham. Meet beforehand from 6.30pm at the Queens Head, Queen Street. Note that this is a week later than normal.

## Saturday 14 January Branch Social

1.00pm  
Joint Social with White Horse and South Oxfordshire branches at the Brewery Tap, Ock Street, Abingdon.

## Saturday 28 January Branch Social

1.00pm  
Social gathering at the Rose and Crown Beer Festival, Market Street, Charlbury. Easily accessible by bus and train from Oxford.

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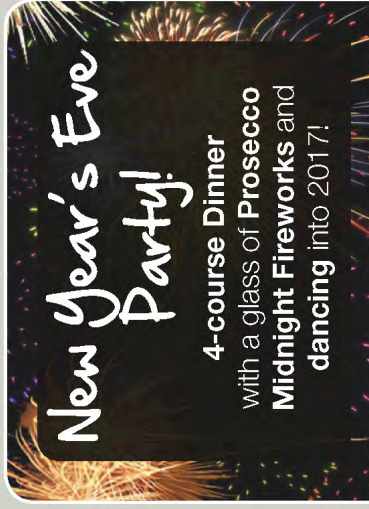
## Christmas Day 5 course Lunch

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