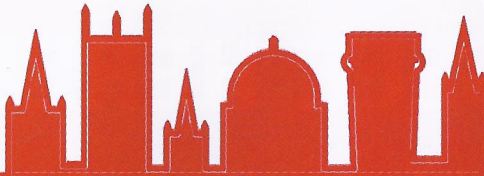


Issue 104
February - March 2018

FREE
please take one



the Oxford Drinker

The Ampleforth



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**

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

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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 website, www.oxford.camra.org.uk.

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Printed by MRD Digital Print
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Welcome

...looking forward to a positive 2018 for real ale and brewing around Oxford

FIRST OF ALL, apologies for the non-appearance of the *Oxford Drinker's* December 2017/January 2018 edition, due to a computer crash in December. The offending laptop could not be fixed until the New Year so the decision was taken to drop that issue, although much of its content appears here.

What can we look forward to in 2018? It might be tempting fate to say so, but pub closures have all but dried up in the Oxford area over the last year. The re-opening of the Abingdon Arms in Beckley, and more recently the Ampleforth Arms in Risinghurst after more than two years of closure, is further good news. The number of community-owned pubs in the county has now risen to eight.

Congratulations to our two Pub of the Year winners for 2017, as voted on by members. The White Hart in Headington takes over from the Mason's Arms in the City category, runner-up being the Rose and Crown. In the Town and Village award, the Brewery Tap in Abingdon displaces the Seven Stars at Marsh Baldon which came second.

With the last budget extending business rate relief for many pubs, there are more reasons to be cheerful. Perhaps the legislators will now go a step further following the lead of Scotland, and introduce minimum alcohol pricing to clamp down on cheap supermarket offers and make pubs more competitive.

I was shocked to read that in Scotland, strong cider can be

bought so cheaply that you can consume 14 units – what the Nanny State says should be the weekly maximum – for just £2.52! While minimum pricing would put up prices at supermarkets, it's bound to have benefits.

A look at the local brewing scene is also suitably heart-warming, at this the coldest time of year. New local micro-breweries such as Oxbrew have further added to the vibrant local scene, while our established brewers such as Wychwood, Hook Norton and Loose Cannon continue to come up with interesting ideas and flavours.

But there is one trend around the country that Oxford is missing out on, and that's the rise of micro-pubs. To the best of my knowledge the only micro-pub in our branch area is the Siege of Orleans at Carterton, whereas in Banbury a second micro-pub opened in November.

While in Banbury to research this issue's main feature – see page 6 – I chatted to John Bellinger, an experienced publican and CAMRA member who has just opened the Old Town Ale and Cider House. John told me that he looked at premises in Oxford, but it was just too expensive to make a micro-pub viable.

And yet there are empty shops in some parts of Oxford where the idea could work, and parts of the city such as Marston Road where there's no longer a pub within easy walking distance.

Let's hope the planners and property owners give micro-pubs a chance. I've been to several very successful ones around the country including the Weavers Real Ale House in Kidderminster, one of four pubs short-listed to become CAMRA's national Pub of the Year. Another of the four is also not a traditional pub – read what Tony Goulding has to say about Wigan Central on page 26.

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

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Banbury's Beer Trail

Dave Richardson and Tony Goulding
discover the drinking delights of this
north Oxfordshire town



WE DIDN'T KNOW IT at the time, but the day we visited Banbury was the opening date of the town's second micro-pub, the **Old Town Ale and Cider House**. But before that we tried to visit every pub in the town, either for a quick look without having a drink or to sample the beers and ciders on offer.

Bailiff's Tap

First stop for me was at Banbury's first micro-pub, which opened in February and was a bailiff's premises for many years. It's easy to miss having a very small shop front, but is right next to the **Three Pigeons** pub on the Southam Road, the main route north.

There is no bar as beers are dispensed direct from the barrel and ciders direct from the box, but behind are two more rooms nicely laid out with armchairs and some fittings left over from its previous role. Tuesdays are usually change-over day for the beers so only one was available, Milestone's Pekko, a 3.9% golden ale that slipped down well. The three ciders were Celtic Marches' Lily the Pink, Lilley's Mango Cider and Black Dragon from Welsh maker Gwynty.

Four beers are usually available at weekends, and those about to come on were Malty Mo' Brew by Warwickshire Brewery; Boomerang by Salopian (6.9%!),



OPPOSITE: Banbury's first micro-pub was the Baliff's Tap; The White Horse

RIGHT: The Three Pigeons on the Southam Road

two from Phipps, and one by Bellinger. Beers are available to take away.

Bailiff's Tap is owned by Ian Shipton and Sheila Poppa whose son Dan is usually serving the drinks, and it follows the normal micro-pub approach by selling only a limited range of other beverages (soft drinks, wine and gin), and no food except crisps. It's a place for relaxation and conversation, as pubs used to be.

"We've had nearly 200 different beers since we opened, and there are only one or two we wouldn't have back," said Dan. "We want to provide a real community atmosphere."

Three Pigeons

We then went next door to the Tap's unmissable neighbour, which stands proudly at a crossroads and is a thatched building with representations of three pigeons in thatch on the roof. It has been privately owned since 2012 and refurbished to a high standard, with a major concentration on food but with a substantial bar area.

Only two real ales are usually available, these being the ever reliable Ubu by Purity; and the ubiquitous Sharp's Doom Bar. I enjoyed a half of the Ubu while looking around, as the pub dates from around 1600 with very thick walls and wooden



beams. It has an AA rosette for dining and also guest rooms.

White Horse

Surprisingly, perhaps, this is Banbury's only entry in the Good Beer Guide for 2018, and proved well worth a visit. It is owned by Everards and was part of its Project William scheme a few years ago, when small breweries were invited to lease the pub to offer a wide range of real ales. This is no longer the case at the **White Horse**, but landlord Ken Thompson opted for a more expensive free-of-tie arrangement to keep up the focus on real ale. White Horse brewery used to run its namesake pub and still runs the **Royal Blenheim** in Oxford under this arrangement.

Everards' Tiger is its only regular beer, and on this occasion two more from Everards were on the bar – a dark ale called Tubby (with 5p per pint going to a retired police charity) and Beacon Hill, an amber ale. The guests were Turpin Brewery's Golden Citrus and Salopia's Helix, but I opted for the Tubby which was excellent on a winter's evening.

This very large pub has a nice community feel, and with about 30 real ales available each month – most sourced by the landlord – it's a must-stop.

Old Auctioneer

Moving around the corner to Parsons Street, my next stop was at an old inn described by the Whatpub database as the third oldest building in Banbury, surviving the great fire of 1628. It claims to date from 1596 and is a very large pub with a patio extension.

The three real ales today were Deuchars' IPA and my choice, Dirty Bear (a delicious malty ale), plus Wells' Bombardier. It's now part of Heineken's pub estate, Heineken owing the Caledonian brewery in Edinburgh which produces the Deuchars beers. Whatpub mentions Theakston's beers being available but there was no sign of these.

It's possibly worth a visit to eat, claiming to be "the home of comfort food" with a menu based mainly on pizzas and steaks with 2-4-1 offers on some nights. Its "Himalayan Salt Chamber 28-day aged steaks"

are no doubt unique in Banbury.

Olde Reine Deer Inn

The **Old Auctioneer** might have some historical atmosphere, but the **Reindeer**, as it's usually known, has much more. Hook Norton's flagship in Banbury bears the names of John Knight and David Horn and the date 1570, and Knight is believed to have owned two buildings on either side of the alleyway over which this inscription stands.

BELOW UPPER: Ken Thompson at the White Horse

BELOW LOWER: John Bellinger in Banbury's newest pub, The Old Town Ale and Cider House



A detailed history can be found on the wall inside, noting how the Puritans who ran the inn were involved in the "Great Rebellion" of 1642-49 at nearby Banbury Castle, which was held by the Royalists during the Civil War. The Globe Room at the **Reindeer** dates from 1637 and is really worth seeing, as it contains many original wooden features and is described as a "Jacobean treasure". It is part of the dining area and seats about 30, being available for private hire.

But what about the beers, I hear you ask? A full range of Hook Norton beers is available, these including Hooky, Old Hooky, Gold, Mild and seasonal ales such as Greedy Goose and Rightside Hops, the latter using hops cultivated on site.

With a real log fire and quiet atmosphere, the **Reindeer** is again a must-stop in Banbury. The management team here also now runs the **Castle** in Oxford.

Old Town Ale and Cider House

We had heard that John Bellinger, an experienced ex-Hook Norton publican and CAMRA member, was opening a micro-pub in Banbury. And so it was delightful to find him open for "friends and family" tonight, in advance of public opening two days later.

The former health food shop, on pedestrian-only Church Lane at right angles to the **Reindeer**, is small but no smaller than many micros – and in this case small is most definitely beautiful. Four hand pumps are available and, unusually, the same beers were available on gravity with room for eight barrels. You can choose to have your pumped beers with or without a sparkler, a small plastic attachment on the tap that gives beer more of a

head. You also get a choice of straight glass or tankard, the option of a "paddle" of three third pints, and a CAMRA discount of 20p per pint.

The four beers on opening night were one of my favourites, Titanic's Plum Porter; Oakham's Moon Landing; Great Oakley's Wot's Occurring; and Gun Dog's Bad to the Bone, a 4.5% brown bitter that I chose over the Plum Porter and wasn't disappointed. Six boxes of cider were also available, and beers about to come on included Loddon's Hocus Pocus, Gun Dog's Lord Barker Stout and Clouded Minds' 99 Steps.

"I'd been thinking of opening a micro-pub for over a year and also looked at Bicester, Kidlington and Oxford, but they were too expensive," said John. "I needed a small space at a low cost, which you're more likely to find in an old town like Banbury."

Wild Lime

On the way back to the station I looked into this large pub just outside the Castle Quay shopping centre, formerly known as the Grand Union and the Priory. It concentrates on cheap food so I didn't stop, but noted Adnams Ghost Ship and Doom Bar were available.

I went home thinking Banbury is worth another visit soon, if only for its micro-pubs, the **White Horse** and wonderful old **Reindeer**.

DAVE RICHARDSON

Tony Goulding adds:

By the famous Banbury Cross is the **Swan**, a lively music and sports pub offered Sharp's Atlantic and Hooky Bitter. A small garden is located beyond the side gates and cheap smooth flow beers, lager and cider perhaps sum up the drinking ambience. Crossing the



road to the **Church House** I also found **Doom Bar**. This very impressive food hall with outside patio also caters for the lively younger set weekends, the building having been a church hall and a theatre.

A few yards along is the Enterprise-owned **Dog and Gun**, another lively music and sports bar, again serving **Doom Bar**. Thirty years ago when I drank here it was a proper pub, now that ambience has gone. A further short stroll will see you entering Greene King's **Cromwell Lodge Hotel**, a 17th century coaching inn with a large walled garden. IPA and London Glory were on the bar along with a disappointing smell of cooking fat.

The **Bell** on Middleton Road, close to the railway station, was at one time a top drinking pub under the tenancy of Dave Andrews. After he departed in the early 2000s, it was a Punch pub and its decline began. But now, as part of Heineken and with a landlord of 40 years' experience, the **Bell** is back on the scene. Wychwood's Hobgoblin Gold, Hobson's Town Crier, **Doom Bar** and a tasty cider were on the bar in this very comfortable pub.

I remember a meeting between CAMRA, Morrells boss Charles Eld and the Banbury planning committee, to make sure alterations to the 18th century

Wine Vaults were in keeping with what CAMRA expected. Morrells had acquired the pub from Marston's, but now this lovely old building is just another GK house serving IPA and one other.

In Butchers Row, two pubs very close together both had horses in their names. The former **Waggon and Horses** was renamed in the late 1970s to avoid confusion with the other pub by Charles Wells, the present owner of the **Banbury Cross**. Two Wells beers and a tasty Young's bitter were on the bar.

Next door, the **Coach and Horses** was renamed recently to attract a different crowd to **FOUR**, its postal address. A Hook Norton pub, up-market and comfortable, it now has more of a café/bar ambience. Three Hooky beers and a tasty cider were being served.

The **Exchange** is a typical Wetherpoon pub in the town's former head post office and telephone exchange. Nine beers and a real cider were on the bar. I looked in the door of the **Wheatsheaf** and was greeted with no real ale and some rubbish piped music. The clean, bright and airy **Cherwell** had five beers and two ciders, and this former Slug and Lettuce looks very much like a Wetherspoon as indeed it used to be about 10 years ago.

I'm not fed up!

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

I AM WRITING this in mid-January on what is allegedly the most depressing day of the year. The Christmas chocolates have long gone, along with all the resolutions; the days are short, dark and dirty, and there is some strange, flabby bloke who keeps looking out of the mirror at me! Time to start taking a grip.

First of all Happy New Year! It's great to start with lots of positive news from Oxfordshire's community-owned pubs. Huge congratulations to everyone at the Ampleforth Arms in Oxford which bring our total to eight! In the last year we also welcomed the Abingdon Arms, Beckley, to the community-owned fold. I am sure there will be more.

My friend Chris French (The Plough, West Hanney) and I have made it our mission to visit them all, and I am so impressed at what an eclectic mix they are. It is clear that there is more than one way of doing things, not only at the purchasing stage but also when it comes to company structures and customer offerings.

So the first resolution that I intend to keep this year is to get us all together to share our experiences informally and learn from each other about what works and what doesn't at every stage of the community-owned pub journey. I hope that we'll be able to put some of this knowledge to use with the help of CAMRA, our stalwart

supporter at every stage, which is busy building a new community-owned pub page on its national website. Incidentally, we are always ready to help any new fledgling community-owned pub groups, so do get in touch via the editor at the earliest stage.

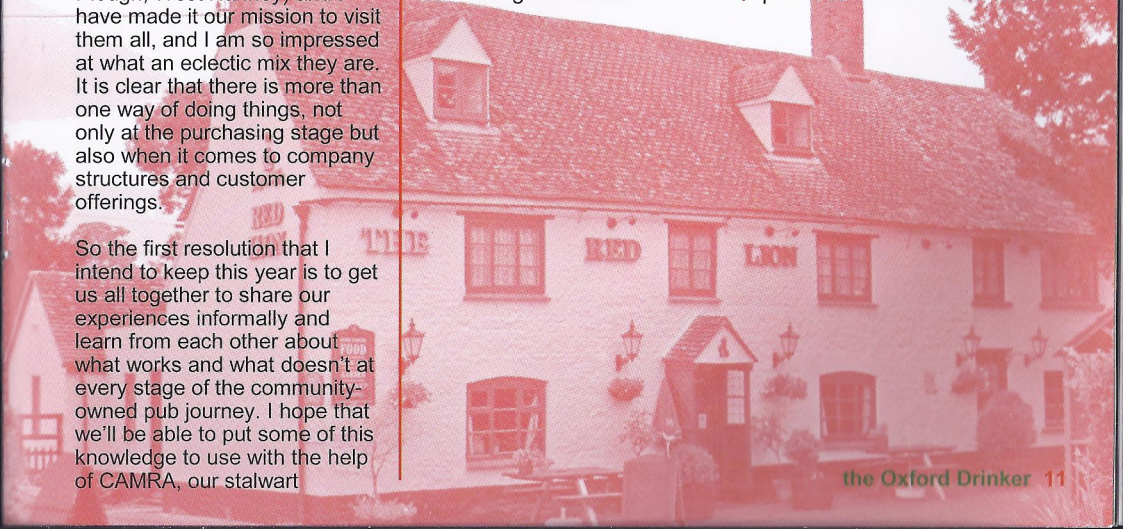
Back to the celebrations, it would be remiss not to mention some local Red Lion Northmoor successes: not only Sawday Guide Community Pub of the Year, but also featured as one of only 50 "Cosy Pubs" in the whole of the UK by the *Sunday Telegraph*. Good job we have a new log burner and lots of logs!

Well done to Lisa and Ian Neale and their lovely Red Lion team. Supported by 90 shareholders, they are doing a great job and are looking forward to

expanding in 2018. Indeed their team has already grown with the arrival of baby Molly.

Those community pub shareholders are a real asset, too, especially when they remember to bring all their friends, so that is going to be my second resolution for 2018: to bring a friend to the Red Lion *at least* every week for a drink and *at least* every month for a meal. Bring your clubs there too. We have a local Breakfast Club that attracts 20 people at 8am, and that's got to be good for business. I hope that you will be active in doing the same sort of thing at your local: they need you and can't survive if you only go once a year.

So, don't worry, be happy, and do remember to get down to the pub. You know it makes sense!



All Power to 'Spoons

Pete Flynn reflects on a successful trip around the county

AFTER WEEKS OF planning, 29 of us set forth from the **Narrows** in Abingdon for a day of beer sampling which coincided with Wetherspoon's National Beer Festival featuring a splendid array of real ales from all over the country. The trip was the brainchild of Narrows manager Sarah Lowe, to celebrate the pub gaining entry to CAMRA's prestigious Good Beer Guide for the first time in 2018.

As I entered the pub around 10.15am it was exceptionally busy with a crowd of pub goers and CAMRA members looking forward to the day ahead. A breakfast of bacon and sausage rolls were thrust into our hands to provide sustenance ahead of the beer sampling, and I could sense Sarah's relief when the coach arrived as she collected tickets and counted passengers. A half-hour drive took us to our first stop, the **Company of**

Weavers in Witney, where our coach load was quickly served as Sarah had sensibly telephoned ahead. Our itinerary included a visit to four Wetherspoon pubs interspersed with time at Oxford's new brewery, Tap Social Movement.

An hour was spent at the Weavers before we headed to Bicester and our next stop, the **Penny Black**, which is the town's former post office. Once again we were warmly welcomed and able to enjoy a fine selection of real ale before departing for **Tap Social**, situated on the Curtis Industrial Estate, Botley.

What makes Tap Social unique is a commitment to helping people who have been through the criminal justice system rehabilitate themselves, by teaching them new skills such as brewing and book keeping. By previous arrangement it

opened an hour earlier than usual.

Unlike pubs serving real ale, Tap Social uses the Keykeg method of dispensing the beer – a disposable vessel which allows small breweries a relatively easy method of kegging their beers hygienically without major investment. One issue with this type of dispense is that the serve flow at the tap requires adjusting, which can give the wrong impression that the beer is over carbonated. I hope this clarifies the matter as one of our party described the beer as being too fizzy.

It was pleasant sitting in the comfy leather sofas drinking tasty beers, and when our 90 minutes were up we boarded the coach for the **William Morris** in Cowley, which sadly is due to close in March. Here we spent a further hour before returning to the **Narrows** for more beer and a buffet.

It was very generous of Sarah to pay for the coach and provide food for us, all for £5 a head. On behalf of Oxford CAMRA and her regular customers, who joined the party, I would like to say a big thanks to all the teams at the Wetherspoon's pubs for making us feel so welcome.



LEFT: Peter Flynn (left) with Narrows' cellar manager Craig Barguss and pub manager Sarah Lowe

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** heads off to Headington

I BELIEVE THAT most beer drinkers are parochial in their choice of pubs and are quite happy to drink locally, particularly as the choice and quality of beer has improved enormously over the years. It was my desire to write an article on Headington pubs which prompted me to visit this suburb of Oxford.

The easiest way to travel from my home in Abingdon is to board the X13 bus which takes you directly to Oxford's JR Hospital, named after the 17th century English physician, academic and politician John Radcliffe who graduated from University College and became a fellow of Lincoln. Apparently, one trait of this erudite gentleman was to stay put if he

was enjoying convivial company, even if he received orders from a higher authority. Ostensibly, this meant he enjoyed the revelry and high jinks not lost on some of today's Oxford students.

Exiting the hospital via Ivy Lane takes you through a delightful park area to Osler Road and then St Andrews Road. The pubs around this area rely almost exclusively on local trade as there is restricted parking, so arriving by bus is the best option. I decided not to visit the CAMRA Good Beer Guide listed and 2017 Oxford Pub of the Year **White Hart** as I wanted to see what the **Black Boy**, situated on the corner of Barton Lane and Old High

Street, had to offer the real ale drinker.

I soon established that this Everards-owned pub is very much gastro food led, with comfortable high backed leather seats, chunky cutlery, and starched white tablecloths. Chef Patron, Chris Bamford, confirmed as much as I spent some time chatting to him over a pint of Everards' Beacon Hill Amber Ale. This is one of up to three changeable real ales that are available during the year which Chris, being the leaseholder, can select at will.

The beer was a clear pale amber colour with a medium white head and aroma of biscuity malt, caramel, slight yeast and subtle straw tasting of biscuity malt, caramel, and some yeast; a standard acceptable session Bitter.

After a 10-minute walk my next stop was the **Britannia**, on the corner of Lime Walk and London Road; very much a CAMRA favourite, this is a popular Mitchell and Butlers pub and part of the branded Ember Inns subsidiary. A number of M&B outlets in Oxford are run by ladies and this one is no exception with Nicola Devereux at the helm, although she was not around on the day of my visit.

It's a tough job running a successful pub and from what I've seen on my travels around South Oxfordshire the ladies excel in this area. The pub is very cosy and roomy and, being on the main thoroughfare, enjoys passing trade as well as





local residents, regular NHS staff and students. I ordered a pint of Ubu Purity, one of five real ales available, and took advantage of the CAMRA 20p a pint discount which, when combined with the attractive offer of £2.49 per pint every Monday, meant the price was almost as competitive as at Wetherspoon.

I was able to spend some time chatting to barman James Palmer, who was obviously passionate about real ale as he told me that Thornbridge Jaipur had been available previously and was one of the best he had tasted. We both agreed that this was a beer worth seeking out notwithstanding it has a high alcoholic content (5.9%). Assistant manager Jason Desouza was also on hand to explain the beer choice and Ember Inns branding.

The pub regularly serves three guest beers as well as the permanent, Sharp's Doom Bar and Atlantic, complemented by Black Sheep and Ember Pale Ale, the latter being brewed specifically for the Ember Inns range of pubs in Kidlington and Banbury.

A short walk south took me to the **Butchers Arms** in

Wilberforce Street, a delightful Fuller's pub in a residential area which has seen the most amazing and tasteful refit creating a bright and breezy atmosphere to complement the demeanour of Pippa and Paul Hitchcock, the landlady and landlord of this well-kept jewel in the crown of back street pubs in Oxford. This is the sort of pub that is at the heart of the local community offering ladies' darts, a regular jazz band, quiz nights, and an excellent range of pub grub with stone-cooked pizzas priced at around £9 each. The pub also features a regular beer festival.

Pippa and Paul were taking a well-deserved break on the day of my visit so I spent some time chatting to Fuller's relief managers, Laura and Mike Columbello, who have worked in the pub trade for many years. I am a keen jazz fan and established that the regular band "Time is of the Essence" performs on the first Monday of each month from 8.45pm onwards and feature trad jazz as well as groove and funky rhythms; I'll have to visit some time!

Six real ales were available on the day I visited which included five from the Fuller's range and West Berkshire Brewery's Good Old Boy. I opted for the seasonal and tasty Fuller's Damson Porter, a beer with a deep brown appearance and a beige head.

I bade farewell to Laura and Mike as I headed back home, regretting that I would have to forgo a visit to Oxford CAMRA's 2016 City Pub of the Year, the **Masons Arms** at Headington Quarry, as it didn't open until later in the evening.

PETE FLYNN



Pub News

From the Oxford and White Horse regions

Abingdon

Brewery Tap

The pub has been voted Oxford CAMRA's Town and Village Pub of the Year for 2017, beating previous holder the Seven Stars at Marsh Baldon into second place.

Nag's Head on the Thames

Having been the landlord of the "Nag's" for five years, Dushan Salwathura has managed to secure the ownership of the pub and the islands on which it stands from the previous owners. This allows him to continue to run this award-winning riverside pub free of tie, supplying a superb range of beer and food, along with regular entertainment, for the foreseeable future.

White Horse

The Greene King pub – which

usually has a fine selection of guest ales – re-opened in January after a refit. New tenants are Alex and Sarah Himpson.

Barnard Gate

Boot Inn

This mainly dining pub – renowned for the copious footwear adorning its walls – was closed at the time of writing, and available to let from Brakspear for £35,000 per annum.

Eynsham

Swan Hotel

Kay and Gordon Richardson have taken a five-year lease on this free house and boutique hotel in Acre End Street, this being their first pub. Gordon was previously a director of the community-owned White Hart in

Wolvercote, while Kay has nearly 20 years' background in catering and pop-up pubs. It serves three changing beers.

Horspath

Queen's Head

The pub is now run by Jason Taylor who is very enthusiastic about its future, following investment in a complete redecoration and refurbishment of the cellar. Jason used to run it in the 1990s and serves a range of real ale with Sharp's Doom Bar and Fuller's London Pride available all the time, and a third pump dedicated to a local ale, often by Shotover or Loose Cannon. Ale consumption is already up and there is a spare pump if it reaches the level to justify a second guest. Prices are keen at £3 a pint for Doom Bar, and £3.20 for the others.

Open from 11.00 to midnight every day (possibly 10.30pm on Sunday), it serves food every lunchtime and evening except Sunday evening. Jason cooks basic pub grub himself Monday to Thursday lunchtimes, and a chef comes in for the rest of the time with a more adventurous menu. In an interesting model, the chef rents the kitchen, buys the food and takes the money.

The Queen's Head is very supportive of local sports teams. There is an outside pool table in the smoking area, Sky Sports and a juke box in the bar, and it has six guest rooms.

Oxford

Ampleforth Arms

The "Amp" -- only pub on the Risinghurst estate near



Headington – re-opened in November after a determined two-year battle by a community group. The Punch Taverns pub had been failing for several years and had been closed on and off – and seemed to have shut for good in 2015.

Amp Community Pub Ltd has acquired a lease and has taken over one half of the pub, while the remainder will be turned into flats in due course. Local people have not only bought shares but contributed all kinds of skills to get this half of the building operational again.

The Amp will pass from Punch to Heineken in March and is free of tie. It serves two varying cask ales, always one from local brewery Shotover (Scholar or Prospect), with Hobgoblin and Black Sheep also in evidence. It becomes the eighth community-owned pub in Oxfordshire, and the second (after the White Hart at Wolvercote) to acquire a lease rather than the freehold.

Lyn Simms, chair of the owning group, said: "The closed pub was an eyesore in the middle of the estate, but we have done our best to turn things around. It was left to go to rack and ruin as it was clearly worth more to developers. Heineken feels we can make a go of it and we have negotiated a 12-month deal hopefully to be followed by a 15-year lease."

Steve Babu, a super league darts player who used to run the Cowley Community Centre, is managing the pub. Food is not being offered to start with but outside traders including Tiago's Fish and Chips offers food from a van on certain

nights. It plans to have an operational kitchen by the summer, and in the meantime it is encouraging customers to order take-away food.

Community events are held here and it is hoping to set up pool, darts and Aunt Sally teams. The Ampleforth Arms opened in 1938, when the estate was new, and is named after Ampleforth College in Yorkshire which local bricklayers helped build.

Castle

Re-opened last September as Hook Norton's first-ever pub in the city, the Castle's fortunes have improved dramatically since opening of the Westgate Centre as the pub is directly outside one of the entrances, and close to bus stops which are the main arrival point for many services. A 20p discount is offered to CAMRA members and a loyalty card offers a 10th drink for free.

It serves a wide range of Hooky beers but also two guests, and on recent visits the range included Hooky, Old Hooky, Hooky Gold and the seasonal Mad Goose, plus Thornbridge McConnell's Vanilla Stout, and seasonal ales Beartown's Santa's Claws and BAD Company's Elf Juice. A real cider, Flat Tyre by Rosie's Pig, was also on offer.

Corner House

Owned by New River Retail, the pub was closed for a major refit in January. It has survived a bid to turn it into a supermarket and sells the beers of Marston's, its previous owner.



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
Castle Tavern
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.

Globe

Latterly known as the Globe but with previous incarnations as the Duke of Edinburgh, Duke and Joseph Perks & Co, this St Clements business is now a Sri Lankan restaurant called the Coconut Tree.

Jericho Tavern

As one of Oxford's leading music venues it has helped launch the careers of groups including Radiohead and Supergrass, and now it has had a major refurbishment costing around £300,000.

Mitre

The oldest pub in Oxford – though now more of a



restaurant – is now run by Marston's with up to three of its real ales available in the back bar.

Rose and Crown

Oxford's longest serving landlords, Andrew and Debbie Hall, celebrate 35 years at the pub this February. They now run the north Oxford free house with son Adam, with a beer selection including regulars from Adnams, Shotover and Hook Norton, and a fourth guest ale. Congratulations!

Priory

The Oxford Mail is backing a campaign to re-open this historic building close to the Kassam Stadium, which has stood derelict since 2013. A readers' poll showed 85% were in favour of its re-opening, and the newspaper reported that a dispute had arisen between leaseholder Firoka and Oxford City Council, which owns it. The Priory was built in the 15th century and Littlemore Priory also occupied the site.

Red Lion

The Greene King Marston pub

now has two guest ales, which on a recent visit were a black IPA from Sadler's and Daleside's Old Leg Over.

White Hart

The Headington hostelry is Oxford CAMRA's City Pub of the Year 2017, taking over from the Mason's Arms at Headington Quarry.

Standlake

Black Horse

The pub closed for a revamp in January and is due to re-open in March.

Stanford-in-the-Vale

Stanford Social Club

The Stanford Social Club was voted runner-up in the Central Southern region Club of the Year awards. When the award was presented, Butcombe Bitter and Navigation Patriot were on hand pump for members to enjoy.

Pubs for sale/lease: Crown, Charlton-on-Otmoor: £365,000 freehold; The King's Arms, Wantage: £285,000 freehold

CAMRA stalwart Tony Goulding celebrated his 70th birthday in style at the Rose and Crown in Oxford. He is pictured second left with Adam Hall (left) and Andrew Hall (right) from the pub, and Oxford Drinker editor Dave Richardson.



Walking the d'Arcy Dalton Way

White Horse branch member **Dick Bosley** sets forth

OK, I ADMIT there were quite a lot of Darcy Bussell inspired jokes about tangos etc so we thought it safer to refer to the route as the DD. Unfortunately this brought to mind the classic 1960s craft beer...

The DD Way – named after a founder of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society – is a route along the western edge of Oxfordshire, and the guide book introduction assured us there were good public transport links for the entire route. Unfortunately the first page stated there were no public transport links to the start – spot the difference anyone?

So, best foot forward -- car, train, taxi and a small detour saw us set off on a slightly overcast day 10 miles north of Banbury. The route goes through traditional farmland and the grounds of 18th century Farnborough Hall, with its stone folly.

After nine miles we reached the village of Hornton, where Jane insisted we stop at the **Dun Cow** so that she could have a cup of tea. This proved to be a very good idea -- although Tim and I tried the Hooky Bitter and St Austell Tribute, as well as very good, and very welcome sandwiches.

Moving on with good intentions of no more stops until Hook Norton, our plan was foiled by seeing the **Bell** at Shenington a couple of miles further on. Here I invoked our Rule 1 – no passing an open pub – and so

in we went. This is a very friendly and welcoming pub which had Hooky and Mane Tail (a Hook Norton seasonal ale) on offer. The landlady explained that locals had contributed the pub's decorations etc when she took over in 2016, and these were supplemented by paintings for sale by a local artist.

We moved on reluctantly, but the **Chandlers Arms** at Epwell soon made the effort worthwhile with the seemingly ubiquitous Hooky, and Adnam's Southwold bitter, on offer.

Ever onwards, and with Jane cunningly detouring us past the pub in Burdrop, we completed our 20-mile hike at Hook Norton village. As you would expect

both the **Sun** and the **Pear Tree** carry an extensive range of HN ales – the former a more modern pub, the latter more traditional. Both are very good.

With the weather now bright enough we were able to sit in the garden of the Pear Tree and await our homeward buses or lifts, and reflect on a very enjoyable day. This is very definitely a walk that you should consider doing – or parts of it – and is generally well marked, but it is probably best to buy or borrow the guide.

www.ofs.org.uk/home/dArcyDaltonWay.php



Brewery News

Church Hanbrewery

Its craft beers are now featuring at the Rose and Crown in Charlbury, the Siege of Orleans in Carterton and The White Rabbit in Oxford. A full range of bottled beer is available in the Charlbury Deli, and it took part in the Oxford Beer Festival with three beers – Witty Bea, Rauk and 1 4 Keeps. Church Hanbrewery organised a beer festival at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Church Hanborough, on 3 February.

Hook Norton

To service its ever increasing visitor numbers, the brewery opened its new Malthouse Kitchen restaurant in November. Located in the original Maltings building, it has been restored to its original look with red brick walls, ironwork and wooden floors.

Malthouse Kitchen guests can enjoy a café-style menu featuring freshly prepared local, traditional food over the breakfast and lunchtime periods. The menu offers small and large plates that can be shared as a group or enjoyed by themselves. Many of the dishes include Hook Norton's award winning ale, such as Old Hooky Steak and Ale Pie, and Buttered Toast and Hooky Gold Marmalade.

Mark Higgs, British Institute of Inn keeping (BII) Licensee of the Year 2017 (featured in the October/November edition) has expanded his pub portfolio by taking up the tenancy of the Sun Inn in Hook Norton village. He is partnering with executive chef and director Matthew Ayers, who brings years of experience in numerous Michelin Star restaurants.

Oxbrew

Winter Warmer is the new seasonal offering from one of the county's newest brewers, a dark, rich red beer made with an array of fruit and spices.

Tap Social

The brewery – which provided cask ales for the Oxford Beer Festival – is celebrating a successful crowdfunding campaign having raised over £32,000 (target £30,000) from 305 supporters in less than a month.

It aims to grow its business, create more employment opportunities, and help more people transition out of the criminal justice system. It has been brewing at capacity, with only two fermenters limiting how regularly it can brew. More fermenters would mean more brew days, more recipe creations, more ingredient ordering, more bottling and kegging days, more cleaning, and ultimately more jobs created for people in prison whom it supports.

Opening hours have been extended and are now from 4pm-11pm on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and from 12-6pm on Sundays. A coffee shop is now open from 9.30am-4pm Mondays to Fridays, with coffee supplied by Redemption Roasters, based at Aylesbury Young Offender Institution.

Tap Social also hosts comedy, community events, fundraisers, yoga, food and cooking festivals, seminars, music festivals, marketing camps, business conferences, award ceremonies and more.

XT

After six years and brewing over three million pints, XT has announced a rebranding of the cask beer range from March. Following a very busy 2017 with significant investment in new brewing equipment and the new brewery tap room, the new look will be launched with special events including St Aldates Tavern in Oxford on 27 February.

The Animal beers have continued to grow in popularity over the years and the first ever permanent Animal beer. HopCat is a hyper-hoppy Pale Ale at only 3.9%, packed with Citra and Cascade New World hops. There will still be the ever evolving range of new Animals to complement HopCat, the first for 2018 being Tarsier, a 4.6% Pacific Amber ale.

For the real beer connoisseur is the limited availability XT Oak Aged Imperial Stout at 8.6%, with characteristics carried over from the sherry, brandy, whisky or rum casks in which they have been aging for over 12 months. The aging casks will next be put to work storing a new strong Burton IPA, which will be kept for 12 months to develop some of the character of a true 19th century beer headed for tables of the Indian Raj.

Wychwood

From February look out for Wychwood Dirty Tackle, as its most popular seasonal ale makes a winning return in time for the Six Nations Rugby tournament.

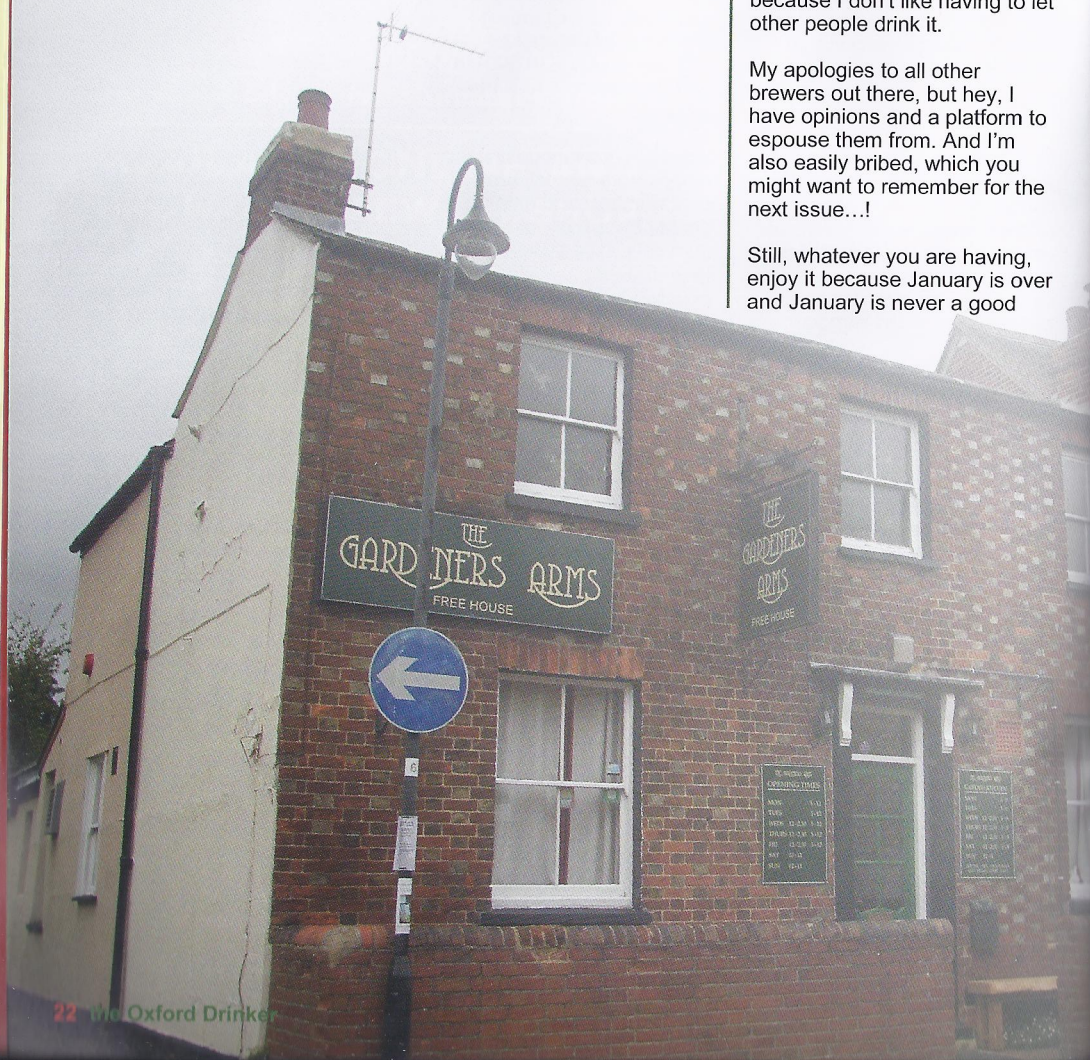
Gardeners' World

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

I HOPE YOU'RE settled into a warm pub somewhere, enjoying a pint of something dark and seasonal. I'd particularly recommend Loose Cannon's Robust British Porter if you get the chance. It's a little bit of an unwieldy name, but a fantastic pint. It's so nice that in a truly ironic twist I rarely stock it, because I don't like having to let other people drink it.

My apologies to all other brewers out there, but hey, I have opinions and a platform to espouse them from. And I'm also easily bribed, which you might want to remember for the next issue...!

Still, whatever you are having, enjoy it because January is over and January is never a good



month for publicans. This is the month when everyone realises just how much they've overspent by during Christmas, just how much weight they've put on while overspending, and frequently realised just how much they've drunk, while putting on weight and overspending.

That realisation probably made you want a drink just to recover from the shock of it all. But you didn't have a drink, did you? Because you'd made resolutions, hadn't you? Yes, I'm looking at you. You made a resolution that you knew in your heart of hearts you weren't going to be able to keep all year, and that probably involving drinking less.

In the past though people would blithely stumble on, no-drinking resolution in place, and all the publicans in the land noticed that you weren't having a drink in January. But it was okay. It happened every year. We tightened our belts and waited for the thaw to begin, usually around the middle of the month when people got tired of the weather, and being back at work, and their stupid

resolutions, and began to drift back to the pub.

Not any more though. Thank you, Dry January. Step forward and take a bow, Alcohol Concern's flagship campaign. No-one gave a thought to the poor landlord when they were brainstorming that idea, did they? Oh no. It was all about helping you save money, reduce your waistline and improve your health. So someone at Alcohol Concern, with no concern for landlords but more than a passing concern for you lot, came up with the idea of Dry January.

Because here's the thing. The average person will consume something like an extra 4,000 calories in alcohol over the festive period. They will, on average, consume something like 18 units of alcohol on Christmas day alone. That's when we're supposed to be consuming between two and four units a day to stay within government guidelines.

So maybe, just maybe, having a month when you try and bring the figures back into balance isn't such a bad idea. The liver is a truly resilient thing, as given a break from alcohol it can recover pretty well. In fact if you removed 90% of a person's liver (don't try this at home, kids) it would regenerate itself completely within a year.

Give it a month off after the Christmas damage and you'll notice the difference. Then you can go back to the beer in your usual moderate fashion. And that means back to the pub. And just possibly the Loose Cannon Porter.



Branch Diary

Oxford

Saturday 3 March Oxford Beer and Cider Festival Helpers' Trip

To Burton on Trent. Coach fully booked but contact Steve to see if there are any cancellations.

Tuesday 6 March Branch AGM and Meeting 7.00pm

In The Blue Room upstairs at the St Aldate's Tavern. Note the change from the usual day and the earlier start time.

Friday 16 and Saturday 17 March

Wantage Beer Festival
White Horse CAMRA's festival at the Beacon, Wantage. See back cover for details. Oxford branch social on Saturday afternoon.

Monday 2 April Branch Meeting

7.30pm
Abingdon, venue to be confirmed

Join the Home Brewers

Michaël Cadilhac describes a growing hobby group

OXFORD BREWERS, the home brewing club, involves around 20 dedicated home brewers from Oxfordshire, mostly from the city. We hold a monthly meeting at the Chequers off the High Street, where 10 to 25 people gather to discuss home brewing and taste their respective productions.

More importantly, we have started to have termly friendly home brewing competitions. Each competition is centred around a specific style, and the beers are graded by all the attendees on a 50-point scale (divided into aroma, appearance, flavour, mouthfeel, and general appreciation).

The first competition focused on Session APA (American Pale Ale), and the second was for English porters. More than 10 brewers brought three litres of their own production for around 20 people to sample, judge and altogether enjoy. The winner of that latest competition is Tom Rhodes with his Really Oughtta Porter which features a sizable amount of Red X malt, together with more traditional brown malt and Fuggles hops.

I wish to emphasise the generosity of the Chequers, which allows us to come and drink our own poison – although naturally we have some of theirs too. We encourage home brewers, and people thinking

about starting in the hobby, to visit our website (www.oxfordbrewers.com) to join our mailing list, and to attend our meetings on the third Wednesday of each month, usually at the Chequers.

Our next competition will probably be in February, and the style is still undecided. Being on our mailing list is the best way to have a say in it! The next meetings at the Chequers are on 21 February and 21 March, starting at 7.30pm.

The club should not be confused with the Alliance of Oxford Brewers, a professional organisation (www.oxfordbrewers.org).



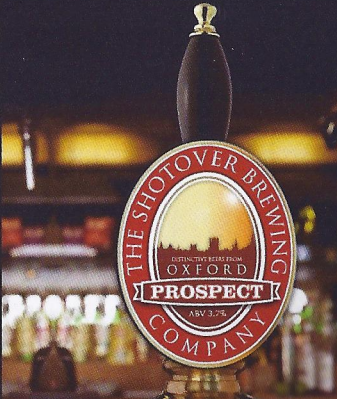
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Swiggin' in Wiggin

Borrowing from the name of the local CAMRA branch magazine, **Tony Goulding** visits a Northern town famous for its "pier", Rugby League.... and real ale

BEFORE SETTING OUT for Wigan, a town where our editor Dave Richardson has family connections, contact was made with Ken and Carol Worthington, local branch members who were our guides for the night. I had only drunk in Wigan on one previous occasion 35 years ago, visiting the **Raven** and the **Park Hotel** for Tetley Walker Warrington-brewed Mild and Bitter. What a surprise, as we were to start at the **Raven** to eat and plan the evening.

This 1905-built, sprawling wood-panelled free house was a delight. Very good value pub grub was washed down with a super 7.2% Black Dragon cider and my only beer of the night, a 5.5% Stout. The Raven serves Bass and Tetley Bitter, both a blast from the past but tasting nothing like back then, along with three guests including a

locally brewed Coach House beer.

A short walk found the **John Bull Chop House** run by Thwaites, a 300-year-old former slaughterhouse converted from a row of small cottages. Lancaster Bomber and two Thwaites seasonal beers were on the bar, along with the tasty but strong Old Rosie cider. An old Rocket 88 jukebox with a very interesting selection completed the lively scene.

Another short walk brought us to the **Anvil**, a former Hydes of Manchester pub which has been a very popular free house for 18 years. Here I had a very tasty 6% Welsh Warrior Cider and on the bar were Banks's Mild, Jennings' Cumberland plus five guest beers. Beers from neighbouring AllGates brewery are often available, but not tonight.

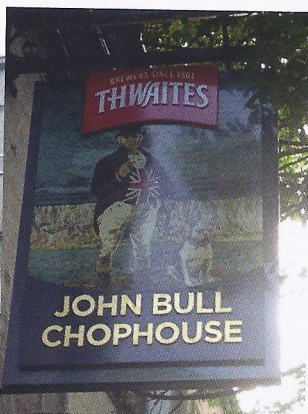
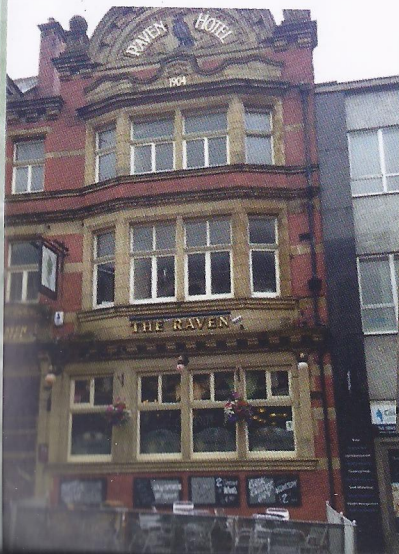
We then had a chance to sober up as we made a 10-minute walk to **Doc's Symposium**, a former florist's shop and a modern take on today's micro-pub and delicatessen. Again I sampled a 6.2% cider and also on the bar were Weetwood Cheshire Cat, Facer's DHB and three guest beers.

Next came the **Tap'n'Barrel**, a modern but comfortable bi-level cafe bar. Opened in 2015 in a former convenience store, it acts as the tap for the nearby Martland Mill brewery with its Arctic Convoy, D Day Dodger and Chonkin Feckle on the bar. To my delight five ciders were available, and two halves were eagerly supplied.

Our last visit turned out to be the best pub, and one of four finalists for National Pub of the Year. Tucked into a railway arch under Wigan North Western station, the aptly named **Wigan Central** was only opened in 2014.

On the bar were five ciders and four beers, plus a wall-to-wall Continental bottled beer library - where do you start? The superb knowledge of very helpful staff sets you on your way, and there is a delightful railway and canal theme about the place.

Wigan is definitely worth a visit, and the good value prices are the envy of anyone used to drinking in Oxford. Thanks again to Ken and Carol Worthington for making us so welcome.



Score that beer!

Steve Lawrence, branch Good Beer Guide co-ordinator, describes how all CAMRA members can score their drinks

REGULAR READERS of the *Oxford Drinker* will be aware that CAMRA branches are encouraged to use beer scores using the National Beer Scoring System (NBSS), with scores entered by members via the WhatPub website (www.whatpub.com) or app. This has a major influence on the selection of pubs to be included in the Good Beer Guide (GBG) and for Pub of the Year competitions.

Oxford branch members look at a summary of top beer scores at the monthly branch meeting, but many of you who put in beer scores might wonder what the underlying numbers are like. This is the first of what I hope will be an annual review of branch beer scores.

In the 12 months from 1 November 2016 to 31 October

2017 there were 1,498 beer scores recorded for Oxford branch pubs. Only 27 local branch members (that's 2.7% of current membership) put in 580 scores for 85 pubs, and 129 members from other branches put in 918 scores for 127 pubs. The branch has 298 pubs, 217 of them serving real ale. The breakdown of scores was as shown below.

NBSS suggests that experienced drinkers will give a score of 5 very rarely, and 22 of the 25 recorded by branch members were by one person. At the other end of the table, local members seem aware of which pubs to avoid for a decent drink. If a pub does give you a pint that is "off" for any reason but is happy to replace this, it seems fairer to score the replacement pint. Scorers who encounter no real ale where

they might expect some are asked to comment on the reason – e.g. cellar flooded – so that we can see whether this is just temporary or we need to alter the pub description

Many thanks to all members who have recorded beer scores during the year, and please keep doing it. As you might expect local members were individually more active but even so 39% of the scores were put in by local members (17% of the people who scored) and 61% by other branch members (83% of the people who scored). This actually means that outside branch members are having more input into which pubs we consider for GBG.

We can't visit all the pubs in our area so we rely on members' scores to continually monitor the beer quality of pubs in the area and become aware of any gem we are missing. There are a significant number of pubs with no beer score recorded in the year with 213 pubs in the branch area that have real ale but no score by a branch member!

Here is a reminder of how you can score beers.

Go to CAMRA's online pub guide, whatpub.com, either on a computer or smartphone.

Log in using your membership number and password. You should be able to tell your device to remember this for the future.

Beer score and pithy description	Number of that score by Oxford branch members	Number of that score by other branch members
5 (perfect)	25	0
4.5 (excellent)	31	23
4 (very good)	118	209
3.5 (good)	162	230
3 (quite good)	166	258
2.5 (ordinary)	51	110
2 (mediocre)	17	52
1.5 (poor)	10	15
1 (unpleasant)	0	7
0.5 (undrinkable)	0	5
0 (no real ale)	0	9
Total	580	918

Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

**Friday 16 - Saturday 17
February**

Bath Cider Festival
Bath Pavilion, North Parade
Road, Bath
100+ ciders & perries
www.clstickets.co.uk

**Friday 16 - Saturday 17
February**

Gosport Winterfest
Thorngate Halls, Bury Road,
Gosport
www.pseh.camra.org.uk

**Tuesday 20 - Saturday 24
February**

**Great British Beer Festival
Winter**
The Halls, St Andrews Plain,
Norwich
www.winter.gbbf.org.uk

**Friday 23 - Saturday 24
February**

Merton Beer Festival
Merton Village Hall, Islip Road,
Merton, nr Bicester

Friday 2 - Saturday 3 March

Coventry Beer Festival
Coventry Rugby Ground, Butts
Park Arena, Butts Road, Coventry
75+ beers, ciders & perries
www.coventry.camra.org.uk

**Wednesday 14 - Friday 16
March**

**London Drinker Beer & Cider
Festival**
Camden Centre, Bidborough
Street, London
150 beers, ciders & perries
www.northlondon.camra.org.uk

**Wednesday 14 - Sunday 25
March**

**Wetherspoon Real Ale
Festival**
All JD Wetherspoon pubs & Lloyds
No1 bars. around 30 beers

Friday 16 - Saturday 17 March

Wantage Beer Festival
The Beacon, Portway, Wantage
28 beers plus 7 ciders & perries
www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk

Friday 16 - Saturday 17 March

Winslow Beer Festival
Winslow Public Hall, Elmfields,
Winslow, Bucks
www.winslowlions.org.uk

**Thursday 22 - Saturday 24
March**

Bristol Beer Festival
Brunel's Old Station, Temple
Meads Station, Bristol
140 beers plus 40 ciders &
perries
Entry by ticket only - see website
www.camrabristol.org.uk

**Thursday 29 March - Sunday 1
April**

Hop Pole Easter Beer Festival
Hop Pole, Bicester Road,
Aylesbury
www.valebrewery.co.uk

**Friday 30 March - Monday 2
April**

**The Brewery Tap Spring Beer
& Cider Festival**
Ock Street, Abingdon
01235 521655
www.thebrewerytap.net

Friday 6 - Sunday 8 April
**Kings Head & Bell Spring
Beer Festival**

East St. Helens St, Abingdon
01235 525362
www.kingsheadandbell-abingdon.com

Friday 20 - Saturday 21 April
**Newbury Racecourse Beer
Festival**

Racecourse Road, Newbury
40 beers ciders & perries
www.newburyracecourse.co.uk

Thursday 3 - Sunday 6 May
Reading Beer & Cider Festival

Christchurch Meadows, George
Street, Caversham
www.readingbeerfestival.org.uk

Saturday 5 May

Witney Beer Festival
St Mary's Church, Church Green,
Witney
www.witneybeerfestival.com

Saturday 5 - Monday 7 May
Perch Beer & Cider Festival

The Perch Inn, Binsey Lane,
Binsey, Oxford
www.the-perch.co.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

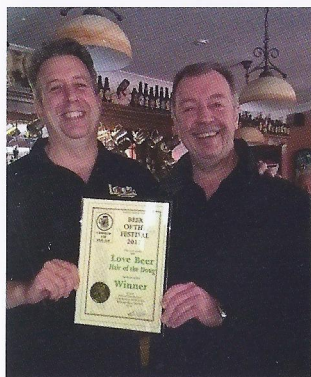
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and we will send you as many issues as you send envelopes.

On CAMRA

On Saturday 13 January members of White Horse CAMRA spent the morning at LoveBeer with brewer Jim Southey. The group assisted in brewing a special beer on Jim's pilot kit, which is planned to go on sale at the 2018 Wantage Beer Festival on 16-17 March.

The brew, Nice Try as named by Dave Glass, will feature among the beers and ciders available on the Super Saturday weekend of the Six Nations rugby tournament which coincides with the festival. It is expected to be around 5% ABV, coincidentally the same as the number of points awarded for a try. The beer used three hops –



First Gold , Willamette and Cascade.

The brewery is based in Milton at Jim's home, where he began brewing in 2014 and recently upgraded to a six-barrel plant.

LoveBeer took the Beer of the Festival prize at last year's Wantage Beer Festival, with Hair of the Doug. Will Nice Try be as popular? Come along and join us and "try" it yourself!

Jim Southey is pictured (left) receiving his award for Beer of the Festival at Wantage 2017 from branch chairman Ian Winfield, the photo being taken in the Plum Pudding pub at Milton.



ABOVE:

The 20th Oxford Beer and Cider Festival held at the Town Hall from 26-28 October proved to be a major success – not least with some newlyweds and their party who came in just after the ceremony.

The number attending increased by about 10% over 2016 and the festival made a healthy surplus to return to CAMRA headquarters – essential if it is to continue.

Ramona Naicker and Darren Madigan had just got married in the St Aldates Room at the Town Hall, so what better way to celebrate than to bring their party to the festival on Saturday morning? They are pictured being welcomed by branch chairman Pete Flynn.

The 2018 festival will again move slightly back in the calendar, and will be held at Oxford Town Hall on 8-10 November.

LEFT:

CAMRA regional director Carl Griffin (centre) is pictured presenting Paul and Frankie Hexter of the Royal Oak, Wantage with their Regional Pub of the Year runner-up certificate. A special award was also presented as 2018 marks 25 continuous years in the Good Beer Guide.

Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding gets out and about again

THE CIDER SCENE in Oxford could always be improved, given the huge increase in consumption nationwide and a sell-out at the recent Beer Festival. So on a visit to that hidden gem the **Butchers Arms** in a back street in Headington, it was good to see a superb Cornish Orchard Vintage (7%) on hand pump. The full range of the company's bottled ciders is available, and in future other ciders may be served. In January Paul and Pippa Hitchcock celebrated five years of success at the pub – well done!

Also in Headington another gem of a pub, the **White Hart**, serves up to two ciders on hand pump. The **Masons Arms** also has cider in the summer, a dozen at its September Beer Festival, and a few bottles with a tasty Rattler on keg.

The **Lamb & Flag** is still the top cider house in Oxford with two ever changing and very differing tastes. The **Turf Tavern** has one hand pump and so does the recently reopened, Hook Norton-owned **Castle**.

The **Gardeners Arms** in Plantation Road serves a changing choice on hand pump in this very comfortable rustic pub. The **Red Lion** in Kidlington has sometimes two hand pumps, with Thistly Cross a sweet but strong sleeping juice. The cider boxes near the bar in the Chequers (six) and the Crown (four) offer very tasty fare at room temperature.

Boxes can also be found in **St Aldates Tavern** and the **Plough** at Wolvercote. There are also some interesting

bottles about, with Harry's from Somerset for a fiver at the **Rose and Crown** in North Parade.

For many CAMRA members, the more unusual beers there are on sale, the more popular the pub is. This disadvantages some of the brewery-owned pubs that might not have a great range, but still have great tasting beers. One I normally pass by, the **Red Lion** in Gloucester Green, had its usual Doom Bar, a tasty St Austell Tribute and Purity Ubu. This is a quality M&B dining pub, very busy at weekends and on summer evenings with a large patio.

Within earshot of its patio is the **White Rabbit**, a very well run and busy pub serving pizzas. I have to marvel at the way the staff float down the stairs, negotiate the bar area and serve customers at their table with three trays of food. We are normally the oldest in there as most customers are in the 18 to 38 range. With four ever changing beers on, never miss it.

A visit to the **Bear** never disappoints, the differing types using the pub being fascinating. Yes £4 plus is here to stay for Fuller's ESB and Gales HSB whether we like it or not.

Wetherspoon's **Swan and Castle**, and **Four Candles**, provide good beer and cheap food, and it is to the fore in saving many superb buildings which might have otherwise gone on to be demolished or become gifts for developers.

