



CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE

Issue 99  
February - March 2017

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# the Oxford Drinker



The free newsletter of the **Oxford** and  
**White Horse** Branches of CAMRA

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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.

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Editorial team:

Editor: Dave Richardson  
[editor@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxford.camra.org.uk)

Advertising: Tony Goulding  
[advertising@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:advertising@oxford.camra.org.uk)  
Tony: 07588 181313

Layout/Design: Matt Bullock

Valuable contributions have been received for this issue from Richard Queralto, Paul Silcock, Dick Bosley, Matt Bullock, Ian Winfield, Dennis Brown, Tony Goulding, Pete Flynn, and Graham Shelton.

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

Pub news can be sent to  
[pub-news@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:pub-news@oxford.camra.org.uk)

The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of Oxford or White Horse Branches of CAMRA, or of CAMRA Limited.

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# Welcome

.... what exactly  
makes a good  
landlord?

**RUNNING A PUB** can be a very stressful business with very little time to yourself, so as one pub near Oxford looks for a new tenant and one long-established husband-and-wife management team call it a day, I started wondering what it takes to fill that role. The pub recruiting is the Abingdon Arms in Beckley – see advertisement in this issue – while the couple who have moved on are Richard and Katherine Gibson at the Angel and Greyhound in St Clement's, Oxford.

The most successful landlords not only know how to keep and serve great beer and food, but are also fine managers of people. They need to know how to delegate and how to balance what should be a fun atmosphere with a dedication to quality and service – no mean feat when you consider that many customers couldn't care less as long as they get served quickly.

But then there's that hidden "something" that makes someone special. As Katherine Gibson put it to me just before leaving, "This is our house, but it's a public house that we open to hundreds of people every day. It's like a drop-in centre." We wish the Gibsons well as they change career, while we recognise that running a successful pub isn't a great lifestyle when you have three school-age children.

The role of the landlord is crucial in making people feel welcome, and that is central to a traditional pub's role in the heart of a community. A new study by Oxford University makes interesting reading, as research done in conjunction with CAMRA makes clear that the pub can play a vital role in combating loneliness.

Professor Robin Dunbar of the university's Experimental Psychology department, said: "This study showed that frequenting a local pub can directly affect people's social network size and how engaged they are with their local community, which in turn can affect how satisfied they feel in life.

"Our social networks provide us with the single most important buffer against mental and physical illness. While pubs traditionally have a role as a place for community socialising, alcohol's role appears to be in triggering the endorphin system, which promotes social bonding. Like other complex bonding systems such as dancing, singing and storytelling, it has often been adopted by large social communities as a ritual associated with bonding."

I recently joined branch secretary Steve Lawrence to meet our local MP, Nicola Blackwood, who is the minister responsible for the UK's very

low alcohol consumption guidelines. We showed her this research and pointed out that the UK's suggested limit (14 units a week for both men and women) is dismissed by many doctors and lower than in most other European countries. She listened politely but gave no ground, saying the rest of Europe would catch up one day. We argued instead for the introduction of a minimum alcohol price that would stop people knocking back cheap supermarket booze even before going out, and this might at last be possible when we exit the EU.

Make no mistake, the anti-alcohol lobby is another threat to our pubs – but once again, the landlord's role is crucial. Pub staff are trained to spot people who have had too much and the pub is a much safer drinking environment than your lounge or bedroom.

I'd be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to nominate a particular landlord for their role in the community, and we'll include them in a future issue. Let's send the Nanny State packing and give good landlords the recognition they deserve.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**

[editor@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxford.camra.org.uk)

# The wonders of Wantage

**Dave Richardson**  
tours the pubs of an  
Oxfordshire market  
town

**WITH THE WANTAGE** Beer Festival coming up on 17-18 March, this was a good time to revisit the town to see what its pubs have to offer. Many CAMRA members know that there are two outstanding real ale pubs here so they tend to disregard the rest, but I wanted to sample a few more while paying homage to the Shoulder of Mutton and Royal Oak.

The festival will be held at the Beacon community centre (formerly the Civic Hall) in the centre of town, close to Market Place where a cluster of pubs are located. Also in the Market Place is a statue of Alfred the Great (849-899), the Anglo-Saxon King of Wessex said to have been born here and who successfully led his army against Danish Viking invaders. The Danes were ultimately successful, however – as there aren't many pubs where you can't find Carlsberg!

With this royal connection it made sense to start at King Alfred's Head, a Punch Taverns pub at the west end of Market Place. The town's nightlife is very much concentrated in this area but this pub casts its net widely, with a few shoppers taking a rest in the afternoon including a couple of ladies with their buggies. The roaring log fire was a definite attraction.

Four real ales are served here with Sharp's Doom Bar and St Austell Tribute being the regulars. The other two beers are rotated and today's

offerings were totally unknown to me, both being Christmas ales still available in the first week of January. Slater's of Stafford provided a ruby ale called Blitzen (4%), while Bosun's (based near Wakefield rather than anywhere near the sea) provided Ingle Belle (also 4%), a blonde beer with appropriate girly pump clip. I opted for the Blitzen which was in good condition, but forgettable. Pity I don't have a weakness for blondes...

King Alfred's Head – known as Alfie's – displayed a CAMRA LocAle certificate dating from 2014, but there were no local beers on. Despite this the choice was good, and with a varied food offer this would make an appropriate lunchtime stop.

We then headed towards the renowned Shoulder of Mutton, only five minutes' walk from Market Place, but stopped off first at what looked like a very historic pub across the road from the Shoulder – the King's Arms. This is a former Morland, Greene King and now Hawthorn Leisure house, but no real ale was available and when there is, it's usually Greene King IPA which I find very insipid. The landlord of this mainly young people's and sports pub was apologetic, but rightly pointed out that with the Shoulder of Mutton just across the road, he was unlikely to sell much real ale. Point taken!

The Shoulder is a Wantage



**ABOVE FROM TOP:** The King Alfred's Head; the beer menu in the Shoulder of Mutton

**OPPOSITE:** Guy Ripley (right) with barman Oliver Curley with an impressive line of handpumps at the Shoulder of Mutton



institution and Good Beer Guide entry since who knows when, but there was some concern when long-serving landlord Peter Fowler moved on in 2015 and a temporary tenant was installed by Admiral Taverns. We needn't have been concerned, as when Guy Ripley took over later that year he carried on Peter's good work.

The range of real ales, plus a couple of ciders, was as impressive as ever and with a craft keg and craft lager added to cater for different tastes. Real ales came from far, wide and more local venues, with True North Brew Co of Sheffield – not even listed in the 2017 Good Beer Guide – providing a Pale Ale at 4.3% and a more unusual Red Rye at 4.7%. Red Squirrel from Hertfordshire provided Mr Squirrel, a 4.3% ruby bitter, but the other ales were more local.

XT's limited edition Animal range provided American Sour Whisky Cask at 5.5%, which some locals were raving about; but my eye went straight to a local micro-brewery, Barn Owl, based at Gozzards Ford near Abingdon. Its Gozzards Guzzler dark best bitter went down a treat at 4.4%, and at this point it would have been very easy to settle down for the evening and forget about the other pubs.

But I made do with another two halves, starting with Butts' Honey Munster at 4.5% which had a rather odd tang – it's described in one online post as

"lunch in a glass". I then moved on to a beer by another Berkshire brewery, unknown to me – Indigenous – this being Monocle Stout at 4.6%. I don't normally drink stout but found the bitter finish very pleasant, and ideal for a winter's evening.

The closest the Shoulder gets to a regular supplier is probably Wild Weather, from the Hampshire/Berkshire border near Reading, providing Big Muddy at 3.8%. Barman Oliver Curley, a local artist whose works are on display around the pub, proved a very knowledgeable and patient guide to all this great pub has to offer. When Guy joined him to lay out 13 pump clips of beers already in the cellar and soon to be available, some of us contemplated moving to Wantage. Wild Weather was strongly represented.

Instead of traditional pumps, the

eight real ales are dispensed from a row at the back as the small bar wouldn't be able to cope. The two bar areas (and pleasant small garden) also help make it a character pub, and Guy – who previously ran the Plough in Witney – ticks yet another box by selling all his real ales for £3.50 a pint. There is no food service yet, a curiosity under the previous tenant being a vegetarian-only menu served in a pub named after a joint of meat with a pub sign to match...

Very reluctantly we dragged ourselves away, as we were meeting White Horse branch chairman Ian Winfield at the Bear Hotel, back at the Market Place. This is a 16th century coaching inn owned by Swindon brewer Arkell's since 2006, and extensively refurbished a few years ago. It was rather difficult to judge whether it has any historical charm on a brief visit



on a dark winter's evening, but to me it seemed to be thoroughly modern – just the kind of hotel the town might need, but not making the most of its heritage.

Arkell's own beers dominated, of course – with Wiltshire Gold and 3B being available, and the stronger Moonlight also being a regular. A guest beer is also available and this was Courage Directors (4.8%), a famous old brand now brewed by Charles Wells in Bedford. That might have been a better choice, but after a half of 3B it was time to move on.

Ian was particularly keen for us to visit the Swan, also on Market Place, and this proved to be a good idea as it's a new entry in the Good Beer Guide for 2017. It's a free house catering very much for young people with a lot of live music and a pool table, and I could imagine it getting very crowded at weekends. It's obviously a very old building (Grade II listed), and I was intrigued by an old pub sign displayed inside apparently from the Smuggler's Cott in Looe, Cornwall – now a restaurant.

But what about the beer? This is the interesting part as you wouldn't expect much choice in a young people's music pub, but five real ales are served and it deserves its place in the GBG. These were Loose Cannon's Dark Horse and 42 Pounder, and three from the Marston's range – Hobgoblin from Wychwood brewery in Witney, 61 Deep (a pale ale) and Owd Roger, a 7.6% strong ale. The latter was very tempting, but I had more pubs to visit. I

contented myself with a half of Dark Horse and we moved on.

A brisk 5- to 10-minute walk brought us to the Lamb, a partly thatched pub dating from the 17th century which appears to be the main dining pub in town, with the added benefit of a large car park. This is a free house but seems to source its real ales from Fuller's, with London Pride, the seasonal Jack Frost and Gale's Seafarers being available. A half of Seafarers slipped down well, and as with the Swan, none of these ales are available elsewhere in Wantage. I found the pub rather gloomy, but it's probably a nice atmosphere for couples enjoying a meal – something we just didn't have time for.

No real ale was found in the Cellar Bar or the Blue Boar, both being run by Greene King, and we also gave another GK pub, the Bell, a miss. It was time to end our tour at another Good Beer Guide "must", the Royal Oak – just a five-minute walk from Market Square. Paul Hexter and his wife Frankie have now run the pub for no fewer than 33 years, and he must be one of the few landlords with a beer named after him – Dr Hexter's Healer (5%), from West Berkshire Brewery. The brewery does in fact provide three of the four regular ales (the other is Wadworth 6X), but Paul is not in fact a doctor. The nickname was bestowed upon him long ago when regulars had a habit of telling him their troubles, and probably still do so today. Dr Hexter's Wedding Ale (4%) is self-explanatory.

Maggs' Magnificent Mild (3.8%)

and the seasonal Yule Fuel (4.3%) were also in evidence from West Berkshire, along with a formidable guest list which on this occasion included Dark Star's Revelation (5.7%) and Hophead (3.8%), Cassock (%) , Butts' Honey Munster (4.5%) and Dray Bells (4.1%), a new Christmas ale by Wadworth. Healer and Magnificent Mild were duly sampled and found excellent. Up to nine guest ales are available, but this is an insignificant number compared to up to 30 real ciders and perries – the pub is a regular finalist, and past winner, of CAMRA's National Cider Pub of the Year contest. We had been pleased to find the Shoulder's real ales capped at £3.50 a pint, but at the Royal Oak they were all under £3 and mainly £2.70 or £2.60. What great value.

This is a pub you could spend all day in – so it's probably just as well that it's open evenings only, plus lunchtimes at weekends. As we made our way home, we reflected that while Wantage has two magnificent real ale pubs, there are also a few others worth visiting – and we hadn't had time to see the Abingdon Arms or Lord Nelson, outside the town centre.

We had found over 30 real ales, with only one available at more than one pub – and for a town the size of Wantage, that's truly impressive. With an X30 bus every half hour from/to Oxford (not evenings), and an hourly 31 service via Abingdon from/to Oxford all day, there's no excuse not to visit.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**





# 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!



6 Alfred Street, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX1 4EH  
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# Brewery News

## Hook Norton

Following the launch of January Joker (a 4% golden hop beer) and Double Stout (4.8%) to start the year, its specials are the Rugby-themed Nice Try (3.8%) for February, a bronze ale described as “easy drinking”; and Hop to It for March, a light 3.8% ale made with Challenger and Jester hops, and Maris Otter malt. For more on Hook Norton, see feature on page 15.

## Little Ox

Little Ox has been set up in the Oxfordshire village of Freeland and uses a 10-barrel brewing system acquired from Northumberland. Head brewer Ian Hemingway has a history of home brewing over thirty years and he has been inspired by new hop varieties and affordable equipment to set up a business. Its first beers are Wipeout, a 4.2% American Pale Ale; Odd Bod, a 4% premium bitter; and Filthy Rich, a 5% chocolate and coffee porter.



## Loddon

Penny Pond Porter (5%), being brewed for the first time in five years, was the first special beer of 2017. It is described as “overflowing with rich, roasty malt and balanced with plenty of Golding and First Gold hops, to create a full-bodied and satisfying ale”.



## Shotover

Set up by Ed and Pip Murray in 2009, the company that brews Prospect, Scholar, Trinity and Porter ales at Manor Farm in Horspath, near Oxford, has changed hands. The Murrays have sold it to friends the Ross family while head brewer Mattias Sjöberg and his assistant Jamie O'Sullivan maintain continuity. A new beer, Hoptric, is being launched, and Shotover expected to brew its one millionth pint early in 2017.

## Tap Social Movement

This unusual new operation based on the Curtis Industrial Estate at Botley, Oxford, aims to help ex-offenders into work and has the slogan “criminally good beer”. The company’s founders say: “Having worked closely with so many people who have been through the system we know that

there is so much talent and potential that is going to waste. Tap Social Movement Ltd. was founded in an attempt to stop this vicious cycle by providing opportunities which set people up for long-term fulfilling employment.

“We have worked closely with prisons HMP Spring Hill and YO1 Cookham Wood whose staff and inmates have shaped our direction and ethos. We have developed exciting work experience and training programmes in brewing and business start-up for people currently serving prison sentences.”

Its first efforts are bottled beers called Good Size Eh?, an American pale ale; Grebe’s Procession, an oatmeal stout; Bigboy Pants, a Belgian sour beer; and Bleeding Heart Numbskulls Cranberry and Thyme (5.5%). A bottle shop and function space are planned.

## Vale/ABC

FitzRoy (4%), a traditional English Best Bitter with a subtle hop finish, is the first special ale of the year, named after Vice Admiral Robert FitzRoy who developed accurate weather predictions for the safety of shipping and fishermen.

Donne (a 3.8% Ruby Red ale) was inspired by John Donne’s famous poem from 1624 “No man is an island”. Combining European hops and strong roast malt flavours, it will be followed by Hooke, a 4.3% Straw Yellow ale, named after Robert Hooke, an important English architect of his

time.

The Brewery Shop in Brill (HP18 9TY) is open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm and Saturday 9.30am-11.30am, selling a wide selection of foreign bottled beers, wines and ciders.

Aylesbury Brewhouse Co, Vale's sister brand, is also pressing on with many special ales.

S\*M\*A\*S\*H is a 4.3% pale beer made with a single malt (Maris Otter) and a single hop, Simcoe. Inertia is a 4.1 % traditional copper bitter described as "nothing mad, weird, or over the top but just a good old pint of ale". Supersymmetry (4.4%) is described as "a well-balanced beer with a sensational blend of hops and malts".

The dining area at the Hop Pole pub in Aylesbury looks into the ABC Brewhouse, where the beer at the bar was made just the other side of the glass – you can't get more locally produced than that!

## White Horse

Three new beers available this year from the Stanford-in-the-Vale brewery are Show Pony RPA (4.5%) described as red, crisp, hoppy and rich; CRAZY Horse IPA (4.7% – "clean, hoppy, punchy and crisp"); and Pferdestarke (German for horsepower) Pils at 4.6%, made with pilsner malt and German hops.

White Horse – whose beers can always be found at a pub it leases in Oxford, the Royal Blenheim – has also invested in its brewery shop where items for sale include tee-shirts, sweatshirts and presentation

baskets of its bottled ales, including pump clips.

Its regular cask ales include White Horse Bitter, Village Idiot and Wayland Smithy.



## Wychwood

The main news for February is the launch of Brakspear Jerusalem, to be followed in March by Wychwood Pinhead, an oatmeal stout. Jerusalem is a 3.8% traditional English Amber ale that has a dry biscuity flavour. Slipping into Six Nations mode, Wychwood adds that this is "complemented by a smooth bitterness from a ruck of the sturdy English hops. Post-match analysis? It's definitely worth a try."

## XT

The annual special for 2017 is XT -17, part of an evolving range of single hop special beers. The base has a red rye malty backbone, giving a very light pale red colour and a hint of tartness from the rye. Onto this base a changing run of single hop additions will be carefully blended. The first brew is the Kazbek, a spicy and lemony flavoured Czech hop.

XT-Jester Experimental: English hop growers are developing new hop varieties and XT has been selected to work on this project by brewing experimental beers. The varieties are still in development, are only available to the partner brewers and only have code names. The first of the new variety beers uses CF125 – if this sells well, then the variety will be moved to large scale production and given a more catchy name.

Animal KIWI is a very pale NZPA showcasing what New Zealand has to offer. Brewed with NZ Hops, generous lashings of Green Bullet and Wakatu added during the boil paired with Motueka and Wai-iti dry-hop additions, the beer has layers of hop characteristics and flavours to enjoy. Lemon, Lime Zest, Mandarin, Raisin and Vanilla all come to the party with floral notes dancing throughout. This cold fermented, dry beer is for the hop lover who wants a taste of Down Under. Animal MONKEY, a Triple Hopped Pale Amber ale, uses hops from the US, Europe and NZ, added at three different stages during the boil and then dry hopped. XT is also adding to its range of keg beers.



# Down Memory Lane

What was the Oxford pubs scene like 40 years ago, when the real ale revival was only just getting into its stride? **Dave Richardson** looks back



**ABOVE FROM TOP:** Paradise House, now the Castle Tavern and recently acquired by Hook Norton; The Kings Arms

**OPPOSITE:** The Bear was already known for its collection of ties by 1977

**BASS WORTHINGTON.** Charrington. Courage. Gale's. Ind Coope. Mitchells & Butlers. Usher's. Whitbread. And, of course, Morland and Morrells. All brewers that are gone, if not forgotten – but very much part of the Oxford pub scene in 1977.

And then there were the pubs long since gone, or renamed: the Albion, the Anchor, the Apollo and the Bulldog, for example. But some breweries are still in business, including Hook Norton and Wadworth, while Morland, Brakspear and Young's live on as brands but not as independent breweries.

By the early 1970s, when CAMRA was formed, most breweries had phased out real ale in favour of mass produced and tasteless kegs, Watneys Red Barrel and Whitbread Tankard being two of the most infamous examples. But CAMRA mobilised public resistance and the tide started to turn, and by 1977 Oxford and Bath were considered such good places for real ale that they were the first city visited by a Rail Ale Ramble, when a special train from London carrying nearly 600 passengers arrived on 1 October 1977.

I wrote about the 40th anniversary of Rail Ale Rambles in the last Oxford Drinker (December-January edition), and organiser Crookham Travel is still going strong although groups are smaller nowadays, and travel on regular rather than special trains. CAMRA's Oxford



branch provided a guide to city pubs and beers for participants on that first tour, and what follows is taken from that.

"Like many other towns, Oxford is experiencing a dramatic increase in the number of pubs selling real ale," says the guide. "In the past 18 months pubs owned by Morrells, Morland, Courage and Ind Coope have changed back."

Morrells, whose Lion Brewery in St Thomas Street operated for over 250 years before closing in 1998, was then the dominant local name operating many of the pubs, many of which were sold off to Greene King a few years after the closure. The Wheatsheaf (which survives independently) is one of the Morrells pubs mentioned in the guide, which adds: "Morrells' newest pub, the Pennyfarthing, which serves draught bitter, is to be found in a new concrete shopping centre, the Westgate. A complete contrast behind the Westgate Centre is another Morrells pub, the Paradise House, a spartan one-bar local where a good pint of bitter is assured."

The Pennyfarthing went on to become the Parrot, various night-spots and a lap dancing

club, while the Paradise House became the Castle Tavern and was recently acquired by Hook Norton. The special train's passengers were also directed towards other Morrells pubs including the Queen's Arms (now the Lighthouse) and the Old Tom, which retains its original name.

Abingdon brewery Morland, like Morrells, dates from the 18th century but closed in 2000 when bought by Greene King, which continues to brew an ale called Morlands Original. In the 1990s Morland acquired many more pubs from Courage and Whitbread, some remaining part of Greene King today, and the famous Morlands Artist tiled sign can still be found in the brickwork of some buildings that have long ceased to be pubs. An example is the Apollo, opposite the police station in St Aldate's, now used as a student refectory. Other Morlands pubs mentioned in the 1977 guide included the Waterman's Arms in Osney, now the Punter.

Some famous pubs of 40 years ago are thankfully still very much in business, but under different ownership. The Bear was an Ind Coope pub that is now run by Fuller's, as was the White Horse, now owned by Mitchells & Butlers which was then a brewery, but is now only a pub company. The King's Arms was then a free house and is now owned by Young's, another former brewery and now pub company whose beers are brewed by Charles Wells. The Turf Tavern, once run by Hall's, is now owned by Greene King but with a good range of guest ales, as at the King's Arms.

Of the 25 city centre pubs listed in the 1977 guide, six have closed and been converted to other uses, ranging from student accommodation to the Wagamama noodle restaurant (formerly the Roebuck). Other pubs that have been renamed include St Aldate's Tavern (then the Bulldog), the White Rabbit (then the Gloucester Arms) and Eurobar (then the Welsh Pony), but 10 pubs that are still trading retain their original names. Several new pubs have opened, mainly in the last 10 years – including two by Wetherspoon (the Swan and Castle, and Four Candles), O'Neill's, the Wig and Pen and, more recently, Pint Shop.

The guide's brewery notes also make interesting reading. Brakspear of Henley (the brand lives on in Wychwood brewery, Witney) was lauded as "one of Britain's outstanding real ale breweries", while Hook Norton's beers were described as "distinctive, unspoilt and very English". The larger breweries generally were less acclaimed,

although Ind Coope's Burton Ale was described as "sweet and full bodied". Courage Directors (another brand still existing under different ownership) was regarded as "potent and of singular flavour", whereas Whitbread's PA was described as "thin and insipid", and Usher's PA (part of Watney Mann) as "thin and bland".

Overall, the train's 600 merry passengers were able to sample around 15 real ales from 11 breweries, whereas today you might find a hundred or more real ales around the city from around half that number of breweries. How things have changed – for the better!

My book *Oxford Pubs* relates the history and present day ambience of over 40 hosteleries in the city. To order visit [www.oxfordpubhistory.co.uk](http://www.oxfordpubhistory.co.uk)

For more on Rail Ale Rambles, visit [www.crookhamtravel.co.uk](http://www.crookhamtravel.co.uk)

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Oxford CAMRA city pub of the year  
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**2016**



[www.themasonsarmshq.co.uk](http://www.themasonsarmshq.co.uk)





# Brewery Focus: Hook Norton

**Dave Richardson** reports on one of the oldest names still brewing, and how innovations are carrying it forward

**TRADITION IS** A word which, you might think, describes everything that Hook Norton Brewery does. It is still brewing today on the same site where it started over 160 years ago, and it still has a working steam engine to supply power and a stud of shire horses that can be seen pulling drays. It doesn't matter that the steam engine is only fired up occasionally or that most of the beer is delivered by lorry – what matters is that “Hooky”, as it's often known, respects and builds on its heritage.

Situated in a north Oxfordshire village of the same name between Chipping Norton and Banbury, the brewery faces an increasing number of competitors keen to capitalise on the public's thirst for craft ales be they cask, keg, bottled or canned. But tradition only gets you so far, and in the last couple of years Hook Norton has

started producing keg beers as well as a range of limited production beers using its own micro-brewery within the original building.

Hook Norton's take-over of the Castle Tavern in Oxford at the end of last year was a welcome development, meaning a guaranteed outlet for its beers in the city for the first time. When it re-opens in May, a few months before the much expanded Westgate Centre opens just across the road, you'll be able to sample up to eight real ales and other craft beers not only from this brewery, but local guest ales too.



## HOOK NORTON BREWERY



**ABOVE FROM TOP:** Inside the Victorian brewhouse; original copper vessels; the brewery museum

The story began in 1849 when John Harris bought a farm in Hook Norton that included a Malthouse. Brewing started in 1856 with the first pub being acquired three years later. The Pear Tree Inn, close to the brewery, was acquired in 1869 and the brewery expanded rapidly at the end of the 19th century. The brewery stands on the site of the original farm and is thought to be finest surviving example of a Victorian tower brewery. The very simple (and ecologically sound) principle behind a tower brewery is that all the ingredients are either carried or pumped to the top, and come down by gravity.

Another link with tradition is that Hook Norton has been in the same family throughout its existence – no mean feat when it's had to weather periods of huge upheaval in the brewing industry. Many family firms were taken over, often by asset stripping giants who then closed them down, while sometimes continuing to brew beers with the original name. Hook Norton's managing director James Clarke joined at the age of 20 in 1991, and is the great-great-grandson of the founder, Alban Clarke being a nephew of John Harris. Some of James's four sons have already worked at the brewery, so a sixth generation of the family might one day take over.

To visit the brewery today – as over 20,000 a year do on brewery tours operating daily except Sundays (£14.50/£12 over-60s) – is to not only soak up tradition and of course a few beers, but to see a business with a modern outlook and

strong branding too. The visitor centre and shop in the old maltings is being expanded, with a second bar in the cellar now available for functions, and plans for a restaurant. The museum on the upper floor covers the village generally as well as the brewery.

Tours cover each floor of the adjacent tower, and also visit the shire horses in their stable. The horses usually deliver to village pubs on Thursdays and Fridays, and also attend special events by arrangement.

The micro-brewery on the ground floor of the tower is a self-contained space where all kinds of "crafty" brews (limited to 20 72-pint firkin barrels) can be tried out, and this is where "brew your own beer" days are held at a cost of £500 per party. These days are proving popular prior to weddings (about three weeks before the event) and include a personalised pump clip and two firkins of beer to take away.

Traditionalist real ale drinkers needn't worry about the new developments, as about 80% of output is still cask ale, with Hooky bitter (3.5%) and Old Hooky (4.6%) being the best-known brands, brewed entirely with British hops. Hooky Mild is still produced at a flavoursome 2.8% -- a very low ABV by today's standards – but the fourth core real ale has changed. The copper ale Lion is no longer part of the core range but will appear as a special – the new core ale is Hooky Gold at 4.1%.

"We started brewing Gold as a

seasonal ale back in May last year, but demand has been so great that we have been brewing it ever since," says marketing manager Mark Graham. "We are still brewing Mild and about a third of the nearly 40 pubs in our estate take it on, but not many pubs take Mild for free trade sales.

"We are now producing a seasonal ale every month, and with our micro-brewery we can try all sorts of ingredients to respond to changing tastes. We might do a Black IPA or a honey beer, for example."

Kepping equipment – injecting carbon dioxide into beer to give it a gassy taste and longer shelf life – was installed about two years ago, and three so-called craft kegs are now part of the core range, these being Red Rye (4.7%), Cotswold Pale (4.4%) and Merula Stout (4.2%). Craft kegs are a rapidly growing market that few brewers can afford to ignore, being especially popular among younger drinkers.

"Cask and keg ales will be available in the Castle in Oxford, but it won't be a weird and wonderful bar like some of the new ones that have opened there," says Mark.

"With about 1,500 breweries operating in Britain we certainly face a lot of competition, but about 200 of them are probably one-man-in-a-shed operations and the quality can vary greatly from brew to brew. But we do expect the growth in breweries to plateau, and some large pub companies have indicated they will no longer deal with

breweries that haven't been through an independent auditing process."

Micro-breweries do, however, enjoy significant tax breaks that put small to medium-sized breweries such as Hook Norton at a disadvantage, squeezed between the micros on one hand and the giants on the other. But Mark says Hook Norton is not chasing volume sales, and is deriving significant revenue through its shop, tours, special events and business meetings, which can be held either in its cellar bar or boardroom.

"We're keen to make the brewery more of a destination in its own right," he explains. "We may do pop-up pubs to lift the brand, and are always looking for opportunities to develop our pub estate. We will do about 50 outside events this year, from farmers' markets to the Cornbury music festival, and we also did Countryside Live at Blenheim Palace. There's definitely an appetite for real ale at festivals – to have a pub experience in the middle of a field.

"Because we've been around for so long, that is not a reason for people to buy your product. We are always looking to do things a bit differently – tradition, but with a modern twist."

To read more about Hook Norton's heritage or to book a brewery tour, visit [www.hooky.co.uk](http://www.hooky.co.uk)

The Castle Tavern in Oxford is expected to re-open by the beginning of May.



**CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE**

# Oxford Branch Diary

## Thursday 2 March Branch AGM

7.00pm

In the Blue Room, St Aldate's Tavern, St Aldate's, Oxford OX1 1BU

Note that this is not the usual day for a meeting

## Saturday 11 March Beer Festival Helpers' Trip

Coach trip to Bath for all those who helped at the Oxford Beer & Cider Festival. Some guest places may be available for £10.

Departs Abingdon at 09.30 and Oxford Railway Station at 10.00. Contact Steve Lawrence to book your seat.

## Saturday 18 March Branch Social

1.00pm

Social gathering at the Wantage Beer Festival (see advert on back page)



# Pub News

## Abingdon

**BROAD FACE:** Eight hand pumps have been provided at this town centre pub since its re-opening last year, signalling that it intends to be a serious player on the town's very competitive real ale scene. It is also happy to allow you to taste before you buy. Brightly decorated and welcoming, the pub is Greene King-owned with Belhaven brewing its own in-house brand Prison Break Bitter (3.9%) – the pub being across the road from the Old Gaol. A visit before Christmas found two former Champion Beers of Britain available – Timothy Taylor Boltmaker (the 2014 winner) and Tiny Rebel's Cwtch (2015). Also available on this occasion were Morland Original, Wadworth Bishop's Tipple, West Berkshire's Good Old Boy, and Adnams Longboat. A visit in mid-January found Prison Break, Longboat and Good Old Boy still available, but others had changed. These were Barn Owl's Golden Gozzard (brewed just a few miles away), Timothy Taylor Landlord, Greene King Yardbird, St Austell Proper Job and Sadler's One Stop Hop.

## Beckley

**ABINGDON ARMS:** The community buy-out of the pub from Brakspear was finalised in late January, and it is now seeking a tenant prior to refurbishment and re-opening (see Graham Shelton's column on page 25). The Beckley & Area Community Benefit Society has recruited over 270 shareholders and raised £480,000 – evidence that this village just to the east of Oxford is serious about saving its only pub. More information at [www.savetheabingdonarms.org](http://www.savetheabingdonarms.org)

## Eynsham

**QUEEN'S HEAD:** Fears that the Admiral Taverns pub might close following Peter Jones's retirement after 33 years have proved unfounded, as it has been taken over by Julie Burness with her husband Peter, daughter Louise, granddaughter Imogen and son Sam. The Burness family has not run a pub before but used to run the Post Office at Wytham, near Oxford.

*Reader Garth Caine writes: This was my first visit in many years to the Queen's Head, but I knew from my drinking partner it had just changed hands. What a pleasant surprise as it was a light, airy and clutter-free pub with a warm, friendly atmosphere. After being made very welcome by Julie and Louise, I tried a pint from the pump in front of me – the other pumps being in the snug bar – the ubiquitous Doom Bar, and after that I tried Fuller's London Pride, these two are the regular ales along with two guest beers. Both were excellent, crisp and clear. Pub grub is available with good sized portions and good value. Both bars have fireplaces to keep you warm, and there is a large garden. The outside Gents have now been replaced with Ladies, with Gents and disabled toilets indoors. As a disabled person myself I was very pleased to find the Queen's Head is totally disabled friendly, and chairs will be moved to allow wheelchair access if required. This pub is definitely on my 'go back to' list."*

**SWAN HOTEL:** The 18th century, Grade II-listed hotel is listed as for sale on various websites, only two years after the present owners took over the lease. It features a Thai restaurant.

## Gosford

**BROAD FACE:** The pub, owned by Mitchells & Butlers, has lost its Harvester branding and is now a Miller & Carter steak house.

## Oxford

**ANGEL & GREYHOUND:** Popular management couple Richard and Katherine Gibson have surprisingly decided to quit after nearly 14 years at this Young's pub in St Clement's, and have decided to take a career break while considering what to do next. The couple, who have three children under 14, met while working at the King's Arms in Oxford in 1995, moving to London in 1997 for training in management before returning to Oxford in 2003. Richard – who was due to leave on 23 January – said he did not expect any major changes when a new manager takes over. The pub serves four Young's real ales plus a guest, which is often Purity's Mad Goose.

**BEERD:** It was business as usual at the former Grapes in George Street into the New Year, despite fears it might close after Bath Ales, now part of St Austell Brewery, announced it was giving up the lease. A new leaseholder is being sought and City Pub Company – which runs St Aldates Tavern and also the George Street Social bar – being one of the names mentioned. Beerd sells mainly craft kegs bit had four real ales in January, two by Bath Ales and two by Wild Weather.

**CASTLE TAVERN:** Hook Norton is the surprise new owner of this city centre pub, having finally realised its ambition to own a pub in Oxford more than 150 years

after establishing its first pubs. It has bought the pub freehold, and the Castle was due to close at the end of January for a major revamp before re-opening by May. The pub is adjacent to the Westgate Centre, which will be a hive of activity when the much expanded retail complex opens in November, and also close the Castle Quarter. Latterly trading as a gay pub (the other main gay pub, the Jolly Farmers, is just around the corner on Paradise Street), the Castle will welcome all customers when it re-opens and may be renamed. Built in mock Tudor style in 1892, its other names have included the Paradise House and Culture Vulture before reverting to Castle. A basement space will become a function room, including regular events which may involve other breweries. Joint tenants are Jem Morey and Anthony Murray, who also run Hook Norton's Ye Olde Reindeer Inn in Banbury. For more on Hook Norton, see feature on page 15.



**CORNER HOUSE:** The tenancy is being advertised as for sale by New River Retail, which acquired it from Marston's. New River Retail has a reputation for selling off pubs to developers, including convenience stores, with the Co-op said to be interested. But in a national agreement with CAMRA, the Co-op has agreed to consult and seek planning permission if it intends to develop pub sites.

**ISIS FARMHOUSE:** Advertised as sold subject to contract by estate agency Fleurets, one of Oxford's oddest pubs is set to change hands. Asking price was £1 million with annual sales of £480,000, with potential for sales growth as it opens only three or four days a week. The free house, which typically has one real ale available straight from the barrel, is not accessible by road but only via the Thames-side path, and is near Iffley lock.

**SOMERSET:** A determined local group is trying to save this closed pub in Marston Road from demolition and redevelopment. The pub was run down for a few years and failed financially, and has been bought by what the group thinks is a consortium of developers. Group member Susannah Wilson says: "They are not being up-front about plans and have been talking about re-opening it for a couple of years and nothing has happened. The same group we believe has demolished and built flats on other pub sites."

"The Somerset is different, however. It is an inter-war suburban pub with a long history; it's also the last pub in Marston (apart from Old Marston) and I think five others have now gone. There is also considerable local opposition to the loss of our last pub. We are a very committed group, and successfully listed it as an Asset of Community Value in 2015. It's never going to be an old fashioned pub, but the people who run the Rusty Bicycle, Jacobs and Field, and the Chester have said they think it's definitely a viable site for a mixed business, a pub which sells food and is a bit of a café during the day. So there would definitely also be a place for a good old fashioned pint. We

are also thinking of setting up a pop-up pub in local premises."

To join a Google group fighting to re-open the pub, email [susannahwilson@gmail.com](mailto:susannahwilson@gmail.com)

**UNIVERSITY CLUB:** Bar Manager Kabi Puliyadi has left his post to take up a role at Kellogg College. In his time at the University Club, Kabi has built up a great reputation for the quality and range of real ales on sale. The bar will now be run by Jamie Laughton, who has worked there for more than a year and has previously worked at the Oxford Retreat and Jericho Tavern.

## Wheatley

**SUN INN:** Villagers are in the dark about the future of this former Punch Taverns pub, which closed last year amid promises that it would re-open under new ownership. With the Railway also closed, Wheatley is down to three pubs while popular real ale pub the Cricketer's Arms, in nearby Littleworth, is for sale.

## Witney

**YE OLDE CROSS KEYS:** Reader Douglas Rudlin has written in to say that this pub was actually the birthplace of Brakspear Bitter, rather than Henley-on-Thames where it later became established. "It was born in the Cross Keys inn in Witney in 1769, so no wonder it tastes more like the original (if anybody remembers what it tasted like that long ago!) as its move from Henley to Wychwood brewery in Witney was back to its birthplace," explains Douglas. Meanwhile, the Greene King-owned pub has announced that it no longer accepts CAMRA Wetherspoon discount vouchers.

# 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)

Wednesday 22 - Saturday 25 February

## National Winter Ales Festival

St Andrews & Blackfriars Hall, St Andrews Hall Plain, Norwich

Includes Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition  
[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 24 - Saturday 25 February

## Merton Beer Festival

Merton Village Hall, Islip Road, Merton, nr Bicester

Wednesday 8 - Friday 10 March

## London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London

150 beers, ciders & perries  
[www.northlondon.camra.org.uk](http://www.northlondon.camra.org.uk)

Friday 17 - Saturday 18 March

## Coventry Beer Festival

Coventry Rugby Football Ground, Butts Park Arena, Butts Road, Coventry

80 beers, ciders & perries  
[www.coventry.camra.org.uk](http://www.coventry.camra.org.uk)

Friday 17 - Saturday 18 March

## Wantage Beer Festival

The Beacon Arts & Leisure Centre, Portway, Wantage

28 beers plus ciders & perries  
[www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk](http://www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk)

Friday 17 - Saturday 18 March

## Winchester Real Ale and Cider Festival

Winchester Guildhall, The Broadway, Winchester

70 beers, ciders & perries  
[www.winchesterbeerfestival.org.uk](http://www.winchesterbeerfestival.org.uk)

Wednesday 22 March - Sunday 2 April

## Wetherspoon Real Ale Festival

All JD Wetherspoon pubs & Lloyds No1 bars

[www.jdwetherspoon.com](http://www.jdwetherspoon.com)

Friday 14 - Monday 17 April

## Black Horse Beer Festival

Faringdon Road, Gozzard's Ford, nr Abingdon

01865 390530  
[www.the-blackhorse.co.uk](http://www.the-blackhorse.co.uk)

Friday 21 - Sunday 23 April

## Spring Beer & Cider Festival

The Brewery Tap, Ock Street, Abingdon

01235 521655

[www.thebrewerytap.net](http://www.thebrewerytap.net)  
*Please check dates with the pub as these are not yet confirmed.*

Friday 28 - Sunday 30 April

## Spring Beer Festival

The Nag's Head, Bridge Street, Abingdon

01235 524516  
[www.thenagsheadonthethames.co.uk](http://www.thenagsheadonthethames.co.uk)

Saturday 29 April

## Witney Beer Festival

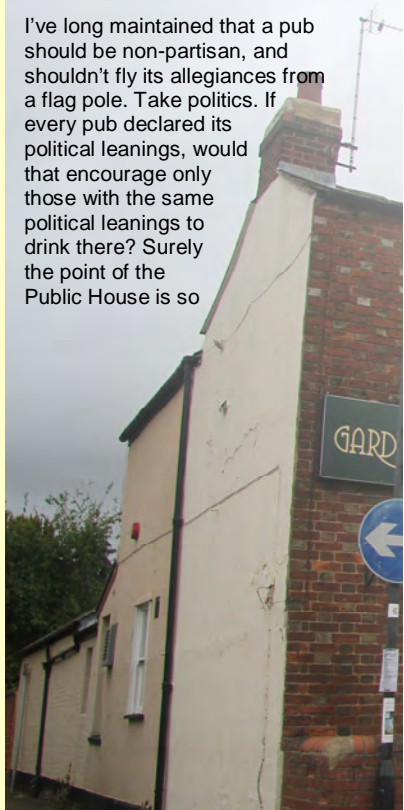
St Mary's Church, Church Green, Witney

One day beer festival, opens at 12.

[www.witneybeerfestival.com](http://www.witneybeerfestival.com)

**HAVE YOU EVER** considered the word "pub"? What it means? We say it all the time, and as a publican I probably say it more than you, but maybe not. Pub. Public House. You say it enough times and you stop thinking about its meaning. Like The Beatles. Probably the best band ever, but with one of the worst names in history, but we've said it so often we don't think about the terrible pun it's based on -- but I digress. It's like remembering that Public House literally means a house for the public, for everyone. Somewhere for everyone to go.

I've long maintained that a pub should be non-partisan, and shouldn't fly its allegiances from a flag pole. Take politics. If every pub declared its political leanings, would that encourage only those with the same political leanings to drink there? Surely the point of the Public House is so





# Gardeners' World

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

that different ideas, be they political or otherwise, get a chance to be aired in public, meet other ideas and be challenged, or changed, or confirmed. Of course, a landlord isn't expected to be non-partisan. We are, after all, members of the public as well.

That's not to say people can say whatever they like in a pub. There will always be some ideas that won't be tolerated. I've barred people for expressing their stupid racist, homophobic or sexist views. Because (a) that sort of thing just shouldn't be tolerated and (b) it's a Public House, for the public, which as we've agreed, means everyone. At least everyone who isn't a narrow minded idiot.

This idea of the Public House being for the public is the same

idea as the pub serving as a hub for the community, a place for people to meet up and chat. And this is a very important idea, not just for keeping me in business, but for you as well. Last year CAMRA commissioned a study from the University Of Oxford's Department of Experimental Psychology into the role of the pub in a community. The study makes for fascinating reading, but its conclusions are even more fascinating. Most regulars to a pub would tell you of the benefits of getting out of the house and meeting friends, but now we have a study that scientifically backs this up as well.

The study found that people who regularly patronise community pubs have more close friends and are more satisfied with their lives.

Community pub goers tend to drink less than those who use large city centre pubs, and this moderate alcohol consumption improves cognitive ability as well as enabling us to build friendships and a sense of community and wellbeing. And we all need a sense of community now more than ever, as understanding and knowing our neighbours is going to get pretty essential if we don't want to end up in even more of a mess than we are in. Do you think Donald Trump knows his neighbours? Not a chance. (I know I said a pub should be non-partisan, but I just want it on the record that Donald Trump is barred here, because, well, some behaviour won't be tolerated).

What's really heartening about the study's findings is that CAMRA and local online service Ami felt it was worth being proactive about. This Christmas CAMRA and Ami partnered up to help people connect with their community through an event held at the Chequers, the aim being to bring people together to make new friends. You can find out more about Ami's great work at [www.withami.co.uk](http://www.withami.co.uk)

So the next time you go to your local, you're doing more than just supporting the pub, you're supporting yourself, your cognitive abilities, your community and your sense of wellbeing. Now that's worth drinking to!



# Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** goes on a Cowley Crawl

**I WAS LOOKING** forward to finding a few hidden gems on my visit to the Cowley area of Oxford. It is perhaps unfortunate that, unless you are a resident there, you are possibly unlikely to visit this conurbation, synonymous with car production, as there are so many good pubs to be found nearer the more accessible central part of the city.

Under-utilisation is, perhaps, one of the myriad reasons we continue to see pubs closing at the rate of 25 per week, according to current CAMRA statistics.

My first call was the Marsh Harrier, Marsh Road. First impressions were not great as there was a foreboding sign attached to the wall inviting people to contact the agent for those seeking a potential investment opportunity, this latter phrase being a euphemism for a pub likely to be sold and converted to alternative use. I was met by the landlord, Jimmy Hoxha, who had only assumed the Fuller's tenancy less than a month ago which, thankfully, answered my initial concern. Jimmy told me he had managed the Red Lion, Islip hitherto so he has experience.

The pub interior is full of timeless charm with a wooden bar and coat hooks underneath it, and a brass bell to call time; a brass bust of a Marsh Harrier (a bird of prey) is also featured. Customers are mostly local residents, teachers and the local business fraternity.

It serves a revolving guest and two permanent beers, Fuller's

London Pride and Seafarers, and I chose the latter which was in good condition. Seafarers has a golden colour and glistening amber hue, and can't really be considered either dark or light. Despite its deep tone the clarity is perfect and its head, which sits atop the beer like a clump of mashed potatoes, is smooth and steady. Most enjoyable.

Jimmy plans to offer a combination of tapas, Italian and English food from the end of January and the pub looks to have a brighter future similar to the eponymously named bird of prey, which faced extinction about 40 years ago but is now re-inhabiting the British countryside.

The pub certainly has a local feel about it with various pub games available and a selection of books to read in this back street of Cowley. I am looking forward to a return visit and may even hold one of our monthly CAMRA branch meetings at this attractive, quaint pub.

Next on my list was the Cricketers Arms, owned by Greene King, at the bottom of Temple Cowley Road. This is a typical sports bar offering Sky TV, pool and darts with two real ales available – Greene King IPA and Ruddles Best Bitter. I chose the latter, a clear, amber coloured beer with a thin white head, aroma and taste of caramel, biscuity malts, fruit and subtle spicy hops. The pub has a strong local following and numerous cups can be seen above the bar recording support for sponsorship of football, pool and darts.



**ABOVE:** Templars Bar and Kitchen is new in Cowley Centre; The Marsh Harrier at Cowley Marsh

**NEXT PAGE:** The revitalised Jolly Postboys in Florence Park

A short walk to the periphery of Templars Square Shopping Centre took me to my next pub, which is the newly opened Templars Bar and Kitchen – a former Post Office and fish and chip shop. The definition of “pop up pub” would best describe this free house, which competes with the adjacent Wetherspoon (the William Morris). It is competitively priced on both beer and food offerings with Greene King IPA at £1.50 per pint. I opted for the ubiquitous Fuller’s London Pride, although I could have gone for the Templars House Ale which I was informed is by Hook Norton. For those with a sweet tooth, free chocolates are available on the bar.

I had a chat with the owners Pam and Ron who told me that the pub was not viable as a fish and chip shop but is proving popular with locals who like the cheaply priced beer. For those who enjoy tropical fish there is a huge aquarium in the seating area which provides a chill factor away from the hustle and bustle of the nearby shopping centre.

During a career spanning in excess of 20 years Pam has managed various Oxford pubs including the Berkshire, the White House and the Duke of Monmouth. I wished them well in their new venture before a short walk took me to my next venue, the Jolly Postboys in Florence Park Road.

This pub has been completely transformed since the new team arrived, consisting of Paddy Henderson, Jade Konz, and George Harwood-Dallyn, who

took over last year. It was in a poor old state, Paddy told me, and badly in need of renovation. Paddy had previously spent two years running the Chester in Chester Street, whilst his colleague, Jade, had gained six years’ experience in pub management working alongside top chef Steven Sanderson at the Chequers, Burcot.

The Jolly Postboys really has a funky, friendly, bright and breezy feel about the place and is obviously popular with locals with people enjoying Sunday lunch whilst I was there. It is often said that people make a difference to whether a pub survives and these two individuals, from what I could gather, have bags of passion and commitment – definitely a recipe for success.

Following the acquisition of a lease from Greene King, the pub serves four real ales which include West Berkshire Brewery’s Mr Chubb’s Lunchtime Bitter, and Loose Cannon’s Abingdon Bridge.

These are the permanent beers with two changing guests which are mostly from local breweries such as Shotover or XT.

I opted for Mr Chubb’s which is a beautifully balanced session ale with a refreshing light floral flavour provided by a single variety of English hops. Mr Chubb was the nickname given to the brewery founder’s father, a lock keeper on the River Thames.

I decided to stay for a spot of lunch as the food looked very tempting and I’m very glad I did. I had the slow roasted pork belly stuffed with sage and sausage, which was succulent and served with a selection of roasted vegetables and Savoy cabbage, and a very tasty wine reduction gravy providing bags of flavour.

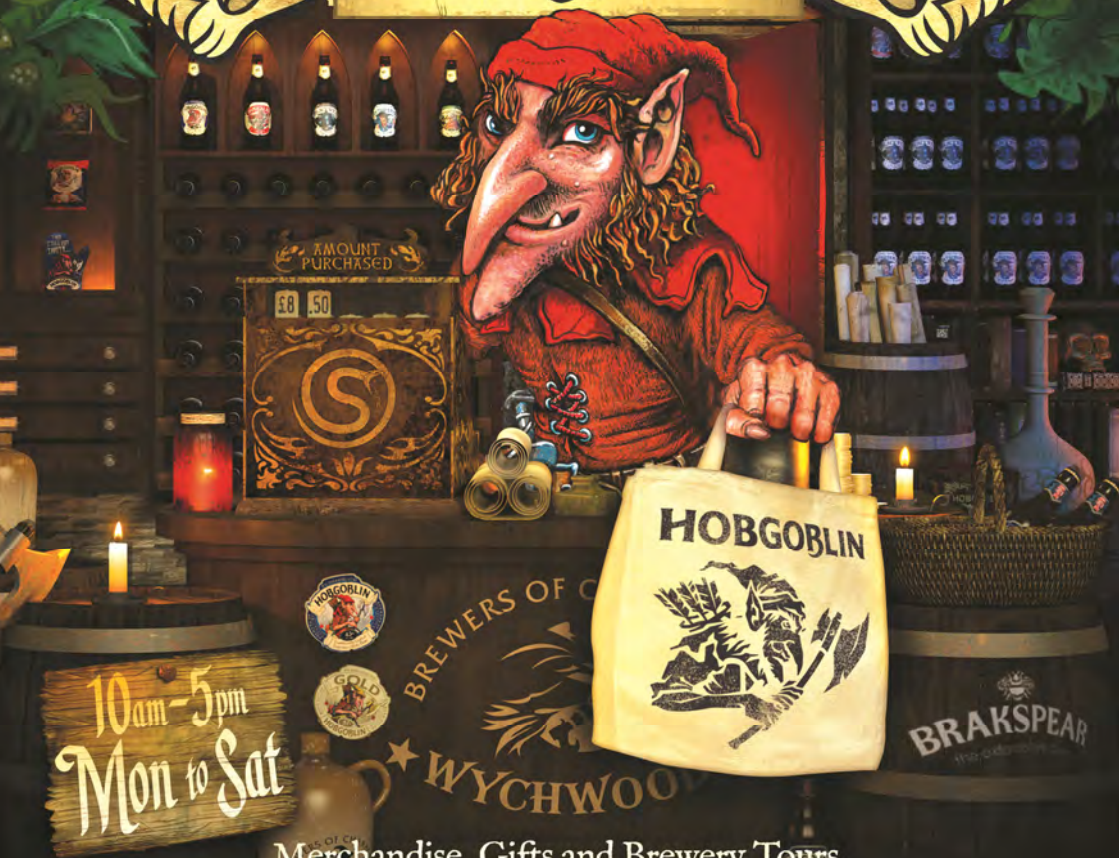
My crawl around some Cowley pubs had been very enjoyable and I had discovered a couple of gems which I hope to revisit with colleagues who can judge for themselves.





# WYCHWOOD BREWERY

## STORE & TOURS



10am-5pm  
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Bottled Beers, Cask Ales and Goodies galore!

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[facebook.com/WychwoodBrewery](https://facebook.com/WychwoodBrewery)

Wychwood Brewery, Eagle Maltings, The Crofts, Witney, Oxon OX28 4DP.

# I'm an apprentice, get me out of here!

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



**ENJOY THE CHRISTMAS** and New Year TV? Personally I've never seen the festive connections of "Can't Pay? We'll Take it Away", "Secret Hoarders" or "Four in a Bed", the last of which definitely over-promises and under-delivers, even with tinsel. Perhaps what we need is more programmes about pubs, but I'd say they are a lot more fun in the flesh than on Christmas TV.

Here in Northmoor we have the most lovely traditional candlelit service of nine lessons and carols on Christmas Eve. We remind ourselves of what it's all about, we sing a few rousing verses of "Joy to the World!", and then we party in each other's houses much longer than we should. On Christmas morning the whole village congregates in the Red Lion to exchange beery Christmas greetings, whiskery kisses and home-made mince pies. I know of no better way to celebrate the joys of living together in such a great community.

We do, of course, think of those less fortunate than ourselves who don't yet have their own

community pubs. My friends in Beckley will have had a quiet time at the Abingdon Arms this year, as it is currently closed. But I am pleased to share with you some really exciting news from Mike Hobbs, the leader of their community buy-out team.

*"Having recruited over 270 shareholding members and raised £480,000 capital, the Beckley & Area Community Benefit Society has exchanged contracts with Brakspear for purchase of The Abingdon Arms, with a planned completion date in late January", writes Mike. "The pub is currently closed. An active advertising programme has been initiated to attract an experienced tenant as soon as possible. Potential applicants can find more information at [www.savetheabingdonarms.org](http://www.savetheabingdonarms.org) or by phoning Mike Hobbs on 07833 676516. Because there will be a time gap before a tenant is in place, essential repairs and remedial work will be undertaken, and the Society is looking into opening a community 'pop-up' pub in the interim. When the tenant is*

*recruited and settling in, there will be a formal opening."*

I can't wait to join in the celebration. Mike and his team tapped into advice from several of the other community pubs now thriving in Oxfordshire, and we all did our best to offer what insight and experience we could to help things along.

Helping others into community pub ownership is turning into a regular pastime here in Northmoor, with people from Berkshire, Kent and some new friends all the way from the Brecon Beacons all asking for input since I last wrote this column.

In my case I always feel rather exposed when offering such advice, not being anything of an expert myself. It seems that the old adage is still true: in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king. But for me, it's more "I'm an apprentice, get me out of here!"

Happy New Year!

## Oxford Branch Contacts:

Chairman  
Pete Flynn  
[chair@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:chair@oxford.camra.org.uk)

Secretary and Branch Contact  
Steve Lawrence  
01235 525436  
[contact@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:contact@oxford.camra.org.uk)

Editor of the Oxford Drinker  
Dave Richardson  
[editor@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxford.camra.org.uk)

**White Horse Branch Contact:**  
[contact@whitehorsecamra.org.uk](mailto:contact@whitehorsecamra.org.uk)

## Oxfordshire Trading Standards Service:

Graham Hill House  
Electric Avenue  
Ferry Hinksey Road  
Oxford OX2 0BY  
Tel: 01865 815000  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)



# LOOSE CANNON

## BREWERY • ABINGDON

  
**LOOSE CANNON**  


---

**• BOMBARD •**  


---

BREWED IN ABINGDON  


---

BIG HOP  
**4.2%**  
FEBRUARY - 2017

  
**LOOSE CANNON**  


---

**• BASILISK •**  


---

BREWED IN ABINGDON  


---

MALTY & MILD  
**4.4%**  
MARCH - 2017

  
**LOOSE CANNON**  


---

**• HOWITZER •**  


---

BREWED IN ABINGDON  


---

LIGHT & CRISP  
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## White Horse Pub News



Stewart and Debbie Bruton (pictured above) have announced that they were to leave the Swan in Faringdon on 30 January, Stewart also being the brewer at Faringdon brewery which is located behind the pub. The Swan is in the 2017 Good Beer Guide and this very sad news for the branch. The Brutons took over the pub five years ago and have transformed it into a thriving pub.

Stanford Social Club in Stanford -in-the-Vale now welcomes CAMRA members, and has two ever-changing real ales with Everards Tiger and Lincoln Green's Little John being recent offers. Open on Monday to Saturday evenings from 8pm-1pm and on Sunday afternoons from 12-6pm, it has its own darts, pool and crib teams. Run entirely by volunteers, the club shows Sky Sports and holds regular theme evenings.

## Brewery Visit

On Saturday 7 January the White Horse branch visited Bingham's brewery located at Tavistock trading estate, Ruscombe Business Park, near Twyford, Berkshire. Chris Bingham founded the brewery in 2010 following extensive training at Hog's Back brewery in Tongham, Surrey.

The brewery is a 10-barrel plant producing a vast selection of cask ales, and is the current Supreme Champion Beer of Britain holder for 2016. This is the first ever time a stout has won the award, and Vanilla

Stout has now also become the top seller for the brewery. The award is proudly displayed in the brewery shop along with several other awards.

The tour including sampling Twyford Tipple (3.7%), Brickworks Bitter (4.2%), Hop Project Citra Cascade (4.5%), Space Hoppy IPA (5%), The Warmer (5%) and of course Vanilla Stout also at 5%. Bingham's beers are typically available in the Reading area, and Vanilla Stout will be available at Wantage Beer Festival.

## Wantage Beer Festival



The festival returns to The Beacon (formerly the Civic Hall) on 17-18 March. The festival was last held here in November 2013 and will now be a regular event in March, so do join us and make this festival as successful as in the past.

It will feature 28 beers with a selection of special brews from local breweries, and four ciders and a perry will also be available. Several local brewers will be at the festival on Friday afternoon 17 March.

At 6pm on that Friday evening the branch will announce its Pub of the Year, Country Pub of the Year and – new for 2017 – its Club and Cider Pub of the Year. On Saturday 18 March it is hoped to screen the Six Nations Rugby matches.

## Branch AGM

This will be 7.30pm on 7 March in the Royal Oak, Wantage. All members are welcome, and this will include nomination of the committee for the year ahead.

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# Tony's Travels

**Tony Goulding** profiles the "M&B girls" – most of the chain's Oxford pubs being managed by ladies



**FROM TOP:** Niki Devaraux, Angela Economopoulos, Kerry Skrzytiek

**MITCHELLS & BUTLERS** is well known amongst older drinkers as one of the big three breweries from the Midlands based in Birmingham, with Brew 11 and Bass amongst its famous beers. From a massive 7,000 pubs in the 1960s the company had various identities until 2003 when the name was resurrected as a chain with 1,700 pubs, bars and restaurants trading under such names as Nicholson's, Castle Taverns, Ember and Vintage Inns.

It has several in the Oxford area with Kerry Skrzytiek at the Chequers leading the gang of girls running these venues very successfully. To have such a high percentage of female managers is most rare and almost unique to M&B.

The Chequers is that old rambling building down an alley off Oxford High Street, dispensing 10 beers with a good selection of ciders and bottles along with ever popular good food. Kerry had been an administrator but looking for something different, took a part-time cleaning job at a pub and very soon had worked her way up to become a manager. In the 13 years since she has moved on from Middlesex to Oxford, serving at the Eagle and Child and the Crown before leading the Chequers into the Good Beer Guide, with a very welcome 20% discount for CAMRA members. All three of these pubs have Nicholson's branding.

Just around the corner in Cornmarket, down another alley, is the Crown -- run by newly promoted Angela Economopoulos who had been second in command under Kerry at the Chequers for over two years, taking over from Chris Brown who has gone to Bath. After working in a vineyard and family restaurants in London and Ingersol in Ontario, her next destination was Oxford. The Crown serves eight real ales with bottled cider and craft keg, and has a busy food scene. I used to drink a tasty Charrington IPA here back in the 1980s in what has been a comfortable but busy house popular with tourists.

Moving into St Giles we find Robyn Cuthell, who has run the historically important and St John's College-owned Eagle and Child for nearly three years. She took a temporary position collecting glasses while looking for a proper job and for the next 12 years enjoyed working in M&B pubs. Sometimes known as the Bird and Baby, the pub serves four real ales including a very tasty Sharp's Sea Fury along with bottles and a couple of ciders. Popular food is served with pies being a speciality. Big changes are afoot in mid-2017 with refurbishment planned.

Up Woodstock Road is the very attractive, rambling old Royal Oak, now the only pub on this major route out of the city. This multi-roomed and comfortable food house is in the capable hands of Michelle Sporre, a

veteran of over 20 years in busy Bass pubs in London and then Liverpool before coming to Oxford. Michelle is well supported by her staff and they do a good job of serving four real ales, cider, bottles and craft keg. As with the Eagle and Child, tourists and the university are the main customers with a few regular locals.

Jut over Magdalen Bridge you will notice, in a prominent position on The Plain, the Cape of Good Hope – a former Morrells house which has since been called the Pub Oxford or It's a Scream, both of which were a typical marketing man's failure. Jo Mountain has been running this student haunt for the past year having previously worked for M&B in Nottingham. Her team serve four beers, some interesting craft kegs and cans along with quirky food. I have fond memories of a certain Chris Moss serving me Wychwood Black Witch here.

A somewhat different situation applies at the White Horse in Broad Street, with the pub being leased from M&B by a small team headed by Kasia Jasinska, a friendly lady from Eastern Europe. Not part of the Nicholson's chain, the White Horse serves six real ales, a cider and a couple of bottles. The pub can be very busy in term time with students and tourists and of course is one of the main pubs in the Inspector Morse TV series. It is one of the city's smallest pubs, and good food is always available.

The girls do allow some lads on the Oxford scene, with Ian Ridding being manager at the Jericho Tavern, once the main music pub in Oxford. Now serving two real ales and a large selection of craft kegs and cans, it is also known for good food.

The only pub actually on Banbury Road, the Dewdrop in Summertown was acquired by M&B 12 months ago and refurbished, and is now very well run by George Cupit and his team which was a big challenge following the 33-year reign of the previous landlord. The Dewdrop still commands a busy food scene with a selection of four real ales and a couple of craft kegs.

M&B has faith in the girls out in the suburbs too, as the Britannia in Headington is well run by Niki Devaraux. The "Brit" is a super value pub with eight real ales costing £3-£3.50 a pint, plus some craft kegs along with very popular food. Very well supported by locals and visitors, the pub was rebranded as an Ember Inn a couple of years ago with Niki moving from M&B's heartland in the Midlands to run it.

I hope I have painted a favourable picture of M&B's mainly female management in Oxford. If you know of other unusual pub ownerships or management, let us know.

# Pubs of the Year



A community-owned village pub is one of two named Pubs of the Year 2016 by the Oxford branch of CAMRA. The Seven Stars on the Green in Marsh Baldon has won the Town and Village award for the first time, whereas the Mason's Arms in Headington Quarry has won the City award several times before.

CAMRA members vote using a range of criteria with beer quality being foremost, followed by style/décor, service and welcome, community focus and atmosphere, alignment with CAMRA's values, and overall impression. The 2015 holders of the awards were the Nag's Head in Abingdon, and Lamb and Flag in Oxford.

Runners-up were the Nag's Head and Red Lion, Northmoor in the Town and Village award, and the Lamb and Flag and Chequers in the city.

To be considered for our Pub of the Year awards, pubs must first make it into the Good Beer Guide. The Oxford branch hopes for an increase in allocation for 2018 from 17 pubs to 21, and 24 by 2019.



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