



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Issue 101
June - July 2017

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the Oxford Drinker



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

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Contents

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

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

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5 Welcome
So what does the future hold for our pubs?

6 Bath Time
The branch visits the pubs of Bath



10 Where's Wally?
Intrepid travellers seek pubs in Wallingford

12 Brewery Focus
This issue we look at West Berkshire Brewery

15 White Horse
A brewery closes, plus other White Horse news

16 Pub News
All the latest from around the region

17 Branch Diary
What's on locally over the next month or two

18 Plough Milestone
A notable celebration in Wolvercote

19 Tony's Travels
Our former chairman gets out and about

20 Level Pegging
An insight into the pub game of cribbage

21 Charlbury's 20th
A look forward to this month's festival

23 Brewery News
All the latest from the local scene

25 Festival Diary
A comprehensive guide to the summer Festivals

26 Pete's Pubs
A visit to the market town of Witney

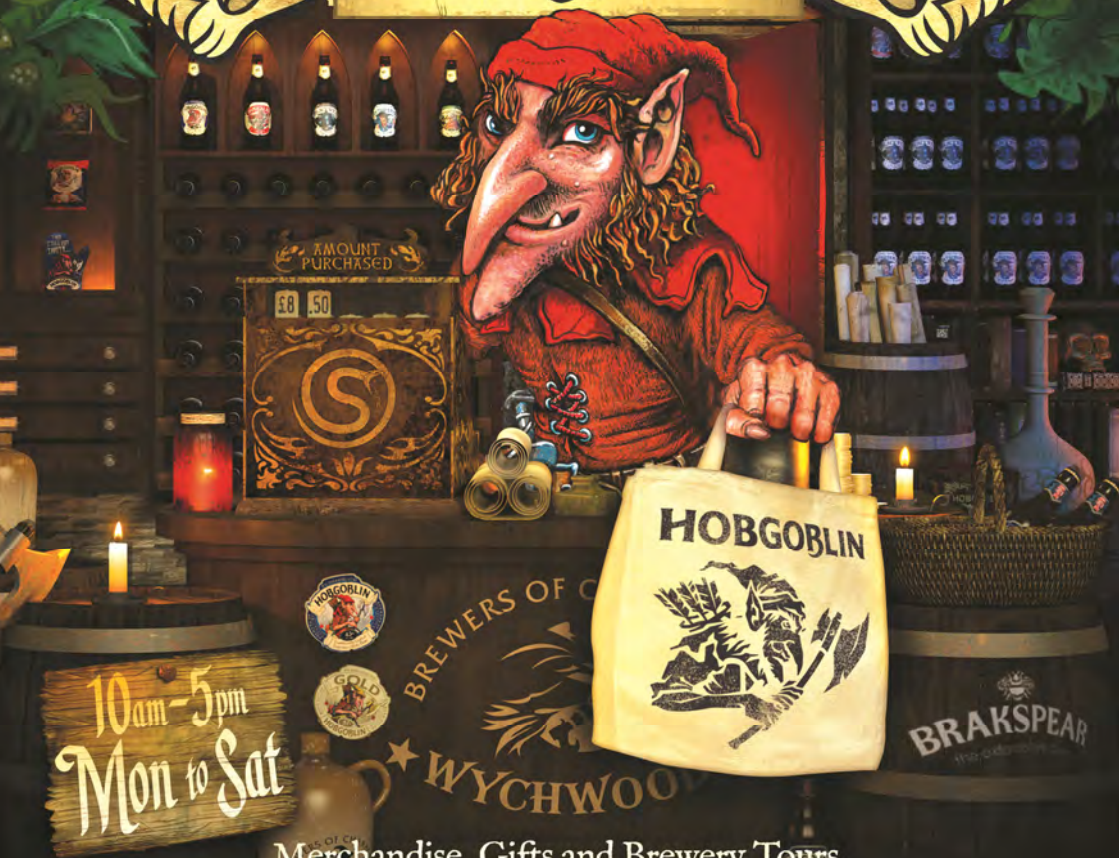


29 Pub talk
Conversation in the Red Lion

31 Gardener's World
Paul Silcock gives a publican's view

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Welcome

.... to a more
positive future
for pubs?

THE PUB CLOSURE rate has slowed down in recent years but is still running at about 20 a week nationwide. While it is good to celebrate the permanent re-opening of the Abingdon Arms in Beckley on June 22 – now under community ownership – others are still struggling.

A change in the law which took effect before the General Election offers some respite as anyone wanting to convert a pub to an alternative use or demolish it must now seek planning permission, giving the community a say. Permission was previously needed to convert into housing, but not to become a shop which is why supermarket convenience stores have destroyed many vital community assets.

The rebirth of two Oxford pubs in recent weeks is another good sign, and evidence that some lease owners are “thinking outside the box” in trying to make it work. The former Berkshire on Abingdon Road is now called Home, and described as a café, restaurant and meeting space as well as a pub. In St Clements, Joe Perks bar (formerly the Duke of Edinburgh) has become the Globe, functioning as a rentable working space during the day from Mondays to Thursdays, becoming a pub at other times. These pubs may not suit traditionalists, but could be the way forward for some.

The Oxford Brewers' Alliance can look back at a successful inaugural Oxford Beer Week at the beginning of May, with a drive to get more pubs to stock local ale and several well attended special events. I was most impressed by the spirit of co-operation, as in what other industry would an upstart newcomer be invited into the premises of the oldest local producer to help learn the craft? Well done to Hook Norton's James Clarke, the prime mover behind the alliance, and look out for next year's Oxford Beer Week.

Micro-breweries are sprouting up everywhere, but as with all things there are numerous regulations that everyone must observe. It's sad to note the demise of one-man-band Adkin brewery of Wantage, because changes in regulations have made it unviable to continue.

This edition of the magazine has a “county” feel with reports on pubs in Wallingford, Witney and Abingdon, plus a look at Bath, venue of our beer festival helpers' trip. We're looking forward to touring the county's seven community-owned pubs in June, to report in the next edition on how each made it happen.

As ever, your news, views and contributions are welcome – just drop me a line.

DAVE RICHARDSON

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and we will send you as many issues as you send envelopes.

Bath time.... with Cardinal Sin!

Michael Corlett joins the annual free coach trip for helpers at the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival – this year to Bath



ABOVE FROM TOP: Pouring beer from the jug at The Star; the Pig & Fiddle

OPPOSITE: The Bath Brew House was the busiest pub of the day

IT IS THAT time of year when the days are starting to lengthen slightly, winter is starting to lose its grip and spring seems like it might be just around the corner. As the promise of springtime creeps in, the thoughts of any sensible branch member can turn to only one thing -- the festival helpers' trip.

This year the destination was Bath, and a group of stalwart volunteers duly assembled for the coach with pick-up points in Oxford, Abingdon and Faringdon. There were many familiar faces as well as some welcome new ones. The last time I had been to Bath was many years ago for the beer festival there, one of the first that I ever went to and some years before I ever worked at one. As a result, I didn't have time to visit many of the pubs so I was looking forward to making up for it on this occasion.

It seemed like no time at all before we were rolling down towards the city, with the characteristic honey-coloured limestone buildings spread out in front of us. We arrived just before midday, and as I had decided to make the Bell my first port of call, I set off up the hill towards the north. As it turned out, quite a number of my fellow travellers had made the same decision and as we arrived at the pub in procession, one passer-by asked if there was a gig on.

The Bell is well known as a

music venue, which is immediately apparent on entering as the walls are covered with music related posters. There is an area for a stage in the large room to the left, and a pair of turntables installed on top of the bar billiards table at the back.

Underneath the hops strung above the bar, six beers were waiting for us (RCH Pitchfork, Butts Barbus Barbus, Otter Bitter, Abbey Bellringer, Stonehenge Sign of Spring, Hopback Summer Lightning and Butcombe Bitter). I went for the Bellringer and found the balance of malt and hops just right for the first of the day. Four ciders were also racked up and on offer. A sign on the wall announces that the pub is an Industrial and Provident Society, owned by a co-operative of locals, making it one of the small but growing number of community-run pubs across the country.

Moving on, it seemed only sensible to visit the nearby Star Inn. The sun was just breaking through as we headed up the hill for a stretch before turning a hairpin round onto the next road. I was starting to feel pleasantly warm as I entered the pub, only to be greeted by a roaring fire in the "Glass Room" between the front door and the bar. The fire seemed entirely in keeping with the rest of the historic interior, made up of small rooms with wooden floors and wood panelling much in evidence.

Ales on the pumps here were Bass and Long Arm brewery's Shadow Wolf Smoked Stout, with Abbey Ales' Bellringer served from jugs filled by gravity out of a kilderkin behind the bar; the draught cider here being Thatcher's Cheddar Valley. Trying the stout, I thought it was an excellent example of the style -- the smokiness coming through without being overpowering.

As we were chatting, the barman warned us that we might meet another pub crawl passing through the town, an annual event organised as a warm-up for the Bath half marathon being held the following day. He also let slip that he was entering the race himself, in aid of a local mental health charity called Bath Mind, and we were pleased to add a few pounds each into his fund.

Busy with the conversation in both pubs so far, I hadn't got around to making any plans beyond this point. So I took the easy option, and followed what remained of our original party back down towards the city centre and into the Pig & Fiddle. The Broad Street entrance to this establishment is a converted shop, and the thought that struck me on walking through to the bar was that the place had been constructed from bits and pieces left over from the parts of other buildings that nobody wanted any more. But the overall effect was appealing and

certainly the atmosphere was welcoming, with plenty of people already enjoying themselves.

The bar, by the other entrance on Saracen Street, seemed most like the piece that had been rescued from a traditional pub, although with modern steel hand-pulls. These were dispensing Butcombe Bitter, Fuller's London Pride, Oakham Preacher and one called Sin Bin (which I thought was from Liberation, but may have been from Abbey Ales who also brew a beer of the same name). I was not at all disappointed by the Preacher, with its full flavour in true Oakham style, and I was happy to recommend it to the next punter arriving at the bar who was equally impressed.

Among the video screens showing sport, numerous diverse objects were dotted about including a tin for

donations towards the "Donald Trump Hit-Man Fund", and a battered old HMV wind-up gramophone -- though neither of which, I suspect, will be used for their original purpose.

From here, I made for the Old Green Tree together with a few others, another pub that we had earmarked for its historic interior. With its Old Curiosity Shop window looking into the tiny room at the front, a narrow, oak beamed bar behind and a further small room behind that, this felt like a place that had tales to tell of times past. Maybe that is why the regulars who engaged us in conversation were discussing Dickens, and the controversy between him and the illustrator Robert Seymour over the origin of the Pickwick Papers. The Internet may be a very convenient way to pick up interesting information and opinions, but to my mind the



tried and tested method of popping into the local is still far better.

As I sampled a rather nice drop of Wickwar's Shanakee Stout, I had a look into the front room and took my own brief trip down memory lane. This was one of the few pubs I had called into on my previous visit, years before, and I remembered it not just because of the timeless atmosphere but because it was the Sunday following the Bath beer festival, and a gang of festival volunteers were sitting at the next table.

"Where's Brian, then?" a young lad asked the others. The character who looked the most experienced took on a grave expression and said, in a sombre tone of voice, "Fell off the stillage". The remainder of

the crew nodded seriously and made "ah, yes" noises, as though this was entirely expected, and really the only surprise was that the rest of them had survived the ordeal. This encounter left me with the mistaken idea, for quite some time, that working at beer festivals is more risky than it actually is. I have found it perfectly safe, as long as you take care (which we always do at Oxford, of course), but I still spare a thought for Brian occasionally and hope he made a full recovery.

The next stop for me was the *Coeur de Lion*, smaller even than the *Old Green Tree* and claiming to be the smallest pub in Bath. This is owned by *Abbey Ales*, and behind the stained glass windows at the front, the bar in the tiny carpeted room was offering a good range of *Abbey's ales*: *Bellringer*, *Bath Best* and *Cardinal Sin* as well as *Golden Hill*, a guest from *Keystone*.

Believing that it might be a bit of a rarity, I was persuaded against my better judgement to go for the *Cardinal Sin*. It was as strong and as dark as an old ale should be, and my misgivings gradually subsided. By the time I reached the bottom of the glass, I had decided that if this beer really was a sin, it also counted as its own forgiveness and hence departed for the next pub with a clear conscience.

The pubs having been so welcoming, and the company so pleasant, the day was now

starting to wear on and I realised I would only have time for a few whistle-stop visits before the coach departed. I called into the *Griffin Inn*, to find a modern interior with six hand-pumps going strong. As is usually the case towards the end of the day, we were all making our way in the direction of the pick-up point and it was no surprise to find a large table full of fellow festival helpers sitting by the window, so we spent a pleasant few minutes catching up. Working out that I could probably accomplish a look-see in the *Bath Brew House* I discovered that it was packed out, and serving in plastic glasses, probably due to the Rugby being shown. I managed a taste of the *Gladiator*, produced on site by the *James Street* brewery, and a quick glimpse of the match above the heads of the crowd gathered in the marquee at the back.

With the clock racing around to 6.30pm I headed back to the *Garrick's Head*, the theatre pub and original home of Bath's *Beau Nash*, where there was just time to poke my nose in the door before joining the now re-assembled company to board our transport for the ride home. Another day of first-class pubs was behind us, and this year's festival to look forward to -- already booked for 26-28 October in Oxford Town Hall, so don't miss it.

MICHAEL CORLETT





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◆ ◆

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Four wallies in Wallingford

A South Oxfordshire market town is the focus of a summer day's pub crawl by **Dave Richardson** and friends



ABOVE FROM TOP: The Coachmakers Arms; Paul Davies at the Town Arms; The Keep micro pub

MY PREVIOUS DRINKING visit to Wallingford had been on a booze cruise along the Thames from Abingdon, when having had more than enough already, the only pub I went in was the Dolphin. So I set out to make amends with branch chairman Pete Flynn, Tony Goulding, and South Oxfordshire CAMRA stalwart Bob Smith.

The beauty of this town – well, apart from the river, of course!! – is that all 10 of its pubs are within easy walking distance. Two of them were found to be closed this Wednesday lunchtime/afternoon so were not visited, these being the Green Tree (it usually has Doom Bar); and Fuller's Coach and Horses.

First stop was at the Old Post Office in the heart of town, whose name is self-explanatory. This large and handsome building features more as a restaurant than a pub, but bar supervisor William Tolley gave us a warm welcome and explained that it's part of Oakman Inns (whose other properties include the Crown and Thistle in Abingdon and the Blue Boar in Witney), and has been a pub-restaurant for seven years.

A deal with Fuller's means that London Pride is permanent along with one of its seasonal ales – in this case, Spring Sprinter. I tried the latter and also Loddon's Ferryman's Gold, both being tasty golden beers

that many people choose at this time of year.

We then headed along St Mary's Street to somewhere completely different, the very traditional Coachmakers Arms. This is an old-fashioned, two-roomed pub with tiled or wooden floors, low beams and a nice patio garden. It's often known as the "Cat" rather than its full name the Coachmakers Arms Tavern, and is owned by Brakspear Pub Company which has a deal with Marston's. The Brakspear Bitter and Oxford Gold beers on the bar are from Wychwood brewery in Witney, and the third beer can be anything in the Marstons range and was today Jennings' Cumberland Ale.

My half of Brakspear Bitter went down well and I could imagine propping up the bar here for some time. Bar meals (lunchtime) and a bistro menu (evenings) are available, and we heard that Wallingford has lost only one pub in the last 10 years. This was the Royal Standard directly opposite, now the Partridge restaurant with a "Morland Artist" plaque still in place.

It was now time to turn our steps towards the river and two pubs right next to each other. The Boat House makes the most of its direct river frontage with a large lower level patio where boats tie up right alongside; whereas the Town

Arms might be overlooked by many especially on a summer's day.

The Boat House is a former Spirit Inns and now Greene King property, but the ownership isn't immediately obvious. The cask beer range included its own branded Boat House Ale, GK's IPA and Old Speckled Hen, and a guest from the GK range – Wells' Bombardier Burning Gold. We had been told the house ale was by North Cotswold, which seemed unlikely now that it's under GK ownership. Lilley's Mango Cider was a pleasant surprise.

I enjoyed the Burning Gold, but the pub is much like any other large drinking/dining pub and we weren't tempted to linger long despite its location, location, location. So we went next door to the refurbished Town Arms, and were pleasantly surprised to find six hand pumps including some unusual beers.

Paul Davies runs this pub very well, having worked in various pubs around Oxford's Cowley Road. Fuller's London Pride looked like a wasted pump to us (available in at least two other Wallingford pubs), but Bond Brews was a new one, almost literally, as the Berkshire mini-brewery opened only in 2015. Its Mellow Velo Mild (3.6%) was an unusual and different session beer, and we also had the choice of White Horse Village Idiot and Butts Traditional. Other local breweries often represented include West Berkshire, Loose Cannon, XT and Loddon.

A kitchen will be operational later in the summer but for now

it's a wet-only pub, with pool, darts and TV. The well preserved Ushers sign outside hints at its history, this being a Trowbridge, Wiltshire brewer swallowed up by the giant keg emporium Watneys in 1960. We met the landlord of a nearby pub in here – always an accolade!

Next to the George Hotel, a Wallingford institution, dating back to the 16th century and thought to have once been part of the long-gone castle. It has 39 guest-rooms and many period features, but the pleasing thing for us was that in the bar, you feel you're in a pub rather than a hotel. It is one of the biggest outlets for Marlow brewery Rebellion and always has three of its ales on, these being IPA, Smuggler and the "extra pale" Zebedee. It clearly attracts plenty of locals as well as visitors, and my half of Smuggler was enjoyed in comfortable and interesting surroundings.

Wallingford now boasts a micro-pub, The Keep, which is South Oxfordshire's Cider Pub of the Year. It opened last summer and is predominantly a craft ale bar with a good choice of bottles, but Loose Cannon is supplying real ale as "bright beer" in mini-"kegs" – Abingdon Bridge, Recoil and the seasonal Tsar. A real cider, Hitchcox, can also be sampled.

The Loose Cannon equipment gives The Keep a foothold in the real ale market without investing in the equipment, but it has done well enough with the craft range and co-owner Rob McGregor is pleased with the first year's trading.

We then made a (very!) brief

visit to the worst pub of the day, the Cross Keys, another Brakspear Pub Company property where only Brakspear Bitter was on offer for real ale drinkers, and that tasted so poor that two of us left it. It's a basic, sports-oriented boozier in a 17th century listed building with four quite small pub rooms that should be a lot more charming than it is, but we hurried on to our last stop.

The Dolphin is Wallingford's only Good Beer Guide pub by virtue of its consistently good quality beer, but in other ways I found it lacking. As a Greene King pub it doesn't seem to make the best of GK's guest range, with two pumps for Morlands Original and one each for IPA, "own brand" The Dolly and two others which presumably rotate – Belhaven's Wembley 67 (commemorating a famous Scottish victory) and my choice, Ale Fresco (4.3%), with a citrus aroma.

This two-room pub with patio garden smelled of cooking fat even at 5pm, while the fake football stadium signs (also in the Cross Keys) didn't inspire either. The Town Arms was definitely my top choice in Wallingford, and I hope that makes it into the GBG sooner or later.



Brewery Focus: West Berkshire

Dave Richardson joins a branch visit to rural Berkshire to hear how a small brewery is being transformed



PHOTOS BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT:

There are still some cows left on site!; James Tomlinson serves us in the tasting room; the vast new brewery; brewing equipment having just arrived from Italy.

IT'S A SAD reflection on the state of farming, but the truth is that there is more money nowadays in beer than milk. That's why West Berkshire Brewery (WBB) will soon be moving into a former cowshed, but put aside the images that might conjure up as it is investing £6 million (£4 million on state-of-the-art equipment) while transforming the 38,000 sq ft building into a sleek and efficient brewhouse.

The brewery is at Frilsham Home Farm in Yattendon, near Newbury, where it currently occupies a much smaller former flour barn. The former cowshed is on the same site, and this is the fourth time WBB has moved to keep up with its rapid expansion. Brewing capacity will be increased about tenfold with the ability to brew more than once a day unlike at present, with casking, kegging, bottling and canning all under the same roof. Complete with a new visitor centre, bar and café looking directly onto the shop floor, the new brewery is due to open by August.

The first question real ale drinkers might ask is whether there will be a change in direction, but WBB sales director James Tomlinson is adamant this is not the case. Like most breweries it is experimenting with different tastes and production methods to meet market expectations, but cask ale will remain dominant. A new keg range called Renegade has been produced which already accounts for 18% of sales, but best-selling cask ale Good Old Boy still represents 60% of output and that may not change radically.

Other core beers include Mister Chubb's Lunchtime Bitter (3.7%) and Dr Hexter's Healer (5%), this being named after the landlord of the Royal Oak in Wantage, Paul Hexter. Maggs' Magnificent Mild (3.8%), named after WBB's founder, is beginning to appear more often, while specials for this year include the new Capability, a 4.1% brown ale commemorating landscape





gardener Capability Brown, appearing in the autumn; and the annual seasonal treat, Yule Fuel (4.5%).

"It's going to be a dream Brewhouse, but my job as sales director is to look after important accounts and say that nothing is going to change," says James. "It's important to look after our core customers, but the pub scene is very competitive and we have to compete for taps."

So how can a small brewery, founded by local couple Dave and Helen Maggs in 1995, afford such major expansion? The answer lies in a share issue and the appointment as chairman of pub and brewing entrepreneur David Bruce, allowing the founders to stand aside although they are still regular visitors.

David Bruce's brewing career goes back to 1966, and he later set up the Firkin pub chain which grew to 12 pubs (including some in Oxford) before being sold on in the late

1980s. He was also involved in setting up the Slug and Lettuce chain and is now also chairman of City Pub Company, owner of St Aldate's Tavern in Oxford.

So with financial expertise, the backing of hundreds of shareholders and a seasoned entrepreneur at the helm, WBB could be set for great things and is probably better placed than many smaller breweries to weather the inevitable storms ahead. Competition is intense not just from the giant brewers but from the explosion of micro-breweries, but with dozens of awards for its beers from CAMRA, the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) and others, WBB is known for consistent taste and quality.

A procession of lorries has been bringing in all the new stainless steel equipment from Italy down West Berkshire's narrow lanes, and further experimentation can be expected whether in cask, bottle, keg or can. More special beers will be produced, recent examples being Mr Turner and

Mr Blacket, in bottles, commemorating the founders of the *Newbury Weekly News* 150 years ago.

The sense of excitement coursing through WBB is very evident, but you get the impression that WBB will say close to its roots even if, years down the line, it is acquired by a bigger organisation. There are no plans to develop a pub chain, but the acquisition of an Islington, north London free house called The Depot is interesting.

The 250 cows that once lived on Frilsham Home Farm are nearly all gone, but the site is still deeply rural. In some ways, perhaps, brewing in general has gone back to its cottage industry roots, but WBB is well equipped for the 21st century.

The editor acknowledges help with historical background from WBB shareholder and Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood member Derek Legg ("Catweazle").



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Adkin Brewery closes



Sad news is that Adkin Brewery of Wantage has called it a day and that the two beers produced for the Wantage Beer Festival and the Royal Oak (Irish Pale and Dr Hexter's Third of a Century) will be the last.

Owner Shaun Cunningham has bowed out as a commercial brewer as taxes rise and hit the small producer. He had been brewing for 10 years, but following a requirement that even the smallest breweries must provide Alcohol

Wholesaler Registration Scheme (AWRS) details, the business became unviable. HMRC may insist that before joining the scheme, breweries must be registered for corporation tax, national insurance and income tax. According to HMRC, anyone buying alcohol to sell from a UK wholesaler will need to check that the wholesaler has been approved by HMRC and has an AWRS Unique Reference Number (URN). The requirement came in on 1 April.



White Horse Pub of the Year and Cider Pub of the Year, the Royal Oak, Wantage, the Country Pub of the Year, the Greyhound in Letcombe Regis and the Club of the Year, Stanford Social Club, are pictured receiving their awards from the Mayor of Wantage, Steve Trinder.

Well done to Paul Hexter and staff at the Royal Oak, Wantage, voted Pub of the Year for all of Oxfordshire. The next round is for Regional POTY competition, with the winner in with a chance of gaining next year's national award.

White Horse News

Correcting what appeared in the last edition of the *Oxford Drinker*, the Old Forge brewery continues to operate at the Radnor Arms, Colehill. It has not moved to Ye Olde Swan at Radcot, but Ye Olde Swan has been taken over by the same team (Alan Watkins) as at the Radnor. Confusion arose because the Swan has Old Forge branding on the premises and serves two or three of its ales.

White Horse branch has submitted an Asset of Community Value listing in a bid to protect the Hinds Head at Kingston Bagpuize, which is threatened with closure.

Greene King has applied for change of use to the Blue Boar in Newbury Street, Wantage to convert it from a pub to a restaurant. It has rarely served real ale in recent years, mainly IPA.

This year's festival helpers' outing will take place on Saturday 9 September, going to the very popular Vibrant Forest brewery near Lymington, Hampshire, followed by a crawl around this small town. More details nearer the time. For non-workers at the festival, a fee of £10 will be accepted if any spare seats are available.

Oktoberfest 2017 beer festival at the Beacon, Portway, Wantage: Friday 13-Saturday 14 October, with more details to follow. It is supported by CAMRA but not CAMRA festival.

Pub News

Abingdon

NAGS HEAD: Surprising news as we went to press was that the pub's lease is up for sale through the website rightmove.co.uk. The lease runs until 2035 and "passing rent" of £70,000 is quoted. This is one of Abingdon's most successful real ale and dining pubs, right on the Thames.

WHITE HORSE: Oxford branch held a successful meeting here in May, as the pub has attracted a strong real ale following with nine hand pumps and a 10% discount for CAMRA members. Manager Darren Fowler and his wife Sharon have run the Greene King pub for four years and are allowed to source guest ales from the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) as long as they also buy from the GK list. On the bar on this occasion were Daleside's G&P (gin-infused) from Harrogate; Saltaire's Sir Titus, a collaboration brew; and GK's Mighty Moose IPA, London Glory, Belhaven Wembley 67, Morland Original, IPA and its own-badged Ock Street Best Bitter. Darren is pictured (left) receiving a LocAle certificate from branch chairman Pete Flynn.



Beckley

ABINGDON ARMS: The community-owned pub is due to re-open on 22 June following its letting to tenants by the Beckley & Area Community Benefit Society, having opened on a temporary basis on Fridays and Saturdays while tenants were found. Aimee Bronock, Tom Bronock and Joe Walton are a sister and brother, and long-standing friend. Aimee has pub experience, and Tom, with business partners Nick Ford and Casey Small, is director of a local live events company, The Cocktail Service. He ran Joe Perks bar in St Clements, Oxford, now renamed the Globe (see below). Joe is head chef at the Abingdon Arms and has previously worked at The Crown in Woodstock and The Anchor in North Oxford. Aimee (front of house), Tom and Joe used to cycle from Oxford to Beckley for pub lunches.

They aim to create a strong food-led business that caters for the community as well as the wider area so that eating at The Abingdon Arms will be affordable for all as well as a place for special occasions. They are looking to stock guest ales from local breweries as well as a varied selection of wines, craft gins, other spirits and soft drinks.

They expect to work with local groups and the community to consolidate the pub as a community asset – like featuring an artist of the month and running events for children and families. They will also offer teas and coffees to those wishing to use the pub as a meeting place or group venue, initially in pub hours but eventually extending this café function.

Oxford

ANGEL & GREYHOUND: The Young's pub boasts a new and more secure sign after the previous one blew down in a storm (pictured). New manager David Oram – who took over after popular couple Richard and Kathryn Gibson decided to leave the trade earlier this year – is continuing to have a rotating guest ale to supplement the Young's range, with Hooky and Old Hooky in evidence recently and other local ales likely to be added.

GLOBE: This is the new name for the St Clements pub trading recently as Joe Perks bar, but known for many years previously as the Duke or Duke of Edinburgh. It is currently serving Greene King Abbot direct from three barrel via a cooling system, as the beer lines were removed at the last make-over. A Greene King tenancy, it is trying to make the space pay by acting as the Wheelhouse, a co-working space from £3 per hour serving only tea and coffee, between 9am-4pm Mondays to Thursdays, attracting local business people and students. After 5pm and at weekends it becomes more like a traditional pub than the cocktail bar it was before. Co-owner Casey Small (below) – who is also involved in the Abingdon Arms, Beckley (see above) – says the cocktail bar was not what the local community wanted. Quiz and music nights are planned.



HOME: The Abingdon Road pub known for many years as the Berkshire House or Berkshire, and for a few years as the Crooked Pot, has been renamed Home as the first venture into operating a pub by a team with plenty of experience designing their interiors. It has a focus on local cask and craft ales with Hook Norton among the first real ales to be served, and LAM keg beer also on draught. A former Greene King and more recently Hawthorn Leisure tenancy, the Berkshire had struggled under temporary tenants and had only served IPA in recent years. It continues to be a Hawthorn tenancy but the new team has a free hand in choosing beers, and has transformed the interior with hand-built furniture and a marble bar. The Chester and Jolly Postboys in Oxford, and the Bull at Charlbury, are examples of their previous designs.

Noel White, who runs Home with Tamara and Perrie Hulett, says: "There is no branding on any of the pumps as we encourage people to interact with staff, but we have drinks menus. The old pub model is dying out as this is also a café, a restaurant and a meeting space, and we aim to have cinema nights too."

The front of Home is now a table service restaurant, with gourmet bar snacks, burgers and pizzas being sold in the bar area.

ISIS FARMHOUSE: This unusual riverside free house, near Iffley lock, is now under new ownership.

KITE: The former Kite pub on Mill Street is due to re-open as the Porterhouse this summer.



ROYAL OAK: The Woodstock Road pub has launched a major charitable push to support the British Heart Foundation, and by late May it had already raised over £2,000 towards its £5,000 target. Michelle Sporle (above), landlady of the M&B pub, is also "mushing" together teams of supporters in preparation for a 200-km husky dog safari in Swedish Lapland next February where she will go wilderness camping at temperatures which can plunge to minus 40C.

"This is a massive challenge for me personally both physically and mentally," says Michelle. "The British Heart Foundation does amazing work and I would love to raise awareness and money for such a great cause."

Events will include quiz nights, cyclo-a-thon, raffles, fancy dress and tombola, with many local sponsors plus breweries. A beer festival will run at the pub from 8 June-15 July with a loyalty scheme in operation, and during Cask Ale Week in September there will be a renewed charity push.

Brakspear's Oxford Gold and Sharp's Doom Bar are the Royal Oak's regular real ales, with two other hand pumps dispensing Purity's Ubu and St Austell's Proper Job on a recent visit.



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Oxford Branch Diary

Saturday 24 June Beer Festival Social

12 noon
Social gathering at Charlbury Beer Festival (on the cricket pitch opposite Charlbury station).

Monday 3 July Branch Meeting

7.30pm
Royal Blenheim, St Ebbes Street.
Meet for a chat beforehand at the Crown, Cornmarket, from 6.30pm.

Monday 10 July Minibus Trip

7.00pm
Minibus trip to Bellingers Brewery at Grove. Please contact Pete to book a seat using the contact details on page 5.

Tuesday 1 August Branch Meeting

7.30pm
White Hart, Headington.
Meet for a chat beforehand at the Britannia, London Road, from 6.30pm.

Saturday 5 August Beer Festival Social

12 noon
Social gathering at the Nags Head beer festival in Abingdon.



CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

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

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

Abingdon

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

Oxford

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

Witney

Company of Weavers *

Pubs offer different discounts, and some discounts are available only at certain times or on certain beers. Please ask at the pub to find out what is offered. An asterisk (*) indicates that the discount is in Wetherspoons vouchers that are sent to all CAMRA members.

Tim Bowring comes of age

THE POPULAR LANDLORD of the Plough in Wolvercote celebrates 21 years in charge this August. He had run the Red Lion at Woodcote, near Reading, for six years before coming here in 1996, when it was a Morrells pub before take-over by Greene King a few years later.

Tim runs the Plough with wife Kim and daughter Katy, and his achievement was marked on the front cover of *Insight*, the GK magazine. The pub has an enviable location right on Wolvercote Green and usually serves three real ales including one or two from the GK guest range, with Saltaire brewery in Yorkshire represented recently.

Loyal and long-serving staff are one of the keys to the Plough's success, with a combined total of over 180 years' experience. Tim is as likely to be found in the kitchen as behind the bar, and he still has the menu from his early days here which shows it has always offered variety. Food actually cost more in real terms then – rack of lamb which now sells for £14 costs £9.95 over 20 years ago, or £17.50 in today's prices.

"I was an engineer bore deciding to run a pub, but I didn't want to be swinging in a hammock at the age of 60 wishing I'd done this," he says. "I'll be 62 soon, but I certainly

don't regret it. Of course I've seen big changes, and you don't get younger people drinking every day now but there's more demand for food. I can have a full pub at lunchtime, but everyone's on soft drinks.

"Cask ale is a lot better now – much more reliable – whereas you used to need real skill to serve ale of good quality, as the shelf life was only a couple of days. We still have a lot of local customers but more now travel from further afield, or visit us from the three nearby hotels. Pubs like this will survive if they stay traditional."



ABOVE: Tim Bowring (right) with some of the team at the Plough – (left to right) Jane Goodman, Sophie Evans and Tim Catlin.

WILLIAM MORRIS: Branch chairman Pete Flynn writes: "We received a letter of complaint concerning the article in issue 100 relating to Tony's Travels, in which reference was made to the customers who enjoy drinking at The William Morris, Cowley. It could be interpreted, from what was written, that people who drink in the pub do so only because they have low disposable income and cannot afford city centre prices. This was unintentional as The William Morris is an attractive venue in its own right and offers competitive prices and value for money for all customers. We would like to apologise for any offence or upset this may have caused to customers and the pub."

Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding gets out and about again

IT'S BEEN A very busy beer festival scene in recent months with top of the order once again being the community scene in the village hall at Merton, near Bicester. I took my 2006 festival glass to drink all six ciders and a couple of the 15 or so rare beers, and this festival is a must every February.

Other "never miss" events for me include the twice-yearly festivals at the Cricketers in Littleworth, near Wheatley. This wonderful locals' free house is no longer for sale and its immediate future is safe, so we look forward to the September event. Come on you Wheatley, Cowley and Headington drinkers, get up there this summer as it's easy to reach from the 280 bus route.

The White Hart in Headington had a mini-fest with about 15 beers following each other through the pumps, while at the end of May its main spring event had 30 beers and some great cider. The Witney festival, at St Mary's church on the green, offered a super choice of 40 beers and six ciders.

In Oxford, Beerd, formerly the Grapes, is now sub-leased by the City Pub Company, the very successful operator of St Aldates Tavern. The building is still owned by the City Council with the lease having been acquired by Bath Ales, which was purchased by St Austell brewery last year. The cellar has been refurbished with the pub back up amongst the top drinking establishments in the city centre. Four cask beers are

usually on, increasing at weekends along with a dozen or more kegs and interesting bottles.

My intention of visiting those pubs not on our branch's normal radar took me to one of my previous top locals, the Old Tom in St Aldates. I used to drink the top quality Morrells beer from 1978 until the demise of the brewery in the late 1990s, but it had been 20 years since I last visited. I found both the Greene King beers to be pretty ordinary in taste, and gone was the old pub feeling. How people eating the nice looking Thai food could be so noisy is beyond me, but it added to disappointment.

Two West Oxfordshire pubs that seem to have lost their way and been closed in recent times have been taken over by a new small company Few Inns, so the Black Horse in Standlake and the Evenlode at Eynsham hopefully have a more secure future. The company also runs the Boot at Barnard Gate and the Bell in Standlake, which has been closed due to fire damage.

The Bell at Langford is set to re-open, as a local person has purchased this freehouse and will reinstate some missing features and refurbish it. The Eight Bells at Broadwell, a couple of miles from the Bell, has been closed as a pub for 10 years but is rumoured for re-opening. Following a spell as the Red Hot Chilli Pepper, it was refused permission for conversion to private housing.



Anyone for Cribbage?

Michael Corlett enjoys a traditional pub game that you can still enjoy in some parts of Oxfordshire

DURING THE MANY years that I have been passing in and out of pubs, in various locations across the country, I have always been curious about the purpose of the wooden boards that you sometimes come across with rows of little holes with pegs in them. At some point I discovered that they were for scoring the game of cribbage, but it wasn't until I moved to Oxford that I came across people using them, and even then the details of the game remained a mystery.

After a chance encounter, I spoke to Geoff Roynon -- a keen player who is captain of the Monday league team at the Cricketer's Arms in Littleworth, near Wheatley, and a member of the Wednesday league side at the Mason's Arms, Headington Quarry. He told me a little about the history of the game, and agreed to show me how it works.

It is believed that the game was invented by Sir John Suckling, a 17th century cavalier poet, based on the older game of Noddy. Among his many other exploits, he is reputed to have sent decks of marked cards to the aristocracy as gifts, and then visited them in turn making a total of £20,000 (£4 million in today's money).

Geoff assured me that such underhand behaviour is unheard of in the local leagues

and in fact, as conversations with other players confirmed, players will often go out of their way to assist an opponent with the somewhat complex scoring rules. By Nelson's time the game was popular with sailors (a cribbage board claimed to be Nelson's own was found recently in an old desk) and it remains popular today with American submarine crews.

There is a tradition that the oldest submarine in the fleet is the "guardian of the cribbage board", which has been handed on from crew to crew since the time of Rear Admiral Richard O'Kane, who achieved a maximum scoring hand on the eve of a decisive battle, much to the delight of the crew who regarded it as a good omen.

Cribbage can be played by two or even three people but the most common form of the game now is "pairs". Each of four

players is dealt five cards and discards one face down to form the "crib" of four cards, then one of the undealt cards is turned up to become the face card. A round of pegging follows, where each player lays a card down in turn scoring points if the total of the cards played adds up to 15 or 31 (court cards are valued at 10), or for various combinations of cards such as pairs and runs.

After the pegging round, each player picks up their cards and, beginning with the player on the dealer's left, each hand is scored in combination with the face card, points being awarded for each set of cards adding up to 15, and again various other combinations such as pairs, runs and flushes. The dealer also gets to score the cards in the crib, together with the face card, in the same way.

After each score is made, the peg for the scoring pair of



Charlbury Beer Festival

players is advanced the same number of holes along the row for that pair in the cribbage board. The rows of holes are called “streets”, and this is where the phrase “streets ahead” comes from when one team is a long way in front, as well as the phrase “level pegging”, used when the scores are equal. The winners are the first pair to reach 121.

Slightly daunted by the number of different things to remember, I sat down to a game with Geoff who demonstrated endless patience as I stumbled through the various stages. Gradually, I started to get the hang of it and began to see the game’s attraction. It requires concentration, particularly as a beginner, but as a rhythm started to develop and as the hustle and bustle of the pub faded into the background, it was easy to imagine that we could have been playing in any inn or tavern at any time in the last four centuries.

Geoff, like others that I spoke to, was taught the game by his father and has been playing for a long time. He says that although some of the important strategies can be learnt quite quickly, becoming an expert player can take years – something I can well believe after my first session. As they say, though, nothing worth doing is ever easy and I was surprised that I learned enough

in such a short time to start enjoying the gameplay. If it takes a lifetime to master, and that means another reason to visit the pub, then so much the better!

As with many traditional pub games, cribbage has been in decline recently with few new players entering the leagues. There’s plenty of opportunity, though, for anyone who wants to have a go. Many pubs will have a board and a pack of cards tucked away somewhere, and if you find yourself standing at the bar with someone who knows how to play, why not ask for a game?

Some of the local leagues are: Oxon & Bucks Winter Cribbage League (Monday): www.oxonbuckscrib.org.uk Abingdon Invitation Cribbage League: www.abingdoncrib.co.uk Witney and District Crib League Oxford and District Club Crib League.

A full explanation of the rules can be found here: <http://www.mastersgames.com/rules/cribbage-rules.htm>

Many thanks to Geoff Roynon for his help with this article.

MICHAEL CORLETT

The 19th annual Charlbury Beer Festival will take place on Saturday 25 June at Charlbury Cricket Club, Oxfordshire from 12 noon to 10pm. The festival has attracted around 3,000 visitors in previous years and raised over £170,000 for community projects, both in the Charlbury area and overseas.

The festival tries to appeal to everyone, ranging from local mums and dads whose kids come to enjoy the children’s entertainment, to serious beer, cider and wine lovers, who visit from as far away as London and the Midlands, and even overseas. The day will incorporate 50 real ales, a range of ciders and perries, wine and Pimm’s; a great selection of food; live music throughout; the Culture Club tent; children’s entertainment; plus the Sixth World Aunt Sally Singles Championships.

Charlbury Cricket Club provides a glorious setting, barely two minutes from Charlbury Station and with excellent all-day (including late night) bus and train services to and from Oxford, Chipping Norton, Witney, Worcester and London.

charlburybeerfestival.org

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Brewery News

Church Hanbrewery

It hopes to have its ales at several local festivals this summer, including those at Charlbury, North Leigh and Minster Lovell.

Hook Norton

The Angel in Burford has been named its Pub of the Year. Re-opening of its recently acquired Castle Tavern in Oxford has been postponed until the late summer or autumn.

LAM

The brewery has announced open days now it is fully established at Sandford Lane Industrial Estate, Kennington, near Oxford. These will be held on Sunday 16 July and Saturday 29 July from 2pm-8pm, while it will also be at Waddesdon Manor Feast, near Aylesbury, on 17-18 June; and the OxRox Alive Festival in Abingdon on 4-6 August.



Loddon

June sees the return of its popular seasonal Summer Snowflake (4.1%) and in July it is releasing a brand new beer, Sunny Daze (4.4%), a light golden ale packed with hops for a refreshing summer bitter. New to the 330ml bottled range is In Yer Face American IPA (5.8%),

packed with citra hops for a strong, punchy but balanced brew which is very different beer from what it has made before and should appeal to an entirely new audience.

Loose Cannon

Seasonal beers at around 4% are named after types of cannon, including "modern rye" Saker for June, tropical fruit flavour Minion for July and hazy wheat Avenger for August. The canning range is being extended including Full Bore IPA.

OXBREW

The new brewery in Church Eastone, Oxfordshire expects to be up and running by July/August. It has been set up by Aaron Baldwin (pictured) and his stepfather Simon Scamp, and has already produced a collaboration brew with Hook Norton and Wychwood for Oxford Beer Week.

Shotover

Oxford Brookes University celebrated its 150th Anniversary in 2015 and local Alumnus Ed Murray, founder of Shotover Brewery, produced a special limited edition beer brewed to an 1865 recipe, John Henry Celebration ale. It is still available through the Costcutter store on the Headington campus and prices are £2.95 for a 500ml bottle and £6.95 for a 750ml bottle in a hessian gift bag.

Vale/ABC

A Bigger Boat (3.8%) is an American Red brewed for the festival season, "You're gonna need a bigger boat" being one of the greatest ad libbed lines in cinema history. Contender (a 4.1% Deep Golden beer)

references Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy, while Play it Sam (a 4.3% Straw beer) references Casablanca where the line "Play it Sam", not "Play it again Sam" was spoken not by Humphrey Bogart but by Ingrid Bergman.

It's Business as usual at the Aylesbury Brewhouse (ABC) with brewer Ben Amos continuing to produce an interesting range of limited edition craft beers. Good ol' Days at 3.5% is a traditional dark mild, while California Dreaming at 3.8% is a West Coast pale ale showcasing the best of vibrant American hops. Odin's Ravens at 4% is named after Huginn and Muninn, the ravens that fly all over world and bring information to the Norse god Odin. The things you learn in the *Oxford Drinker!*

XT

XT will be at the Great British Beer Festival in August with its own bar, having been selected to represent the growing force of smaller, independent craft breweries. It has teamed up with the UK's leading hop merchant Charles Faram and the most innovative English hop farmers to bring an exclusive new beer to the festival.

It has also teamed up with two of the country's leading independent breweries for three new collaboration brews. The first is with Windsor and Eton's Uprising to produce two new beers under the Animal and Uprising brands.

Wychwood

Seasonal beer for June is Wychwood Drophead (3.8%), a blend of pale and caramel malts to produce a pale amber ale.

An ancient city. A modern beer.



Complex, distinctive and richly satisfying
– Prospect is the full-bodied session ale
from Oxford's Shotover Brewery

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Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

Monday 19 - Saturday 24 June

Royal Blenheim Summer

Solstice Beer Festival

St Ebbes Street, Oxford

01865 242355

www.royalblenheim.co.uk

Friday 23 - Saturday 24 June

Tingewick Village Fete & Beer Festival

Recreation Ground, Water

Stratford Road, Tingewick, nr

Bicester

www.tingewickfete.co.uk

Saturday 24 June

Charlbury Beer Festival

Charlbury Cricket Club, Dyers Hill, Charlbury

Incorporating 'The World Aunt Sally Open Singles Championship'

50+ beers, ciders & perries

www.charlburybeerfestival.org

Saturday 1 July

Haddenham Summerfest

Haddenham Community Junior

School, Woodways, Haddenham

www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk

Friday 7 - Saturday 8 July

Stratford-upon-Avon Beer & Cider Festival

Stratford-upon-Avon Racecourse,

Luddington Road, Stratford-upon-Avon

70+ beers plus 30+ ciders & perries

www.stratfordbeerfestival.org.uk

Friday 7 - Sunday 9 July

Beer on the Wye

Hereford Beer & Cider Festival

Hereford Rowing Club, Greyfriars Avenue, Hereford

Saturday 8 July

Buckingham Beer & Music Festival

Buckingham Rugby Union Club, Floyd Field, Maids Moreton, nr Buckingham

30 beers plus 6 ciders & perries

www.buckinghambeerfestival.co.uk

Saturday 8 - Sunday 9 July

Woodcote Festival of Ale

Tidmore Lane, Woodcote, off A4074 Wallingford to Reading Road

30 beers plus cider & perry

www.woodcoterally.org.uk/festivalofale.html

Friday 14 - Sunday 16 July

Bastille Day Beer Festival

Horse & Groom, Lower Heyford Road, Caulcott, nr Bicester

18 beers plus 6 ciders

01869 343257

www.horseandgroomcaulcott.co.uk

Saturday 15 July

Hook Norton Festival of Fine Ales

Held in a field off Clay Bank, Hook Norton

www.hookybeerfest.co.uk

Saturday 15 - Sunday 16 July

Swindon & Cricklade Railway 'Steam Cider & Sausages'

Blunsdon Station, Tadpole Lane, Blunsdon, nr Swindon

www.swindon-cricklade-railway.org

Friday 21 - Sunday 23 July

Cogges Beer and Cider Festival

Cogges Manor Farm, Church Lane, Witney

30+ beers & ciders

01993 772602

www.cogges.org.uk

Friday 21 - Sunday 23 July

Tree Hotel Beer & Cider Festival

Church Way, Iffley, Oxford

01865 775974

<http://iffley.treehotel.co.uk>

Thursday 27 - Sunday 30 July

North Moreton Beer & Cricket Festival

Bear at Home Inn, High Street, North Moreton, nr Didcot

01235 811311

www.bear-at-home.co.uk

Friday 4 - Sunday 6 August

Nags Head Summer Beer & Cider Festival

Bridge Street, Abingdon

01235 524516

www.thenagsheadonthethames.co.uk

Tuesday 8 - Saturday 12 August

Great British Beer Festival

Olympia, London

900 beers, ciders & perries

www.gbbf.org.uk

Saturday 19 August

Seven Stars Beer Festival

The Green, Marsh Baldon, nr Oxford

01865 343337

www.sevenstarsonthegreen.co.uk

Friday 25 - Monday 28 August

Chipping Norton Beer & Cider Festival

Between the Fox and Red Lion

Pubs, 40 real ales and ciders

Sponsored by Hook Norton Brewery.

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** goes wandering in Witney

IT'S ALWAYS ENJOYABLE walking around this lovely West Oxfordshire town, especially around the Church Green area with its historic church and buildings constructed using traditional Cotswold stone; fine examples of craftsmanship through the centuries. The town has four museums including Wychwood Brewery, open at weekends.

I met Chris Bamford, our membership secretary, who lives in the area and was ideally situated to provide me with some local knowledge. It's always good to meet CAMRA members on my tour of pubs as it's about fun and fellowship as well as the beer – just ask some of like-minded members who attend our regular activities such as brewery visits and branch meetings.

On the edge of Church Green stands The Company of Weavers, a vast Wetherspoon pub. Formerly the town's cinema, it is now tastefully redecorated in a modern style to reflect the status of the town as a former manufacturer of point blankets which were exported globally and became the iconic dress of indigenous Native Americans. Murals depict the town as a manufacturer of blankets with trading starting during the 17th century using wool from a species of sheep introduced by the Romans known as "Cotswold Lions", an icon of the locality. If you appreciate local beer you may know about Cotswold Lion Brewery, Cheltenham.

No fewer than seven real ales were available the day we

visited The Company of Weavers, including North Cotswold's Shagweaver, Jennings Cockahoop and Oakham Citra. The latter is a firm favourite of mine which I have reviewed in a previous article; packed with Citra hops, the beer is golden in colour with a bitter taste and floral aromas coming through.

I took the opportunity to meet highly personable James Flin, who has been managing the pub for the last nine months and, hitherto, had spent seven years in gainful employment with his employer. James's enthusiasm was very infectious as he told me about how this busy pub sponsors Click Sargent, a children's charity providing respite/hospice care for young persons suffering from debilitating illnesses. The pub also involves itself in the community by promoting Lib Fest, an annual charity event, and is a keen supporter of local brewery Wychwood.

The next stop for Chris and I was Hook Norton's Eagle Tavern, not to be confused with the Eagle Vaults around the corner, where we were warmly welcomed by charming landlady Annette Hegerty. The pub features wonderful flagstone flooring with wooden panelling throughout, giving the premises a real old-fashioned pub feel yet the juke box gives it a more contemporary outlook. I suspected a twinkle in Annette's eye as I was poured my Hooky Gold, and it was revealed Annette is marrying her partner and fellow landlord, Ian Payne, who is well known for the superb way in which he manages his portfolio of beers



ABOVE: The Royal Oak and the Eagle Tavern

which are always in prime condition.

Four beers were available on the day we visited which included Old Hooky, Hobgoblin (Wychwood) Hooky Bitter and the flavoursome Hooky Gold, that I sampled. It was pleasing to hear Annette say how the pub has a large following of younger real ale drinkers who ask for hand-held dimpled glasses, reminiscent of the predominantly keg fizz served in them during the 1970s.

We wished Annette well on her forthcoming nuptials before walking the short distance to our next venue, The Angel Inn. This is a historic pub, almost opposite The Company of Weavers. With its origins in the 18th century, it is a grade 2 listed building with a wonderful bay window where you can gaze over Church Green whilst enjoying a glass or two of your favourite drink. Although a free house, the pub buys its cask ale from Marstons which can boast local Wychwood Brewery as part of its empire. Four real ales were available which included, Hobgoblin, Angel Inn Ale, Hobgoblin Gold and Brakspear's Oxford Gold.

I chose the Hobgoblin, which never disappoints. The aroma is malty, with complex nodes of toffee, coffee and chocolate against some tangy old world hops. The flavour follows suit, with a malty beginning, lemony hops on the back end, and a surprisingly firm and pleasant warmth of alcohol. This is an old-style English Special Bitter which, to my taste, is a little more watery than my favourite, Fuller's ESB.

Occasional guest beers are available and every Friday features live music night. The menu offers daily specials and the pub has been in continuous ownership for 25 years. Darts, pool and crib are all played in this Market Square pub, which is popular with locals.

Our next stop was the Royal Oak, which can be found by heading in a northerly direction up the High Street. Upon entering this welcoming establishment Chris warned me that this was the most expensive beer in town, and from the four Greene King beers available we opted for the Patron Saints Ale, a perfectly acceptable 4.5% rich amber-coloured beer with a toffee character and fresh hop finish brewed to coincide with St George's Day.

To my astonishment I was charged £8.60 and had to remind the barman that we had ordered two halves, not pints. He was quick to remedy his mistake which we agreed was a schoolboy error, possibly a result of simultaneously teaching a new recruit how to manage the till; perhaps it's a bloke thing, but I've always had difficulty multi-tasking! You might be surprised to learn that the pub is a free house but happens to buy all of its products from Greene King at a substantial discount that other local brewers are not able to match, making it the distributor of choice for this 19th century pub.

Barman Kurt Semaine, whose grandmother owns the building, revealed that she had been running pubs for 33 years and

had acquired this one 16 years ago. This family-run establishment caters very much for locals, and offers a selection of free magazines and newspapers as well as lunchtime food within a very cosy, smart, and relaxed atmosphere. It's not my sort of pub, to be honest, as I prefer the old traditional type such as The Eagle Tavern.

It was time to say cheerio to Chris and make my way back to Abingdon on the regular bus service, reflecting on an enjoyable day spent in conversation, learning a little local history, and, drinking a variety of real ale. I can recommend retirement!

PETE FLYNN



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Strong and stable leadership..?

Graham Shelton, who led the community buy-out of the Red Lion in Northmoor, continues his regular column

HAD ENOUGH OF elections? You're not the only one. What do you fancy: a coalition of chaos or the many not the few? Hard to say really. I tried asking in the Red Lion, but there is a lot more interest in the village Barn Dance than in whether Brexit (like eggs and toilet paper) should be hard or soft.

That's what I like about pub conversation. It's eclectic, good-humoured and fun, if sometimes lacking in intellectual rigour! Ours can be pretty wide-ranging, from recollections of the night-soil man through to how to treat an egg-bound chicken, taking in the day a German bomb fell on Witney and where to get a good haircut or a bottle of wine for under £10. But with a lovely local pint from Loose Cannon or Loddon, all such social intercourse can be handled with equanimity and happiness.

I was having a conversation with Lisa Neale, our lovely landlady, on Saturday about their latest piece of brilliant news, not so much an election

but definitely a contest: the Red Lion in Northmoor has won a national prize! It is now officially Sawday Guide 2017/2018 Community Pub of the Year. "The whole team are really chuffed," said Lisa. "There are nearly 800 pubs in the guide so to win this award is very exciting. We all work so hard to make our pub warm and inviting and everyone pulls together, so this is a tremendous motivation for our team."

"We had some secret diners, who it turns out were from Sawday," she said. "They really liked the experience and loved the community connection. Life here is so much more than just a living. With people tending to drift apart these days we are trying to do our bit for friendship and community."

That's the stuff to make a happy and successful pub! I get a buzz every time I go in. Everyone is very friendly, and the beer and food are spot-on. We've had huge support from all the local shareholders, from CAMRA and from West Oxfordshire District

Council, so we hope that they will feel a little bit proud too.

Our local CAMRA branch was organising a Community Pub Crawl on Saturday 10 June to visit all seven community pubs in Oxfordshire. All being well, we were visiting The Plough at West Hanney, The Seven Stars at Marsh Baldon, The Bull at Great Milton, The Plough at Great Haseley, The Abingdon Arms at Beckley, The White Hart at Wolvercote and The Red Lion, Northmoor.

If you are reading this after 10 June, don't worry as there will be more in this column next time on what makes them all tick. But I guarantee one thing – the best community pubs aren't always the biggest or the shiniest, but they are the ones with a real connection to the community, who welcome everyone and who create a friendly environment where all can feel happy and at home. It takes a strong and stable leader to do that!



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Gardeners' World

More musings from **Paul Silcock**, landlord of the Gardeners Arms in Plantation Road, north Oxford

THERE IS A new threat facing pubs. It's obvious really, as there seems to be a new threat facing pubs every week, whether from rising beer prices, increased rents, health kicks, home drinking, the lack of a British summer or the decline in community spirit.

But now there is a genuine new threat rising up from the people themselves, a grassroots movement built upon the two words designed to strike abject fear into the heart of the publican. Tee-Totalism. (For the pedants out there I accept that because of the hyphenation it might just be one word, but please address any complaints to Pedant Matters, *Oxford Drinker*. And be sure to mark your envelope "Nit Picking" in big letters.)

Now I know the arguments about non-drinkers and pubs.

Yes, there is

more profit on a pint of Coca-Cola than on a pint of beer, but no-one goes to the pub for four pints of Pepsi. Or if they do, you really don't want to be anywhere near the over caffeinated, sugar-high fool. But new research has found that tee-totalism is on the rise. Quite rapidly in fact. Nearly 10% fewer people are having a drink nowadays than ten years ago, while 56% of people admit to having a drink once a week now, compared to 64% ten years ago. That's nearly 1% a year! Which even by my maths suggests that by the year 2073 no-one will be drinking anything. Anywhere. And just for once it's fair to blame the kids for this.

The research shows that it's the 16-24-year-old age bracket that is less likely to drink than any other age group. It's the 45- to 64-year-olds that are keeping us pubs in business, it would seem. The actual sad fact behind all this rather silly scaremongering on my part is when you read on down through the Office of National Statistics findings (and you can look this

up on its website, it's worth a read) and see the number of alcohol related hospital admissions. It's over one million for 2016 – 1.1 million in fact. That's up from 670,000 in 2006.

Which is all to say what exactly? People are drinking less but going to hospital more? Drinking has no relevance to your chances of ending up in hospital? Again, sadly no. There are more people ending up in hospital because they are being admitted for long-term alcohol related illnesses, so these findings are actually a wake-up call for the need to drink responsibly.

Like so many things in life, the answer does not lie at either extreme of the equation. Drinking too much is, as we all know, really bad for your physical health. But as I wrote in a previous issue, it has also been found that going to the pub, and being sociable, is really good for your mental health.

So if the kids aren't going to be drinking any time soon (crazy kids), it's up to the rest of us to drink sensibly. In other words, it's better for you, and therefore better for me, if you come to the pub and have two pints twice a week, rather than four pints in one sitting. Which is now, thanks to the lowering of the alcohol recommendations, classed as binge drinking. Don't binge drink! We need a steady measured approach to dealing with these pesky tee-totalers. And that means staying healthy.



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