



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Issue 102
August - September 2017

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the Oxford Drinker

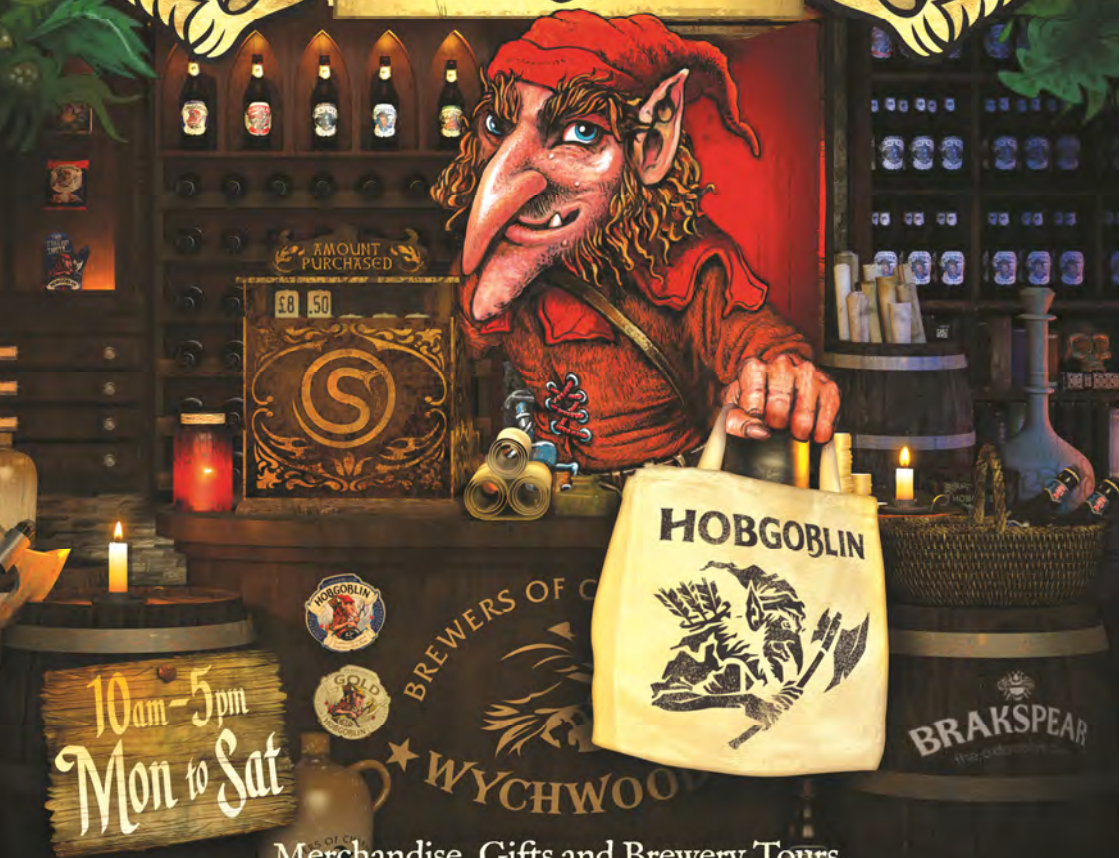


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The **Oxford Drinker** is the newsletter of the Oxford and White Horse branches of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

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

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

Editorial team:

Editor: Dave Richardson
editor@oxford.camra.org.uk

Advertising: Tony Goulding
advertising@oxford.camra.org.uk
Tony: 07588 181313

Layout/Design: Matt Bullock

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

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

Pub news can be sent to
pub-news@oxford.camra.org.uk

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

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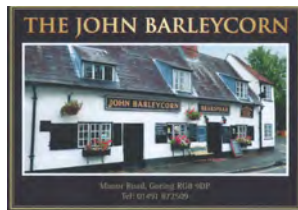
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Welcome

..... to a "community themed issue"

YOU CAN READ something about community-owned pubs in every issue of this magazine thanks to our regular columnist Graham Shelton, but in this edition there is also a focus on all seven such pubs in Oxfordshire, following a minibus tour that the branch ran in June.

Community ownership of pubs is a growing trend throughout the country, with CAMRA's national Pub of the Year, the George and Dragon in Hudswell, being one such in Yorkshire. Oxfordshire has more than its share with seven, as locals club together to save what is often the last remaining pub in their village. It's a heartening story and one we certainly haven't heard the last of, but pub closures are continuing -- usually for conversion into convenience stores or housing.

It's sad to hear from CAMRA's White Horse branch -- see page 21 -- that the neighbouring villages of Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor are down from three pubs to one in the course of a year. Another closed pub is the Hatchet at Childrey, where villagers are agitating to save it. Could this be a community-owned pub in the future? They might have to be quick.

Summer is the time when a lot of us like to visit pubs with gardens, but that's the case year-round if you're a smoker. It is now just over 10 years since the smoking ban was imposed in public places, amid dire warnings that it would be the death of many pubs. But while the ban certainly added to pubs'

long list of troubles, many pubs have adapted successfully with outside smoking areas, often with heated patios. And the number of smokers, thankfully, is continuing to fall to about one in six of the adult population -- while plenty of "new" customers were attracted to pubs by the smoke-free environment.

Another "habit" now regarded as anti-social is swearing, and I was interested and amused to read that Samuel Smith brewery has now officially banned swearing in all its pubs, including the Three Goats' Heads in Oxford. I popped in to see if this was true and was assured that it was, although "it's easier to enforce with some customers than others"! Seriously, though, who can object to the consensus that anti-social practices such as swearing, loud belching, spitting and -- yes -- smoking should have no place in pubs today, belonging in the sawdust era. Just as long as they don't ban drinking alcohol.....

This edition of the *Oxford Drinker* continues the county town theme of recent issues with a look at the pubs of Abingdon and also Bampton, home town of the late and much lamented Ray Borrett whose obituary also appears here. Ray embodied all the best things about CAMRA and was a great character, who is sorely missed.

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

DAVE RICHARDSON

editor@oxford.camra.org.uk



**CAMPAIGN
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Oxford Branch Contacts:

Chairman

Pete Flynn

chair@oxford.camra.org.uk

Secretary

Steve Lawrence

01235 525436

contact@oxford.camra.org.uk

Editor of the Oxford Drinker

Dave Richardson

editor@oxford.camra.org.uk

White Horse Branch Contact:

contact@whitehorsecamra.org.uk

Oxfordshire Trading Standards Service:

Graham Hill House

Electric Avenue

Ferry Hinksey Road

Oxford

OX2 0BY

Tel: 01865 815000

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Keeping in touch with Oxford Branch:

Get all the latest news and events, and share information about what's happening in your area. To join send an e-mail with 'subscribe' as the subject to events-request@oxford.camra.org.uk

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

Care in the Community

Oxfordshire has a high proportion of community-owned pubs – seven of the 70 in the UK known to CAMRA, although the national total may now exceed 100.

Dave Richardson joins an Oxford branch visit to all seven one sunny day in June



ABOVE: Chris French at the Plough, West Hanney;

OPPOSITE: The Seven Stars; The Bull at Great Milton; Matt Ford (left) of the Seven Stars with Graham Shelton of the Red Lion

THE SEVEN STARS in Marsh Baldon – Oxford CAMRA's current Town and Village Pub of the Year – was the first in the county to become community-owned, in March 2013. The most recent, the Abingdon Arms in Beckley, re-opened in June this year, after limited trial opening staffed entirely by volunteers.

All seven community-owned pubs in Oxfordshire have started operating in the last four years, and more could be coming if determined local groups have their way. Six of the seven are in rural villages which would have lost their only pub if the community hadn't stepped in, while one is in Wolvercote, on the northern edge of Oxford, with three other pubs within easy reach.

So what is community ownership? The exact model may vary, but essentially it happens when a group of predominantly local people club together to buy the pub off the brewery, pubco or individual who owns it. The vendor might well be intending to sell it as a private house, typically worth double its value as a pub.

Some are genuine co-operatives (one person, one vote) while others are private companies with many

shareholders, often including a few wealthy individuals who put up the money to secure the property as either a shareholding or loan. In most cases the group buys the freehold, but in the case of the White Hart at Wolvercote, it has taken on the lease. A community group has also been trying to take over the lease of the closed Ampleforth Arms, an estate pub in Risinghurst, Oxford.

Interest in community ownership is high and very much encouraged by CAMRA, which has advice and links on its website. Pubs that have made a success of it are also keen to share their experiences and encourage others, but some things are the same whoever owns a pub. It has to be a viable business, it has to be welcoming and it needs to have professional people running it, as some community groups have discovered the hard way.

The branch minibus tour, with the ever obliging Tony Goulding at the wheel, was one of the most popular ever with all 17 seats taken and a waiting list. So what did we find? Plenty of beers for a start, as all seven are free houses.



Plough, West Hanney

Deep in the Vale of White Horse and off the A338 Oxford-Wantage road, the Plough was put up for sale by Punch Taverns in 2015 for £325,000. Over 100 shareholders raised £400,000 to save and upgrade it, but problems finding the right tenants caused hiccups and the owning group had to run it for a while, which proved hard.

Chris French, one of the prime movers in the group, said its first tenants wanted to serve Greene King beers which weren't popular, and are not exactly hard to find hereabouts. All the beers are now local with the four hand pumps serving Bellinger's Cavalry (4.6%) from just a few miles away; the monthly special Saker (4.2%) from Loose Cannon in Abingdon; Loddon's Summer Snowflake (4.1%); and Vale Brewery VPA (4.2%). The Cavalry was excellent and just as well, as Bellinger's was about to collect a certificate from CAMRA's White Horse branch as runner-up at the Wantage Beer Festival.

The Plough is a lovely old thatched pub having low beams, a tempting garden with Aunt Sally pitch, and a "Farm to Fork" menu of locally sourced food. We all went away



promising to return.

"We felt an obligation to try to keep a pub open in West Hanney – especially with a lot of new housing nearby," said Chris. "It's been a fantastic experience, but is really hard work and we haven't made a penny profit."

Seven Stars, Marsh Baldon

This is a pub I visit regularly, and whenever I go it is nearly always busy. A lot of that is down to landlord Matt Ford and his team, as Matt had long experience of running pubs and restaurants before moving here.

A mile away from Nuneham Courtenay village off the A423 Oxford-Henley road, the pub sits beside one of the largest village greens in England in Marsh Baldon and also has its own large garden with views of countryside and paddocks. An adjoining barn was converted into a restaurant about a year after re-opening, and bookings are essential.

Fuller's London Pride (4.1%) has been the regular beer here for many years, but up to three others are available – helping it into the *Good Beer Guide* for the first time in 2016. On this occasion these were Vale's Brill Gold (3.5%), Loddon's



Ferryman's Gold (4.4%) and Timothy Taylor's Landlord (4.3%). The bar area has a pub atmosphere although you can also dine here, with pub games and an open fire in winter. A beer festival will be held on Saturday 19 August.

The pub had been closed for the third time in four years before the community bought it, but now it is absolutely thriving and the owning group lets Matt get on with it.

"People now come from far beyond the three local villages, and being in the *Good Beer Guide* helps," he said. "But every day is still a challenge, and you have to engage in every aspect of marketing including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. When you have lots of shareholders, it becomes their regular haunt. I don't have problems with shareholders asking for free drinks."

Bull, Great Milton

In a village off the A329 Reading-Aylesbury road, close to the M40, the Bull is another idyllic thatched pub with a very famous neighbour – celebrity chef Raymond Blanc's ultra-foodie Manoir aux Quat' Saisons hotel, run by luxury group Belmond whose other interests include the Orient-



Express trains. Blanc is one of the pub's investors, and customers include staff from Le Manoir and people dropping off illustrious guests there, but in the main the Bull appeals to locals.

It has less of a focus on real ale than most of the others, with Sharp's Doom Bar being the regular ale plus a local brew – in this case a new one on me, Glass Blower (4.3%), a malty best bitter by micro-brewery Philsters from a neighbouring village. This was a great beer and one you probably have to travel to this area to find.

The pub is believed to date from 1684 but had fallen on hard times, a failed Greene King pub that was put on the market in late 2013 and destined to be yet another pub turned into housing. The asking price was only £280,000, and GK would have got far more for it with planning permission to become a house.

The Bull too struggled with tenants, but stability has now come and it has a varied food offer while remaining essentially a pub. Steve Harrod, of Great Milton Community Pub Ltd, said: "We have tried to avoid over-investing, with a very old-fashioned, traditional set-up. We have 160 shareholders with



a minimum stake of £300, and some bigger investors who we've yet to actually see in the pub."

Plough, Great Haseley

Only one mile from the Bull but on the other side of the A329 is a pub that has invested heavily since the community bought it, with an emphasis on food. Oddly the two real ales on offer were the same as at the Bull, Doom Bar and Glass Blower.

It's a very old pub with a partly modernised interior and restaurant extension, with open kitchen, and garden. As at many other community-owned pubs, help was available in the form of council grants or rates relief.

Landlord Steve Webster, a chef who took over in 2014, said: "Most of the 120 shareholders are local while some live as far away as Australia. We're off the beaten track, so use Facebook and Twitter to attract people. This used to be a Punch pub but as soon as it made a profit, costs to the tenant went up."

Abingdon Arms, Beckley

In a village to the east of Oxford, just a few miles from Headington, this pub overlooks Otmoor and plans to develop its



garden to make the most of the view. The Beckley & Area Community Benefit Society raised £475,750 from 270 investors within a month of its launch, after the pub was put up for sale by Brakspear in May last year.

It was not yet open to the public during our visit, but made our group welcome among the decorating materials with a key-keg of real ale provided by Shotover, which now supplies the regular beers. Food is being developed by a tenancy team including Aimee Bronock.

Society chair Mike Hobbs says any profits are ploughed back into the community. "We had watched as successive Brakspear tenants failed to make it work, but with CAMRA's help we got it listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV)," he explained. "Brakspear didn't have to sell to us and was initially hostile, but the ACV gave us time to generate a significant head of steam in the community while other potential buyers backed off. The pub is now our asset in perpetuity."

White Hart, Wolvercote

This is very different to the rural pubs we visited, and has more of a town pub atmosphere with no food except on Sundays and



FROM LEFT: The Plough at Great Haseley; Steve Webster behind the bar at the Plough; the crown outside the Abingdon Arms, Beckley; The White Hart at Wolvercote; The Red Lion at Northmoor

special days, pub games such as pool, TVs and slot machines, and a generally fairly raucous atmosphere. Four hand pumps are available and three were in use, but with all beers rotating there is no regular. On today were XT1, Hook Norton's Old Hooky and Shepherd Neame's Spitfire.

Brunch is served on Sundays at the same time as a farmers' market outside, and it sees no point in trying to rival the food offers of the Trout just half a mile away, the Plough on Wolvercote Green, and Jacob's Inn which is right next door. The White Hart has a large garden and stages occasional music nights.

"We are just a proper boozer," said landlady Amanda Jones. "Although it's very hand-to-mouth at the moment, we're getting there. We're solely reliant on locals, with no walk-in trade."

Red Lion, Northmoor

It's tempting to say we saved the best pub until last, as the Red Lion has become a firm favourite not only with villagers but the many CAMRA members who head into the wilds of West Oxfordshire (a couple of miles off the A415 Witney to Abingdon road) to discover a

pub that made it into the *Good Beer Guide* for the first time in 2017. This is one of several awards since re-opening in 2014, the latest being named Sawday Guide 2017-18 Community Pub of the Year, open to pubs throughout the UK.

It is a lovely place to visit on a summer evening, not just for the beer, conversation and excellent food, but also to admire the large kitchen garden and flock of unusual breed hens that provide some of the produce. As at the Seven Stars the tenants have made all the difference, with young couple Ian (head chef) and Lisa Neale having a following near and far.

Up to four real ales are available with locally brewed Brakspear Bitter and Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge being the regulars, joined on this occasion by Vale's Brill Gold and Two Cocks' Cavalier, from Berkshire. Food ranges from fish and chips and home-made burgers to gourmet dishes such as Devon crab, venison, and lamb and beef from local farms.

It could all have been so sadly different, if the Red Lion had become a private house when Greene King put it up for sale in 2013. Graham Shelton, who led

the buy-out and has advised various other community groups across the country, is now an authority on making buy-outs happen.

"Every pub, whether community-owned or otherwise, needs to be a business making a profit, identifying every one of its costs and where profitable sales are coming from," he said. "It's hard to generalise, but many small country pubs probably won't break even on annual turnover of much less than £300,000, and to make a decent profit they need to head towards £500,000. That's tough unless you attract customers twice a day, every single day.

"But it's brilliant fun to do things together. A village needs a pub, a church and a public hall as the tripod to stand on, and if the Red Lion had closed there would have been a huge hole in the heart of our community. So bring on more community, and bring on more community pubs."

Community groups planning a buy-out are welcome to contact Graham – via editor@oxford.camra.org.uk

See CAMRA's website for more advice: www.camra.org.uk/community-right-to-buy

Free Beer - almost!

Dick Bosley weighs up the value of CAMRA membership on a trip to Abingdon

MEMBERSHIP OF CAMRA is a bargain in itself – with monthly newsletter, quarterly magazine, cheap entry to beer festivals and the chance of attending entertaining monthly branch meetings with like-minded people. Another benefit is that some superior pubs give discounts to CAMRA members and Abingdon is justly renowned for this.

I started my tour at the Nag's Head. This pub is built on an island on the River Thames and in 1686 the rent was 25p per annum. As a previous Pub of the Year you would expect that the quality of beers would be good – and you will not be disappointed. Nag's Island Pale Ale, at least one local beer and proper cider are always available, as well as five or six varying guests. There is a wonderful large garden with views over the river, regular live music and, as with all the pubs visited, good food as well. Here my CAMRA membership saved me 30p.

Heading into town from here led me to the Broad Face. It has changed greatly in the 40-something years I've been visiting, but I don't think it has ever been better. The manageress previously ran Newbury's Pub of the Year and is planning to do a Beer Sommelier course to ensure the quality of the ale here. I'm not sure she needs to. Prison Break (the house ale), a couple of local brews and five guests – mine was excellent - will meet the needs and standards of

most drinkers. Here my CAMRA membership saved me 15p.

Continuing into town and turning behind the museum leads you to the Kings Head & Bell. If you are visiting the town or haven't been before you should go up the seemingly interminable steps into the museum, to see the collection of Morlands Brewery memorabilia on display. Returning to the job in hand the KH&B dates back to at least 1554 and was used in the Civil War by Charles I. It serves a Charles I Ale plus three/four guests, again including a local brew and frequently has live music. If you are interested in pub history you should also take a moment to look at the courtyard of this old coaching inn. Here my CAMRA membership again saved me 15p.

Heading along the High Street, into Ock Street, you will reach the grand-daddy of Abingdon real ale pubs - the Brewery Tap. Despite having opened only in

1995 it has set the high standards that others have now had to reach. It always has a beer from Loose Cannon and three /four guests, with a draught cider in the summer. It also has a collection of pictures and memorabilia from Morlands Brewery for history aficionados. Another 15p saved.

Continue away from the middle of town to reach the White Horse. As a Greene King house it has to carry three GK ales but it also has four/five guests as well as a lovely garden, and is the de facto headquarters of the Ock Street Morris Dancers. Here my CAMRA membership saved me 35p.

As a voluntary add-on to the tour I would recommend going up Spring Road and turning left into Faringdon Road to reach Shippon, on the edge of town. Cross the A34 and take the next left to reach the Prince of Wales, opposite the church. A traditional two-bar village local with Timothy Taylor's Landlord as the house beer plus at least two local guests, here you will find a warm welcome, log fire and large garden. You can even get a bus back to town if you are feeling lazy. Here my CAMRA membership saved me 20p.

All in all an excellent pub crawl of interesting, varied and historic pubs ... with enough saved to buy a half-pint at the Royal Oak in Wantage. And I didn't even bother to go into the Narrows in Abingdon to use my Wetherspoon vouchers!





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Ray Borrett

22 April 1944 - 31 May 2017



One of Oxford CAMRA's best-known characters, Ray Borrett, has died aged 73. He was known in CAMRA circles well beyond this area, being an enthusiastic volunteer at festivals including the Great British Beer Festival (GBBF) in London.

Ray, born in Suffolk but a resident of Bampton, was very well-known throughout West Oxfordshire where he delivered copies of the *Oxford Drinker* to pubs. He met his wife-to-be Lynne in 1994 on a ramble, one of his main leisure activities, and they married in 1997.

"He and two friends were carrying rucksacks full of bricks in preparation for walking the Pennine Way," she recalls. "No youth hostels or B&Bs for them. They slept in sleeping bags in all weathers and washed in a stream. It took them exactly two weeks and they caught the train to Oxford on the Sunday, and went back to work the next day."

At that time Ray worked as a medical laboratory scientific officer at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford, taking blood samples from haemophilia patients, and his name appears on several important medical reports. He was an enthusiastic Morris

dancer, performing the Broom Dance outside their house in Bampton before they went on honeymoon.

Ray and Lynne's camping holidays in the Yorkshire Dales provided an opportunity to sample many real ales, and he made her take a sip of every glass to give her opinion – not that he took any notice!

"We went to lots of beer festivals, but the highlight of his year was GBBF where he made many good friends," she recalls. "He loved the upstairs drinking sessions when the bars had closed to the public. Two years ago, when he couldn't go, his friend Ben sent him a photo of all the helpers, some in the most amazing get-ups, with a generous cheque and a lovely letter saying how much he was missed.

"Ray had an extraordinary collection of beer festival t-shirts. One I remember said, 'I've had Betty Stoggs.' It took me some time to realise that Betty Stoggs was a beer, not a woman! I have so many memories of our life together as he was unique, a one-off, and a very funny man. RIP Ray."

Long-standing Oxford CAMRA member John Mackie worked

beside Ray at beer festivals including GBBF. John mentions that Ray also worked in country crafts including hedging, dry stone walling and thatching, and was a tour guide at Wychwood brewery in Witney.

"A story I recall was when Prince Charles visited the brewery because it brewed his Duchy beers," says John. "Ray was performing with the Morris team and waggled his 'bladder' (used by the Morris Fool to wind up onlookers) towards the prince, much to the annoyance of his minders. But Charles boomed out: 'Is that a pig's bladder or a bull's bladder?!'"

"I worked full time at GBBF from 2006 to 2010 and when we volunteered together, we asked Paula Waters to allocate rooms in Imperial College adjacent to Earl's Court. My job was in a tiny team of five in Corporate Hospitality, and I had my own little empire where Ray and others would often pop up for breaks to have a chat. At the Elder Stubbs gardening and crafts festival in Oxford, Ray and Lynne had a stall with organic produce from their garden."

Another long-standing Oxford CAMRA member, Chris

Bamford, first met Ray when she belonged to the Tree Group organised by Ian Gourlay some 20 years ago. Ray taught a few of them the rudiments of hedge laying one very cold winter afternoon.

"He was a regular at the annual Wychwood Fair where he demonstrated various woodland crafts, woodturning and constructing small items of rustic furniture," she says. "He supported CAMRA by helping out at many beer festivals, and his home-made pork scratchings were the best!"

Oxford Drinker editor Dave Richardson adds: "I wasn't fortunate enough to have known Ray for long, but the first time I met him I knew instantly that he was a 'character' of the kind you rarely meet nowadays. He served me a couple of times at GBBF, where I took this picture, and he seemed to get muddled with the change so that I got my beer and my money back!

"As one pub landlord told me, 'you couldn't fall out with Ray'. When we first met he presented me with his business card, which read: 'Ray Borrett – Carnivorous Plants'. That's a mystery I might never solve."

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Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding gets out and about again



A FEW CHANGES in the Witney pub scene give me a chance to update you. The Court Inn, a privately owned hotel and bar in a prize position overlooking the busy West junctions, had over the past few years seemingly lost its way. Wychwood had supplied a couple of beers but this had fallen to almost nothing.

A retired Ghurkha (19 years' service to the Crown), Cess Thapa, has taken over and in just a month has had a positive response to tasty Nepalese food. No real ale is available but hopefully the drinkers will come back.

Up the road on Newland, John Faherty has worked hard to keep the Wadworth-owned Griffin Inn as a traditional pub and it now does food in the evenings. John took over last year after a career at pubs in Ireland and London, and three real ales are usually available.

On Wood Green that super old "locals' local" the Three Pigeons has not changed in 30 years, except that "man about the pub" John Pratt has now taken a well-earned back seat. Don't worry, he still looks after the beer.

Around the corner, the Admiral Taverns-owned Hollybush now seems to be well run by Sam

Jenkins and Toria Hughes. After a quickly passing 15 months the pub is now back to where it should be. Sam has had plenty of time working in Witney pubs along with a year at Jacob's Inn in Wolvercote, and this reflects on his knowledge of what customers like. Good food is served along with four permanent beers: Timothy Taylor Landlord, St Austell Tribute, Hobgoblin Gold and Otter Bitter. A half of the latter was very tasty, and Witney's only pub garden awaits you here.

The Cross Keys at the bottom of Market Square has changed owners and landlords recently. Taken from Spirit Group by Greene King, it is now managed by Jodi Burgess who has previously worked at pubs in Headington. This busy, cosmopolitan pub serves good grub all day along with four beers from the GK range including IPA. A taste of Barmy Army Golden IPA (it was test match time) and an Amplified Radio X Mash proved very tasty. This pub has one large bar with a comfortable patio/garden full of the characters of the town.

Moving on to Beckley, a village just outside Oxford, it was a pleasure to visit the re-opened, community owned, Abingdon

Arms. Even on a Tuesday lunchtime the pub and garden were busy with food customers and the whole scene felt great. Beers on the bar were regular Shotover Prospect and XT4. Two guest ales are served and on the day these were a tasty Shotover Trinity and Vale Gravitass, a great show of local ales.

Passing through Banbury, the pub scene there has a newcomer. Near Market Square we have Hook Norton's top pub, the Olde Reine Deer Inn, and five minutes away is the Everards-run White Horse. Both these pubs now have a really good pedigree for their beer quality and pub ambience.

A complete surprise was the Bailiff's Tap, a super new micro-pub located near the Three Pigeons, a former bailiff's office. Up to four ever changing beers are on gravity, with a Towcester Mill beer in superb form when I visited. For me, heaven means up to 10 ciders, wow! There are no bottles, cans or lagers, but also coffee. This is a family-run pub and a "must visit" for drinking and conversation. On my fortnightly routine I travel to Warwick via Shipston-on-Stour, but the return will now be via Banbury.

Brewery Focus: Bellinger's

Dave Richardson visits an award-winning micro-brewery, and then a quirky pub

"DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE" is a very sound piece of advice, but Bellinger's manages to combine the two as a very successful business. It is best known as a major car dealer selling Vauxhall in Wantage and Didcot, but behind the Wantage showroom (actually at Grove, on the A338 road from Oxford) a micro-brewery started producing beer for the public in 2011.

Beers are on sale at the garage shop, and a nearby pub, the Volunteer, often has one of them in cask. But as with many micro-breweries you might struggle to find their beers elsewhere, as competition to get into pubs is so intense.

This is possibly the smallest commercial brewery I have ever visited, a five-barrel plant in a space not much bigger than a typical family garage. But it's very good stuff, winning awards including runner-up at the 2017 Wantage Beer Festival for Gallipoli stout (5.3%).

The Bellinger's logo shows a vintage aircraft in silhouette,

and some of the other beers also have military names including Blenheim, Cavalry and Stirling. Nine beers are produced over the course of the year and V, a rich amber bitter at 4.2%, was available in cask for an Oxford branch group visit. Beers are produced with all-natural ingredients and no finings.

The military connection commemorates Les Bellinger, a World War 2 pilot who flew the Stirling bomber depicted in artwork and later its successor, the Blenheim (commemorated by a 6% Christmas ale). His escapades included dropping people behind enemy lines, but he lived to tell the tale – returning to the motor business first established in Wantage in 1932.

His son Mike Bellinger set up the brewery in 2011 but sadly died the same year, and his nephew Matthew Rosum (below, with Branch chairman Pete Flynn) is now the brewer, salesman and much else.

"We brew all our beers because

we want to drink them ourselves," says Matthew. "The brewery is a glorified hobby, but we also want it to be a successful business. This is a family business and while we're not making a conscious decision to remain very small, it's got to be fun too."

Bellinger's is doing well enough not to bother trying to get into lots of pubs, which are often tied to particular brewers, and often sold or closed. But if a pub (or individual) wants to try a beer, then the core range including Cavalry and V is available in five-litre mini-kegs (£16.99) which are often supplied for special events.

So you might have to travel to find Bellinger's, but most of us were very impressed and it's good to support a local family business.

We finished off the evening with a visit to the quirky North Star pub in nearby Steventon, where landlords "H" and Lisa Pulleyn took over a few months ago to save it from closure. This unspoilt pub with no bar counter is described in CAMRA's book *Britain's Best Real Heritage Pubs* as having "one of the great village pub rooms of Britain – once common enough, but now incredibly rare". Infamously, the North Star survived a bid by the owner, Robert Tyrrell, to demolish it with a mechanical digger on New Year's Day 2003, after he was refused a drink. The things you discover on CAMRA outings!



Gardeners' World

Paul Silcock of the Gardeners Arms, Plantation Road, North Oxford takes exception to some "ingredients"

RATHER STRANGELY FOR an article in a real ale magazine, I'm going to start this one off by praising gin. Gin, a drink which the late, great Douglas Adams wrote had been invented in something like 85% of all the known worlds in the Galaxy.

Gin, which until few years ago, came in two flavours -- with tonic and without. Then in 2009 those rebellious lads and lasses at Sipsmith won a two-year court case for the right to produce gin in small batches, rather the Gordon's sized industrial quantities distillers had been forced to produce before. And voila! Just as with the proliferation of craft brewing, suddenly gin distilleries were springing up like roadworks in Oxford in July.

So what's that little detour to do with anything? Other than to have a quick pop at roadworks. Well, so far gin distillers have resisted what quite a few brewers have not, and stuck to more or less making gin. Sometimes they add a bit of rhubarb, or saffron. Olives and basil as well. Or even tea. The crucial thing is that so far none of them have added

something to make the gin undrinkable, just in the name of crafting a brand identity.

"Yes, we are Tarkers & Winifred boutique distillers and we have created the world's first tarmac flavoured gin." This has not happened yet.

The other week, though, I was back in my home town of Sheffield where I encountered a beer flavoured with Cumberland sausage. I won't name the brewery, mainly because I've forgotten, but also to protect the guilty. It really did taste like Cumberland sausage. There was a hefty taste of pepper, and more than just a hint of sage. Which is all credit to the brewer's skill, but ignores the very basic fact that neither of these flavours have ANY PLACE IN A PINT OF BEER. Next to a pint of beer? Yes. Definitely. But this was like drinking a pint I'd spilt over a full English breakfast.

Unlike gin distillers some brewers are just going too far to try and create their own distinctive beer, ignoring the fact that the very first rule of a good beer is that it must be drinkable. I've had a good look around this week and discovered you can get beers flavoured with, among other things, pizza, maple bacon coffee (that's one flavour), coconut curry, a mind bendingly desperate combination of banana, chocolate and peanut butter, beard (yes -- the ultimate extension of hipsterdom, the

brewer dropping clippings of his beard into the brew), and rocky mountain oysters. For those not in the know, that's bull testicles.

Yes. Testicles. But it just goes to prove that there are brewers out there getting confused about what should be outside and inside a pint of beer. Everything in that list above is fine when it's not in a pint. If I wanted testicles in a pint of beer I'd go to an Oxford Brookes Rugby social.

Now all this sounds like a rant, but I'll tie it all together now. Everything above explains why there has been a sudden increase in people asking the question when they come to the bar: "Which of these is a traditional bitter?"

I rotate my stock frequently with something new every week, so even regulars ask about the beers. It was a little mystifying why so many people were asking, but then after what I shall call "the Cumberland Incident" it became clear. Everyone is being that little bit more careful not to get something flavoured with badgers, or flags.

Just for once it might be time to slow the rising popularity of real ale until we can get some rules in place about what shouldn't be in a pint. I'll start the ball rolling now with the first suggestion: Testicles.

I think we can all agree they should be left out of a pint.



An evening out in Downton

Following the death of CAMRA stalwart Ray Borrett, **Dave Richardson** looks at open and closed pubs in Ray's home town of Bampton in West Oxfordshire



ABOVE FROM TOP: The Horse Shoe; The new sign at the Romany; **OPPOSITE FROM LEFT:** The murals in the Morris Clown; the exterior of the Morris Clown; the former George and Dragon

MANY PEOPLE WHO have never been to Bampton may recognise some of its buildings, used extensively for filming the town scenes in the long-running TV period drama Downton Abbey. Bampton's old grammar school and library were used as Downton Cottage Hospital, while Bampton's "Downton Mile" also includes Mrs Crawley's House, St Michael's church and two pubs that migrated from Yorkshire, the Grantham Arms and Dog and Duck.

Whether any of Bampton's pubs actually featured in the series I know not, as I'm afraid to say Downton Abbey sent me to sleep. What is for sure is that there were at least a dozen pubs here in the early 20th century when the drama was set, and while only four remain as pubs, you can identify others.

First stop was what might have been the least promising pub, the former Greene King but now Hawthorn Leisure Horse Shoe where the only GK beer of the night, the popular Morland Original, is the regular. This is a former Morland's house but the three other hand pumps usually dispense two local guest ales, which on this occasion were Wychwood's Hobgoblin and my choice, White Horse's Wayland Smithy, proved to be in good condition. The Horse Shoe is a very

traditional pub appealing to a wide range of customers – "from just being old enough to drink – to retirement", according to landlady Jackie Hackett who runs it with her son, Michael Knowles. It looks like it could get quite lively at busy times, with pub games, a garden with Aunt Sally pitch, and log fire in winter. Food is served from Thursday to Sunday only.

We then moved on to a very romantically named hostelry, the Romany Inn, a very old building which is also a 10-room hotel. The pub sign shows a typical Gypsy caravan, and as this was once considered the top real ale pub in town, we were curious to see what it's like today.

A large front bar where food is served is complemented by a small and cosy side bar or snug, decorated with many ornamental teapots, where two unusual real ales are on offer. A North Cotswold brewery ale is always available, and today this was the own-badged Romany Reveller at 3.8% which was a tasty, malty drink. North Cotswold also supplies the guest ale, which was Yubberton's Yubby Cotswold Bitter, also 3.8%, from a micro-brewery.

The Romany remains a Punch Taverns pub – not one of the Punch pubs sold to Heineken –



and tenants Mike and Glynis Drysdale have clearly done a good job re-establishing real ale here after previous tenants ran it down. They have secured an agreement only to buy real ale from Punch when large quantities (72-pint barrels, all Punch will provide) are needed for special events, and as North Cotswold can supply 36-pint polypins – unusual these days – they don't risk an over-supply and the beer going off.

It has only been a pub for about 50 years, having previously been a restaurant and in various retail uses. Mike describes it as an inn rather than a hotel – “no reception, porters and the like” – but guest rooms are key to profitability. It also has the nicest pub garden in Bampton.

Our third stop proved to be a short one, as the Talbot is a rough-and-ready pub (also a hotel) with only one real ale pump, but at least this was decent. The regular ale used to be Fuller's London Pride but is now Butcombe Bitter, Butcombe having supplanted the much bigger brewery on cost grounds.

This is a busy pub with TV, slot machines and pool room, and a large patio garden. An old press cutting on the wall reveals that the hotel is haunted by a ghost called Horace who allegedly steals room keys, and this



makes a good story. The pub sign reveals it to be an ex-Courage property in “Bampton in the Bush”.

Much as we liked the Romany Inn, our final stop was saving the best till last – another former Courage pub, the Morris Clown. There's quite a story behind the name as Bampton is a major centre of Morris dancing, and the late Ray Borrett was himself a Morris Clown or Morris Fool, to give the role its proper title.

This pub used to be called the New Inn, and when Courage renamed it the Morris Clown in 1975 it caused an outcry due to incorrect use of the term and the original Morris team refused to dance there for over 20 years. Now it is back in the fold and Morris Men dance there again, as at the Romany which has recently welcomed a team and seen beer sales shoot up as a consequence!

A former and hopefully future *Good Beer Guide* entry and Pub of the Year, the Morris Clown is a very traditional wet-only (no food) free house run by the personable Steve Mace. The same family has run it for nearly 40 years, the last 20 as a free house.

Steve's mother-in-law painted the very attractive murals of classic French entertainment scenes, which are always a



talking point. The pub serves three real ales with West Berkshire's Mr Chubb's Lunchtime Bitter being a regular, as is the new White Horse Grumpy Landlord (4.1%), a flavoursome amber ale much to my taste. The guest ale varies and is always interesting, but I found King Alfred's Gold by Pewsey, Wiltshire brewery Three Castles too hoppy.

The Morris Clown advertises itself as “proud not to do food” and where you'll receive “a better quality insult from your host” – oh, the freedom of the free house!

In between visiting these four pubs we saw others that had closed, all now private housing. These are ex-Wadworth pub the Jubilee, now Jubilee House; ex-Morland house the George and Dragon, with artist plaque on the wall; and the Elephant and Castle, once a Halls pub, with the Halls hare still in place.

Let's hope the present four will still be thriving in 10 years' time – but they can only do that if more people patronise them. Bampton isn't the easiest place to visit by public transport – usually via Witney – but as a small, unspoilt rural town it has more to offer than pubs.

Pub News

From the Oxford and White Horse regions

Beckley

Abingdon Arms

The pub re-opened under community ownership in late June, with regular beers provided by Shotover and guests by other local breweries including XT and Vale. See article on community pubs on page 6 and Tony's Travels, page 15.

Childrey

Hatchet

The Hatchet has been closed for over a year, and owners Ian and Jane Shaw have applied for a change of use to residential, with villagers campaigning to keep it as a pub. They told the *Oxford Mail* that having run it for 23 years it was no longer viable, as local residents were not regular drinkers, and they had sunk much of their own money into the pub.

Kingston Bagpuize

Hind's Head

This pub looks set to be converted into a convenience store after Vale of White Horse District Council refused to list it as an Asset of Community Value, saying "there is insufficient evidence to show that the nomination is valid or that the pub is able to satisfy the requirements to demonstrate community value in the future".

White Horse branch will be objecting to planning permission being granted but doesn't hold out much hope as the council has asked the developer to keep the front of the building as now, and have a Sainsbury's Local store behind. The run-down Hawthorn Leisure property closed on 11 June.

The closure leaves the neighbouring villages of Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor with

only one pub when there were three a year ago, the Lamb and Flag having also succumbed. Greene King's Waggon and Horses in Southmoor is the last one open.

Oxford

Black Boy

The Headington gastro-pub, named after a horse, has opened three deluxe bedrooms.

Mitre

Oxford's oldest pub, although it is mainly a restaurant, has changed hands with Marston's taking over from the Beefeater chain. This has led to a change in the beers usually available in the Turl Bar at the back of the property, which is owned by Lincoln College and is a Grade II listed building. The present building was a coaching inn dating from the 17th century, but an inn had already stood on this High Street site for hundreds of years and a chart on the wall traces landlords back to 1230.

New Inn Social

This is the latest name of a Cowley Road free house that was originally called the New Inn, before becoming the Corridor and more recently Harry's Bar. In its latter incarnation it sold a range of real ales, but following another change of ownership earlier this year it now serves only Loose Cannon's Gunners Gold as a regular cask beer.

As we went to press it was being reported that Aberdeenshire-based brewers BrewDog have applied to Oxford City Council to amend the licence, so Cowley Road could be getting a BrewDog pub soon.





Porterhouse

The former Kite Inn in West Oxford, very close to the railway station, has been rebranded as the Porterhouse with a steak menu and boutique hotel rooms. This is its fourth change of tenancy in as many years and it continues under Greene King. Pictured above is assistant manager Kirsty Baird. You can read more in Pete's Pubs, on page 24.

Three Goats' Heads

The city centre pub and only one in Oxford belonging to Yorkshire brewery Samuel Smith re-introduced real ale a few months ago and usually has Old Brewery Bitter (4%) on the bar along with several bottled ales. Samuel Smith has officially banned swearing in all its pubs, and claims that none of the drinks it serves are "media advertised". The pub is unusual in having a downstairs bar (usually only open at weekends) and upstairs bar both reached via steps from street level. Its name may appear to be a bit of modern silliness as with Slug and Lettuce or Cow and Creek, but Three Goats' Heads is

in fact the sign of an ancient shoemakers' guild.

South Leigh

Mason Arms

Now known as Mr Hanbury's Mason Arms, this 15th century thatched pub has been re-opened by boutique brand Artist Residence, which describes itself as "an eccentric bunch of fun and friendly places to eat, sleep and drink". Eccentricity seems to be in the DNA of this village pub near Witney, as it was previously owned by the controversial Gerry Stonhill who was fined nearly £6,000 for flouting the smoking ban. It aims to have a country pub atmosphere with Hook Norton's Hooky the regular beer, plus a seasonal ale from Wychwood.

Wantage

Abingdon Arms

There's encouraging news from the Abingdon Arms in Wantage, where Hawthorn Leisure has invested in a revamp. The £40,000 investment in conjunction with business owner John Donohue includes fresh signage, external decoration, a new menu and décor. The atmosphere remains steeped in the pub's heritage and tradition from the trophies won by the Aunt Sally and darts teams, to photos of Wantage's history.

Pubs for sale/lease

Golden Ball, Littlemore: £395,000 freehold (via Fleurets). King's Arms, Wantage: £325,000 freehold (via Fleurets).

Please send news to:
pub-news@oxford.camra.org.uk



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

Oxford Branch Diary

Saturday 19 August Beer Festival Social

12 noon
 Social gathering at Summer Beer Festival at the Seven Stars, Marsh Baldon.

Saturday 2 September Minibus Trip

Minibus trip to select the Town and Village Pub of the Year. Contact Pete Flynn (details on page 5) to book a seat.

Tuesday 5 September Branch Meeting

7.30pm
 At The Wig and Pen, George Street, Oxford, in the function room on the second floor. Meet beforehand for a chat at the White Rabbit, Friars Entry, from 6.30pm.

Saturday 9 September Beer Festival Social

1.00pm
 Social and inter-branch Aunt Sally competition at the Masons Arms, Headington Quarry at the 16th Headington Beer Festival.

Saturday 23 September Beer Festival Social

1.00pm
 Social gathering at the Cricketers Arms, Littleworth..

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Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

Tuesday 8 - Saturday 12

August

Great British Beer Festival

Olympia, London
900 beers, ciders & perries
www.gbbf.org.uk

Thursday 10 - Saturday 12

August

Black Country Beer Festival

Lye Cricket Club, Stourbridge
Road, West Midlands
130 beers, ciders & perries
www.blackcountrybeerfestival.com

Thursday 17 - Saturday 19

August

Worcester Beer, Cider & Perry Festival

Worcester Racecourse, Pitchcroft,
Worcester
170+ beers plus 100+ ciders &
perries
Advance ticket purchase
recommended
www.worcesterbeerfest.org.uk

Friday 18 - Sunday 20 August

**North Cotswold Summer Ale
& Steam Weekend**

Winchcombe Station, off Becketts
Lane, Greet, nr Cheltenham
Closes early evening each day
www.northcotswoldcamra.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**

"Festival site will be located
between The Fox and The Red
Lion pubs"
40+ beers & ciders
www.hooky.co.uk

Saturday 26 August

Chinnor Beer Festival

White's Field, Mill Lane, Chinnor,
nr Thame
www.chinnorbeerfest.org.uk

Saturday 26 - Sunday 27

August

Brill Festival

Brill Sports & Social Club, Church
Street, Brill, nr Thame
www.brillbeerfestival.co.uk

Sunday 27 August

Minster Lovell Beer Festival

Wash Meadow, Old Minster,
Minster Lovell, nr Witney
10+ beers & ciders
www.facebook.com/events

Friday 1 - Saturday 2

September

**Ardley with Fewcott Beer &
Cider Festival**

Village Hall, The Playing Fields,
Ardley Road, Ardley with Fewcott
www.ardleywithfewcottvillagehall.com

Friday 1 - Sunday 3 September

BunkFest

'Wallingford's free family festival
of music, dance & steam'
Kinicroft, Wallingford
20+ beers plus ciders
www.bunkfest.co.uk

Friday 8 - Saturday 9

September

**North Cotswold Beer & Cider
Festival**

Moreton Cricket Club, Batsford
Road, Moreton in Marsh
www.moretoninmarshcc.co.uk

Friday 8 - Sunday 10

September

Headington Beer Festival

Mason's Arms, Quarry School
Place, Headington, Oxford
01865 764579

45 beers plus 15 ciders

www.themasonsarmshq.co.uk

Saturday 9 September

Newbury Real Ale Festival

Northcroft Playing Fields, off
Northcroft Lane, Newbury
www.newburyrealale.co.uk

Friday 22 - Sunday 24

September

Bletchington Beer Festival

Bletchington Sports and Social
Club, Oxford Road, Bletchington,
nr Kidlington
01869 351866
www.bletchingtonsportsandsocialclub.com

Saturday 23 September

**Cricketers Arms Autumn Beer
Festival**

Littleworth, nr Wheatley
01865 872738
www.cricketers-arms.co.uk

Saturday 30 September

Choko Beer Festival

Laurence Hall & Gardens, Church
Road, Cholsey, nr Wallingford
www.chokobeerfestival.org.uk

Saturday 30 September

Tree Hotel Oktoberfest

Church Way, Iffley, Oxford
01865 775974
www.treehotel.co.uk

Thursday 26 - Saturday 28

October

Oxford Beer & Cider Festival

Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford
The 20th Oxford Beer and Cider
Festival; make a note of the
dates. More details will follow in
the next issue of the Oxford
Drinker.
www.oxford.camra.org.uk

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** finds "Ale off the Rails"



ABOVE: The entrance to the Jam Factory; The Porterhouse

RIGHT: The Punter on Osney Island, once known as the Watermans

I FREQUENTLY USE the train service from Oxford but hardly ever visit the pubs in the vicinity, tending to use the city centre establishments which, invariably, offer a superior choice of real ale.

I thought it was about time to review the pubs in the area and see exactly what they have to offer. My first stop was the Jam Factory, Park End Street, which is an iconic building being formerly the home of Frank Cooper's jams and marmalades. It remains a listed building and was purposely built by local long-established building firm, Thomas Henry Kinglerlee, to accommodate Cooper's expanding empire which moved from the original site in the High Street around 1904.

Frank Cooper's marmalade was especially popular with dons and students in Oxford University. It was taken to Antarctica on Robert Falcon Scott's expedition to the South Pole, and a jar was found buried in the ice many years after the ill-fated expedition.

A splendid array of hanging baskets adorned the entrance to the Jam Factory bar where there was only one real ale on offer the day I visited, Mad Goose by Purity. This is a zesty pale ale with a citrus finish with Cascade and Willamette aroma hops. Manager Ali Burn informed me that two real ales are available from this free house during the winter, citing a low level of demand during summer time. I did note that a

bottled beer from local brewery, Tap Social Movement, was available; evidently they enjoy a good relationship.

This café-style hostelry with its eclectic mix of funky chairs, leather sofas and tables offers something for everyone. It's a chameleon-type business with breakfasts for early morning commuters, mid-morning nibbles, tapas, and "ladies that do lunch", as well as the hipster and wifi brigade. Other customers include students from the Said Business School and the local science community. The venue is proving extremely popular with turnover increasing by 20% year. Happy Hour is from 3pm-7pm daily, and a German Beer Festival will be held in October.

My next call was the Punter, formerly the Waterman's Arms, in nearby South Street. This lovely old pub is situated on Osney Island and can count boaters mooring up on the river outside as its customers, as well as local residents that inhabit the rows of terraced houses in adjoining streets. The Punter is one of these pubs put on this earth to remind us that not everyone is tied to their desks and that some do escape, emerging blinking into the sunlight heading straight for the pub to recuperate with a tasty beer and some wonderful grub before having to return to the front line.

I ordered a pint of XT Animal's Squawk, which was in excellent condition, an American Brown Ale and part of the Animal

range of beers brewed by this Buckinghamshire brewery. This is a delicious beer brewed with Columbus, Simcoe and Chinook hops and Special B malt, to provide a tasty, strong-bodied maltiness and medium high hop bitterness. Two beers are a permanent feature of this Greene King pub, Morland Original and Old Golden Hen, with an interchangeable guest.

Manager Rob Hedge explained that the pub has undergone a tasteful renovation, and offers an inspiring high standard food menu which holds up its end of the bargain with a price to match. Rob and his team are proud that they have built up a community spirit around the success of the pub. Customers are typically regulars and the local business community which includes *Oxford Mail* and the odd commuter, being only five minutes' walk from the station.

My next call would be at the Porterhouse, formerly the Kite Inn, and now a sister pub to the Punter. It is just around the corner in Mill Street, and having been open less than a week, I was keen to try! When compared with what it was formerly, the Porterhouse has undergone a high-end makeover offering seven en suite rooms. Being a two-minute walk from the station, it is a handy alternative to more centralised accommodation.

I spoke to assistant manager, Kirsty Baird, who was very passionate about the pub and informed me that the four real ales on offer are likely to be

permanent fixtures with some interesting bottled beers thrown in for good measure. These are Morland Original and Old Golden Hen from the Greene King range, XT Animal's Kangaroo, and Titanic Stout. The Porterhouse advertises itself as "grill and rooms" and, although an upmarket pub, still has a community feel about it for those happy to pay £4.60 a pint.

I settled for the Titanic Stout, a very tasty and well-kept beer best described as pitch black in colour with lots of liquorice, chocolate, caramel with roasted malts throughout and very drinkable. The best beer of the day for me as, unlike Luke Skywalker, I tend to prefer the dark side!

I discovered that Kirsty used to work at the Crazy Bear hotel, Stadhampton so I gathered she knew a thing or two about customer service and it's always good to feel warmly welcomed as you enter a pub.

With a comprehensive steak menu and piquant interesting

wines to match the emphasis on quality, it was curious to see a "dry ager" for steaks nestled in the bar area with individually priced fore ribs and entrecôte advertising a feast of testosterone.

Whilst savouring my stout I heard a chap behind me order a steak and, when asked what size he would prefer, did a double take when he requested one which weighed around 600 grams. For those of you of a certain age that is equivalent to about one pound and three ounces. His preference for it to be served rare made me think, why not just remove it from the Aga and serve with the usual trimmings; it takes all sorts!

I enjoy visiting the diverse pubs and bars that Oxfordshire has to offer and I'm always amazed how different one can be from another, no more so than my visit to the Greene King pubs on my journey today. I'm hoping that if you find yourself at a loose end around Oxford station my ramblings might inspire you to enjoy some "ale off the rails".



Brewery News

Hook Norton

Come rain or shine Hooky will always be about beer and it has brewed two new ales – Harvest Hop and the much loved and anticipated Haymaker. Harvest Hop (3.9%) was brewed for the first time last year and returns by popular demand, a light and fruity ale with a cosmopolitan hop burst.

Haymaker (5.0%) is refreshingly hoppy in character, a strong pale ale with a bucket load of Goldings hops that give it a certain something extra – described by some like sunshine dancing on the tongue. Haymaker was available in cask for July only and but Harvest Hop continues through August.

Meanwhile Mark Higgs, landlord of Hooky's Castle at EdgeHill pub-hotel near Banbury, has won the British Institute of Inn keeping (BII) Licensee of the Year award 2017 – the biggest accolade in the industry.

Loddon

Sunny Daze (4.4%) is a new summer beer brewed with Northdown, Bobek and Cascade hops for a crisp, refreshing pint. It is also launching two collaboration brews with Abingdon's Loose Cannon brewery, and has introduced a brand new bottled beer – In Yer Face IPA.

Loddon is joining Henley Rugby Club as an elite sponsor for the next three years, so its beers will be on permanently in the bar – including the club's official beer, Hawks' Gold. Its next Beer Club social night is on 5 August.

Shotover

The brewery, just outside Oxford, has received planning permission for expansion and will install a

20bbl kit on the existing brewery site in Horspath by early 2018. This is will allow it to expand the range with more seasonal and speciality brews, as well as fulfilling demand for the current range.

At the end of July it launched a new beer, O'Sullivan's Golden Nugget (4.9%), available in pubs and at beer festivals.

Tap Social

The new craft brewery in Botley, Oxford has launched a limited edition beer, Naughty Wheat Fields, brewed in collaboration with the London Beer Factory. The taproom is open every Friday and Saturday from 4-11pm with a wide selection of its own beers available, plus a few rotating kegs from local suppliers LAM Brewing and XT. Caterers including Chaat Oxford, Wandering Kitchen and Chilli Dogs provide food on some days.

Tap Social is unusual as it was founded by a young team with a background in legal affairs, with a commitment to social justice. It has taken on ex-offenders including Colin, a prisoner on day release from HMP Spring Hill, who is studying a book keeping course paid for by the brewery.

"I work alongside three great individuals who genuinely wish to do all they can to create jobs and enable our transition from being in custody, to being released back into the working world," he says. "I fully stand by all their efforts and encourage others to support and or join the movement."

Vale/ABC

Vale Brewery's summer festival specials include A Bigger Boat (3.8%), an American Red named after one of the greatest ad-

libbed lines in cinema history. Contender is a 4.1% Deep Golden beer, while Play it Sam is a 4.3% Straw-coloured beer. "Play it Sam", not "Play it again Sam" was said not by Humphrey Bogart but by Ingrid Bergman in the film Casablanca.

The brewery shop in Brill (HP18 9TY) is open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm and Saturday 9.30-11.30am to sell its own range plus wide selection of foreign bottled beers, wines and ciders.

Aylesbury Brewhouse (ABC) now has brewer Ben Amos fully into the swing of things, continuing to produce an interesting range of limited edition craft beers. Good ol' Days (3.5%) doffs the cap to a great British beer style thankfully making its way out of the doldrums, being a traditional dark mild which is rich, malty and full of flavour belying the low ABV.

California Dreaming (3.8%) is a West Coast pale ale showcasing the best of vibrant American hops with a crisp clean finish. Odin's Ravens (4%) is named for Huginn and Muninn, the ravens that fly all over world and bring information to the Norse god Odin – an Oatmeal Stout brewed with flaked malted oats and plenty of roasted character malts. Bharat (4.5%) is the Hindi name for the Republic of India where the majority of the world's root ginger is grown, and is a ginger infused golden ale that balances aromas of citrus and tropical fruits from new world hops with the tang of root ginger.

West Berkshire Brewery

The new brewery is progressing rapidly and is hoped to be operational by August, including a restaurant/bar space available for events both corporate and public. It will be serving simple

pub grub with a WBB twist and as well as its own beers there will be a selection of spirits, wines and other local brews. It aims to make the restaurant/bar space a destination, with views of the brewhouse on one side and open countryside on the other.

Oktoberfest tickets are selling rapidly. The event on Saturday 23 September looks like being the best yet with two sessions being offered (12-5pm or 6-11pm), new entertainment and food vans. Its traditional Oktoberfest beer will be joined by regular brews by WBB, Renegade and also cider, plus traditional bratwurst and Go Fish and Chips later in the evening. Book online at wbbrew.com, by phone on 01635 202968, or pop into the shop.

The award-winning Tamesis Stout is maturing in bourbon barrels, and will be ready soon.

Dinton Beer Festival

The Third Annual Dinton Beer Festival will be held on Saturday 19 August from 12 noon until 6pm in the garden of the Seven Stars Pub in Dinton, easily accessible on the 280 bus route between Oxford and Aylesbury. There will be a dozen real ales to sample, at £3 a pint, from breweries near and far, plus cider and Pimms. The Owlswick Morris Dancers will entertain and there will also be some live American old time music and barbecue during the afternoon. Those attending will get a commemorative glass, tasting notes and six £1.50 vouchers for £10. All proceeds will go to help a village project.

Bletchington Beer Festival

The Beer Festival at the Sports & Social Club is taking place on Friday 22nd September through to Sunday 24th September, opening at 5.00pm on the Friday and 1pm on the Saturday and Sunday.

There is live music on Friday night with Irish Folk Singer Declan Gaynor; on Saturday it's a "Family Fun Day" with Children's Entertainer, Bouncy Castle, Face Painting Etc. There will also be a pig roast and crepe stand, and a static display of Classic Cars and, weather permitting, a Hot Air Balloon Display. Live music will kick off on Saturday again at 9.00pm with Steamroller. Sunday is a quieter day, with an Aunt Sally Competition in the afternoon.




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Let the train take (some of) the strain

White Horse branch member **Dick Bosley** puts on his walking boots

THIS MONTH'S OUTING saw us start at Didcot station, or more precisely the Prince of Wales opposite the station -- a Greene King pub that makes full use of the GK guest list, making it one of the best waiting rooms in the county. When we visited Britannia (from Evan Evans brewery in Wales), Trooper (Robinson's) and Kimberly Bitter (Hardy & Hansons) were available, and a couple of samples kept us occupied before getting the train to Pangbourne.

Leaving Pangbourne station you can bear right then left onto the High Street and left again at the George to Whitchurch toll bridge (free for pedestrians), or you can bear left to visit the Swan beside the river. At the Swan we found Lodden Hopbit, Windsor Knot & Knight of the Garter, both from Windsor & Eton Brewery; as well as Sir Titus and IPA from GK. Leaving the Swan you walk back into town, following the route above, or turn down The Wharf and follow a pleasant path by the river to the bridge.

From the bridge you walk uphill past a couple of pubs to the top of the village, and just when you think you have gone too far you will see on your right a well-marked Thames Path sign. You are now on the hilliest part of this path and then through some very nice woods. As you approach Goring you return to

the riverbank before reaching the village itself.

We detoured here to visit the John Barleycorn – a lovely old Brakspear house – where we sampled Ringwood 49er and Wainwrights Ratrace. Sadly the 1965 price list, showing bitter at 1/7 (about 8p) a pint was no longer valid. When we visited there was a very jovial crowd claiming it was the AGM of the pubs PPS – Philosophical and Poetry Society, although we thought one of the “P”s could usefully have been added to “iss take”.

Resuming our walk we followed Thames Street opposite Goring Village Hall which leads on to a signed footpath alongside the river. This soon becomes signed as the Ridgway Path and that leads you to South Stoke and the Pike & Perch. Although primarily a foodie pub, there was Brakspear Bitter and Ringwood Boondoggle to try before continuing through the village and on through North Stoke and Crowmarsh to Wallingford.

The first pub we came to was the Town Arms, and it had excellent Le Butts (Butts Brewery) and Crazy Horse IPA (White Horse). There seemed little point in going anywhere else until it was time to walk up to the Market Place and the X2 bus back to Didcot.



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.

Great Expectations

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

IT WAS AN EXPECTANT crowd that joined the bus on the Great Oxfordshire Community Pubs Expedition in June, and I was privileged to be among them. Our mission was to visit all seven community pubs, and to find out what makes them tick by the simple expedient of sampling their wares and asking lots of questions.

Editor Dave Richardson has writes eloquently about the fun we had in this edition, starting at the Plough in West Hanney, and ending at my beloved Red Lion in Northmoor. I can vouch for the fact that every word Dave wrote is true – except for the bits where my mind went a bit mizzly mozzzy after the sixth pint!

Visiting seven pubs with a group of friends is always going to be an enjoyable affair, the more so because we had convinced ourselves that we were embarked on a piece of research of national, possibly even international, significance. Could we find the secret formula that would ensure that locals up and down the land

could thrive, even when the pubcos had given up? More particularly, can community ownership make a failing pub into a successful pub? And the answer is..... not that simple.

Whoever owns the bricks and mortar of a pub it's the quality of the landlord and landlady which is a critical defining factor. Unless people want to buy the hospitality on offer, no amount of warm community feelings will make up for the lack of cash at the end of a hot, 12- to 16-hour day. It's easy to become ground down by that, and so the first thing is to smile and welcome everyone; they may have money in their pockets which can be transferred to the till.

It seems obvious that the beer has to be well kept, but it often isn't. It also seems obvious that the food should be good, even if simple, but it often isn't. Especially in isolated communities, it is important to give people a reason to make the journey to your pub when they will pass many tempting alternatives along the way. The best landlords and landladies

know this perfectly well. The others are just nonplussed and cross when nobody turns up.

So is there anything a beer lover *can* do to help things along when the local pub closes and the brewery wants to sell? Absolutely! The second defining factor is the community. With a little application, the community can purchase and provide a good building at a fair rent, reject all but the most hospitable, professional and hard-working applicants for the tenancy, and give those lovely and very rare people the space to run their free house without constant interference. Your pub will be so good that you will want to invite all your friends, and you'd better make sure you do.

In conclusion, we saw with our own eyes that a good community can have a good community pub. Just be aware that if you have great expectations you can make them come true, but you have to work at it.





Oktoberfest

The Tree Hotel, Iffley
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