

Issue 125
Winter 2024-2025

50 YEARS OF OXFORD CAMRA



1974-2024



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the Oxford Drinker

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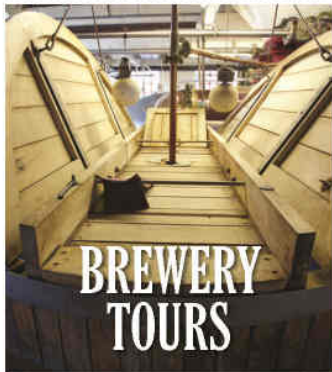


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Cover: Punk music fans at the Oranges and Lemons in St Clement's, Oxford, in 1979. Punk bands performed there regularly, including Billy Idol of Generation X, but not the Sex Pistols (as far as we know!). The Angel and Greyhound pub has reverted to its previous name since it was taken over by Morgan Pub Collective. Report on page 20.

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 packed issue of news and views and a dive into the past

IN OVER A decade editing the *Oxford Drinker*, I can't think of a more diverse edition than this one. Apart from our regular columnists, including a front-line Oxford pub manager, a profile of Hook Norton brewery boss James Clarke and Tony's Travels in Eynsham, we look in detail at a small pub company that's become very important in Oxford – the Morgan Pub Collective.

But why on earth would we give space to an American Professor of Sociology, no less? I think you will find Kent Bausman's "Sociology in a Pint Glass" to be well worth a read, as he celebrates the many wonderful things about Oxford pubs that we often take for granted. With news now emerging about what the long-closed Eagle and Child might look like when it re-opens, it's time to celebrate all that's good about our special drinking places.

It's well known that Oxford, like most of Britain, once had many more pubs than it does now. We are fortunate that *Oxford Drinker* founder Matt Bullock has recently come into possession of a treasure trove of archive photos of local pubs that we'll be sharing with you over time, online or in print. Check out "Lost Pubs of Jericho" for a first taste.

While researching images for our trip Down Memory Lane, I came across this gem from the archive of our friends at the *Oxford Mail and Times*. It shows an Oxford versus Cambridge



drinking competition in 1963 at a pub called the Burton Ale Stores, later to become the Angel & Greyhound. The pub reverts to a previous name, the Oranges & Lemons, when re-opened by Morgan after a brief refit in January 2025.

How drinking culture has changed since then! Many young people including students no longer drink beer or any alcohol, one reason for declining attendance at our beer festival in the Town Hall. Read how you can help revive the festival on the following pages.

We are lucky to have a vibrant local pub and brewing scene despite the gloomy headlines about the hospitality industry, which have only increased following last autumn's Budget and the extra financial burdens caused by hikes in employers' National Insurance payments and the National Living Wage.

I'm reasonably confident that local pubs and breweries will weather those storms, but do get out and support them, especially in January and February when trade is at its lowest.

Don't forget to go online for regular *Oxford Drinker* updates, and your suggestions are always welcome using the contact details opposite.

DAVE RICHARDSON



Up in Arms about change



I STRUGGLE WITH change. When a beer recipe is cheapened by a trans-national mega-corporation, I feel like screaming at a storm, knowing it's deaf. Similarly, when a pub is put at risk, normally by a chain that has thousands of pubs in its "portfolio", desperate to squeeze the last penny without a thought to the impact, my rage rises.

I might write a longer piece about Community-Owned pubs, but this contemplation is really about not liking change. I'm trying to be open to change not all being bad and trying for a sense of proportion. I get discombobulated if dinner turns out to be pasta not noodles, but I also like pasta... so not all change

is negative.

From a community perspective, the worst thing that can happen to their pub is normally that it closes. OK, maybe not the **Nelson** in Cowley, but that was probably beyond redemption. As well as Community-Owned groups, the Oxford Branch of CAMRA has seen pubs saved by three smaller pub companies. Unlike the mega-chains, with vast estates and the sole goal of maximised profits, these companies start with wanting to run interesting pubs that local people love. They are Oak Taverns, the Morgan Pub Collective and Dodo Pubs.

They each have a slightly different outlook/model/niche,

Chair's Chatter

and all three models seem to be doing well. They have saved pubs that may very well have otherwise been lost. If they want to change the name of a pub I say we shouldn't be concerned. I'll pick on just one old example.

A decade ago, the last pub around Marston Road, the **Somerset**, was long closed and under threat. Dodo Pubs took it over and changed the name to the **Up in Arms** (left). I was there recently, and they have done a great job transforming a pub that felt neglected. It has a positive vibe with good food and a fabulous outside space.

You can see a similar significant investment inside and out at Dodo's **Slow and Steady**, the former **White House**. I look forward to seeing what Morgan will do with the resurrected name **Oranges and Lemons**, previously the **Angel and Greyhound**. Change can be exciting.

We should celebrate that these companies, and some other business people, still want to invest in pubs to make them distinctive social places that people enjoy. Rather than being up in arms about positive change we should be in the **Up in Arms**, or other pubs. Use them or lose them!

JOHN WINNEY



THE GRAPES

— OXFORD —



A Deal A Day

Monday - Burger Monday

Tuesday - Rib Tuesday

Wednesday - Wine
Wednesday

Thursday - Steak
Thursday

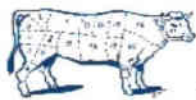
Friday - Tapas Friday

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Pub, Brewery and Festival News

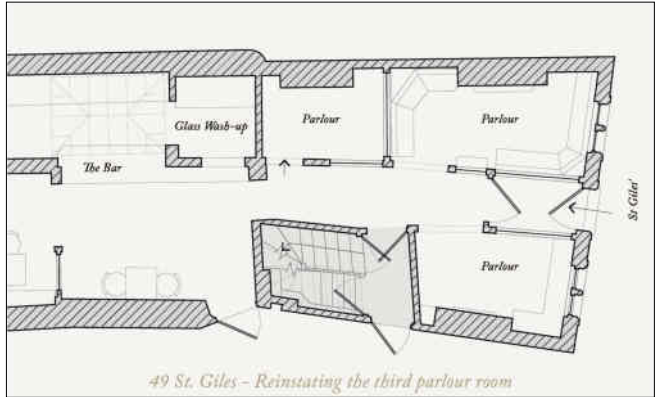
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Eagle and Child starts to take shape

The Ellison Institute of Technology (EIT), new owner of the historic Eagle and Child pub in St Giles, Oxford, invited Oxford residents and businesses to view its refurbishment plans and “learn how EIT will honour the pub’s cultural legacy and restore the public space to the community”, writes *Steve Thompson*.

The viewing took place in the Garden Quad Reception Room of St John’s College on Thursday 21 November. It included photos and plans of the existing buildings, and EIT’s vision of how they will look in the future. There is a lot of work to be done!

The Eagle and Child is best known as the pub where the Inklings, a literary group who included J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, met regularly from 1939 to 1962. They met in a private room at the back of the pub called the Rabbit Room, apparently because



A ground floor plan of the Eagle and Child, showing the three parlours and the bar at the entrance to the Rabbit Room (above left).

the landlady kept rabbits there.

Also of interest are the two parlours at the front of the pub and the size and position of the bar. The two parlours will be kept and a third one reinstated as it was in 1863. The new bar will be in the same position as before, but bigger

and better we hope.

Apart from the pub itself, EIT’s plans include academic meeting rooms on the first and second floors, and a bakery next door, previously occupied by Greens Café.

Work on the Eagle and Child is expected to finish in 2027.



Left: The parlour on the right as you enter the pub. Right: An artist’s impression of the bar at the entrance to the Rabbit Room.



Real ale choice up in city centre, but so are prices

Royal Blenheim and Turf Tavern had the widest range, Head of the River most expensive



Oxford CAMRA's annual survey of real ale in the city centre came up with some encouraging results this year. But prices are creeping ever upward, and can be expected to rise still further as pubs grapple with the impact of the recent Budget on employers' National Insurance contributions and an increase in the National Living Wage.

The survey found that there were 113 real ales available this year compared to 100 in 2023, duplication meaning there were 85 different pints available compared to 72 in 2023. The average

price of a pint of real ale, leaving aside the two J.D. Wetherspoon pubs that always sell it cheap, increased from £5.06 last year to £5.42.

The **Royal Blenheim** and **Turf Tavern** had the widest choice with 10 real ales each, but several pubs had just one real ale including the **Cow & Creek**, **Lighthouse**, **Plough** and **Red Lion**.

Conducted on a Saturday afternoon in November, the survey considered only traditional cask or real ales – with some craft keg products typically costing £1 a pint more. The 25 pubs covered were in the city centre going out as far

as Folly Bridge, Magdalen Bridge, St Giles and the railway station.

The most expensive pint found this year was £6.55 for a Fuller's seasonal ale in the **Head of the River**, where you may pay for the view as well as the beer, followed by £6.45 at the **Turf Tavern** for a Greene King special beer, where you pay for the historical surroundings rather than the view. The lowest costing pint outside Wetherspoon was still £3.80 in the **White Rabbit** (left) (same as last year), but the number of pubs where you could not get a pint under £5 has gone up from six to 12. The most common price this year was £5.60, as opposed to £4.50 last year.

Prices at the two Wetherspoon pubs, the **Swan & Castle** and the **Four Candles**, were actually down on 2023 with all at £2.49 a pint, except for Greene King IPA at £1.99. In the 2023 survey, all real ales cost £2.88 or £3.11 a pint, with IPA at £1.99. Wetherspoon is still the place to go if you're on a budget, with CAMRA members also having 50p per pint discount vouchers to slash costs even further.

The most common brewery found was **Greene King** with 12, although five were one-off "specials" at the **Turf Tavern**. Next came **Titanic** with six, **Vale Brewery** with five and **Hook Norton** with five. Last year, **Greene King** had eight including four "specials", followed by **XT/Animal** with six and the now closed **White Horse** brewery with five. The most common beer was **Timothy Taylor** Landlord with five, **Greene King** Abbot with four, and **Greene King** IPA and **Sharp's Doom Bar** with three each.

Pub, Brewery and Festival News

Local breweries are urging customers to check if their drink is truly made by an independent, following an initiative by SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers and Associates).

While the Government considers legislation to allow all pubs a measure of freedom in what they order, SIBA has launched the Brewery Checker (www.indiebeer/uk) allowing drinkers to identify whether a brewer is independent or part of a big conglomerate. It has also introduced a new symbol (right) starting to appear on beer badging.

SIBA staged its Midlands regional competition at the Oxford Beer Festival in October, when Loose Cannon was one of the winners with a gold award for Something Wonderful, in the British Best Bitter category.

Loose Cannon general manager Anneli Baxter told



the BBC at the festival: "People want to be able to drink a beer that is brewed within a 10-mile radius. Currently in Abingdon, we can drive past eight pubs before we could make our first delivery. If we could deliver one cask into those eight pubs, that would be a massive im-

provement to our yields, sales and efficiencies."

Tap Social fully supports this, pointing out: "By choosing independent beer you're not only getting a great tasting pint, but supporting local business, protecting pubs, and making a more sustainable choice."

Controversy over name change

Greene King has stirred up emotions in Abingdon after announcing it will rename the Midget, on Preston Road in Abingdon, when it re-opens after refurbishment.

It is named after an MG sports car made close by, but GK's senior public affairs manager, Chris Shimmwell, said: "In recent years, we have been reviewing our pub names as we want our pubs to be places where everyone can feel welcome, as we believe all pubs have an important role to play in promoting inclusive venues across the UK. We have therefore decided to change the pub's name to the Roaring Raindrop, another record-

breaking car manufactured in Abingdon."

According to the *Oxford Mail*, earlier this year more than 500 people signed an online petition to change the name of the pub. However, another petition calling for the name to remain the same attracted more than 4,700 signatures.

Local resident Nigel Stead has questioned whether the word midget is offensive. "It's imperative to state that this name does not in any way symbolise disrespect towards people with dwarfism," he wrote.

Photo by Andrew Ffrench, courtesy of Oxford Mail/Oxford Times



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Pub, Brewery and Festival News

Banks's for the chop in 2025

The closure of Banks's brewery in Wolverhampton in 2025 will eliminate some historic real ales as owner Carlsberg concentrates all future cask production on the Marston's brewery in Burton-on-Trent.

Carlsberg has acquired total control of Marston's, which is now simply a pub company. Marston's operates pubs in Oxford including the Lighthouse, the Seacourt Bridge in Botley and the Corner House in Headington, and has supply agreements with others.

Real ales brewed in Wolverhampton that will be axed include Banks's Mild, Amber and Sunbeam; Eagle IPA, Jennings Cumberland Ale, Marston's Old Empire and 61 Deep; and Ringwood Boondoggle and Old Thumper, plus a couple of keg brands. Other brands brewed in Wolver-

hampton may be at risk, including Hobgoblin Gold and IPA (formerly Wychwood at Witney); Brakspear Gravity, Oxford Gold and Special (formerly Wychwood and before that Brakspear of Henley-on-Thames); Tetley Bitter; Wainwright Amber and Gold; Bombardier, Bombardier Gold and Eagle IPA (formerly Charles Wells); Razorback, Boondoggle, Fortyniner and Old Thumper (formerly Ringwood); and London Original and Special (formerly Young's).

Some of these are also expected to disappear, while top sellers such as Hobgoblin Ruby continue at Burton. This has brought mixed reactions in CAMRA circles, with some mourning the likely loss of famous brands while others feel they were already changed beyond recognition.

One opens, one closes in Abingdon

A new sports-themed pub, the Earl of Abingdon, has opened as part of Coxeter House at the junction of Ock Street and Stratton Way in the town. One or two real ales are served, including Timothy Taylor Landlord and Sharp's Doom Bar.

It is run by Andrew Fudge and Kylie Buckle, who previously ran the Grapes in Abingdon High Street as a sports bar. Many of their customers have come with them and the



Grapes has closed, future unknown, although it is a historic building.

The Old Anchor Inn beside the Thames also remained closed at the time of writing and up for lease, having shut in May 2023.

QUICK ONES

White Hart, Wolvercote: Rob Yeatman has taken over as manager, with Jude Campbell continuing as assistant manager, at the Community-Owned *Good Beer Guide* pub, previous manager Amanda Jones having moved to Pembroke College. A good range of mainly local real ales is served, 12 years after being rescued from probable closure.

The Church Hanborough Beer Festival will take place from 12-10pm on Saturday 1 February at St Peter's Church in the village. It is organised by Church Hanborough, which operates the Teardrop bar in Oxford's Covered Market.

The Port Mahon, which re-opened in September, has introduced a "Kill the Cask" offer of £3.50 a pint on Tuesday evenings, until the beer runs out. Although a Greene King house, it serves two real ales free of tie, Chiltern's Beechwood Bitter being a regular.

The Crown & Thistle in Headington, closed and derelict since 2011, is up for sale through Fleurets for £375,000, and has attracted interest from the Oxford Preservation Trust. It opened in 1669 as the Titup Hall, and the city council has twice turned down redevelopment plans.

The Gardiner Arms in Tackley has re-opened and is being run by volunteers from the village, which is on the Oxford-Banbury bus and rail routes. Real ales have come from breweries including Renegade, Tring and Fuller's, and it is open from Thursdays to Sundays.



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Pubs of the Year

and *Good Beer Guide* choice for 2025

The Grapes in Oxford and Crafty Pint in Witney chosen in popular vote

A TOTAL OF 55 Oxford CAMRA branch members voted in the Pub of the Year (POTY) 2025 awards, which saw two new title holders – the **Grapes** in Oxford and **Crafty Pint** in Witney.

Voting was drawn from a list of the top pubs by beer scores in the 2025 *Good Beer Guide* (GBG), which was announced in September when the nationwide guide was published.

The **Royal Blenheim** in Oxford, City POTY for several years, became runner-up, followed by the **Mason's Arms** in Headington. The Town and Village POTY changed hands too, as 2024 holder the **Brewery Tap** in Abingdon was nudged into second place. The **King's Arms** in Kidlington came a very creditable third, and all six winners will be invited to Oxford CAMRA's Awards Night on 17 February.

The voting was extremely tight between the top two in both categories, and there was an increase in the number voting this year after a change of format to online. City pubs faced extra competition this year from the **Grapes** and the **Lamb & Flag**, both renowned real ale pubs that were not eligible for 2024 after dropping out of the guide following long periods of closure. The **Grapes** wins the award after re-opening in August 2023 following invest-



The Crafty Pint in Witney won the Town and Village award.

ment by the London-based Morgan Pub Collective, which has since also taken on the **Gardener's Arms** in North Parade Avenue and the **Angel & Greyhound** in St Clement's, which is to revert to its previous name the **Oranges & Lemons** in January.

Grapes landlord Johnny Roberts is a strong supporter of real ales and ciders, while also offering an extensive keg range. You never know what you might find at the **Grapes**, although Harvey's Sussex Best and at least one real cider are fixtures. He has also given a platform to very small local breweries such as Craftsman of Abingdon, and

showcased several unusual beer styles. His achievement in pushing the **Grapes** to the top of the tree in such a short time is to be commended.

It's also a major achievement for the **Crafty Pint** to win the Town and Village POTY award, bearing in mind that Mel Cassidy and Ian Walton took over only in 2023, after the previous owner of the business, Simon Scamp, decided to retire. Mel and Ian were already running the bar when Simon left and they have clearly built up a strong following among beer lovers, whether they prefer cask or keg beer.

It always offers an inter-

esting range of independently brewed beers from near and far, ranging from Loose Cannon of Abingdon to Orkney Brewery in northern Scotland. With charity quiz nights and regular live music, it is very much a community pub despite its small size.

Wheatley has its first entry in the *GBG* for many years after the **Sun** was chosen for the consistently good quality of its beer. It was re-opened by Oxfordshire-based independent pub group Oak Taverns in December 2022, and follows many of its other pubs into the guide including the **Cross Keys** in Wallingford, **Cross Keys** in Thame and **King's Arms** in Wantage.

An old favourite in Oxford returning to the guide for 2025 is the **Lamb & Flag** in St Giles, a historic pub with a major focus on real ale and a



The Grapes, Morgan's first pub in Oxford, has been a great success.

strong following among students and academics as well as locals and visitors. Since re-opening in October 2022, it has been run by a community group called the Inklings on behalf of owners St John's College, and has again be-

come very successful.

Also back in the guide are **St Aldate's Tavern** in Oxford, the **King's Arms** in Kidlington and the **Nag's Head on the Thames** in Abingdon, all good real ale pubs that hadn't featured for a year or more. Competition to get in the *GBG* is intense, with 24 places available for pubs in the Oxford branch area which also covers Abingdon, Kidlington, Witney and nearby villages. Six pubs drop out for 2025 to make room for the new and returning pubs.

All in all, the *Good Beer Guide* entries for 2025 reflect an upbeat scene for pubs in and around Oxford, which has become a destination city for real ale drinkers keen to try the strong selection of beers made by local breweries and breweries from further afield.



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



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Down Memory Lane

The lost pubs of Jericho

Jericho

Dave Richardson recalls long-gone pubs in this part of Oxford with a little help from his friends

WHEN I MOVED to Oxford in 1980, I lived in Leckford Road in the north of the city where I drifted off to sleep at night thinking there were about 20 pubs within a 10-minute walk. Many of these were in Jericho, that grid of tight-packed streets of terraced houses between Walton Street and the canal. But some had already closed, as Jericho had started its transition from a working-class district to a gentrified suburb where two-bedroom terraced houses now cost nearly £1 million.

Only three pubs remain in Jericho itself, plus another three along Walton Street. But the area is still a “destination” for real ale drinkers, especially if you include the **Gardener’s Arms** in Plantation Road, plus the **Rose and Crown** and second **Gardener’s Arms** in North Parade Avenue, just the other side of Woodstock Road.

Back in the 19th century, there were around 20 pubs in Jericho alone according to the *Drink Map of Oxford 1883*, published by temperance campaigners and available from the Bodleian Library shop. Many of these had gone by the time I arrived, but in 1980 there were still lots of them by late 20th-century standards.

One I remember particularly but couldn’t recall its name was close to St Barnabas Church, with many posters of rock stars and a whiff of marijuana in the air. How interesting then that all these years later I would get to know the man who put the posters up and organised the jukebox in this and other pubs, who told me that this pub was the **Crown** in Canal Street.

Mick “The Hat” Weston, who worked in many Jericho pubs from the late 1960s until

the 1980s when he moved away, said: “We had wonderful landlords in Jericho as most of them were local, and most of the customers were local too as they worked at Lucy’s ironworks or Oxford University Press.

“Tony and Wendy Matthews had the **Crown** in the 1960s and then Bernie and Vera Evans. One day Bernie said to me, ‘Mick, I’m off to Cheltenham races, can you paint the bar while I’m out? Any colour you like.’ When he came into the lounge that night he asked me how it had gone in the bar, and when I took him in there he asked me to turn on the lights. But the lights were on, and I’d painted the walls matt black. ‘But in two days’ time,’ I said, ‘I’ll put up lovely big pictures of Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, Leonard Cohen and The Byrds, and put their music on the jukebox.’ ”

That proved to be a success, and Mick was soon in demand at other pubs. Another long-closed pub, the **Foundation** in Cardigan Street where a school now occupies the



The Crown, 9 Canal Street. (Pub photos by Michael Crook)



The Radcliffe Arms, now the Rickety Press, and fiddle player Hughie McCann who played there every Sunday.

site, had a majority Irish clientele so he ensured it had the best Irish music in town. At that time Jericho had many small shops, all now gone, including a butchers run by Arthur Custance. He would ask customers to come into the **Fountain** where he was sitting, pay for their meat and pick it up from the unattended shop!

Past characters loom

large in Mick's recollections, including a fiddle player called Hughie McCann who cycled from Cowley every Sunday to play at the **Radcliffe Arms**, which survives today as the **Rickety Press**. The **Old Bookbinders**, which has also survived, was at one time run by an Asian landlord who specialised in duck curry. The third survivor, the **Harcourt Arms**, was run by Vic and

Amy Armstrong and then "John the Dog", so-called because he had come from the **Squire Bassett** pub in Kidlington, now a Nepalese restaurant.

Mick also recalls Pete Winters at the **Carpenter's Arms** in Nelson Street, "who did sausage, egg and chips all day for almost nothing", and later Ken Siret. "Official opening time was 10am but he would open at 9.59, when half of Ruskin College was already in there," he added.

The **Baker's Arms** in Albert Street, run by Geoff Payne, was very big on Shove Ha'penny, a table-top game with players using a large coin to strike a smaller coin, along with Aunt Sally and darts. The **Globe** at 59 Cranham Street, now private property but still looking very much like a pub, was run by Ken Freeman: "His beer had to be perfect, and he served the best pint of Morrells Varsity Ale in Oxford."

Other names of pubs, their landlords and customers drifted in and out of our conversation, including the tiny **Walton Ale Stores**, the **Prince of Wales**, the **New Inn** and the



The Fountain, 11 Cardigan Street.



evocatively named **Cottage of Content**. The Prince of Wales, now much expanded and called **Jude the Obscure**, is particularly remembered by long-standing Oxford CAMRA member Graham Baker, who used to work as a lab technician at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Woodstock Road.

"There was a passageway leading from the back of the infirmary onto Walton Street, and the **Prince of Wales** was the nearest pub," recalled Graham. "We had a generous lunch hour, when the bosses would go to the lounge and the lower castes to the public bar where we tried to keep out of sight. We also went to the **Royal Oak** in Woodstock Road (also still open) which was full of doctors and nurses.

"Another one we used to use was the **Radcliffe Arms**, which had just a single bar in the 1970s. That era was the start of holidays abroad and it was full of little straw donkeys and postcards from Spain. It had old Northampton Brewing Company etched windows, but they were lost. An old girl there knew exactly when the fruit machine would pay out.

"The **Harcourt** is definitely the least changed of the Jericho pubs that are still open, and a real step back in time.

The Globe Inn at 59 Cranham Street (above) and the Carpenter's Arms at 7 Nelson Street (right). (Inn sign photos by Ken Baker)

After three pints of Fuller's ESB at lunchtime you'd need a nap in the afternoon.

"Some pubs in Jericho were well known as drug dens, and raids were a regular occurrence when people would throw everything on the floor," added Graham. "But the police did tolerate it as they knew where everyone was, and could keep an eye on them. There were a lot of undercover cops around – you could tell them by their clean jeans."

He added: "Jericho was a tough area, also known as a red light district, but it was

also cosmopolitan and bohemian. It was full of very interesting characters, and didn't have the antagonism of Town versus Gown that you had in city centre pubs in the 1970s."

I still enjoy visiting the last three pubs in Jericho, the Phoenix cinema and the pubs and restaurants along Walton Street. On dark and misty nights, perhaps, the ghosts of old characters still walk these streets, while a whiff of weed and the beat of classic rock comes from buildings now converted into housing. It's nice to remember.



Beer Heroes

175 years of playing Hooky

Pete Flynn profiles
James Clarke of Hook
Norton – a resilient
brewing legend

ARRIVING AT THIS delightful brewery on a damp morning, I travelled through muddy, narrow country lanes to arrive at Hook Norton brewery where a tour was taking place. You cannot help being impressed at the magnificent site of a Victorian tower brewery which loomed in front of me, one of only a few remaining in the UK, and characterised by their multi-storey design using gravity to aid the brewing process.

Managing director James Clarke had agreed to meet me and right on time we settled in the wonderfully comfortable café, which opened in 2017 to complement the brewery shop and tour side of the business.

James explained that 2024 marks the 175th anniversary of the brewery started by his great-great-grandfather, who was a local grain merchant and saw an opportunity to use his own locally grown organic produce. Today, the business includes 32 pubs which are all freehold and employs around 80 people in total, of whom 30 are in pubs. During the pan-



The tower brewery is characterised by a multi-storey design that uses gravity to aid the brewing process. (Photo by Pete Flynn)

demical, all tenants were supported by a waiver of rent which proves the long-term commitment of a business that does not have to answer to external shareholders.

About 12,000 barrels of beer are brewed annually of which 30% is bottled. The business has diversified enormously since the early days and the brewery buildings host around 12 weddings a year. The happy couple can celebrate their nuptials by brewing their own beer using the small barrel plant, which is on site, and otherwise used mostly for R&D and training purposes.

James is celebrating his 33 years at Hooky by brewing a dark mild beer which is testament to a style of beer that was a lynchpin from the early

1900s to the 1980s.

I asked James about ownership of the company and was surprised to learn that little has changed since the 1950s when some family shareholders decided to exit the business and sell out to another local family, resulting in just 10 shareholders today. There are four non-executive directors and an internal senior management team overseeing day-to-day operations.

I have known of James for many years, and he has hosted beer-related events all around the county. He is always most engaging and charismatic, while acting as wise counsel to smaller brewers who would count on him as a friend though business rivals. I asked James about

his early background, and he told me that initially he was an employee of the fire service before joining the family business in 1991, becoming head brewer in 1998. Following in family footsteps, he became MD on the death of his father in 2004.

James has two sons: George who is employed within the business on the brewing side, and Ed who is a brewer at London-based Gipsy Hill brewery. It is good to know that Hooky is likely to be in family hands for at least another generation.

While running a successful business might seem enough for most people, James pioneered NOXAIDUK, a local charity to help victims of the war in Ukraine.

"It all started with an idea I had following a conversation with my dentist, whose mother is Ukrainian," James recalled. "It all started very simply by sending a man in a van to talk to locals and logistically look at what type of support we should provide, with an ambulance being a possibility. During May 2022 we dispatched two vehicles, with Fuller's and Bateman's breweries already having visited the area.

"Thirteen trips have been made over the past 2½ years, providing a focus on medical gear, with a fire engine planned for delivery in January next year. An hour over the border is where we meet our contacts, and it's all about getting the right aid to the right people as war breeds black market racketeering. Resourcefulness and spirit are key to all we do."

The efforts made by James and his team are admirable, and to his credit he sets aside a day a week to help his Ukrainian friends he has



*James Clarke has led Hook Norton since 2004.
(Photo by Pete Flynn)*

made during the conflict. "Psychological support is key, and they remember you and enjoy meeting new people," he said. "Sadly, we have known friends who have been killed fighting in the conflict."

Providing support locally is something James is passionate about, and he has been recognised recently for his volunteer work as a community first responder for South Central Ambulance Service. He received a "Highly Commended" award in the volunteer category at the BBC Radio Oxford Make a Difference Awards, highlighting his dedication in providing medical assistance in his community, whether from his home or workplace – surely an inspiration to us all.

Community engagement is also important to James as Hook Norton sponsors local football and cricket teams, while a classic car group

meets regularly at the brewery. James also pioneered the Green Hop run, a motorbike gathering which he likens to a Beaujolais wine run, but better.

One of the most engaging events as far as Oxford CAMRA is concerned was the Big Oxford Beer Bash, which featured local breweries promoting both core and innovative brews at the Oxford, South Parks premises of TOAD (The Oxford Artisan Distillery). This wonderful event included live music and street food and was organised by the Oxford Brewers Alliance, in which James plays a leading role. But as these premises are no longer available, its future is unclear.

"Hooky" is proud to display its green credentials as it now has two new hot water tanks using thermal batteries. Planning permission has been submitted for a solar field, while a new steam boiler is to



The Castle in Oxford is one of 32 pubs owned and operated by Hook Norton brewery.

be installed shortly.

During its 175th anniversary Hooky has not been immune from the odd drama, and one unfolded in May 2024. A catastrophic fire which quickly spread damaged the stable block when a series of solar panels caught fire, but fortunately no-one

was injured. The brewery's shire horses, still used for deliveries in the village, were unharmed as they were out in the fields at the time.

For those of you who want to read more about James and the heritage of "Hooky" you should read the book *Playing Hooky* by Adrian Tier-

ney Jones, published to celebrate the anniversary.

It is important to reflect on the legacy that James and his team are building at the brewery, and what it means for the brewery's future. A thriving brewery shop and business centre provide valuable sources of added income, while the events management team also add value. Eight tour guides offer an insight into day-to-day workings and are keen to emphasise the heritage and hardiness of this family dynasty.

James has many fine attributes, but my two takeaways are his personal resilience and charisma, just the sort of leader who can be relied upon: an Ernest Shackleton of the brewing industry. Here's to another 175 years of brewing.



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Third time's a charm

As new player Morgan Pub Collective launches its third pub in Oxford, **Dave Richardson** talks to the company's founder Dick Morgan

WHEN THE FORMER Angel & Greyhound re-opens with its previous name – the Oranges & Lemons – it marks another step forward for a small but growing pub operator that few in Oxford had heard of until last year – the Morgan Pub Collective. It re-opened the Grapes in George Street in August 2023, and it was named Oxford CAMRA City Pub of the Year just over a year later.

Morgan then re-opened another pub that had been closed for an extended period, the Gardener's Arms in North Parade Avenue, in October 2023. It's fair to say that this has not been such a success and has struggled to find its place on the North Oxford scene, but with staffing issues hopefully resolved it may now be able to move forward.

Morgan's business model is to take long leases on pubs, the properties being owned by various companies including Greene King. The Grapes is owned by the city council, the Gardener's Arms by GK and the new addition by a property company which bought it recently from Young's.

The Oranges & Lemons in St Clement's Street, East Oxford is an exciting prospect for real ale and craft keg lovers, as it plans to offer one of the largest choices in the city



Dick Morgan at the Oranges and Lemons.

with up to 10 cask lines and over 30 keg taps. Reverting to its previous name from 1970 until bought by Young's in the 1990s, it is due to re-open after refurbishment by late January. It will stay open until New Year.

This is where I caught up with Dick Morgan, the company's founder, to find out more about a company tracing its origins back 50 years to when he ran his first pub, the Oporto in Central London, now the Craft Beer Co Covent Garden. But his pub journey actually

started in 1961 when, as a boy, he was washing bottles at the Vine in Kentish Town.

"I was working behind a bar while still at school, earning 30 shillings (£1.50) per session," he recalled. "At college I did business studies, but it didn't suit me. I was soon back working full time in pubs, and I've never really done anything else.

"But I'm not one who believes it was all wonderful years ago. We want to operate pubs offering a traditional welcome, but with much im-



At the Oxford CAMRA Awards Night in February 2024, CAMRA's Dave Richardson (left) presented a special award to Dick Morgan (right) and Johnny Roberts of Morgan Pub Collective.

proved standards. There's still demand for what people perceive as a traditional pub, but people demand a lot more nowadays. It's now recognised that a well-run pub is very much a middle-class place, often with meals. If you want cheap beer then you go to Tesco, but you go to a pub for the experience."

Dick has worked with various breweries and pubcos over the years, including Watneys, Allied, GK and Stonegate. His dislike of the business studies course is ironic as he's now known as a shrewd businessman, and with a couple of exceptions where he operates tied pubs,

you wouldn't guess who owns the pub. At the Gardener's Arms, for example, no Greene King real ales are on offer.

But nor would you know it's a Morgan pub, which leads me to ask Dick what is a Morgan pub, would he say? And as his property agent remains on the look-out, what is a potential Morgan pub?

"I'm a big believer not just in real ale but in real pubs," he answered. "You've got to get the ambience right as well as the product. The Sussex Arms in Twickenham has 16 hand pumps but it also sells a lot of food and wine. At the Grapes in Oxford, the food offer is simple because of its small

size. My property agent said I should look at the Grapes, as it was very similar to our Lyric pub in Soho. It's been very nice to bring it back to life with a wide range of cask and keg ales, as at the Lyric."

Morgan pub managers are given plenty of freedom to choose their beers, and Johnny Roberts – landlord of the Grapes who also oversees the Gardener's – has proved a good friend to CAMRA with an ever-changing roster of ales, Harvey's Sussex Best being a regular. So how does Dick feel about the future of real ale?

"Real ale sales go up and down, and volumes have

Murder at the Magdala

When the upcoming ITV/ITVX drama *A Cruel Love: the Ruth Ellis Story* is aired, glasses will clink in celebration at the Magdala, a Morgan pub close to Hampstead Heath in London. They probably won't be celebrating a notorious murder and murderess, but because Ruth Ellis shot her lover David Blakely outside this very pub, so the TV series is bound to bring extra trade. She was the last woman executed in Britain, in 1955, and the salacious details of her life as a "nightclub hostess" have inspired numerous films, documentaries and plays ever since. A previous landlady of the Magdala apparently had "bullet holes" put in the wall much later to burnish the legend!



Photo by George Rex

The Magdala pub is named after the Battle of Magdala in 1868, in which, after a long and expensive march and siege, British forces captured the fortress of Magdala in Abyssinia, now Ethiopia. To learn more about the Siege of Magdala, read *Flashman on the March* by George MacDonald Fraser.

gone down over the last couple of years and are still falling as there's a shift to keg products," he said. "But if real ale is what people want we'll increase the range, as here at the Oranges & Lemons.

"Young's had spent a lot of money on this pub quite recently, but when it was put on the market we thought we could bring something different to this site. Young's runs pubs in the same way wherever they are, with the same menus, whereas we would adapt to local markets. People ask why did Young's sell this, but it must be because they couldn't make it pay. They were adding a 12.5% service charge to food in a big student area."

The beer range here changed very soon after pur-

chase. Cask ales Young's London Original and London Special were replaced by a range of independent real ales and a cask cider. Two-for-one food offers have been introduced, and it may even restore darts and other pub games. The huge photograph of customers outside the Oranges & Lemons taken in 1979, which adorns a wall, will remain, however.

Some Morgan pubs are known for their vinyl record players and traditional photographs and prints, whereas others have live music. It all depends on the size of the pub, the locality and of course the customer base, in contrast to the corporate approach taken by many pubcos and breweries.



The Gardener's Arms in North Parade Avenue is Morgan's second pub in Oxford.

Morgan's 24 pubs are in locations as varied as Soho in Central London and Chichester, West Sussex, but there is a particular concentration in the south-western suburbs of London and in Surrey. This too is where Dick's son James, one of six children, is a partner in Big Smoke brewery of Esher. As Morgan operates its own food delivery business, further expansion around where existing pubs are situated would make sense.

"If the deals are right then we will continue to add pubs, but I'm not out to build an estate of another 20 in the next few years," said Dick. "We don't brand our pubs, as a pub collective is exactly what it means and you won't see any corporate signs outside."

"Our philosophy will stay the same – getting the right person into the right pub for them, with the right attitude and the right product whether it's real ale, wine, food or music. It seems to be successful."

But for now, making the Oranges & Lemons a success is the priority for Morgan. If the Grapes is anything to go by, Oxford CAM-RA will offer it full support.



Festival a success but future uncertain

A RALLYING CALL will go out in spring 2025 for help with social media and securing sponsorship deals, to safeguard the future of the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival.

Dates have been secured for a Town Hall event from 16-18 October, but attendance at the October 2024 event was disappointing. It would have made a loss if not for involvement by the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA), which approached Oxford CAMRA to stage its Midlands regional brewing competition during the festival. Although SIBA was pleased with the event, it is thought unlikely it will return in 2025 as Oxford is at the southern extremity of its Midlands region.

SIBA supplied around 120 barrels of real ale at highly favourable rates in 2024, so the festival made a surplus. But as attendance was down again, to less than 1,700 over three days, it would have made a loss for the first time without SIBA's involvement.

Festival organiser Graeme Allen warned of a major increase in costs for 2025 even before any beer is ordered, with Town Hall venue hire increasing by up to 18% and security costs more than doubling. Total expenditure could go up by £12,000.

"If SIBA isn't there then it won't work, as I won't get budget approval from CAMRA," he said. "We face diminishing numbers, a massive increase in costs and



Thanks to husband-and-wife team Ed Turner and Anneliese Dodds for their "labour" at the festival this year!

uncertainty over SIBA's involvement.

"But I'm not up for pulling the plug completely now. Dates for 2025 are in place, and we've got the next few months to see how it goes and look at the results of other CAMRA festivals."

Another of the organisers, Matt Bullock, said: "I understand that without SIBA, the chances of having the festival in 2025 are slim. We need younger people to come in and help, as social media is the way forward. And what about sponsorship? There are also opportunities for corporate entertaining."

At its height a decade ago, the festival attracted around 3,000 people or almost double

the number in 2024. Various reasons have been put forward for the slump, including older people still being hesitant about going out, fewer people working in the city centre, research indicating that many 18-25-year-olds don't drink alcohol, and the wide availability of quality real ales in city centre pubs.

Those who did attend in 2024, the 25th year at the Town Hall, found it very enjoyable. More than 80 volunteers helped it to run smoothly, but had to pour a lot of beer away when it was over.



Got any ideas or want to help? Email contact @oxford.camra.org.uk

Signs of the times



Eagle and Child

Nicknamed the Bird and Baby, the Eagle and Child in St Giles is perhaps the most famous literary pub in Oxford. From the 1930s to the 1960s, a literary group called the Inklings, who included J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, met here to discuss and read their work.

The inn sign is based on the crest of the Earl of Derby and shows an eagle carrying a child, probably representing the baby Jesus.

The Eagle and Child has been closed since 2020. However, in late 2023 it was bought from St John's College by the Ellison Institute of Technology, which has committed to re-opening it as a traditional pub.



Morris Clown, Bampton

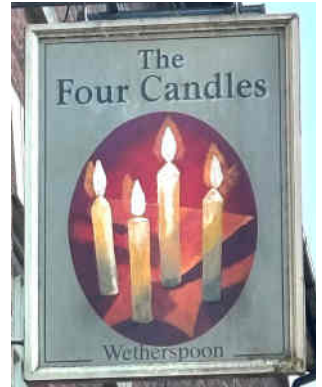
The Morris Clown, in the village of Bampton in west Oxfordshire, has been the cause of some controversy in the past.

In 1973, the New Inn was renamed to celebrate Bampton as a centre of Morris Dancing, a traditional English dance performed outdoors by groups of dancers wearing

Steve Thompson continues to look at some of the best inn signs in the Oxford branch of CAMRA

Four Candles

The Four Candles in George Street, a Wetherspoon pub, is named after a TV comedy sketch by the Two Ronnies – Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett. It was first broadcast in 1976 and is rated one of the funniest performances of all time.

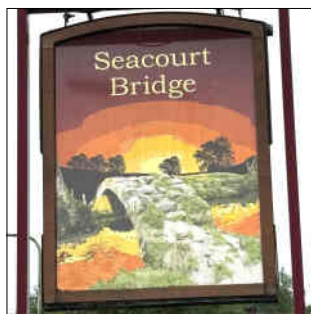


The sketch is set in a hardware shop, with the shopkeeper played by Corbett and a customer played by Barker. The shopkeeper becomes increasingly frustrated because he cannot understand what the customer is asking for. For example, the customer asks for what sounds like "four candles", but he wants "fork 'andles – 'andles [handles] for forks [garden forks]".

The sketch was written by Barker, an Oxford lad who attended City of Oxford High School for Boys in the building next to the Four Candles pub. The school's best known former pupil was T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), and the building is now the Faculty of History of Oxford University.

costumes with small bells attached and carrying handkerchiefs or sticks. However, the name change was contentious because the jester in the Bampton Morris has never been called a Clown, always a Fool.

More than 50 years later the name remains, and one hopes it is no longer an issue. (Photo by Steve Daniels)



Seacourt Bridge

Despite its modern feel, Seacourt in Botley is an ancient name. It was a medieval village first recorded in AD 955 and is mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086.

Once a prosperous settlement, with a parish church, a manor house, and several mills and alehouses, it is uncertain how Seacourt went

from riches to ruin but it may be no coincidence that within 100 years of the Black Death in the mid-1300s the village had been abandoned.

Today no building survives (most remains are entombed below the A34 Western Bypass), but the name lives on in Seacourt Stream, the bridge over the stream and the Seacourt Bridge public house.

Jude the Obscure

Jude the Obscure in Jericho is named after the 1895 novel by Thomas Hardy. The book is set in the fictitious town of Christminster, modelled on Oxford, and mentions real pubs such as the Turf Tavern and the Lamb and Flag. The Jericho area is called Beersheeba in the book.



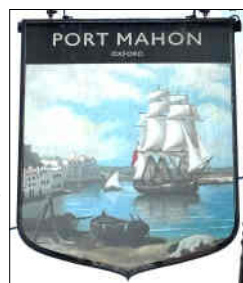
Built in 1871 as the Prince of Wales, the pub was modernised and expanded in 1978 and renamed in 1995.

Port Mahon

The Port Mahon in St Clement's is named after the Capture of Minorca in 1708, in which the island was seized from Spain by British and Dutch forces after they laid siege to the town of Mahon.

According to *An Encyclopaedia of Oxford Pubs, Inns and Taverns* by Derek Honey, the Port Mahon pub in Oxford opened two years later in 1710.

The 1708 battle should not be confused with the Battle of Minorca in 1756, in which the French defeated the British after capturing the garrison of Port Mahon.



For better or worse



Tip of the hat to the Magdalen Arms in Iffley Road, which has produced a new sign (left) much better than the old one (above right) – perhaps after reading our comments in the Autumn issue of *the Oxford Drinker*.

Meanwhile, the sign at the Angel and Greyhound in St Clement's (below right) has disappeared altogether! Blue-sky thinking perhaps? We are sure it will soon be replaced by new owner Morgan Pub Collective, when the pub reverts to its previous name, the Oranges and Lemons.



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

IT GOES WITHOUT saying that pub companies are first and foremost businesses whose main objective is to make money. There is no reason, though, why companies cannot both be profitable and own pubs that offer customers great pub experiences, either directly or via their tenants/lessees.

Also, pubs are not just businesses; they are an integral part of our social network, so community responsibilities are attached to their ownership (and hence the protections afforded to pubs by the planning system). Some companies have been accused of putting short-term profit ahead of long-term commitment to their pub estates – and we'll return to this in a later article.

Managed pubs

We saw in the previous article ("Tenancy or 'Manchise' means more choice for landlords", Summer 2024) that pub companies are increasing the number of pubs they manage, either directly or through retail agreements. The advantage for them is control over every aspect of the pub operation – stock, pricing, staffing, opening hours, decor and so on. The bigger companies can use their buying power to command significant discounts from suppliers, including brewers. They can standardise elements of the customer offer, like menus, which also bring economies of scale. Efficient practices can be identified and then applied across every outlet.

The danger, of course, is that pubs become identikit and certainly some branded operations are pretty much the same wherever in the country you find them, with

Pubcos

How they make money

CAMRA's **Paul Ainsworth** presents the fourth article in a nine-part series



The Holly Bush in Oxford is owned by Wells & Co, which employs Liam Burdett (left) and Kyle Baird as general manager and assistant manager respectively.

choice and character being sacrificed to conformity. Other companies, though, take great care to ensure the individuality of their pubs, notably by the way they are designed and

fitted out – so a balance can be achieved. It must also be said that many customers value consistency and like to know in advance what they can expect.



The Crooked House near Dudley in the West Midlands before it was illegally demolished in August 2023.

Tenanted/leased pubs

Companies derive income from their tenants/lessees in two main ways – “dry” rent and “wet” rent. The dry rent is what you pay to occupy the building. Typically, there will be an initial deposit then a monthly rent, agreed for a three- to five-year term. Pub companies claim that their rent levels will generally be lower than the market rent for an equivalent property, and so represent a relatively low-cost entry to a business that also provides a roof over your head.

In fact, surveys by the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers show that rent as a proportion of turnover (the key figure) is on average higher for tied pubs than free-of-tie leased pubs. The rent will be reviewed at the end of the term; we’ll come back to the issues that can arise in a future article.

The wet rent is what you pay the company for beer and other supplies. As a tenant, you’ll normally be “tied” to the company and obliged to buy the products they offer at the prices they ask. With beer, for instance, that price will usually be 50%-100% higher than the free trade price. The company, because of its bulk buying powers, will pay less than that price anyway so the profit for them from this income source is considerable – a minimum of £210 per barrel.

Some companies offer free-of-tie tenancies, and tenants can also try to use the Pubs Code (more later) to obtain freedom from the tie – but in both cases, the *quid pro quo* will often be a significant increase in the dry rent. There are other ways in which companies can extract money from tenants/lessees but, again, we’ll get onto these later.

Pub disposals

Pubs often occupy attractive, well-located buildings. In many cases, particularly in villages, they are worth hugely more as houses than as pubs. Others are on large plots of land which make them attractive to developers. A little while ago, over a hundred pubs a year were being lost in conversions to convenience stores, mainly in suburban areas. The temptation for pub companies, therefore, has been to capitalise on their assets and flog off pubs to make a quick profit.

Fortunately, and thanks to campaigning by CAMRA and others, it’s now more difficult to do this, in England at least (the planning laws are less helpful in the rest of the UK). Before 2017, planning permission wasn’t needed to demolish a pub or convert it to a restaurant, a shop or most kinds of office. A change in the law means that consent is now required for any change of use or demolition.

Pub losses have fallen greatly since then, despite all the recent difficulties for the trade. Where a pub is clearly valued by the local community, CAMRA will always support objections to unwanted planning applications. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that some pubs find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, because the previous clientele is no longer there or because of demographic changes in the area, and change of use in these circumstances would be reasonable and even welcome.



To read previous articles in this series, go to the *Oxford Drinker* website and search for “Ainsworth”.

THIS PAST SUMMER, I had the pleasure of leading a four-week study abroad course in Oxford, where we explored the sociological significance of the British pub. As an American scholar, I am fascinated by the role this longstanding institution has played in fostering community, a tradition that has long expired in the United States with the onset of suburbanisation and franchised establishments.

During my stay, along with a couple of my American students, I visited nearly 20 different pubs. Those experiences left us with a deep sense of appreciation for these spaces. Before our arrival, I introduced my students to several readings expressing concern about the future sustainability of this cherished British institution. During our stay, we had the opportunity to speak with a couple of CAMRA members, and they confirmed many of these concerns.

As an outsider, I came into this experience with a romanticised view of British pubs. I imagined them as cosy, centuries-old establishments dedicated to the art of socialising over an ale or two. To me, pubs were more than just places to drink; they were vital social hubs where locals gathered to commiserate over the day's events. During my daily visits to various pubs across Oxford, I found ample evidence to support these imaginings. What my students and I discovered was that the Oxford pub remains a deeply rooted institution, hosting lively debates over football matches, philosophical ideas, or serving as a quiet retreat for solitary reflection.

A surprisingly delightful aspect of pub culture we encountered was how welcom-

Sociology in a pint glass

American professor of sociology **Kent Bausman** reflects on why British pubs are unique and must be protected



Kent Bausman at the Cape of Good Hope pub in Oxford.

ing these establishments were to both children and dogs. Interestingly, in our discussions with CAMRA members, the presence of children and dogs in pubs was described as a tolerance, but to an outsider, it felt refreshingly accommodating. Unlike the largely adult-only environments typical of American bars, many of the pubs we visited in Oxford fostered an inclusive atmosphere. Families gathered in outdoor garden areas, and dogs were not only welcomed but often provided with water bowls and treats. For me, this was a

warm, refreshing and commendable norm of your pubs.

The family-friendly nature of pubs underscores the community vibe they exude and highlights their role as local gathering spots beyond just drinking venues. In this respect, the Oxford pubs defied the stereotype of being solely dedicated to lager and ale consumption. I found them equally inviting for non-drinkers, deepening my appreciation for the pub as a community-oriented space. With quaint boxes of board games, lively quiz nights and traditional Sunday roasts,



Research assistants Morgan Wimbush and William Cradock at the Head of the River in Oxford.

these local pubs offered a diverse range of social experiences catering to everyone.

Moreover, the relationship between the pub staff and patrons was unexpectedly welcoming. Unlike the often transactional nature of American bars, where tipping can create a hierarchical relationship, Oxford pubs offer a more egalitarian and genuine interaction between the two. I would argue that the absence of a tipping culture allows for a more relaxed dynamic, where pub staff engage patrons as part of a shared communal

experience rather than for pure economic gain. This, in turn, fosters relationships between regular patrons and the staff, evolving the pub into a “third place”, a space for gathering beyond home and work.

In the United States, such “third places” have dwindled since the start of the 21st century. Part of the problem in the American food and drink sector is that our concept of a “local” establishment has been diluted by the prevalence of franchise chain restaurants and bars, which strip

spaces of any uniqueness or originality. It is understood that many Oxford pubs are controlled by chains like Greene King, Fuller’s or Young’s, but to an outsider, these corporately partnered pubs still retain a unique charm and character.

This is rare in American bars, where corporate branding tends to overshadow any sense of local identity. American bars and restaurants are habitually refurbished to conform to the latest commercial trends, leaving spaces that feel like replicas rather than authentic gathering spots. In contrast, the Oxford pubs we visited maintain their storied histories, traditional architectural ambience and intimate settings, offering a refreshing alternative for the visitor more accustomed to sterile and impersonal venues.

While standardised menus across Greene King, Fuller’s and Young’s-owned establishments are a concession to corporate control, Oxford pubs still exude a sense of authenticity. Each pub, with its distinctive architectural quirks, creaking wooden floors, original brickwork and worn leather banquettes, holds a narrative shaped by decades, or even centuries. This adherence to tradition ensures that patrons feel connected not just to the establishment but also to the broader historical context it represents.

For me, the Oxford pub serves as a vital counterpoint to the growing commodification of social spaces. Although no one knew my name, with each visit, I still felt a sense of belonging in every pub I had the honour of entering. In an increasingly digital and isolated world, the face-to-face interactions and simple

mingling with other humans make pubs invaluable. These establishments offer a rare opportunity for genuine human connection, something too often lost in the noise of modern life.

Furthermore, although nestled within the perceived elitist confines of Oxford University, where prestigious centuries-old colleges dominate the landscape and set a lofty tone, the Oxford pubs we visited offered a stark contrast. They functioned as spaces where social boundaries blurred, and people across the spectrum interacted on equal footing. Whether at the **Bear Inn** or the **Chequers**, we saw how these pubs moderated the rigid hierarchies that can define Oxford life. Inside these warm communal spaces thrives an egalitarian spirit of locals, tourists, scholars and working-class patrons alike. In countless circumstances, pubs appear to shape the foundation of Oxford's social life in a manner that few other spaces can.

Given the unique social role of the pub overall in British culture, it is surprising that so few efforts have attempted to use it as a setting in media story telling. Nevertheless, a recent proposal to remake the TV series *Cheers* in a British pub setting feels like a cultural mismatch. The iconic American sitcom thrived on lively, comedic exchanges in a bar where "everyone knows your name".

In contrast, the traditional British pub, especially those we visited in Oxford, offered a more introspective experience. The connection in the Oxford pub happens quietly through shared space rather than regular boisterous banter. From my experience, the



The Ellison Institute's recent acquisition of the historic Eagle and Child is a promising example of how business and education can partner to preserve and revitalise such iconic institutions.

British pub serves as a proper third space, but where patrons value reflection and solitude as much if not more for socialising.

This deeper, quieter role stands in stark contrast to the upbeat energy that defined *Cheers*, underscoring the cultural gap between the two. Given the challenges facing pubs today, the upbeat spirit of *Cheers* seems far removed from the complex realities of British pub culture.

Although they have traditionally held significant communal/cultural value, British pubs, including those in Oxford, face significant threats. Gentrification, rising property prices, changing social habits, and the lingering impact of the Covid pandemic have all contributed to a decline in pub numbers. As an outsider, with less at stake, I argue that the impact of this decline will be

felt far beyond simply the loss of a place to grab a drink.

When a pub closes, a piece of the community's history is lost. The social role that pubs play, as meeting places, as venues for local events, and as spaces where people from all walks of life can come together, is irreplaceable. The disappearance of these spaces leaves a void that is hard to fill. The loss of a pub is not just a business shutting down; it is the loss of a community space (a third space), where people once gathered to share their lives, build relationships and forge connections essential to maintaining social cohesion.

For many, especially younger generations, the pub is no longer the default destination for socialising it once was. This shift in behaviour poses a significant threat to the future of pubs. These so-

cial pressures are compounded by economic challenges, including changing consumer habits, the rise of home entertainment, the availability of cheap alcohol in supermarkets, and the growing trend of online socialising. Unsurprisingly, these factors have led to a decline in pub patronage over the past decade.

Thankfully, while in Oxford, I was heartened to learn that organisations like CAMRA and the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) are at the forefront of efforts to preserve the rich legacies of pubs. Both groups recognise the cultural and social significance of pubs as spaces that foster community connections and serve as essential "third places" for residents of Oxford and across the UK.

The Ellison Institute's recent acquisition of the his-

toric **Eagle and Child** is a promising example of how business and education can partner to preserve and revitalise such iconic institutions. According to the institute, it plans to refurbish the pub while maintaining it as a vibrant public space. In this spirit, it aims to foster both social and intellectual exchange, a fitting tribute to the pub's storied past.

Also, it is encouraging to see media attempts to bring a new generation in connection with the British pub experience. However, a more fitting staged comparison for revisiting might be the 2004 British TV series *Early Doors*, which successfully portrayed the subtle dynamics of pub life.

My students and I share the hope that organisations like CAMRA, the BBPA and the Ellison Institute, through

targeted campaigns, lobbying and preservation efforts, will successfully safeguard the unique role that pubs play in British society. By preserving these cherished gathering places, they can ensure that future generations continue to experience their rich cultural significance, untouched by the pressures of modernisation and commercialisation.



Kent Bausman, who is professor of sociology at Maryville University in St Louis, wishes to thank Morgan Wimbrush and William Cradock for their help in research. Local CAMRA member Matt Todd and Oxford Study Abroad Programme member Adam Brown also contributed insights.



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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A COUPLE OF months ago, I finally restored the bar to its pre-pandemic state. That is, I had four hand pumps pouring drinks. Until now, it just hadn't been feasible to have more cask ales on, as spreading the choice across four beers would split the sales. That reduced the speed with which each cask was sold, increasing the chance of selling beer that was not in prime condition.

I'm proud to say I have a reputation for keeping good cask ale, so it was troubling me why I hadn't been able to push ales to the point where having four on the bar was sustainable. And then I realised. I had way more than four "real" ales on the bar, it's just that they weren't all cask. I've got two keg from Butcombe, another keg from Tap Social and a tap that rotates between keg ale, stout and sours. So that's seven ales on the bar.

And yet the fourth hand pump is now back in action. Only it's not pouring ale. It's serving cider.

I really enjoy cider, as I like the slightly excited sugar rush feeling of drunkenness it produces. It does, after all, straddle the divide between alcohol and fizzy pop. Only it doesn't, that was just the perception it held for many years. Alcopops actually straddle the divide between alcohol and fizzy pop. The clue is in the name after all. But I'm not talking about the fizzy kind of cider, I'm talking about The Still Stuff.

Before anyone protests that I'm talking about cider in a CAMRA magazine, please note that CAMRA does stand for the promotion of cider and perry along with real ale. It doesn't include it in the title because the Campaign for Cider, Real Ale and Perry is

Gardener's World

Cider

(How about them apples)

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



The fourth hand pump on the right now serves cider.

unwieldy, plus the acronym would be CAMCRAP which is a bit self-defeating.

In the 1980s, cider had a reputation as a drink consumed by the homeless, scouts and idiots in search of a village. Then it had a sudden renaissance. Such a renaissance in fact that Tesco reported it has increased its cider range by 60% to keep up with popularity.

CAMRA's figures show a similar increase, from six pints consumed per head in the UK in 1972 to 13.6 pints in 1992. That's over double. But how much of that cider can be defined as real cider? By CAMRA's guidelines that means a cider that is made

from at least 90% fresh apples, not from concentrate. Disappointingly, UK law only needs a cider to contain 35% apple juice, either from fresh apples or concentrate, to be called cider. Hence the large discrepancy between your mass-produced fizzy keg stuff and the real cider we're talking about here.

Yet the boom in cider popularity is probably down to the mass-produced stuff managing a pretty swift volte-face in cider perception. This is just my opinion, but I think we can thank Bulmer's for this as it created a two-pronged marketing campaign. Firstly, it made it seem to be a drink not consumed on a park bench,



An orchard near the Trout pub in North Oxford has more than 70 different apple and pear trees, including cider apples such as Dabinett and D'Arcy Spice.

but by the sort of person who went glamping at Glastonbury and drove an SUV rather than a tractor.

Secondly, they made it seem like putting ice in cider was a new idea. Incredible! Thank you, Bulmer's, as who'd have thought of putting ice in a fizzy drink?

Cider should never have been sidelined as it was. Okay, it does have the reputation for being high in alcohol occasionally. But what do you expect? The word itself, *Cider*, in Middle English, from where it derives, means "strong drink". The clue is in the title, folks.

But leaving that aside, ale has never been looked at suspiciously even though Scottish Beithir Fire, the world's strongest ale, is 75% ABV. 75%!

And then there's the in-

credible way that cider is made. By picking apples, and smooching them. That's pretty much it, as all the yeast for fermentation is in the apples' skins. Now if you want a really drinkable cider you might want to be picky about the apples you, er, pick, but that also leads onto another wonderful thing about cider. Orchards.

Friends of mine moved into a converted stable in the grounds of a manor house in Oxfordshire, and within the grounds was an orchard. A cider orchard. The orchard was planted with a certain number of one variety of cider apple trees, a certain number of other cider apple trees, to make a particular cider.

How incredible is that? A living, growing recipe. And off to the side, in an old shed, was a cider press. That's all you need for cider. Apples and a way to

press them. So my friends decided to make cider.

The old cider press itself was long since rusted to a point where all it could produce was tetanus, but there is more than one way to pulp an apple. Soon my mates had buckets of fermenting cider, and after a couple of months, and the occasional explosion from the build-up of natural gases within the fermentation buckets (well, if it was your first attempt at making cider would you have known that could happen?), the cider was ready to drink. Just like that.

Everything needed to make the cider was just hanging from a tree.

The cider was lovely, and almost blindingly strong. It eventually tested at around 20% ABV (again, if it was your first attempt, would you have known it would ferment to the point where it could take the paint off the front door?).

I'm not going to use this article to harangue any of you into trying cider. We're all big folks now and should know what we like to drink. Rather, this is just a bit of a celebration of cider. Cider should get more consideration, and it would be nice to see more variety on bars across the country. Give people the chance to try a wide range of ciders instead of the standard old carbonated choices. It even mulls really nicely at this time of year, a refreshing alternative to mulled wine.

I'll just leave you with this point though – can people stop asking if we stock any fruit ciders? Yes, I know what they mean by that, the Old Mout stuff with raspberries and kumquats in it. But the last time I checked the apple was a fruit. By being a cider, it consists of fruit!



*The Campaign for Cider, Real Ale
and Perry is unwieldy,
plus the acronym would be CAMCRAP
which is a bit self-defeating.*

Tony Goulding
visits the village
west of Oxford

EYNESHAM IS A village off the A40 between Oxford and Witney. There were 20 pubs open following the Second World War, now reduced to seven with an interesting mix of offerings and customers. As I continue to bring you news of the boozing scene, I may not now mention the various beers available, as things change so quickly.

It is so easy to visit Eynsham with a frequent bus service between Oxford and Witney, so you can start east or west of the village. On our bus ride from Witney, it is worth noting the small village of Barnard Gate, where the **Boot Inn** built just over 100 years ago is now boarded up and for sale. It was formerly the **Britannia**, for many years a basic Morrells house, described 40 years ago as a good straightforward locals' pub. Let's hope it is saved to be that type of venue again.

Our first pub, the **Evenlode**, is an imposing building on the main road which was for many years a Berni Inn. Now a successful free house with fine dining and comfortable guest rooms, it is surprisingly to my liking with up to four cask beers being served including a local Little Ox. It is well worth visiting for the extensive outside drinking area, sometimes extensive numbers of well-behaved children, and definitely extensive traffic.

It's 10 minutes' walk or a bus to the next pubs, passing the site of the **Star**, demolished 12 years ago and now a small housing development. As you enter the narrow streets in the small town cen-

Tony's Travels

Ales aplenty in Eynsham



The Evenlode.

tre, you will see the fine-looking 16th-century coaching inn, the **Swan Hotel**. For many years it has been a basic locals' pub, albeit with comfortable dining and function facilities, and guest rooms. This pub is owned by Stonegate group and on my visit was to be changing landlords following the retirement of the successful outgoing couple. The pub can be busy but with two bars and extensive outdoor seating, there is room for all. One cask beer was being served – Wadworth 6X.

A few yards further along the street is the Punch Taverns-owned **Jolly Sportsman**, a jolly good basic local. For-

merly a Halls house, its front bar is for sports and conversation with the cosy side bar serving food. Two cask beers are available, usually including St Austell Tribute.

Almost next door is the former **Board Hotel**, closed 35 years ago, another fine old building now an Indian restaurant. Locals recollect the pub being a bikers' haunt hosting regular Hell's Angels meetings.

Just around the corner is the **Red Lion**, the former heart and soul of the village, a regular meeting venue for youngsters on their way into Oxford for the past 50 years. It's still a fine drinking and dining house which serves up

to three real ales, mainly from Hook Norton, Loose Cannon and Little Ox.

A short walk around the corner past the main bus stops is Queen Street, home of another cosy back street local, the **Queen's Head**, a former Courage house now run by Admiral Taverns. For almost 30 years from 1985 the pub was run by the same landlord and appeared in the *Good Beer Guide* for many of those years. A secret feature of those times was the availability of guest beers, which the pub group would certainly not have allowed to be served. Drinkers would only know what was on at the last moment! Good pub grub is served, with a couple of beers from Admiral's guest list which would include Sharp's Doom Bar.

Another short walk up to



The Red Lion.

Newland Street will bring into sight the former **Newlands Inn**, a free house for many years but now sadly boarded up and for sale. This imposing old stone building was formerly a Halls pub, note the "Halls Hare" on tiles on the front offside wall.

A short walk up the street will find the **White Hart**, another former Courage then Morland and now a Greene King house. This comfortable

old stone building is very much a locals' haunt, with weekday evening opening and extended hours at weekends but no food. The pub is well run by the team from the **Red Lion**, with up to three real ales mainly from Hook Norton, Loose Cannon and Little Ox.

You may need the bus for the last of our pubs, as it's a good half mile to the **Talbot**, very close to Swinford toll bridge. This former riverside Halls house has been owned by Arkell's of Swindon for almost 20 years, and for many years featuring gravity dispense from barrels directly stillaged on the back bar. It's now very popular for fine food, cosy guest rooms and a couple of Arkell's beers, but parking and walking to the pub can be a bit hairy at times due to the close proximity of a busy road.



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The Last Drop

Not just for Christmas

Graham Shelton celebrates the re-opening of the Red Lion Northmoor



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camra.org.uk/join



IT'S DARK, IT'S foggy, it's cold but the log fires are lit and there's a pint of well-kept ale in the glass. Friends and chat are flowing. Time for a Pub Quiz! So here's the first question. "What am I? I cost you money, I'm fun, I'm frustrating, I'm loveable, I'm hard work, I'm exciting, sometimes I make you despair. Am I: your girlfriend, your spouse, your child, your pet parrot, your Community-Owned pub, or all of the above?"

Eleven years into the Community-Owned pub journey at the Red Lion Northmoor, there's not much doubt in my mind about the answer.

Fired with hope, ignorance, enthusiasm and belief, it was a matter of moments to agree that we should club together to buy the pub for the village when no-one came forward to take on the ultra-expensive tenancy from Greene King in 2013. The Seven Stars at Marsh Baldon had gone before us on the Community-Owned pub journey, but there weren't many others in Oxfordshire at that time. So we just did it the best way we could and hoped for the best.

We struck lucky with our first tenants, who took on a three-year lease and then a seven-year tenancy. Lovely and enthusiastic, great on looking after the beer and providing delicious food, they were good. CAMRA helped us every inch of the way, and we felt we'd cracked this pub lark.

But Covid and the energy crisis (neither of which we had predicted in our business planning) really began to bite. Pubs all over the country were closing, and our tenants decided not to renew their lease at the end of March this year. For us, out in the West Ox-

Graham Shelton (centre) celebrates with new tenants Deb and Toby Merridan.

fordshire countryside, there could be no choice but to buckle down and find some new ones; our local pub is simply essential to life as we know it!

Seven months later, we are open again. Yay! But it's been a long old journey: expensive, fun, frustrating, hard, hard work, exciting, driving us to the point of despair...

Thank goodness for all the selfless people who have lent a hand in cleaning, repairing, painting, carpeting, plumbing, gas fitting, wiring, plastering and all the colossal list of tasks we suddenly found we needed to do.

I took a few photographs along the way, just to remind others out there who may be ready to embark themselves, as we did, with hope, ignorance, enthusiasm and belief that the Community Ownership journey is long, hard and expensive.

It's still fun, though, and the sun came out for us when we found our super new tenants, Toby and Deb Merridan, fresh from the Six Bells in Kidlington. Their "soft" launch was on Saturday 1 November to test out what worked and what didn't, so it was drinks and snacks only to get things started.

We were more than a bit worried if anyone would come after so long, but we needn't have been. It was shoulder-to-shoulder happiness and good beer!

"Our aim is always to have several well-kept local cask beers on tap, as well as the occasional guest from further afield," said Toby. "There'll be a good selection of keg beers,



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Church Hanborough Beer Festival



Church Hanborough

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Pre-order before the day and get a free beer token – £10 for 3 beer tokens and a commemorative glass.

To pre-order email the Church at rector@hanboroughparish.co.uk or the brewery at churchhanbrewery@gmail.com

Any surplus from the event will go towards the restoration work at St Peter & St Paul in Church Hanborough



cider, wines, spirits and non-alcoholic drinks as well.

“We want to make sure that it is a proper pub with good pub grub, and our full food offering starts on 17 November. There are traditional Sunday roasts as well as veggie options, so something for everyone. We know we can’t please everyone, but we do have the results from the survey that was done just before we arrived. We’ll be doing our best to deliver for the majority: a good quality, accessible pub where you’ll always feel at home and where you’ll be proud to bring your friends whether it’s for a drink, a snack or a full meal.”

Meanwhile partner Deb

has advanced plans for quiz nights, bar games, bingo and maybe even the odd piano-fuelled party night. Do come along and enjoy the fun. It’s a lot of work keeping a pub going in a tiny village like Northmoor, so do be sure to pop in every week.

The luxury en-suite shepherd’s huts in the garden are clean, warm and welcoming too, and offer a great overnight stay after a meal, a drink and then maybe another drink! Toby is supplying a cooked breakfast for every overnight guest.

The Red Lion is open every day except Monday – new number 01865 686101.



Oxford Branch Diary:

Friday 13 December, 2pm
Branch Christmas Social
Start at White Rabbit, 21 Friars
Entry, Oxford OX1 2BY

Saturday 1 February
Central South Region London
Ramble
Details to be confirmed

Monday 17 February
Oxford CAMRA Awards Night
Oranges & Lemons (former
Angel & Greyhound)
To be confirmed

To view the full branch diary,
visit oxford.camra.org.uk

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