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Welcome

..... to a positive 2020 for local pubs and breweries?

NOW THAT THE New Year is upon us – and I hope you've binned any thoughts of Dry January already! – it's time to look forward confidently to another good year for our pubs and breweries. While we all know of pubs that are in trouble, this area and Oxford City in particular are seeing more pub openings than closures.

That appears to be the national trend too, with the Office for National Statistics reporting that in March 2019 there were 39,135 pubs, 320 more than a year earlier, and the first net increase since 2010. This came as Wetherspoon announced a £200 million expansion plan with the focus on smaller towns.

In 2019 we celebrated the re-opening, after several years of closure, of two pubs in the Oxford suburbs – the Up in Arms (formerly the Somerset) in Marston Road, and the Holly Bush in West Oxford. Soon after the last edition went to press the White House on Abingdon Road closed and has been shuttered ever since, but salvation is coming. Local brewery Tap Social will re-open the White House in the spring, the third local brewery (after White Horse at the Royal Blenheim and Oxbrew at Witney) to open its own pub.

Things are stirring in the villages too, with Stanton Harcourt having a pub again after several years (the Harcourt Arms) and a community buy-out bid under way at the White House in Bladon, near Woodstock. But a community buy-out of the Three Horseshoes at Garsington appears to have failed, so we can never be complacent.

While the formal coming together of Little Ox and Oxbrew as Little Ox Brew Co is a natural progression, any predictions that the local brewing revival would run out of steam have proven unfounded. We now look forward to Oxford Beer Week in May, when the aim will again be to get more locals to sell local breweries' beers.

Oxford CAMRA can also look back on another highly successful Beer and Cider Festival at the Town Hall in October, with over 3,000 people coming through the doors and a healthy surplus made for CAMRA. Everything is looking good for 2020, and as ever your news and views are welcome – just drop me a line. The next edition will appear in April, then bi-monthly as usual.

DAVE RICHARDSON
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Tony's Travels

Tony Goulding looks
at Mitchells & Butlers
(M&B) pubs in and
around Oxford



MITCHELLS & BUTLERS is a name associated with Midlands brewing since 1898 and where I grew up in Coventry, it once had pubs on almost every street corner. It then became part of Bass, later renamed Six Continents, Bass having sold its brewing interests. This did nothing for the future of drinking or brewing and finally in 2003, with 1,800 pubs, bars and restaurants, the pubs became M&B again.

This is part one of a series looking at breweries which came to Oxford over the last 50 years, and our walk around the M&B empire starts in Kidlington. The **Red Lion** is one of three pubs in close proximity on the main road and was a pub from the 19th century, being rebuilt in its present form by Halls in 1960. After a period as part of Spirit Group, it was acquired by M&B in 2015 and refurbished as a comfortable good value food and ale house.

On the bar you will find one of the best selection of national ciders in the area along with up to four beers which may include Timothy Taylor's Landlord, Sharp's Doom Bar, Marston's

LEFT: The iconic White Horse on Broad Street

RIGHT: The Chequers and the Eagle and Child..



Pedigree and Wells' Bombardier. As part of M&B's Ember Inns sub-brand, it offers a CAMRA discount.

The **Red Lion** can be busy but is worth a look, which is more than can be said for drinkers at the former Kings Arms on the Bicester road in nearby Gosford which is now a comfortable and over-priced **Miller & Carter** Steakhouse with no real ale or cider.

The **Dew Drop Inn** in Summertown, formerly two shops, became a Simmonds and then a Courage pub. After a period with Spirit then Orchid and 25 plus years of loyal service from the previous management, it became part of M&B under the Castle brand in 2015. It's a busy food pub (on Fridays you need to book), with two bars and a rear sun trap garden. On the bar were Brakspear Bitter, Bunny Hop and Ubu from Purity brewery, and a rare London brewery, Moncada, providing Notting Hill IPA at 4.7%.

The **Jericho Tavern** on Walton Street has had different names, and when the Firkin chain came

to Oxford it became the Philanderer and Firkin in the early 1990s. Bass then acquired the Firkin chain and continued the famous live music scene at this three-storey, historic alehouse. Up to four beers are on the bar, and on the day these were Brakspear Gold, Timothy Taylor Landlord and Butcombe's Rare Breed, plus a few interesting cans and bottles.

A short walk through the old Radcliffe Infirmary brings you to the 18th century, multi-roomed **Royal Oak**. This very busy food pub is owned by St John's College and was leased to Halls for many years, with a strange trading deal to serve Wadworth 6X. It is very much a student and tourist trap but only three beers are served, which on this day were Timothy Taylor Landlord, Long Man's Old Man, and a very interesting if a little tasteless Pheasant Plucker from Bowland Brewery. With some interesting kegs, bottles and cans, the **Royal Oak** is always worth a visit.

After a short wander into St Giles you enter another historic pub known as the Bird and Baby but correctly the **Eagle**

and Child, part of M&B's Nicholson's chain of historic pubs. Owned by St John's and in past years leased to Halls, the pub had as its most famous customers the authors C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Four beers are generally available and these were Nicholson's Pale Ale, Brakspear Gold, Sharp's Doom Bar and St Austell's Jolly Holly. Big changes are afoot at this rather run-down pub, with the Young's pubco taking over the lease. A major refurb of the unlisted parts of the building will be undertaken.

Walk into Broad Street and you enter the smallest pub in the city, the **White Horse**, which for many years was leased to Halls. Some very famous Prime Ministers and Presidents have supped here without any Inspector Morse connections. Beers on today were the very tasty Shotover Porter and Scholar, Timothy Taylor Landlord, Sharp's Doom Bar, St Austell Tribute and the very aptly named White Horse Bitter.

In busy George Street you will find **O'Neill's**, the Irish-themed

LEFT: The newly-refurbished Crown



(fake of course) pub built in 2000, a busy and noisy sports bar and food venue which serves Brakspear Gold and Sharp's Doom Bar.

Another short walk around to Gloucester Green will lead you to a very impressive early 1900s corner house, the **Red Lion**. This former Halls pub, later the Fuggle and Firkin and then the Goose, is now a very comfortable and busy food venue. One large bar and a spacious, noisy garden is very popular with all sorts of people, with beers including Brakspear Gold, Sharp's Doom Bar and Long Man's Old Man.

A walk into the High Street will find the **Chequers** down an alley. This well restored 15th century inn (the Monks Bar at one end dating from 1779) is a sprawl of rooms on several levels. Morrells ran it until 1980, then Halls until 1990 at which stage Bass took over. Now using the Nicholson's sub-brand, it serves the largest selection of beers of local M&B pubs with nine in total, plus four boxed ciders, and is always busy with food.

A walk down to The Plain brings you to the **Cape of Good Hope**, in a prominent position on the roundabout. Rebuilt in 1893 for Morrells, it became a Hobgoblin in 1992 being leased by the then fledgling Wychwood brewery of Chris Moss fame. It's had some silly names, such as The Pub Oxford (It's a Scream!), which failed to impress. M&B restored the original name, and with comfortable surroundings, a large patio garden and a function room upstairs, it would make a good music venue. Good food is served along with Sharp's Doom Bar, Firebird's Two Horses, Gritchie's Lore, Butcombe's Rare Breed and some interesting cans and bottles.

Until Oxford United moved to the Kassam stadium, the **Britannia** in Headington was one of two pubs taken over on match days by fans. Nowadays it's an Ember Inn, part of the M&B group, and with the tiled Halls hare logo on the wall showing its original ownership. This is a very popular food pub used by many different customers, and up to six beers

can be served at some of the city's cheapest prices. On the day these were Ember Ale brewed by Black Sheep, Fuller's London Pride, Brakspear Gold and Purity's Mad Goose.

The last M&B pub to on my tour re-opened after a minor refurbishment in late November. The **Crown** in Cornmarket was a Morrells house for many years until 1970 when Bass took over, with a nice pint of Charrington's IPA being served. The original pub was built in 1364 where McDonalds now stands, and where we drink now was the old stables and store. On the bar of this Nicholson's branded pub were Nicholson's Pale Ale, Sharp's Doom Bar, Brakspear's Oxford Gold, Fuller's London Pride, St Austell's Proper Job, Purity's Mad Goose with a very tasty St Austell Jolly Holly. At least two boxed ciders will be served, with six kegs to accompany very popular food in the comfortable bar and large heated patio.

M&B also operates the All Bar One bar, on High Street.



THE BEAR INN

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

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

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

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



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Profile: Ad Tavernum - To the Pub!

Dave Richardson looks at an innovative local pub company

YOU HAVE PROBABLY never heard of Ad Tavernum, but you might have heard of East Oxford pub the Jolly Postboys. You might also have heard of the Red Lion in Eynsham and the Bell in Faringdon, and what these pubs have in common is that they are run by an enthusiastic young team led by Drew Brammer and George Harwood-Dallyn.

The company name isn't used for the public, but translates from Latin as To The Pub! This is a principle that all readers of the *Oxford Drinker* presumably share, but in Drew's and George's case, it's underpinned by a quest to save dying pubs from extinction and "give them back to the community".

While Drew's background is in catering, George was schooled from a young age in pubs and brewing. They already knew each other when, in 2014, Drew was involved in re-opening of the Chester in East Oxford, asking George to become his right-hand man. Their involvement here didn't last long, but after several years of closure the Chester is now re-established as a focal point of the community with a good reputation for food and ales.

The Jolly Postboys had been closed on and off for some time and was regarded as a failed pub when Greene King looked

to dispose of it in 2016. Situated on the 1930s-built Florence Park estate between the Iffley and Cowley roads, the area was becoming "gentrified" but the unloved pub seemed stuck in a time warp. But in came Drew and George to a pub they now call their "mother ship", with the concept they introduced here

being replicated at the two more recent acquisitions.

Informality and quality are key ingredients, and appeal to the whole community with coffee and cake available in the mornings, family activities at certain times, a menu big on "sharing platters" as well as pub



Drew Brammer (left) and George Harwood-Dallyn

classics, and an innovative approach to drinks. All beers (including lager) are British, and that applies to many other drinks too using local suppliers wherever possible.

Although Greene King still owns the Jolly Postboys building, Ad Tavernum has complete independence to run the business. The same applies at the Red Lion in Eynsham, leased from property company Hawthorn Leisure that took over many Greene King pubs. But the Bell in Faringdon, a 17th century coaching inn which is also a nine-room hotel, remains owned by and tied to Wadworth, its 6X and Horizon ales being regulars.

House ales at the Jolly Postboys and Red Lion are Abingdon Bridge from Loose Cannon, and American Pale Ale Wipeout from Little Oxbrew – both local beers. Guest beers are sourced from XT and other local breweries, with the Jolly Postboys having a real cider, Freak Show from Cotswold Cider Company, on recently. Both pubs have four hand pumps.

George was managing a Brighton pub at the age of 18 and then went travelling, working at the renowned Little Creatures brewery in Perth, Australia where he developed his interest in craft keg. Later he was a trainee at Peach Pubs in England, so had lots of experience when the pair took on the Jolly Postboys.

“We felt that anything was possible here, but how do you set about delivering it?” he recalls. “I learned at Little Creatures and Peach Pubs about the importance of engaging with guests – we don’t call them customers – and staff training. We aim to be ‘fun, friendly and familiar’, and staff go through a seven-step training programme over four weeks. They can then work in any of our pubs.

“The gastro-pub concept has come with the stuffiness of a traditional restaurant, and we didn’t want that. We are not restaurants with a pub attached, but pubs that serve good food. We love pubs and what they can do to bring together the communities they serve. We are on a mission to save the Great British Pub.”

The Jolly Postboys has been very successful, even though George said some local people still didn’t realise how it had been transformed. He and Drew already knew the area before they opened up, but that didn’t apply when they moved into the Red Lion at Eynsham (2018) and the Bell in Faringdon (2019).

“The Red Lion had been on the brink of collapse for years, and by selling cheap beer and attracting a certain type it damaged the community around it,” says George. “It was like a rotten apple, but when two young guys approached Hawthorn with a plan they said,

‘OK, what do you want?’ We were adamant about what we wanted and that was to have nothing to do with Hawthorn, as with Greene King. We have freehold tenancies and a very good relationship with them, as they leave us to it.”

The Red Lion has now been restored at the heart of Eynsham life, but the Bell, acquired last March, could be more of a challenge. While George is happy about the relationship with Wadworth and likes its beers, Faringdon itself poses problems. The Bell is in the heart of the town on Market Place, but the planners have effectively torn the heart out of Faringdon by allowing Tesco, Aldi and Waitrose to open on the edge of town. Some pubs have closed, including the Volunteer.

“The older generation feel the town centre is dying, but younger people feel there is hope for Faringdon and it has many villages in its catchment area,” says George. “Now it is our biggest pub.”

And possibly biggest challenge? Time will tell, and in the meantime Drew and George have their hands full running three pubs while remaining open to new opportunities. We love their drive and powers of transformation, as without them two or possibly three more pubs would now be shops or private housing.



Pub News

From Oxford CAMRA, White Horse CAMRA and beyond

Abingdon

King's Head and Bell

The 500-year-old coaching inn has a bright new look while retaining the character of its original rooms, following investment estimated at around £500,000. Part of the garden has been enclosed by a large conservatory-style extension with retractable roof, and an open kitchen with pizza oven has been installed in the extension having previously been upstairs.



Owned by Urban Village, a small independent pub company with several properties in southern England, the pub guards its historic character including a snug and some upstairs meeting rooms

which are among the oldest in Abingdon.

Up to four real ales are served and two of these will normally be from Loose Cannon, being Abingdon Bridge and a seasonal ale which was 42 Pounder on a recent visit. Sharp's Doom Bar is sometimes available with the fourth being Rat Brewery's White Rat on this visit. Pizzas, burgers, fish and chips, and pub classics are the main menu choices.

Beckley

Abingdon Arms

This community-owned pub in an Otmoor village is under new management, with Alex Dumitrache, formerly head chef at the White Horse, Woolstone, in the Vale of White Horse, who promises to "not charge an arm and a leg" for a good meal. Suzy Minichova moves from being general manager of the Bell in Hampton Poyle for 10 years, and has expertise in keeping and serving real ales. Vicky Macpherson, who also previously worked at the Bell, is in charge of marketing.

Bladon

White House

The latest community buy-out bid, which would bring the

number in the county to 10, is under way. It is the only remaining pub in this affluent village near Woodstock, which also attracts a lot of tourists visiting Winston Churchill's grave in the village church, and nearby Blenheim Palace.

The White House dates from the 1660s but has been much modernised, and the Bladon Community Pub Committee is making the most of the Churchill connection claiming that "this is the pub where he learned to drink"! Mike Edwards, of the committee, said: "To quote Sir Winston, we plan to 'never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never'. Now that Greene King has made the decision to place the pub on the disposal list, Bladon locals have followed the example of Sir Winston by forming our own War Cabinet and society to keep this Churchillian centre of our village open."

It has won support from Blenheim Palace, the local MP and charity the Plunkett Foundation, with the community quickly pledging over £100,000 and crowdfunding under way at the time of writing. For updates visit bladoncommunitypub.org/ or www.facebook.com/bladoncommunitypub/

Garsington

Three Horseshoes

A community buy-out of this pub in a village south of Oxford has however failed, with Greene King rejecting the bid put forward. Hugh Blaza, of the Garsington Community Benefit Society, said the pub had been sold but didn't know to whom, or whether it is set to continue as a pub.

The pub was put on the market for £360,000 but the society had hoped to raise £500,000 to include repairs and renovation.

With two other pubs having closed in Garsington in the last decade, hopes of saving the last pub in the village now look uncertain.

Littleworth

Cricketers Arms

This regular *Good Beer Guide* entry, situated on the outskirts of Wheatley, is again for sale. It continues to have a good reputation for real ale and held another beer and cider festival with many small producers represented.



The White House at Bladon at the turn of the 20th Century, and below, villagers outside the pub launching their campaign



Kelmscott

Plough Inn

Acquired by the Barkby Group in 2018, this West Oxfordshire village free house (pictured over the page) has developed its culinary offering and is again included in the *Michelin Guide*. The Plough has eight bedrooms and was built in 1791, retaining a classic village pub appearance with a picture of the pub from 1902 that sits on the fireplace showing little difference.

Kingston Lisle

Blowing Stone

This well regarded free house in a Vale of White Horse village closed in October and had yet to re-open at the time of writing. Landlord Sam Plant reportedly gave up the lease blaming excessive rent and not enough profit, leaving owner the Lonsdale Estate to look for a replacement.

Oxford

Ampleforth Arms

Continued community involvement in the running of this pub on the Risinghurst estate, Headington has been put in doubt after Heineken's Star Pubs and Bars brand announced that it was looking for a new tenant and to make a considerable investment. A community-owned group took over the lease a few years ago and saved the "Amp" from probable final closure, it having been closed on and off for a few years previously. The pub passed to Star as part of Punch Taverns' slimming down, but under community lease about half of the building continued as a pub with the other half standing empty.

Lyn Sims, of Amp Community Pub, said: "We are not giving up at the moment, and continue to lease the pub and trade as before. The 'For Let' sign has been up for several months, but we have an open-ended lease which continues until we are given notice. We saved the pub, but just to keep trading is a challenge. We could apply for a new lease but can't afford to invest a lot of money."

Star plans to invest over £300,000 in the pub, install a kitchen and change its name to the Risinghurst Arms, and hopes to recruit someone prepared to pay £40,000 a year in rent.

Black Boy

This Old Headington gastro-pub re-opened in December having closed abruptly in June, following a major refurbishment including new kitchen. It is owned by Everards and usually serves a couple of its real ales, with Everards also owning the nearby White Horse.

Eagle and Child

The long drawn-out process of getting planning permission for major changes to this historic pub on St Giles looked to be drawing to a successful

conclusion after planners recommended that the city council accept plans by owner St John's College. The revamp will involve taking over the café next door and building rooms above to use as hotel accommodation, with the conservatory at the rear of the pub to be removed and a new single-storey extension built.

The council is keen to ensure that the historic part of the pub is protected, this being well-known as a meeting place for famous writers including J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. It is understood that Young's will take over management from M&B brand Nicholson's.

Four Candles

The Wetherspoon pub on George Street has upped its focus on local real ales since new CAMRA member Johnny Roberts became one of the managers, including Chadlington Brewery which provided a branded Four Candles/Fork 'Andles beer over Christmas in honour of the Two Ronnies TV sketch that gives the pub its name. Real ales normally

cost £2.49 but were reduced to £1.99 over the festive season and into January, or £1.49 with CAMRA voucher. The range typically includes Chadlington, White Horse, Wychwood and Loddon, with others to be added.

Holly Bush

Closed since 2013 and widely expected to become private housing, the pub re-opened triumphantly in October after major investment by new owner Charles Wells, which has built a conservatory extension and installed a new kitchen and toilets. The pub has adopted Wells's Pizza, Pots & Pints brand as at the **Oxford Blue** off Iffley Road, with a genuine pizza oven and no fried dishes but "bubbling pots of comfort food".

Real ales on a recent visit were Adnams Ghost Ship, Courage Directors and two ales from



Wells's "Wandering Brewer" initiative, Wayfarer Green Hop Pale Ale and Charlie Wells' Late Hop Pale Ale (see West Oxford feature, page 16).

Nick West, lately of St Aldates Tavern, has taken over as manager. "We have been very happy with the support from the local community in the first two weeks, and as we open at 11 we are attracting Mums with prams as well," he said. "We had seven real ale pumps at St Aldates so I know the local brewers and will bring them in, but here it is a far more community-based pub than in the city centre. I hope to know 50 local people by name by the end of 2019."

White House

Closed suddenly in September, this Wadworth pub in Abingdon Road looked to have an uncertain future before news came through that it would be taken over by Oxford's own craft brewery Tap Social, with a projected opening date of spring 2020. The building is owned by Brasenose College, and it has been confirmed that Wadworth is no longer involved leaving Tap Social free to start from scratch.

The brewery's founder director, Tess Taylor, said: "We're setting it up as a community space and kitchen, where we'll serve food and are planning for a seasonal and local menu offering all-day brunch and dinner. We will have a full range of drinks, including both our own and guest beers, plus a coffee shop in daytime. "We hope to be open from spring 2020, and will run lots of events, classes (yoga, painting, etc.), light live music, private hire, etc. We're really pleased as it'll give us the chance to

extend our training programmes for the guys released from prison that we employ at the brewery, to include both culinary and front-of-house hospitality work opportunities." The re-opening has strong support from the local community – and from CAMRA too.

Stanton Harcourt

Harcourt Arms

This village near Eynsham has a pub again, following re-opening in November of the Harcourt Arms (not to be confused with the pub of the same name in Jericho, Oxford). The pub has been not so much revamped as totally transformed, with the construction of a large modern extension offering 10 guest bedrooms. A separate new building will open in the New Year as the village shop.

This is an unusually large pub with many of its historic features retained, including an ancient fireplace and stone floors. Even in the modern extension, which includes the restaurant,

traditional furnishings and décor are used. It has already built up a reputation for fine and inventive food, with starters from £6.50 and mains from £13.50-£26.50.

Hooky Bitter from Hook Norton is a regular ale here, and two more ales are sourced from Loose Cannon including Abingdon Bridge and a seasonal beer. The fourth choice on a recent visit was Timothy Taylor Landlord, with Butcombe Bitter also appearing.

You might think there is still another pub in Stanton Harcourt when you see the traditional sign for the Fox Inn, but this is now a private house.

...and finally

Reader Tony Moulam has written to take issue with our reporter Tony Goulding, who mentioned in the last issue that the House of Windsor in Witney had been closed for 25 years. "This is not so, as I celebrated my 80th birthday there, and that was only 12 years ago!" says Tony #2. Tony #1, you are duly ticked off.



Canal Desires

Dick Bosley gets his walking boots on.... First in Oxford, and then in Wantage



A VISIT TO the monthly collectors' fair in Kidlington gave me a chance to try out some pubs along the Oxford Canal. This is particularly apt as the Morrells family were keen investors in canals, and one of the main freights carried to Oxford was coal for their brewery.

Starting at Kidlington, where I don't think I've ever had a beer before, I chose the **Red Lion** in the middle of the town. It is now part of M&B's Ember Inns chain and Butcombe Original, Sharps Atlantic and the eponymous Ember Pale Ale were available along with a couple of real ciders.

Heading towards Oxford alongside the canal you pass through some lovely countryside, although the traffic noise is a bit intrusive at times. At Wolvercote Lock I left the canal, crossed the railway and Thames to reach the **White Hart**, which at one time had extensive stabling for the boatmen's horses.

This pub has been leased to the local community for about five years and specialises in local beers. Field of Dreams from Vale brewery was very good, and XT-4 and 42 Pounder, from Loose Cannon, were also available. There are lots of social and village events held here and the barman's cheery "godspeed" sent me on my way with what could laughingly be called a spring in my step. Returning to the canal there is a footbridge after a couple of hundred yards that will lead you to the **Plough**, overlooking

Wolvercote Green. At this place during the 1930s an eight-year-old boy is reputed to have caught a pike bigger than himself. At about the same time many trainspotting youths were sent to the **Plough** to get jugs of ale for drivers and firemen.

This was previously a Morrells pub where, in the 19th century, the stables would act as mortuary. The **Plough** is now a Greene King pub with Old Speckled Hen, Scrum Down and Bonkers Conkers on sale. Sadly the prices on the 1964 Morrells price list on display were no longer in use. There are many other reminders of the Morrells connection (pictures, etched glass, etc) around the pub.

Moving on I then left the canal again at Aristotle Bridge in North Oxford to visit the **Anchor**. This is a pub with a curious history of long serving landlords including William Heyfield (1721-78), Anthony Harris (1796-1847) and William Dolley (1852-77), – the latter giving the **Anchor** its long standing colloquial name of "Dolly's Hut".

Obviously very popular with local residents, the **Anchor** is now owned by Wadworth and an extensive and very good looking menu is complemented by 6X, IPA and Horizon.

Not much more than a hop, skip and a jump further on and you reach Jericho, an area so rich in good pubs that it deserves an article in its own right – see Pete's Pubs in this edition.

A White Horse branch meeting brought us to the **Lamb** in Mill Street, Wantage, an attractive 16th century thatched pub a couple of minutes' walk from the town centre.

The **Lamb** is, in fact, the only thatched building in central Wantage. This is because the Wantage Improvement Act of 1828 forbade the use of thatch, or its replacement in the town, as a fire prevention measure. As the town boundary at the time was the nearby Letcombe Brook, the pub fell just outside the town's jurisdiction.

In recent years Wantage has lost the **Shears** and the **Woolpack**, so the **Lamb** is the only pub left in the town with a name connecting to the once common wool trade in the area. The **Lamb** was one of the

first pubs to be run by Morlands – prior to its move to Abingdon – and it is thought that it has never been sold on the open market.

The pub is now owned by Andy and Anne Chalmers who run it free of tie, with their sons Lee and Gary in charge of day-to-day running. Having previously worked for Allied Breweries before taking on the Lamb in 1994, Andy has run up an impressive 52 years in the beer trade.

He was originally a tenant of Morlands brewery, who Andy says were lovely to work, but his tenancy moved to Greene King when it took over the Morlands estate. Discretion being the better part of valour, I won't repeat his comments about GK. However after many

years of trying they were finally able to purchase the pub in 2007.

The pub is very popular with excellent beer and very good value food, as well as a large garden and car park giving it a wide appeal. All ale drinkers will know that quick turnover of beer is a key part of keeping a good pint and the **Lamb** aims to clear six or seven firkins of its regular house beer, Fuller's London Pride, per week – as well as four or five firkins of other bitters. During our visit Fuller's Seafarer and St Austell's Proper Job were on offer.

All in all, and I am not just saying this because Andy treated us like kings at the meeting, the **Lamb** is definitely a stop worth making whenever you visit Wantage.



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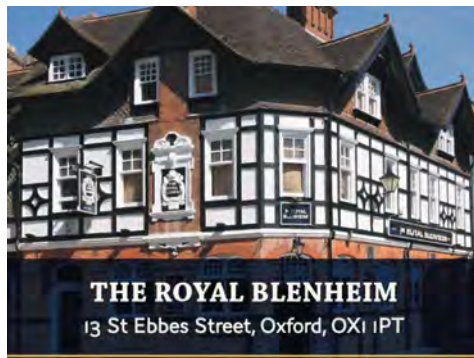
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BELOW: The Osney Arms in happier times; old adverts in the garden of the Punter

RIGHT: The Seacourt and the One

West Oxford Revival

Re-opening of the Holly Bush gives **Dave Richardson** an opportunity to look again at the pubs along Botley Road



West Oxford has suffered a disproportionate number of pub closures, but unusually the three pubs to close in recent years are all still standing with their new identities. The **Osney Arms** retains its name as a guesthouse, while further out towards Botley, the **George** became the Richer Sounds store while the **Carpenters Arms** became a McDonalds.

Starting at the city end, I was about to stop at **One**, close to Oxford rail station, which retains a public bar although the lounge is now an Asian fusion restaurant. I remember it as the **Old Gatehouse**, with a sunny garden to wait in if you missed your train, but a glance through the bar windows confirmed that it offers no real ale, so I moved on.

Before meeting me at the **Punter**, Tony Goulding had paid a quick visit to the **Porterhouse** down Mill Street, a former Morrells back street local known as the **Kite Inn** but now an up-market steak restaurant. It's under the same management as the **Punter** and also tied to Greene King, but also sells guest ales. Today's selection was Fireside and Old Golden Hen from GK, plus Crowned Crane from the XT Animal range, and Stable no. 5

from White Horse. It's good to see what's primarily a posh restaurant offer such a good choice of ales, so maybe I'll try some food matching with the steaks.

On then to the **Punter**, situated right beside the Thames on Osney Island (the area is surrounded by water). This is yet another pub that's had a name change – the **Punter** being still known to many as the **Waterman's Arms**. This former Morland house has a strong food offering but is still essentially a pub, and today's range of ales included GK's Fireside, the Pacific Red ale XT -13, and Morland Original.

The latter is the regular ale but we were told this was about to change, with Deuchars IPA taking the regular slot. One beer is always sourced from XT while the third may be from the GK or SIBA ranges, as the **Punter** has more freedom to choose than many. I had a half of the seasonal Fireside while enjoying the cosy atmosphere with candles on the tables and artworks on the walls. In summer, it makes the most of its location with an attractive garden.

It was now time for the evening's main event, so were



made our way to the **Holly Bush** at the entrance to Osney Island, set just a little way back from Botley Road. It had re-opened just a couple of weeks previously (see also Pub News, pages 10-12) having been closed since 2013. This pub really has come back from the dead after its owner wanted to convert into a private house, but the city council and local councillors stood firm, and the Holly Bush is now a fine addition to West Oxford's charms.

Brewer Charles Wells has poured in a great deal of money including the building of a large conservatory mainly for dining, and a bright and contemporary colour scheme. The pub has adopted Wells's Pizza, Pots & Pints brand as at the **Oxford Blue** off Iffley Road, with a genuine pizza oven and no fried dishes but "bubbling pots of comfort food".

Adnams Ghost Ship, Courage Directors and two ales from Wells's "Wandering Brewer" initiative, Wayfarer Green Hop Pale Ale and Charlie Wells' Late Hop Pale Ale, were available here. Our first impressions of the **Holly Bush** were very favourable and it was with some reluctance that we moved on, past the three "re-purposed" (!)

former pubs and on to a grimy industrial estate, not really the place you want to be on a wet Saturday night in November. But cheer lay within and without, as **Tap Social** brewery has a great range of craft kegs and at busy times brings in independent traders (in this case Italian) to sell food from vans outside.

Tap Social has only been in business since 2016, with a very commendable focus on bringing ex-prisoners back into society as well as producing "criminally good beer"! In that time it has added a second brewing site in Kennington and is now about to take over the **White House** pub in South Oxford (also see Pub News).

Personally I am not a great fan of craft keg beers, especially the heavily hopped and sour beers that many specialist brewers produce. The choice was wide with seven of its own beers plus guests, but I enjoyed two pints of Tap's very tasty oatmeal stout, Grebe's Procession, which at 5.5% soon banished the rain and cold. Even fairly early in the evening the place was buzzing, proving that the surroundings don't really matter when you're having a good time. Open from Thursdays to Sundays, Tap's

bar is in effect another pub in West Oxford, but one with a difference.

We ended our tour by walking a short way to the **Seacourt Bridge** opposite Botley shopping centre, this being now in the throes of major building and expansion. This Marston's pub is thoroughly traditional, with some of the best value Lunch Club meal deals in Oxford two courses for £4.95, three courses for £5.95). A pint of real ale can be added for £1.50 to Lunch Club meals, and otherwise costs from only £2.90 a pint.

Beers from the Marston's empire included Banks's Amber, Bombardier, Wychwood Hobgoblin and a Rugby-themed special, Sweet Chariot. The Amber was a surprise as this is in fact Banks's Bitter, a half of which was all I wanted. Landlady Tracey Dennell told us that drinks still account for 70% of sales, a rarity nowadays.

As we made our way home we reflected that each pub we had visited was different, and that West Oxford is firmly back on the city's drinking map. We'll go back one summer day, when we can also walk out to the **Perch** at Binsey or the **Fishes** at North Hinksey.

Pete's Pubs

Branch chairman **Pete Flynn** takes a "Jolly around Jericho"



If you're out and about in Oxford then do visit Jericho as it has a lot to offer in terms of pubs and restaurants. The *Times* newspaper in 2013 voted it the coolest area to live in the UK and, being a 10-minute walk from the centre of Oxford, is easily accessible. This is based upon an index to include the number of independent coffee shops, vintage fashion shops and cultural venues, giving marks out of 10 for three categories: hip culture outpost, creative capital and traveller value.

The name Jericho is referred to in the Bible as "remote place" and being just outside Oxford, this has some credence. The area around Walton Street, Walton Lane, Richmond Road, Wellington Street and Canal Street defines this Bohemian part of the city with its attractive, eclectic range of bars and shops, a far cry from the prosaic chain stores which dominate nearby Westgate.

Unsurprisingly, housing around here is fiendishly expensive based upon its desirability, but it wasn't that way when the area was first developed. Most of Jericho's houses were built in the 19th century to accommodate workers as local businesses expanded. The area suffered from poor drainage with outbreaks of dysentery and cholera quite common, until a drainage system was introduced during the 1860s.

LEFT UPPER: Andris Wood, General Manager at Gardeners Arms

LEFT LOWER: Henry Golding and Suzanne Shelton at Victoria

RIGHT: The Victoria

Whilst I enjoy these sojourns I much prefer doing so with a fellow CAMRA member and on this occasion I was accompanied by Jane Howells. Our first call was the **Gardeners Arms** in Plantation Road, a firm favourite of real ale drinkers. It is run by Paul Silcock and Andy Skinner (the chef), with general manager Andris Wood overseeing the day-to-day running of this CAMRA *Good Beer Guide* entrant.

These guys make a real difference to this lovely back street pub and offer a comprehensive vegetarian menu which has seen real growth since introduction in 2003. Four cask ales were available when we called, and having been free of tie from Marston's for the last six years, local beers are greatly encouraged. I sampled Lovebeer's Purdy Peculiar whilst my colleague had Little Ox's Oxblood, both of which were very tasty. The Lovebeer brew was a finalist in our annual beer festival a few years ago, and I am delighted that this is now available in the Oxford area.

Paul informed me that his regulars tend to be post-grad students and locals. Prior to getting into the pub business he was a tutor in IT and, in a former life, used to be a roadie supporting Britpop band Blur during the 1990s. During the

summer months the pub could not do more to satisfy its clientele and with the pub lease up for renewal this year, Paul has every confidence that owner St John's College will want him and his team to continue. This delightful pub offers a worthy student experience, which is very much the ethos of the college.

And so our journey continued to the nearby **Victoria Arms** in Walton Street, a dignified building with its attractive red and grey brickwork. It was built in 1839 by Oxford brewer Halls as the area was starting to see growth, with Oxford University Press having opened its iconic building in 1830. The interior is most eclectic with a humorous version of Michelangelo's painting "The Creation of Adam" adorning the ceiling, complete with Banks's beer glasses. The attractive snug area is where Dudley Moore, then at Magdalen College, would play the piano.

We were met by general manager Henry Golding and assistant Suzanne Shelton, who made us feel very welcome. I was delighted to see three cask ales on hand pump which included Ubu from Purity, Quantock Brewery's Stout and Shotover Prospect, with Loddon Hullabaloo the next one on. I chose Quantock Stout and Jane the Shotover Prospect, with both beers being very enjoyable.

I was intrigued to learn from Henry that owner Matt Davies, who also runs the **Big Society** pub on Cowley Road, fought several legal battles with freehold owner Marston's over three years. He took over in 2009 but has only recently been granted a "free of beer tie" deal.

This is marvellous news for both Matt and his customers as he can now offer greater beer choice.

The **Victoria Arms** is renowned for its pies and large portions together with a selection of cocktails, which seems appropriate as Matt also runs cocktail bar Raoul's which has been voted one of the best cocktail bars in the world by the *Sunday Times*. With its comfortable snug area, this is a pub which Oxford CAMRA can add to its list of suitable venues for monthly meetings in my opinion.

Our final call was the **Old Bookbinders** in Victor Street, well known for its inclusion in Inspector Morse episodes. This hostelry was once named The Printer's Devil and was built in 1869, being acquired by Morrells brewery in 1881.



The cask beers available included St Austell, Tribute, Hogs Back TEA, Black Sheep's Best Bitter, and the ubiquitous Timothy Taylor's Landlord. I particularly like this Traditional English Ale from Hogs Back with its malty and slightly fruity flavours. I'm informed that the brew uses Fuggles hops and in 2000 won gold in the Best Bitter category at the Great British

Beer Festival.

The recipe for success is down to patriarch Michel Sadones, who with his family, has run various French restaurants in Oxford over a 45-year period including Michel's Brasserie in Little Clarendon Street. French influenced bistro-style food cooked on site, with a wide crepe menu, is a theme that works well looking at the fully occupied tables on a Sunday evening. The family took over the **Old Bookbinders** in 2011 and their pub empire now includes the **James Street Tavern** in East Oxford, and the **Crown** in Stadhampton.

Michel's son Josh Mullett-Sadones told me that customers demand far greater choice these days and independent businesses tend to offer greater ambience. The pub's owner Greene King

recognise this, allowing it up to 12 guest beers per month. Every customer-facing staff member in each establishment wears a hip uniform reflecting a strong identity. It's black t-shirts and red braces at this pub, with matelot striped t-shirts and black shirts respectively at the **James Street Tavern** and the **Crown**.

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Beer therapy is a Thing!

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

WHAT A TERRIBLE couple of months it has been since the last *Oxford Drinker!* The General Election seems to have excelled in terms of unsuitable candidates and out-of-touch policies. The President of the United States could be impeached. The Royal Family are fighting among themselves like rats in a sack. We are heading for a global recession, Brexit, the longest night, months of cold rain and flooding.

To cap it all, as I write this column, Christmas will shortly be upon us and already the newspapers are full of terrible suggestions about what to buy. I can't decide whether to go for the Handwash and Balm, at only £87, an eyebrow grooming kit for just £54.50 or a lipstick set, a snip at £299. Just be warned: for only £299 I'd wear it!

Happily, I have a calming solution to all our troubles, and I can attest to its efficacy. A quiet pint in your favourite pub works every time.

to soothe your sweating brow. I was in the Red Lion at Northmoor last night when the fires were burning, and all was good with the world as I supped a perfect pint of Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge with a fellow armchair revolutionary. We spoke of many things and found ourselves in quiet agreement about them all.

This should not be surprising, and I expect you remember the CAMRA research from Professor Robin Dunbar of the University of Oxford which found that pubs play a key role in facilitating friendships. Those who have a local pub are happier, more trusting and better connected to their community, and we know this to be true. We play nicely together, we get quite a lot done, and the pub is right at the heart of our little community.

It set me wondering why we don't hear more about the magic of Beer Therapy, so I had a look on Google. I learned that taken in moderation, beer acts as a health supplement. It turns out

to be good for your bones, your skin, your gut, your sleep patterns and your wellbeing. So long-standing is this knowledge that one anthropologist claims to have found a 1,600-year-old Nubian population that drank beer from the age of two years.

No wonder that I felt so good as I enjoyed the 22nd Oxford Beer and Cider Festival in October. The trick is to titrate the dose, like any drug, to ensure that plasma levels stay in that beneficial zone which is not too low to have no effect, and not too high to cause embarrassment!

I dutifully worked my way round some of the 130 real ales on offer, trying to be sensible by just ordering a third of a pint each time, and I can report that I achieved perfect mental equilibrium, albeit that I had to go home on a bus. So when you are feeling a bit low, just remember this: Beer Therapy is a Thing! And it's a good thing.



Gardeners' World

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

AH, THE POOR old undervalued and underpaid bar staff. Almost as important as having good beer in a pub is having good bar staff. Seriously, without good bar staff cheerily serving customers in pubs up and down the land, it would be up to us, the landlords, to serve you all.

All the time. All. The. Time.

If it was just me having to serve everyone in my pub, I think I'd see a pretty swift drop in profits. Don't get me wrong, I'm always very glad to see my customers, and I love my job. But I'm not sure I'd want to be doing it seven days a week. And every other landlord will agree with me. Which is why the bar staff are so important. And I'm lucky, because I know I've got great bar staff. Honestly, I'm really proud and happy with them.

Until they go and try and ask for time off.

Now I don't want to sound all Scrooge-like at this point, especially at this time of year. It's not like I'm telling them to put less coal on the fire. Or only letting them take half a day off on Christmas Day. (At this point I should come clean and say that while I know, and applaud, the many pubs in the country who will be open on Christmas Day for the tradition, as well as for the many people seeking a brief escape from their families, I happily take Christmas Day off and gladly give all my staff the day off as well. You see, not a Scrooge).

But back to staff wanting to take time off at other times during the year. I don't resent them taking the time off. I just resent having to restructure the staff rota and fill in whatever shifts now need to be filled. For some reason I approach it with the same reluctance I approached homework as a kid, leaving it to the last minute and doing it on the bus on the way to school. So when staff take time off I'm always frantically texting other staff to see if they can cover a shift that I've known about for three weeks, but am only now trying to cover three hours beforehand. It's stupid but after nearly 16 years in this job, I'm still doing it.

Which is why I was so dismayed when one of my staff asked for time off in the run-up to the election, to canvas for his political party. Not that he wanted to go out canvassing, which is very laudable, especially in this time of growing political apathy, but because I would once again be trying to fill the shift at the last minute and then having to work it myself due to my poor organisational skills.

But it did remind me of a belief that I've gone on about before, that a pub should be non-partisan, and it just seems timely to reiterate it. As I write this the General Election is looming, although by the time you read this it should all be over bar the shouting.

Obviously the people in a pub can't be (or at least shouldn't be) non-partisan when it comes to political beliefs, but the pub itself should remain an open meeting ground for people of different political beliefs to be able to rub shoulders. And discuss. And if necessary to argue. But it encourages the exchange of ideas. Ideas need to be discussed, tested, and considered. Any idea that grows in isolation remains untested, so how can you ever know if it's a good idea or not? (Although at this point I'll just make it clear that anyone who wants to sit around and spout far right views can go find somewhere else to drink, a long way away preferably).

There really isn't another place like a pub for discussions of this kind, because of the random nature of who you'll meet in a pub. It's not an organised debating ground. The topic of the night's discussion isn't pinned to the door, so potential customers can decide if they



Festival Diary

Compiled by Richard Queralt

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

are in the mood for that evening's deliberation.

"Oh, I'm not sure I'm in the mood for 'Is a post-patriarchal society doomed to follow the mistakes of its forebears?', shall we try the King's Arms? I think it's 'If all time is relative, is it possible to have a concept of self?' tonight." That's a sentence you're not likely to hear outside any pub ever. Thankfully.

So the next time you hear an opinion you don't agree with in a pub, at least give thanks for the chance to hear it, if not like it. You're not likely to get the same level of debate in Topshop. And give thanks to the hard working bar staff who are often overlooked. Go on, it's nearly Christmas, buy them a drink.

Unless they've just asked the boss for a day off...

**Friday 24 - Sunday 26 January
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Market Street, Charlbury
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www.roseandcrown.charlbury.com

**Friday 31 January - Saturday 1 February
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www.salisburycamra.org.uk

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<https://winter.gbbf.org.uk>

**Thursday 6 - Saturday 8 February
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www.tewkesbury.camra.org.uk

**Friday 7 - Saturday 8 February
Bath Winter Ales Festival**
Widcombe Social Club, Widcombe Hill, Bath
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www.bathandborderscamra.org.uk

**Friday 13 - Saturday 14 March
Wantage Beer and Cider Festival**
The Beacon, Portway, Wantage OX12 9BY
28 real ales, 4 ciders, 2 perries
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www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk

New branch chair needed

After nearly four years as branch chairman, Pete Flynn will be looking to step down at the AGM on 4 March 2020.

"I thought it appropriate to seek a replacement so if you are energetic, passionate about beer and enjoy meeting people, then this is a job for you," he comments. "You will be looking to promote CAMRA pro-actively, and support our brewing and retail partners with real enthusiasm and commitment in a fun environment.

"You will be expected to attend regional meetings and chair the monthly branch meetings. We have a very strong and long-standing committee who between them have exceptional knowledge about all things beer, and I have learned a lot from them during my tenure. It's been a real pleasure to be part of the team."

If you're interested, contact branch secretary Steve Lawrence – see Contacts, page 15.



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89 beers and counting!

A SURVEY OF city centre pubs done on a Saturday lunchtime in November revealed what we know to be true but probably couldn't back up with figures – that Oxford offers a great choice of real ale.

Volunteers manfully (even womanfully!) set out to list the real ales and prices at 29 pubs in an area bounded by Magdalen Bridge, Folly Bridge, the top of St Giles and the railway station, finding 89 different beers from 46 breweries. The number in each pub ranged from zero at the Jam Factory (due to technical issues), to 10 at the Royal Blenheim. The dearest “pint” was at Teardrop bar in the Covered Market, which only serves in thirds and two-thirds with the latter costing £3.30, and six of its own Church Hanbrewery beers available.

The cheapest beers were of course at the two Wetherspoon pubs, the Four Candles and Swan and Castle, with Greene King IPA at £1.69, Sharp's Doom Bar at £2.29 and most guest ales at £2.49. Not counting these, the average cost of a pint was £4.19 with the cheapest being £3.30 in the Royal Blenheim and the dearest £4.90 in the White Rabbit. We found 13 pubs where you couldn't get a pint for less than £4.

Of the local breweries, White Horse/Luna featured 10 times, XT/Animal seven times, and Hook Norton six. Other local breweries represented included Amwell Springs, Loose Cannon, Shotover, West Berkshire and Wychwood/Brakspear.

The survey results were broadly similar to the first beer census in November 2018, when we found 82 different beers from 50 breweries. As expected, Sharp's Doom Bar – with enormous reach as it's owned by multi-national Molson Coors – was the most common real ale, but only found in seven pubs. The next most common was Brakspear's Oxford Gold.

Oxford Drinker editor Dave Richardson says: “To find so many different beers in a fairly small area means that Oxford can truly be described as a great real ale city. Considering its size and population, it probably stands comparison with anywhere in Britain.

“It's heartening to see local breweries well represented, but it would always be good to see more.”

Thanks as ever to branch secretary Steve Lawrence for compiling the statistics.

Oxford Branch
www.oxford.camra.org.uk

Next Branch Meeting:

Tuesday 4 February
Castle, Castle Street, Oxford
7.30pm
Meet beforehand at the Royal Blenheim from 6.30

Contacts:

Chairman
Pete Flynn
chair@oxford.camra.org.uk

Secretary
Steve Lawrence
01235 525436
contact@oxford.camra.org.uk

Editor of the Oxford Drinker
Dave Richardson
editor@oxford.camra.org.uk

White Horse Branch
www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk

Next Branch Meeting:

Tuesday 11 February
The Greyhound Inn, Main St,
Letcombe Regis OX12 9JL
7.45pm

Contact:
contact@whitehorsecamra.org.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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Museum still seeking funding

THE MUSEUM OF OXFORD is seeking alternative sources of funding to create a display on pubs and brewing in the city for when the much improved new museum opens in late 2020.

This follows the failure of a crowdfunding campaign, which raised only £315 towards the £15,000 target.

David Juler, the museum's development officer, said: "We are still committed to producing this exhibition for the people of Oxford and will continue to fundraise for it. Anyone willing to support this great exhibition about Oxford's pubs and breweries, do please get in contact.

MUSEUM OF OXFORD

"I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has supported us and of course CAMRA for promoting. Working with partners such as Tap Social, TOAD, the Oxford Retreat and Teardrop, amongst others, has been a great experience for the museum team. Oxford should be proud of its pubs and breweries, the people that work in them and the communities they help to build. I still believe they are one of the most integral aspects of the city's history and future.

"The new Museum of Oxford will be a great improvement on what we have been able to offer previously, with larger displays, more stories and, of course, more objects. We are always on the lookout for more city stories. You can contribute these via our collecting website – www.museumofoxford.omeka.net. Maybe you have a story about your favourite pub or your favourite ale? Perhaps you played in a band who toured Oxford's pubs? Or you used to taste the beer at Morrell's Brewery before it was shipped out?"

Centrepiece of the display will be a sign from the Allied Arms in Rose Hill, originally called the King of Prussia but renamed on the outbreak of World War I. It became the Ox in 1977 but reverted to King of Prussia in 1996, and was always owned by Morrells. It closed in 2006 after a serious fire, leaving this part of Oxford without a pub.

For more information on the museum's plans, contact David Juler at djuler@oxford.gov.uk or call 01865 252417 or visit www.museumofoxford.org. You can contribute at www.oxfordhiddenhistories.org



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The CAMRA Discount and how to get it

Branch secretary **Steve Lawrence** describes the new scheme

GETTING MONEY OFF your pint of real ale or cider used to be straightforward for CAMRA members. You got £20 of Wetherspoon vouchers when you joined or renewed which were split into three-month bands and you could use in any Wetherspoon pub to get 50p off a pint. There were also a variety of pubs which generously offered discounts at different rates to CAMRA members, sometimes limited to specific ales or times.

From July 2019 Wetherspoon vouchers were replaced with a new CAMRA Voucher Scheme. All new and renewing CAMRA members now receive £30 (60 x 50p) worth of CAMRA real ale, cider and perry vouchers.

Redeemable at over 1,550 pubs nationwide, including Wetherspoon, Stonegate (real ale only), Brains (Brains real ales only), Castle Rock, and Amber Taverns managed pubs.

All vouchers will be valid for the length of membership for added flexibility.

Each voucher is stamped with a start and end date and must be redeemed within this time. A membership card should be produced when using vouchers as proof of membership.

If, like me, your membership doesn't renew until next year you won't have received these new vouchers yet – but existing Wetherspoon vouchers are still valid during the 12 months from July 2019.

The CAMRA Voucher Scheme is in addition to the Real Ale Discount Scheme where around 3,500 pubs offer benefits to CAMRA members who can receive discounts from 10p off a pint to a whopping 20% off selected products on the production of a valid membership card. Pubs offer the discounts to encourage CAMRA members into their pubs to enjoy their real ales. Please note that discounts are at the discretion of the pubs and they reserve the right to remove or change an offer at any time without notice.



Oxford Branch is not very well supplied with pubs that are in the voucher scheme, as apart from the five Wetherspoon pubs there is just the City Arms in Cowley Road (Stonegate). We are better off with the discount scheme where CAMRA has persuaded Greene King to give 10% off a pint of real ale in most of its managed houses. All in all there are about 30 pubs in the branch area that offer a discount of some sort. You can find these pubs, (and others anywhere in the country), by simply visiting WhatPub.com and searching for pubs tagged with these symbols:



discount
scheme



voucher
scheme

Pubs participating in the scheme will also feature the Real Ale Voucher or Discount Scheme window sticker – look out for this in your local (new design in pubs soon!)

If you find a pub that gives a discount but hasn't got the symbol, or a pub that has the symbol but no longer gives a discount, please let me know by giving feedback through WhatPub or emailing whatpub@oxford.camra.org.uk

For full Terms and Conditions visit www.camra.org.uk/join/membership-benefits/camra-voucher-scheme/



Brewery News

Hook Norton

What The Fox was voted Oxfordshire Beer of the Festival at the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival 2019, being a 4% golden beer packed with hops and tastes of lychees, orange, grapefruit and citrus fruits. Runner-up was White Horse with Stable Genius, and in third place Loddon with Citra Quad.

Little Ox Brew Co

Having merged their production facilities back in January 2019, Little Ox Brewery and OXBREW have now joined forces as Little Ox Brew Co. Aaron Baldwin (founder and head brewer of OXBREW), and Ian Hemingway (founder and head brewer of Little Ox) are based at the brewery in Freeland, but the OXBREW brand is retained for the micro-pub in Witney.

This is run by Aaron's step-father, Simon Scamp, serving Little Ox beer alongside other local breweries. It is one of only two pubs in Witney in the *Good Beer Guide 2020* and already well established although it opened as recently as summer 2018.

"After a lot of thought and heartache, we have decided that the OXBREW brand will close," says Aaron. "This decision has not been easy as myself and Simon have built

OXBREW over the last four years, but we truly feel that Little Ox as a brand and a brewery is doing some wonderful things. We can't wait to get stuck in and concentrate on bringing you great and exciting beer, and the new beers we have been bringing you recently will become part of Little Ox brand instead.

"Little Ox will run a few core beers, and we will be brewing one-off and seasonal beers regularly with exciting new styles. Also we are thrilled to be continuing our Barrel Ageing Programme in collaboration with The Oxford Artisan Distillery, so look out for Imperial TOAD, a 9.8% Rye Whisky Barrel-Aged Imperial Stout in bottle.

"Every beer we produce will be gluten-free, and the process we use to de-glutenise our beer during fermentation does not affect the flavour of our beer at all. It just means that more people can enjoy it."

Old Forge

Following the demise of this micro-brewery at the Radnor Arms in Coleshill and also the Halfpenny micro-brewery at the Crown in Lechlade, Old Forge Brewery is now brewing at the Crown. Its Thames Tickler beer may be available at pubs including Oxbrew and the Siege of Orleans in Carterton.

Oxford Brewers Alliance

The alliance – including nearly all the breweries in and adjacent to the county – held a joint meeting with the Oxfordshire Community-Owned Pubs Network to explore ways of working together. Possible areas of collaboration include pubs banding together to purchase local beers, commissioning dedicated brews as established already with Little Oxbrew, and pairing of pubs with brewers, including for Meet the Brewer beer and food pairing sessions.

The alliance is now planning Oxford Beer Week from 8-17 May 2020, which includes the Big Oxford Beer Bash at TOAD distillery, Headington on 16 May. Tickets are already on sale for this at www.oxfordbrewers.org/event/big-event/, costing £10 including commemorative glass.

Vale Brewery/Aylesbury Brewhouse

Special Vale ales for the festive season include Christmas Star (3.6% Dark Copper), Five Gold Rings (4.2% Golden) and Good King (5% Mahogany). Beers for winter are Apollo (4.1% Golden), packed with floral hop and biscuity malt flavours; and Best Buy (4.3% Light Copper), a premium ale style with intense roast malt flavours and rich biscuit aroma, with hints of honey on the nose.

White Horse

Stable Genius was voted runner-up at Oxford Beer and Cider Festival. New seasonal beers for December and January are Panto Horse (4% pale gold with a hint of spice) and Arion, a

single hop beer with Styrian Cardinal at 3.5%. Five new seasonal beers are planned for 2020 plus the return of favourites such as Show Pony and Colt.

Luna beer for January is Moon Dog, a 4.2%, golden ale with Archer Huel Melon and Olicana. A new bottled beer is also planned for January, the name to be confirmed.

Wychwood

New branding for Hobgoblin has been introduced for the first time since its launch in 1983. The original Hobgoblin is now branded as Ruby, to distinguish it from the more recently introduced Gold. Assistant brand manager Hannah Scott says: "I can confirm 100% that the beers remain the same. Our original Hobgoblin has actually always been called Ruby but this rebrand does indeed make this a little clearer than before."

Head brewer Jon Tillson and senior brewer Dave Carter have been busy developing new beers for 2020, and in the meantime seasonal beers such as Brakspear Oh Bee Joyful and Wychwood Bah Humbug

are available. In December the Wychwood Brewery Tap Bar celebrated its first anniversary.

XT

New team member Rob Weston joined in September, with a fine pedigree in brewing having previously worked at Rebellion and Skinners breweries. This comes as two of the brew team at XT are in the early stages of starting up a brand new brewery in Edinburgh. XT has also made a significant new appointment as head brewer starting in January, someone with considerable experience having worked in some of the biggest names in the industry. More will be revealed in the next edition.

For the festive season, the ever popular XT-25 Xmas Ale at 4.7% returns – a rich amber winter ale, slow brewed for a deeper, smoother flavour. A brace of Animal festive ales in dark and light, Yin and Yang of Rook and Dove, are also available. Rook is a 4.6% full bodied black oat stout, carefully brewed to match and offset against the Dove which is a very pale, triple hopped blonde ale. Snow Kitty is a new seasonal bottled ale, a stronger,

winter version of the ever popular pub puss, Hop Kitty. Alongside the festive beers the Animal range will be joined by the little Axolotl, a rye beer balanced with a whole load of New World hops.

Oxford Brewers Group

Not to be confused with the Oxford Brewers Alliance, this home brewing group continues to hold competitions although organiser Michaël Cadilhac has moved to Chicago, with Ed Williamson taking over. The first event run by Ed was a free style sour beer competition with yeast and bugs of all descriptions present within 15 entries.

Winner was Steve Backer with his accurate representation of a Flanders Red Ale. Steve kettle-soured his wort, meaning the bugs that created the acidity and thus sourness were added before the boil and before any anti-bacterial hops were present. He just added yogurt, and aptly named his beer "Duchesse de Boulanger", a clever play on words with his name and the famous Flanders Red Ale: Duchesse de Bourgogne. To access his recipe visit <https://community.grainfather.com/recipes/310318>

To join the Oxford Brewers Group visit www.oxfordbrewers.com and sign up to the newsletter for information on meeting and competitions.

BIG OXFORD BEER BASH
16 MAY 2020
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www.oxbrewmicropub.co.uk or - simon@oxbrew.co.uk

And you can find us in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide2020



OXBREW WITNEY - 8 LANGDALE COURT, OX28 6FG

OPENING TIMES : Sun Mon 12 - 8 Tues 12 - 9.30 Weds Thurs 12 - 10 Fri Sat 12 - 11