

Issue 124
Autumn 2024

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1974-2024



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for
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the Oxford Drinker

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Oxford Beer Festival, 10-12 Oct

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Cover: The 2024 Oxford Beer and Cider Festival will be held at Oxford Town Hall from Thursday 10 to Saturday 12 October. Report on page 18. Online booking for Thursday and Friday only will be available – see back cover of this issue.

the *Oxford Drinker* is the newsletter of the Oxford Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale.

4,000 copies are distributed free of charge to pubs across the branch's area, including Oxford, Abingdon, Witney, Eynsham, Kidlington, Bampton and Wheatley 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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Welcome

...to a bright outlook for the Oxford Beer Festival and the local pub and brewing scene

IT WON'T HAVE escaped your notice (we hope) that the 25th Oxford Beer and Cider Festival is happening from 10-12 October. This year it's rather different as we join forces with independent brewers group SIBA meaning more beers than usual, with some craft keg as well as our mainstream cask ale offer.

Whether you're reading this here, during or after the festival, it's worth reflecting on some mainly positive developments for local pubs and breweries despite the gloomy headlines that seem to be everywhere. Yes, we have lost some breweries (Wychwood, last year, being the big one) but most of the independents are still going strong, and while Wriggly Monkey also disappeared, a new brewery near Bicester, Twisted Tree, is now putting down roots.

It's the same with pubs. Despite Covid and the cost-of-living crisis, very few pubs in this area have closed for good and this issue brings news of several re-openings after (mainly) short periods of closure. There could be more good news soon as Morgan Pub Collective, the London-based independent that has taken over the Grapes (what a success!) and the Gardener's Arms in North Parade Avenue, is known to be interested in acquiring a third Oxford pub. Keep an eye on the *Oxford Drinker* website for updates.

See page 18 for more on the festival, and we hope you will also enjoy our regular



contributors Paul Silcock (Gardener's Arms, Plantation Road), Steven Lyne (Royal Blenheim), Graham Shelton (Red Lion, Northmoor) and our own Pete Flynn and Tony Goulding. They make up a very fine stable of thoroughbreds – take them for a canter!

Talking of things that can't escape your notice, what about Jeremy Clarkson's new pub the Farmer's Dog, near Burford, the former Windmill restaurant? Not being a fan of celebrity culture I haven't visited, and while his own Hawkstone Lager could be mighty fine, we'll have to see if cask ale is part of the offer.

The inevitable TV series *Clarkson's Pub* will focus national attention on our pubs, but I wonder how useful it will be in bringing to public attention the issues facing pubs generally. I suspect his pub will be mainly for celebrity fans, as if it ever was a pub rather than a restaurant, that was very long ago and very few people live in the immediate area. We shall see.

As ever, your news and views are welcome for future editions of the magazine and our frequently updated website – just use the contact details on this page. See you at the Town Hall!

DAVE RICHARDSON



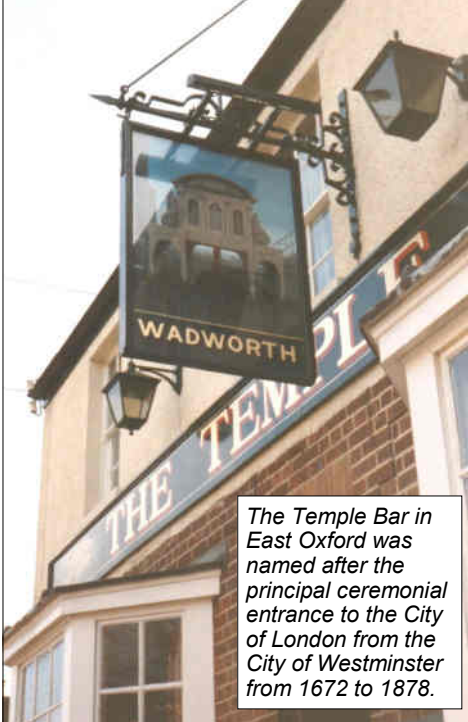
Past pubs revisited

SIX MONTHS SINCE

becoming chair of Oxford CAMRA and so far it's been fun. The branch social stuff, lots of chances to get to know people better, but best of all I've been visiting pubs other than my "usual suspects".

In the early 1990s, I lived in East Oxford and there are a few pubs there I hadn't been to since. Sadly, my old favourite the **Temple Bar** (right) is gone, but there was lots of great news. The **Chester Arms**, once best avoided, is now a great place for beer and food. Another pub I used to avoid is now called the **Library**. Old habits and all that, but I had spurned it for decades. Turns out it has good cask, some lovely keg from the likes of BMAN (if you don't know BMAN you should check them out) and much to my surprise, a great little courtyard garden. I could easily have spent the next two decades walking past this great little pub.

The **Fir Tree** retains its old pub charm without feeling old



The Temple Bar in East Oxford was named after the principal ceremonial entrance to the City of London from the City of Westminster from 1672 to 1878.

and I was so pleased it has managed to evolve without changing too much. My star of Oxford east is probably the **Star** (sorry for the poor pub pun). It normally has nice options on both cask and keg, a pleasant large space inside and a great garden.

As well as old East Oxford haunts, I've started to get to some of the many village pubs that had seemed too out of the way to visit. It's been a treat and I hope to visit a lot more of these hidden gems.

Chair's Chatter

Two shout-outs to food-led places that serve good beer -- the **Mole Inn**, Toot Baldon (where I tried the Hooky) and, nearby, the **Seven Stars on the Green**, Marsh Baldon (Timothy Taylor Landlord, both in excellent condition). As well as these regulars, they both offer a rotating choice of local beer from the likes of Oxford, XT and Loose Cannon.

Both source many of their ingredients locally and the menus are evolving, so best to check on their websites. Both are a tier above standard pub grub menus, with the **Seven Stars** having an Asian influence on many of its items. They are both the kind of gastro pubs that make me want to eat out more often.

My takeaway from my first six months is explore more, as there are some great pubs to discover or re-discover.

Over Christmas/New Year, we'll be looking at pubs to go in the 2026 *Good Beer Guide*. All the pubs above would be suitable candidates but lots of our excellent pubs aren't considered because fewer than five CAMRA members have done beer scores for them. Please, it takes only a minute to score beer in the pubs you visit. It's super easy at WhatPub.com or on the *Good Beer Guide* app. Many thanks.

JOHN WINNEY

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Pub, Brewery and Festival News

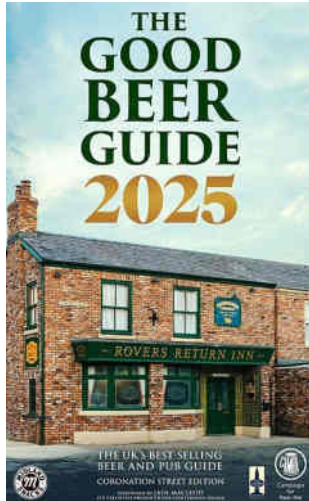
For regular updates, visit www.oxforddrinker.camra.org.uk

CAMRA's *Good Beer Guide* – the UK's best-selling beer and pub guide which launches on 26 September – is celebrating its 52nd edition with two versions featuring two of the UK's favourite if fictitious locals: *Coronation Street's* Rovers Return Inn, and *Emmerdale's* Woolpack.

CAMRA says the Rovers Return and Woolpack represent the familiarity and community spirit of pubs across the UK. This edition pays tribute to the communities that are beamed into homes, providing entertainment and companionship to those that may not have a pub of their own.

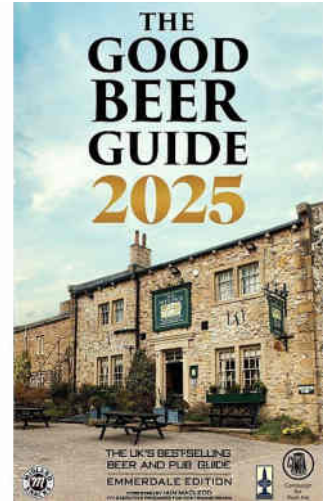
Research commissioned by CAMRA found people who have a local pub rate themselves as significantly happier because of it, and have more close friends, and the pubs on television reflect this feeling. Some of *Coronation Street's* and *Emmerdale's* most touching and memorable moments have taken place in their re-

Good Beer Guide on The Street



spective pubs.

Check out the Oxford Drinker Online on launch date



to see which pubs in and around Oxford are new to the guide for 2025.

Lamb and Flag, Oxford

New landlord at the Lamb and Flag is David Molina (right), originally from Spain, who has lived and worked in the UK for 11 years, writes *Steve Thompson*. He has extensive food and beverage experience, including the Anchor in Jericho, the Crown in Woodstock, the Duke of Cambridge in Little Clarendon Street and the Bull in Charlbury.

Popular landlords Dylan and Alice Dudbridge-Hay had run the pub since it re-opened in October 2022 on behalf of the Community-Owned group known as the Inklings, who



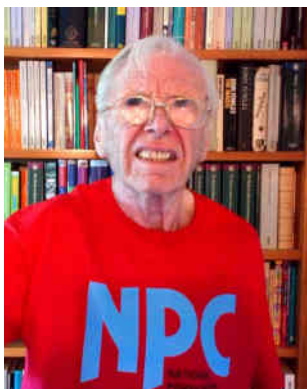
lease it from St John's College. Apparently, Dylan and Alice were bound for a new opportunity in Cornwall, but

the new landlord is not planning any major changes, except perhaps to encourage more custom in the mornings.

John Mackie, RIP

A familiar figure in Oxford CAMRA circles until a few years ago, John Mackie died on 27 June aged 85. Mobility problems meant he had been housebound for the last few years, but had a steady stream of visitors at his flat overlooking Florence Park and remained an active commentator on Facebook until recently.

Scotsman John was a civil servant for HM Customs & Excise, working in various parts of the country on VAT issues which brought him into contact with a wide range of people. When he moved to



Oxford in the 1980s he became a member of CAMRA here and was often seen at social events and branch meetings, with an eye for detail meaning he could audit branch accounts.

He was particularly keen on campaigning issues, encouraging the branch to reward pubs, breweries and individuals who had done

something special. He was involved with CAMRA's Campaigner of the Year award nationally and took his beer tasting seriously, often to be seen making notes as he went around.

A committed Socialist, John's other great interest in later life was the Oxfordshire Branch of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), campaigning on issues affecting retired people nationally and locally.

Iain Blacklaw, formerly of Oxford CAMRA, said: "I moved to Oxford in 1985 and joined the local CAMRA branch where I met John. I had known him for almost 40 years. He was a very nice man and it was always a pleasure to meet him, and have a pint or two and a chat. He will be sorely missed."

For more about John, see the Oxford Drinker Online.

Twisted Tree Brewery

This new micro-brewery, situated on a private estate near Bicester and not open to the public, will make its debut at the Oxford Beer Festival in October. It has already produced canned and bottled beers including an IPA and an espresso stout, but will bring cask ales to the festival and is committed to producing them on a regular basis.

Director Mark Hayes-Kemp, who runs the brewery with Peter Kemp, said: "Cask beer will be a regular feature at our brewery with plans for a new beer each month in the new year. We're committed to keeping a steady flow of cask ales available, as we believe in the tradition and craft of cask brewing. We'll be producing a variety of styles, from IPAs to stouts, and we're always experimenting with new recipes to keep things



interesting including a low ABV beer to be realised very soon which packs a serious punch of flavour."

Mason's Arms, Oxford

The annual Headington Beer Festival, planned here for 6-8 September with over 50 ales, was called off in early August and will now happen at another time of year in 2025, according to a Facebook post by landlord

Chris Meeson. He did not go into detail about why he had cancelled this very successful annual event, but there were problems last year with the temperature of the beers served which may have prompted a rethink.

Fleece and Flagon, Witney

The former Chequers and Chequers Smokehouse in Witney has been bought by pub company Craft Union, part of Stonegate, and renamed the Fleece and Flagon to commemorate Witney's blanket making industry. Three real ale pumps for Carlsberg-sourced beers were available in the opening week in July – Hobgoblin Gold, Hobgoblin IPA and Wainwright, costing around £3.35 a pint which is low by local standards. This is Craft Union's 600th pub.

Pub, Brewery and Festival News

White House/ Slow and Steady, Oxford

The former White House pub (right) in Abingdon Road was due to re-open on 6 September with the new name Slow and Steady, after Tap Social Movement pulled out after four years and handed over to another independent Oxford-based operator, Dodo Pub Co.

But the change of name has proved controversial, with CAMRA members calling for a rethink after the *Oxford Mail* ran a poll of over 500 readers which found that 62% disapproved of the new name. As the pub was also called the Folly Bridge Inn for a while, this or simply the Folly have been put forward as alternatives.

Dodo says it will rename the pub the Slow and Steady as its architect was Henry Hare, who also designed the Town Hall. It becomes Dodo's fourth pub in Oxford and ninth overall, and all have been renamed. See feature on page 20 looking at pubs that have been renamed in Oxford.

Dodo's first pub was the Rusty Bicycle (formerly the Eagle Tavern) in Magdalen Road, East Oxford in 2009, followed by the Rickety Press (formerly the Radcliffe Arms) in Jericho in 2011. Both these

Fox Inn, Boars Hill

This country pub just outside Oxford re-opened in June, with a former manager at the Chequers in Witney now in charge. Only two real ale pumps were in use on a recent visit, dispensing Timothy Taylor Landlord and Wadworth 6X. The pub re-



pubs are owned by and tied to Swindon brewer Arkell's, but the Slow and Steady is free of tie, like the Up in Arms (formerly the Somerset) in Marston Road, which re-opened in 2019 after a long period of closure.

Tap Social has expanded rapidly since its foundation in 2016 on the Curtis Industrial Estate in Botley, operating two breweries, two bars and a bakery. But taking on a traditional pub formerly run by Wadworth, when Covid restrictions were still affecting trading, was clearly a major challenge.

For more on this, see the Oxford Drinker Online.

mained closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, but on other days is serving a varied menu including Brets Burgers, once of Cowley Road. Previous landlord Tommy Pritchard, who tragically died in a car crash on Christmas Day, had built up the pub into a *Good Beer Guide* contender.

QUICK ONES

🍺 The **Berkshire** in Oxford's Abingdon Road re-opened in June, but it continues to have no real ale as for the last couple of years and it would have to re-install hand pumps if there was a change of policy. In the last few years, it has had various identities including the Crooked Pot, Hubble & Home and simply Home, but reverted to Berkshire under the previous operators.

🍺 The **White Horse, Stonesfield**, re-opened on 14 June as Oxfordshire's latest Community-Owned pub. Villagers raised more than £450,000 to save the pub near Woodstock, and were recognised by CAMRA nationally as runner-up in its prestigious Pub Saving Award 2023.

🍺 The tenancy of the **White House, Bladon**, is up for renewal by the end of November, and a new pair of hands is required to write the next chapter of this Community-Owned pub. The current tenancy with L&B Hospitality was due to expire in June 2025 but the tenants decided to give early notice of termination.

🍺 The long-closed **Black Horse, Gozzards Ford**, in a small village near Abingdon re-opened on 13 June as an independent operation, serving three Loose Cannon real ales and an extensive grill-based menu. The pub was closed for about five years, and it was thought there was little chance of it re-opening, but last year owner Greene King said it was trying to find new tenants. It has been let to an independent operator and is being managed by Dennis Yuri and Manol Mitre.



THE GRAPES

— OXFORD —



A Deal A Day

Monday - Burger Monday

Tuesday - Rib Tuesday

Wednesday - Wine
Wednesday

Thursday - Steak
Thursday

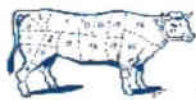
Friday - Tapas Friday

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Bell at Aldworth is regional Pub of the Year

Dave Richardson
helps with scoring
CAMRA's South
Central champion pub

IT'S BECOMING a bit of a habit for the **Bell Inn** at Aldworth, a small village in Berkshire just a few miles off the A34, overlooked by the Ridgeway. It was voted CAMRA's National Pub of the Year (POTY) in 1990 and again in 2019, and now it's in with a chance again as one of 17 pubs around the UK vying for that title in 2024.

We reported in the Summer 2024 issue about the Oxfordshire POTY, when the **Cross Keys** at Wallingford was up against the **Royal Blenheim** in Oxford, **White Horse** in Banbury and **King's Arms** in Wantage. The **Cross Keys** was the winner, but was now up against the **Bell** and the Buckinghamshire winner, the **King's Arms** in Tring.

Stepping inside the **Bell** is like stepping back in time – not to a quaint re-invention of what someone thinks a traditional pub looked like, but to the real thing. It's a wonder that it's survived and thrived in a small village where most visitors drive, when the only food it serves is sandwiches (£4.60), soups and puddings and it closes at 8pm each night. The pub has been run by many generations of the same family, so let's hope that continues. It is very popular with walkers along the Ridgeway, but do check the opening hours.



The Bell Inn at Aldworth, Berkshire.



Landlord Hugh Macaulay (behind hatch) welcomes Oxford CAMRA members, from left, Simon Scamp, Steve Lawrence, Tony Goulding and Dave Richardson.



Buckinghamshire champion the King's Arms at Tring.

Beer is the big thing, and atmosphere. And what beer! The **Bell** brews its own, with Aldworth Brewing operating from a shed in the garden where James Macaulay, son of landlord Hugh, is head brewer. Its signature brew is Five Giants, with the pump clip having caricatures of the five friends who created it. Naturally this 4% Best Bitter slipped down wonderfully well.

The brewery is tiny and you may not find any of its beers available, but four other beers, all local, were on offer: Arkell's BBB, Amwell Springs'

Chairman Dave, Indigenous Brewery's Baldrick, and Rebellion's Roasted Nuts, plus a couple of real ciders. This superb range of different styles of beer is served from a hatch, not a bar. Many awards line the nooks, crannies and walls, not just from CAMRA. The two antique rooms give it a place on CAMRA's list of historic pub interiors, so do make time to look around when you visit. But if you're going to the Gents then hope it's not raining, as the urinals are partly open to the sky!

So, how do you match

that? The short answer is that you don't, as the **Bell** was the clear winner among the three regional pubs, although the organisers had to use a tie-breaker to rate the **Cross Keys** as runner-up and the **King's Arms** as third.

For a description of the **Cross Keys** see the Summer edition or the *Oxford Drinker* website, but we made the short drive to Wallingford next before heading for Tring. Tring is actually in Hertfordshire, although the **King's Arms** was Buckinghamshire champion (blame CAMRA's branch boundaries, a sore point for some members).

I found this to be a very attractive pub serving wonderfully well-kept beer, like the other two, but without that *Wow!* factor. Once you've got used to its "striking fuchsia pink" colour scheme, as the Whatpub database puts it, you find a very convivial back street local dating from 1830.

Four of the five hand pumps were in use, and it was no surprise to find that three of the real ales were from Tring Brewery – my favourite Side Pocket for a Toad (3.6% golden), Blockbuster (3.7% pale, the monthly special) and Moongazing (4.2% red-amber). Again, this was a good range – complemented by Wantsum Brewery's Imperium (4%). A sandwich menu (from £12.50) is served.

The **King's Arms** is quite small, but has a separate large sports bar called the Coach House which was showing the Euros (it was early July) and has no fewer than three dartboards – proof it is a "proper pub".

Let's see now how the **Bell Inn** fares in the national contest. Fingers crossed!



IT'S ALL ABOUT connections and so it was with the evolution of Oxford Brewery, formerly known as Shotover. It was during 2009 when former owners Pip and Ed Murray, and good friends of the current owners Moira and Alastair Ross, decided to sell the business. Over a pint or two at their favourite pub the Three Kings in Twickenham, the four shook hands on the deal and so Oxford Brewery had new owners.

This remarkable brewery is set inside some farm buildings in the little village of Horspath, just to the east of the BMW plant at Cowley. This is where I met the charming owners who have a real passion for all they do, and they should be rightly proud of their achievements.

Alastair had hitherto embarked upon a career as an architect and had his own practice, and although this has subsequently closed, he still likes “to keep his hand in” by providing planning advice. These days, he mostly enjoys getting out and about delivering beer while Moira runs the office. Daughter Caitlin, until she married, was involved with brewing, sales and accounting.

Moira recalls: “Along came Covid. That changed everything and made us decide what we wanted to do for the future.” When the cost of utilities rises more than three times in a short space of time, it really focuses the mind. It was about this time that a decision was made to rebrand the business. W.P.A. Penfold Ltd was appointed to oversee the exercise, a company involved in transforming the fortunes of Harveys and Theakston, both of which will be known to beer drinkers.

Beer Heroes

Birth of the cool brand

Pete Flynn continues his series with a profile of Oxford Brewery



The taproom in Horspath is well kitted out with chairs and tables, and the full range of core beers is available.

Moira remarks: “Even people living in Oxford were not familiar with the name Shotover. It is vital that you have a distinctive identity, and the name Oxford Brewery gave us that uniqueness. We needed to stand out in a crowded market and it’s about where you are.”

So successful was the rebranding that they won a gold award – Design Effectiveness Awards 2022. “This is a global award, and you are up against the likes of Diageo

and Cadbury, so we are delighted with our achievements,” Moira told me proudly. “I learnt that the exercise encompasses all of the advertising and communication side of the business, and by all accounts Penfold really understands the market and are terribly nice people.”

The distinctive names of the individual beers are testament to the ascendancy of the marketing appeal, with such names as Prospect, Trinity, Scholar and Porter. For a full



These days, Alastair Ross mostly enjoys getting out and about delivering beer while Moira runs the office.

list of beers, visit their website www.oxfordbrewery.co.uk.

Oxford Brewery also provides beers in bottles with nearby Hitchcox Cider undertaking this process. The very popular Hoptric is sold in cans and, interestingly, all of the beers have a wonderful story behind each name which Moira reminded me is part of the provenance and positioning of their products. All of their flagship beers are recipes from the previous owners and their eight-barrel plant brews two or

three times a week.

The summer beer Hoptric, a refreshing pale ale, has also won an award for the can design and these products are known as “crushes”.

While there was a huge increase in off-sales during Covid, this year has seen a big increase in brewing sales with ordering and delivering carried out the same day. Beer from Oxford Brewery is very popular locally, and tellingly this is down to consistency and the high volume of

repeat orders, Moira explains.

The Lamb and Flag in St Giles, Oxford is far and away the biggest seller of its cask beer, and winter appears to be the best time for increased sales. Other outlets in Oxford include the Rose and Crown, Victoria, Jolly Farmers, Jolly Postboys, Angel and Greyhound, King’s Arms, Harcourt Arms, Gardener’s Arms (Plantation Road), Bear, Butcher’s Arms, White Rabbit, Isis Farmhouse, Teardrop, as well as the King’s Arms, Kidlington, and the Abingdon Arms, Beckley.

Another useful outlet is Oak Taverns, a small wet-let pubco favouring small brewers. An earlier edition of the *Oxford Drinker* featured Oak Taverns (or search the *Oxford Drinker* online) and the pubs it operates in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

Being associated with the heritage of Oxford, Christ Church College asked Oxford Brewery to produce a white label beer to carry its branding. This is another way to obtain global appeal and how rebranding can impact on your future success, Moira explained.

With a small business, it is essential to maximise opportunities for growth at every level. Oxford Brewery is no exception, with a team of only seven, so it’s all hands on deck. Head brewer Angus Wallbank has been with the brewery for seven years and with production nearing capacity, at some point the brewing tanks will require upgrading which will mean a huge investment just to maintain capacity. Sales increases alone are not the answer, so the team have built a taproom in Horspath which has a charming appeal.

The room is well kitted out with chairs and tables mostly bought via eBay, and the full range of core beers is available. Moira recalls: "When we opened for the first time it was April 2021 and the first day of the ending of Covid. We opened at noon and our loyal customers had been queuing since 11am to sample our beer."

The taproom is open on Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 4-11pm and serves tasty pizzas, while the brewery shop is open every day except Sunday from 9am.

Another success story for the brewery is local community support and engagement. Quiz and music nights are a popular feature and offer an opportunity for musicians from all genres to entertain customers in a lively environment. Full details can be found on

the website.

Moira and Alastair are rightly proud of their achievements and recognise that it remains a battle to maintain sales and, while their sales are up, their profits remain flat. As a result of the pandemic investment was curtailed, yet they have only pushed through two price increases since Covid.

I really enjoyed my visit to Oxford Brewery, and I arranged for Moira to open up the taproom a little earlier on a Saturday in August so Oxford CAMRA could pay a long-awaited visit. My hosts generously gave me a bottle of Headless Laud, a cellar-aged 7.1% IPA, and I decided to share this beer of distinction with a friend as it was too good to keep to myself.



Headless Laud, a cellar-aged 7.1% IPA.

Oxford CAMRA City Pub of the Year 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014, 2016 and 2019



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WE ARE FAST approaching an exciting time for some young people in Oxford as they start their academic endeavours here. A brand-new city to explore and integrate into!

However, one of the first hurdles anyone who moves here is where to go at the end of the day. Moving into a new place is stressful enough, but finding out where to unwind is always a daunting task.

Until a few years ago, one of the first places anyone would recommend was one of our fine drinking establishments, the humble British pub. With a plethora to choose from in Oxford, it seems an obvious starting place. However, as each generation arrives, we see a shift in behaviour and consumer trends.

Gen Z seems to be labelled the “sober curious” generation, with statistics showing they drink less than previous ones. Plenty of journalists see this as a main reason the Classic British Pub is dying. I beg to differ.

Let’s start with the obvious comment on Gen Z, that they drink less than previous generations. A consensus of reports worldwide shows that Gen Z pub goers drink about 20% less alcohol than Millennials, who in turn drink less than older generations.

At first glance, this seems a worrying statistic. It tends to be the first comment by your average older pub goer on his younger colleagues as they enter the bar. They see this reduction in alcohol consumption as a dreadful thing for the future of pubs. In their view, the younger generation consume less alcohol, which means the pub takes less money and leads more pubs to close for good.

I wish condensing the

On the Front Lyne

Pub goers: The next generation

Gen Z drinks less alcohol, but **Steven Lyne** of Oxford’s Royal Blenheim says it’s not all doom and gloom for pubs



Photo CAMRA

issues pubs face into such a short statement would help people understand the problems we face in the industry. If younger people are drinking less alcohol, why do they still pop into the local? Why must pubs try to better understand younger people’s drinking

habits, and the definition of a “night out”?

Both Millennials and Gen Z are mindful of their alcohol consumption thanks to research on the dangers of over-consumption, a subject that has only really come to light over the past decade. In-



creased awareness of the dangerous effects of alcohol abuse has led to this lifestyle trend. And we can see it happening across other generations too.

The after-work drinks time slot, which spans generations, has seen a dip in alcohol consumption in the past five years as more adopt “low and no” alcohol alternatives. We can spot a few key points among all this information, but we should try not to focus on the negative figures, and instead promote the positive sides of these trends, which won’t go away any time soon. I feel the younger generation is onto something with its “new” approach to going to the pub. Younger customers prioritise experience-led socialising over alcohol-focused activities.

While younger people don’t drink as they used to, they still visit pubs every week, for various reasons that we as an industry have gotten

used to. At the end of the day, people visit pubs not just for the beer, but for social interactions and connections. It is no longer alcohol that is the main leader of these social interactions, but genuinely using the social space in order to engage each other.

Also, much as the older generation believes the young have gone down the teetotal route, it is truly not the case. The young are just far more conscious of what they consume, which has led to another trend across the industry – the shift towards quality over quantity.

This is something I have mentioned in my articles on the future of pubs, and their survival in the “new normal”. Gone are the days of pubs just opening their front door and cracking on. Some genuine thought and effort is needed to ensure that pubs continue to prosper. As we see these trends converge, in order for pubs to do well, they

will need to provide high quality products, including those with low and no alcohol content.

Pubs will also need to do their best at what they are meant to be good at – socialising! The pubs now in decline are the ones that don’t adapt to change quickly enough. They are left behind as the younger generation walks through their doors and feels there is something missing but can’t quite put their finger on it.

These trends will allow the pubs that adapt well to become the new “British Pub” as they provide better products for us to enjoy and an atmosphere that allows people to socialise with each other. The pubs that get this right will see no decline in alcohol consumption as more people will visit every week. And with more attention paid to quality products, surely this is something to look forward to.



Oxford Beer and Cider Festival celebrates 25 years

THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL at Oxford Town Hall from 10-12 October is special in more ways than one. Not only is it the 25th year it has been held at the Town Hall, but a new collaboration with independent breweries will see craft keg beer available in addition to 140 cask ales, and 20 cask ciders and perries.

The festival was first held at the Town Hall in 1998, but as 2020 and 2021 were lost to the Covid pandemic, this year marks the Silver Jubilee. This is reflected on the glass design, with all being pint glasses this year marked for half and third pints for those wanting a smaller measure.

Craft keg – high-quality beers served cold using carbon dioxide – has never been served at an Oxford CAMRA festival before. Nor are there any plans to offer keg beers in future, but this year it's different as Oxford CAMRA has teamed up with SIBA (the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates) to stage its Midlands regional competition.

SIBA is the voice of independent brewers, who are becoming increasingly important for all drinkers of quality, non-mass-produced beer. It gives awards in a wide range of categories for both cask or real ale, and keg. The competition will be staged on the first day, with judges by invitation only, but all the cask ales and some of the keg beers will be available on other days until they run out.

This also means that all



Above, volunteers in 2023, from left, John Winney, Mark Geeson and Paul Anderson. Right, SIBA Midlands regional director Anneli Baxter. (Photo SIBA)

the beers this year will be from the Midlands, a large area stretching from Oxfordshire to Derbyshire and from Shropshire to Northamptonshire. SIBA members will provide 130 real ales, but another 10 from the local area will be sourced from non-SIBA members Barn Owl, Church Han-





The Oxford Beer Festival at the Town Hall in 2023 attracted many visitors.

brewery, Craftsman, Tap Social and new brewery Twisted Tree, from near Bicester.

Grahame Allen has organised the festival for Oxford CAMRA since it started at the Town Hall so is very proud of reaching this milestone.

"This is an achievement and I'm very pleased, but it has only been possible because of the loyal support of hundreds of volunteers, some of whom have been coming since the very start," he said. "We are pleased to be joining SIBA this year as it's a very important organisation."

Anneli Baxter, general manager of Abingdon's Loose Cannon brewery and a Midlands regional director of SIBA, said there was growing awareness among the public

of the importance of supporting independent brewers.

"Incorporating our own competition into CAMRA events helps with awareness, and on the Thursday representatives from all the brewers will be at the Town Hall to chat to drinkers, decked out in their brewery's T-shirts. The average drinker probably isn't aware of all the different styles of beer in each category, so if anyone says, 'I don't drink beer', we say, 'You've just not found the right one.'

"SIBA members are currently experiencing a 14% increase in demand for cask ale, whereas the global and national brands are moving away from it as it doesn't fit their business profile.

"Independent brewers are

filling that void. Since Covid many more people are trying to support local producers including breweries, who have a more sustainable model."



DAVE RICHARDSON

The Oxford Beer and Cider Festival is at Oxford Town Hall from 3-11pm on Thursday 10 October, 11am-11pm on Friday 11 October and 12-9pm on Saturday 12 October. Entry will cost £18 (CAMRA members £15) including non-returnable glass and £10 of tokens. Online booking for Thursday and Friday only will be available – see back cover of this issue.

Volunteers are still needed: contact@oxford.camra.org.uk

What's in a name?

Dave Richardson delves into namings and renamings of Oxford pubs



THE FURORE THAT greeted Dodo Pub Co's decision to rename the **White House** the **Slow and Steady** – see news pages – got me thinking about the different names many of our pubs have enjoyed, or otherwise. Very often, the new names are either banal or just silly, whereas the old names usually have a link with history that many people feel is worth preserving.

And indeed, Oxford has many examples. It is of course usually open to the operator to call the pub whatever it wishes, and you can't argue too much with that if they feel it would attract customers in these diffi-

cult times. But how many people are put off, on the assumption (possibly mistaken) that the renamed pub would be full of... well, banal or silly people? But at least Oxford hasn't suffered the fate of a pub in Liverpool which was renamed into something vulgar and/or offensive – more of this later.

Probably the most re-named pub in Oxford currently rejoices in the moniker **Cow and Creek**, which for me conjures up images of bovines wading into water and possibly leaving behind traces of their presence. Perhaps that's why I haven't been in, but then again I didn't go in when

The White House, now re-named the Slow and Steady. (Photo Tap Social)

it was called **Que Pasa?** or the **Bell and Compass**, both identities it has had in the last 20 years. A pub first occupied the site in 1764 as the **Blue Anchor**, later becoming the **Anchor**, purchased by Oxford brewery Morrells in 1779 and being renamed the **Westgate** in 1977. In 1997, it became the **O.X. ONE**. I make that seven identities, five of them in less than 50 years.

Nautical themes seem popular in Oxford and although we're far from the sea,



The Cow and Creek was previously called the Westgate.



we do at least have a river. But does that excuse another much renamed pub taking on the name **Lighthouse** a few years ago? According to Marston's (which also owns the **Cow and Creek**), it has a "Steampunk" interior. Its previous identities have included the **Duke's Cut** (named after a branch of the Oxford Canal that finishes nearby), **Rosie O'Grady's** (an Irish-themed pub) and, until 1995, the **Queen's Arms**.

In the 1980s and 1990s, over 40 pubs in the UK were owned by Firkin Brewery, and many of these were brew pubs which were renamed the

(Something) and Firkin – these included the **Red Lion** in Gloucester Green (**Fuggle and Firkin**), and before that **Bakery and Brewhouse**), what is now the **City Arms (Philosopher and Firkin)** and the **Jericho Tavern (Philanderer and Firkin)**. Firkin had disappeared as a brewery and pub chain by 1999, but some of the names lasted much longer. Some Firkin pubs eventually became part of the Mitchells & Butlers (M&B) pub company, once a brewery, which operates under various brands including Nicholson's, Ember Inns and faux Irish chain O'Neill's.

Probably the most banal and unimaginative renaming in Oxford – or anywhere? – befell the **Cape of Good Hope**, on The Plain, which at one point became **The Pub Oxford**. Fortunately this didn't last long, but it then became **It's a Scream!**, with a sign showing Edward Munch's famous painting *The Scream*, as part of a chain of student-oriented pubs. It was certainly a striking sign, attracting the "right" audience perhaps, but

reverted to the **Cape of Good Hope** before long.

Three pubs were operated by Wychwood brewery when it was independent, the brewery being closed last year by Carlsberg Marston's, and these were named after Wychwood's stand-out beer, **Hobgoblin**. These were what's now the **Cowley Retreat**, previously the **Ampney Cottage**, and what is now **St Aldate's Tavern**. A pub had stood on the St Aldate's site since 1380, becoming the **New Inn** in 1716. That name endured until 1965 when it was renamed the **Bulldog**, not after a breed of canine but after the bowler-hatted university officials known as bulldogs.

After **Hobgoblin** it became **St Aldate's Tavern**, but now it becomes even more confusing as the pub first known as **St Aldate's Tavern** was further down near the road by the law courts. The Morlands Artist plaque still adorns the wall of this building, at 61 St Aldate's, which is part of an educational establishment. But even this name

was relatively new – from 1866 until the 1990s it was known as the **Apollo**, becoming a Mexican restaurant before closure.

Other renamings in Oxford are almost too numerous to mention, but include (original names in brackets) the **White Rabbit** (**Gloucester Arms**), **Oxford Retreat** (**Nag's Head**, **Antiquity Hall**), **OXO Bar** (**Welsh Pony**), **Angel and Greyhound** (**Burton Ale Stores**, **Oranges and Lemons**, **Parker's**), **James Street Tavern** (**Red, White and Blue**), **Big Society** (**Elm Tree**), the **Library** (**Brickworks**, **Rats Wine Bar**), **Rusty Bicycle** (**Eagle Tavern**), **Up in Arms** (**Somerset**), **Jude the Obscure** (**Prince of Wales**), **Rickety Press** (**Radcliffe Arms**), **Porterhouse** (**Kite Inn**), the **Punter** (**Waterman's**) and the **Wolvercote** (**Red Lion**, **Jacob's Inn**).

Others to have reverted to their original names include the **Castle** (**Paradise House**, **Culture Culture**, **Baby Love**), and the **Berkshire** (**Crooked Pot**, **Hubble and Home**, **Home**). Will more follow?

The **Slug and Lettuce**, a new-build bar at Oxford Castle, is part of the UK's largest pub group, Stonegate, and could be considered the most successful of the "silly" names. The **Rat and Parrot** chain is no more (although I did spot the **Apple and Parrot** in Torquay recently), but did you know that the **Three Goats Heads**, a Sam Smith's pub in central Oxford, is not in the "silly" category? Apparently, this is the sign of the Shoe Makers Guild, and a shoe maker may have once stood there.

But to return to the **White**



The Pub Oxford (right) has reverted to the Cape of Good Hope (above).

House/Slow and Steady, Dodo can point to three apparently successful renamings as with the **Rusty Bicycle**, **Rickety Press** and **Up in Arms** mentioned above. After a while, do people really care what a pub is named after?

Diehards may protest, but many people don't have a sense of history which so many pub names allude to.

J.D. Wetherspoon has named most of its 800 pubs after something historically significant to their location, and that is true of the three in Oxford – with the **Four Candles**, for example, recalling a sketch by comedian Ronnie Barker who went to school nearby. But some Wetherspoon names are a mouthful, such as **Chief Justice of the Common Pleas** (a former courthouse in Keswick) and **Captain Ridley's Shooting Party** (close to Bletchley Park).

My worry about the **Slow and Steady** name is that it



refers to Henry Hare, the pub's Victorian architect, with a logo showing a hare and a tortoise. Even if you make that connection, won't people start to expect slow service, or moan about the dreadfully slow traffic along Abingdon Road? And it does stand on the corner of Whitehouse Road, named after the pub – should that be renamed too?

And that vulgar and offensive pub name I mentioned at the beginning? Turn the page now if easily offended....!

Around the corner from my old school in Liverpool was a pub called the **Doric** (named after a type of classical architecture) where we



From Rats Wine Bar (below) to the Library (above) in Cowley Road.



drank occasionally (we start young in Liverpool!). A few years ago, it became the **Cock and Seaman**, which caused a tabloid and social media storm, but the company running it pleaded that all its pubs were called Cock and (Something), and its location Seaforth was near the docks. People have probably been sniggering over the name **Cock Inn** for centuries, but the new name didn't prevent the old **Doric** closing a few years ago and becoming housing.

Oxford once had the short-lived **Cock and Camel**, but hopefully we'll be spared anything worse. We wish the **Slow and Steady/White House** every success when it re-opens in September, while noting that an online poll by the *Oxford Mail* found a majority opposed to the renaming.

Even I question the relevance of some historic names, such as the **Port Mahon**, named after a naval battle in 1756 that Britain actually lost. But I somehow can't imagine the **Bear Inn**, **Turf Tavern**, **Lamb and Flag**, **Rose and Crown** and even **Eagle and Child**, when it finally re-opens, ever being renamed, at least under their current owners.

Or am I being naive? See you down the **Cock and Bull!**



For more on Oxford pub history, check out my book **Oxford Pubs** (www.oxfordpubhistory.co.uk) in which I acknowledge previous books by Derek Honey (*An Encyclopaedia of Oxford Pubs, Inns and Taverns*, 1998) and Paul J. Marriott (*Oxford Pubs Past and Present*, 1978).

Signs of the times

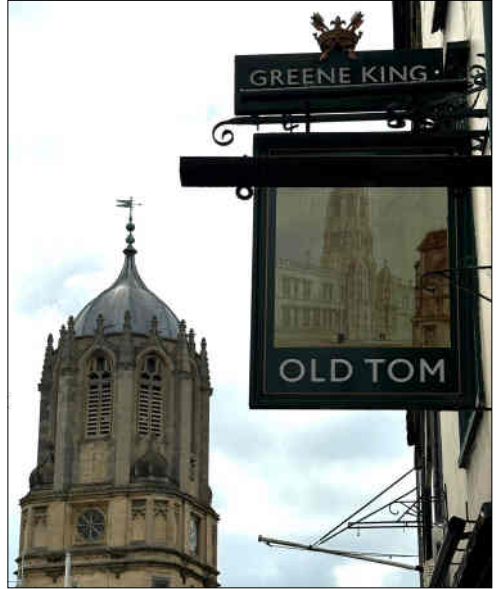
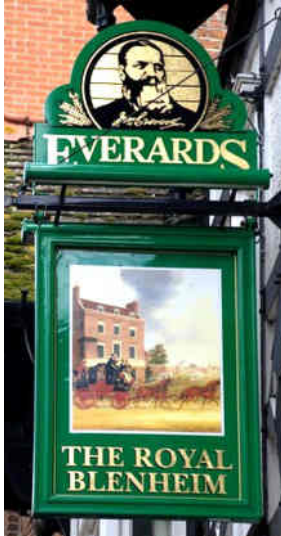
Steve Thompson looks at some of the best inn signs in the Oxford branch of CAMRA

Royal Blenheim

Many associate the Royal Blenheim (right) in St Ebbe's Street with Blenheim Palace at Woodstock, 10 miles north of Oxford. The palace was built in 1705-24 by John Churchill to reward him for his victory at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704, in which the alliance army he led defeated the forces of France and Bavaria. Winston Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace in 1874.

However, the Royal Blenheim pub is named after a stagecoach that plied between Oxford and London before the advent of the railways, although the stagecoach ceased to operate at least 50 years before the present building opened in 1889.

The stagecoach can be seen in this inn sign, which adorned the pub in 2007 but sadly is no more.



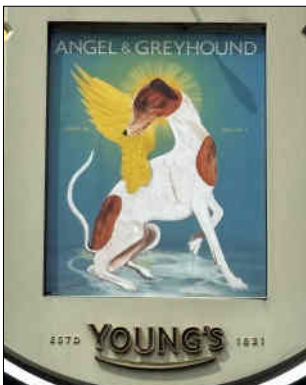
Old Tom

The Old Tom (above) in St Aldate's is named after one of the bells of Christ Church College opposite. As Dave Richardson points out in his book *Oxford Pubs*:

"One of the curiosities of Oxford is that the bell, which weighs more than seven tons, is rung 101 times at 9.05pm to commemorate the original number of students at the college... Even more curiously, the pub's address is 101 St Aldate's."

Angel and Greyhound

The Angel and Greyhound (left) in St Clement's takes its name from Angel and Greyhound Meadow, an open space that can be reached via the car park behind the pub. The meadow in turn is named after two old coaching inns, the Angel on a site in the High Street now partly occupied by the University Examination Schools, and the Greyhound on the corner of Longwall Street nearer Magdalen Bridge.



The two inns enjoyed their heyday during the 18th century, when long-distance travel with coaches and horses became popular, and at one time 10 coaches set out each morning for various destinations.

Notable guests at the Angel included Queen Adelaide, consort of King William IV, in 1835, while Elias Ashmole, who went on to establish the Ashmolean Museum, stayed at the Greyhound in 1669.

Three Goats Heads

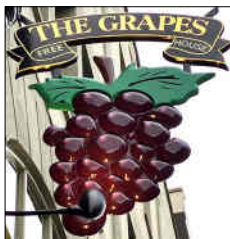
According to a plaque in the Three Goats Heads (right) in St Michael's Street: "From 1621 an inn on Cornmarket Street was named the 'Three Goats Heads' and bore the sign of the Guild of Cordwainers, of which the innholder was a member. The inn kept this name for over two centuries before its demolition and revival here on St Michael's Street."



The Three Goats Heads, a Sam Smith's pub, does not serve real ale.

The Grapes

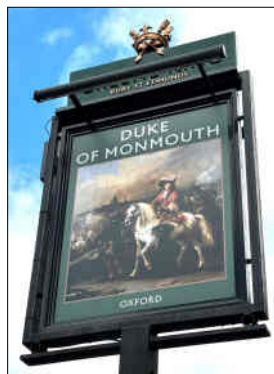
The Grapes (right) in George Street re-opened in August 2023, and among the many improvements by owner Morgan Pub Collective and landlord Johnny Roberts was a brand-new inn sign.



Eight hand pumps are available, with a wide choice of local real ales plus highly regarded beers from further afield, including Harvey's Sussex Best. Keg ale and lager drinkers are also well catered for with no fewer than 40 keg lines.

Duke of Monmouth

The Duke of Monmouth (right) in Abingdon Road is named after James Scott, illegitimate son of King Charles II, who led a rebellion against his uncle, King James II, in 1685. He was defeated at the Battle of Sedgemoor, captured and beheaded for treason.



According to *An Encyclopaedia of Oxford Pubs, Inns and Taverns* by Derek Honey, the original inn sign was "a headless man dressed in the regalia of an English duke".

Broad Face, Abingdon

The Broad Face (right) in Abingdon is at the junction of Bridge Street and Thames Street.

Mystery surrounds the origin of its name. Some say it's to do with its riverside location, as the building presents a broad face to the Thames. Much more colourful are the theories that it either alludes to the swollen face of a man who drowned in the river, or the bloated face of a man who was hanged at the gaol that used to be opposite the pub.



Can do better



From left: The Magdalen Arms, the White Horse, Headington and the Wolvercote, all in Oxford.

We know times are hard, and an attractive inn sign may be seen as an unaffordable luxury, but come on! A catchy sign may draw more customers into your pub. (Of course, some pubs have no sign at all...)

Here are three pubs we feel can do better, sign-wise.



The Inn Sign Society is seeking new members and membership costs just £15 a year. www.innsignsociety.com

Gardener's World

Send a Cable: Hate not welcome here

Paul Silcock (below), landlord of the Gardener's Arms in Plantation Road, Oxford, continues his regular column

IF YOU'VE READ any of my previous articles, you know they tend to have a beer/pub bias. This one is no different, it's just going to ramble on a bit more than usual before it gets to the pub bits. But hang in there, get a packet of crisps to go with the pint, and we'll be talking pub stuff in no time.

My friend Matt Coyne is a much more successful writer than I am. He's got several published books, more than one of which has been on *The Times* best sellers list. If you take nothing else away from this article, and I really hope you will take more than just this one fact away from reading this, than go and look up Matt Coyne wherever you buy your books. Purchase anything with his name on it, and follow him on social media. He's on every major platform as Man vs Baby, and he'll cheer your day up with his easy humour.

I mention Matt not because he needs any help from me plugging his work (see those *Times* best sellers lists) but because he posted an image from our home town of Sheffield. It was of protestors



(let's call them racists, shall we?) taking to the streets to be racist about immigration. There were five of them, looking laughably dejected as a large crowd of anti-racist protestors booed them. Matt's post was rightly saying he was proud to be from a city whose response to the wave of anti-immigration protests and riots was to stage much large pro-immigration and pro-tolerance

marches.

I'm writing this the day after there was a planned anti-immigration protest in Magdalen Road in East Oxford. Over 600 anti-racism, pro-tolerance demonstrators turned out, according to Oxford Stand Up to Racism. The number of racist protestors who turned up was considerably lower, if any of them even dared to show. It's heartening that it seems that even when the world is in such a state, more people want to demonstrate for tolerance than hate.

Now, apart from just wanting to bring you this little piece of good news, why am I mentioning this? In my previous articles you will have seen me bang on about the importance of a pub remaining non-partisan. A pub is a *public* house. It's open to the public, even if sometimes all of us publicans would rather shut the doors to the public and just have a few drinks with our mates. The importance of a pub remaining non-partisan is so that all people can feel welcome, and that they can meet and mingle with people who do not necessarily hold the same viewpoint as themselves. After all, a lot of ideas can seem perfect until challenged. Every belief should have someone say, "Hang on a minute..." and dig into it.

Now, obviously, pretty much everyone reading this will have had some sort of altercation with another person in a pub over something or other, possibly after having imbibed a pint or two of social lubricant. An altercation that has only ever entrenched their own views and having the net result of leaving both arguers believing they have met the most stupid person in the world.



On 8 August, according to *Oxford Stand Up to Racism*, over 600 anti-racism, pro-tolerance demonstrators turned out to counter a planned anti-immigration protest in Magdalen Road in East Oxford. (Photo courtesy of *Oxford Mail/Oxford Times*)

Or at least in the pub.

I have two friends who vote on opposite sides of the Red/Blue political spectrum, and I've forbidden both from talking politics if they've had more than a couple of pints. Any nuance or measured debate goes out of the window in favour of what can best be described as a mud-slinging match followed by a joint sulk. It's a bit like a Twitter (X) feed live at the pub table. We all have friends who do this. Provided no-one throws punches and forgets about the whole thing come the sober light of morning, it doesn't really matter.

In this day and age though, with the troubles and

cracks in our society seemingly on the rise, I want to revisit this assertion that a pub should be non-partisan because I want to be very clear on one very important point.

A pub being non-partisan is not about tolerating any view a person has. It is not about accepting beliefs or opinions that stand against what should be fundamental basics in our culture.

What I mean by this is not that you aren't allowed to state, loudly if you really have to, that Liz Truss was the best Prime Minister this country has ever seen (although I will probably suspect you might have had enough to drink at that point, and suggest you

should probably go home and sleep it off), or other political party-aligned idea.

What I mean is that there is no place for racist, homophobic, transphobic or other forms of hate speech in pubs. If you want to spout that sort of bollocks, I'll ask you to leave. I'll make you leave if I have to. Non-partisan does not mean *carte blanche* for ideology. In this context, non-partisan is political, along political party lines. Yes, the BNP is a recognised political party, even if with fewer than 500 members it is more or less as politically defunct as it is morally bankrupt.

But as the BNP was nothing more than a mouthpiece

for racist ideology, its members are guilty of the hate speech I'm talking about (plus, if you are the sort of person who would happily have a drink in a pub with a BNP sticker in its window, please put this magazine down and go and climb in a bin). Reform UK is also skating on thin ice in this regard. It is not about sitting back and allowing hate speech. I guess what I really mean by non-partisan is creating a space for the discussion of recognised, reasonable ideas.

Some people are always going to want to talk shit about others, and that's almost certainly not something we can stop. After all, we have more categories for hate speech, such as transphobia, Islamophobia, sexism and on and on, than Dulux has for paint. That's almost certainly a sad



indictment of humanity, that we have so many ways of expressing hate we've had to come up with a dictionary just for them.

But this doesn't mean we have to tolerate them.

People who speak and think like this will always find a grubby little corner of the Internet to be an idiot in. A corner with a few other idiots,

where their back-assward ideas just serve as an echo chamber for the reiteration of hate. We don't have to stand for it in public though, and many in the past weeks haven't.

So how to bring this article back from ending on a bit of a downer? Three things:

~ Do what I suggested at the start of this article and go and buy one of Matt Coyne's books, or follow him on social media.

~ Remind yourself that when racists rioted over misinformation, many hundreds more people came out to show this was not how most people felt, much like the Battle of Cable Street nearly 100 years ago.

~ Go and have a pint, and Google the Battle of Cable Street. It's fun to read about fascists failing!



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**TIME TO BOOK
YOUR CHRISTMAS
PARTY**

WOODSTOCK IS SO easy to travel to these days as four buses per hour operate from Oxford, some via Kidlington and some via Yarnton and Begbroke. After alighting from the bus, you are surrounded by pubs.

The first one to visit is the 12th-century **Punch Bowl**, now owned by Arkell's, a Swindon brewery. For many years, this pub was a popular free house with two or three unusual beers on the bar. Today, the beer choice is not that exciting from Arkell's with 3B and Donkels, a collaboration with sister brewery Donnington. Good food is served all day long and there are rooms to retire to.

Just a few yards across the road is the **Crown**, a former sprawling Courage house now serving popular food along with interesting cask ales. On the day, from Amwell Springs near Wallingford, were Why Not Now, Easy Geez and Rude Not To – excellent tasting beers with slightly daft names. Fifty years ago, the pub was described as smart and busy, and nothing has changed (it would be Rude Not To visit!).

Around the corner, five minutes walk away in Park Lane, is the old 17th-century pub called **Back Lane**, re-named from the King's Head. This was one of the two famous Spud pubs (the other one was Sturdy's Castle), where two dozen different baked potatoes were on the menu. Nowadays, really fine food is served along with a couple of cask ales. On the day, Black Sheep bitter and Timothy Taylor Landlord were being served. This former Halls pub was then acquired by Punch Taverns and seemed to lose its way a little. In the last 12 months, a real

Tony's Travels

By the time I got to Woodstock

Tony Goulding finds there's more to Woodstock than a 1970s pop song



The Punch Bowl.

sparkle has arrived and it can be very busy.

Another five-minute walk leads through the rear courtyard of one of the oldest buildings in town, the **Bear Hotel**, which was serving Morland Old Speckled Hen on hand pump. This brought us to the **Star Inn** on Market Square, which for many years has been the lively heart of Woodstock. Being a Charles Wells of Bedford house, you would expect some of its beers here – not so! On the bar were Sharp's Doom Bar, St Austell Tribute, Landlord, plus Adnams Southwold Bitter and Ghost Ship.

A few yards down the road we find the **Woodstock Arms**, a former Bass house acquired by Morrells. Follow-

ing Morrells' demise, Greene King now owns this lively pub. Very good food, comfortable rooms and a popular rear patio make for a pleasant experience. On the bar are up to three cask ales with on-the-day Landlord and Brakspear Gravity along with a real cider, Sandford Orchards.

Just across the road is the large, imposing **King's Arms Hotel**, once a Bass house and owned by Fuller's pub company for the last 10 years, well known for fine food and comfortable rooms. The building is older than the nearby famous Blenheim Palace, having been built in the 1500s. Beers served were London Pride, Golden Days and I'm Freshening Up (daft name or what!). The service and ambience



The best real ale pub in town, the Black Prince, remains closed with its future uncertain.

here were enjoyable. Across the road is the Woodstock Social Club, a private members bar serving Doom Bar and occasional local beers, such as Little Ox.

The best real ale pub in

town, the **Black Prince**, remains closed with its future uncertain. Former pubs converted to housing are the Queen's Own (known as the Tuppenny Tube) and the Rose & Crown. Also in town,

the Marlborough Arms is a private hotel not selling cask ale.

Woodstock is worth a visit for a pint or two, or perhaps a crawl!



The Star Inn.

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The Last Drop

Red Lion to roar again

The pub in Northmoor has found new tenants, giving **Graham Shelton** cause for celebration



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IT'S GENUINELY EXCITING to hear that Jeremy Clarkson's pub (the former Windmill restaurant on the A40 near Burford) will soon be opening. It will be big, it will be bright, and it will sell a lot of Hawkstone lager! The food will be good and local, and customers are likely to come in droves from all over the world, hoping to meet the great man and appear on TV. Good for our industry? I think so, and the only questions will be whether the car park will be big enough, and if West Oxfordshire District Council will mind if he builds a helipad.

And in the unlikely event that Clarkson's pub bombs, it will still make great TV!

Here in the West Oxfordshire village of Northmoor, where I live, we have a similar problem, but it's quite a bit less straightforward to fix. This is mainly because, unlike Jeremy Clarkson, I have only about six followers on X and no presence on TV of any kind, so it's simply not possible to compete with Clarkson's nine million X fans, never mind the millions more who watch him on Amazon Prime.

If you've been out to Northmoor recently, you'll know exactly what our problem is: our lovely Community-Owned pub, the Red Lion, has been closed since the end of March. You don't need me to tell you that when your local pub is closed, as a light goes out in your life.

When this happened 10 years ago, it was so unbearable that we rallied round, raised £400,000 from local people, and bought the building for the community. We did a fair amount of renovation, advertised in the *Morning Advertiser*, where most UK pubs are listed, and had loads of great applicants to be our



Toby Merridan at the Six Bells. (Photo Admiral Taverns)



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.



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*The
Red Lion,
Northmoor.*

tenants, even though the concept of community ownership was fairly novel in those days. For 10 years we basked in the glory of having a lovely couple and their staff to welcome us, to serve us drinks, and to pander to our various dietary excesses. It was good! And it gave me great pleasure to share our journey with you in the pages of the *Oxford Drinker*.

We became close friends with our tenants, of course, so when they told us last Christmas that they weren't going to renew their 10-year lease, we were sad indeed. But they had devoted 10 years of their lives to Northmoor, and that's a long time for anyone. You get less than that for manslaughter or serious knife crime these days.

There have been 20 landlords in the 200-year history of the Red Lion, so our task has been to find the 21st. What a different experience it has been. We advertised as before in the *Morning Advertiser*, but the pub trade is a lot quieter now than it was in 2014. At the height of the Covid pandemic 35 pubs a week were closing, and still today some two pubs a week close, never to re-open. And with those closures lots of experienced people have left the industry for good. Energy, food and staff costs, never mind tax, have had their wicked way.

Would the Red Lion go the

same way? Surely not.

The *Morning Advertiser* brought a few interested people from across the country, but the breakthrough came for us following a little article I wrote for the Summer edition of the *Oxford Drinker* about our search for a new tenant. Who should contact me but Toby Merridan and his wife Deb from the Six Bells in Kidlington? They have agreed to take on the Red Lion in addition to running the Six Bells, with family members also running the Kidlington pub. We are so looking forward to welcoming them! As we go to press, we don't have an opening date fixed, but be sure it will be widely advertised when we do.

Meanwhile at the Red Lion, the cellar, the kitchen and the tenants' accommodation are having much-needed repairs and refurbishment. The outside is all freshly painted, the windows have been replaced, the lovely country garden is being kept spick and span, and the shepherd's huts for guest accommodation are getting a full makeover. It's going to be good!

Do come to see us. Pubs can only survive if they have enough trade, so it matters to get out and support them. I know all our CAMRA friends will not let us down.



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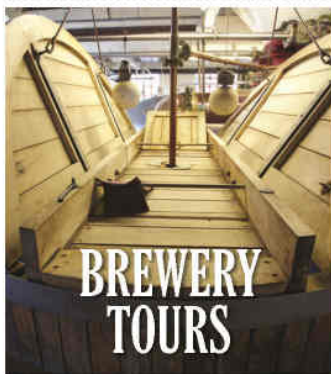
Keep in touch with Oxford Branch:

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

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The Festival is organised by Oxford CAMRA and is staffed by volunteers.