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Issue 126
Spring 2025

the Oxford Drinker



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Cover (clockwise from top left): The Grapes, Oxford CAMRA City Pub of the Year; Crafty Pint, Town and Village Pub of the Year; and related to the Oxford Beer Festival, Loose Cannon for Something Wonderful; and Oxford Brewery for Shotover Trinty. Report on page 20.

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

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Editorial team:

Editor: Dave Richardson
editor@oxford.camra.org.uk

Advertising: Oliver Sladen
advertising@oxford.camra.org.uk

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Design and Production:
Steve Thompson

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Please send contributions to the editor at the above email address.

Pub news can be sent to
pub-news@oxford.camra.org.uk

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Welcome

...to a challenging time for pubs and for drinkers

LET'S FACE IT, drinking a pint of draught ale has become a rather expensive "hobby". With the exception of Wetherspoon pubs, you're unlikely to find a pint of real ale costing less than £4 anywhere around Oxford, and more likely you'll be paying £5 or even more as our survey of city centre prices last autumn showed (*Oxford Drinker* 125 or search the online version for "survey"). It doesn't seem long since the £5 barrier was breached, but now £6 is well and truly in sight. And as for craft keg prices... at least £1 a pint more for a product needing less care.

The tough economic outlook facing many people in 2025 could make it even worse for pubs, and now they face increases in employers' National Insurance, hikes in the minimum wage and higher business rates. We have escaped the worst of the closures affecting parts of the country, but in this scenario few pubs could be considered safe.

This makes our guest writer column by Royal Blenheim boss Steven Lyne particularly worth reading, as he talks about that elusive "magic" that brings people into pubs, while the lack of it may drive them away. It's not worth trying to compete with supermarket drink-at-home deals in any case, and most pubs no longer see some of their regulars because of it – the drink-at-home trend being exacerbated by the pandemic.



We don't want to see pubs become places where only the well-off can afford to go, and fortunately the wider social benefits of pub visiting are now better understood. But we will have to grin and bear further price increases this year, and there's always Wetherspoon if you need to economise. Or take a trip to another part of the country where prices are much lower – the Black Country, for example, some of whose wonderful pubs are described in this issue.

We also have our usual line-up of regular columnists, including landlord Paul Silcock with his views on the benefits of moderate drinking, and Steve Thompson reflecting on Lost Pubs around the Plain in our nostalgia feature. There's plenty of good news too with awards for local breweries, re-opening of the Oranges & Lemons (above) and a new brewery planning its first open days.

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

DAVE RICHARDSON

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

“Brown and twiggy” Plus!

Chair's Chatter



AS A TEENAGER, my local beer of choice was **Greene King's** Abbot Ale. If I could get it I enjoyed **Timothy Taylor's** Landlord (hard to believe it was once difficult to find outside Yorkshire) or **Badger's** Tanglefoot. Other than these two pales I was firmly in the dark beer camp – milds, stouts and porters making me smile, but nothing as much as **Theakston's** Old Peculier.

Lager drinkers would mock my “brown and twiggy” brews, a phrase I embrace.

Overall, bitter drinking was declining and many brewers changed their recipes, normally to cut costs. Abbot was a victim in this cycle and many once great beers were cheapened to the point of being ruined. Thankfully, **Greene**

King realised it needed to make Abbot more like it used to be, but a lot has been lost.

The globals wanted to lower costs and remove choice but a UK brewing revolution was under way. Thousands of new breweries were being founded. These independent brewers are producing some fabulous beers. Many are hazy pales, IPAs etc, but there are the likes of **Oxford Brewery's** Shotover Scholar, a lovely bitter, and **XT 10** (top right in photo), a proper stout.

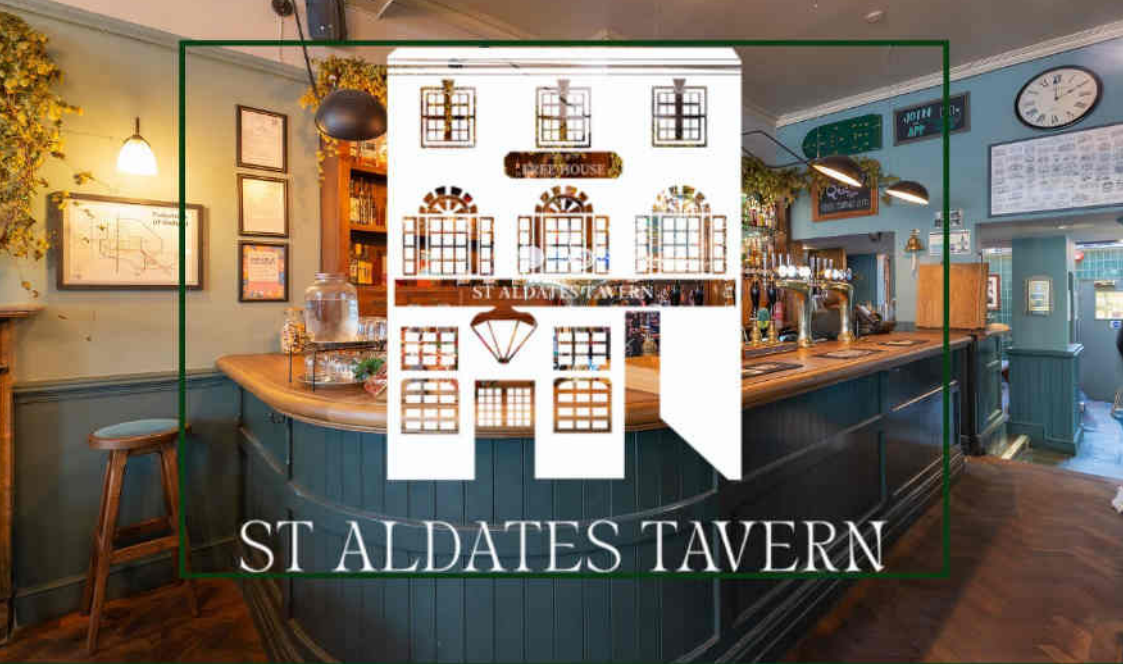
These Indie Beers have totally changed the game. Until I started hanging out with CAMRA folk, I hadn't fully appreciated the world of beer is really very different compared to 40 years ago. Plenty

of the new beers don't fit easily into the old categories. Many are fruity and fun, though definitely not soft drinks. We probably need a category “electric soup” for the likes of **Disruption IS Brewing's** Chaos More Chaos. It blew my mind. Some, like **Little Ox**, are gluten-free across the whole range.

Craftsman has produced a wonderful Christmas beer, that actually tastes like Christmas! **Tap Social Movement** isn't just making great beer but helping hundreds of people turn their lives around through its work with ex-prisoners. **Church Hanbrewery's** Czar Bomba is a divine Imperial Stout. Ten years after **Greene King** closed the Morland brewery **Loose Cannon** was founded, making Abingdon a brewing town again.

In 2024, pubs in just the Oxford branch were selling beers from more than 240 breweries. These Indie Beers can surprise and delight. Old Peculier is still my “go to” beer, *but I'm different now*, and give beers that aren't “brown and twiggy” a chance. Next time you see an Indie Beer give it a try, you might like it a lot!

JOHN WINNEY



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Pub, Brewery and Festival News

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Oranges & Lemons re-opens but Morgan pulls out of Gardener's

Morgan Pub Collective re-opened the Angel & Greyhound in February after a revamp that saw it revert to a previous name, the Oranges & Lemons. But Morgan's second foray onto the Oxford pub scene ended in disappointment at the beginning of the year as it has handed back the keys of the Gardener's Arms in North Parade Avenue to Greene King.

The Oranges & Lemons was closed for over a month for what company boss Dick Morgan called "de-Youngification", Young's having run the pub for over 30 years. The pub now has a retro look with dark shades, plenty of old pictures, and vinyl music from a record player on the bar top.

Morgan has transformed the St Clement's pub into an essential stop for beer lovers with eight hand pumps and 30 keg lines. Young's beers are no longer available here, but can be found at the King's Arms and also St Aldate's Tavern, part of City Pub Group which is owned by Young's.

Real ales available on opening day were Harvey's Sussex Best (available at many Morgan pubs including



Left: Lord Mayor of Oxford Mike Rowley joins GM Johnny Roberts at the opening night celebrations.



Below: Bertie Neal knew many of the people in this punk era photo of the pub's customers, taken in 1979. CAMRA's Rita Vlahos listens in.

the Grapes in Oxford), Titanic Plum Porter, Tap Social Crowded House, Thornbridge Jaipur, and Little Ox Yabba Dabba Doo and Dark & Seedy. Two from Lilley's range were also available – Elderflower Cider and Bee Sting Still Perry.

Morgan's landlords have a lot of freedom in choosing their ales, and Johnny Roberts – general manager of both the Grapes and the Oranges & Lemons – has promised plenty of choice, as at the Grapes. Food offers have also been introduced at the Oranges &

Lemons including 2-4-1 Fish Frydays and Steak Saturdays (ribeye £17.95, fillet £18.95, including a drink).

Dick Morgan said he had high hopes for his new operation, which was acquired from Young's by a property company and leased to the collective. But he added that the Gardener's Arms proved too small for his type of operation, having struggled to find its place in North Oxford and often nearly deserted even at weekends. It now goes back to Greene King and remained closed at the time of writing.

Timothy Taylor Landlord now top real ale by value



We see a lot of Timothy Taylor Landlord around Oxford, as almost everywhere, and we know it tends to be expensive. Now it's been confirmed as the top real ale by value, though still lagging slightly behind Sharp's Doom Bar in volume of beer sold.

Industry figures by CGA, as published in trade portal the *Morning Advertiser*, show that the ubiquitous Doom Bar, owned by multi-national Mol-

son Coors, is in decline with a 20%-plus drop in value and volume in the 12 months to October 2024. It could be seen as further evidence that large multi-nationals are less and less interested in real ale, and that its future lies with the independent sector.

But only three of the top 10 selling real ales were brewed by independents, the others being St Austell Tribute and new top 10 entry Black

Sheep Best Bitter, Black Sheep now being owned by a corporate investor. Butcombe Original and Harvey's Sussex Best drop out of the top 10.

Greene King's Old Speckled Hen is also new to the top 10, joining its IPA. Marston's also has two real ales on this list, Wainwright and Pedigree, but it remains to be seen whether they stay there now that Marston's is closing its Wolverhampton brewery and concentrating all real ale production in Burton-on-Trent.

Landlord has consistently been one of the strongest performing real ales, but is not always well kept and known as a "lively" beer needing good cellar skills. It came eighth on the list in 2018, fifth in 2019 and 2020, third in 2021, and second in 2022, 2023 and 2024 by volume – but first by value.

The brewery, based in Keighley, West Yorkshire, also produces other real ales but these are rarely seen in this area. Boltmaker is the most likely to be seen, but around its heartland, especially at its own pubs, you may also see other cask and bottled styles such as Ram Tam, sometimes branded as Landlord Dark.

Morning Advertiser Drinks List – Cask Ales 2024

Brand	Volume (HL) MAT YA	Volume (HL) MAT TY	% change	Value (£m) MAT YA	Value (£m) MAT TY	% change	2023 Rank	Up or Down
Sharp's Doom Bar	144,133	109,043	-24.3%	91.8	72.3	-21.3%	1	Level
Timothy Taylor's Landlord	100,254	102,654	+2.4%	75.2	79.0	+5.1%	2	Level
Greene King IPA	84,703	77,661	-8.3%	57.3	54.5	-4.9%	3	Level
Fuller's London Pride	71,985	76,850	+6.8%	56.1	61.1	+8.9%	4	Level
Wainwright Gold	47,635	44,030	-7.6%	30.9	29.4	-4.6%	5	Level
Greene King Abbot Ale	46,152	43,824	-5.0%	29.8	30.4	+2.0%	6	Level
St Austell Tribute Ale	36,845	30,717	-16.6%	26.9	23.0	-14.6%	7	Level
Marston's Pedigree	33,417	30,284	-9.4%	21.3	19.9	-6.4%	8	Level
Old Speckled Hen	16,075	18,217	+13.3%	17.3	12.8	+16.5%	N/A	New entry
Black Sheep Best Bitter	14,385	13,608	-5.4%	19.4	9.4	-2.8%	N/A	New entry

All data provided by CGA for the 12 months to 5 October 2024

Pub, Brewery and Festival News

Campaign's new look

A brand-new look for the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has been revealed, encouraging more people with a passion for pubs and pints to become part of the 147,000-strong CAMRA family.

At the heart of CAMRA's ethos is that the pub is more than just a place to enjoy a drink; it's an experience to enjoy and to savour with friends. The new look follows 18 months of

in-depth research and development, revealing an untapped group of people who want to explore different beer styles.

CAMRA wants to welcome new people who can help to protect pubs at the heart of the community, while importantly enjoying quality beer and a rich social experience, with like-minded people.

To join CAMRA, see the advertisement on page 36.



Ryan Baldwin (right) of the Brewery Tap in Abingdon receives an award from Oxford CAMRA secretary Steve Lawrence.

Twisted Tree Brewery

Only a few months after opening its doors, this new brewery says it's thrilled to see the response to its beers. Both Trunk IPA and Ground Stump Coffee Stout have won gold in the regional SIBA Beer Awards, which now progress to the national competition with results due in March.

Twisted Tree has been steadily getting its cask beers into more local free houses in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, and an updated list of pubs and shops is on its website alongside the full range of cans and bottles. It is now offering exclusive cask supplies for pri-

vate events locally, and starting this spring, will host open weekends at the brewery near Bicester once a month throughout the summer. Next dates are 25-26 April and 23-24 May, from 12-9pm.

"We're working hard to ensure our brewing practices are as sustainable as possible, and we're incredibly grateful for the support of fellow breweries across Oxfordshire," said director Mark Hayes-Kemp. "The brewing community here is truly special, so we encourage everyone to continue supporting all the fantastic local breweries." – Twistedtreebrewery.com

QUICK ONES

Brewery Tap, Abingdon
Ryan Baldwin (aka Baldy) has taken over as landlord of the pub from Matt Heritage, who ran the bar for a few years. Local CAMRA member Pete Flynn said: "Ryan has had excellent tutelage from Matt and his wife JD, so I would like to think the transition is seamless. All the best to Ryan and I hope he continues to run beer festivals, and that this fab pub remains in our *Good Beer Guide*."

Rose & Crown, Oxford
Popular landlady Deborah Hall is joining Caroline Hayes to exhibit during Oxfordshire Art Weeks from 3-11 May (11am-6pm at 536 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 8EG).



Their original artworks include bold paintings, mixed media creations and handmade cards across a broad spectrum of styles, from abstract to figurative.

Bat & Ball, Cuddesdon
Closed for over a year after being put up for sale by Admiral Taverns, this pub in a village near Wheatley reopened on 8 January as more of a dining pub. It has been taken over by Ben Moss, who runs the Lamb Inn in nearby Little Milton, his Montgomery Group being well known for restoring failing pubs.

Rose and Crown PH

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Real Ale Trail of West Oxfordshire

The Ale Trail Company is coming to Oxfordshire in April to offer a bus-based tour of village pubs. This is not organised by CAMRA but by a company that's had considerable success with the concept in different parts of the country over the last 11 years.

Starting from Oxford Parkway station, the tour on 26 April will visit the Royal Sun at Begbroke, White Horse at Stonesfield, Royal Oak at Ramsden and Lamb & Flag at Hailey, before dropping into Little Ox brewery in Freeland and finally the Jolly Boatman in Thrupp, near Kidlington.

Founder Shelly Barratt said: "This isn't about flashy beer festivals or manufactured experiences, but discovering villages where the pub remains the beating heart of the community. It's about supporting these vital institutions that have weathered centuries of change while keeping their doors open to weary travellers, local farmers and friends seeking respite from the day's demands."

For full details see below.

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On Tour

The Black Country



Dave Richardson joins the annual branch minibus tour to a legendary part of the Midlands

THIS WAS MY third or fourth pub tour of the Black Country, but I didn't need to think twice about going again. If you like pubs with genuine character and a wonderful line-up of mainly old-fashioned, traditional ales then this is the place to go, and you may well see other CAMRA groups making their way around.

The Black Country, to the west of Birmingham around towns including Stourbridge and Dudley, is a misnomer in

this post-industrial age, but is so called because it once had much heavy industry. You can almost hear the footsteps of the working masses as they marched from terraced houses to factory to pub, and some of the latter still survive.

First stop, in less than two hours from Oxford, was one of two pubs we would enjoy that day called one thing but nearly always known by another name. The **Vine** in Brierley Hill is called the **Bull & Bladder** by nearly everyone, as its lounge bar occupies space that was once a butcher's shop. Landlord Tom Comyns told me that the only parts of a bull not used were its horns (a pair are on display) and its bladder.

The Vine in Brierley Hill, better known as the Bull & Bladder.

This revelation didn't put me off my beer as this is the brewery tap for Batham's, which has been in business since 1877 and is produced behind the pub. Through the good offices of CAMRA member Mark Geeson we were able to visit the cellar, where giant 54-gallon hogsheads of Best Bitter (4.3%) are rolled from the brewery and taken down by a lift, being much too large to handle. When you consider that a normal brewer's barrel holds 36 gallons and a firkin 18, that's a lot of ale – but they often get



through one hogshead (over 400 pints) in a day.

We emerged shaking our heads to find pints of Best stacked up and ready for us, and also had time to sample the Mild – wonderfully flavour-some at 3.5%. There's absolutely nothing pretentious or gimmicky about Batham's, as Best Bitter and Mild are all it usually sells, plus the winter ale XXX during our visit. No IPAs, nothing trendy – but I pitied a group of lads who ordered Stella. We walked out of here reluctantly and looked back at the Shakespearean quotation adorning the outside: "Blessing of your heart – you brew good ale". That says it all.

We now moved on a few miles to Amblecote where there are three *Good Beer Guide* pubs within a few minutes' walk of each other, which was just as well as heavy rain and strong winds were battering us. First up was the **Swan** which had an interesting beer choice but

was otherwise unremarkable, with a much modernised interior.

Another of the Black Country's traditional breweries, Holden's, was in evidence here with Town Crier and Golden Glow, the other real ales being Exmoor Gold, Sambrook's Powerhouse, Ludlow Gold and Salopian Lemon Dream. I tend to favour amber or darker beers but went with the Lemon Dream, a real contrast with the Batham's brews.

But I was soon on my way to the **Starving Rascal**, just a few doors away, keen to sample Black Country Ales as this brewery is one of my favourites and operates pubs throughout the Midlands, the most famous being the Wellington in central Birmingham. As in all its pubs the real ales appear on a TV screen showing their colour, strength and price, and I had a half of Pig on the Wall and a half of one of the guest ales, Beowulf's Black & Blueberry Dark Ale

The pub sign at the Starving Rascal in Amblecote shows a vagrant being turned away by the landlord on one side, while the other side shows the landlord inviting the vagrant's ghost back in.

(4.5%). Other guests included Enigma Golden Ale, Magic Dragon's Hoppy Jester and Salopian Firkin Freezin, with the Black Country range also including BFG and Jubilee IPA.

I was keen to learn why the pub is called the **Starving Rascal**, which it has been since 1974 when renamed from the **Dudley Arms**, and an info panel duly obliged. The pub sign shows a vagrant being turned away by the landlord on one side, while the other side shows the landlord inviting the vagrant's ghost back in. No wonder it's haunted!

We then braved a short walk downhill to the **Robin Hood**, most traditional in atmosphere of the three, where

I enjoyed a half of one of my favourite beers, Three Tuns' XXX. Also on here were Batham's Best, Enville Ginger, Fixed Wheel's Blackheath Stout, Castle Rock's Snowwhite and Burton Bridge's Stairway to Nelson Sauvín (don't ask – I don't know). They do like their real ale around here but there were also two real ciders – Lilley's and Thistly Cross.

It was now on to Stourbridge and the only disappointing aspect of the day for me. I'm no fan of austere brewery beer halls with their barn-like atmosphere and bench seating, and the **Green Duck** was no exception. But I realise that without these tap-rooms many independent breweries would struggle to survive, and good for them that it was very busy with a Santa Claus event – for dogs. It was a chaotic scene with no chance of enjoying a pizza in the time available, but there were seven cask ales on and I had a half of Mild and a half of Bostin' Mild XXL, bostin' being (I deduced) Black Country speak for something very good.

Skirting Dudley we soon reached the **Jolly Crispin** in Upper Gornal, a pub which frankly I remember little about. That's not because this GBG free house isn't in itself memorable, but because I was pretty well bostin' myself after "a number of" excellent ales. My records show that the choice available included Citra and Green Devil from Oakham, Butty Bach from Wye Valley, Absolution from Abbeydale and Dark Ruby Mild from Sarah Hughes – more of which later.

But I had perked up by the time we reached another essential stop on a Black Coun-



The Robin Hood in Amblecote.

try tour – **Ma Pardoe's**. Search for that on the CAMRA website and the first pub it lists is the **Old Swan** in Netherton but fear not, dear reader, they are one and the same. Doris Pardoe ran the pub from 1931 to 1984 when she died aged 85, and her name endures.

The **Old Swan** brewery is on site too, and it was just one of four brew pubs still existing

in 1971 when CAMRA was formed – there are many more today. The historic pub dates from 1863 and its layout and fittings are largely original, giving it a labyrinthine if rather gloomy feel and earning it a place on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors.

Landlord Tim Newey is rivalling Doris in his longevity as he has worked here for



The Old Swan in Netherton (aka Ma Pardoe's) and landlord Tim Newey. (Photos by Mark Geeson)



47 years, half of that time as landlord. In 2022, he warned of bad times, retirement and closure, but that hasn't happened. This sort of pub can never be considered safe, though, so support it while you can. Real ales are all in-house and included Original, Entire, Bumblehole, Netherton Pale Ale and Black Widow.

Did we save the best until last? Well, we did visit one more, another old pub with a brewery as the **Beacon Hotel** at Sedgley is home to **Sarah Hughes** brewery and its renowned Dark Ruby Mild (6%). For logistical reasons we have to visit the **Beacon** either at the beginning or end of a tour, and midday nor 6pm, having already visited six other pubs and a brewery, is not the time to be imbibing Dark Ruby Mild. Other brews available

included Snowflake (8.5%), Sedgley Surprise (5%) and Pale Amber (4%), and I settled for a half of the Mild and a half of the latter. The **Beacon** still has the same layout as in the 1920s with four rooms and three serving hatches rather than a bar, and is also on the heritage list. A conservatory was added to cope with demand as people flock here from near and far, and soon after opening time it was full.

That was pretty well it, and I have little recollection of the return journey. Nearly all pubs visited would be worth a longer stay, and none of them serves food apart from cobs (rolls) and bar snacks, leaving them free to concentrate on the beer. We had no fewer than 38 real ales to choose from, and not a national brand to be seen. Roll on next year!



Pete Flynn charts the journey of Anneli Baxter at Loose Cannon Brewery

AS A 10-YEAR-OLD, Anneli Baxter was already helping out in her parents' pub, so it was inevitable that such an early introduction to the licensed trade would ultimately lead to a career in this profession.

Sitting down for a chat in the offices of Loose Cannon Brewery in Abingdon, situated above the towering fermenting vessels below, I asked her about her role as general manager. "It was the decision of owner Will Laithwaite to step aside and focus on family business interests that created this opportunity," she told me.

Prior to this, Anneli enjoyed a 14-year tenure at Titanic Brewery as general manager and then a move to White Horse Brewery in Oxfordshire.

Starting out, Anneli had a number of sales jobs after sixth form college, including a stint at a business entitled Liquid Assets, before joining Scottish & Newcastle (S&N) as director of pubs in the Lincolnshire and Norfolk areas.

Beer Heroes

From pints to prestige

As S&N moved to the free trade, Anneli was able to base herself at Home Brewery which owned about 450 pubs, before switching to the marketing department. Establishing contacts with cask ale wholesalers via Roosters and Oakham, with supply agreements and networking arrangements, gave her an invaluable insight into cask ale distribution.

"It was the declining health of my father that led me to take over his wholesale business in 1999, so I had to quit my role at S&N," she explained. Her father had hitherto bought the business from Keith Bott (one of the founders of Titanic Brewery), and it was a boozy night out with Keith that led him to offer her the role of GM at Titanic.

"I had to telephone him the

following day to confirm, just to make sure he wasn't joking," Anneli went on to explain. "At this time, Keith was chairman of SIBA and needed help to put systems and processes in place. He did not have the time, and my experience in previous roles provided a natural fit for his business so I complemented the team."

Anneli is naturally coy about the introduction of the bestselling Titanic Plum Porter, and how it came about. "It was an accidental discovery" is her recollection, but it is worth mentioning that this genre-defining and multi-award-winning beer is responsible for over 60% of Titanic sales – not bad when something as momentous and defining as that happens on your watch!

An opportunity then arose



The Shop and Tap Room at Loose Cannon. (Photos by Pete Flynn)



Anneli Baxter at Loose Cannon Brewery in Abingdon.

for Anneli to move to White Horse Brewery at Stanford-in-the-Vale. Years earlier, co-founder Andy Wilson approached his old pal Keith Bott about setting up a brewery, and, with the help of a third shareholder, Ian Rogers of Wychwood Brewery, White Horse was formed. Later, Andy decided he wished to pursue other interests so Anneli arrived to manage the operation during 2019, and while there she was made a number of key changes.

“One was to complete a full rebrand, and a redesign of the pump clips enabled White Horse beer to be recognised from afar,” she recalls. “Another initiative was to introduce Luna as a White Horse subsidiary, enabling small batch brews to be produced. This was really pushing the boundaries and the catch phrase ‘brewed by Mashtronaughts’ further popularised the concept. Rebranding enabled us to modernise and simplify the whole process.”

Just before moving to Oxfordshire, Anneli had embarked on a remote four-year chartered management degree in business management with Staffordshire University. This would prove relevant regarding her current role and must have created a vision of empowerment for the future. At the end of her degree course she left White Horse (which was later sold and closed down), to embark on her current role. She was informed by Staffordshire University the week before her interview with Will Laithwaite she had not only passed, but with First Class Honours. This must not only have boosted her confidence, but convinced her new boss of her credentials.

So in May 2022, Anneli began her new role at Loose Cannon with a mandate from the owner to “operate the brewery as if it were your own”.

For most people, you might think it would be enough to run a brewery employing 25 full- and part-time staff, but you would be wrong. Anneli is an advocate for the small brewing industry and a director of the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA) Midlands Region. This involves political lobbying with Treasury officials, meetings in the House of Commons, and chairing the competitions committee and executive board.

SIBA will oversee the launch during April 2025 of the Indie Beer Campaign. “Beer consumers are being misled by the likes of the global monoliths, who like to disguise their ownership of what

you might see as local brand. Camden Town and Beavertown Brewery are examples,” she explains. “Using the app will enable consumers to focus on supporting our local brewers merely by identification and verification.”

Anneli has already begun to implement her own vision for the future of Loose Cannon by developing tap room activities to include wine tasting, charitable events, drag queen bingo, quizzes, live music and hosting book club events, all with the intention of attracting more people to Loose Cannon. “Our venue is seen as a safe space for women and a place where single women are made to feel welcome,” she adds.

Anneli continues to promote Loose Cannon as a hub for local business and a force for good in the local communi-

ty, while developing a range of events which attract more people. “It’s all about local business, local suppliers and a local craft market where traders can promote their products. We all help each other out,” she says proudly.

Looking ahead, it is not unrealistic to expect Anneli to continue to play an important role promoting independent brewers with her considerable networking and nurturing skills. The role of head of SIBA is surely within reach, should she wish to add this to her list of achievements.

Anneli is a fine example of not being afraid to accept new challenges. The experience she has gained from her roles at Scottish & Newcastle, Titanik and White Horse are recognised as major contributions to the brewing industry.



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



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Awards Night honours the best

THE BEST PUBS and breweries in and around Oxford came together on 17 February at the recently re-opened Oranges & Lemons in St Clement's, to celebrate their success in ballots by local CAMRA members and a panel of beer tasters from this area and throughout the Midlands.

It was appropriate to hold the event in the Oranges & Lemons, formerly the Angel & Greyhound, as this pub is now run by Morgan Pub Collective. Morgan's first pub in Oxford was the Grapes, re-opened in August 2023, which carried off the City Pub of the Year title at the first attempt. Long-standing favourite the Royal Blenheim came second, with another previous winner, the Mason's Arms, coming third.

The Crafty Pint in Witney was chosen as Town and Village Pub of the Year, the first time a micro-pub has won the title. Previous winner the Brewery Tap in Abingdon came second, while third was the much improved King's Arms in Kidlington. The Oxford CAMRA committee has chosen the Grapes to go forward as our contender for Oxfordshire Pub of the Year.

Brewery awards were different this year as Oxford CAMRA did not stage its own competition at last year's beer festival, because the festival was venue for independent breweries association SIBA to stage its Midlands regional competition.

But two breweries who did well in the SIBA competition were honoured as Local Champions, starting with Oxford Brewery which won the Gold Award for Shotover Trinity in the Cask Session Pale Ale category. It also won a bronze award for keg stout and porter.

Loose Cannon won no fewer than nine awards in the SIBA competition, including Overall Gold in the Cask British Best Bitter category, for Something Wonderful. The keg version of this beer also won gold, as did St Amand and Dubbel Bubbler in keg categories. Loose Cannon general manager Anneli Baxter was also presented with an Appreciation Award.

Finally, the People's Choice award went to the first beer to sell out at last year's beer festival – by 100-litre micro-brewery Craftsman in Abingdon, for Scooby Dooby Doo IPA. Well done, Justin and Sam Evans!

Oxford CAMRA chair John Winney said that membership of this branch was growing for the first time since the pandemic, and that in 2024 our members had completed beer scores for 600 different beers from 240 breweries, at 142 pubs. He paid tribute to top beer scorers Gareth Green, Pete Flynn and Chris Spry, whose efforts help choose candidates for the *Good Beer Guide*.



Opposite above: Loose Cannon general manager Anneli Baxter receives an Appreciation Award from CAMRA's Pete Flynn. Below: CAMRA's Tony Goulding (centre) presents a Town and Village Pub of the Year award to Simon Hopkins (left) and Adam Manning of the King's Arms, Kidlington.



Cover (clockwise from top left): Johnny Roberts (left) and Jack Amos (right) of the Grapes receive the City Pub of the Year award from CAMRA's John Winney; Mel Cassidy of the Crafty Pint accepts the Town and Village Pub of the Year Award; CAMRA's Matt Bullock (left) presents Loose Cannon's Gavin Stanton with a Beer Festival Local Champion Award for Something Wonderful; and Oxford Brewery's Alastair Ross receives a Beer Festival Local Champion Award for Shotover Trinity.



Lost Pubs of Oxford

Around the Plain

This part of East Oxford once had about 40 pubs, and Oxford CAMRA veteran Dennis Brown shares his memories of a few with **Steve Thompson**

THE PLAIN IN East Oxford acquired its name when St Clement's Church was removed in 1828, leaving a large open space that is now the Plain roundabout. Branching out from the roundabout are four major arteries: Magdalen Bridge and Oxford High Street; St Clement's Street leading to Headington; Cowley Road; and Iffley Road.

Like Jericho in the previous issue ("The Lost Pubs of Jericho", Winter 2024-2025), the small area around the Plain east to, say, James Street and Princes Street has the air of a self-contained village. Yet according to the *Drink Map of Oxford*, in 1883 it had no fewer than 40 pubs! Today, there are seven (nine if you include the Big Society and Mad Hatter cocktail bars).

In this piece, we celebrate the seven survivors, plus four that are no longer with us – the Coach & Horses and the Duke of Edinburgh in St Clement's Street, the Prince of Wales in Cowley Road and the Temple Bar in Temple Street. We have images of all four thanks to a remarkable collection of Oxford pub photographs owned by Michael Crook and taken in the 1950s or earlier.

Oxford CAMRA veteran Dennis Brown, who has been a member since the early 1970s, shared his memories with me recently, in the Royal Blenheim in St Ebbe's Street – another survivor!



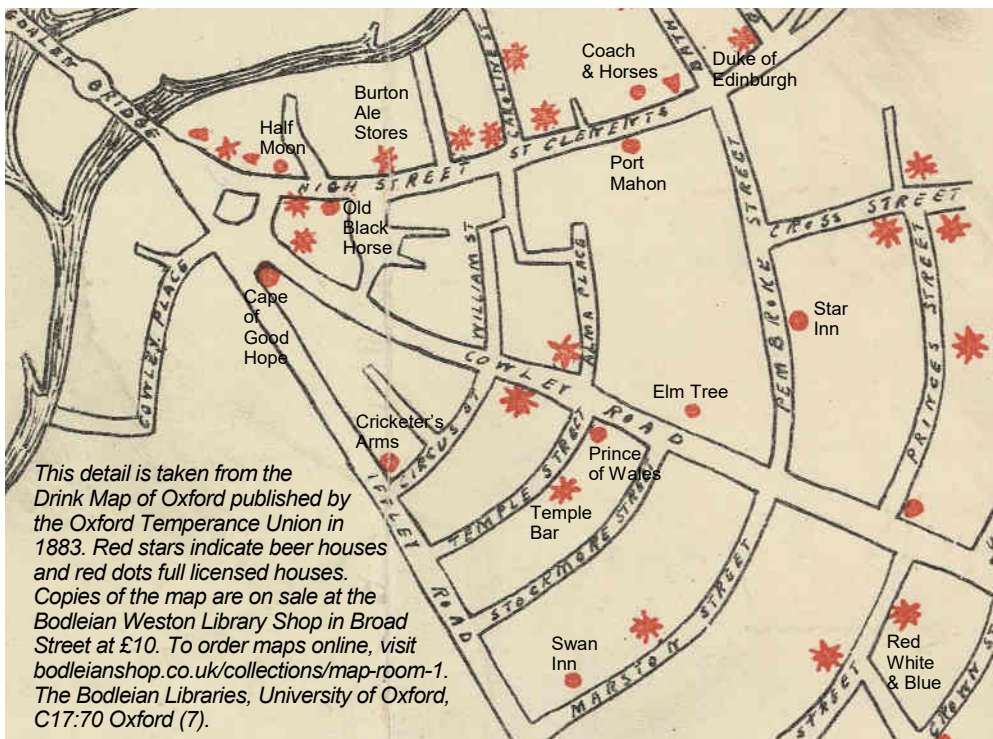
*The Half Moon was originally one unit but now it's two.
(Pub photos © M. J. Crook)*

The **Coach & Horses** in St Clement's Street was formerly a stable opened in 1774 for use on the Oxford to London stage route. The old coaching yard can still be seen through a covered archway to the side of the pub. Closed in 1999, the name lives on in the Oxford Coach & Horses family-run guest house.

Dennis recalls: "That's the Coach & Horses, almost opposite the Port Mahon. It was a Morrell's house. I've got a feeling that in the early 1980s, it might have got as far as the *Good Beer Guide*. It wasn't one of my regulars, more a watering hole. It was a pretty

standard Morrell's boozier until Morrell's were bought out and it went on to Greene King."

Further along St Clement's Street was the splendidly titled **Duke of Edinburgh**, named after not the late Prince Philip but Alfred, second son of Queen Victoria. This tiny pub was noted for its pool table "squeezed into a nook which necessitates comically short cues for certain shots". An Ind Coope house serving Double Diamond and no cask ale, it was not one of Dennis's favourites! It closed in 2014 and is now the Coconut Tree restaurant serving Sri



Lankan street food.

The **Old Black Horse** in St Clement's Street is a 17th-century coaching inn that is now a three-star hotel (with a bar but no real ale). It was "dry" at least until the late 1970s and is said to have been used by gangsters – temperance ones presumably!

Little is known about the **Prince of Wales** in Cowley Road, but in his *Encyclopaedia of Oxford Pubs, Inns and Taverns* Derek Honey teases with this nugget: "With only a £2 rent the landlord during the early 1890s must have thought he was sitting on a gold mine, his turnover going from £692 in 1889, to a high of £848 by 1893." It was still open in the 1980s but later closed and is now a Nando's restaurant.

The **Temple Bar** in Temple Street was named after

the principal ceremonial entrance to the City of London from the City of Westminster from 1672 to 1878, while Temple Street itself takes its name from the medieval Temple Mill once situated just south of Magdalen Bridge. It closed in 2010 and is now Mint Kitchen & Lounge, a Lebanese restaurant.

Dennis recalls: "The Temple Bar was Ind Coope. In the 1980s, when the Beer Orders came in, certain of the national brewers with large holdings in one particular city were forced to go in for pub 'swaps' and the Temple Bar was one of these, swapped with Wadworth.

"Just before Wadworth took it on, it never did much in the way of trade, and a chap I knew at the time told the story that just before the swap, the landlord said to him, 'I'm be-

ing swapped with Wadworth. What should I do?' The chap replied, 'Get more staff!' 'You sure?' 'Trust me.'

"The chap was in just after the swap and the landlord said, 'Thanks for the tip!' That was the first Wadworth pub within the city boundaries."

Although renamed the Mad Hatter in 2013, the pub-turned-cocktail-bar in Iffley Road still retains much of its look as the **Cricketer's Arms**, including the sign above the main entrance and a sculpture on the corner of the building. The sculpture is of Donald Bradman, considered by many to be the greatest batsman of all time, and commemorates the match he played for Australia in 1948 against the University of Oxford at the Christ Church cricket ground opposite the pub.

Dennis remembers hearing that Morland Brewery of Abingdon demolished the pub and rebuilt it in 1936. "To keep the licence, you still had to serve beer so the landlady at the time lived in a tent on site.

"In the 1980s, her daughter and son-in-law were running it, Ray and Daphne. Daphne was the 'queen of the bar', you know, that was her domain. And Ray's domain was the cellar, and God help him if he was in the bar when it was open!

"The Cricketer's was very much a taxi driver's pub as well. Because I mentioned Ray and Daphne, her father was a cabbie and that was where the cabbies used to gather. Drink driving wasn't in by then but even so you still had to be careful.

"The Cricketer's was in the *Good Beer Guide* for years, and did all three Morland beers, Mild, Bitter and Best. (Former Oxford CAMRA chairman) Tony Goulding was a big fan, I think. Ray and Daphne retired in the 1980s or early 1990s."

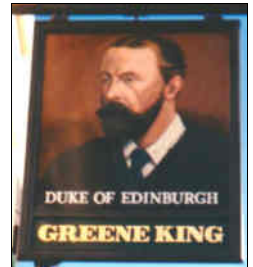
The **Elm Tree** in Cowley Road was built in 1899 to a design by Henry T. Hare, an architect also responsible for the Town Hall and the Slow & Steady pub (formerly the White House) in Oxford. The building is noted for its long chimney stacks and its pillared rounded porch entrance. The pub was so named for the elm trees that lined the main Oxford to Cowley road when it was no more than a dirt track. It was renamed Big Society in 2013 and is now a popular burger and cocktail bar.

Dennis remembers seeing a table tennis table in the Elm Tree, the only one either of us had seen in any pub anywhere!

Despite the losses and changes, there are still some



The Cricketer's Arms at 43 Iffley Road (above) and the Duke of Edinburgh at 76 St Clement's Street (below). (Inn sign photos by Ken Baker)





The Elm Tree at 95 Cowley Road (above), now the Big Society, and the Red White & Blue at 47 James Street (left), now the James Street Tavern.

fine real ale pubs around the Plain.

Dennis remembers the **Half Moon**: "It was an Ind Coope house, one of the smallest, if not *the* smallest, pubs in the city. It was originally one unit but now it's two. If you look at it from the front, the right-hand room was a trade union office. It added a good 50% to the size of the pub. I'm afraid they missed a trick there. I think they should have changed the name of the pub to the Three Quarters Moon!

"The pub was known for live Irish music. Joe Ryan was the

landlord and very much of the same ethnic origin as most of the customers. He's still around apparently but retired now. You had long benches along the wall, made of planks resting on beer barrels."

At one time, Joe Ryan ran both the Half Moon and the Oranges & Lemons (the former Burton Ale Stores). The former was very much an Irish pub, while the latter was frequented by punks for its live music. According to Oxford/Dorset CAMRA member Graham Baker, Joe's policy was

one of mutual exclusion: No Irish in the Oranges, and no punks in the Half Moon. "Stick to your own pubs!" he said.

For more on the Half Moon, turn to "Signs of the Times" on page 26.

Finally, Dennis recalls the **Port Mahon**: "It's the next one as you go up, on two levels, with the Jeune Street bar on the lower level. To enter, you go up some steps and then down again, and the reason for that is the area is prone to flooding. It was Morrell's and is now Greene King, and it's under new management. It used to be a bit of a music venue but no longer."

Of the remaining pubs on the 1883 *Drink Map of Oxford*, the **Burton Ale Stores** in St Clement's Street is now the Oranges & Lemons, the **Red White & Blue** in James Street is now the James Street Tavern, the **Star Inn** in Pembroke Street is now the Star in Rectory Road, and the **Swan Inn** in Marston Street is now the Oxford Blue.

Facing the Plain, only the **Cape of Good Hope**, like its namesake in South Africa, remains forever unchanged.



Signs of the times

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

Half Moon

This small pub on the Plain in East Oxford was originally even smaller! The bar area was the original pub from 1890, and it was enlarged when the adjoining property was acquired in 2001.

One of Oxford's great character pubs and a real throwback, the Half Moon has live music most nights, often with an Irish theme, including folk on Sundays. It is open from 7pm to 2am every night, attracting staff from other pubs on their way home.

As Dave Richardson writes in his book *Oxford Pubs*: "It is easy to picture the pub in Victorian times, although it dates back slightly further to 1823. Beer barrels were once used as seats and tables, when 50 people would often crowd into the one-room pub, cheek by jowl."



Roaring Raindrop, Abingdon

This pub in Preston Road was recently renamed by Greene King after the fastest ever car produced by the MG motor works in Abingdon. In 1957, the EX181 broke the class world land speed record at 245.64mph, with a young Stirling Moss at the wheel.

Until recently, the pub was called the Midget after a two-seater sports car produced by MG from 1961 to 1980. Previously, it was the Magic Midget after a number of record-breaking 750cc MG cars of the 1930s, including the EX120 which became the first 750cc car to exceed 100mph in February 1931.

However, in 2024 an activist in Liverpool launched a petition claiming the name was offensive and the Midget became the Roaring Raindrop.



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



The Britannia

The Britannia in Headington was originally a private house built in 1771 and possibly connected to a turnpike on the Oxford-London road. The steep stone steps at the entrance were to help you get on your horse!

It became the Britannia in 1828 and has been much extended and arranged over different levels.

A blue plaque outside

the pub proclaims that Oxford United Football Club was founded here as Headington FC on 27 October 1893. The former Manor Ground opposite the pub was its home from 1925 to 2001.

The club changed its name to Oxford United in 1960, when its captain was Ron Atkinson who went on to manage West Bromwich Albion and Manchester United.



The Wheatshaeaf

The Wheatshaeaf off the High Street has been described as “determinedly unpretentious” and “a bit rough round the edges”. Praise indeed!

Now there’s only the pub on the ground floor, but previously the first floor was one of Oxford city centre’s last grass-roots live music venues. It

hosted live bands for 20 years, including Oxford acts Foals and Stornoway before they became better known.

However, the 150-capacity venue closed during the first Covid lockdown in March 2020 and did not re-open. An application to convert the first and second floors into flats was rejected in 2024.

Harcourt Arms

Built by Hall’s in 1871 and rebuilt in 1938, the Harcourt Arms in Jericho is named after the Harcourt family, local land-owners who also owned land at the village of Stanton Harcourt, six miles west of Oxford (where there is another pub named the Harcourt Arms).

Current owner Fuller’s undertook a major refurbishment of the Harcourt in Oxford in 2023, without altering the character of the drinks-only pub.

The motto on the inn sign *Le bon temps vientra* (or *viendra*) translates as “The good times will come”.



Head of the River

The Head of the River on Folly Bridge was named only in 1977, when it was converted to a pub from a wharf house belonging to Salter Brothers, a boat building company that continues in business to this day. The name was the result of a competition organised by the *Oxford Mail* newspaper, with the winner chosen from 2,700 entries.

The name refers to the annual rowing races that take place in May, in which university colleges compete for the title of Head of the River.



Black Boy

There has been an inn in the old village of Headington since 1667.

According to CAMRA’s WhatPub website, the pub was called the Black Boy since at least 1805 and there was originally a painting of a black servant above the door. It came from a coffee shop in Little Clarendon Street, then called Blackboy Lane. In 1990, the sign was replaced

by a painting of a sooty chimney sweep’s boy, but the image now on the pub sign is that of a black horse.

In 1997, some Oxford students found the name offensive and complained unsuccessfully to Morrell’s brewery to have it changed. The pub and restaurant are now managed by Everards of Leicester.

The Black Boy does not serve... real ale!



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

Beerfest in a stunning historic setting

Bryan Brown, chairman of the Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust, sets the scene for the Abingdon Beer Festival on 25, 26 and 27 April

ABINGDON BEER FESTIVAL is now in its eighth year, having started in 2016 and missing the lockdown years of 2020-21. It is held for two main reasons, to bring people to the medieval Abbey Buildings who may not know them, and to generate some funds to maintain these precious and important buildings.

Pleasingly, the festival has grown year on year, and it is now an established event in the Abingdon community calendar. It is mostly staffed by very able volunteers, some 60 in total, 40-odd serving beer and another 20 who guide customers and sell beer tokens.

Volunteers are at the heart of our society; indeed, I don't think the country could work without them. Of course, there is no such thing as a free lunch and in return for their time volunteers enjoy a rewarding and satisfying experience. People get great fulfilment from supporting their favourite enterprise, perhaps CAMRA, a community pub, a hospital, a charity or a community event. So, if you are already involved, many thanks. If not, I encourage you to do so; volunteer input is so valuable, and it is great for meeting and helping other people.

Over the years, the Abbey Buildings have become a key community asset, increasingly



The Abbey Buildings are home to the Abingdon brewing tradition.

important in a town centre serving a population of now over 40,000 people. The buildings include the Unicorn, the only theatre in the town centre which is home to community am/dram, professional music and drama, music clubs and festivals and used by many local charities and schools. Other buildings are the Long Gallery, which is a great wedding venue, particularly coupled with our beautiful millstream garden, and the Lower Hall, home to the Beer Festival and great for all kinds of events.

The Abbey Buildings are also home to the Abingdon brewing tradition, beer having been brewed and consumed at the buildings for a thousand years. So, the Abingdon Beer Festival is a revival of the monks' many years of occupancy followed by 300 years of the Abbey Brewery. A

monk's intake was seven pints a day so a target for our customers!

This year also heralds a further milestone for our charitable trust as we are on the threshold of fulfilling our goal of restoring and enhancing the buildings so they are accessible to everyone and usable for 12 months of the year. We are grateful for the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, local councils, several heritage trusts and most importantly our community, and we welcome new donors.

So come and celebrate with us and contribute towards Abingdon's oldest and most important heritage buildings by drinking beer. What a great way to help a charity. We can't think of a better reason to raise a glass than joining us at the Abingdon Beer Festival.



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BREWERY

 **HERITAGE
FUND**

IT'S A FRAGILE time for pubs. With recent announcements in budgets leaving more and more pub operators feeling like the rug is being pulled out from beneath them, we need to take a step back and have a proper look at how we can keep the Great British Pub thriving. At a time when pubs have been building themselves back up after a difficult time thanks to the pandemic, a lot of help will be needed to keep pubs going.

There is very little wiggle room for operators, with inflationary costs up across the board. Too many times, I've spoken with general managers and could not believe some of the eye-watering costs they must pay in their venues. Some pubs are busier than ever, but their bottom lines are still struggling. Without further support, I fear plenty of pubs will close their doors in the next 12 months.

While many people are doing fantastic work trying to swing around the government's perception of the hospitality sector to give us more support, it all starts with the people reading this article. The punters.

I've had the pleasure of visiting quite a few pubs across the country in the past few months. I managed to get out of my own pub for a change! As a landlord myself, I'm always curious to see how other venues are run, to see if there are bits I can draw inspiration from and bring to my own venue. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery after all.

However, I have noticed a troubling trend with many of the pubs I have visited, and I think it's one of the root causes of why most pubs are struggling. Quite a few seem to lack a sort

On the Front Lyne

The magic of proper pubs

Landlord of the Royal Blenheim, **Steven Lyne** (below), looks at what makes a "proper pub" and why people need to appreciate them now more than ever



of "magic". It can be a beautifully presented pub but there's something missing.

Before people jump in and say, "Well, what do you expect from a pub at 2pm on a Monday afternoon?", I've been in plenty of venues that haven't struggled at all at that hour with only a handful of people

in. Many of these lacklustre venues suffer from the same issues. You walk in only to feel you're in a pub from a flat pack. The same as the pub round the corner, the same as the pub you visited last week. The bar encourages you to grab a seat, pull up its loyalty app, scan and order from the



table. A staff member brings your drinks over and that's the end of your interaction. After sampling what it has on offer, off to the next pub I suppose.

This style of running a business in hospitality has always been prevalent, particularly in chains, but in recent years it has really started creeping into pubs. Pub operators are always trying to make changes to benefit their customers and improve business. But if it is not done well, the pub starts to lose a little of its identity, something that makes it that little bit special, its "magic".

This makes it harder than ever to grab some mates together to head down to these pubs. "Why there? It's been bad for years!" is often dropped into conversation. It's not surprising really. Pubs are meant to be the heartbeat of the community, where everyone can get together for any

occasion. Work drinks, a leisurely lunch, a funeral wake, a catch-up with friends after a long week. Pubs capture so much of life's stories, being such an integral part of British lives. It's often why pubs are so prevalent in TV and film. It's a space that can capture so many different stories of everyone who walks through its doors. But when the venue itself doesn't have its own heartbeat, is it surprising that people struggle to find the motivation to visit?

What will be important this year is that venues focus on what truly keeps them open. The regulars and their time. Yes, money in the tills is what pays the bills at the end of the day, but time is so much more valuable. With cash tighter than ever, people are very selective about where they choose to part with it. They will therefore gravitate towards places where they feel

a connection.

At the end of the day, hospitality is about storytelling, and a pub is just a collection of different stories all happening at once. A pub with a sense of community and its own heartbeat is challenging to create. But once it's there, the spark of magic draws people back. Knowing you walk through the doors of a pub and feel that, is special indeed.

The pubs that do it well make it look effortless, but I can tell you it's one of the hardest things I have to manage as a pub landlord. However, it is probably the most rewarding aspect of the job. Being able to create a space where people feel so comfortable is an addictive feeling. Let's hope that is enough to convince other venues to get on board and make it through the next few months.



I'M GOING TO start this column by being as transparent as possible about the upcoming contents. The following 300 words or so are going to be rough. If you're feeling sensitive, or just don't want a wallop of bad news with your drink, skip down the page to the paragraph that starts in bold and just know I've spent the next 300 words talking about the impact of beer on health. Those of you feeling brave, read on...

Would you like the good news or the bad news first?

Good News – the NHS recommends drinking four pints a day!

Bad News – It blatantly doesn't mean four pints of beer. That would be madness.

In fact, to carry the bad news on even further, if you were to drink four pints of beer a day, let's say Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge at 4.1%, which is 2.32 units a pint, that would be 65 units of alcohol a week, which is just a smidge over the NHS's recommendation of 14 units.

To be very clear here, I'm not villainising Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge. It's a lovely beer, and not particularly strong, and was chosen for this reason. The stronger the beer, the more units it has, which I'm pretty sure you know. Just to emphasise this point though, if I'd taken Tap Social's Time Better Spent (another great beer), it's 5.1% which is 2.9 units. That would be 81 units, a mere hair's breadth over that 14-unit NHS recommendation.

You know what? I'm just going to pile on the bad news here and tell you that four pints of 4% beer contain roughly 720 calories. That's over a third of your daily calories if you're a woman, and

Gardener's World

All things in moderation

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



over a quarter of your calories if you're a man.

I know, this is a hell of a depressing start to the column, but have faith, from here on in we're going to find the good news again. To start with, hopefully none of you are drinking four or more pints a day, which is actually a surprisingly high amount if you try it. So chances are you aren't getting 65 units into your body. More interestingly, there are scientific studies on the benefits of alcohol *in moderation*. I feel it's important to emphasise that point, as every study I read is very clear about it. But here are some of the benefits of alcohol. *In moderation*.

Beer does have nutritional value, I'm not even going to try and list all the minerals in a typical pint, but by all means Google it. You'll need to scroll the page in your browser to

read every vitamin and mineral in beer. There's a lot.

On with the good news. Scientific reviews have suggested that drinking beer may help decrease the risk of heart disease. One study found beer drinkers can have a higher level of good cholesterol, better vascular elasticity and higher apolipoprotein A1 levels (which is an indicator of a lower risk of cardiovascular disease). So that's good, when you consume beer *in moderation*.

More good news. Another scientific study, while also confirming the above reduction in heart disease, also found a decreased risk of developing neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's and other dementias. When beer was consumed *in moderation*.

Onwards with the good

news. More than one study has concluded that alcohol consumption can help control blood sugar levels, which can be directly linked to the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, when participants in the study consumed beer *in moderation*. A 2019 study even found a link between alcohol and the risk of osteoporosis, especially in postmenopausal women when consumed, all together now, *in moderation*.

And that's just the physical beneficial effects of alcohol. Did you know that the malted barley in bitter contains hordenine? Hordenine activates dopamine release in the brain, which is that "happy" chemical we could all do with more of at the minute. As beer is a relaxant, it can help lower stress as well. Beer also helps with building social connections, lowering the feeling of loneli-

ness, when done in a social situation, say, a pub. Which is a point I would like to emphasise, obviously.

Perhaps all this sounds like a Catch-22 situation. Drinking can be good. Drinking can be healthy, but as I've gone to great lengths in this article to emphasise (with italics and a bold typeface), when it's done in moderation. So am I not arguing for going to the pub less, and drinking less when you're there? Kinda.

What I'm really advocating is for a more considered approach to the drinking aspect of a pub. With the rise of actually good non-alcoholic beer, I believe it's now possible to spend as much time in the pub as always but still keep your alcohol consumption lower. Not just by cutting the booze out completely and just drinking the dry stuff.

Why not try starting with a non-alcoholic drink, then switching to the real stuff? That's already slashed two units of alcohol from the night. Or try this. A shandy. But not with lemonade, with a non-alcoholic beer in its place. We've got Butcombe's Goram Zero on draught at the minute, and it's pretty close to being actual beer in flavour. But if you had half a pint of that mixed with half a pint of a real IPA, you'd barely notice. Trust me, I've tried it. It's good. So good it may well be my "go to" for hot summer days. Drink four pints of that and you've halved your units.

All of this is to try and raise awareness of alcohol in all its glory, and its negativity. Watching your health will keep you around for longer, and that means you can make more trips to the pub.



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Tony's Travels

From alcopop to the real thing

Tony Goulding presents a general guide to the cider scene in our local area

THE WONDERFUL TASTE of beer was denied to me, which was a huge disappointment, after I was diagnosed with celiac disease – an allergy to wheat and gluten. As an alternative I tried a few soft drinks and then discovered cider was safe for me to drink, along with gluten-free beer.

The word cider encompasses a multitude of tastes and strengths involving the pressing of apples, and I will try to explain the different methods of production, varying tastes and availability of “real cider” in this area.

Real cider, as defined by CAMRA, is produced by a very simple method of pressing apples. The juice is then allowed to ferment with yeast in vessels in the cidery which can be made of wood, plastic or metal. Cider is then drawn off when required. This is still cider, with sugar added to medium and sweeter varieties, and most cider production up until the 1960s was made in this way. Perry is a similar drink but made from pears rather than apples.

Another process is to take this still cider and then filter



Cider producers in Oxfordshire include Hitchcox from Chalgrove.

and carbonate it into a sparkling cider which can be kegged, bottled or even canned. The largest proportion of cider after the apples have been pressed is converted into a concentrate or syrup, which is then watered down to produce the mainly fizzy and cold ciders we see in most pubs today. These include Thatchers, Stowford Press, Strongbow and Aspull. A good proportion of this concentrate is imported from Europe and America as we do not have enough cider apple trees in this country to keep up with demand. A small amount of this concentrate can produce some very tasty ciders. In all fairness, because of the popularity of cider, you could cover

most of Somerset with huge vats of cider if you didn't use concentrate.

Real or still cider is very difficult to find in our area. There are few producers in the county, but these include Hitchcox from Chalgrove, Oxford Farmhouse from Headington, Cotswold from near Faringdon and Harp Hill from Wittenham Clumps, near Wallingford. Just over the Oxfordshire border are Grovers of Little Kimble, Buckinghamshire and Tutts Clump of Bucklebury, Berkshire.

Real cider could be served by hand pump, bottle or bag-in-box, and you may see these boxes around the bar area of a pub. A point to be aware of is that some bag-in-



Jade Henderson at the *Oranges & Lemons* (left) and Jess Dixon at the *Red Lion*, Yarnton.



box could be from concentrate. Some pubs will offer bottled cider and these can be very tasty and to my liking. These include Thatchers, Katy, Thatchers Vintage and Henry Weston's Vintage along with the many tastes of Hitchcox and Tutts Clump.

The most common dispense is by cold and fizzy keg, and hand pump dispense is found in only 10% of pubs in Oxford. These include the **Gardener's Arms** in Plantation Road, the **Lamb & Flag**, the **Grapes** and the **White Hart** in Headington, with two real ciders on hand pump at the recently reopened **Oranges & Lemons** (formerly the Angel & Greyhound) in St

Clement's. Bag-in-box cider is also dispensed in about 10% of our pubs including the **Royal Blenheim**, the **Chequers**, the **King's Arms** in Kidlington and the **Red Lion**, Yarnton. If you are up for a bus or train ride, the **Rose & Crown** in Charlbury has up to six boxes.

Fruit ciders are very popular, by which I mean ciders including fruit other than apples. Tutts Clump is possibly the best producer along with Lilleys, which presses its cider in Somerset. Bottles of "real" fruit cider are rare to find and should not be confused with Old Mout which is one of the sweetest, almost an alcopop, a fruit drink containing a very small amount of apple concentrate – an insult to the word cider. Koppberg is another cider produced for the sweet-toothed drinkers of today.

The word "scrumpy" has done cider no favours, this being a term used for still ciders originally from the West Country. Farmhouse is a much better word.

Most cider drinkers of today would not be comfortable sitting on a damp park bench – to quote from Paul Silcock's very interesting article on cider in the Winter edition of the *Oxford Drinker* (Issue 125).

To finish, compliments must be paid to the most passionate cider producers, Toby Hitchcox and Tim Wale from Tutts Clump, for their service to the cider scene.

If anyone finds anything to comment on in my article, please contact the editor.

For more, see Find real cider and perry producers – CAMRA – The Campaign for Real Ale.



More Tales from the Nose & Frown

A good send-off

Graham Shelton and Grenville Reeves reminisce on a friend's funeral... and dominoes



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I WAS a bit late getting down to the Nose last Tuesday evening, what with having to rescue old Mrs Pasco's dog – a nasty little brute who bit me to the bone, but I'll tell you about him another time. Anyway, I got there at last and Joe was already in his usual seat, right by the fire. By the looks of him he'd been there some time too. Sue had him well supplied with "specials" (each comprising half a pint of Gloucester cider and a quadruple vodka) so it didn't take much to get him started.

We'd all been to Pat's funeral earlier in the day, and as I came in, Joe was expressing the view that he liked a good funeral, more particularly when it was followed by a good wake. There was general agreement about that. "You can be sure of a good feed, and you don't 'ave to bring a present," opined Joe, always keen on a good deal.

Pat's had certainly been a good send-off, as he'd been well liked in the village, and Paul, the Rector, was a clever man and had given him a rattlin' good eulogy. Who can say if the Rector's effusive language was related to his own healthy consumption of Clinch's Mild just before the service, but he looked pretty flushed, and I couldn't help noticing he held on nice and tight to the pulpit, so he didn't sway too much.

The old Rector always got into the pub before I did after Church. It was next door, but I never understood how he did that. I think he must have had some sort of divine intervention. He had a little black pre-war Austin 7 which he drove around the parish, but it used to weave about a bit when he was on the way home. He claimed it was the steering box.



*Funeral,
Epsom,
1919.
(Photo
Wikimedia
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There was certainly a lot more drinking done in them days. It used to start at 8 in the morning directly after milking, then back to work, depending on the time of year, and back again to the pub after work. We used to sing when we'd had a good bit to drink. 'The Thrashing Machine' was one of my favourites, but we had plenty more and what we lacked in harmony, rhythm and tone we made up for with enthusiasm. It was hard work on the farm and down the gravel pits, but we had a lot of fun.

We used to play dominoes too: 5's and 3's, four to a table. We played for a shilling, and we cared more for that shilling than we did for a full round of drinks costing two quid. Sue always put on a good lot of roast potatoes with plenty of salt on a dominoes night. She thought the salt would make us drink more, but in truth we didn't need any encouragement. There was an Annual Dominoes Trophy too, and there's a photo to prove it.

As for Pat, he had had a good life, and his wife certainly knew what rations to give him to keep him up to full showing condition. They had eight of them carrying his coffin, and it's a good job it wasn't far to the churchyard, or I reckon they'd have had to bury a couple of the pallbearers along with him. Pat always had that sort of beeswax pol-



The Annual Dominoes Trophy at the Nose & Frown.

ished look to his round face that came from three good home-cooked meals a day. They reckon it was his kidneys what gave up, but I don't reckon any part of him can have been up to much in the end.

They had a rare job getting him down the stairs in his coffin too. In the end, they had to shove him out through the coffin window halfway down and try not to drop him in the garden. He's safely in the churchyard now and he hasn't moved an inch these last 45 years. We all helps to cut the grass and keep it tidy and I often thinks of all those folk I knew and the good old times we had.

I'll be joining them soon, but I intend to drink a few more pints first! Mine's a pint of mild if you're buying.

PS. Just know that every word of this is true. really, more or less!



Branch Diary:

Monday 24 March, 7pm
Oxford CAMRA AGM
Oranges & Lemons,
St Clement's Street

Friday 11 and Saturday 12 April
Plum Pudding Beer Festival
High Street, Milton, near Abingdon

Friday 25 to Sunday 27 April
Abingdon Beer Festival
Abbey Buildings, Checker Walk,
Abingdon OX14 3JB

Saturday 3 May
Social at Witney Beer Festival
St Mary's Church, Church Green

Saturday 10 May
Brief meeting (2pm) at Loose Cannon, followed by social
Suffolk Way, Abingdon OX14 5JX

Saturday 17 May
Social at White Hart Beer Festival
St Andrew's Road, Headington

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

Branch Contacts:

Chairman
John Winney
07901 010468
chair@oxford.camra.org.uk

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

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

Keep in touch with Oxford Branch:

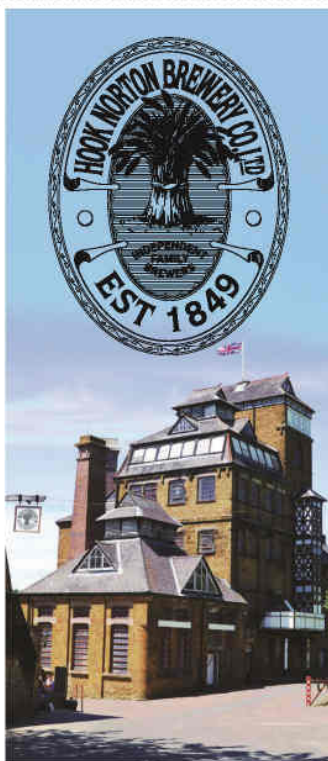
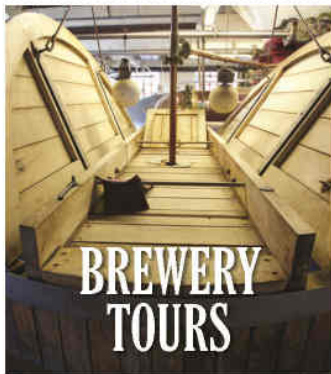
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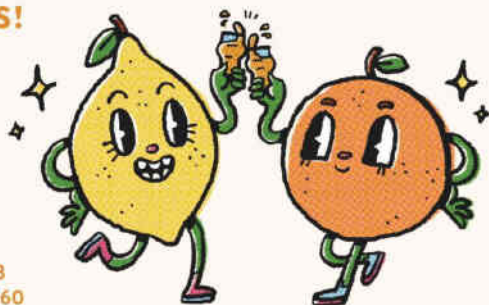
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