



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**



Issue 100
April - May 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

**100TH
ISSUE!**

April 2017

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Contents

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

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PDF downloads of past issues are available at the Oxford CAMRA webiste. www.oxford.camra.org.uk.

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

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- 5 Welcome**
Guess what? It's our 100th issue!
- 6 Thame Tour**
A guide to the pubs of Thame
- 10 Tony's Travels**
Tony visits Oxford's Wetherspoons pubs



- 12 Pub News**
Including changes on the Abingdon Road

- 14 Festival Diary**
A guide to the upcoming beer festivals

- 15 Gardener's World**
Paul Silcock gives a publican's view

- 17 Drinker centenary**
Celebrating our 100 issues with a look back



- 25 Awards Night**
Some photos from our recent Gala night
- 26 Community Spirit**
Graham Shelton loves CAMRA!
- 28 Brewery News**
All the latest from round the region
- 32 Brewery Focus**
This month featuring White Horse Brewery



- 34 Pub walks**
Dick Bosley avoids taking the bus

- 35 White Horse**
News from the White Horse Branch

- 37 Beer Week**
Oxford Beer Week launched

- 37 Branch Diary**
What's On, including date for Oxford's AGM

- 39 Pete's Pubs**
Pete takes a trip round the pubs of Cowley Road

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Welcome

..... To our
100th issue

THE OXFORD DRINKER celebrates its centenary in this edition, with extra pages put together by its first editor, Matt Bullock, looking at how it has evolved since 1999 to reflect the local brewing and pub scene.

What's changed over those 18 years? Everything, and nothing. There has been a huge increase in the availability of real ales and the breweries supplying it, many of them being local. Half a dozen new small breweries have opened in the last year, each with its own approach to the "craft beer" revolution whether it's in cask, bottle, keg or can. The first Oxford Beer Week – see back page and page 37 – is a great idea to showcase local breweries big and small.

The increase in breweries mirrors the national scene, but so does the decline of the traditional pub which continues at a pace of about 20 a week around the country. In Oxford city centre we're lucky to have such a vibrant pub scene, but in the suburbs and villages the closure rate has accelerated because of the price of property

and demand for new housing.

The latest threat to pubs is a hike in business rates of up to 400%, plus the first rise in beer duty for five years. The Government's temporary £1,000 discount on business rates bills for pubs with a rateable value of less than £100,000 is welcome, but many pubs won't see any benefit and this just adds to the pressure.

If there is a disconnect between the growing number of breweries and the declining number of pubs, then that only spurs on brewers to find new outlets for their produce whether it's a tap room on their premises, a deli-style or bottle shop, special events or a farmers' market.

What hasn't changed, however, is the pub's role at the heart of a community, although that sometimes has to be fought for. It's pleasing to report in this edition on re-opening of the community-owned Abingdon Arms in Beckley, and on plans to revitalise two pubs in the Oxford suburbs.

Another unchanging aspect is the crucial role of the pub landlord or landlady, in holding everything together despite the often long hours and poor returns. In the next edition we will be focusing on some of these heroes behind bars, so please do drop me a line to nominate anyone running a real ale-focused pub who you think has that "something special".

The *Oxford Drinker* has seen many innovations in recent years, including the introduction of regular columnists, "Down Memory Lane" features, reports on all the pubs in a particular area or town, and a major focus on one local brewery in each edition – this time, it's White Horse. But we can only continue innovating with more input from readers, so we welcome your views, suggestions and news.

What will edition number 200 be like, I wonder? Or even edition 125? Change is the only certainty, but hopefully we will still be around to reflect it.

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Thame by comparison..

**Dave Richardson
and Tony Goulding**
visit an Oxfordshire
market town

THE GREAT THING about Thame – apart from its many independent shops and businesses – is that nearly all its 10 town centre pubs are in a straight line, from Lower High Street at the Oxford end to Park Street at the other. The fact that one of these pubs, the Cross Keys, is CAMRA's regional Pub of the Year made the idea of an afternoon's drinking there irresistible.

The 280 bus from Oxford – operating every 20 minutes daytime and every 30 minutes in the evening – dropped us very close to the Six Bells, a Fuller's pub, and the first of several historic hostleries. Six golden bells do indeed hang from the pub sign, and the curved bar inside adds character with a rambling dining area nicely laid out for dinner.

Five hand pumps were dispensing London Pride (two), Oliver's Island and the Rugby-themed seasonal Front Row, but no guest ale was available today. Oliver's Island got the day off to a modest start, as we looked at the large garden and unusual display of vintage French cycling posters – the one for Laurent certainly attracted the eye but you'll have to see it to understand why.

We had considered giving the Thatch, a couple of hundred yards away, a miss – as it is better known as a restaurant. But a sign outside dating the building to 1550 made us curious, and inside it is very attractive with the original inn at the front complete with log fire, and a modern extension behind.

It is still a pub as well as a large restaurant with two ales available – the local XT-3, and the ubiquitous Sharp's Doom Bar.

The XT-3 was very palatable and the pub is worthy of its Cask Marque status, but food was expensive including "Posh Fish and Chips" -- £35 for two including four types of fish. At that price I'd expect it sprinkled with caviar rather than salt and vinegar!

Tony was looking forward to visiting the Rising Sun after many years, but this Brakspear Pub Co property proved to be something of a disappointment. Brakspear Bitter is the regular cask ale plus two others from the Marston's range, these being Brakspear Jerusalem (a special for February) and Ringwood's Boondoggle. The Jerusalem was tried but found to be off, and although the barman happily changed it for the Bitter, he didn't turn around the Jerusalem's pump clip so it remained on sale.

The Pad Thai restaurant now occupies the rear of the pub, with delicacies including Pla Lad Prick which, whatever we might have thought, is in fact deep fried sea bass. While contemplating this we looked over character features at the front including comfortable sofas beside a real log fire, but with unexciting ales it wasn't a place to tarry.

Arriving in the heart of town along Cornmarket, our next stop was at the James Figg who was, an English boxing



ABOVE FROM TOP: The Thatch;
James Figg; Trudy at the Cross
Keys

OPPOSITE: The Cross Keys

champion (1684-1734), native of Thame, and “associated with this inn, then called the Greyhound”. The pub was also more recently known as the Abingdon Arms, and dates from the 17th century although only an archway hints at its previous role as a coaching inn.

The beer choice here was more inspiring, apart from the Doom Bar, including Purity’s Mad Goose, XT-17 and Hook Norton’s Hooky. The Mad Goose was reliably good and the pub was very busy on a Friday afternoon, including some families. It is part of Peach Inns which also runs the Thatch, the Fishes in North Hinksey and the Fleece in Witney, and seems to be a go-ahead small chain. But its approach is “good honest food” rather than the gourmet fare at some of the others.

A sign across the road for the Witch’s Ball caught my attention, and this apparently was a pub that disappeared in the 1960s. So it was on to the Birdcage, an odd, half-timbered building dating from “circa 1300”, the appearance of which is spoiled by a most inappropriate modern sign. This is known as one of the livelier pubs in the evening and is part of Bermondsey Pub Company, with a beer range including Fuller’s London Pride, Deuchars IPA and a guest ale, not available today. Pieminster pies (see their shop in Oxford Covered Market) are served.

We didn’t have a drink here as our thoughts were turning to the Cross Keys, and nor did we

drink at the Spread Eagle, Thame’s oldest hotel. The street entrance leads directly into a very modern bar and restaurant in complete contrast to the coaching inn dating from the 16th century, where a single hand pump serves Rebellion IPA. Its claim to fame is that John Fothergill, author of *An Innkeeper’s Diary* (1932), used to run it. Apparently he was a terrible snob and very rude – attributes you still see in landlords today, but not that often!

Next stop was the Black Horse, another old building still used as a hotel, where a somewhat harassed landlord explained that the only real ale available was from a 16-pint “beer in a box” on the counter. This was Rebellion’s Roasted Nuts, but again we didn’t try it. This type of “bright” beer didn’t appeal when better things lay in store, as we were keeping our powder (if not our throats) dry.

Another ancient but missable pub is the Old Nag’s Head, a basic Greene King and ex-Morrells boozier right on the market square which is a somewhat rowdy sports bar with

a ceiling covered by football shirts. Only GK IPA was on offer here, but we were told an interesting story that it was once called the King’s Arms, but when someone was hanged here during the Civil War the name was changed as this couldn’t be done in a pub with that name. True or false? I don’t know.

This part of Thame has several former pubs, and next to the Old Nag’s Head is a church now functioning as a kitchen and flooring shop. Smart’s Fish and Chips was previously an ABC pub called the Fox. Prezzo restaurant is also a former pub, once the Oxford Arms and then the James Figg before that name transferred to the former Abingdon Arms. Confusing? Yes – but at least we were still sober.

In Buttermarket just behind Cornmarket is a lovely old pub sign for the Saracen’s Head, with the Halls Hare (sign of a defunct brewery) on the wall. This isn’t a pub any more either – it’s a funeral parlour. And they say pubs are a dying trade.....

The Swan Hotel, by the market



and opposite the Old Nag's Head, is still very much alive with quite a cosy bar, but new businesses now occupy parts of the old coaching inn site. Greene King supplies the beer here and this included Swan Ale (actually Belhaven), IPA and Morland Original, but a real cider had just gone off. The Swan Ale was palatable, but it was gone 5pm and that's when the Cross Keys was due to re-open.

Situated on the edge of the town centre on the corner of Park Street and East Street, this is Thame's only Good Beer Guide pub, and 2016 Pub of the Year for CAMRA's Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe branch. It was also voted the Central Southern region's Pub of the Year, putting it in the running for the national award.

The Cross Keys has its own micro-brewery (named after the

town), but with no storage space here whatever it produces sells very fast. XT-4 is the only regular ale and all the others rotate, the choice on this occasion being Thame Brewery's Hoppiness, Courage Directors, Hop Kettle's North Wall Best Bitter, Vale's Brill Gold, Brakspear's Jerusalem and Red Squirrel's Mr Squirrel's Premium Bitter. I had a half of Hoppiness (against my instincts – I think hoppy beers are over-rated) followed by a more satisfying Mr Squirrel, while contemplating our surroundings.

It's a lovely traditional pub, not serving food but totally dedicated to drinking, and on the ceiling are an estimated 3,000 pump clips illustrating all the beers that have been served here since Trudy and Peter Lambert arrived to run it eight years ago. It's not just about beer, either – the range of real ciders was equally

impressive, much to Tony's delight. These included the local One Eyed Vince from Radnage, Henry Weston's Family Reserve and Old Rosie, Thatcher's Cheddar Valley and Sheppy's Farmhouse.

The Cross Keys was busy with all ages at 6pm on a Friday, just as a good pub should be. As expected we didn't have time to venture slightly out of town to the Falcon, a Hook Norton pub; or to the Star and Garter, now an Indian restaurant. It's always a challenge for other pubs to concentrate on real ale when a pub like the Cross Keys is in town, but as we made our way homeward we reflected on a day well spent, with the Six Bells and James Figg our favourites among the others. We had found 23 real ales from 15 breweries, not bad for a small town.

DAVE RICHARDSON

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Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding
visits Oxford's
Wetherspoons and
sundry other pubs

FOLLOWING ON FROM my article about the "Mitchells & Butlers girls" in the last edition, I now discover that the three J.D. Wetherspoon pubs in Oxford are also managed by ladies.

Love them or loathe them, 'Spoons are here to stay. Although not my first choice they do provide a good service to quite a diverse set of drinking and eating customers. I have to admit that not for a long time have I had to return beer in any of these three.

Cowley Centre is a lively shopping scene representing the older generation from a long-gone industrial age, and others who have not had the choice in life that is so obvious a couple of miles down the road. There is not the disposable income here, which reflects on the happy crowd that support the William Morris.

Having opened a couple of years into the new century in a spacious, light and airy new building, it has seen different trends that have sometimes blighted its reputation. But over the last year young manageress Becci Fair has faced a huge challenge and made a real impact. Becci has been with 'Spoons for over 13 years working at several levels, and before that she was a student.

On the bar are the normal three regular beers including Doom Bar, along with four guests including a local ale. A boxed cider along with a selection of craft keg and bottles are also on sale. Open all day from 8am, the William Morris has a popular

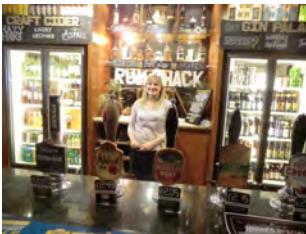
quiz on Monday evenings, at least three beer and cider festivals a year, and meet the brewer nights. Our branch has a meeting here on 3 April at 7.30pm, so come along and join us.

The second 'Spoons to open in 2009, the Swan and Castle, is a bright spacious bar surrounded by huge glass windows. It is quite a rarity for managers to stay more than a couple of years, but a young Steff Robinson has been here almost six. After only a year's training she was straight into this prime site in Castle Street, which will be even busier when the new Westgate shopping centre opens.

With Steff smiling behind the bar the hand-pumps were serving again the three regular beers with up to five guests including a local ale. As with the next 'Spoons in George Street, a typical city centre customer selection includes a mix during the daytime of old and middle ages, with evenings and weekends bringing in a younger generation.

A short walk into George Street, and opposite Gloucester Green, is the Four Candles – opened in 2008 in a former modern-build Yates's bar. This has more of a pub feel and a second, upper level balcony bar. Another youngster, Siobhan Finnegan, has been with the company for 15 years, some at the 'Spoons in Northamptonshire and five of them at the Candles, since leaving her native Ireland.

She is doing a great job here



FROM TOP: Becci Fair, Steff Robinson and Siobhan Finnegan

with a huge selection of craft, cans, bottles and ciders along with up to 12 beers on the pumps. Although it is rare for me to eat in pubs, if the need arises I have no problem with Wetherspoons and don't forget that your CAMRA subscriptions each year are almost given back to you with 50p Wetherspoon discount vouchers.

Oxford: The Kite in Mill Street has struggled in recent years to serve the local community, finally closing prior to Christmas. Hope has arrived with the present management of the nearby Punter, formerly the Watermans, who in partnership with Greene King is completely refurbishing and relaunching the pub as the Porterhouse. It is due to reopen by the end of May with the Punter's proven emphasis on good food and GK beers.

The Head of the River is being heavily refurbished by Fuller's to re-open around Easter. This follows a refreshing make-over of the toilets and kitchen at the super Bear Inn, still serving Fuller's, Gales and Shotover beers in fine form.

The Wheatsheaf, not owned or run by any big brewery or pub group, has escaped being converted back to serve gastro food which was the case 35 years ago as a Buccaneer Inn. For some seven years it has been run by "the man in shorts", Simon Hogarth. As Oxford's top music venue, live performances take place upstairs up to four nights a week. The ground floor is for

drinking and conversation with a pretty good selection on the jukebox.

Four beers are served – Wychwood Hobgoblin, Brakspear Oxford Gold, Robinsons Trooper and at £3 a pint Sharp's Doom Bar, with a small selection of bottles. Our local branch held meetings here 10 years ago and I noted that the drinking here was described as dreadful, but this is not the case these days. This basic boozier, a real surprise in the rich city centre, is well worth a visit when you find it tucked away down an alley off the High Street.

Eynsham: Another run-down former Morrells house, the Red Lion in the square at Eynsham, is the subject of a refurbishment by Hawthorn Leisure, which purchased a lot of allegedly failing pubs from GK. It used to be the prime pub in Eynsham but following periods of a lack of care, the downward spiral commenced.

Garsington: The Old Bookbinders in Jericho became a very popular community pub under the stewardship of the

Sadones family, so it was a great delight to the residents of Garsington when their only pub, the Three Horseshoes, was taken under Jackie Sadones' wing. Sadly, following her sudden passing last year, the family handed back the Three Horseshoes to Greene King. To attempt to continue the good work at the pub, Stuart the team from the equally popular Red Lion in Marston have taken on the challenge.

Kidlington: Another Red Lion is closed and undergoing a costly rebuild to become an Ember Inn, very much like the Britannia in Headington, to cater more for family eating. It was only three years ago that the pub was pizza-ised.

Wolvercote: Landlord Tim Bowring and his team celebrate 20 years at the Plough this year, with their story appearing in the GK company magazine. Well done, as anyone who has successfully served under GK that long deserves a medal. The Plough has something for everyone, and I welcome its very pleasant boxed cider in the summer months.



Pub News

Beckley

ABINGDON ARMS:

Oxfordshire's seventh community pub has opened. Almost exactly one year after it was listed as an Asset of Community Value, the Beckley and Area Community Benefit Society's 280 shareholders took ownership of this historic country pub in the last week of January. It opened for business on 10 March only six weeks later, after 60-plus local volunteers had repaired, redecorated and cleaned it, rebuilt the car park wall and tamed the garden.

Volunteers staffed the bar for drinks-only sessions over the first weekend, and the opening session attracted over 100 people celebrating the community's success. The first real ale offering, 108 pints of Shotover Prospect, was consumed before last orders were called on the Friday evening, to be replaced on Saturday by a cask of XT4 which was all but finished by the day's end.

The community's plan is to open the pub for drinks each weekend on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons, until a tenant is recruited. Then the Abingdon Arms will rebuild its former reputation for a warm welcome, great drink and excellent pub food in a beautiful rural setting overlooking Otmoor. Check opening hours before you visit at bacbs.org.

Existing community pubs in the county are the Seven Stars at Marsh Baldon, Red Lion at Northmoor, White Hart at Wolvercote, Bull at Great Milton, the Plough at Great Haseley and the Plough at West Hanney.

Eynsham

EVENLODE:

This large pub – on the main A40 road on the edge of Eynsham – was closed and for sale at the time of writing. It was previously renowned for its good value carveries.

Kidlington

DRUNK DRY:

Recently opened on Banbury Road, just along from the Black Horse pub, this new off-licence is very well stocked. Reader Chris Dicks called in one Thursday evening for the weekly tasting session, when Loose Canon was giving out free samples whilst talking through its various brews. He describes it as "something different and well worth a visit, but just check opening times as it shuts earlier than usual pub times." www.drunkdry.co.uk

Oxford

BERKSHIRE:

This Abingdon Road pub – briefly known as the Crooked Pot – closed in mid-March leading to fears for its future, the former Morrells and Greene King corner pub having been sold to Hawthorn Leisure in 2014. But signs in the window promised craft ales and a menu of locally sourced food including vegetarian and vegan options, and a new



coat of paint was being applied.

Reader Paul Sherwin writes: "The good news is that the Berkshire is certainly going to re-open in some form. A major refurbishment is underway and residents in the immediate locality have received a flyer promising wonderful things. It appears that the pub will be run by the people behind the Rusty Bicycle, either on lease or as freehold owners. It seems likely that the pub will be renamed in the same 'amusing' style.

"What is unclear is if such a market re-positioning will actually work. Although South Oxford has undergone considerable gentrification over the last 30 years, it has a very different demographic to East Oxford, and geography limits the size of the local customer base (just look at a street map). There have been attempts to move the Berkshire up-market before, most notably as a Morrells real ale outlet about 20 years ago, and all have struggled to find a market. Anyway, fingers crossed and I look forward to visiting when it re-opens."

DUKE OF MONMOUTH:

Only a few hundred yards along Abingdon Road from the Berkshire, this large GK pub has had a major refit including the welcome return of a traditional pub sign in place of the Meet and Eat branding.

Reader Paul Sherwin writes: "The interior decor is very like the GK Wig & Pen in George Street and there are four hand-pumps currently serving GK IPA, two GK guest beers and Wadsworth 6X. The manager has said he intends to order a more adventurous beer range in the near future. Brewdog

Punk IPA is available on keg for those who like that sort of thing, and Duvel is available in bottles. "The beer quality has been consistently good, and the management team is unchanged and presents a friendly welcome. The manager has stated that he plans to introduce a CAMRA discount on cask beer, though this was not in operation when I last visited. Standard pricing is very reasonable, however."



EAGLE & CHILD:

Young's has acquired the lease of this historic pub from M&B/Nicholson's, and will completely revamp it by 2018 in an agreement with owner St John's College. Separate drinking and dining areas will be established, and a seven-bedroom boutique hotel opened on the upper floors of this and adjacent properties. Young's also operates the King's Arms and Angel and Greyhound in Oxford.

HEAD OF THE RIVER:

Fuller's flagship pub in Oxford, by Folly Bridge, has closed for a major revamp but is expected to re-open by Easter.

HOLLYBUSH:

City councillors have called in plans to convert this closed West Oxford pub into housing, so planning permission will have to be sought.

HONEYPOT:

Oxford City Council has approved demolition of this pub in Hollybush Row, close to the railway station, to be replaced by a block of flats. It was previously known as the Albion and is close to the former Chequers (latterly Maroon Bar), which was converted into housing.

JACK RUSSELL:

The locals' fight to save this New Marston pub has hit the end of the road after the city council approved its demolition and conversion into housing. Closed and sold by Greene King in 2015, it was badly damaged by fire last November.

KITE:

This Greene King pub in West Oxford was closed at the time of writing, having had three sets of tenants in the last few years, but is due to re-open in May under the same management as the nearby Punter and renamed the Porterhouse. See Tony's Travels on pages 10.



UNIVERSITY CLUB:

Doubt surrounds the future operation of this popular venue on Mansfield Road, which welcomes CAMRA members and stages regular meet-the-brewer events. The March event with Roosters was described as "the last event of this kind for the foreseeable future" as event space on the first floor was needed for other uses, and planned events including the visit of Tiny Rebel on 28 April were cancelled because of this.

Wheatley

RAILWAY INN:

It is understood that the former Fuller's pub has been sold for redevelopment as flats for retired people.



PUBS FOR SALE/TO LET:

Isis Farmhouse, Oxford: £1 million freehold, below (via Fleurets).
Chequers, Cassington: £675,000 freehold (Fleurets).
Red Lion, Islip (Punch Taverns).



Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

**Wednesday 22 March -
Sunday 2 April**

Wetherspoon Real Ale Festival

All JD Wetherspoon pubs & Lloyds No1 bars
30 beers
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

Friday 21 - Sunday 23 April

Spring Beer & Cider Festival

The Brewery Tap, Ock Street, Abingdon
01235 521655
www.thebrewerytap.net

Thursday 27 - Sunday 30 April

Reading Beer & Cider Festival

Christchurch Meadows, George Street, Caversham
550+ beers plus 200 ciders, perries & foreign beers
www.readingbeerfestival.org.uk

Friday 28 - Sunday 30 April

Spring Beer Festival

The Nag's Head, Bridge Street, Abingdon
01235 524516
www.thenagshheadonthethames.co.uk

Saturday 29 April

Witney Beer Festival

St Mary's Church, Church Green, Witney
60+ beers
www.witneybeerfestival.com

Saturday 20 - Sunday 21 May

North Cotswold Spring Ale & Steam Weekend

Winchcombe Station, off Becketts Lane, Greet, nr Cheltenham
Closes early evening each day
32 beers plus 12 ciders & perries
www.northcotswoldcamra.org.uk

Friday 26 - Sunday 28 May

Rokefest Beer and Music Festival

Home Sweet Home, Roke, nr Wallingford
www.rokefest.com

Saturday 27 - Monday 29 May

Swindon & Cricklade Railway Real Ale & Cider Festival

Blunsdon Station, Tadpole Lane, Blunsdon, nr Swindon
www.swindon-cricklade-railway.org

Saturday 3 June Great Chadlington Beer Festival

Chadlington Memorial Hall, Chapel Row, Chadlington
Open noon to 11pm
www.chadlingtonbeerfestival.com

Saturday 3 - Sunday 4 June Buzzrail Ale Trail

Leighton Buzzard Railway, Page's Park Station, Billington Road, Leighton Buzzard
01525 373888
www.buzzrail.co.uk

Thursday 4 - Saturday 6 May

Banbury Beer Festival

Army Reserve Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury
100 beers, ciders & perries
www.northoxon.camra.org.uk

MANY YEARS AGO (actually, it was only 2001 but that's starting to look a worryingly long time ago now), CAMRA launched its campaign "Ask If It's Cask" in what turned out to be a very successful mission to save the real pint of bitter. It was all about getting people away from keg beer, and back to drinking traditional bitter from the cask.

But keg is back, and in an advertising move almost as great as the Lucky Strike advertising campaign 'It's Toasted', it's not called keg anymore, it's called craft. For those who don't know, by the way, the Lucky Strike advertising campaign 'It's Toasted' proudly boasted how Lucky Strike tobacco was, well, toasted, unlike other brands, whose tobacco was also toasted. But it worked for them and consumers reported being able to taste the difference in a Lucky Strike. Mind



Gardeners' World

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

you, Lucky Strike also marketed itself as a slimming aid for women so honesty wasn't top of its priorities.

But it's worth bearing in mind that what the consumer is told is quite often what the consumer thinks they get. I have honestly heard customers at my bar drinking craft lager and telling their mates "Yeah, you can taste it's crafted". How? And how do you think it's crafted? By a select group of beer elves in the cellar just waiting for the opportunity to hand build your pint of beer from select spring water, a selection of natural ingredients from Narnia, and some string?

Now all this makes me sound like I'm rather against craft beer. I'm not. I've heard a few grumbles from other people,

though, against this craft movement. You can no more be against craft beer than you can be against any product with an advertising slogan. More to the point craft beer, and by that I really mean keg beer – specifically keg beer from micro-breweries – is a wonderful idea in my opinion. It offers the chance to expand the range of beer on offer considerably.

Take White Horse The Guv'nor, which is a cracking pint, but it's 6.5% which offers a problem for the drinker, in walking straight after a night on it, but also the publican, and not just in having to steer you out the door at the end of that night. Not everyone wants a beer that strong, and it can be a bit hard to sell a barrel of it quickly enough to keep it in tip-top condition in a pub my size.

But White Horse also does The Guv'nor in keg, which has one distinct advantage. It keeps longer. So every now and then I can stock a keg and know it won't turn before it's sold. See also XT's Bastard Bunny. Its longer shelf life also allows bars which otherwise couldn't offer anything like a real ale to stock something other than just bottles of beer. And we've been drinking bottles for years without grumbling too much.

Plus, isn't this just about a broader drinking experience? The Pint Shop in Oxford city centre offers 20 beers at any time, but not one of them is cask. Now that's not for everyone's taste, but I doubt that any of the micro-breweries making beer in keg for sale somewhere like the Pint Shop are putting any less effort into their brewing than more traditional breweries are for their cask beers. In fact, quite probably more effort than some of the big breweries. Without naming names, let me just say Kreen Ging, and leave it at that.

So, while craft beer really isn't crafted, at least any more than anything else you could drink, it certainly shouldn't be demonised, but quite possibly be celebrated as a way to expand and improve our drinking experience. Now just don't get me started on artisan beer...



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100 not out

Matt Bullock looks back on the history of the *Oxford Drinker* as we reach out 100th issue

AS THE OXFORD DRINKER reaches the milestone of one hundred issues, it seems an appropriate time to look back on the previous 99 issues, the highs and the lows, and to thank those who have made its production possible over the past eighteen years.

The *Oxford Drinker* story begins, somewhat oddly, on a Tuesday night in July 1999 in a now-forgotten pub in Bampton. Members of the Oxford branch, myself included, were embarking on one of Tony Goulding's popular minibus survey trips to the west of the county. Having departed the Wharf House pub in Oxford, we had drunk at the Trout at Tadpole Bridge and the Morris Clown in Bampton, before heading for the Elephant and Castle. It was here that I raised the subject of a branch newsletter – I had been involved in producing one for my previous branch, Solihull, before I moved to Oxford in 1998 – and it was agreed that it was a good idea; the editor's job was mine. And so began the *Oxford Drinker*.

The newsletter got off to something of an inauspicious start. We had decided to launch at the Oxford Beer Festival in October 1999, so 500 copies of our two-page, A4 size, black and white publication were delivered to the Town Hall to be handed out to unsuspecting punters. I'm not sure how many were distributed, but by the second night a significant number remained in the box, and I believe most of these ended up in the bin, either

deliberately or accidentally, sometime during the Saturday. If you have a genuine glossy copy of Issue 1, it's definitely a rarity!

Future issues stuck to the A4 format: we expanded to 4 pages for the second, and, boosted by our first advertising, to 8 pages for the third. These early issues seemed to be the bringers of bad news – several pub closures, the closure of Morland brewery, the threat to pubs due to Bass' price increases (beer going up to £2.50 a pint!), and even a letter (our first) criticising our choice of a Morrell's pub for a branch meeting, so after issue 6, I took a slightly different approach.

Issue 7 (September 2000) was notable in that it was the first to be in the current smaller (A5) format, 16 pages on orange paper to make it stand out. The coloured paper was changed each issue to make it more obvious when a new issue was out, as the first six had been literally black and white and had essentially looked very similar. An attempt was made to make the contents a little more upbeat, without shirking the issues of the day. The centre pages featured a guide to the best pubs in the city centre, aimed at visitors to the festival, and from the next issue, I introduced a regular feature of a pub crawl of an area of the city, or a town nearby, visiting all the pubs and describing them, and also giving them a star rating. The first crawl was of George Street, and aside from the Cock and Camel (4 stars) the other venues did not find



Dave Aitken
 Grahame Allen
 Sue Allen
 Helene Augar
 Graham Baker
 Chris Bamford
 Carly Banner
 Ray Bateman
 Mark Bates
 Adrian Bolton
 Ray Borrett
 Dick Bosley
 Dennis Brown
 Stuart Bull
 Matt Bullock
 Andrea Bunce
 Magda Clarke
 Andy Coates
 Dave Cogdell
 Michael Corlett
 Neil Crook
 Kian de la Cour
 Geoff Day
 Jeremy Dennis
 Chris Dicks
 Dermot Dobson
 Mike Dodgson
 Mark Doran
 Steve Dunkley
 John Evans
 Everards Brewery
 Fin
 Dave Flitney
 Pete Flynn
 Dave Fogden
 Matt Ford
 Mick Furn

much favour.

Obviously at the time, the pub industry was struggling, and there was no escaping the fact that pubs were closing, and this was reported on a regular basis. The pub crawl features tried to strike a more light-hearted balance – they had grown into a social night out to conduct the research, and were a popular feature of the magazine. These reviews would eventually gain me a regular column about pubs and real ale in the Oxford Mail, but my review in Issue 13 of a barman's bizarre means of serving six halves of Burton Ale at the Chequers on the High Street on a busy Friday night – three half glasses and two brim-filled pints – had another knock-on effect: apparently it resulted in him being dismissed. Harsh, maybe, but I'm pleased to say standards in the Chequers are much improved now!

I courted controversy in Issue 15

(February 2002) by reporting the sale of the Turf Tavern to the Laurel Pub Company, which would result in the removal of all guest beers, something the Turf at the time had gained a great reputation for under the management of Trevor Walter. The licensee at the time took angry exception to the story, though we eventually buried the hatchet, but only after his pub had been acquired by Greene King and lost most of its guest beer choice!

After an up-beat 2001, the issues in 2002 were again bringing the drinkers of Oxford bad news: the former Firkin pubs dropping real ale, and Brakspear closing down its historic brewery in Henley, and Greene King acquiring the former Morrell's pub estate. Better news was to follow, firstly Wetherspoon's arrival in Oxford (Issue 22, April 2003), Brakspear moving to Witney to be brewed by Refresh at Wychwood using the old Brakspear brewing kit (Issue 24, August



Issue 1 is launched, but not many made it into circulation!

Issues 2 to 6 are more successful. The format is A4, black and white

1999

2000



Issue 7: the format is reduced to A5 size and coloured paper introduced!

2001



Issue 15 and the Drinker courts controversy by criticising the sale of the Turf

2002

2003), and the acquisition of the George in Littlemore by Gales (Issue 27, February 2004).

By this time, the magazine had grown to 24 pages, and was self-sufficient in terms of having enough advertising to cover its costs and having enough contributors to ensure that I had to do very little writing myself. In October 2004 we were delighted to announce a new arrival to the Oxford brewing scene, Old Bog, which bought brewing back to the city after a five year absence.

The gloom of the pub trade continued. The impending smoking ban was bringing predictions of mass pub closures, and in June 2005, before the ban came into place, Oxford had lost the King of Prussia in Rose Hill, the Globe in Jericho and the Plasterers in Marston Road. In August, the pub crawl featured Abingdon and awarded its first zero stars rating

due to the appalling service at the Ock Mill. In June 2006 (Issue 41) we reported a triple-header of departures: Young's were to leave their Wandsworth site; Tony Flatman was selling up at the Wharf House pub, and I was stepping down as the Oxford Drinker's editor. Young's moved to Bedford, the Wharf House became flats, and the *Drinker* needed somebody else to step up to the plate.

That person was Sam French, our resident cider guru, who had been assistant editor for a while and took sole charge from Issue 42. The magazine changed little in appearance initially, but gradually Sam stamped her ideas on the publication, and by the 50th edition in 2008, the cover was in full colour. The 50th issue also included a copy of issue 1 in its centrefold to remind people just how far we had come in nine years.



OXFORD DRINKER
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OXFORD CITY BRANCH OF CAMRA

"Well here's another fine mess you've gotten us into!"
Laurel (and Hardy) Pub Company to destroy the Turf?

IS THIS THE END OF BURTON ALE?

Burton Ale, CAMRA Champion Beer of Britain in 1996, is once again under threat of extinction. Production of the beer, brewed by Cambridge Teryx, was rescued from its traditional home in Burton-upon-Trent to Teryx's brewery in Leeds, about 12 months ago.

But now, despite all the investment at Leeds to brew a beer which tastes like the original, the beer seems set to be sold as it becomes more difficult for breweries to obtain

Turn to Page 8...
See Page 3 for details

Inside this issue: The Real Monnets are back in Town; Abingdon Road Pub Crawl; Pubs in Apperden; Oxford Pub Guide; All the local pub news!

OXFORD DRINKER
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OXFORD CITY BRANCH OF CAMRA

Gales Forecast

house of Windsor refused

BRITAIN'S BEER DRINKERS ARE IN GREAT MINDS, BUT ARE THEY IN GREAT PUBS?

Inside this issue: The Real Monnets are back in Town; Abingdon Road Pub Crawl; Pubs in Apperden; Oxford Pub Guide; All the local pub news!

OXFORD DRINKER
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OXFORD CITY BRANCH OF CAMRA

Is there a future for the traditional English Pub?

The Traditional English Pub Home
d. 2006
RIP

Inside this issue: The Real Monnets are back in Town; Abingdon Road Pub Crawl; Pubs in Apperden; Oxford Pub Guide; All the local pub news!

Sam French
 Tony Goulding
 Gareth Green
 Johanne Green
 Steven Green
 Jim Hague
 Chris Hale
 Dave Hambly
 Lawrence Harman
 Mick Hemmings
 Matt Heritage
 Matthew Hicks
 David Hill
 Dawn Hipwell
 Neil Hoggarth
 Derek Honey
 Hook Norton Brewery
 David Howe
 Harry Hudson
 Chris Hunter
 Chris Johnson
 Phil Jones
 Steve Lawrence
 Loddon Brewery
 Loose Cannon
 Brewery
 Mike Lord
 Andrew Loutit
 Lawrence Lustgarten
 Steve Lypany
 John Mackie
 Jerry Macklow
 Matteo Malacaria
 Dan McHugh
 Robert Mitchell
 Kevin Moreland
 Wony Morris

The effect of the smoking ban, which came in on 1 July 2007, was often blamed on the increase in pub closures, something that featured too regularly, and often prompted a healthy response on the letters page. We still managed to provide a good mix of articles, pub crawls, foreign trips, pub news and even cryptic crosswords, and circulation was increased to 2000 copies.

Whilst a variety of writers continued the pub crawl reports that had been a mainstay of the magazine for several years, in mid-2009 Tony Goulding began writing about his travels around the region's pubs – something he continues to do for the Oxford Drinker to this day. Even back then, Tony was running minibus trips to visit out-of-the-way pubs, with the occasional brewery thrown in for good measure, and without his enthusiasm and dedication our collective knowledge of the branch's pubs would be much more limited.

Sam's tenure in charge of the Drinker lasted until issue 59; the following edition (February 2010) was now in the capable hands of husband-and-wife team Johanne and Steven Green, initially assisted by Jon Price and Carly Banner. Whilst still at 24 pages, the new editors introduced more colour and in the April issue that year (61), the format was changed to 32 pages of full colour, which we continue to use – this issue excepted – today. At the same time, we teamed up with our neighbouring White Horse branch to offer them some space in the magazine to report their news, widening the circulation to Faringdon, Wantage and the surrounding villages; 4000 copies were now produced to serve this.

The move to full colour presented certain challenges but also offered significant opportunities, not least of which was the chance to sell full colour advertising, which was much more attractive to our customers

Issue 41 is the last edited by Matt Bullock, for a while.....



Sam French is the new editor of the magazine



Issue 50 introduces colour for the first time

Issue 59 is the last produced by Sam

2006

2007

2008

2009



and readers alike. Adding to this the better reproduction of photographs, very soon the magazine began to take on a completely different look and feel, though the spirit and sentiment remained as before. Johanne worked very hard to get new advertising to support the expanded and enhanced format, and many of the fruits of her labour we still benefit from today: some of our advertisers have been very loyal supporters over the years. The first full-colour issue also heralded the arrival of Loose Cannon brewery, the first in Abingdon since the closure of Morland in 1999, and fitting in many ways as our new editorial team were based in the town.

CAMRA celebrated its 40th birthday in Issue 67 (April 2011), we launched the award-winning Oxford, Abingdon and Witney Pub Guide in issue 70, and the following edition saw the arrival of XT

Brewery, not in our area, but a brewery that has since gained a big and most welcome presence in the Oxford pub scene.

Steven and Johanne edited the magazine up until issue 76, when pressure of work forced them to step down. There were no willing volunteers waiting in the wings to take over, and a consequence, there was no issue in December 2012, nor was there much hope of anything going to press in the New Year. I was chairman of the branch at the time, and not wishing to see the Oxford Drinker disappear altogether after 13 years of effort, I decided to give the magazine one final chance to see if we could kindle anyone's interest.

Issue 77 hit the bars of Oxford in February 2013 with an appeal for help in continuing production of what is our biggest year-round campaigning and information tool. An open meeting was arranged at



Issue 60
Johanne and Steven Green take on the editorship



This beer is made at the White Horse Brewery of Oxford. Also featuring the White Horse Brewery of Oxford.



Matt Bullock back in charge, for one issue only

Old Bog Brewery
 Oxford Mail and Times
 Palmers Brewery
 David Pearce
 Tony Perry
 Alistair Pitman
 Jon Price
 Richard Queralt
 Dave Richardson
 Keith Rigley
 Jesper Rosenlov
 Martyn Sanders
 Cameron Shiell
 Graham Shelton
 Paul Sherwin
 Shotover Brewery
 Michael Sibbald
 Paul Silcock
 Mick Slaughter
 Graham Smith
 Kriss Sprules
 Russ Taylor
 Jon Tillson
 Vale Brewery
 Wadworth Brewery
 Rob Walters
 West Berkshire Brewery
 Tom White
 White Horse Brewery
 Caroline Whiting
 Chris Williams
 Ian Winfield

the St Aldate's Tavern in March for people to offer what they could to the cause. I was not keen to take on the mantle again, and thankfully I did not have to. The meeting was well attended by some enthusiastic and practical people, and from amongst the crowd, Dave Richardson stepped forward to take on the editor's job.

Dave had been contributing to the magazine for a number of months prior to this, and as a freelance journalist, he was eminently qualified for the task. I took on the design and production, and Johanne continued for a while to sell advertising, and a new era commenced.

Having a professional journalist as editor took the Oxford Drinker to a new level. I can speak for myself, and possibly for the others, when I say that the editor's role in the past had been to wait for articles to arrive in your inbox, to choose

which to use, amend them as needed to fit and put the magazine together for the printer. Dave, on the other hand, used his journalistic expertise and immediately began going out looking for stories, travelling to meet and interview new publicans, brewers, finding the stories that would fill the pages of the magazine.

He profiled the then new community pub at Marsh Baldon, the Seven Stars, and also highlighted the plight of the Fairview pub in Headington (featuring some excellent photographs of the historic interior by Michael Slaughter); the following issue he met with the founders of the Oxford branch of CAMRA and resurrected the pub crawl feature with a visit to Wheatley and Otmoor. The days of filling space with re-hashes of *What's Brewing* articles or CAMRA press releases were over!

Issue 78 and the new editor is Dave Richardson



Issue 92 and our biggest ever prize - a day's brewing at Hook Norton worth £500



2014

2015

2016

2017

From this point onwards, the magazine has gone from strength to strength. In addition to all Dave's work, we have had a number of regular contributors, brewers, bar staff, publicans – and politicians, alike (in Issue 86 Dave is pictured with the then Prime Minister, David Cameron). We continue to report on the ups and downs of the pub industry – the closure of Far from the Madding Crowd in Issue 88 (February 2015) took many by surprise, whilst the growth of the community owned pubs – including the Abingdon Arms in this issue – is a change few of us would have envisaged at the outset but is now providing a lifeline for rural pubs where villages have been left with few or no other local community facilities.

Dave was commissioned to write a book on Oxford Pubs in 2015, and as a result of the contacts established whilst researching it has been able to reproduce some

of the extensive archive of pictures from the Oxford Mail and Oxford Times in a "Memory Lane" feature that has proved very popular.

So 17 years, 8 months and 10 days after that initial "why don't we..." suggestion in the Elephant and Castle, I find myself preparing this for the centenary issue. I'm older, and hopefully wiser, but very proud to have played a significant part in getting the Oxford Drinker to this point.

Naturally, a lot of other people have helped too, and I thank all the individual contributors, breweries, publicans and advertisers for their part in the story. We mustn't forget the customers, you, our readers, who hopefully continue to enjoy reading our output, and we thank you for your occasional kind comments! Hopefully the Oxford Drinker will be available to you for many years to come.



LEFT: Four 'generations' of Oxford Drinker editors captured on camera by chance at Tap Social, Botley. From Left to right, Matt Bullock (issues 1-41, 77); Sam Shiell (see French, issues 42-59); Steven Green (with JoHanne Green, issues 60-76); Dave Richardson (issues 78-100, and counting...)

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Gala Night Glamour

CAMRA's Oxford branch held its first gala night in February, with LoveBeer kindly donating a barrel of its renowned Purdy Peculiar. All local breweries and Good Beer Guide pubs were invited, plus local CAMRA supporters. Certificates were handed out to winners at the Oxford Beer Festival in October, when the top three from 21 local brewers were chosen in a "blind" tasting. Certificates also went to the two Pubs of the Year.



TOP: Brothers Chris (left) and Matthew Meeson of the Mason's Arms, Headington with their City Pub of the Year award from branch chairman Pete Flynn.

MIDDLE: CAMRA's Matt Bullock (left) with the overall winner (for the second year) – John Romer of Turpin Brewery, for Golden Citrus.

BELOW LEFT: LoveBeer won runner-up spot for Purdy Peculiar. From left: Jim Southey, Matti Juvonen from CAMRA and Jeremy Scott.

BELOW RIGHT: Matt again with Chris and Vanessa Hearn from Loddon Brewery, in third place for Peeler.



Relaxed casual revolutionaries

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

I LOVE CAMRA. Quietly and effectively CAMRA members are changing the world into a better place. I know this from personal experience.

Here's an instance. Oxford branch chairman Pete Flynn very kindly invited me to the CAMRA Gala Evening, held at the St Aldate's Tavern. It was a wonderful event, and I am happy to record my thanks for having a great time. The Red Lion, Northmoor was in contention to be Town and Country Pub of The Year, and so it was lovely that I could join Ian and Lisa Neale, intrepid young Red Lion landlords, and many others at the celebration.

Not wishing to be inappropriately dressed, I enquired about the dress code, thinking that maybe I'd have to brush down the DJ and try to remember how to "tie a bow tie by viewing in the mirror", a task guaranteed to stress the most gentle of souls. Happily the word came back: relaxed casual. Phew! That's my kind of party. I had never heard the term "relaxed casual" before, but like it very much and applaud the quiet revolution in dress code.

The Oxford POTY prizes went this year to the Seven Stars, Marsh Baldon, and the Masons Arms in Headington. Worthy winners both, and it is a

pleasure to congratulate them for setting such high standards. What was interesting to me, though, was not so much who won, but that for the first time two of the seven finalists were, and one of the two winners was, a community-owned pub: another quiet CAMRA-inspired revolution that would not have been possible even five years ago.

I was very grateful to have the opportunity to say a few words at the Gala Evening about community pubs, drawing particularly on the Red Lion experience. Community pubs definitely offer a great opportunity to create a new, sustainable business where older-style tenancies are no longer financially viable. Business success is never won easily, however, even with community support. There is no substitute for intelligence, hard work and a keen eye on the costs to go along with that warm welcome, well-kept beer and great food. It's a deceptively simple formula, but very hard to do well.

I am keen to create a community pubs outing, if members of CAMRA would be interested. The idea would be to make a tour, perhaps over a couple of days, of all the community pubs in the area to find out what makes them tick and ask those in charge about



their formulae for success. We could maybe put together some sort of top-line community pubs document based on what we learn. Others could use this when their opportunity comes to purchase their local for the community. If you would be interested to participate in this activity do, please, let me know via the editor, Dave Richardson.

The beer for the Gala Evening was very kindly provided by micro-brewer Lovebeer, from Milton, which also won one of the coveted prizes determined by blind tasting at the Oxford Beer Festival last year (pictured below receiving their certificate). The rise of micro-brewers and community pubs seem like parallel trends to me. In my view, we need to find ways of helping them to collaborate and thrive together. Maybe CAMRA could take an even greater role in fostering these links?

If anyone can, CAMRA can. You may not know it, but in your own relaxed, casual way you are revolting and I love you!





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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Brewery News

Church Hanbrewery

Founded in Church Hanborough, between Oxford and Witney, in November 2015 but now operating from New Yatt, the brewery produces ten real ales that are 100% pure, unpasteurised, unfiltered and unclarified – without isinglass or gelatine. Its slogan is “Cloudiness is Purity”!

Hanbrewery beers are available in many shops, such as Eynsham Cellars in Eynsham, the Grog Shop in Oxford, Hampers Food and Wine in Woodstock, Drunk Dry in Kidlington, and Foodies in Deddington. With a recycled paper label that is wrapped around the bottle, its beers are easily recognisable.

“Sustainability is very important to us, and we have designed these labels so that we could clean and reuse the bottles more easily, as the label is not glued to the bottle,” says Luciana Gyuricza, joint founder with husband Christian.

Two of its beers – Bluenette (honey and oatmeal porter, 5.5%) and Red Beetter (English bitter with beetroot, 5%) – featured at the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival in 2016. Draft beer in casks and kegs was then produced for pubs and other events, and may be found at the Chester Arms and the Library in Oxford, and the Rose & Crown in Charlbury.

Hook Norton

Back this Easter by popular demand is the “eggstremely” quaffable Hop To It (3.8%), a pale amber ale delivering a taste of

soft fruit with a hint of citrus. Hop To It will be on the bar at the brewery, in Hook Norton pubs and available to the free trade, in cask for March and April only. Hook Norton’s recently acquired Oxford pub, the Castle Tavern, will re-open this summer after a major revamp.

Loose Cannon

Recoil (4.2%) is the seasonal ale for spring, a dry-hopped, all Pilsner malt brew, following on from Basilisk (4.6%) in March. As with all monthly ales it is named after a famous cannon – a late medieval cannon used to besiege towns and cities.

It has begun canning and will soon add the 5% Oxford Pilsner and 4.1% Session IPA and 5.4% Full Bore IPA.

The inaugural Brewery open day was on 18 March and brewery tours are proving as popular as ever. As well as the usual first Tuesday of every month, additional dates on 18 April and 16 May have been added to satisfy demand. Members will again be benefitting from their own special tour event and BBQ on Saturday 13 May when customers who have enjoyed every single beer produced in 2016 will be rewarded with some special gifts. Loose Cannon will be at the Abingdon Air and Country Show on 14 May.

LoveBeer

Fresh from being named Beer of the Festival at Wantage in March for new brew Hair of the Doug, it is working on a special anniversary ale marking the 40th ruby anniversary of the Abingdon Concert band and Abbey Brass. A naming competition will be

finalised in March, and the new pale ale will be on draught at the Nag’s Head and possibly other venues in early June, with gigs in the pub to mark the launch.

Abingdon Concert Band and Abbey Brass were founded in 1977, and were put in touch with LoveBeer by the Nag’s Head.

Old Forge

The micro-brewery has moved from the Radnor Arms at Coleshill to Ye Olde Swan pub at Radcot, by the Thames on the A4095 Witney to Faringdon road.

OXBREW

Producing “good quality crafted cask ales and bottled conditioned beers with a modern twist” is the mission of Oxfordshire’s newest brewery, OXBREW. Stepfather and son duo, Aaron Baldwin and Simon Scamp, are installing an eight-barrel brew-house at their unit on Enstone Airfield near Chipping Norton, with the aim of having their first commercially available beers ready by the summer.

Aaron, born and raised in Oxford, has spent the last few years researching, experimenting and refining a range of beer styles. Simon, originally from Kent, has been brewing on and off on a small scale since the 1990s and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Aaron Baldwin says: “We’re excited to now be able to turn our long-standing passion into a business. We have been overwhelmed with the support and genuine interest that local brewers have shown us, and look

Continued on page 30



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Brewery News continued from page 28 - OXBREW

forward to working with the Oxford Brewers' Alliance."

To find out more about OXBREW, follow it on Facebook: www.facebook.com/oxbrew

Tap Social

Two more beers are being produced by this new brewery in Oxford – Thrutchy Moves, a 4.2%, a kolsch-style Belgian pale ale; and Monkey Bars, a 7.3% Belgian dubbel. No finings are used to clear the beers, so a natural haze is present and they are vegan-friendly.

Tap Social's beers are served in the bottle or by key-keg and are naturally carbonated through the conditioning process, with no gas added. Core beers are Good Size Eh?, an American pale ale (4.5%); Grebe's Procession, an oatmeal stout (5.5%); Bigboy Pants, a Belgian sour beer (3.8%); and Bleeding Heart Numbskulls Cranberry and Thyme (5.5%).

A taproom and a bottle shop are open to the public from 4pm-midnight on Fridays and Saturdays. It is also planning to have brewing courses where you can learn how to brew and take home the beer.

Vale/ABC

Beers in the pipeline for Vale include Just Like That (3.9% - Fez Red), its tribute to the great Tommy Cooper. Roasted malt character with a combination of spicy, floral English hops makes this a classic beer for a classic comedian. Fork Handles (4.2% Blonde) doffs its caps to another British comedy classic, a blonde

ale brewed with pale English malt and hops that are all English too.

After a short gap due to a change in personnel, new brewer Ben Amos is now at the helm and the Aylesbury Brewhouse Co. is up and running once again. Very little else has changed, with the brewery still focused on producing single batch limited edition craft beers that are both interesting and enjoyable to make and drink.

Gamma, a 5% Black IPA, represents the first outing for Ben. Once seen as a contradiction in terms, Black IPA has become one of the most recognised styles to come out of the craft beer boom. It is as dark as a stout with the big hop character and clean finish of a classic IPA.

Next up is Beaver State, a 4.2% American Wheat beer, an adaptation of a classic Bavarian hefeweizen. Supernova, a 4.8%

West Berkshire

The new brewery at its existing premises in Yattendon is taking shape, with direct access from the shop into a beer garden for summer events. It is due to open by August, using equipment sourced from Italy. The brew-house will also be visible from the shop/café.

XT

Following the success of its three new craft beers, Snake IPA, Squid Ink and XPA have become permanent beers and are selling well. The latest beer in the XT17 Single Hop range has been brewed using Jester hops, and it

is brewing a special XT666 (South Seas Black Magic!) to celebrate the 666th brew – a strong Black IPA at 6.66%.

Two new Animal beers are Buzzard, a Yakima Pale 4.6% beer; and Buffalo, an American Amber 4.6% brew. Other beers in the pipeline include Lion, a London Porter at 4.6%; Simian, a hopped-up Red 4.2%; and Orca, a 4.9% beer with a single malt and single hop – Maris Otter and Wakatu.

It will be supporting Oxford Beer Week with its first open day of 2017 on 6 May, from 10am to 5pm.



ABOVE: A good choice of beers is available every Friday and Saturday from 4pm at Tap Social Movement's brewery bar on the Curtis Industrial Estate at Botley

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Brewery Focus: White Horse

Dave Richardson ventures to Stanford-in-the-Vale to hear about a brewery that takes its name from ancient times



AS YOU HURTL west at 125 mph along the Great Western railway line between Didcot and Swindon, you might just get a glimpse of the white horse that gives its name to a district council, a brewery and a branch of CAMRA, to mention just three.

The B4507 road leading west out of Wantage gives a closer view, and if you clamber up the hillside you can admire a carving in chalk dating back 3,000 years, the oldest in Britain. A one-mile walk along an ancient route called the Ridgeway leads to Wayland's Smithy, an ancient burial site that lends its name to one of White Horse brewery's beers.

The brewery is situated on a modern industrial estate in the heart of the Vale of White Horse, being set up in 2004 by Andy Wilson (pictured left) and partners at a time when new breweries were still rare. Today it is a thriving enterprise which is just the right size to be a reliable partner for pubs and retail outlets, without losing sight of its founding principles.

Andy – with partners Keith Bott (who runs Titanic Brewery in Stoke-on-Trent) and Will Bebb – is a very hands-on boss. Only half a dozen people work for White Horse in any case, and

on the day of my visit he was answering phone calls and serving a shop customer as well as talking about beers and brewing.

Andy has worked in brewing all his life, first with Whitbread in Romsey and then with Clark's in his native Yorkshire. He came to work at Wychwood in Witney in 1993 where one of its founders, the late Chris Moss, was an inspiration. Andy not only worked in sales and deliveries but also ran Hobgoblin pubs in Newbury and Oxford, when Wychwood had a chain of around 20 with the Hobgoblin name. The Oxford pub run by Andy and his wife Pam was previously known as the Bulldog and is now St Aldates Tavern, becoming Oxford CAMRA's Pub of the Year during his tenure. He stayed on after the chain was sold but then worked for Bateman's before deciding to set up his own brewery.

"We had to be situated in the Vale to be called White Horse Brewery, and the horse itself is sometimes visible from here," he says. "Our intention was always to sell quality beer, but not to become the biggest or to sell out after a few years. We still have the same malt and hop suppliers as on the day we started, as it's all about building



friendships with people.”

Regular beers are White Horse Bitter (3.7%), Village Idiot (4.1%), Wayland Smithy (4.4%) and a mild, Black Beauty (3.9%). Village Idiot, instantly recognisable by its amusing pump clip, is the best seller and “brewed in honour of the village idiot who stands at every bar in the land, dispensing pearls of wisdom such as ‘the water’s not that deep – it only comes halfway up the ducks’”! Andy describes it as a Northern-style bitter whereas Wayland Smithy is more of a traditional best bitter.

Black Horse Porter (5%) is brewed several times a year while Dark Blue Oxford University Ale (4.3%) is a rich chestnut beer that is often available. Rudolph the Red Nosed White Horse (4.8%) appears every Christmas, while specials are produced quarterly rather than monthly with Crazy Horse IPA (4.7%) being currently available.

“Many breweries do a special every month, but people are often disappointed to find it gone which is why we do it quarterly,” explains Andy. “There is a major trend towards hoppy golden beers, but we haven’t gone along with that except for Crazy Horse, and the

red pale ale Show Pony which we did at the beginning of the year. Hoppy beers might have a lovely fragrance, but you can’t get rid of it on your palate.”

White Horse is not against innovation, however, and head brewer Nathan Beet – ably assisted by Alex Timms – is free to experiment. The summer special will be Pferdestarke Pils, a 4.6% German-style cask ale. It is also experimenting with kegs – a version of Crazy Horse, and The Guv’nor, which at 6.5% is its strongest beer.

“I love the ideas of some of the young brewers, and it’s wonderful to see more young people drinking ale – including women – when it used to be thought of as something for old men,” says Andy. “People will always want to try different beers, and there’s room for everyone as long as brewing is done properly, and everyone pays their way.

“We are now covering the broad horizon of what people want to drink, but our core range is the same.”

An advantage enjoyed by White Horse, but not by the micro-breweries that have sprung up everywhere, is that its beers are usually easy to find locally with Wetherspoon being a major

supporter. Membership of the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) has also opened the door to many other pubs, but there is always one pub where a good range of White Horse beers is guaranteed.

It took over the lease of a pub owned by Everards, the Royal Blenheim in Oxford city centre, in 2008. The pub acts as its brewery tap while also selling up to half a dozen other real ales, often including one from Everards and one from Titanic. With Mike and Jane Binyon maintaining the pub’s Good Beer Guide listing after they took over, the Royal Blenheim is an essential stop on any Oxford pub crawl. It will have a make-over prior to re-opening of the adjacent Westgate Centre in the autumn, and may hold events during Oxford Beer Week in May.

What next for White Horse? Andy hopes that steady growth will continue, but it’s not about to go in any major new direction. “Let’s set trends, but not follow them,” he says. “Our motto is ‘we brew beer to drink, and what we have left, we sell’. That’s something we will keep to.”

www.breweryoxfordshire.co.uk

A stroll through the Vale

Dick Bosley takes Shanks's Pony from Wantage to Steventon

HAVING WALKED TO Wallingford in a previous edition, this is a seven-mile pub walk from Wantage through the attractive downland villages below the Ridgeway.

Wantage is easily reached by bus from Didcot, Abingdon and Oxford and has a good claim to be Oxfordshire's real ale capital. Both the Royal Oak and the Shoulder of Mutton normally carry ten ever-changing beers each, so there is little point in listing the ones available when I walked this route. For ease of directions I'll assume that you go to the Royal Oak first then start walking from the Shoulder.

Head away from Market Place along Wallingford Street, which becomes Charlton Road, until you reach the Nelson. This is a generic Greene King pub known for good value food, although the Abbot Ale can be acceptable.

Here you turn up Larkhill and after about 50 yards there is a path on your left that leads past allotments and a couple of houses into open countryside. This path goes past one of my favourite sloe collecting places and onto a quiet road where you carry straight on, until another footpath bends to the left along the edge of Ardington Community Wood. Carry on past the woodland into the village going over an offset crossroads, past the church, to reach the Boar's Head.

This pub has changed greatly since I first visited, when Ralph Radband was the landlord, but I

don't think he would be spinning in his grave at the changes. Although renowned for food – and Janine strongly recommends the Prawn and Salmon Gravlax Salad – it normally serves a Loose Cannon beer, Fuller's London Pride, its own Ardington Ale and a varying guest – when I called it was an excellent 3.6% Brill Gold from Vale.

Turn right out of the pub until you see a path going through a tunnel on your right. It would be remiss of me not to point out that should you have brought a horse or pony with you, you cannot take this route. At the end of this path go downhill, over the stream and then turn left onto a track/path to West Hendred. After crossing the Ginge Brook you go through one of the loveliest churchyards in the county, reaching a road where you turn left, then after about 100 yards there is a white house on your right with a signed path behind that you follow.

This path takes you into East Hendred, and if you carry straight on the road leads past the village hall and the church (with no clock) when you can turn left up a slight hill to the



Eyston Arms. Again this is a pub well known for food but London Pride, Wadworth 6X and Hook Norton Hooky bitter are normally available.

Again turn right out of the pub through the heart of this historic village, and go up White Road until you reach the main A417. Carefully cross this taking the farm track almost opposite. This path takes you past some farm buildings and a small copse before leading down through a gap in a hedge onto a path where there is a footbridge (with some missing planks) that crosses Ginge Brook. Over a stile and into a field turn right, and go over a couple of stiles past Hill Farm and St Michael's Church and then follow a raised medieval pathway, the Causeway. This will lead you over the railway line to the North Star in Steventon, where new landlords took over recently. Continuing on the Causeway to the main road, turn right to reach the Cherry Tree where you will find a very well kept range of Wadworth's ales.

From Steventon there is a half hourly bus service to return you to any of the towns mentioned above, with a bus stop outside the pub, for when you have sufficed.

One final note – although the Shoulder of Mutton and Cherry Tree are open all afternoon, it may be worth checking the opening times of other village pubs before your trip.

DICK BOSLEY

White Horse News

Kingston Bagpuize

HINDS HEAD:

The branch is collecting signatures to list this village pub as an Asset of Community Value, to try to stop it being converted into a supermarket. Sold to Hawthorn Leisure by Greene King in 2014, it is now subject of a planning application by its owner. In neighbouring Southmoor, the owner of the Lamb and Flag has been given planning permission to convert it into a family home. It closed in October.

Shippon

PRINCE OF WALES:

Ken Sandall and Cheryl Barnes are pictured being presented with their Locale certificate. This popular village pub normally has three bitters – Timothy Taylor Landlord and two local guests – as well as three real ciders and good quality pub grub. It offers a 20p discount to CAMRA members. Plans are in hand for a summer beer festival and Shippon can be reached easily by foot, car or number 4 bus that runs between Abingdon and Oxford.



Faringdon

SWAN:

The new landlord and landlady of this popular real ale pub are Andy and Liz Brotherston, whose previous pub was the Queen Charlotte in Windsor. Andy aims to commence brewing as he has done some training at Windsor & Eton and Bond breweries, the Faringdon Brewery being on the pub's premises.

Steventon

NORTH STAR:

"H" and Lisa Pulleyn, new landlords of the North Star, are pictured receiving their Locale certificate.



Wantage Beer Festival



Held at the Beacon on 17-18 March, this was considered a great success with 20 new members recruited. All cider and perry was sold out and nearly 100% of the beer, with just one of the 28 mainly local beers not making the grade to serve.

Beer of the Festival as voted for by attendees was Hair of the Doug by LoveBeer Brewery of Milton, and a presentation evening will be arranged to award the certificate in due course. Around £200 was raised for festival charity, the October Club (Alzheimer's Day Care Centre) in Wantage.

Branch meetings

Tuesday 16 April: 7.45pm at the Red Lion, 3 Cornmarket, Faringdon, SN7 7HG.

Tuesday 9 May: 7.45pm at the Prince of Wales, 60 Barrow Road, Shippon, OX13 6JQ.

A social is planned at the Reading Beer Festival Sunday 30 April at 12.00.

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OXFORD BEER WEEK

1st – 6th May 2017

A CELEBRATION OF the incredible range of local beers served in Oxford will take place from 1-6 May. The inaugural Oxford Beer Week will see a huge range of local brews available in a host of pubs across the city (see back cover).

The aim is to celebrate the choice and quality of beers made locally, and to give beer lovers in the city the chance to discover new ales. Breweries taking part – all members of the Oxford Brewers' Alliance – are:

Brakspear, Henley/Witney
Church Hanbrewery, Witney
Hook Norton, Hook Norton
LAM Brewing, Kennington
Little Ox, Freeland
Loddon, Dunsden Green
Loose Cannon, Abingdon
Cotswold Brewing Company,
Bourton-on-the-Water
Shotover Brewing Company,
Horspath
Tap Social, Oxford
Turpin, Hook Norton
Wychwood, Witney
XT, Long Crendon

James Clarke, managing director of Hook Norton Brewery, said: "Having spent last Mayday enjoying the delights of several pubs around the city, it became clear there was an opportunity to celebrate the great diversity of beer brewed in and around the city and county.

"This is the first event under the Oxford Brewers' Alliance banner. Oxford is a fantastic city, with a diverse and exciting beer scene, and we hope lots of people, both locals and visitors, will enjoy a week of beer celebrations."

Kurt Moxley, from LAM Brewing, said: "LAM is so excited to be involved in providing craft beers in this showcase of the best of Oxfordshire's beer. Good old crafty Oxford!"

Jon Tillson, second brewer at Wychwood Brewery, added: "Oxford Beer Week is an opportunity to reach out to the people of Oxford and demonstrate the amazing variety and quality of beers being produced on their doorstep."

Christian Gyuricza, from Church HanBrewery, said: "Church HanBrewery is very proud to take part in the Oxford Beer Week. This is a great event for Oxford citizens, tourists and beer enthusiasts to experience the prolific range of different local beers available in Oxfordshire."

A full list of Oxford pubs taking part will be published nearer the event. For more information, see back page and visit oxfordbrewers.org/oxbeerwk, facebook.com/oxbeerweek and twitter.com/oxbeerweek



Oxford Branch Diary

Saturday 15 April Birthday Social

12 noon
Social at the Mason's Arms, Headington Quarry, to celebrate 20 years of Chris Meeson being in charge of our current City Pub of the Year.

Saturday 29 April Beer Festival Social

12 noon
Social at the beer festival at The Nags Head on the Thames, Abingdon.

Tuesday 2 May Branch Meeting

7.30pm
White Horse, Ock Street, Abingdon OX14 5DW
Branch meeting in Abingdon, Meet beforehand at 6.30pm at The Old Anchor, 1 St Helens Wharf, Abingdon, for a natter before we walk along the Ock valley to the White Horse. All welcome.

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** looks at pubs around Iffley and Cowley Roads in Oxford



ABOVE FROM TOP: The Rusty Bicycle and the James Street Tavern

FURTHER TO MY previous jaunt around Cowley (Issue 99), this time I was accompanied by our branch secretary, Steve Lawrence, who amongst his multifarious duties is responsible for collating information for the CAMRA national database www.whatpub.com. It's a great way to select pubs if you fancy a pub crawl anywhere in the country; I've used it countless times. We were both kept busy with Steve taking notes to update each pub we visited and me hoping to garner enough information for my regular column.

Our first stop was the Magdalen Arms on the corner of Magdalen Street and Iffley Road. This is a pleasant pub serving the local community, even opening at 10am on Saturdays for coffee if a pint is not your forte first thing in the morning. The pub is part of the S&N Heineken group and was offering four real ales: Caledonian Over the Bar, Caledonian XPA, Brakspear Bitter and Deuchars Bitter. I opted for the former, a polished copper ale with an aromatically hopped, bittersweet balance; a good accompaniment whilst watching the Six Nations Rugby series.

An unfortunate event preceded formation of the Caledonian Brewery, as George Lorimer Sr was walking past the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh as fire engulfed it. He attempted to save a trapped labourer but the north wall of the theatre collapsed, burying both men. On news of his father's death, George Lorimer Jr returned home. He was a member of the Bruntsfield Links Golfing Society whose members met at the Golf

Tavern and this is where Lorimer met Robert Clark, a local head brewer. Pints were drunk and plans were hatched. Lorimer & Clark's Caledonian Brewery opened in 1869 on Slateford Road in Edinburgh, where it brews to this day. Proof, if ever needed, that adventure begins with a pint.

I spent some time talking to landlady Florence Fowler, who is passionate about the pub she has been managing with her partner, and chef, Tony Abarno for about eight years. Prior to that they had worked in catering for 25 years in London so have bags of experience. The pub offers a comfortable dining area which can seat up to 200 people, and a walk through a central partition opens up a cosy back room. Local residents and students are very supportive of the pub where the food menu changes daily and a set menu is offered. To further cement relationships with locals the pub holds a flea market on the first Saturday of each month.

We didn't have to walk far to our next venue, the Rusty Bicycle in Magdalen Road, which is instantly recognisable by a bike attached to the top of the pub reminding me of a scene from the film ET. The pub is one from the portfolio of Arkells Brewery, Swindon which is an independent family brewer tracing its roots back to 1843.

Five real ales were available including Ruby Rye, Wiltshire Gold, Hoperation, Moonlight and 3B. I tried the 5% Ruby Rye, a beer brewed using rye which adds a silky depth of flavour and bigger mouthfeel to this coloured beer; a touch of

mandarina hops into the hopback brings a light orange finish to the flavour. Very tasty, and if Arkells plans to introduce further seasonal/guest ales then I am excited.

I was pleased to speak to Rob Sanders who, along with Sam Thompson, jointly manages this funky and friendly "chimney pub" (a Victorian or Edwardian building with original chimney) with its cosy ambience. Rob has plans to introduce a wood-fired oven to offer enhanced pizzas to the locals. I've always considered Arkells to be rather anachronistic with its selection and presentation of beers, but Rob assured me that the brewery and its pump clips are changing with youthful protégé Alex Arkell assuming the reins at this family dynasty. A portent for dynamic change, perhaps? Let's hope so.

Our next stop was the Cowley Retreat which is almost adjacent to music venue the O2 Academy on Cowley Road. This former Hobgoblin pub is popular with students and now part of the Punch Taverns empire. Four real ales were available including St Austell Brewery's Tribute Ale, Sharp's Doom Bar, Purity Mad Goose, and Everards' Tighthead. I chose the Tribute which is a 4.2% pale amber zesty ale with a lasting white head, fruity on the nose, with biscuity flavour and juicy fruit flavours from the hops.

Tribute was created to commemorate the 1999 solar eclipse. It was originally a one-off special named Daylight Robbery but proved to be so popular it was reintroduced as Tribute and has since won several awards around the UK. It now accounts for 80% of sales for this Cornish brewer, but unfortunately the beer was too

warm for my liking so I finished my half and we left.

Just off the Cowley Road is the James Street Tavern which is a Greene King (GK) pub offering six real ales when we visited. These were GK IPA, Shotover Brewery's Scholar and Prospect, XT13, Loddon's Hoppit and the house beer known as JST Bitter. I opted for the XT13, a Pacific Red Ale brewed with a cocktail of hops selected from nations around the Pacific – Columbus from north-west America, Galaxy from Australia and Wakatau from New Zealand.

I enjoyed this brew with a caramel aroma whilst the flavour is moderate to heavy, sweet and bitter with a long duration, fruity, hoppy and dry with an oily texture possibly due to the proliferation of hops. It's always great to see local breweries represented in our pubs and XT from Long Crendon, Bucks is a fine example as the beer is highly regarded with the brew numbers representing colours of the spectrum.

The James Street Tavern is wet-aled although the barman told me that a food offering is imminent. Entertainment includes an "open mic" night on a Tuesday with comedy night once a month.

The last pub on our travels was the Angel and Greyhound, St Clement's Street, and it was singularly appropriate that we chose today to visit as the previous landlords, Richard and Kathryn Gibson, who have been successfully dispensing drinks since 2003, had recently left. This was an opportunity to meet the new manager, David Oram, who had arrived just over a week ago. The pub's current name is derived from the

meadow nearby, which was named after coaching inns that were at one time in the High Street. In its heyday (when called the Oranges and Lemons) the pub was synonymous with punk rock, with performers such as Billy Idol of Generation X appearing.

David was keen to talk and informed us of his plan to place greater focus on food for the future. He has a background in catering and had worked for Bath Ales previously. I could see he is passionate and positive about future prospects for this fine Young's pub where five real ales were on offer including Bitter, Special Bitter, London Gold plus two guests, Twickenham Ales' Grandstand and Purity Brewing's UBU.

I've always had a liking for Twickenham Ales so I opted for the Grandstand Bitter and wasn't disappointed. A well-hopped and well balanced refreshing amber session beer, triple hopped with Brewers Gold, it gives light citrus notes and a fresh clean finish. It's the sort of beer, at 3.8%, that you can drink more than one of quite easily. We bade David farewell and offered him all the best for the future.

As we made our way towards the High Street to board our bus to Abingdon, Steve and I reflected on our day and hope that more and more people come to use whatpub.com to locate pubs serving real ale; if you are a member of CAMRA you can also score the beers you sample.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Dave Richardson's book *Oxford Pubs* for information contained in this article (www.oxfordpubhistory.co.uk).

PETE FLYNN

OXFORD BEER WEEK

1st – 6th May 2017



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