

Issue 114
October - November 2019

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the Oxford Drinker

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

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

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

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EVER WONDERED HOW a major beer festival happens? In this issue we try to explain the work that goes on behind the scenes to make Oxford one of the most enjoyable festivals on the circuit, although it's far from the biggest.

Once again we will be a cask ale only event (plus real cider), although that may change in 2020 if we decide to add a few keg lines in response to consumer demand. Should we add a gin bar too, as at the Great British Beer Festival in London? Only time will tell, and Rob Walters' article in this issue on the rise of craft keg is thought provoking.

But real ale will always be the heart of the festival, and as organiser Grahame Allen explains, this is a great opportunity to win over students, many of whom have just "come up" to university. Many of us love quality beer however it is dispensed, and just look at the success of Tap Social (keg only except at our festival) and Oxbrew, whose micro-pub in Witney sells more craft keg than cask.

Oxbrew is one of the new entries in the *Good Beer Guide* 2020 and so is the Bear Inn, while the Royal Blenheim returns after a change of management. As the person responsible for media publicity I must thank the *Oxford Mail* and Radio Oxford for their coverage, and while they focused on the new entrants it's worth also praising the pubs who get in the

guide year after year without fail.

In this issue you can also read about how we choose our Pubs of the Year, and if you're a CAMRA member, why not get involved and start scoring beers on the Whatpub database and voting for the top pubs selected for these awards? It would be good to see more involvement, and you have until the New Year to vote.

You can also read about the Bodleian Library's "drink map" of Oxford dating from 1883, put together to try to stamp out alcohol rather than encouraging it. Let's hope a new age of prohibition isn't coming and while that is highly unlikely, pubs and breweries should be aware of the anti-alcohol lobby and start selling more low alcohol or no alcohol alternatives.

Another unusual feature in this edition is an article on the Museum of Oxford's plans for a major exhibition on pubs and brewing – so if you have photos or memorabilia, it would love to hear from you. Also look out for the series of talks about pubs and brewing and other events being organised by the museum over the next couple of months.

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

DAVE RICHARDSON
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Get set for the Festival

Dave Richardson meets **Grahame Allen**, organiser of the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival at the Town Hall



IT PROBABLY GOES without saying, but the vast majority of the 3,000-plus people who will come to the festival from 24-26 October have no idea just how much work – all unpaid – goes into putting on such a good show. It's one of the key events in the beer festival calendar drawing people from near and far, and many would agree that the historic venue makes Oxford extra special.

Grahame Allen has organised this event throughout its time at the Town Hall, starting in 1998 – meaning this is the 22nd festival, although its origins were at an event in a bus museum two years earlier. Visitors quaff their beer in a grand Victorian hall usually reserved for concerts and gala events, but staging a beer festival in these surroundings also has its challenges.

Although he has done many jobs, events organisation is not something Grahame had tackled before. He has worked as a taxi driver, run a shop and been a rail ticket inspector and recycler, and is currently running a company's accounts in Abingdon.

"Organising a beer festival is a lot down to common sense, and having a great team behind you," says Grahame. "But one thing you must have is

someone with a licence to see alcohol, which I had as I previously ran shops that sold it. There are five key things you need to run a festival – the venue, the staff, electrics for a cooling system, glasses and, of course, a product to sell."

The key management team includes branch secretary Steve Lawrence, who organises the volunteers; Matt Bullock, who arranges deliveries; Graham Baker, who orders the beer; and Sam and Cameron Shiell, who order the cider and run the cider bar. Up to 100 volunteers keep things running over the three days, most serving beer but also entry tickets and vouchers, clearing up, attending to health and safety issues, and many other tasks.

Dates are agreed with the Town Hall more than a year in advance, and the hard work really starts about three months ahead. "We need to pitch a date as early as possible, and because we want to attract a lot of students we aim for soon after Freshers Week at the start of the academic year," says Grahame. "The festival is a campaigning tool and we need to get students used to real ale."

CAMRA headquarters needs to approve the budget with the main aim of breaking even, but Oxford usually makes a good



profit that is returned to CAMRA. Headquarters supplies the bar units, cooling equipment and a few hundred previously used glasses from other festivals, but everything else is down to the local branch.

Glass design and of course date change every year. This year Grahame is ordering 2,500 pint glasses and 1,000 half-pint glasses, but back-up is always needed by the third day.

Scaffolding is ordered from a local company called Speedy Hire, as without that you can't create a stillage. Health and safety documentation is put together, and arrangements made to provide to provide a food option with a long-standing Cornish pasty merchant coming back again this year.

Sponsorship is sought for staff t-shirts, with Wyewood having obliged for many years. Security staff need to be arranged with the Town Hall.

Much of the planning involves publicity, and this year the branch is producing over 1,000 posters plus 5,000 beer mats that volunteers will distribute. The publicity officer contacts local media (primarily the *Oxford Mail* and BBC Oxford) which usually oblige with good coverage, while social media are increasingly important.

Graham Baker has the enviable (?) task of ordering the beer, not only from local breweries but, via two major wholesalers, from breweries all over the country. This year there will again be 170 different ales available (40 being held back for Saturday) plus 50 ciders. The beer list is produced and a programme printed, paying due regard to information about allergies and with gluten-free or vegan beers identified. A tasting panel is organised to choose the festival champion beers.

Deliveries start on the Tuesday of festival week but are ramped up on the Wednesday, when a team of volunteers does the really hard work of manhandling all the barrels and bar units up into the Town Hall for secure storage. Expert and experienced electricians and cellar-men are involved, and on the Sunday after the festival everything has to be taken down again. The hall is re-arranged early on Saturday, when there are fewer beers, to provide more seating.

All this involves a huge amount of work for Grahame and his team, but every year it seems to run like clockwork – thanks to good organisation.

"The Town Hall runs a tight ship, and we need to protect the fabric of the building so we use

rubber mats when creating the stillage, and we can't use sticky tape," explains Grahame.

"Considering how many people we attract, there is very little drunkenness. You might get that with lager drinkers, but not with real ale. My greatest satisfaction is to see people enjoying themselves and telling their friends about it."

What of the future? Grahame expects that a keg bar will be set up in 2020, to meet demand. A gin bar will be considered if someone will run it, but there are no plans for music, comedy or any other entertainment, as at some other festivals.

What advice would Grahame give to would-be festival organisers?

"My advice is to talk to me, as after more than 20 years I know what works and what doesn't," he says.

"At the end of the festival, I do feel quite emotional as it's such a great team effort. I look forward to having a drink on the Sunday, when we host the volunteers doing the heavy work to lunch. We serve around 12,000 pints each year, but during the festival I don't drink at all."

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Witless in Witney

Part 2

Dave Richardson and **Tony Goulding** resume their crawl around Witney

THE FIRST PART of our crawl around Witney pubs appeared in the last edition (see link at the end if you missed it) and looked at the Corn Street area plus a couple around Market Square. This time we returned to the town centre and also looked at pubs on the outskirts, starting at the **Plough** on High Street.

New tenants took over here early in 2019 and I was pleased to see that they have put up a notice outside to celebrate its long history. Claiming to be the oldest hostelry in town and dating from the 16th century, it has also been known as the Ball, and the Plough and Shuttle, the latter relating to the town's weaving industry. At one time it was owned by Clinch's brewery, which occupied the premises now used by Wychwood.

The pub had been smartened up considerably since my last visit with four real ales being served – Wychwood's Hobgoblin Gold and Timothy Taylor Landlord are regular beers, while Ringwood Razorback and Courage Directors were also from the Marston's empire.

The Hobgoblin Gold tasted very good and a limited but inventive menu is served, with food offers including two-for-one fish and chips on Fridays. Be sure to visit in daylight if the weather is good as the **Plough** has a very long garden, and is the only pub in Witney with a river frontage.

We now moved on to the **Royal Oak** which is, as far as the real ale drinker is concerned, something of a puzzle. Why would a free house limit its choice to Greene King beers when they are so easy to find hereabouts? It used to serve Wadworth beers but now we found only familiar GK brands including IPA, London Glory and Abbot, although I chose the rotating guest beer, Prodigal Sun, a golden beer that I found forgettable.

But GK beers clearly suit the **Royal Oak**, which is a major dining pub with very extensive menus for breakfast (from 10am) and lunch, but doesn't serve dinner. It also has gluten-free and vegan menus, and is one of the top places to eat in Witney. Another very old pub, it has a conservatory extension and patio, and has been run by

the same family for over 30 years.

It's not the case that GK beers are hard to find in Witney, as across the road is the **Olde Cross Keys**, one of its own pubs, which appears to be one of the main sports bars in town. On cask here were IPA, Yardbird Pale Ale (which I hadn't seen on cask before) and Sharp's Doom Bar, with two other hand-pumps not in use. A good value menu is served, but it wasn't a place I wished to linger in.

So it was on to the **Beekeepers**, rebranded this year from the **Eagle Vaults**, the first time I had been into this Mitchells & Butlers pub. I was immediately taken by what looked like a real beehive that forms the pub sign, but with Sharp's Doom Bar being the only real ale available, I didn't stay for a drink. This is an enormous pub with an equally large garden, open all day, popular with the young crowd, and with many food offers and a focus on craft keg. Why it has been renamed the **Beekeepers** I was unable to find out, but at least this avoids confusion with



Hook Norton's **Eagle Tavern** around the corner, reviewed last time.

Witney has only two entries in the *Good Beer Guide* – the **Angel Inn** and the **Eagle Tavern** for 2019, and the **Angel** and **Oxbrew** for 2020, the **Eagle Tavern** having dropped out due to a change of management, as required by CAMRA's rules. It was to the **Angel** that we now went, a free house that sources all its beers from Marston's, mainly from Wychwood brewery just a few hundred yards away.

My half of Hobgoblin tasted as good as ever, and also available were Hobgoblin Gold and Brakspear Oxford Gold (also brewed in Witney), and the own-badged Angel Inn Ale. This turned out to be Banks's Mild, although it is lighter in colour than most milds, brewed by Marston's in Wolverhampton.

This 18th century pub has real character and is every inch a typical local, with good value food (daily specials and Sunday lunch for £7.95), pool table,

sports TV, and small rear patio. If you can get seats in the two bay windows at the front then you can watch the passing scene on Market Square, and the beers are good quality if rather predictable.

It was now time to visit Wetherspoon's take on Witney, the **Company of Weavers**, which pays tribute to the town's history of making blankets and other woollens. This is a typically large Wetherspoon pub with the best real ale prices in town now starting at only £1.69 a pint (£1.19 if you have a CAMRA voucher) for Ruddles, one of the GK beers that are on permanently in all Wetherspoon properties. Abbot and Sharp's Doom Bar can also be found here, as was the 6.5% Abbot Reserve on this occasion.

But we made straight for the guest ales which, while few in number, were big in quality. Only two from independent brewers were available on this occasion, but we each had a pint of either True Faith dark ale from J.W. Lees (4.2%) or Affinity (4.8%), a citrusy ale



from Lacons of Norfolk. Being a fan of dark ales I wasn't disappointed by the True Faith.

Manager Owen Jones, who has also worked at Wetherspoon pubs in Abingdon, Bicester and Oxford, said he had the freedom to choose a local guest ale and was interested to hear that the Four Candles in Oxford now has a deal with Chadlington brewery. We hope there might be a local real ale available the next time we visit.

Looking at the pubs on the outskirts of Witney, on another occasion I dropped into the **Griffin Inn**, a Wadworth house and now the only pub on Newland, on the main bus route from Oxford. The beers here were the ever reliable 6X, IPA and the seasonal Bowled Over, plus Old Rosie cider on hand pump.

This is a good locals' pub with a basic pub food menu mainly of pizzas and burgers, plus home-made specials. A huge clock overlooks the bar, and it has pool, darts and a large garden with Aunt Sally. Until recently



LEFT TO RIGHT: Ye Olde Cross Keys, The Angel, The Royal Oak and the Plough

there was another pub just along the road, the **Carpenters Arms**, now a Cambodian restaurant.

Also on the outskirts is the **Windrush Inn** on Burford Road, a large dining pub where the two regular real ales are GK's Abbot and Sharp's Doom Bar, with views over the Windrush valley where new housing is now encroaching. On an estate west of the town centre is the **Rowing Machine**, a GK Hungry Horse pub serving IPA and one other GK beer.

Tony Goulding adds: The **Elm Tree** on West End has been a free house for well over 40 years and the present owners, Neilson and Rachel McDermott, have run this spacious and friendly community pub for the last five years. Timothy Taylor Landlord, Sharp's Doom Bar and two guest beers are the norm with guest ales costing £3 on Wednesday evenings. Food is served only Friday evening and Sunday lunch. Built in the 17th century, the pub gets younger the nearer you get to the sun trap garden.

Almost adjacent are the former **Harriers**, a Hunt Edmonds house closed 45 years ago; and the **House of Windsor**, closed about 25 years ago. The **Old Court Inn**, a former Courage house famous in the 1980s for a proper pint of John Smiths, is now a Nepalese restaurant serving no real ale.

The **Windrush Club** is a private members' club run by Robert Patterson, a CAMRA member who serves Hobgoblin, Windrush Ale (actually Banks's Mild), Wells Bombardier Gold, plus a guest from the Marston's list.

The **Three Pigeons** on Wood Green is a multi-roomed former Courage house run by the current team for the last 27 years. Now owned by Enterprise, three beers from its guest list are served with Courage Best, St Austell Tribute and Fuller's London Pride available on the day. Good value food is served with a very popular Sunday lunch possibly consumed in the tidy rear garden.

The verdict
Witney is certainly worth a visit, but doesn't have the range of real ales you'd expect to find in Abingdon or Wantage, towns of similar or smaller size. So where would I go back, for quality and choice of real ale in Witney?

Oxbrew's inclusion in the *Good Beer Guide* 2020 makes this a natural choice, but with only one or two cask ales available, it may appeal more to craft keg enthusiasts. The **Angel** is a good choice for Wychwood ales, but I would also recommend the **Eagle Tavern** which is sure to be in the running for the *Good Beer Guide* 2021 after its new management is established. I was also impressed by the **Plough**, and would check what's on at the **Company of Weavers**.

If you missed Part 1, read it online on the Oxford CAMRA website: <https://oxford.camra.org.uk>

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Help tell the story of Oxford through its locals

David Juler, development officer for the Museum of Oxford, describes how it is seeking help to mount a major new focus on pubs and breweries

MUSEUM OF OXFORD

YOUR LOCAL PUB is a part of Oxford's rich history. The Museum of Oxford is being transformed, and crowd funding means every member of the public has the opportunity to contribute to the installation of this integral display at the heart of the new Museum of Oxford.

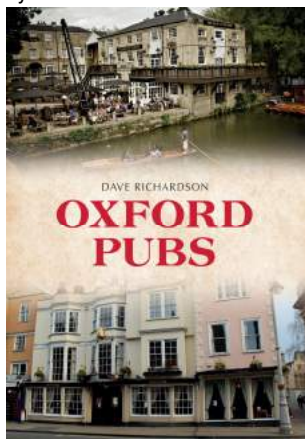
Your support will mean that a new display can be created with the Allied Arms pub sign at its centre. The sign is an intriguing social history piece as it originally stood in front of a pub in the Rose Hill area of the city. The pub was initially called the King of Prussia and during the First World War changed its name to the Allied Arms. The sign shows three men dressed in various sporting attire, all having a drink! The pub is now not in existence but we know that many of you remember it, or have family who do. Your support will mean this pub's story will be told and remembered.

Intriguing objects from Oxford's pubs and breweries will make up the display next to the sign. It will feature a metal work eagle from the gates of the Eagle Brewery, and beer bottles and beer mats relating to Morrells Brewery. Central to the exhibition will be an interactive display that will explore the

different pubs and breweries from then and now, and share interesting facts and memories about them.

With your support, we will be able to create this intriguing and interactive display, preserving the objects in bespoke cases to ensure that they are protected for generations to enjoy and learn about. We want to install this exhibition in the summer of 2020 and for your new museum to be open in the autumn of 2020. Your support will mean that the museum can be a place to remember and share all of the fun stories and memories of Oxford's greatest pubs.

A series of talks is also planned by the museum. *Oxford Drinker*



editor and author of the book *Oxford Pubs*, Dave Richardson, will give a talk at the Castle pub, Oxford, at 6pm on 8 October. On 15 October, Teardrop bar in the Covered Market will host a drop-in session inviting the public to relate stories about city pubs, from 2pm-5pm. Launch party for the crowd funding campaign will be at Tap Social brewery, Botley on 9 November (5.30pm-7pm), and on 14 November Mark Davies will host Pubs on the Canal, a walking tour starting at the Lighthouse at 5.30pm. Local historian Liz Woolley will host a talk on the History of Brewing in Oxford, at 6pm on 26 November in the Town Hall. On 5 December, the museum will host a Memory Lane drop-in session at the Royal Blenheim, from 2pm-3.30pm. Some events are free while others make a modest charge – booking is through Eventbrite (www.eventbrite.co.uk).

The museum will have a presence at the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival on 25 October, from 1pm-5pm, when visitors are invited to share their stories and bring photos and memorabilia.

Contact David Juler at DJULER@oxford.gov.uk
01865 252417

Pub of the Year

...it's time to get Involved

Branch secretary **Steve Lawrence** describes the voting process, while **Dave Richardson** visits the finalists in the Oxfordshire and regional competitions



IT'S TIME FOR all local CAMRA members to do your bit for the branch and help choose our Pubs of the Year 2020. As usual we have one for the city -- basically inside the ring road -- and a Town and Village choice for the rest of the branch. All you have to do is print off a form from our website (link below) and then go and visit these pubs. To make it manageable we have limited the number to seven in each area, by including pubs with the highest beer scores through the Whatpub database.

Scoring is based on CAMRA's national guidelines for Pub of the Year competitions, with double points being awarded this year to Beer Quality and Community Focus. Style, service, alignment with CAMRA's values and overall impression are the other scoring categories.

You have got until the branch meeting on 6 January 2020 to return the forms to me, and if you can't get to one or even two of the more remote candidates, you can still give it a go. If you want the form as an XL spreadsheet that you can fill in and email back, please ask. If you can't get the form to me any other way then just list the pubs in an email with your total score for each one (and your membership number.)

I've put a lot of work into this, so make it worthwhile by visiting

LEFT TOP: North Oxfordshire winner the Horse and Groom

LEFT BOTTOM: South Oxfordshire's Fleur de Lys.

RIGHT: The Rising Sun.



some pubs and voting. Is that too much to ask?

<https://oxford.camra.org.uk/whats-on/vote-for-branch-pub-of-the-year-poty/>

STEVE LAWRENCE

contact@oxford.camra.org.uk
01235 525436

Now for the fun bit.....

Once our Pub of the Year (POTY) is chosen, members of all branches in the county are invited to vote for the Oxfordshire winner. This joins the winners of the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire competitions in the Central Southern regional contest, and the winner of that is one of 16 that has a chance of becoming the national champion.

As we have two POTYs but can only put one forward, we alternate between the City and Town and Village winners, and in 2019 it was the Brewery Tap in Abingdon that went forward. CAMRA rules don't allow you to vote for your own pub, which is a bone of contention. As more members from the Oxford branch usually vote than from the other branches, that puts our winner at a disadvantage – something we'd like to see changed.

Undeterred, we set out one spring evening in Tony Goulding's hired minibus to visit the other three county winners,

starting with the **Horse and Groom** in Caulcott, a small village on the B4030 road near Bicester which was the North Oxfordshire winner. This lovely old thatched pub dates from the 16th century and has a French owner/chef who has created a renowned dining experience, but real ale is clearly also part of the picture.

Four real ales were being served and staff were very knowledgeable, asking what kind of glass you'd prefer and offering a CAMRA discount. Black Sheep Bitter is a regular but this was resting; I chose halves of Butt's Organic Jester and Cheeky Monkey, a beer from Parkway brewery in Somerset which was new to me. Goff's Lancer was the fourth.

Both beers were excellent, and good value these days at £3.70-£3.90 a pint. The ancient working fireplace, half-timbered ceiling and garden were all inviting, and I may return one day to try the food. This was a promising start.

We then drove on to East Hagbourne, a village near Didcot, for the South Oxfordshire winner – the **Fleur de Lys**. Some were put off by its ownership by Greene King which usually means a restricted range of beers, but not here. Of the real ales available only Morland Original is brewed by GK, in recognition

of its local origins. The others were Caledonian's Deuchars IPA, Timothy Taylor's Landlord, St Austell's Proper Job and Skinner's Betty Stogs. While none of these is hard to find, we agreed that all were well kept.

One side of the pub has historic character while another side is laid out for pub food, with mementoes including a 36lb pike in a glass case. Where the pub really scores is in its community focus, with live music and a range of games including Aunt Sally and darts. A bikers' night was being planned and dogs are welcome, and we got the impression that locals really love this place.

Final call was an old favourite of many, the **Royal Oak** in Wantage, which is the White Horse branch winner. This wet-only, non-food pub has won so many CAMRA certificates that it hardly has room to display them, but if you are planning a visit then check opening times, as it isn't open at lunchtimes on weekdays. Paul and Frankie Hexter have clocked up 35 years here, which says it all really.

The range of real ales is far greater than at the other contenders, but this isn't a factor in POTY voting which prioritises quality over quantity. For the record however the beers available on this occasion were Easy Geez and 35 Yearz from nearby micro-brewery

Amwell Springs; Bunny Hop and Gigglemug (an 8.5% beer) from Berkshire brewery Indigenous; Chalk Stream and Milk Stout from Ramsbury brewery in Wiltshire; Butts' Barbus Barbus, also from Berkshire; Titanic Plum Porter; and just one ale from a larger brewery, Wadworth's 6X.

The 35 Yearz was brewed to celebrate the couple's long service, but there was no sign of West Berkshire's Dr Hexter's Healer, also brewed for them (he isn't actually a doctor!) I enjoyed halves of this and the Milk Stout, a style I associate with the early days of Coronation Street! This is another great locals' pub that also attracts real ale and cider drinkers from far and wide, with a lot of Royal Navy memorabilia (hence the Royal Oak name – it's a warship).

We voted this our Oxfordshire winner, but – surprisingly perhaps – it was the **Fleur de Lys** that went forward to the regional voting. We convened again at the end of July to revisit this and the two other county winners, starting at the **Rising Sun** in Haddenham, Buckinghamshire.

This turned out to be almost a brewery tap for XT, whose leading light Russ Taylor lives nearby. On the bar were XT-4 and two beers from its Animal range, Hop Kitty and Angel Fish. The fourth was Hop Kettle's Flying Solo, from a brewery in Wiltshire, with a fifth hand-pump serving XT-5 that had just gone off. Being fond of amber or darker beers rather than golden ales, I stuck with XT-4 which was perfectly pleasant.



This non-food free house is a former Charles Wells pub now owned by Oak Taverns, which has a group of character pubs around Oxfordshire and neighbouring counties, including the **Cross Keys** in nearby Thame. It has a pretty garden and relaxed atmosphere, and my eye was caught by a blackboard in the garden with quotes from a range of songs including the words rising sun. It all adds to the overall impression, one of the categories in the vote.

Our return visit to the **Fleur de Lys** found a more interesting range of beers than before, including local ales Abingdon Bridge from Loose Cannon and what is possibly the funniest name I've seen for some time, Wibbly Wobbly Whippet from LoveBeer, which names all its beers after dogs. Hop Back's Summer Lightning was also a nice surprise.

Finally we drove on down the A34 to reach the Berkshire winner and one of the best pubs I've found since joining CAMRA,

the **Bell Inn** at Aldworth, a village on the Ridgeway. This will delight anyone who likes old-fashioned pubs and it's a great pub for a sunny day with a nice garden. This was a dark night, however – and as the village has no street lighting you have to watch your step.

Beers available were Old Tyler (actually a re-badged Good Old Boy) and Maggs Magnificent Mild from West Berkshire; Arkell's BBB, Loose Cannon's Bombshell, Indigenous brewery's Baldrick Mild and Marlow Brewery's Roasted Nuts, and I tried halves of the BBB and Old Tyler which were both excellent. This pub is on CAMRA's Best Real Heritage Pubs list because of its unchanged interior, with beers served through hatches and a tap room with inglenook fireplace.

Landlord Hugh Macaulay, pictured above, explained that on his mother's side, the pub has been in the same family for about 250 years. It has a great display of pump clips from all the beers served over the years, and keeps people fed with crusty rolls and puddings that take away nothing from the atmosphere.

We voted the **Bell Inn** our champion of the three – and it was no surprise to hear later that it is the Central Southern champion and a contender for National POTY 2020. So when you hear that winner announced, remember that you could have played a role in its success if you voted for our own POTYs. Use your vote!

DAVE RICHARDSON



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.

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Email: bearinn@fullers.co.uk

Beware the demon drink!

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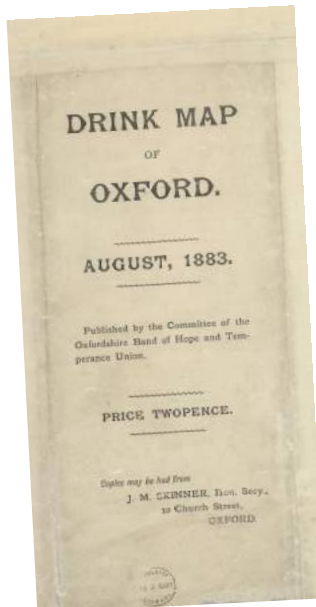
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Stuart Ackland, from the maps department of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, describes the Drink Map of Oxford, originally published in 1883



HOUSED IN THE book stacks of the Bodleian Library is a map which has long been a favourite amongst staff, so much so that we have created a reproduction of it with an introduction which goes on sale in October. This is a basic skeleton plan of the city with symbols showing the locations of all the pubs, breweries, licensed premises and beer houses.

And there are a lot: seven breweries, 143 pubs, 125 beer houses and 44 other licensed premises. A beer house differed from a pub in that any member of the public who paid rates could apply for a licence, and sell or brew beer in a room in their house. You can see when looking at the map, reproduced on the next page, how the majority of beer houses are tucked away in over-crowded residential streets, while the fully licensed premises are on the main thoroughfares, and in one case even in the railway station.

Unlike a modern CAMRA map showing the pubs in Oxford that it believes are worth visiting, the intention with the *Drink Map* is to discourage people from drinking alcohol. The map was published by the Committee of the Oxfordshire Band of Hope

and Temperance Union, and was designed to highlight how the poorer areas of Oxford were heavily populated with drinking establishments. The working class districts of Jericho, St Ebbes and St Clements, and the courts that led off Cornmarket and the High, are saturated with dots (pubs), breweries (squares) and beer houses (stars).

Text on the back of the map, reproduced in full in the new version on sale, explains how “all who look carefully...must be struck with the fact that drink-shops are not equally distributed all over the city. In the poorest neighbourhoods they are most plentiful while in the north of Oxford there are very few red spots”. The text goes on to state: “Magistrates rarely grant a licence for any house near their own homes, but they do not hesitate to grant a large number of licences for houses amongst their poor fellow-citizens. The law is the same for the rich as it is for the poor...the morals of the poor should be of as great concern to our rulers as the morals of the rich”.

The map highlights the social inequality of a city famed throughout the world. The upper

and middle classes provided the city with its magistrates, and they were reluctant to issue licences to properties where they lived. This goes a long way to explaining why there are still few pubs once you move past the top of St Giles and the start of Woodstock Road compared to the rest of the city.

Poor sanitation in the middle of the 19th Century led to major cholera epidemics in Oxford, so the reality was that for many people in these slum areas, beer was a safe alternative to drinking the water. Weak beer was brewed specially for children to drink. The Temperance Society recognised this, the main target as far as it was concerned being the sale of gin and other strong spirits, and the effects this was having on the health, moral outlook and prosperity of those affected.

As the text on the map says, “drunkenness abounds in our midst, and its attendant evils, crime and pauperism, are ever calling our attention. Can this be wondered at, seeing we have upwards of three hundred places licensed by law for the sale of strong drink?”

The Bodleian has close to two

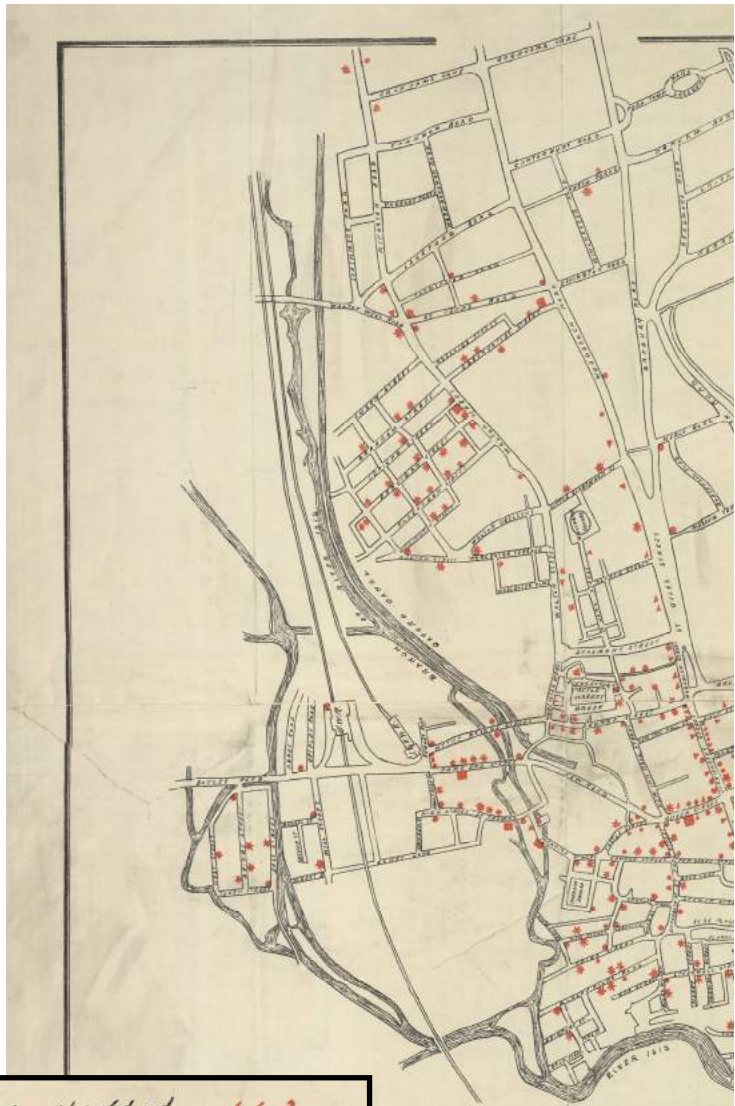
million maps in its collection, including a large number of Oxford. Quite a few are held in three floors of storage underneath the Weston Library, and we hold the only copy of one of the oldest maps of the city from 1578 as well as a map of Oxford by the German Army in preparation for the invasion of England.

Unlike the majority of maps of Oxford, though, the *Drink Map* is most definitely Town and not Gown and one of the strongest maps of anywhere that the library holds that makes such a bold social comment. As it is also about our city, this makes it one of our most important and treasured items.

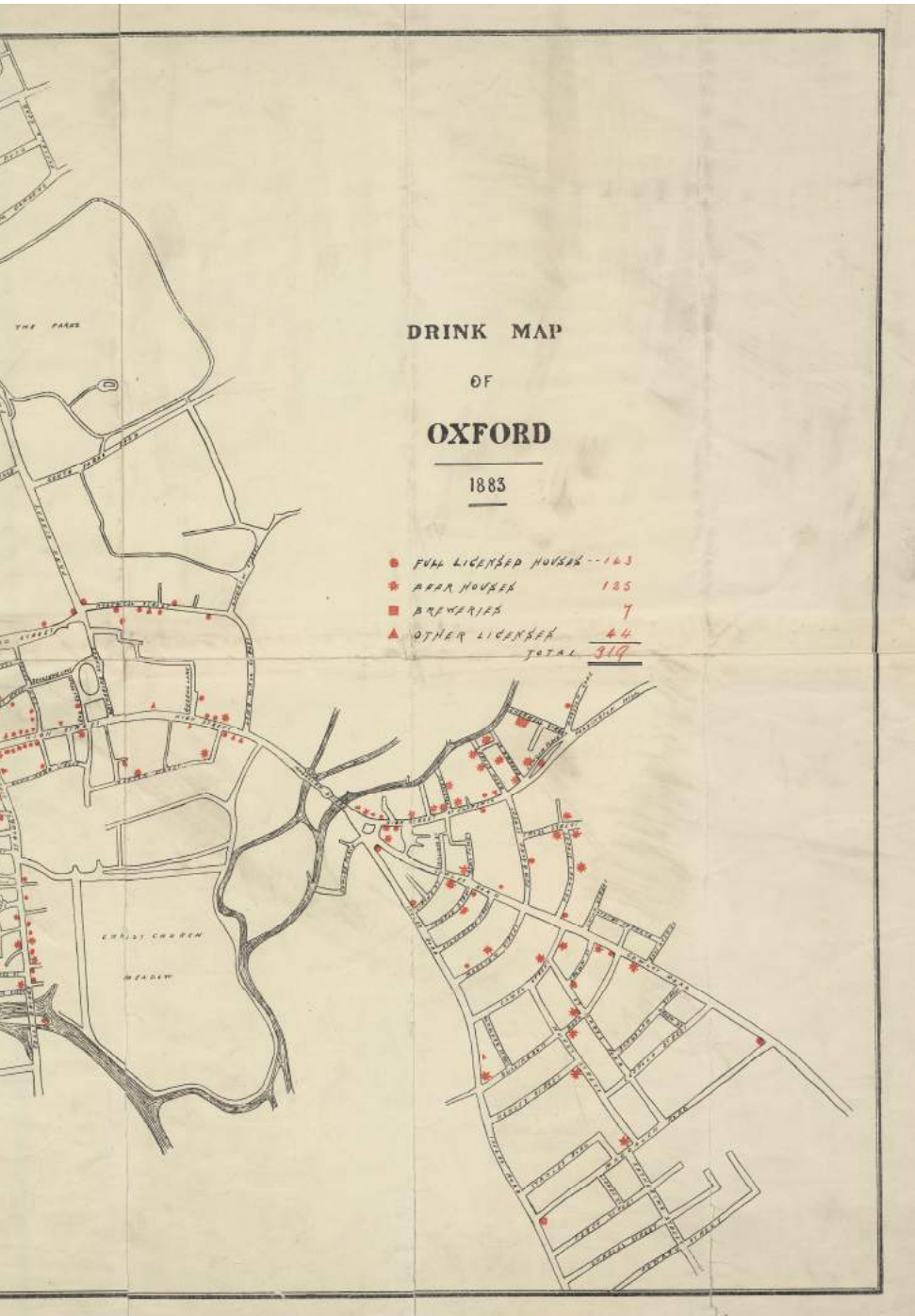
The original map is on display in a major maps exhibition in the Weston Library, in a cabinet along with other important maps of Oxford. The author of this new edition of the map will be at the Oxford Beer Festival on Saturday 26 October with a facsimile of the map and copies to buy.

The *Drink Map of Oxford*, with an introduction by Stuart Ackland, is available from Bodleian Library Publishing at £10.

<https://bodleianshop.co.uk/>



●	FULL LICENSED HOUSES	-- 143
✱	BEER HOUSES	125
■	BREWERIES	7
▲	OTHER LICENSES	44
	TOTAL	<u>319</u>





Pub News

From Oxford CAMRA, White Horse CAMRA and beyond

Appleton

Plough

A new landlord who arrived in May has spruced up the village pub and installed a Bouncy Castle in the garden. Now owned by Hawthorn Leisure, the pub offers real ales including Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Jennings' Cumberland Ale, with a third hand pump for cider.

Beckley

Abingdon Arms

The community-owned pub in a village overlooking Otmoor was hoping to appoint new tenants by October, as the previous tenancy team led by Aimee Bronock had decided to move on after two years in the job since the community buy-out. Since then it has won a place in the 2019 *Good Beer Guide* and various awards including Sawday's Community Pub of the Year 2018/19, being also tipped for Sunday lunch by *The Independent*.

Childrey

Hatchet

White Horse branch has welcomed a decision by Vale of White Horse District Council to turn down a change of use application, some years after

the owners of the then free house closed it but continued to live on the premises. A spirited local campaign has been mounted to save it as a pub, but the owner has the right to appeal.

Oxford

Hollybush

Brewer Charles Wells plans to re-open the Osney Island pub – just off Botley Road – in October, after a major refurbishment campaign and several years of closure when the building's then owners wanted to convert it into a private house.

Wells is aiming for the same style as at its Oxford Blue pub in the east of the city, using the Pizza, Pots and Pints brand. The former Greene King pub, closed in 2013, will offer real ales from the Charles Wells stable once its new brewery opens in 2020, the former brewery in Bedford having been sold to Marston's.

Re-opening of the Hollybush is a major advantage for West Oxford, after closures have left only the Punter (formerly the Waterman's Arms) open but several pubs closed. Although a couple remain open near the station, the only other pub in

West Oxford is the Seacourt Bridge at Botley. Brewery Tap Social operates a bar in Botley from Thursdays to Sundays.

Isis Farmhouse

The Thames-side pub near Iffley Lock has been involved in a licensing battle with Oxford City Council, which has refused permission for a larger area for events. The pub has erected marquees for major events, but residents have complained about disorder. People have to walk through Iffley village to reach it, as there is no road access for the public. A Shotover beer is often served.

Royal Blenheim

A charity fundraising event was held in September to support Kamran's Ward at the JR Hospital. This was organised by the family of eight-year-old Fenton Tutty, who had been diagnosed with leukaemia.

New in the 2020 Good Beer Guide

Three pubs in Oxford branch and two from White Horse are celebrating after being included in the real ale drinker's "Bible" – in one case for the first time ever.

The historic **Bear Inn** in Oxford hasn't been in the guide since

2012, while featured for the first time ever is the **Oxbrew** micro-pub in Witney. The **Royal Blenheim** in Oxford returns to the guide after one year's absence.

The Fuller's-owned **Bear** is one of Oxford's oldest pubs and renowned for its collection of over 4,000 ties, started in 1954 when the landlord started snipping ties off his customers. In complete contrast is **Oxbrew**, which opened in former shop premises just off Market Square as recently as August 2018. It serves beers from the Oxbrew and Little Ox breweries in Freeland, plus a selection of guest ales and other drinks from around Oxfordshire.

The **Royal Blenheim** is a renowned real ale pub in central Oxford, with links to White Horse brewery in Stanton-in-the-Vale and Titanic brewery in Stoke-on-Trent, but serving ales from all over the country.

The *Oxford Mail* ran a story about the newcomers, while Simon Scamp from **Oxbrew** and Tony Goulding representing CAMRA were also on Radio Oxford on the day the guide was launched.

Inclusion in the guide is based on the top scoring pubs in each branch, and is dependent on beer quality. The 2020 guide includes 24 pubs in the Oxford branch – 13 in the city and 11 in and around Abingdon, Witney and villages nearby.

Oxford Drinker editor Dave Richardson, who is also Oxford CAMRA publicity officer, says: "It's great to see the **Bear** back in the guide as it is one of Oxford's most characterful pubs. The **Bear** serves a range of Fuller's beers and a guest ale

from local brewery Shotover, and like all pubs in the guide, it has to work hard to achieve consistent good beer quality. "We also congratulate **Oxbrew** for getting into the guide only one year after opening. Micro-pubs such as this that concentrate on beer rather than food are helping bring back the art of conversation, and supporting local breweries, gin distillers and other local producers.

"The **Royal Blenheim** is an old friend that only dropped out of the 2019 guide due to a change of management, but the change -over went smoothly with a continuing focus on real ale.

"Congratulations also to pubs that have been in the guide continuously for over 10 years – the **Rose and Crown**, **Lamb and Flag** and **Masons Arms** in Oxford, and the **Brewery Tap** in Abingdon."

In White Horse branch, the **Kings Arms** in Wantage is also new in the guide. Taken over last year by Oak Taverns—which runs real ale pubs in Bicester, Thame and Faringdon – it has six hand pumps and is also well-known for real cider. Also celebrating inclusion is the **Eagle** in Watchfield, a village pub near Shrivenham. The Admiral Taverns pub offers a CAMRA discount.

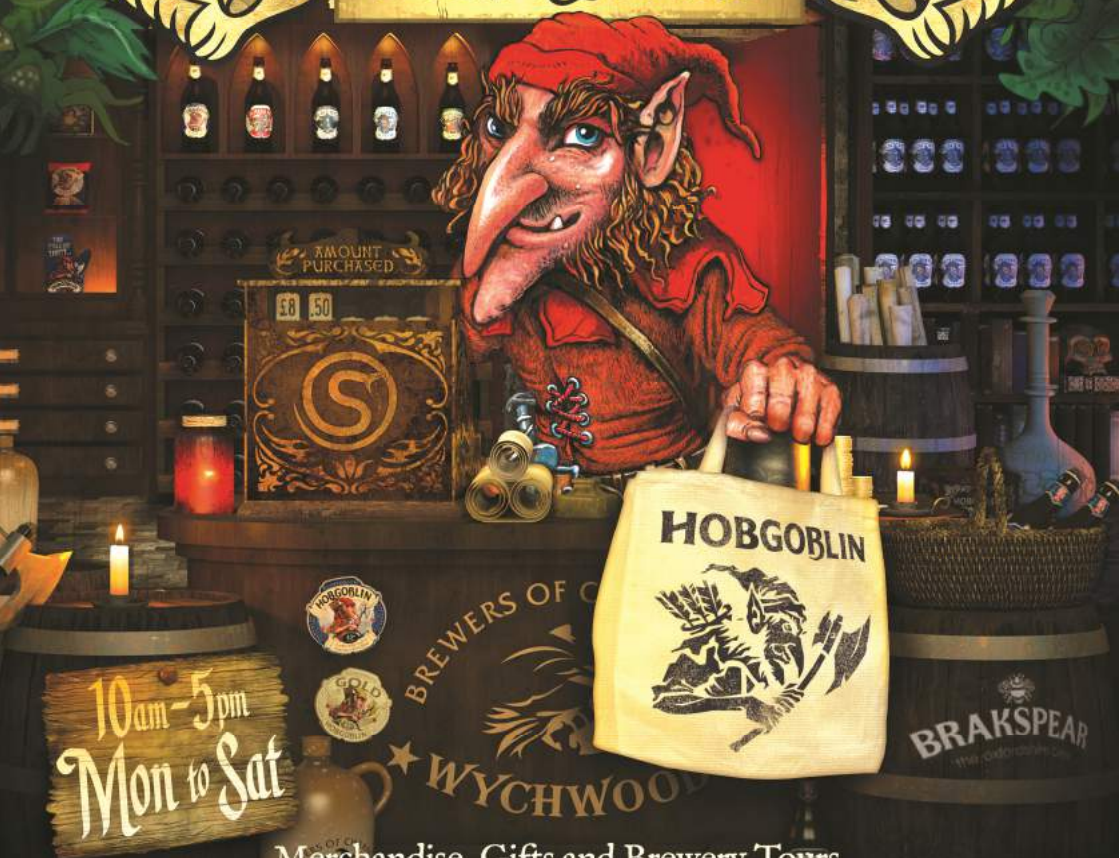


LEFT: Lisa Glass and Jo Sonice at Eagle, Watchfield
BELOW: Bear Inn landlord James Vermede (second from right) celebrates inclusion in the Good Beer Guide 2020 with CAMRA members, from left, Tony Goulding, Helen Jones, Pete Flynn and Steve Lawrence.



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Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding gets out and about

FIRSTLY I WOULD like to thank all my CAMRA friends, and some pubs and other outlets, for their support in collecting funds to help the Alzheimer's Society fight this wretched disease dementia that claimed the life of my wife Marie. Those with collection boxes include the Red Lion in Northmoor, Oxbrew in Witney, the Rose and Crown and Gardeners Arms in North Parade Avenue, North Oxford, Teardrop bar in Oxford Covered Market, the Plough in Wolvercote, the Kings Arms in Kidlington and finally Coventry Building Society, Freelance Fabrics and the cobblers, all in Kidlington High Street.

Another successful branch mini-bus trip arrived to survey the "Wild West", starting at the **Rose Revived** in Newbridge. This 400-year-old Cotswold stone inn is a former Thames-side Morland house, now Greene King, a very busy food outlet serving its IPA and Abbot. Noticeable were the eight hand-pumps serving only these two beers. Just over the two bridges spanning the Thames here is the **Maybush Inn**, another former Morland pub, now a closed free house. It has been flooded in recent times and the future looks uncertain.

At the former ferry crossing at Bablock Hythe is another free house, the **Ferryman**. This popular pub serves the local community along with the many visitors to holiday parks nearby, and along with pub food it serves four beers from

Wadworth which on this day were 6X, IPA, Horizon and Bowled Over.

Another short drive brings you to Standlake, a sprawling village that has lost the **Bell**, another former Morland house, to fire damage and a developer. The **Black Horse**, a free house, survives to serve up-market food and at least two ever changing beers. Not too far away is Stanton Harcourt, which sadly has lost all its pubs.

Arriving in Aston we found the **Red Lion**, a former Courage house now run by Enterprise. Pub grub is served here along with two beers which on the day were Marston's Pedigree and a Wychwood beer. A short drive down the road is Bampton, a thriving county village with four differing pubs. We did not visit it due to opening hours, but the **Morris Clown** is a top class free house and former Courage pub not serving food, where the quality beer will keep you happy.

Near Market Square is the **Romany Inn**, a former Ushers



and now Punch pub and one of the oldest buildings in town, serving good food and two local beers. Almost next door is a free house, the **Talbot**, serving one real ale. Across the road is a Greene King house, the **Horseshoe**, a lively locals' pub serving food and three beers.

A short ride down the road in Clanfield, the **Clanfield Tavern** had been a free house for years until acquired by Marston's with up to four of its ales available. Good food is served in this sprawling old Cotswold stone tavern. Across the village green is the up-market **Old Plough Hotel**, a fine old building serving two mainly local beers, hundreds of gins and gastro food.

The **Swan** at Radcot Bridge, on the Thames, is a former Morland then Greene King house where the Old Forge micro-brewery is now located. Alas there were none of its beers available. The pub is always busy in summer and was serving pub food along with two beers, Abbot and Otter Best.

Across country is Kelmscot, summer home of Victorian craftsman and campaigner William Morris, who was known to drink in the 16th century **Plough Inn**. This free house serves up to three changing beers, very good food and also has some handsome rooms. Another short drive over the old Oxford to Fairford railway line, closed some 50 years ago,

brought us to Langford, another fine old village where the **Bell** has outlasted the **Crown** by 25 years. The 17th century former Halls pub is now a gastro food and boutique rooms house with two ever changing beers, popular with locals and visitors.

A couple of miles west is Filkins, where the **Five Ails**, a former Morland and then free house, is now very well run by Brakspear. This is another gastro pub with fine rooms, and on the bar were Brakspear Bitter, Gold and two beers from Marston's. Wadworth has run the **Plough** in Alvescot for many years, pub food and three beers including IPA and 6X.

A couple of miles away is the RAF town of Carterton, where the two traditional pubs are the **Beehive**, a Wadworth house

with one real ale (normally 6X) and Greene King's **Golden Eagle**, much the better of the two. This former Courage pub serves good pub grub and shows sports of many types.

The town's secret is down a shopping alley. The **Siege of Orleans** is a recent great micro-pub opening, with very friendly staff serving four ever changing beers and ciders along with some craft keg, bottles and cans. Serving food on a Sunday, this is worth a visit.

Just up the road is Brize Norton, with a great free house village local the **Masons Arms**. Up to three ever changing beers and pub grub make for a comfortable time. A mile away on the Bampton road is the **Chequers**, a former Morland now Greene King house that is

very popular for food and serves three in-house beers. On towards Witney is the village of Curbridge where former Courage pub the **Merry Horn** became a private house after closing 35 years ago. The remaining pub, the **Lord Kitchener**, (what a splendid name!) is a former Morrells now Greene King food house that serves just IPA.

Across the fields is Ducklington, now almost a suburb of Witney. The only pub left in the village is the **Bell**, a great local, once a Courage, then Morland and now a popular Greene King house serving pub food. Up to four beers are served with the odd surprise from the guest list. Last of all, just as you cross under the A40, is the **Witney Spires Hotel**, serving a pleasant pint of Wychwood Hobgoblin.



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Comedy in the Quarry

20 years of Stand-Up Comedy

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman Pete Flynn celebrates 40 years of "the Wonder of Wetherspoon"



DO YOU REMEMBER 1979? It was the year of Margaret Thatcher being elected as Britain's first female Prime Minister, the "winter of discontent" strikes, Sebastian Coe recording a record time for running a mile, the assassination of Lord Mountbatten and, locally, an announcement by British Leyland that the Abingdon car factory MG would close the following year.

Whilst these articles were in the mainstream news that year, what was not perhaps so well-known was that J.D. Wetherspoon ("The Spoons") opened its first pub in Colney Hatch Lane, Muswell Hill, London. The name originated from J.D., a character in the Dukes of Hazard comedy series; while Wetherspoon was the name of founder Tim Martin's teacher in New Zealand.

During the 1990s, Wetherspoon began a policy of routinely closing its smaller or less profitable outlets, often replacing them with larger premises close by. In 1998, it introduced the oversized pint glass to promote the "full pint". This initiative was withdrawn, supposedly because customers were still asking for top-ups, but

possibly because other pub chains did not follow its lead.

Arguably, The Spoons has always been a game changer with its innovative ideas and prescient business practices. It pioneered non-smoking areas in pubs before the Smoking, Health and Social Care (Scotland) Act 2005, the Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Health Act 2006 in England and Wales became law.

Weekly food promotions include Steak Club on Tuesday, Chicken Club on Wednesday, Curry Club on Thursday, Fish and Chips on Friday, and Brunch on Sundays. Wetherspoon claims to be "the only large pub firm which opens all its pubs early in the morning", serving breakfast and coffee. The full food menu is available well into the late evening.

Wetherspoon hosts two ale festivals in March/April and October each year, when a larger range of guest ales is available in each pub, and a cider festival in the summer. I'm delighted to report that Sarah Lowe, manager at Spoons pub the Narrows in Abingdon, goes one further by organising a half-

yearly coach trip for regulars and CAMRA members alike, usually visiting a local brewery and local Spoons outlets. Oxford CAMRA supports this initiative wholeheartedly, further cementing the goodwill engendered between us.

Many Wetherspoon pubs are conversions of existing buildings including banks, churches, post offices, theatres and a former public swimming pool, and many properties are listed buildings. If you are a frequent traveller abroad and miss your regular pint of real ale then Wetherspoon bars are situated in the passenger terminals of many UK airports, so you can savour the unique taste of cask ale – perhaps your last for two weeks or so, until you return salivating at the prospect of renewing your acquaintance!

Wetherspoon also owns a chain of over 55 hotels in the UK. One fact I find interesting is that every pub has a unique carpet, drawing on the location, building and name. They are produced by Axminster Carpets and, having more than the usual six colours, have to be partially handmade on old-fashioned looms, costing up to £30,000 – twice as much as stock designs. A fine example and worth a visit, standing alongside Church Green in Witney, is the Company of Weavers which has a fascinating testimonial to the famous Witney blankets adorning the inside walls of the pub.

The firm – whose founder is a strong supporter of Brexit – replaced champagne with British sparkling wines and Australian wines on 9 July 2018. It claims this is to sell

cheaper drinks and to get cheaper alcohol to its two million weekly customers.

Who doesn't like Wetherspoon with its value-for-money proposition? Watching my local, the Narrows in Abingdon over the course of a week, it's hard to know. Certainly not students, who pile in to get leathered on the cheap. Not the families with young children, taking advantage of the pub's child-friendly early evenings. Not the early afternoon men who nurse silent pints alone at high tables.

No, as far as I can see, the only people who don't love Wetherspoon are the online review reading, Michelin star munching, craft beer seeking, Instagram-denying, middle class bores – the ones as anxious about what their meal says about them, as how it tastes and how much it costs. Who no longer have any idea how ironic their love of Nando's, also a fast food chain, is. People who hold dinner parties, which is the exact opposite of Tim Martin's business ethos.

With its 900 pubs and over 38,000 staff, Wetherspoon accounts for one thousandth of the UK's total tax revenue. It is the biggest investor in craft beer in the country, and is protecting the rights of its EU workers of which it employs many. The return on capital the group achieves is the envy of arch rivals Marston's and Greene King; in fact The Spoons buys around 25% of total cask ale output from the latter.

Wetherspoon is winning! As if we need more evidence it recently opened its largest pub yet, the Royal Victoria Pavilion, an almost 11,000 square foot

"Super Spoon" on the seafront in now gentrified Ramsgate with terraces overlooking the seafront. The building, a former casino built in 1903, is grade-II listed with original features lovingly restored; mint walls with chessboard tiles and parquet floors, wood panelling and a grand staircase. No wonder it has won a CAMRA heritage award.

In its 40th year the chain has nearly 1,000 branches, at a time when pubs around the country are closing at a rate of 20 per week – the same time it takes Wetherspoon to sell three million pints. In a week it will also serve more than half a million breakfasts, and a million cups of coffee. Its cult appeal is growing.

In Oxfordshire its pubs include the Swan and Castle and Four Candles in central Oxford, the William Morris in Cowley, the Narrows in Abingdon, the Company of Weavers in Witney, the Penny Black in Bicester, the Catherine Wheel in Henley and the Exchange in Banbury.

In the next edition of our magazine, and to coincide with the aforesaid beer festival, I shall be looking to visit as many of these as possible meeting staff and customers alike to continue celebrating the fantastic success of 40 years of The Spoons.

Recently Wetherspoon slashed some beer prices by 20p a pint in anticipation of leaving the Customs union with the EU, meaning most of its pubs are selling the cheapest real ale for between £1.69 and £1.09 a pint – even before the 50p CAMRA voucher discount.

Gardeners' World

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

I GOT KNOCKED off my bike this week. Totally taken out by some fool who didn't look properly before opening his car door into me and sending me flying across Hythe Bridge Street. I open with this little fact because as I sailed gracelessly through the air I thought, "This is annoying. This is painful and annoying. Much like the strange way some people insist on ordering their beers with completely the wrong choice of words."

I've kinda, sorta gone on about this before. The appropriation of beer names to a drinker's own ends. In the past it was the adoption of the word "Ipa" to describe an IPA. And that's fine. That's good in fact. Language has naturally evolved since the first Neanderthal grunt, and it will continue to do so as new inventions arrive, new experiences happen and we, as a race, communicate these innovations and adventures to each other. That's what I mean when I say I've kinda gone on about this before.

What's got my goat this time, though – and on a level with getting knocked off my bike – is the current trend amongst drinkers to choose the strangest, most tenuous of verbs to order their beer with. Everyone, and I mean EVERYONE reading this has ordered a beer before, and has done so by looking at the pump clips, maybe seeing their favourite beer, or indeed a totally unknown beer from a respected brewery, or just a

beer they've never heard of. (This -- trade secret alert -- is often how I order the bitter on the bar at the Gardeners).

There's a formula for the ordering. You could pick the brewery, "A pint of White Horse please", or you could pick the name of the beer should the pub have more than one delicacy from the same brewery, "A pint of Wayland Smithy please." Or even the lengthy "A pint of White Horse's Wayland Smithy please, my good bar keep."

This is pretentious, unnecessary, but will give you a thirst, as well as a strange look from the "bar keep". What you should never do, though, is order "a pint of copper". Feeling a bit confused? So is the bartender. Because "copper" isn't a beer. It's a verb. A verb to describe one aspect of the beer. It's also the really small print on the pump clip. But this is what some people are doing. Seeking out the most vague, smallest wording on the pump clip and using it as noun for ordering. And I really want to know why.

Is it to seem particularly knowing? Like you're on such good terms with the beer you don't even use its name, but your own little secret nickname? Like people who name-drop celebrities -- "Oh yes, bumped into Angie the other day. You know, Angie. Angelina Jolie. You must have

seen one of her films?"

Is it that the only thing you're bothered about is the colour of the beer? Which is almost fair enough, because some people like pale ale, while some prefer a darker brew. However, not stating the colour when you order the pint will not change what comes out of the tap. You're also going to get a surprise if it's XT's XPA, as you ordered a pint of Black (it says Black quite clearly on the pump clip) but get a very hoppy pint.

There's another reason this stupid trend is so annoying. For those of us on the other side of the bar, doing the actual pouring, an order of a pint of "amber" just leaves us stumped. I mean, I'm proud of how well I keep my ales, and how frequently I rotate the line-up, but I haven't memorised every word on each pump clip. But I know which beers are from Loose Cannon, or Vale, or Purity, or Shotover, or LoveBeer. I just don't know exactly how the brewers have decided to describe their pints on the clips.



So, if you're one of the people whom this article is directed at, let's go over this etiquette once more for the hard of thinking. When at the bar, choose your beer – yes, study the clip for clues of taste and style, and then look for the biggest words printed on the clip.

These will always be the most useful words to use when you're ordering. Because there isn't a brewer or brewery whose ego is so small as to print the name of the company and the name of the beer in small letters beneath some well-meaning, but vague verbs. And when the bar person looks at you a little strangely and asks you which beer you mean, for the love of all that is fermented don't just point vaguely towards the pumps while muttering "that one". Because quite often, from our perspective, you've just pointed to the entire left side of the bar.

This advice is going to put you in very good stead if you're visiting the Oxford Beer Festival, as well as significantly lowering the chances of the poor, tired bar tender "accidentally" spilling your beer over you. So remember, please order responsibly.

Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

Wednesday 9 - Sunday 20

October

JD Wetherspoon Autumn Real Ale Festival

All JD Wetherspoon pubs & Lloyds No1 bars
40 beers
www.jdwetherspoon.com

Wednesday 16 - Saturday 19

October

Great Welsh Beer & Cider Festival

National Cricket Training Centre, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff
130 beers plus cider & perry
www.gwbcf.info

Thursday 24 - Saturday 26

October

Oxford Beer & Cider Festival

Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford
170 beers plus 50 ciders & perries
www.oxfordcamra.org.uk

Thursday 24 - Saturday 26

October

Swindon Beer Festival

STEAM Museum, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon
100+ beers, ciders & perries
Friday evening ticket only
www.swindon.camra.org.uk

Friday 1 - Saturday 2 November

Aylesbury Beer Festival

Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School, Oxford Road, Aylesbury
www.fnhospice.org.uk

Friday 1 - Saturday 2 November

Cheltenham Real Ale Festival

Cheltenham Ladies College, Bayshill Road, Cheltenham
80 beers plus 20 ciders & perries
www.cheltenhamcamra.org.uk/craf

Thursday 28 - Saturday 30

November

Dudley Winter Ales Fayre

Dudley Town Hall, St James's Road, Dudley
70+ beers plus cider & perry
www.dudley.camra.org.uk

Tuesday 3 - Saturday 7

December

Pig's Ear Beer & Cider Festival

Round Chapel, Glenarm Road, Hackney, London
200+ beers & ciders
www.pigsear.org.uk

Saturday 14 December

Haddenham Winterfest

Banks Park, Banks Road, Haddenham
40+ beers
Open noon to 6pm
www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk/winterfest



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Concerned by craft

Rob Walters looks at the rise of craft keg ales and whether they pose a threat to real ale

A FEW YEARS ago XT brewery held an exhibition of its beers in the Lamb and Flag in Oxford and I happened to chat with the brewer about the real ale scene, CAMRA, etc – the usual fodder of conversations at these events. Learning that I had been around since CAMRA's early days, he suddenly sprung this question on me: "When do you think was the best time for real ale?" I thought for a short while, then replied: "Now!" He agreed.

It still is. Yes, I know that many pubs have closed and that is sad, but the choice of real ales is satisfyingly immense. It has reached the stage when it is just a little disappointing to enter a pub and see a line of pumps all displaying ales that you have already tried.

So why am I concerned? When three of us started the Suffolk branch of CAMRA eons ago, things were very different: there were few breweries left and the number was still falling. Yet that was not our chief concern since we still had three brewers in the county: Tolly Cobbold (long gone), Greene King and Adnams. What worried us most then was fizz.

Because real ale is a living thing it can be difficult to keep, and the main problem is drawing unclean air into the barrel to replace the beer drawn out. So, encouraged by the brewers, pubs started to replace that

unclean air with carbon dioxide gas. The ale was not pasteurised but it was pressurised, and the result was fizzy beer. As the chief brewer of Tolly Cobbold told us all those years ago: "It is my ambition to get the product to the consumer in perfect condition." And our simple response was: "But it doesn't taste right and it's fizzy."

And that is the nub of the thing: it is all about quality and choice. Now, if you could find something that tastes as good as real ale, did not go off, and was easy to keep, then that would be great, just great. And maybe that's keg – a dead liquid fizzed up by carbon dioxide pressure. And if it really did taste as good, who would bother with real ale with all of its problems of short shelf life, the need to settle, to vent and perhaps more?

Most attempts to define craft beer (except in the US where it is defined by the amount a brewery produces) are so generic that they cover virtually all beers. I do not pretend to be an expert, but as far as I'm concerned craft beers are keg beers. Tastier perhaps, but still keg. And Tolly Cobbold's brewer would be delighted with craft since it does get the "product to the consumer in perfect condition" – but it is not real ale, it is fizzier and does not taste as good. Maybe someday it will – and that will be the end

of that bothersome stuff, real ale.

Meanwhile I believe that craft beers are a threat that could destroy this wonderful real ale age. Why? Simply because they are easier to keep and ensure less wastage. This means that they will be heavily promoted by the larger breweries and become the preferred choice for unskilled cellar keepers. Meanwhile, most worrying, younger drinkers will be seduced by the promotion of craft and scared off by the association of real ale with an ageing population.

When we began CAMRA in Suffolk, the then ageing population told us, "Good luck to you boys, but you'll never beat the big brewers." Well, we did – much to our own surprise, we really did. Now I fear that the "boys and girls" of today will become craft ale drinkers, and all those wonderful breweries which sprang out of the campaign for real ale may have a tough fight for survival. I just hope that I'm wrong, but I am certainly concerned.

P.S. The night after I finished the above, I had a pint at Oxbrew's wonderful micro-pub in the heart of Witney. There were plenty of youngsters there, which was great. There was just one real ale and five kegs on sale.



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I/we wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association these are available at camra.org.uk/memorandum ☐

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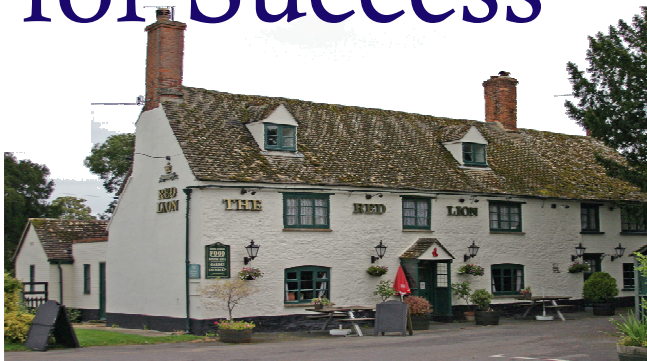
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Recipe for Success

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



I'VE JUST COME back from yet another disappointment at the Annual Northmoor Gent's Cookery Contest: third of three in a testosterone-fuelled and bruising fray! The recipe provided by the organisers was an elaborate concoction of chicken, ham, boiled egg and pickled walnut in a pie made with something called hot water pastry (as in a pork pie).

It was a jolly lot of hard work and involved expensive ingredients, but it didn't actually taste very nice to me. I think it was something to do with the walnuts rather than my cooking, but I may be biased! Ever the optimist, I take heart that my son George's whippet liked it a lot and appeared to suffer no ill-effects.

I've been exploring a few unusual recipes recently, inspired by my elder brother Richard who gave me for my birthday a most interesting old book on Scottish drinks: a forerunner, perhaps of the *Scottish Drinker*? From this I learned that for centuries the

everyday drink of lowland Scots was beer, not whisky, which if available at all was reserved for very special occasions.

Hops don't grow naturally in Scotland. As a result, early Scottish beers were big on malting barley, but they did learn to use other plants such as broom, gorse and bog myrtle to add a bitter edge. I fancy some of these additives contain a few interesting mind-altering substances too!

The subject of unusual recipes brings me, somewhat circuitously, to the 22nd Oxford Beer and Cider Festival, courtesy of Oxford CAMRA, in Oxford Town Hall from 24-26 October 2019. There will be 130 different real ales, with 40 more held over to the Saturday, plus 50 ciders and perries. Like many members, I don't manage to attend every single branch meeting, but this is an event I won't miss. Can there really be 170 different brews on offer? Just how many variants are there? It's going to be fun finding out!

Personal taste is everything, of course, and I'm a traditionalist at heart. So mango beer, orange, toffee, grebe, red kite, dolphin, pony, robin, donkey, fox, honey and pineapple, grapefruit, cherry, caramel, rhubarb, chilli and partridge are unlikely to pass my standard taste test: would I order a second pint of this? I list these just because they were all at last year's festival.

I'm not sure if the grebe and other animal beers actually contained any animal. I always find the grebe a showy but rather oily fowl, but I can say that I didn't like the mango all that much. I'm all for live and let live, however, so wish these innovative brewers every possible success.

For my part I plan to stick to the old faithfuls of hops, malt, water and alcohol in a fresh, clear pint at cellar temperature. While the dog was happy to eat my unusual Gent's cookery dish, I'm not sure even she would go for curry beer.



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Brewery News

Hook Norton

In the World Beer Awards 2019, Hook Norton Brewery has repeated its success from last year with Red Rye once more being voted the UK's Best Rye Beer. It has now been entered into the final round of judging for the World's Best Speciality Beer, an award it won in 2017. Hook Norton Brewery was also awarded Gold Medals for its Flagship IPA and Old Hooky beers. Cotswold Pale picked up a Silver Medal and Hooky Gold collected a Bronze Medal.

In the International Beer Challenge 2019, Hook Norton picked up bronze medals for Cotswold Pale, Double Stout, Flagship, Hooky Gold and Old Hooky. Red Rye was once more the judges' favourite, collecting a Gold Medal and being put forward to the grand final.

Vale/Aylesbury Brewhouse

Beers in the pipeline for the autumn are Try Line, a 4.2% Tawny beer with soft malt mouthfeel and intense citrus hops; Electric Mayhem, a 4.3% Light copper Ale charged with Citra hops; and Apollo, a 4.1% golden ale packed with floral hop and biscuity malt flavours.

At Aylesbury Brewhouse, the Vale-owned micro-brewery at the Hop Pole pub in Aylesbury, two new beers are being

produced. These are Midas, a 4.1% classic golden beer; and Odyssey, a 4.3% ruby coloured ale with a blend of dark malts and a subtle orange aroma – a single hopped variety beer.

West Berkshire

Congratulations to the brewery for carrying off the bronze award for mild in CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain awards, for Maggs Magnificent Mild. The beer is often available at the brewery-owned Grapes in Oxford.

White Horse

Oxford Dark Blue University Ale won Gold and was named Overall Winner at the SIBA Regional Independent Beer

Awards 2019. It won the Gold Award in the Bottled British Dark Beers up to 4.4% category, and was then awarded Overall Winner in the Bottled Beer and Can Category, beating 107 other beers.

Anneli Baxter, who took over from Andy Wilson when moving from Titanic brewery in September 2018, said: "We are thrilled to be judged as producing the best bottled beer in the Midlands area, especially when we were up against some excellent beers from much larger renowned brewers. We are a very small team here at White Horse Brewery and the staff continually go above and beyond their job roles to ensure quality of product, innovation and customer service. This is very much an award for the whole of our fantastic team."

Anneli is pictured below with James Calder, Chief Exec of SIBA, on the left, Gavin Stanton, Brewer at White Horse, and Guy Shepherd, Chairman of SIBA,



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