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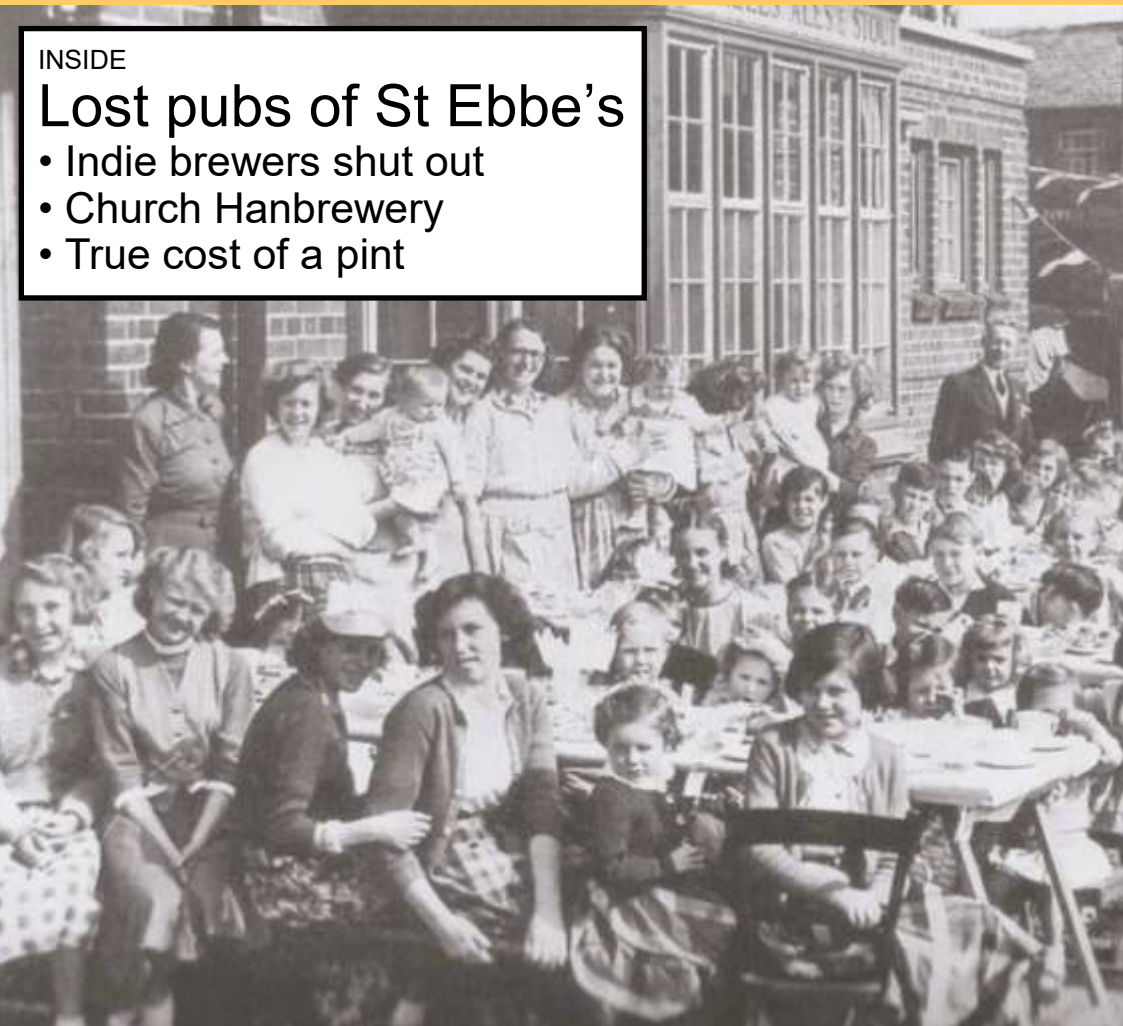
Issue 127  
Summer 2025

# the Oxford Drinker

INSIDE

## Lost pubs of St Ebbe's

- Indie brewers shut out
- Church Hanbrewery
- True cost of a pint



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*Cover: A party was held at the Duke of York in St Ebbe's in June 1953 to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The pub was run for many years by Ted Sloper, to the right of the window. (Photo from The Changing Faces of St Ebbe's and St Thomas by Carole Newbigging.) Report on page 10.*

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

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# Welcome

...so when is a free house not a free house?

**READING ABOUT THE** problems faced by independent breweries having their beers stocked by local pubs (see page 6), I began to wonder just how many genuine free houses there are with total control over what cask ales they sell.

"Free house" is a term very much open to interpretation, and can be misleading. Wetherspoon advertises its pubs as free houses and while its managers may have some discretion to sell a local beer, mostly its pubs order from a changing list compiled by head office. It's the same with other pub companies such as Marston's, M&B, Stonegate and many others, while breweries including Greene King and Fuller's also have an approved guest list to offer variety – a big change from a few years ago.

In Oxford, genuine free houses are few as in most parts of the country. They include (in no particular order) the White Rabbit, Lamb & Flag, Jolly Farmers, Wheat-sheaf, Gardener's Arms (Plantation Road), Rose & Crown, Star, Mason's Arms, Jolly Postboys, Tile Shop, Perch and White Hart, Wolvercote – plus a few more.

Morgan Pub Collective's pubs the Grapes and Oranges & Lemons could be added to the list as its landlords have a lot of freedom in what they order. The Royal Blenheim, while operated by Titanic, has up to four guest ales.

Even some free houses offer limited opportunities to brewers with the Rose & Crown,

for example, having three "permanent" real ales and only one guest pump as it knows what customers like. But however you crunch the numbers, it's a highly challenging scenario for local brewers and many have responded by opening their own taprooms and ramping up direct sales.

Independent brewers group SIBA feels, rightly, that members are being squeezed out. But even if English pub tenants gained the legal right to sell one beer of their choosing, as in Scotland, you suspect the big brewers and pub companies would still have them over a barrel. By threatening to raise the price of their own beers, for example.

Enjoy this issue, with the usual wide range of articles including Oxfordshire Pubs of the Year, a focus on Church Hanbrewery, Beer on Buses (!), Steven Lyne on the true cost of a pint and another wander Down Memory Lane, this time to St Ebbe's.

We all know pubs with resident dogs or cats, but I was intrigued to read that most St Ebbe's pubs also had a resident parrot like this particularly fine African Grey, who happens to reside with the editor. I'm not so sure about the coffin anecdote, however – see what you think?

Your ideas for future content are always welcome, and don't forget to go online for regular updates.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**



For regular updates visit  
[www.oxforddrinker.camra.org.uk](http://www.oxforddrinker.camra.org.uk)



## Chair's Chatter

*The Swan & Railway Hotel in Wigan. Its lovingly restored heritage interior is matched by the quality of its beer and the warmth of the welcome.*

# Northern Soul

**ONE OF THE** cultural schisms that perpetually divides the English is North versus South. Mostly, this is just gentle joshing about accents and how cheap/expensive it is in different places. Yet travelling around you do notice there is more to it than that, which often makes the journey worthwhile.

Four of us headed off for a weekend in Wigan so the headline should be obvious, the Road to Wigan Beer, but that has been used already. The *Good Beer Guide* gave us a list of pubs to visit and just as in Oxfordshire there are good/great pubs that don't make the guide, but it was a starting point.

There is a lot of history in Wigan pubs, and you can feel that at one point the best were true beer palaces. In some ways, the fact that the years are starting to show for some

makes them even more magnificent. There were also a couple of really impressive new pubs, and the splendid **Wigan Brewhouse**. Its taproom is accessed by the steepest stairs of any bar I've been to, but assuming you can navigate them the taproom is welcoming and the beers fantastic. To cap it all, the pump clips look like record labels. Sometimes, it is the little details...

Some say people are more friendly up North, a sweeping and controversial argument I don't wish to ignite. In Wigan, we found lots of people were interested in why, with our obviously Southern accents, we were out having fun in Wigan. It was always friendly, with the harshest banter being an assumption that Southern meant lightweight.

You'd expect the rock pub

to be the **Anvil** or the **Raven** (both excellent), but it turns out it's the **John Bull Chop House**. A cracking jukebox full of classics, people of all ages who know all the words, and an upstairs dungeon... what happens in Wigan stays in Wigan.

If you're in a strange town, or just want inspiration, then the *Good Beer Guide* might give some ideas of where to visit. CAMRA members can get the new guide two weeks early, for just £12, by joining the GBG Privilege Club. Just log in to the CAMRA website, click on the account button top right next to the bell, and it's under My Profile. No money upfront, so you can cancel any time.

See also WhatPub.Com, the new online version being a *big* step forward.

**JOHN WINNEY**





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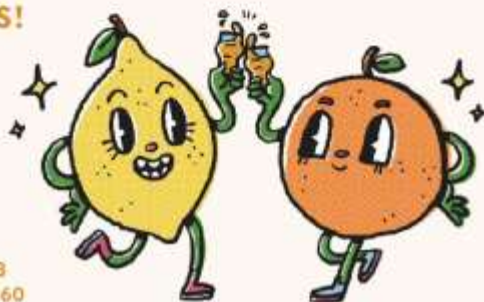
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# Pub, Brewery and Festival News

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## Indie breweries under pressure

The hard times facing breweries are outlined in the SIBA Independent Beer Report 2025, showing that around 100 independent breweries closed last year.

The figures must be seen in the context of huge growth in brewery numbers over the last decade, so maybe it reached a level not sustainable. Our local brewers have reflected that trend with the closure of Wychwood by Carlsberg Marston's in 2023, and the demise of White Horse and Wiggly Monkey. But a new brewery, Twisted

Tree, has sprung up – and is getting its cask ale into a few local pubs.

The SIBA report found that average production climbed 10% last year but remains below pre-Covid levels. But 46% of independent brewers say their main priority is survival and 29% expect turnover to fall. The increasing popularity of porters, stouts, craft lagers and “no and low” alcohol beers helped drive growth.

“Time and time again, the research shows that there is high demand for the innovative, interesting and tasty beers that indie brewers are best at making,” commented Andy Slee, SIBA CEO. “However, the current global trade anxiety and tax changes in the UK are making it a challenging market.

“Indie brewers can't get their foot in the door to get their beers to the customer.

Our members currently have around 6% of the market and where they are allowed to compete against global breweries, they could have 30% market share.”

YouGov polling, commissioned by SIBA, shows that less than half (47%) of all consumers ever drink beer and only 28% of the 18-24 age group. More are choosing not to drink alcohol at all – 21% of all consumers, increasing to 36% for 18- to 24-year-olds.

More than three quarters (77%) say it is important for pubs to offer a range of beers from local breweries, but independent brewers report being unable to sell to, on average, 60% of the pubs local to their brewery.

The big brewers and pub companies still control most of the market, making genuine free houses all the more important.

## Headington highlights

A crawl around Headington will involve a lot of walking, as buses only serve the main London and Windmill roads. Starting with the three pubs I consider to be the “real Headington”, the **Mason's Arms** is a super local community pub. No food but some sports for all, expect Rebellion Smuggler plus four ever-changing cask ales along with a few Belgian bottles and Katy Cider.

The **Butcher's Arms** is owned by Fuller's and serves three of its cask beers with no food. It's well supported by the local community, with Ian



Stuart (also landlord of the Harcourt Arms in Jericho) certainly putting his stamp on this fine back-street local.

Another fine pub owned by Everards of Leicester, the **White Hart** (above) serves

five cask ales from that brewery and guests, along with a real cider. Great food is served in this again welcoming community pub, with an attractive garden. Dining pub the **Black Boy**, also owned by Everards, is nearby.

The **Tile Shop Ale House** micro-pub serves up to three cask ales from Tring brewery. M&B's **Britannia** will serve up to five cask ales and good value food, while the sports-led **Royal Standard** is a typical Greene King local.

Also try the **Ampleforth** on the Risinghurst estate, with two beers.

**TONY GOULDING**



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2<sup>nd</sup> July - 27<sup>th</sup> July**



# Pub, Brewery and Festival News

## Craftsman takes over Abingdon micro-pub

A couple who started by homebrewing and have supplied beer to the last few beer festivals in Oxford, Justin and Sam Evans (right), opened their own premises in the centre of Abingdon in May. The former Cowshed Drinks bar in Stert Street is now the Craftsman Taproom.

Craftsman has expanded seating capacity to about 40, with one of its own cask ales and three of its kegs on the bar, a full range of its bottled production, plus boxed ciders and a good choice of wines. All draught beer and boxed cider costs £5 a pint, with a 20p discount for CAMRA members.

Craftsman beers have already won critical acclaim, and its Naughty Pappa IPA (4%) and Scooby Dooby Doo IPA (also 4%) were the first to sell out at last year's Oxford festival. The beer available on the hand pump rotates, starting with Magic Midget bitter (4%).

"We started brewing at home in 2016 and by 2021 we had a 100-litre kit, but we need 200- to 300-litre capacity to keep the taproom supplied so we are looking at new



premises," said Justin. "We have been selling beer at local markets and festivals, and a few pubs including Cowshed and the Grapes in Oxford, White Hart in Wolvercote and King's Arms in Wantage.

"Micro-pubs have a bright future if they attract the right clientele, and we've made an encouraging start."

Opening hours are 5-10.30pm on Thursdays and Fridays, 10am-10.30pm on Saturdays and 11am-6pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays, but closed Mondays to Wednesdays.

## QUICK ONES

Over 700 people had signed an online petition by late May calling for reopening of the **Cock Inn** at Combe, near Charlbury. It describes the pub as "abandoned" and "increasingly derelict" and calls on its private owner to take action. <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/cock-inn-action>

Former Greene King pub the **Six Bells** in Headington Quarry has reopened as an independent concern offering one or two real ales, Marston's Wainwright looking set to be a regular. It is open from 1-11pm daily with food until 9pm.

Hopes are rising that the **Old Anchor Inn** in Abingdon will re-open, having closed over two years ago. Greene King has given up the lease, but scaffolding went up in May as renovation work began.

The **Bear Inn** in Oxford was due to close for much of June for a refurbishment. The Fuller's pub is Grade II listed and on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors.

The **Hook Norton Festival of Fine Ales** is at the brewery field on Saturday 19 July and features 100 beers from mainly independent breweries throughout the country, with charities supported including Blood Cancer UK and local causes.

Confirmed dates for the **Oxford Beer and Cider Festival** are from Thursday 23 to Saturday 25 October, and will again be supported by independent brewers association SIBA.

**See also Branch Diary on page 34.**

### Wanted – brewery reporter

Here's a role that will appeal to anyone who likes beer and wants to get to know local brewers. The *Oxford Drinker* needs someone to visit breweries and keep an eye on their social media to provide regular updates for the online version and for the quarterly printed magazine. No pay unfortunately but there might be a beer or two in it! Interested? Contact [editor@oxford.camra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxford.camra.org.uk)



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**ST EBBE'S PARISH**, in the southern part of Oxford city centre, is now best known for the Westgate shopping centre, completed in 1972 and extended in 2017. Before work began on the Westgate, Oxford City Council bought up property in the area, including some or all of these pubs, with the year they closed:

- Albert Arms (1965)
- The Beehive, Gardener's Arms, Plumber's Arms (all 1967)
- Pavier's Arms (1968)
- Jolly Bargeman (1969)
- Wharf House (2006)
- Duke of York (2008)

A lad or lass who was of drinking age in 1967 would be 76 today, and those who are still alive would have been scattered to other parts of Oxford. To research this article, I relied on two books, *The Changing Faces of St Ebbe's and St Thomas* by Carole Newbigging and *An Encyclopaedia of Oxford Pubs, Inns and Taverns* by Derek Honey.

In the preface of her book published in 1997, Carole Newbigging describes meeting "Friars" and "Tom Rags" (a disparaging reference to residents of either St Ebbe's or neighbouring parish St Thomas):

"While researching this book, I have had the pleasure of talking to many of these people, whose memories are as sharp as ever, all of whom have recalled the sense of 'belonging', of neighbourly caring and of a community in the strongest sense of the word. Their day-to-day existence was hard, often hand to mouth with luxuries non-existent, nevertheless they knew they were part of a large family, a caring family, who would give support and assistance whenever necessary."

Readers will notice in the

## Lost Pubs of Oxford

# The ebbing of St Ebbe's

Now known mainly for the Westgate shopping centre, St Ebbe's in Oxford was once a thriving working-class community with many pubs.

**Steve Thompson** reports on talking parrots



*The Duke of York on the corner of New Street and Union Street, later Norfolk Street. (Photos © M.J. Crook)*

map on page 13 street names that no longer exist such as Friars Wharf and Blackfriars Road. Thirteen friars arrived in Oxford in 1221 and, until their expulsion from England in 1538, the Dominican Friars owned much of the land in St Ebbe's. There was even a pub in Friars Street called the Friar, which closed in 1937.

To help readers find their bearings outside the Westgate "footprint", the map also in-

cludes existing pubs such as the Jolly Farmers, the Paradise House (now the Castle), the Swan & Castle (originally in New Road and now a huge open-plan Wetherspoon) and the Royal Blenheim.

Here are some of the lost pubs of St Ebbe's, illustrated with images from a remarkable collection of Oxford pub photographs owned by Michael Crook and taken in the 1960s or earlier.



*Talking parrots (clockwise from left): The Beehive in Blackfriars Road, the Albert Arms in Albert Street and the Plumber's Arms in Speedwell Street.*

The **Duke of York** was named after Ernest Augustus (1763-1827), second son of King George III. According to Derek Honey, it originally stood on the corner of New Street and Union Street. "When the district was redeveloped in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this pub was left standing for a while on its own, amongst the rubble of the building site, and is now (1998) on an island of roads at the approach to the West-

gate Centre, in what has been renamed Norfolk Street." It finally closed in 2008.

Dizzy Gosnell was a regular: "When I left school at 16, I went to work at Sainsbury's in the Westgate Centre. 'The Duke' was right behind the Westgate, and a whole gaggle of us, maybe 15 to 20, all about the same age, used to go there at lunch and after work. Their ham rolls and a pint of bitter was 75p then.

"We used to play darts and listen to the juke box until closing most Friday and Saturday nights. Early Queen, Glitter Band, Bowie, Slade, T Rex, Thin Lizzy's *Whisky in the Jar* and the excellent B side *Black Boys in the Corner*.

"So many stories from that fabulous pub, it was like the youth club I never had before."

Derek Honey paints a colourful picture of the **Beehive** in Blackfriars Road:

"Mrs Godfrey, the landlady during the 1950s, kept a strict house, but she did allow the older members of Balliol Boys Club close by to use the snug. The boys club was famous for its boxers who were trained

by local coloured boxer Percy Lewis, one-time world lightweight champion.

"Although the pub had a cellar, the beer was kept in barrels on racks behind the bar.

"The pub also had a famous talking parrot with human characteristics. When Mrs Godfrey's husband died, the funeral was started from the house, and as he was being carried through the pub, the parrot pulled a feather out and laid it on the coffin."

The **Albert Arms** in Albert Street, named after Prince Albert, grandson of Queen Victoria, also had a talking parrot. According to Derek Honey, the Albert was "a typical Victorian alehouse, with a notorious talking parrot called Billy, owned by the landlord Ephraim (Tommy) Knight. The pub was pulled down in 1965 when St Ebbe's was redeveloped. The parrot found a new home at the Vine at Cumnor, where it continued to be an infamous fixture."

The **Plumber's Arms** in Speedwell Street had a talking parrot too! (Was there a pub in St Ebbe's *without* one?) A bird with strong lan-



guage, it was given to landlord Alfred Brown by a sailor. Brown was Hall's Brewery's longest-serving tenant, arriving in 1902 and not leaving until he retired in 1949.

The **Gardener's Arms** in Penson's Gardens (named after Nathaniel Penson, a leading 18<sup>th</sup>-century gardener) was originally a very small pub, with only a tap room and a bar at the rear. Later, the blacksmith's shop next door was incorporated into the extended pub, with a jug and bottle, and a tap room to the rear of the building. Across a yard at the rear was a skittle alley, a popular pub game at the time.

The **Jolly Bargeman** was on the corner of Speedwell Street and Friars Wharf. The present Speedwell Street is unrecognisable from the medieval lane it once was, and Friars Wharf has disappeared altogether. The Wharf House pub was practically next door.

A Morrell's pub, the Jolly Bargeman's tenant in 1871 was John Clark, while the last was S.M. Nash, who was there from 1963 until the pub was demolished in 1969. Another landlord was Chick Parker, a former professional footballer with Headington United who coached the Balliol Boys Club football teams.

Derek Honey describes the **Pavier's Arms** (which he spells Paviour, meaning someone who lays paving stones) as "perhaps the most famous pub in Oxford in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For no particular reason, it was only a locals' pub."

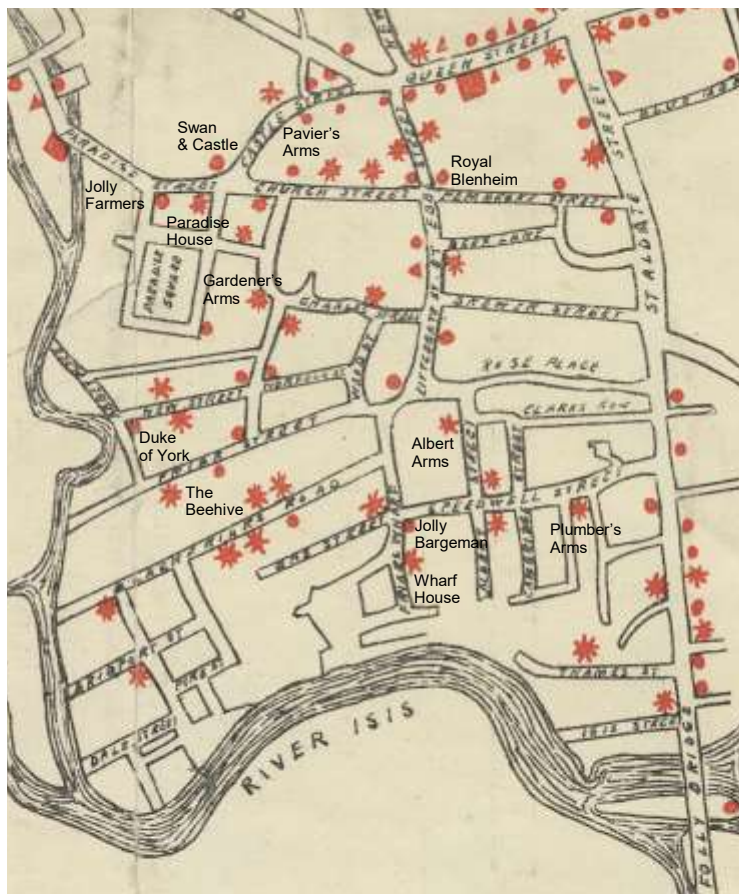
Towards the end of the

*Clockwise from top: The Gardener's Arms in Penson's Gardens, the Pavier's Arms in Castle Street, and the Wharf House and the Jolly Bargeman in Friars Wharf.*



This detail is taken from the Drink Map of Oxford published by the Oxford Temperance Union in 1883. Red stars indicate beer houses and red dots full licensed houses. Copies of the map are on sale at the Bodleian Weston Library Shop in Broad Street at £10. To order maps online, visit [bodleianshop.co.uk/collections/map-room-1](http://bodleianshop.co.uk/collections/map-room-1). The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, C17:70 Oxford (7).

Pub locations are largely guesswork as the street grid in St Ebbe's has changed enormously since the Westgate shopping centre was built. Also, the map is dated 1883 and the photos by Michael Crook were taken in the 1960s or earlier. But we hope the map gives a feel of a St Ebbe's pub crawl in the early 20th century.



19<sup>th</sup> century, it became the headquarters of the supporters of Oxford City Football Club, and photographs of the team that won the FA Amateur Cup in 1905 were proudly displayed on the walls.

And finally the **Wharf House**, remembered fondly by author, guide and beer lover Rob Walters, who wrote "Memories of the Wharf House" for *the Oxford Drinker* (Issue 117, Winter 2022-2023):

"Ah, I remember the Wharf and I guess we will never see its like again in Oxford. The attraction for me was real ale,

character and characters. There were downsides of course, and those deterred the more squeamish from ever crossing the threshold.

"When I discovered the place, I lived nearby in Paradise Square and there were two landlords: Tony Flatman and Simon Hoskins. They were very different chaps. Simon had started his own brewery in London, and I think it failed because it was before its time, before the real ale gold rush that is. Tony had worked on the design of the Channel Tunnel and was a walking encyclopaedia on

many subjects, including beer but also music.

"Of the two, Simon was the less tolerant of the main body of Wharf regulars. Anyway, Tony and Simon had a disagreement and Simon returned to London, though he and I met at the Oxford beer-fest for a few years after that.

"So Tony became the man in charge for many years. When I entered the pub, I didn't have to say anything. Tony knew my taste in beer and would pour one, then tell me what it was – such service. He knew what I liked."



**Pete Flynn** meets the face of Teardrop bar in Oxford's Covered Market and Church Hanbrewery

**IT'S A STORY** of "Craft, Community and Change" in Oxford's historic Covered Market. On an early morning visit here I always find it buzzy, and on this occasion I was not disappointed with the bustling restaurants, cafés and speciality food shops already open for business.

Brown's Café is a favourite of mine and this is where I planned to meet Luciana Gyuricza. She is regarded by many of the market traders as the doyenne of this wonderful community, Teardrop being the first licensed retailer in a market which first opened for business over 250 years ago.

As the first to arrive I had ordered a coffee, and this came promptly as Luciana walked into an almost full café, settling down to join me. Lu, as she likes to be called, is a native of Brazil and with her husband Christian, whom she has known since they were both 12 years old, emigrated to the UK in 2003 when their two children were quite young.

Having trained as a lawyer, Lu wanted to consider different interests while Christian was studying for an MBA at the London Business School. After a few years in the UK they settled in Church Hanborough, a small village north-west of Oxford.

"Christian and I are real foodies, and we have always wanted to have our own business," she explains. "Having travelled around Europe extensively, I began to appreciate the various beers from all

Beer Heroes

# Craft, community and change



*Christian was studying for an MBA at the London Business School before he and Luciana decided to change direction.*

countries, England, Belgium and Germany in particular."

It was a joint decision to pivot their careers and pursue passions for food, drink and experimentation, by founding Church Hanbrewery in 2015, starting at home and later moving to an industrial estate

in New Yatt, near Witney. While Lu was a convert, Christian had earlier visited a vineyard in France and the extent of the demanding work convinced him that this symbiotic relationship with food and drink was a way to capture what they enjoyed doing.





*Luciana says tourists love the diversity of Teardrop and like the idea of "try before you buy". (Photos by Pete Flynn)*

Lu's idea of brewing is so innovative: "We were the first to use different measures and were less pub orientated, deciding early on to promote pure and unfiltered beer by following traditional methods and using no finings or chemicals."

I asked her to explain her philosophy and how she gained her knowledge: "We want to create beers that are full of character and reflect our international background and love for England; it is about experimentation and tweaking recipes that use English ingredients, starting with a small kit of 20 litres and

then progressing to our current capacity of 500 litres. Although it is very manual, the experience is extremely rewarding, enabling us to focus on small-batch, innovative beers: smoked, fruit and wheat varieties, often using real ingredients like honey, raspberries and elderflowers."

Church Hanbrewery is known for its unusual bottle- and keg-conditioned beers, but a couple of cask ales are regularly available at Teardrop. The core range includes beers such as Ale X (an IPA), Bluenette (honey and oatmeal porter), Mat Black (black IPA) and Red Beetter (a bitter with a hint of beetroot).

Lu is very focussed on the local community and hand-crafted quality, epitomised by the amazing Czar Bomba, an

Imperial Stout which has an elevated ABV of 9.99%. As a devotee of beer, I would say that anyone who can produce this complex product would be described a notable brewer.

I asked Lu to explain the concept of her micro-bar Teardrop, which is situated in the north-west corner of the market.

"When we started out, we bought a caravan in the shape of a teardrop which we took everywhere with us, selling our beer at local food festivals and the like, finding it difficult to sell our products in pubs. There had never been a bar in the Covered Market, so we took our idea to the council, and they gave us a licence on the basis that we had to close by 5.30pm. Can you believe we were the first bar to open

in the history of the Covered Market? Long-standing market tenants said they had been waiting 40 years for something like this.

"We have had to adapt through challenges such as the impact of Covid on business operations. In 2020, we partnered with Eynsham Cellars to open the Market Cellar Door, a 'nano' wine bar next to Teardrop, and in 2022 we opened Sartorelli's Pizza, our food offering."

Traders in the market belong to a family as they all help each other out, and early con-

cerns about bringing a bar to the market proved unfounded.

What really gave Teardrop a fillip was an entry in CAMRA's *Good Beer Guide*, highlighting the bar's significance in Oxford's evolving hospitality landscape. I recall teasing Lu about the GBG entry which initially described it as austere, spartan and small, so much so that I jokingly suggested she brew a beer and call it "Spartan".

Joking aside, what is missing in the guide is a description of a community-focussed approach: casual dining, sim-

ple menu and local engagement. I can almost guarantee when I visit, there is already someone I know and if not, I soon get chatting to people who enjoy the diversity that is sometimes missing at a local pub.

Lu recalls what makes Teardrop unique: "Tourists love the diversity and like the idea of 'try before you buy'. This puts them at ease especially with craft beer, which is the dominant style in most of Europe. They just go for it."

Lu's role in shaping a new breed of beer bars while fostering a vibrant, inclusive local scene is worthy of much recognition. Her excitement for innovation, community feedback and ongoing projects (such as expanding pizza operations and new market ventures) is exemplary with a sharp vision for the future: balancing family, business growth, and community involvement. There is excitement about plans, particularly the addition of more seating and extended hours, which are expected to make Teardrop even more accessible and welcoming for after-work gatherings.

As I bid farewell to Lu, mindful that she has to set up her bar for the day, I reflect that she has taken a considerable journey from Brazilian lawyer to Oxford microbrewer pioneer, with a nod to others with an entrepreneurial spirit to just go for it.



**Teardrop is open daily from 11am-5.30pm (7pm Fridays and Saturdays, 5pm on Sundays). Church Hanbrewery is open 2pm-9pm Thursdays to Saturdays and 3pm-8pm on Sundays, with pizzas served from 5pm.**



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# Oxfordshire's Top 4

**Dave Richardson**  
sets out to review our  
Pubs of the Year

**EACH OF THE** four CAMRA branches in Oxfordshire votes for their Pub of the Year (POTY) and you must visit all four to vote for a county winner, to be declared in June. This then goes forward into a regional competition with the top pubs in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and the winner of that has a chance of being named top pub in the UK.

## **Red Lion, Horley** **North Oxfordshire branch**

This free house in a village a few miles north of Banbury has been voted POTY a few times before, being a rare example of a country pub that doesn't serve food but is dedicated 100% to serving the village with a very traditional pub atmosphere.

Landlord Dave Morris owns the property which he bought from Hook Norton 21 years ago, having run a pub for only one year prior to that, in Shropshire. His career before then was in the RAF, and he was looking to settle down in a peaceful village to bring up his children. His wife wanted a wet-only pub, and in any case it doesn't have a kitchen.

Three cask ales are provided, with Hook Norton's Hooky and Timothy Taylor's Landlord being regulars. Oxford CAMRA chair John Winney rated the Landlord as possibly the best he had ever drunk – praise indeed! I chose the guest beer, Church End brewery's Stout Coffin (4.6%),



*The Red Lion,  
Horley, and landlord  
Dave Morris.*

again superb – as well it might be, being voted CAMRA's West Midlands Champion Beer of Britain 2023. Pump clips displayed around the bar came from many renowned breweries, proving that Dave really knows his stuff.

Darts, Aunt Sally and dominoes are played here, and the Red Lion has a lovely garden with a tent to enjoy the summer. It's definitely worth trekking out to, but you'll need a car or taxi, and opening hours are limited.





### The Grapes, Oxford Oxford branch

Winning by a one-vote margin over the Royal Blenheim, City POTY for the last few years, the Grapes has come on by leaps and bounds since Morgan Pub Collective re-opened it in 2023, after several years of closure. It usually has up to six hand pumps for real ale and cider, and I often choose Harvey's Sussex Best, its only regular, a malty bitter available in all Morgan pubs.

Otherwise – as at the Oranges & Lemons, also run by Morgan – you never know what might turn up. Johnny

Roberts, landlord of both pubs, is keen on innovation and often offers beers by small local breweries as well as trending beers from far and wide. Beers and ciders can come from all over, and it also has a huge range of craft keg.

The Grapes is small for a city centre pub and often very busy, but the refit prior to re-opening has opened up more seating. The food available is good value, especially on offer days such as “Steak Thursdays”. Enjoy the vinyl records being spun on the bar top, if you can hear them.

### The Crown, South Moreton South Oxfordshire branch

This former Wadworth pub in a village near Didcot is one of the great local successes of the Community-Owned movement, having been rescued in 2019 after several years of closure when developers were poised to move in. Now it is a thriving village pub when it could so easily have been lost, like so many others. Landlady Di Humphreys has been running it for the last five years, with a “Frame of Fame” (right) inside the door recording the names of those who helped save it.

Three local real ales are usually available, including the house ale, Ye Olde Dash & Tipple, a session IPA by Amwell Springs brewery situated just a few miles from the pub. I enjoyed a half of this despite being generally wary of IPAs, and also had an enjoyable half of Abingdon Bridge from Loose Cannon in Abingdon. Hooky was the guest ale on this occasion, and that had come only 40



miles. Two boxed ciders were also available, from Sam's in Devon.

The Crown is a large pub with some seating at sofas, and was busy serving Sunday lunches on the afternoon of our visit. The patio garden was busy too with plenty of seating to the front and side, including non-smoking areas. Many customers had brought their dogs as they are encouraged to do.



### King's Arms, Wantage Vale of White Horse branch

This town centre pub was not in contention as a real ale venue until Oak Taverns took it over a few years ago, but as at all Oak pubs, real ale and cider now take centre stage. Another priority for the company was to restore the garden, and this large space with patio and lawn adds hugely to the fairly small pub's appeal on a sunny day like this.

Six rotating real ales were on offer, and these can come from anywhere. Siren Craft (with a Session IPA) and Thornbridge (Jaipur) were the best known, while Electric Bear (Little Ripper Aussie IPA) and Wantsum (Yellow Tail) were on my radar. But I had never heard of Moonraker (Crafty One) or Brass Castle (Bad Kitty), so I had a half of each. Crafty One (with a fox on the pump clip) was described as a copper ale, and while of good quality I found it bitter to the point of unpleas-



antness. Bad Kitty was a vanilla porter but not too sweet, and a good antidote.

A cider festival and barbecue were happening in the garden, but all year there's a good choice of boxed cider. Like all Oak Taverns pubs, the King's Arms doesn't normally sell food, but many welcome food vans, and this pub has plenty of outdoor space for third-party caterers on special occasions.

So, how to decide between these four great free houses? News of the winner will be on our website and in the autumn edition of this magazine.







# 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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## Tony's Travels

# Wessex excursion

**Tony Goulding** heads to Dorset and Bath in search of character pubs

**FOLLOWING AN INVITATION** to visit them from co-founder of XT Brewing Russ Taylor, who has retired from brewing and moved into small-scale farming; and Graham Baker, who will continue ordering beer for Oxford Beer Festival despite also moving to deepest Dorset, we arrived in Corfe Castle via a change of train at Winchester and a short taxi ride from Wareham.

We didn't plan to walk up to the castle ruins, but to take a trip on the steam-powered Swanage Railway to Swanage and return. The village of Corfe Castle has three pubs almost next to each other, the **Bankes Arms** being an impressive old rambling hotel with fine dining, very comfortable rooms and four cask beers. Two beers from Palmers in Bridport and two local beers were being served in good condition by a very knowledgeable and friendly landlord.

Just around the corner is the *Good Beer Guide*-listed **Fox Inn**, another sprawling free house serving two cask beers. This old building goes from one room to another, including a skittle alley and a splendid garden. We met a fellow CAMRA member from Reading branch and following the usual banter, just about made the bus back to Wareham.



Above from left: Tony Goulding, Dave Richardson and Pete Flynn at the Lord Nelson Hotel. Left: the Copper Street taproom. (Photos by Graham Baker)



We did not stop here because of train times but I have drunk here twice before in the ever-popular **Horse & Groom**. A short hop by train took us to Dorchester, our base for two nights, and right opposite Dorchester South railway station is Brewery Square, a shopping and food complex built on the former Eldridge Pope brewery site. The main brewery buildings, which once dominated the centre of town, are now nicely integrated into this development. It was built in 1880 and closed in 2003, Royal Oak being the beer I remember best.

Brewing continues in the town as a micro-brewery and taproom, **Copper Street**, is situated yards from the station. What a find, as up to four gravity cask ales and four ciders were on offer – I could have stayed all night but for 9pm closing. Brewing began in 2018 with as many as 15

beers brewed. Adrian the head barman had a wealth of knowledge about Dorset's beer, cider and festival scene and was a great host.

Next morning, a bus took us to Bridport to meet Russ and Graham. The first pub was my favourite, probably because of its name, the **Lord Nelson Hotel**. Memorabilia commemorating the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar included portraits of the great man himself. More importantly, four Palmers cask beers were on, the brewery being at the bottom end of town. A real cider is also served in this good old-fashioned multi-room pub, including a skittle alley and garden.

A few yards across the road up a quiet side street is the **Tiger Inn**. This former Groves then Devenish breweries pub is now a free house serving six ever-changing cask beers and three real ciders. This Victorian building

*From left: Harrison Yarnold (owner of the Pursuit of Hoppiness), Pete Flynn, Russ Taylor, Tony Goulding, Graham Baker and Dave Richardson.*

has many nooks and crannies, a cocktail bar/function room, skittle alley and gardens back and front.

It's another short stroll to the town's micro-pub, the **Pursuit of Hoppiness**, formerly a tobacconist's shop. Dispensing six changing cask beers and two real ciders in a wonderful typical micro-pub atmosphere, it's *the* place to be. Open for eight years, it is well established on the high street and serves no food.

After another short stroll you will enter a Bridport institution, the **Ropemaker's**, Palmers brewery's top pub. Lined up on the bar you will find all six of their beers on cask, with two ciders. Tasty food is served all day in this



*The Woodman Inn (left) and the Old Green Tree. (Photos by Graham Baker)*

splendid building with many nooks and crannies, various rooms and a rear garden. All manner of activities are laid on, including various clubs and regular music events.

Last call before the bus back to Dorchester was the **Woodman Inn**. Russ had indicated this was his pub of choice and I was not disappointed. On the bar were six changing cask beers and 10 ciders, so no wonder it's 2024 Wessex Regional Pub of the Year and Cider Pub of the Year. It's a place for pleasant conversation and serious drinking indoors or out including a skittle alley with, of course, no food. What a super visit to Bridport, as all the pubs were great with the **Nelson** a fraction in front.

Arriving back in Dorchester, it was time to visit the town's original micro-pub, the **Convivial Rabbit**, which opened in 2018. Tucked away down an alley just off the High

Street, it's easy to miss this converted rustic workshop. In pleasant and surroundings, around 20 people were engaged in conversation and various board games, with a choice of six changing cask beers and six real ciders. I had been here once before a couple of years ago and nothing has changed in this super drinking den.

**Tom Brown's** is an outpost of Oxfordshire's own Oak Taverns, but 30 years ago it was a brew pub producing Goldfinch beers. I then moved on for a second visit to **Copper Street**, and although it was busy with conversation I still managed to get my seat on the green chesterfield sofa.

Our return journey by rail was not via Winchester and Bournemouth as we came, but on a direct train to Bath for a lunchtime stop – it would be rude not to. Four pubs were visited, all just over 10 minutes' walk from the station.

The **Star** never disappoints, with five cask beers including the ever-present Bass, plus a real cider. This wonderful old multi-room pub is now run by Abbey Ales and again is a "proper" pub, with no food.

Five minutes' walk brings you to the **Bell**, which was purchased by many of its regulars in a community buy-out in 2013. I would say it is now the city's premier music venue, again with no food but dispensing seven cask beers and four real ciders with an appealing ambience. Great place.

Equally great but in a quieter way was our next pub, a real favourite of mine, the **Old Green Tree**. This wood-panelled building is 300 years old and a pleasant retreat from the busy tourist scene in the area, with five cask beers and a cider on the bar.

Last pub of the day was the busy **Raven** dispensing nine cask beers and four real ciders. What a great end to our adventure. This 200-year-old building has numerous rooms over three storeys with very tasty food available. From Bath there are trains to Didcot every half hour for onward travel to Oxford, making it easy to reach.





**PROBABLY ONE OF** the most successful long-term advertising campaigns in the history of transport has been the promotion by breweries of their products. After a long day at work, especially in the early years, it was proclaimed that there was nothing more refreshing than a pint!

In Oxford's diverse work ethics, from college scholars to factory workers, the city and surrounding area had a thirsty appetite. The two main city brewers, Hall's and Morrell's, had many of their own hosteleries situated on the main transport thoroughfares, as did Morland from Abingdon and Hunt Edmunds from Banbury.

From the early years of the motor bus in Oxford, passengers and passers-by would not see the locally produced beers advertised. This didn't happen until after World War 2, when competition from outside the area forced the local breweries to advertise on buses. Initially, both Morrell's and Hunt Edmunds advertised traditionally on the roof cove panels of single deckers, later ads appearing on the sides and on double deck vehicles.

It was the breweries from outside the area, such as Simonds, Flowers, Mitchells & Butlers (M&B), Allsopps, Guinness and Watneys, that were anxious to have their ales known to the colleges and off-licences. They were all competitive to get their brands marketed, until the 1960s when mergers and take-overs meant that many of the previously famous household names started to disappear. Strangely, Tolly Cobbold of Ipswich promoted its beers vigorously, judging by the amount of

## Down Memory Lane

# Beer on buses

In the first of a two-part article, **Grahame Wareham** looks at the advertising of beer on City of Oxford Motor Services (later Oxford Bus Company) vehicles



*Morland was not a prolific advertiser on Oxford's buses, but nor was its main competitor in Oxford during this period. This 1951 bus PWL 419 advertising Morland's Viking stands idle at Cowley Road Garage during an October weekend in 1961.*

bus advertising that transpired. As a youngster, I can only remember it in bottled form being sold in off-licences, as I wasn't allowed in pubs in those days!

Advertising on Oxford's motor buses did not get under way until the 1920s, when more double deck vehicles

joined the fleet. The conventional advertising sites on a bus were traditionally front, nearside and offside, upper rear and lower rear on the exterior panels, and these were restricted to one advertiser per site. Tobacco and cigarette advertising was prevalent in the 1920s as smoking



*In 1995, Grahame Wareham took his preserved single deck bus OJO 727 down to Morrell's Brewery in Oxford to publicise the Bus Museum beer festival, a joint venture with Oxford CAMRA before it was held at Oxford Town Hall.*

habits changed, with increasing manufacture of tobacco-based products as social habits prevailed. To go with these the match companies also sought to conquer the tobacco business and it wasn't unusual to have both products on either side of a bus.

The advertising of beer got off to a slow start but by the 1930s both Simonds of Reading and Flowers of Stratford-upon-Avon were the nearest "local" outsiders to offer competitive wares to those brewed in Oxford and

Abingdon. It is believed that this was an amicable arrangement between neighbouring brewing towns, keeping out some of the larger breweries anxious to offer their wares to the thirsty Oxford population. Of course, it wasn't long before some of the larger brewers from the Midlands and Burton felt it necessary to pitch their products to the locals, but that was also extra revenue to the bus companies which gladly accepted advertising to cover up worn or dated posters.

In the early days, most long-term advertisements were sign written onto prepared paintwork. These would be sold at a premium rate as a renewable item on an annual basis, but restricting the legend to what was originally applied. The larger national

advertisers, such as M&B, Double Diamond, Guinness and Watney Mann, would flood the country with paper ads which could change up to five or six times a year in an effort to promote the latest in advertising prowess. City of Oxford Motor Services had a permanent signwriter and poster fixers to keep the fleet looking pristine.

It wasn't until the 1970s that most paper advertising material began to be replaced by vinyl sheets which were more durable, lasting longer on the side of a bus as the washing plant would soak paper and wash the adhesive away. Nowadays, with advances in thin plastic polymers, a whole bus can be covered in pre-printed vinyl as good as a freshly painted process.

These were some of the then independent breweries advertising on Oxford buses, for which we have photographic evidence. The larger brands will be covered in Part Two.

**Samuel Allsopp & Sons,  
High Street, Burton-upon-Trent**

Double Diamond was a brand of Samuel Allsopp, which became part of Ind Coope which later sold out to Carlsberg.

**Flower & Sons, Brewery  
Street, Stratford-upon-Avon  
(later Birmingham Road)**

Flowers was taken over by Whitbread in 1961 and closed in 1970, and Whitbread ceased brewing in 2001. Flowers also had a brewery in Cheltenham, formerly Gardners Brewery trading as the Cheltenham Original Brewery, becoming Whitbread Flowers in 1963. Flowers introduced the first keg beer to be commercially available.

**Hall's Oxford & West  
Brewery Company, 32-34  
Park End Street, Oxford**

Hall's was founded in 1646, having its origins as the Swan's Nest Brewery. It was purchased by William Hall in 1795 and sold to Allsopp & Sons in 1926, when brewing ceased in Oxford. Allsopp was merged with Ind Coope in 1936, becoming Allied Brewing Company in 1961. Allied Brewing merged with Carlsberg in 1992 to become Carlsberg-Tetley. The Hall's name was re-introduced in the 1980s when it was used to market Harvest beers, these ads appearing on local buses. Hall's Oxford & West continued as a beer distributor concentrating on Skol lager under licence, until this was transferred to Burton. It also had many pubs, some still identifiable today with the "Hall's Hare" insignia.



*A 1957-built AEC Regent V, 195 BFC, having arrived in Oxford from Burford. Jumbo Stout was brewed by Ratcliffe's in Northampton, having taken over Phipps Northampton Brewing Company.*

**Mitchells & Butlers,  
Springfield Brewery,  
Wolverhampton**

Mitchells & Butlers (M&B) merged with Bass in 1961 but traded as M&B as a brewer until take over by Coors. The Springfield brewery closed in 1990, but M&B continues as a major pub group.

**Morland, Ock Street,  
Abingdon**

Founded in 1717, Morland absorbed six local breweries over the early years. Finally, it acquired Ruddles in 1997 and was sold to Greene King in 2000, when the Abingdon brewery closed.

**Morrell's Brewery, The Lion  
Brewery, St Thomas Street,  
Oxford**

Morrell's of Oxford, established in 1782, was sold to Refresh UK in 1998 when the brewery shut down. Refresh was later acquired by Mars-

ton's in 2008 and continued brewing the Morrell's portfolio. The Lion Brewery and 132 pubs were bought by entrepreneur Michael Cannon in 1998 and most were sold to Greene King in 2002. In its final two decades of existence, Morrell's was a major advertiser, and City of Oxford's fleet would receive the lion's share (pun intended) of Morrell's advertising budget!

**Phipps Northampton  
Brewing Company, Bridge  
Street, Northampton**

Originally from Towcester in 1801, a second brewery opened in Northampton and all production moved there in 1901. It sold out to Watney Mann in 1960 and became part of Carlsberg in 1974 when the brewing of IPA and Jumbo Stout ceased. In 2004, Phipps emerged again as an independent at the old Albion Brewery.





*Single deckers such as NJO 714, built in 1949, were used mainly on country routes and advertising, in this case Hunt Edmunds of Banbury, was confined to roof cove panels.*

### **H & G Simonds, Broad Street, Reading**

Absorbed by Courage & Barclay in 1960, with Simonds renamed Courage by 1970. The company was sold to Fosters in 1986 and then Scottish & Newcastle in 1995, operating as Scottish Courage. It was purchased by Heineken in 2008 and the Berkshire brewery was closed (and subsequently demolished) two years later. At the time of the Heineken take-over, the rights to all Courage brands (including Simonds) were sold to Wells & Young's of Bedford. The Courage brand is now marketed by Marston's.

### **Trumans, Shoreditch, London**

Trumans started brewing before most others and became the largest brewer of the 20th century. It was later absorbed into the Scottish & Newcastle (S&N) empire having been the subject of numerous acquisitions by some of the largest combines of the time, includ-

ing Watney Mann. Trumans is now independent once again, having been purchased back from S&N, and has a state-of-the-art brewing facility in Hackney Wick supplying many London pubs, including the original establishment in Brick Lane.

### **Ushers, Trowbridge, Wiltshire**

Founded in 1824, Ushers was later absorbed by Watney Mann. After being taken over by Grand Metropolitan and sold off, Ushers UK was re-born and brewing transferred to Wychwood in Witney.

### **Wadworth, Northgate, Devizes, Wiltshire**

Established in 1875, Wadworth is still a family-owned business with over 140 pubs located in the Southwest, including a couple around Oxford. In 2023, it opened a new brewery in Folly Road, Devizes and its current portfolio includes the popular 6X and Henry's IPA brands.

### **Wychwood Brewery, Witney**

Founded in 1983, this was the home of Hobgoblin and was originally brewed at the Eagle Maltings premises which was part of Clinch's Eagle Brewery. Wychwood also took over the brewing of Brakspear beers in 2002. Wychwood was bought out by Refresh UK, a Marston's subsidiary, in 2002 and brewing continued until November 2023 when all production was transferred to Burton. Also brewed by Marston's (the brewery is 100% owned by Carlsberg) is Bombardier, once a brand of Wells & Youngs (originally Charles Wells, Bedford and Youngs of Wandsworth, London).

### **Oxford's brew pubs**

Mention should also be made of Oxford's short-lived brew pubs, which had been started in London by David Bruce and were introduced to Oxford in 1995. Oxford Bus Leyland Titans were used exclusively to advertise the three pubs for about a year but by 1999 they had been sold on to what became Punch Taverns. These were the Fuggle & Firkin, Gloucester Green (now the Red Lion), the Philosopher & Firkin in Cowley Road (now the Cowley Retreat) and the Philanderer & Firkin in Walton Street (now the Jericho Tavern).



**To be continued. Grahame Wareham worked for the Oxford Bus Company from 1974 to 2015 and was involved with the Oxford Bus Museum at Long Hanborough, which staged a few beer festivals before these moved to Oxford Town Hall from 1998. He is now a member of the Cherwell Bus Preservation Group which has 20 historic vehicles.**

**IT HAS BEEN** a curious few months in Oxford for pub regulars, with many venues introducing new prices across their businesses to combat the recent impact of new taxes and regulations. It's a sobering thought to now see pint prices across Oxford now hitting the £5 average pint barrier for real ale in many venues.

None of us wants to see these prices go up much further but the recent increases in pint prices have been essential to ensure that pubs continue to trade viably as their punishingly slim profit margins are squeezed even further.

In these challenging times for the hospitality industry, we continue to push forward, trying to provide valuable community spaces and essential jobs in our local pubs.

With pint prices hitting new highs though, I've had many people ask why beer is so expensive today and why we see some wildly different prices in venues only a few doors from each other.

To help add some context as to what pubs are dealing with, let's try and look at a simplified breakdown of the true cost of a pint in the UK.

The true cost of a pint includes not only the price you pay at the bar, but also the various costs and taxes associated with it.

A significant portion of the price of a pint is, of course, taxes. More than a third of the price of a pint goes towards taxes. Alcohol duty, VAT and business rates all contribute to this heavy blow for pubs.

Reforms to alcohol duty came into effect in February this year, which is when many pub operators first had to look at potential increases to the

On the Front Lyne

# The true cost of a pint

Royal Blenheim landlord **Steven Lyne** (below) helps to explain what the true cost of a pint is and why we are seeing so many different prices across the country



cost of their products. I'm sure many of you remember seeing this on the news, with the government waxing lyrical on how this will equate to a saving a 1p tax cut on the average-strength pint.

However, other tax changes at the same time impacted operating costs even further,

which meant that 1p was not the salvation the humble local needed.

The second highest expense in the price of a pint tends to be staff wages, at around 15 to 20% of the cost of a pint. Good, well-trained staff behind the bar is essential to a good pub. When cus-



tomers enter a venue, staff tend to be their first interaction, and staff can make or break their opinion of a pub.

In a previous article where I spoke about the magic of pubs and what makes them work, having friendly, engaging and attentive staff can separate a good pub from a bad one. There's nothing worse than being served by someone who looks like they have no interest in being there!

Staff wages have increased significantly over the past few years and labour is always a difficult cost for operators to keep under control, especially with the cost-of-living crisis making trade less predictable than in years gone by. With the minimum and real living wage increases in April, pubs feel the squeeze even more trying to keep staff employed.

And once again, the price of a pint had to creep a little higher.

With over 50% of the price of a pint now taken up, what

else drives prices up? Well, this might be an obvious one: the cost of running the pub itself!

While labour costs do factor into this, labour tends to be more controllable in the short term. What is harder to control is operating costs. There will be some variations from pub to pub, but these costs could be anything from rent and utility bills to paid TV subscriptions and bank charges. As many punters know, several of these areas have seen prices hikes due to inflation and even Brexit!

Geographical challenges can also be introduced into the mix. Running a city centre pub in the heart of Oxford, I look at very different figures compared to a quaint country pub in a small village. With many of these costs increasing every month, it can be quite a juggling act to manage them across the year.

Another side of operating costs is ensuring that our products are still of high quality. And in most cases, high

quality means higher prices!

The best pubs manage this balance well, sourcing high-quality beers and working directly with breweries to ensure customers get their money's worth at their local. This is no easy task and can be quite time consuming for businesses already feeling the pinch.

Yet the venues that get these costs under control balance this fine act of hospitality gymnastics as best they can. They are the ones still smiling as they serve every pint and keep the spark of their venues alive.

After all that hard work to get a pint into your hand, pubs do not see much profit these days. A good level for a pub is around 7.5% if all is well. However, as with all good pubs, compromises must be made to keep the business viable and customers coming back. As the dust settles on the most recent price increases, punters will be ever more vigilant as to which venues strike those compromises best.





# Return of Great British Beer Festival

**THE GREAT BRITISH** Beer Festival (GBBF), which had a year off in 2024, returns at the new venue of the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, from 5-9 August. Held for many years at Olympia in London, GBBF will be back in the West Midlands for the first time since 1983.

The new, larger location makes possible a more expansive festival with even more variety of beer, cider and perry. It's easy to reach, too, with an hourly train service from Oxford and Banbury to the adjacent Birmingham International station (last return service at 10.13pm with a journey time from/to Oxford of

60 minutes).

Festivalgoers can also enjoy a wide range of food, live music and classic pub games. For those wanting to learn more, the Discovery Bar, in partnership with Brewster, will be working with breweries from across the UK and Ireland such as Thornbridge and Wilderness Brewery to provide fun, educational and informal tastings every day.

Brewery partners are Thornbridge, Greene King, Harvey's, Siren Craft Brew, Oakham, Woodforde's, Batemans, Ossett Brewery, Brains, Theakston, Green Duck, Attic Brewery, Purity,



Black Sheep, Beartown, Brew 61, Iron Pier, Birmingham Brewing Company, Dorking, St Austell and Budvar. Many other breweries' beers will

be available. Other partners are the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA), British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA), Cask Marque, J.D. Wetherspoon, Transport for West Midlands, National Express, Brewster, Beer52 and Mr Porky.

The Champion Beer of Britain 2025 competition overall winners will be announced on the first day and beers in each of the 12 winning categories will be available to try.

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More Tales from the Nose & Frown

# Putting back the clocks

**Graham Shelton and Grenville Reeves** reveal more tales of their pub between the wars



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**LIKE MANY WORKING** people, I often found myself drawn to the Nose & Frown in the evening when my labours were done, especially in the winter when the days were short. But, of course, Sue plied her trade at other times of the day too, opening (unofficially) in the morning after milking, and at lunchtime as well as in the evening.

The old bobby never really minded when she opened and closed and, indeed, was often there himself. If the truth was told, he was glad she managed to supplement the rather meagre beer ration with some very drinkable home brew, though where she got the ingredients she never said.

Sue never did much cleaning. It was pretty dark in the public bar at all times of day and night, so no-one could tell how dirty it was (except perhaps the spiders, who liked it like that); and the spilled beer gave the pub a lovely, lived-in aroma, if a bit sticky underfoot.

Daytime opening suited my friend Joe, and once he was retired, he spent most of his time in the pub. His wife was a bit fierce, and an incessant talker, particularly on the subject of all the chores he should be doing, and her mother (who he particularly disliked). So he enjoyed getting out of the house for a bit of peace. "I'm just going down to see a man about a dog," he'd say, and she knew he wouldn't be back till closing time. In truth, she was quite glad to see him out of the house, although would never let on.

Anyway, I was having a clear-out the other day and came across a rare photograph of Joe, not in his customary chair by the fire in the evening but sitting outside in the daytime. I thought you'd



like to see it, so here it is. You can tell it's the real thing because he's holding one of his "specials", and I'm a witness to the fact that it's not just cider in that glass!

Joe was a nice old boy, but he had very fixed views. He didn't hold with all that nonsense about changing the clocks. He felt that time was God's prerogative and shouldn't be interfered with. "I've got enough to do without doing his work as well," he'd say, although what exactly he did was never really clear.

He had a sundial in his garden and, being a clever and parsimonious man, he'd made the sundial from the handle of an old pitchfork. Once he had that, Joe meticulously followed his own sundial time, loving the fact that it was different to everyone else's, sometimes by a few



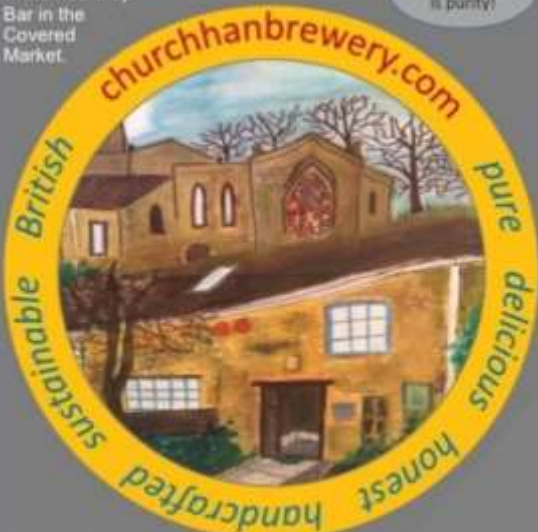
Joe outside the Nose & Frown with his usual "special".

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minutes and sometimes by an hour or more.

But he was caught out one time, when they changed the clocks by two hours. Going into Witney on Market Day (when the pubs open early) he arrived two hours late to find they'd already closed because he'd got the wrong time. "That'll larn 'im" was the general feeling. "'E's too clever by 'alf."

Joe was a good and respected gardener, though, growing lovely potatoes, beans, spinach, peas, onions and fruit on his allotment. He never missed the opportunity to pop into the Nose for a thirst-quenching pint or two of mild, either on the way to the allotment or on the way back (and frequently both).

They had a great to-do one year, when all the fruit

started vanishing. He had some lovely strawberries almost ready, and the next day they'd gone. Joe couldn't abide thievery, and made no secret in the pub about the incomers to the village and their poor moral standards. "I'll nab them," he said, and was up at first light the next morning hiding in the hedge ready to catch them red-handed.

Nobody came, of course, leaving Joe even more irritated and cursing the interlopers for their cunning. Next day he was in the hedge again, at 4.30am this time, and there they were: bold as brass – two families of blackbirds, a mistle thrush and a party of waxwings.

It took him a while to live that down.

Have a happy summer.



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### Keep in touch with Oxford Branch:

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

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## Branch Diary

Saturday 21 June 2-11pm  
**Tap Social Movement Craft Beer Festival**  
North Hinksey Lane, Oxford  
Early bird tickets £6.60 then £13.20

Saturday 28 June 12-8pm  
**Bampton Beer Festival**  
St Mary's Church, Bampton  
OX18 2LW  
Entry £12 includes glass and 2 tokens

Saturday 28 June 12-9pm  
**Charlbury Charity Beer Festival**  
(including Branch Social)  
Cricket Club near station  
Entry £20 includes glass and £10 tokens

Saturday 5 July 12-10pm  
**Chipping Norton Rugby Club Beer Festival**  
Chipping Norton OX7 5UY  
Entry £5 includes free half

Friday 18 (1-10pm), Saturday 19 (12-10pm) and Sunday 20 July (12-7pm)

**Seven Stars at Marsh Baldon Beer Festival**  
The Green, Marsh Baldon  
OX44 9LP  
Free entry

Friday 5 to Sunday 7 September  
**Headington Beer Festival**  
(Branch Social Saturday from 12pm)  
Mason's Arms, Quarry School Place, Headington, Oxford  
Free entry

To view the full branch diary, visit **[oxford.camra.org.uk](http://oxford.camra.org.uk)**

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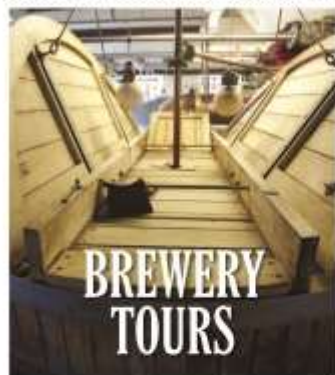
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