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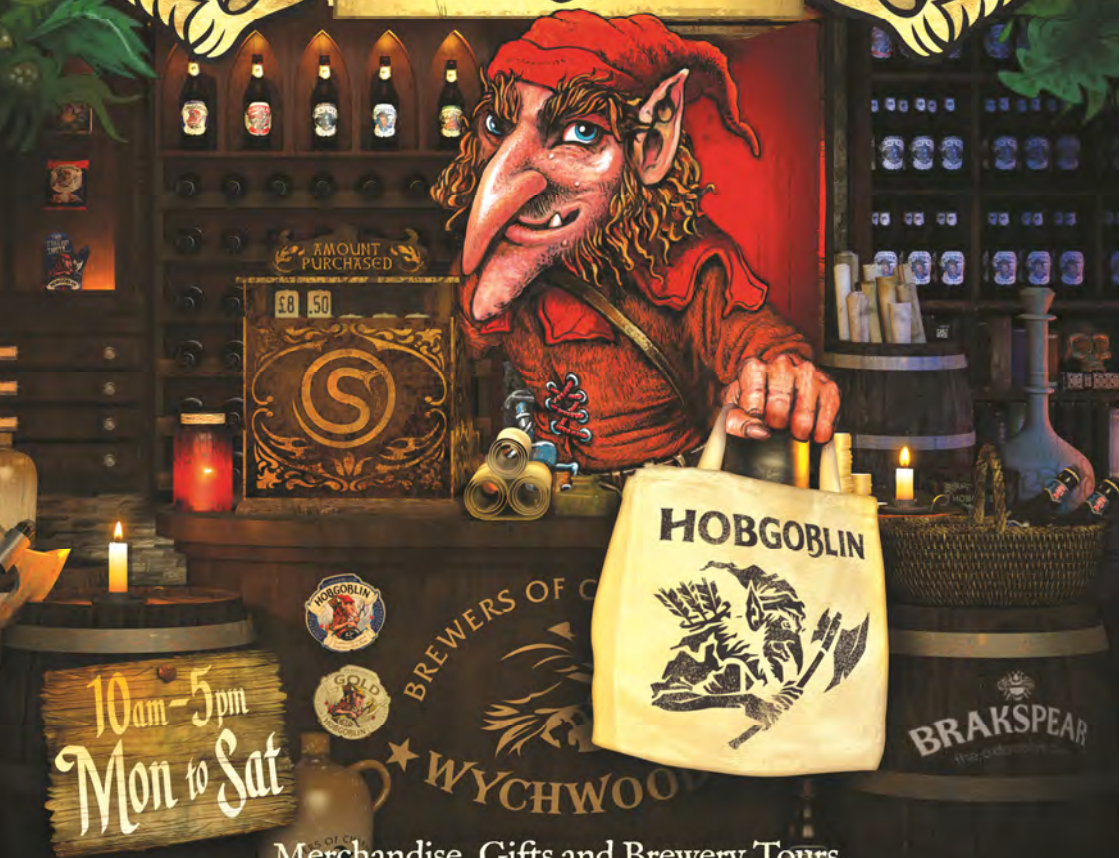
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Oxford  
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# Welcome

..... are you ready for the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival?

**BEER FESTIVALS ARE** now held so often and in so many places – see the list on page 23 – that it's easy to take them for granted. But you will always find a beer, or possibly a style of beer, that you've never tasted before, so make sure to visit the Oxford Town Hall festival from 26-28 October.

Here you will find a vast range of real ales and ciders from near and far, brought to you by a hard working team of CAMRA volunteers led by Grahame Allen and including some prize winning brews. The vast amount of planning needed starts soon after the last festival is finished, with matters ranging from scaffolding to stillage and health and safety needing to be sorted long before we start considering which drinks to sell.

As last year, Saturday will be a key day with beers held in reserve and a larger, more welcoming sitting area being created. Time was when you might taste a beer at a festival but never see it again, but the range of real ales now offered in our top pubs is so great now that there's a good chance that you will – especially from the fast growing local ale scene.

CAMRA's best pubs are recognised in the 2018 *Good Beer Guide*, a national publication that includes over 20 local pubs plus others from around the county. With so many festivals, so many breweries (now 1,700-plus around the UK) and so many

ales, all in our beer garden would appear rosy – but that isn't so.

Many pubs are barely viable, and the latest threat to their existence is a huge increase – sometimes of over 300% - in business rates, being phased in over the next five years. CAMRA has mounted a campaign calling for a £5,000 reduction in business rates for every pub in England, without which many more could close.

Already there is more beer drunk at home than in pubs, and that is largely down to cheap supermarket offers meaning you pay a fraction of what you must hand over in a pub. The Government has already introduced lower "safe consumption" alcohol limits than almost any other country in Europe, and while we must applaud responsible drinking, many feel it has gone too far.

CAMRA is supporting the launch of a new independent organisation, Drinkers' Voice, to speak up for moderate drinkers across the UK and counter what we believe is misleading public health advice. The Nanny State is alive and well and wagging its finger, yet another threat to the community hub provided by good pubs everywhere.

As ever, your news, views and contributions to the *Oxford Drinker* are welcome – just drop me a line.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**

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FOR  
REAL ALE**

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



# It's getting ..... Better in Bicester

**Dave Richardson** visits an “unfancied” town for real ale drinkers to report on the pubs scene



**WITH ONLY ONE** pub in the 2017 Good Beer Guide, I had been told that Bicester was hardly worth a pub crawl. But news that the Angel pub was opening a micro-brewery prompted me to make the trip, using the new half-hourly rail link from Oxford.

Setting out to sample all the pubs in the town centre, we went to the furthest point first passing various closed pubs along the way, including what I presume was the George and Dragon judging by a metal sign. I had visited the **Littlebury Hotel** before as this was where CAMRA held a regional “revitalisation” event last year, but there was no real ale today as the single hand pump selling Vale Brewery’s VPA had just gone “off”. So we moved on.



The next stop was a surprise as I hadn’t realised that the Plough – now renamed **Jacobs Plough** – had become part of House of Jacob, which runs **Jacobs Inn** in Wolvercote and the **Woodstock Arms** in Woodstock, in addition to its original Jacobs & Field deli in Headington and a brasserie also at the latter location.

Jacobs arrived in Bicester in May, aiming to bring the same locally sourced, up-market food menu as at its other

**OPPOSITE:** The front of the Angel Inn; Simon Collinson at Bicester Brewery;

**RIGHT:** Bicester's Good Beer Guide Entry is the Bell



establishments. **Jacobs Plough** remains a Greene King tenancy, however, so IPA is a fixture with Old Golden Hen also available. I opted for the regular guest ale, the reliable Timothy Taylor's Landlord, which slipped down well but costs £4.20 a pint.

This former Morrells pub offers a very pleasant environment, and is mostly laid out for dining but with sofas and a large old fireplace in the drinking area. Its own herbs are cultivated in the garden, contributing to a menu with main courses costing £14-£16 (steaks £12.50-£26).

**Jacobs Plough** seems in fact just the sort of place to attract some of Bicester's many new residents into town from the surrounding housing developments.

On then to the **Angel**, the first in a series of pubs along Sheep Street and Market Square. A sign over the door advised that the pub dates from 1674 and became known as the **Angel** around 1804, and now it has brought brewing back to Bicester.

Not quite in time for us, however, as the first commercial brew of Bicester Brewery was settling in the cellar although two of its beers

will normally be available when you read this. Four beers were on sale from the six pumps, however, and I chose Chiltern Brewery's Chiltern Black (3.9%) in preference to Chiltern Gold (3.9%), Animal's Mioung (4.6%) and Wychwood's Hobgoblin (4.5%).

We then discovered that the **Angel** is now part of the 16-strong Oak Taverns group, which includes real ale favourites the **Cross Keys** in Thame and the **Swan** in Faringdon, which also have micro-breweries. While the **Angel** itself is an average sized pub, it has made the most of its large rear area by opening not just the brewery, but a bottle shop (called 102, its number on Sheep Street) and a cocktail bar in a barn open at weekends, plus a marquee available for hire. Food traders will also be invited to pitch up at weekends, while snacks and sharing boards are available in the bar.

Three beers are being produced, including a 4.5% pale ale and rotating beers in different styles. We were shown the brewery by Oak boss Simon Collinson who happened to be visiting, and he is clearly very confident about his new investment.

"People used to think of Bicester as a town full of squaddies where no-one wanted to come in at night, but Bicester Village is a huge tourist attraction, and 7,000 homes are being built here," he told us. "With **Jacobs Plough** also nearby, this is emerging as the nicer end of town."

Suitably impressed, we set out to complete our tour at what might be the less nice end of town, and next stop was the **Bell**, Bicester's 2017 GBG entry. Originally part of the short-lived Hobgoblin pub chain, it continues to major on Wychwood beers with Hobgoblin, Hobgoblin Gold and a guest – XT-17 – XT plus its Animal range being regular suppliers.

This is a very old, very large and somewhat rowdy pub, even in the early evening, appealing to the youth market with "Sharp Shooters" with names such as Tequila Mockingbird and others which can't be repeated in a respectable magazine! There's lots of live music, TVs and slot machines, and while we found the beer quality good, we didn't like the ambience and doubted whether it would get into the GBG if it was in the Oxford branch area.

*continued over..*



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Across the road is the **Saxon**, another huge drinking and dining hall, which looked like a Wetherspoon with similar food offers, except that the real ale range was much more limited. The two regular beers are Doom Bar and St Austell Tribute (I chose the latter), but it came up trumps for cider with Lilley's Mango Cider on hand pump and two more ciders in boxes. The **Saxon** seems to be making a success of being a Wetherspoon lookalike, but with the added attraction of live sports.

Now for the Wetherspoon itself, called the **Penny Black** as it occupies the former Post Office. It is a typical Wetherspoon in most respects, with the patio garden that many of them lack, but the beer choice was disappointing with the same

range on both sets of pumps. Doom Bar, GK's Abbot and Ruddles (£1.99!) are the regulars, and today's guests were Prescott's Hill Climb, Grafton's Apricot Jungle and my choice, an IPA by Gage Roads of Western Australia, part of Wetherspoon's international range.

I gave this a try but, as I might have predicted, it was far too hoppy for me. I got it down as I read about the history of the Penny Black stamp, with the ex-Post Office clerk and then famous writer Anthony Trollope credited with its invention.

Two more pubs awaited but they didn't take us long. The **White Hart** is Greene King's main show in town, being a large barn of a pub behind its moderate exterior with multiple

sports screens and slot machines. IPA and London Glory were the only real ales on here. Final stop was a Greene King-run hotel called the **King's Arms**, which concentrates on accommodation and dining. It also has a small bar which usually serves IPA and London Glory (both off), but the day was saved by a pleasant half of Black Sheep Bitter. As at the **Saxon** it excels at ciders, with Lilley's Apple and Blackberry on draught, and two more in boxes.

As we returned to Bicester Village station to mingle with the homeward bound Asian tourists, we reflected on a visit that turned up more than we expected. The **Angel** alone makes Bicester worth visiting, and I trust it will get in the GBG soon.

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# Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** discovers the Joy of George Street

**ALWAYS A BUSY** thoroughfare in the centre of Oxford, it's not unusual for up to 4,000 people to congregate in George Street on a Saturday night in mid-summer. Well, that's what I remember during the 1980s when punters would spill out on to the pavement. It's not the same today as health and safety measures have been introduced to moderate the human traffic flow, but it remains a thriving and vibrant place for drinkers of all ages.

My first stop was **The Grapes** which had only re-opened a week earlier, following a tasteful refurb and reverting to its previous, historic name. The transformation from its previous incarnation as Beerd is tangible. Instead of numerous divisive screens we now have an open

and inviting drinking area, with high stools and matching tables culminating in a more relaxed atmosphere offering a clean and refreshing outlook.

The much needed improvement to both beer cellar and toilets has also been made. I gained the impression that the previous owners were either unable financially, or unwilling to invest the necessary capital required to meet the demands of its clientele. I have to ask what was Beerd all about? -- a marketing faux pas if ever there was one! In the pub business they often say if you can't make a go of it then let someone else try and all credit to former owner St Austell Brewery, which had taken over Bath Ales, for its decision.

City Pub Company is the proud new lease owner, with thriving existing establishments in Oxford: St Aldates Tavern and George Street Social. It's good to know that once again, **The Grapes** is in a safe pair of hands and has reverted to its former glory.

The pub has a quirky feel to it with some interesting artefacts and paintings on display, together with books on the bar which include: *Grapes of Wrath*, *Grapes Peaches Nectarines* and *Melons*, *A cluster of Grapes*!! Upon opening, to my surprise, food and drink menus are listed. The former is interesting as it offers various gluten-free options and competitively priced pizzas costing around £9.

On the day of my visit seven real ales were available, and as soon as I caught sight of the unique and distinctive Siren Craft Brewery pump clip my decision was made. I succumbed to the delights of the citrus tasting Yulu (3.8%), which was very refreshing and flavoursome. I am fortunate in meeting many beer drinkers at the numerous festivals and pubs that I visit, and most discerning drinkers would agree that Siren Craft would feature in their top ten in terms of its superiority and overall quality rating of the numerous beers.

I didn't have to walk far to my next venue; next door in fact! **The Wig and Pen** is a huge split-level Greene King (GK)





establishment with plenty of room so no trouble finding a seat, but this was a Monday lunchtime and the place is heaving on a Saturday night. Six real ales were on offer which included three from GK. From the guest beer range I chose the rich, dark and creamy Honey Porter from Milestone Brewery, which was very tasty.

Established by pub landlord, beer connoisseur and businessman Ken Munro, Milestone, based in Sutton-upon-Trent, is a craft brewery producing fine flavoursome ales which has won many prestigious awards over the years. Historically, the area around Burton-on-Trent is home to Britain's brewing heritage. The term "Burtonisation" is the act of adding sulphate, often in the form of gypsum, to the water used for brewing to bring out the flavour of the hops. Burton-on-Trent had several very successful breweries due to the chemical composition of the local water.

Less than 50 yards away was my next stop, **Pint Shop**, which

opened about a year ago to complement the eponymously named original in Cambridge, with a selection of 21 taps of which three are real ales. I chose a saison beer named Clover Club (brewed using wild yeasts) by Bad Seed Brewery, with raspberries and hibiscus wheat. Needless to say it was red in colour and, true to form, tasting rather sour to reflect the beer style. At an eye watering £5 a pint I would not want to undergo any serious session drinking here when cheaper alternatives are available locally.

**Pint Shop** is owned and operated by Benny Peverelli and Richard Holmes, who pride themselves on putting customers first. The food offering looks tempting with coal-baked kebabs a popular choice. I also sampled a keg version of the same beer, which I found to be a little fizzy and similar to a sour version of Dr Pepper.

My last stop was **The Four Candles**, one of two Wetherspoon pubs in the city

centre, named in honour of comedian Ronnie Barker who went to school in George Street. Ten real ales were displayed of which four were "resting" so only six were actually available. Maybe I'm a bit picky but I find it frustrating that not all the beers were available, and you could argue that if the six on offer were in tip-top condition then that should suffice. Another gripe I have concerns slot machines, as these are a real distraction. Annoyingly, three of these were within earshot so I hastily moved as far away as possible after I had ordered my beer.

I opted for Moles Brewery's Mole Catcher which is a malt driven Old English full-bodied beer offering up a deep, dark amber coloured body with an aroma of dark caramel, with mid-sweet fruits beneath. Interestingly, Moles Brewery in Melksham, Wiltshire was this year sold to Wickwar Wessex Brewing Company, which should guarantee its future after its founders decided to retire after 30 years of running a successful business.





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# A room with a view - and a pub with a difference

**Dave Richardson**  
visits Hook Norton's  
Castle at Edgehill to  
meet an award-  
winning landlord



**I HAD STOPPED** at the Castle at Edgehill a couple of times before, admiring its ancient tower and wondering whether I should stay overnight there. It overlooks the site of the first major conflict in the English Civil War, the Battle of Edgehill, fought in 1642.

But my mind was made up when I heard that Mark Higgs, who runs the Castle with his wife Claire, had won the British Institute of Innkeeping Licensee of the Year award 2017 – which is simply the highest accolade in the industry. I would meet Mark on Monday morning, but on this sunny Sunday afternoon there was time to enjoy the surroundings and learn about the Castle, which lies just over the border in Warwickshire, off the B4100 Banbury to Warwick road.

The tower, with three of the four letting bedrooms, was built exactly 100 years after the battle to commemorate that event, at the spot where King Charles I raised his standard. The battle between the Royalists and Cromwell's Parliamentarian troops raged for several hours but was inconclusive. The Castle became an inn in 1822 with Hook Norton taking over in 1922, with the pub, restaurant and beer garden having a revamp three years ago.

The views from our Rupert Room on the top floor were superb, as were the modern comforts, with several counties visible on a clear day. The Castle stands on a ridge with mature trees below, and the view and explanation of the

battle can also be enjoyed from the beer garden. Hook Norton's renowned range of beers are reason enough to make this an overnight stop, with Hooky, Hooky Gold and Old Hooky available on tap. Two pints of the latter helped down an a la carte dinner before we climbed the tower to sleep soundly.

When I met Mark Higgs the next morning I found him very informal and approachable, as a landlord should be. He ran his first pub at the age of 22 and admits it soon became a way of life – but how did he become the top landlord in the country?

"Hook Norton put me forward for the award, and it is the best company I have ever worked with as a family brewer which has changed with the times," he said. "I had to fill in a long questionnaire with checks on everything from health and safety to the kitchens, and then there was a mystery visit. There were 300 nominations from throughout the UK, and attending the final at Sky Studios was a bit like an episode of The Apprentice.

"Everything about running a pub comes into it, including business development, people and training, and financial awareness. But you have to get the basics right too, including great beer and clean toilets. People pay good money for service, and everything has to be right."

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# Greene King builds bridges

**GREENE KING SOMETIMES** has a difficult relationship with real ale drinkers, especially in Oxfordshire where there is still lingering resentment over its take-over and closure of Morlands brewery in Abingdon in 2000 and subsequent take-over of many of the Morrells pubs, reducing choice for drinkers.

It is still the dominant pub owner around Oxford, but in recent times there have been signs of change with some tenants getting a better deal which might even include an agreement totally free of tie on the beers supplied – as at the Jolly Post Boys in Oxford (see Pub News). The range of guest ales has also increased greatly, meaning it is rare to find only GK beers available.

At the invitation of Oxford branch chairman Pete Flynn, two of GK's local management team attended the September branch meeting which was held in one of the newer GK pubs, the Wig and Pen in central Oxford. Business development manager for the South West region Mike Laudat, and Will Morrison who works on the brewing and brands side, brought with them a range of complimentary bottled and canned beers to sample, complete with tasting notes.

Mike came across as a very genuine character with a strong local pedigree in the pubs business, as he used to run the

Cricketers on Iffley Road (now the Mad Hatter cocktail bar) and Bullingdon on Cowley Road. He then worked for Punch Taverns, Spirit and Orchid Group before joining GK in 2010. He now oversees 18 managed but unbranded pubs, but is not responsible for tenancies.

In total the Suffolk-based brewer has over 1,800 managed pubs, including brands such as Hungry Horse, Chef and Brewer, and Flaming Grill. Tenanted pubs, hotels and restaurants bring its total outlets to over 3,000, making it one of the UK's biggest.

"My forte is unbranded pubs – good, old-fashioned locals, having been a publican myself," said Mike. "The pubs I look after are a real mixture, from the historic Turf Tavern in the middle of Oxford to the Royal Standard in Headington."

Greene King has sold off plenty of smaller pubs in recent years, both managed and tenanted, while opening more larger food-led pubs, which are more profitable.

"There is a false expectation that throwing money at a pub will work," said Mike. "But it's all about the pub itself and the people who run it. If people aren't using them, is the problem the pub or the manager? Sometimes you've got to change managers to make a pub viable again, but we explore all the options

before we look at disposal. But sometimes, you just can't make it work."

A case in point was the Grapes, right next door to the Wig and Pen on George Street in Oxford. GK handed the lease back to the city council in 2012 after costs went up to £60,000 a year, but Bath Ales (and more recently City Pub Company) took over. The pub had only 24 seats and GK could not make it viable.

While stressing that he did not look after tenancies, Mike added: "There are now a variety of tenancy deals to suit the market. There's no point holding people to ransom over rent and the brewery tie."

His colleague Will Morrison said seasonal ales continued to do well, and a new Mulled Hen will be produced for the festive season.

After a lively discussion, we offered a vote of thanks to Mike and Will before trying some unusual beers from the range including East Coast and Twisted Thistle IPAs.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**



# Bohemian Rhapsody

Oxford Branch's annual European trip this year visited Prague. **Matt Bullock** reports from the Czech capital.



**A SENSIBLE FLIGHT** time from Gatwick meant we arrived in Prague in the early evening. You actually arrive at the airport in the middle of nowhere, and get a bus to Zličín where you can join the metro to the city. Our chosen hotel was the Jury's Inn, opposite Florenc metro station where we disembarked, about one mile from the main square.

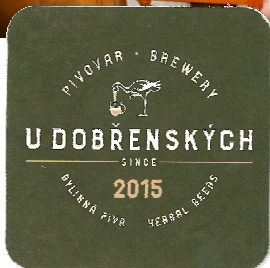
Our chosen destination that night was just two blocks away from the hotel. Pivovarský Klub (Křižikova 272/17) is a small bottle shop and bar with a basement bar area. A few of us went to seek it out, and found plenty of available seats in the basement on a Wednesday night, so we tucked in as we waited for the rest of the party to join us. There were six draught beers from six different Czech breweries: an unfiltered pale lager, a wheat beer, a Märzen and three American-style pale ales. In addition there is a beer menu of around 100 bottled beers, a mix of styles and from a number of countries,

though with the assistance of the helpful, English-speaking staff we managed to find a few favourites including a Bohemian Ale, more a Belgian Tripel (8.2%) and Pardubice Porter 19° (8%). The beers were priced at about £1.50 for half a litre, and the simple but wholesome food was well-priced too. After a long day's travelling, this was our only port of call that night!

The following morning after a hearty buffet breakfast we walked in the hot sunshine through the city to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Charles Bridge which crosses the Vltava River. After taking in the sights, a few of us went on an exploratory walk to locate some of the brew pubs. Despite it still being morning, the first we located, U Valšů (Betlémská 286/5), was open so we popped in to try the dark Valšovo Tmavé 10° (4.1%) served in 0.4l dimple mug glasses. We met up with the crowd (there were 20 of us in total) at the Fat Cat (Karlova 147/44), a modern brew-pub



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** U Tří Růží; this sign enticed us into U Valšů  
**ABOVE:** The group gathered at Štupartská (left) and U Fleků (above)



where the beer styles were more British, and the prices more expensive, though they came from a number of Czech breweries. It is situated in the heart of the old town, and there are several fantastic brew pubs close by. Only a few doors away is the atmospheric 15<sup>th</sup> Century U Tří Růží (The Three Roses, Husova 232/10), selling their own Dark Special brewed with Zatec hops and an American Hop Lager with Simcoe and Chinook. From here we visited U Zlatého Tygra (The Golden Tiger, Husova 228/17), not a brew pub, but one of the few remaining authentic Czech pubs. It serves only one beer, Pilsner Urquell 12°, sold as a “tank” beer as it’s delivered by tanker and is served on draught as a live product from the pub’s cellars.

That evening we’d booked a beer tour. When I’d last visited Prague 20 years ago, I’d done the same and was treated to a fabulous tour of traditional pubs by an Irishman who gave us a full history of the beer, the bars,

the city and the country as we walked round. In comparison, this tour was a bit of a disappointment. We visited three reasonably nice bars – Štupartská, U Vejvodů and U Pivnice, but the beer choice was limited to the Czech staples – Urquell or Staropramen – and our guide, though very pleasant, was not a mine of information and we were all left feeling a bit underwhelmed. Once our guide had taken her leave, we retired to U Supa (Celentá 22), a cavernous two-storey brew pub where we ate and drank until it was time to go home.

On Friday morning I took a tram ride to have a walk around the New Town, to view a Frank Gehry building, to see Wenceslas Square and to locate some of the bars on this side of the city. Walking back into town, I heard familiar voices from within the Fat Cat, and was not surprised to find some of the crowd there. After another Summer Cat Ale (3.8%) we walked back the same route I’d just covered to the New

Town to Novoměstský Pivovar (New Town Brewery), a place I remember well from 20 years ago. Because there were so many of us we were seated in the bowels of the basement, and the beer, though pleasant, was unremarkable. A few doors down is the austere Branicka, a tiny bar serving its own Lager. This was probably the only place we went to where we were the only tourists, and the only place where English didn’t seem to be spoken. The beer here was less than a pound.

Three stops out of town on the tram (or two stops and a walk

*Degrees Plate (such as 11°) is a European measurement of the concentration of sugars in the wort prior to fermentation, expressed in terms of percentage (11 plato is 11% sugars). The higher percentage of sugar, the more the yeast can metabolize into alcohol. As a guide a 12° is around 5% ABV.*



as some of the group discovered) is U Fleků (Křemencova 11), a famous pub, founded in 1499 comprising eight separate beer halls surrounding a courtyard beer garden. We took a long table in the sunny garden where we were entertained by the accordionist and were served with the brewery's only beer, Flekovský Tmavý Ležák 13° (Flek Dark Double Lager, 5%). Although the beer is more expensive here than most places, it's definitely worth it, and despite the tourist nature, it's retains something of an "authentic" feel. The beer was so good that gradually everybody contacted us and joined us, so we stayed for

another and another, before abandoning our trip back to the hotel to "freshen up" in favour of continuing our brewery crawl.

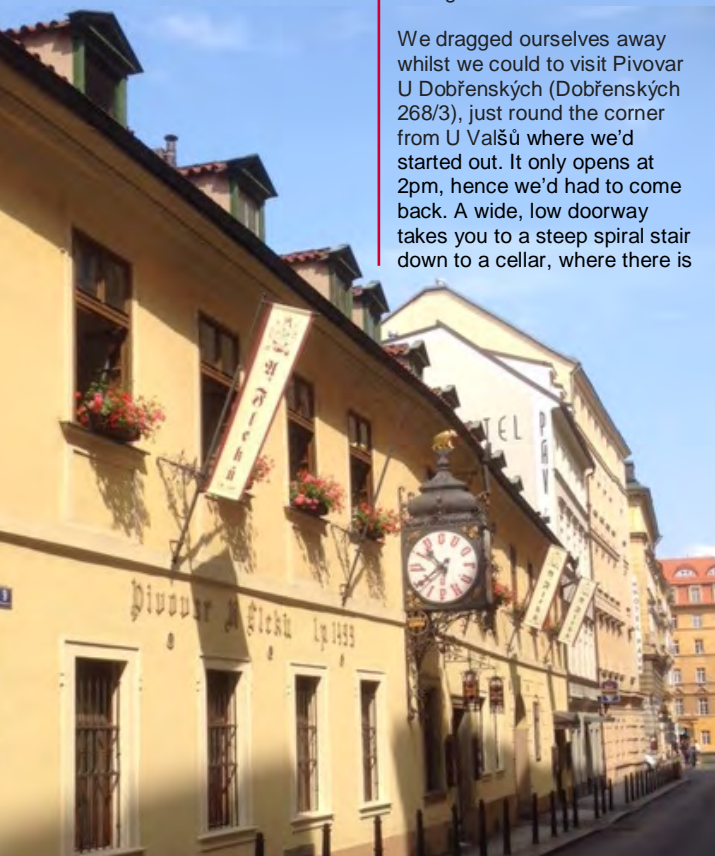
Only a few streets away is Pivovar Národní (Národní 8), a smart, modern brew pub on a major thoroughfare with a large garden to the rear. We sat out the back, where we discovered the unfiltered Ležák, the Polotmavý 13° (literally a semi-dark, or amber, 5.5%) and the fabulous Polotmavý Cuning Fox 14°, a spring special with a strong herbal-fruity aroma with a touch of grape, gooseberry and pineapple, made from Czech, Munich and caramel blanc hops, but of an unknown strength!

We dragged ourselves away whilst we could to visit Pivovar U Dobřenských (Dobřenských 268/3), just round the corner from U Valšů where we'd started out. It only opens at 2pm, hence we'd had to come back. A wide, low doorway takes you to a steep spiral stair down to a cellar, where there is



a split level drinking area with two rooms, and a bar area with a compact brewery behind. The beers here are brewed with herbs, and we had the choice of pale Lemongrass Ale 11° (4.5%), a top-fermented ale brewed with lemongrass; the Salvia Stout 14°, brewed with Sage (6%) and the excellent Tribulus 14° (6%), brewed with tribulus terrestris, a herb that if you read up on it can or can't do a host of wonderful things! After a couple of these, negotiating the steps is a little dangerous, but we made it out safely, most opting for the metro home, but four of us decided to visit the historic beer hall U Medvídků, hoping to try their own brew, 1466 (the year the brewery was founded), but it was unavailable so we had to have tank Budvar instead.

On Saturday our plan was to visit the micro-brewery festival held in the grounds of the castle. It's a long walk up to the castle, and even longer to go round the back to find the festival entrance, but once there





**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The exterior of U Fleků with its impressive clock  
**ABOVE:** The festival site at Prague Castle)

we handed over enough of our Czech Koruna to gain entry and set to work. The cost was about £15, and you received a programme, a small glass lined at 75ml, and a pouch bag to hang round your neck to keep your belongings in. There were seventy stands under tents in the castle grounds, each stand from a different brewery, mostly Czech but some from Hungary too. Each brewery offered two different beers, so there was a great choice, and you took your glass to get as many beers as you wished. I won't bore you with a list of meaningless names, nor with a description of Dermot's attempt to negotiate an ancient stone doorway to reach the toilets, but suffice to say we got our money's worth! I did manage to try the 1466 that I had missed the previous night, and I enjoyed a number of pale ales, including the "Gentle Bastard" (6%, 63IBU) from Horizont Sörök in Budapest and the Hoplish IPA (6.8%, 56IBU) from Pivovar Zhůřák in south-western Czech Republic. I remember too an excellent

Doppelbock, several other dark beers, and some less successful fruit beers.

An afternoon here took its toll, so we wandered back to the hotel on the tram, and spent our last night back where we'd started, with a meal and a few beers at Pivovarský Klub. I was probably one of the first to retire to the hotel!

We travelled back on Sunday by the reverse of the outward route (metro/bus/plane) and apart from chaotic queues at Gatwick it all went very smoothly. Thanks go to those who did the organisation, without whom these trips wouldn't happen. Despite its stag-do reputation (which we saw nothing of), Prague is an excellent place for the beer drinker, prices are reasonable, service is good, English is widely spoken (the Czech language is not easy to pick up), and the people are welcoming and friendly. I'd definitely go back. So, goodbye, everybody, I've got to go....



## CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

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

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

### Abingdon

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

### Oxford

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

### Witney

Company of Weavers \*

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.

# Pub News

From the Oxford and White Horse regions

## Abingdon

### White Horse

Sharon and Darren Fowler have left the Greene King pub after several successful years, which included increasing the choice of real ales on offer, introducing a CAMRA discount and getting the pub in contention for the Good Beer Guide (GBG).

## Childrey

### Hatchet

The pub has been closed for more than a year. Despite assuring a public meeting of villagers and White Horse CAMRA representatives that they didn't want to deprive the village of a pub, the owners have submitted an application for change of use to do just that. Both CAMRA and the villagers have objected on the basis that they jointly believe that a pub in Childrey is a viable concern; the "Don't hatchet the Hatchet" campaign has organised a series of very successful "pop-up pubs" in the village hall.

## Eynsham

### Evenlode

Now operating as a free house and part of the same small group as the Pickled Ploughman at Adderbury and Lion at Wendlebury, the Evenlode has had a major make-over under new ownership. Situated alongside the A40 just outside Eynsham, it serves meals all day from 12.00 noon and at 7.30am for breakfast. It has up to five real ales sourced from Marston's, typically including Wychwood's Hobgoblin and Brakspear Bitter.

## Faringdon

### Swan

This pub re-opened on Friday 1 September after a very pleasant make-over, in particular the lounge area, but brewing was not yet taking place at the site.

## Fernham

### Woodman

New owners have taken over here and have installed three

hand-pumps, beer having been previously served from a stillage behind the bar. Available during a recent visit were XT-4, Bingham's Vanilla Stout, Timothy Taylor Boltmaker and Marston's 61 deep pale ale. On the keg font was XT Squid Ink.

## Kidlington

### King's Arms

The free house celebrated its 200th anniversary in August with a charity event in aid of Prostate Cancer UK. Landlords Gerry and Christine McGrath have run the pub for 20 years since it was acquired by John Salter, of the Salter Brothers boating firm. Marston's Burton Bitter and three changing ales are served.

## Kingston Bagpuize

### Hind's Head

Owners Hawthorn Leisure are in the process of selling it to Sainsbury's to convert into a local supermarket. The Parish Council and Vale of White Horse District Council have rejected CAMRA's application to have it listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), stating that the pub is not an asset to the area or the community. The pub closed on 8 June but has since re-opened for a short time. The White Horse branch is objecting to any change of use.

## Oxford

### BrewDog/Harry's Bar

Scottish-based craft beer brewer BrewDog has finally achieved its ambition of opening in Oxford, but in Cowley Road rather than the city centre. The pub briefly known as Harry's Bar at number 119, but previously known as the





Corridor and before that the New Inn, reopened on 29 September. The brewery and pub chain is known for its super-strength beers, often dispensed in small measures, but it also brews the low-alcohol Nanny State. Its best known beer is Punk IPA (5.6%).

### Castle

Opening its first-ever pub in the city is Hook Norton, which purchased the Castle last year and re-opened it on 22 September after a major refurbishment. Previously operating as a gay pub, it now welcomes all comers with six cask ale and 10 keg taps, and a menu concentrating on pizzas and small plates.

The main bar has been re-modelled revealing the pub's original features with Hook Norton wooden beer crates being used for the bar. The lower level bar has been opened up as a space for entertainment and will also be available for private hire and parties.

Tenants Jeremy Morey and Anthony Murray, from Hook Norton's Ye Olde Reindeer Inn in Banbury, said: "We're excited to have been given this great opportunity to add a second Hooky pub to our portfolio. Our aim for the Castle is for it to become a lively, buzzing city centre venue with live music, comedy nights, beer evenings and of course to serve a great and wide range of beers, wines and spirits."

The pub – adjacent to the much expanded Westgate Centre, which opens in October – dates back to 1892 and was constructed to designs by H.G.W.

Drinkwater in a distinctive mock-Tudor style with tall red brick chimney stacks. It was almost lost forever in the 1960s with the development of the original Westgate Centre, and has also been known as the Paradise House and Culture Vulture.

### Eagle and Child

Currently a Nicholson's pub but due to be taken over by Young's, this famous old pub with literary connections is due for a major revamp by the site's owner, St John's College. This has attracted the attention of Oxford Civic Society, which wants to ensure that its links with famous writers of the Inklings group including J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S Lewis are respected. It is going through the planning process as it aims to create separate drinking and dining areas, with seven boutique hotel bedrooms to be created above.

### Grapes

The oldest pub on George Street has reverted to its original name having been known as Beerd since 2015. A revamp has restored some of its original



features and layout following acquisition of the lease by City Pub Company, which runs St Aldates Tavern. The previous leaseholder, Bath Ales (which includes the Beerd brand), was taken over by St Austell Brewery which wanted to offload some of the pubs. See Pete's Pubs, pages 10-11.

### Jolly Post Boys

The Florence Park pub celebrated the first anniversary of its transformation in September, being a highly unusual Greene King tenancy with no beer tie whatsoever. Indeed there is no GK branding inside the pub, which has a keen focus on real ale despite being also a café (coffee and cake are available during the day) and serving up-market food and tapas.

Run by the same tenants as at the Chester in East Oxford, the Jolly Post Boys has proved so popular that it is now open throughout the day, while remaining closed all day on Mondays. It has attracted people in with regular events such as the "Bad Dads Club" on Sunday mornings and "Drinking Dads" to connect local fathers.

West Berkshire's Mr Chubb's Lunchtime Bitter and Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge are the regular ales, with a guest range that is highly eclectic. A third real ale is available on weekdays and a fourth at weekends, and names that have appeared recently include XT/Animal's Bear, Purity's Ubu, and Bad Seed Brewery's Session IPA.

Drew Brammer, one of the management partners, said: "We are always on the hunt for

regional real ales, and we have also had a beer suitable for vegans. We have a 50-50 balance between food and drink sales when we had expected sales to be more wet-driven.

“People are using the pub to make friends, and we are appealing to a lot of young families moving into the area.”

The Jolly Post Boys helped people in Marston to have a “pop-up pub” on 8 October in the scout hut on Marston Road. New Marston’s last pub, the Somerset, has closed.

### William Morris

Regulars were shocked when Wetherspoon announced that the pub, its first in Oxford in 2003 and just outside the Templars Square centre in Cowley, would shut in March 2018. New River Retail owns the building and plans major redevelopment of the shopping centre, but told the Oxford Mail that the decision to close was taken by Wetherspoon and it will now seek a new pub operator. Greene King’s Hungry Horse chain might be in the running as it had hoped to open in the nearby John Allen Centre.

## Shippon

### Prince of Wales

Tim and Nicky Hamilton are the new tenants here, where they are continuing the tradition of serving local ales from Loose Cannon, Shotover and White Horse. They are providing home cooked food and good quality wines at reasonable prices. Their website is [princeofwalesshippon.co.uk](http://princeofwalesshippon.co.uk)

## Witney

### Rowing Machine

The Hungry Horse pub re-opened in September after a major revamp of its dining area, improved beer garden and

introduction of a wider drinks range.

### Nicholson’s

The 77-strong pub chain is running the National Beer Showcase 2017 for six weeks until 22 October, including at the Chequers, Crown and Eagle and Child in Oxford. This features 28 new beers, guest talks, workshops and tastings, with Nicholson’s Cask Masters from each region creating six “District Beers” from breweries including *West Berkshire*. The free *There’s A Beer For That* guidebook introduces the District Beers, which include *Mjango Unchained*, *Rye the Hell Not*, and *Ryeders of the Lost Cask*.  
[www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk/beershowcase](http://www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk/beershowcase)

## Wantage Festival News

Oktoberfest – a festival supported by CAMRA but not organised by it – will take place at the Beacon, Wantage (Civic Centre) on Friday 13 October (5pm-midnight, £3) and Saturday 14 October (2pm-midnight, £5). Loose Cannon is helping to source 24 real ales, while local real ciders are being sourced by the Royal Oak pub in the town.

Wantage Beer Festival 2018: The Beacon has been booked for the eighth festival, with public opening on 17-18 March 2018 from 11am-11pm. Live music will be staged on Friday evening and the Six Nations Rugby can be seen on the Saturday on a big screen. Entry will be free to CAMRA members at all times.

**BELLINGER'S BREWERY**  
A FAMILY BUSINESS  
MMXI

**SUMMER ALE**  
ALC. 3.7% VOL

**ORIGINAL BITTER**  
ALC. 4.1% VOL

**V**

**THE BEST BEERS ARE THE ONES WE DRINK WITH FRIENDS.**

**BELLINGER'S BREWERY**  
Station Road, Grove, Wantage, OX12 0DH

T : 01235 77 22 55  
E : [info@bellingersbrewery.co.uk](mailto:info@bellingersbrewery.co.uk)  
W : [www.bellingersbrewery.co.uk](http://www.bellingersbrewery.co.uk)

**BELLINGER'S BREWERY**  
Station Road, Grove, Wantage, OX12 0DH

THE OXFORD BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL 2017

# Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

**Wednesday 11 - Sunday 22  
October**

## **JD Wetherspoon Autumn Real Ale Festival**

Around 30 beers featuring 30  
different hop varieties  
All JD Wetherspoon pubs  
[www.jdwetherspoon.com](http://www.jdwetherspoon.com)

**Friday 13 - Saturday 14 October  
Oktoberfest 2017**

Beacon, Portway, Wantage  
[www.beaconwantage.co.uk](http://www.beaconwantage.co.uk)

**Saturday 14 - Sunday 15  
October**

## **Chinnor RFC Beerfest**

Chinnor Rugby Club, Kingsey  
Road, Thame  
[www.chinnor-rfc.com](http://www.chinnor-rfc.com)

**Wednesday 18 - Saturday 21  
October**

## **Concrete Pint Beer Festival**

"Celebrating 50 years of Milton  
Keynes"  
Snozone Xscape, Marlborough  
Gate, Central Milton Keynes  
[www.mkcamra.org.uk](http://www.mkcamra.org.uk)

**Thursday 19 - Saturday 21  
October**

## **Maidenhead Beer & Cider Festival**

Magnet Leisure Centre,  
Holmanleaze, Maidenhead  
Note new venue  
140 beers, ciders & perries  
[maidenheadbeerfest.camra.org.uk](http://maidenheadbeerfest.camra.org.uk)

**Friday 20 - Saturday 21 October  
Plum Pudding Beer Festival**

High Street, Milton, nr Abingdon  
01235 834443  
[www.theplumpuddingmilton.co.uk](http://www.theplumpuddingmilton.co.uk)

**Monday 23 - Sunday 29  
October**

## **St Aldates Tavern Beer Festival**

St Aldates, Oxford  
01865 241185  
[www.staldatestavernoxford.co.uk](http://www.staldatestavernoxford.co.uk)

**Thursday 26 - Saturday 28  
October**

## **Oxford Beer & Cider Festival**

Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford  
170 beers plus 50 ciders &  
perries Thu and Fri; 40 new beers  
on Saturday  
[www.oxford.camra.org.uk](http://www.oxford.camra.org.uk)

**Thursday 26 - Saturday 28  
October**

## **Birmingham Beer & Cider Festival**

Custard Factory, Gibb Street,  
Digbeth, Birmingham  
200+ beers, ciders & perries  
[www.birminghambeerfestival.org.uk](http://www.birminghambeerfestival.org.uk)

**Thursday 26 - Saturday 28  
October**

## **Cheltenham Real Ale Festival**

Cheltenham Ladies College,  
Bayshill Road, Cheltenham  
100 beers, ciders & perries  
[www.cheltenhamcamra.org.uk/craf](http://www.cheltenhamcamra.org.uk/craf)

**Thursday 26 - Saturday 28  
October**

## **Swindon Beer Festival**

STEAM Museum, Fire Fly Avenue,  
Swindon  
100 beers plus cider & perry  
Friday evening - entry by advance  
ticket only  
[www.swindon.camra.org.uk](http://www.swindon.camra.org.uk)

**Friday 27 - Saturday 28 October  
Aylesbury Beer Festival**

Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School,  
Oxford Road, Aylesbury  
Note new venue  
Includes Saturday Sausage  
Festival  
[www.aylesburybeerfestival.org.uk](http://www.aylesburybeerfestival.org.uk)



**CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE**

# Branch Diary

## Oxford

**Wednesday 25 - Sunday  
29 October**

## **Oxford Beer and Cider Festival**

At the Town Hall. Help needed for  
all five days,  
[staffing@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:staffing@oxford.camra.org.uk)

**Tuesday 7 November  
Branch Meeting**

7.30pm  
At The Narrows, Abingdon.  
Meet beforehand for a chat at the  
Punchbowl from 6.30pm.

## White Horse

**Tuesday 10 October  
Branch Meeting**

7.45pm  
The Woodman Inn, Fernham,  
near Faringdon, SN7 7NX

**Saturday 14 October  
Beer Festival Social**

12 non  
Social at Oktoberfest, The  
Beacon, Wantage OX12 9BX.

**Tuesday 24 October  
Beer Festival Planning**

7.00pm  
2018 Wantage Beer Festival  
planning meeting at The Royal  
Oak, Newbury Street, Wantage,  
OX12 8DF.



## The Masons Arms

2 Quarry School Place  
Headington Oxford  
01865-764579

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

Oxford City CAMRA pub of the year  
2004, 2005, 2010, 2014 & 2016



# KING OF THE OLD COOL

HARD CRAFT SINCE 1875



[www.wadworth.co.uk](http://www.wadworth.co.uk) @wadworth



# Gardeners' World

Paul Silcock of the Gardeners Arms, Plantation Road, North Oxford, gets grumpy

**IF THIS COLUMN** seems a little grumpier than usual, it's because I've got good reason. I've just been reading, with some interest, Marston's Ale Report for the year. It's full of some interesting facts and figures, which I'll get onto later. But here's just one fact, one little nugget of knowledge from Marston's report, and it's the reason I'm not happy. It turns out that I, and all other bar staff in the country, are "seen fourth after other areas of the pub".

Now I know that's because you've all got your hearts set on a decent pint, first and foremost, but it's still a kick in the ego. Not even a podium placing for us poor bar staff. Fourth. First -- Beer. Second -- Tables. Third -- probably the toilets. And then Fourth -- us. Your poor, hard working, selfless bar staff. I know some other pubs don't always have the prettiest bar

staff, but really, do you look at us after the toilets? Okay, maybe toilets weren't third, maybe it's food menus or something useful (not that toilets aren't useful, but you know what I mean).

So leaving my bruised ego aside, what did Marston's have to actually report? The central fact is that despite ale drinkers saying their preferred format for a drink is cask, cask sales are falling. Real ale sales are declining as keg sales rise. It's that crafty old craft ale market, with its preference for barrelling into kegs that's causing it. So is it time to panic buy cask ale? Of course not, as this dip in cask sales has happened before, during the keg boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s. And things recovered. Anyone remember Caffrey's?

How many of you reading this have had a bad pint in a pub? I don't mean some pint of experimental mint and juniper milk stout. I mean a pint of pure vinegar, or something so cloudy

it could be soup. Well, according to Marston's 7 in 10 of you have. Personally, I think this is suspect. I think it means that 3 out of 10 drinkers can't recognise a bad pint, probably because they drink in Greene King pubs.

What's actually shocking though is that 40% of that "7 in 10" will not just stay away from that beer, they'll stay away from the pub, according to the Marston's report. With that sort of response and its impact on the number of customers, it's no wonder publicans are taking the easy road and opting for keg. Especially as so many customers now routinely ask for IPA, which the American and craft brewing market seems to have cornered.

Which brings me to another gripe – people who say IPA from America should be an APA. Why? If you can call a beer brewed in the United Kingdom an IPA, then you're admitting it's a style. Some of those American IPAs are far closer historically to an IPA than a lot of British beers that have carried the name.

Of course, I've ranted on here about findings in a report that actually uses the word premiumisation seemingly without irony or putting it in quotation marks, so maybe their findings aren't all that accurate after all...



# Pub Cricket, anyone?

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

**HOPE YOU'VE HAD** a lovely summer. I've been enjoying the garden, and *really* enjoying not getting snarled up in motorway traffic and airport delays. If you are like many people, however, you are now firmly back from the annual holiday bronzed, relaxed and all prepared for the long haul to Christmas. Or, in the alternative scenario, frazzled, skint, and overweight!

On the rare occasions when I go away I love to visit the local hostelry, not only to taste their wares but also to find out a little bit about the local people, what they do and how they live. When you are made welcome and included in the conversation by locals, it is such a joy and a privilege. It makes me realise what a responsibility we have to visitors when at home.

Our village really comes alive in the summer, with lots of people staying in local bed and breakfast accommodation, holiday caravans and mobile homes. There is also a large itinerant population of boaters

and walkers navigating the Thames. We have lots of cyclists too: lycra-clad, enthusiastic and undaunted by the Cotswolds just a short pedal away.

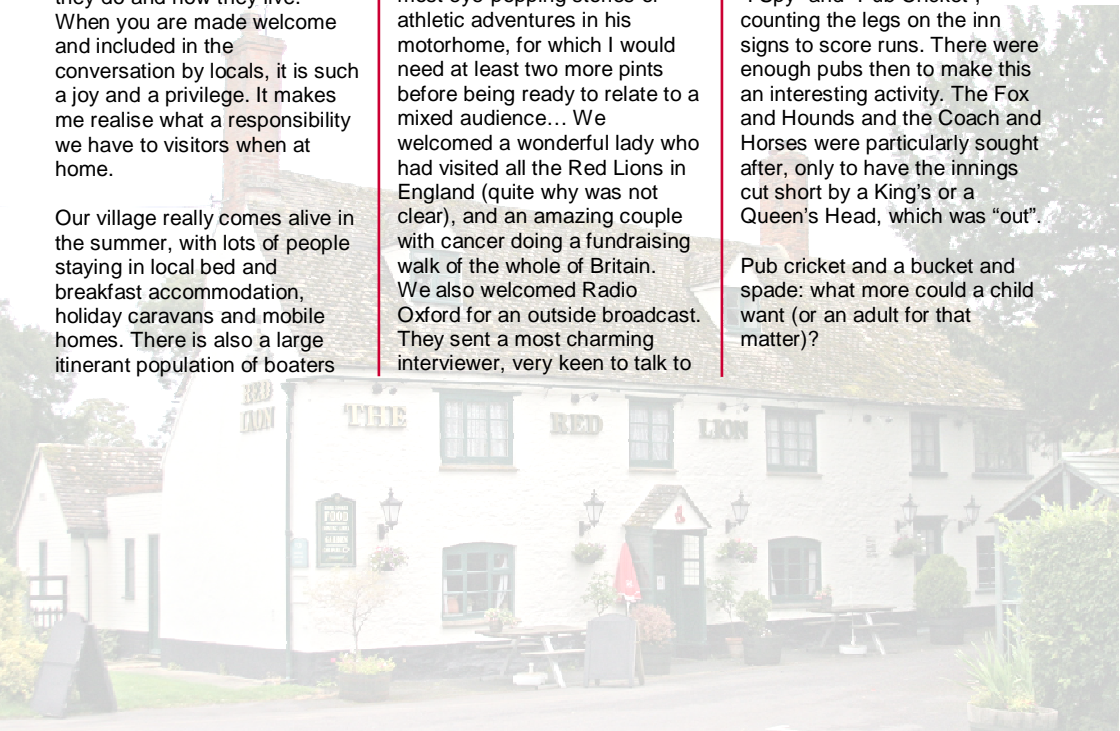
Tottering round the corner from my house to the Red Lion is always fun at any time of the year, but especially in the summer. I love talking to new people, and finding out where they've come from and what they do, and I never cease to be amazed by the tales they tell.

One elderly gentleman told the most eye-popping stories of athletic adventures in his motorhome, for which I would need at least two more pints before being ready to relate to a mixed audience... We welcomed a wonderful lady who had visited all the Red Lions in England (quite why was not clear), and an amazing couple with cancer doing a fundraising walk of the whole of Britain. We also welcomed Radio Oxford for an outside broadcast. They sent a most charming interviewer, very keen to talk to

all the locals. She was only momentarily disconcerted on hearing that one such was "mostly safe" in mixed company. "That'll do me," she said with apparent enthusiasm. What a professional!

So where does cricket fit in? Well, when I was a boy we always went to the seaside for our holidays and, there being no motorways, our journey passed through all the towns on the way. Five hours in an Austin 7 smelling of petrol is testing for a child with a weak stomach and no iPad, and so we used to play "I Spy" and "Pub Cricket", counting the legs on the inn signs to score runs. There were enough pubs then to make this an interesting activity. The Fox and Hounds and the Coach and Horses were particularly sought after, only to have the innings cut short by a King's or a Queen's Head, which was "out".

Pub cricket and a bucket and spade: what more could a child want (or an adult for that matter)?





# Brewery Focus: Oxbrew

**IT'S A FACT** that we now have more than 50 independent breweries within a 25-mile radius of Central Oxford, and in excess of 1,700 nationally. Never has the discerning real ale drinker been better served or offered such a huge choice of cask conditioned ale, so we were delighted to receive an invitation from Simon Scamp to view his new brewery on the Church Enstone industrial estate in North Oxfordshire. This was a Royal Air Force Bomber Command Operational Training Unit (OTU) in the Second World War, and the area of former RAF buildings has been redeveloped as an industrial estate.

We are very fortunate to include Simon as a regular attendee at branch meetings, and value his brewing knowledge and expertise. Not many CAMRA branches are able to boast that they have a brewer as an active member. I'm always very grateful to our driver, Tony Goulding, for his selfless act in co-ordinating these visits.

A group of 12 of us arrived in the usual minibus and received a warm welcome from Simon and his business partner, and son-in-law, Aaron Baldwin. We were obviously expected as the brewery doors were open and the BBQ coals were sending spiralling smoke trails into the air on this warm and tranquil evening.

It was a chance meeting whilst working at Mansfield College, Oxford, that led Simon, who originates from Canterbury, to settle in Oxford, as it was here that he met his wife Sue who he had dated back in the 1980s. A

background in creative art and design was a harbinger for a new direction in brewing ably assisted by Aaron, who has another business on-site and was responsible for the electrics, chilling systems, drainage, floor work and installation of the brewing vessels. Their combined skills complement each other and ultimately saved themselves substantial third party set-up costs.

Their eight-barrel plant started by brewing two beers – Red (5%), and Amber (4.5%). Simon has always had an interest in home brewing and recalls his father producing beer in the back garden using a black plastic bin. Times have moved on and Aaron told me that he has obtained valuable brewing experience from working at the pilot plant at Hook Norton Brewery and at Wychwood, following his brewing course at Manchester. A collaboration brew was produced for Oxford Beer Week in May.

Both brews are unfinned, which means that a fining agent has

not been applied during the brewing process and the beer has a natural haziness. Some beer drinkers find this cloudiness repellent but this shouldn't be, as it's quite acceptable.

The Amber brew is best described as a typical bitter with a creamy head and tangy notes. It certainly looked good as I poured it directly from the barrel in the Maersk shipping container which serves as a very secure chilling room for beer storage. The Red Ale has a slightly higher alcohol content and a fuller flavour muddy mouth taste, owing to the unfinned nature of the beer. Aaron told me that they are expecting to start brewing a 3.8% pale ale which will add a session beer to their expanding portfolio.

After a memorable evening spent with the Oxbrew team it was time to bid farewell, with an open invitation to return. We thanked our hosts and wished them every success for the future.

**PETE FLYNN**



# Brewery News

## Hook Norton

The brewery – which recently opened its own Castle pub in Oxford – has picked up a range of awards. At the World Beer Awards 2017, judging over 1,900 beers from 36 countries, top honours went to Red Rye (4.7%), a ruby red, fruity ale which picked up both the UK's Best Rye Beer and then World's Best Rye Beer awards, repeating its success from 2015. Playing Hooky, a 4.7% pale, amber, malty biscuit brew picked up Bronze in the UK Pale Ale category. Old Hooky (4.6%), 40 years young this year, was voted Best English Brown Ale showing that there is still a place for a full-bodied, classic real ale in an increasingly craft market.

At the International Beer Challenge 2017, Hook Norton achieved three silver medals (Old Hooky, Red Rye, Seven Days) and two bronze (Hooky, Playing Hooky) from among more than 700 beers from 30 countries which entered the competition.

Managing director and brewer James Clarke said: "It's a great achievement for all of our beers to be recognised, and we are particularly pleased with the bronze for Playing Hooky as it has only been on the market for a few months."

Its latest seasonal cask ale is Flagship (5.3%), a strong, zesty and full flavoured IPA with Admiral hops. Originally brewed to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar back in 2005, it has been a firm favourite ever since.

## Loddon

Following on from Golden Bullet, a 4.6% golden beer brewed for the summer, it has produced NOTUS American Pale Ale (4.6%). This is described as a "4.7% hop-

fest" which won awards following its launch 12 months ago. Brewed with citra, centennial, sterling, azacca and wai-iti hops, NOTUS is tropical, fruity and delicious.

## Loose Cannon

The Abingdon brewery has achieved some notable milestones recently including producing its 1,000th brew and 1,000th brewery member. Five new beers have been produced, two of which were brewed in collaboration with another brewery.

Loose Cannon was established in 2010, and the 1,000th brew is a Double IPA. New for September was Mortar, "a fruity, salted" beer at 4%. The benefits of membership include 10% off beers bought at the brewery shop, and two open evening visits per year for the member and two friends.

## Tap Social

Exciting things coming in the next couple of months including version 3 of its Bleeding Heart Numbskulls sour ale, a three-night restaurant pop-up from Native Feasts, the Waste Food Festival from Low Carbon West Oxford, and The Oxford Beard Festival. Check its website for a full listing of music, street food, and events

## XT

September was hop harvest time, a limited window of opportunity to brew a fresh hop beer. Hops are delicate and need to be dried and vacuum packed for storage, but if you use them straight off the bine within 24 hours you can brew a fresh hop beer. XT have collected fresh hops from a farm in Herefordshire and made Beerjolais Nouveau, a 4.2% blonde ale.

XT's head brewer is heading off to Italy in October to work with a boutique brewer there on a new "sustainability in brewing" project. This is looking at using as many locally sourced ingredients as possible including malts and hops grown on the farm surrounding the brewery in Sardinia.

For the new season there's a brace of new Animals from the XT stable: Goat – a 4.6% Oatmeal Pale Ale; and Aztec Squawk, an Amber ale with lashings of hops from the Yakima Valley in the American North West. The Animals are joined by an autumn favourite, the ruby red XT-6, a rich ale coming in at 4.5%.

## West Berkshire

From October brewery tours are moving into the new site on the same farm complex at Yattendon. With more beers to try, more brewery to peruse and 20% off anything bought in the shop on the day, it is celebrating opening of the new brewery in style. Ticket sales for this year's Oktoberfest on 23 September were described as "overwhelming".

## Wychwood

An international brewer visited in September, as part of J.D. Wetherspoon's Autumn beer festival. Richard Chennells from Zululand Brewery in South Africa came to brew his Zululand Pale Ale, and the collaboration brew was available at all Wetherspoons during the festival in late September/early October.

Jon Tillson, Wychwood's second brewer, commented: "In the past we've brewed with many international brewers from all over the world for JDW beer festivals, including America, Canada and Norway, and it's always an enjoyable experience."

## More local pubs in the 2018 Good Beer Guide

**OXFORD BRANCH HAS** a bigger allocation of pubs in the new edition of the *Good Beer Guide*, meaning we can welcome in or welcome back more pubs we would like to have put in the guide before.

There are now 21 GBG pubs in the branch area, which covers Oxford, Abingdon, Witney, Kidlington and surrounding villages. Completely new to the GBG 2018 are Wetherspoon's Narrows, in Abingdon; GK's Old Bookbinders, in Jericho, Oxford; and free house the Angel Inn, in Witney.

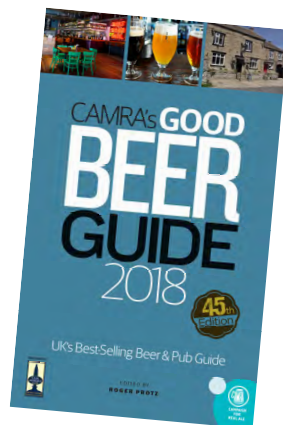
Back in after missing out in 2017 (both were included in 2016) are GK's Turf Tavern, Oxford; and free house the Cricketer's Arms, in Littleworth, near Wheatley. Dropping out for

2018 is the King's Arms, Kidlington, but hopefully we will welcome it back in 2019 when we will again have an increased allocation.

Four pubs in White Horse Branch's area are celebrating after being chosen for the 2018 guide: The Crown in Marcham, The Greyhound in Besselsleigh (on the A420), The Greyhound at Letcombe Regis and The Blue Boar in Longworth.

Pubs are chosen for the *Good Beer Guide* using a rigorous selection process, based on beer scores that any CAMRA member can submit online through the Whatpub database; and follow-up visits by branch members. Final judging takes place early in the year for the following year's guide.

The *Good Beer Guide* is available to purchase for £12.99 from bookshops and online outlets. It will also be on sale at the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival, at the Town Hall from 26-28 October.




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# Tony's Travels

**Tony Goulding** gets out and about again



**THE BEER FESTIVAL** scene goes on and on with our local pubs to the fore. The Jolly Post Boys in Florence Park now has a slightly up-market community local feel, so its first beer festival promised much. No disappointment here and following the successful format at the Chester (under the same management) the weekend was a great local effort with 30 beers from far and wide, six ciders, festival snacks supported by the very tasty pub menu, and some very interesting live music. Apart from a couple of complaints from locals who had forgotten the pub had been here for many years before they arrived, the festival was a great success and the next one is already planned.

The Seven Stars in Marsh Baldon is a successful community-owned pub with previous beer festival experience. Matt Ford, the landlord decided to have a one-day, Saturday event which certainly attracted locals and CAMRA members in large numbers with some help from the sunny weather. Ten beers, a very tasty hog roast supported by the great selection of pub food and live music, made for a super day.

The King's Arms in Kidlington celebrated 200 years of service

to the local community with a weekend festival. The locals turned out in numbers but were disappointed to find that landlord Gerry McGrath is not in fact 200 years old. Fifteen beers, six ciders and live music made for a great time, with £2,000 being donated to a prostate cancer charity. A former Ind Coope then Greene King pub, it is now a free house and only three landlords have served in over 40 years – Tony Lane, Dave Giles and Gerry and Chris McGrath.

The standard for pub festivals has been set over the last 20 years by the Meeson boys at the Masons Arms in Headington. Thirty beers, eight ciders and a super hog roast



packed the place out despite some showers. Local CAMRA branches play their annual Aunt Sally competition on the Saturday afternoon.

The Grapes in central Oxford has reverted to its original name having been known as Beerd for a few years, and with the team of Josh Hook, James Kaye and Mark Bruce in charge the future looks bright. Up to six real ales are available plus 16 interesting kegs in this cosy, but sometimes busy pub.

Following the sad passing of well-known CAMRA stalwart Ray Borrett, I have taken over *Oxford Drinker* deliveries to our Wild West area beyond Witney. A visit was made to the Five Alls in Filkins which has a gastro food scene, with four beers from Marston's. Served on the day were Brakspear Bitter and Gold, a badged Five Alls Ale and a very tasty Hobgoblin.

The Evenlode on the A40 at Eynsham has moved on from being a cheap carvery, being now part of the small but discerning Inn-deavour Inns group with gastro food served. A surprise is up to five beers from the Marston's selection including a Brakspear and a badged Evenlode Ale.



# THE BEAR INN

The Bear Inn is the oldest pub in Oxford and is a hidden gem, just off the hustle and bustle of the busy High Street.

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

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

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



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