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Issue 128
Autumn 2025

the Oxford Drinker

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Cover: Joe Brouder of Vale Brewery behind the handpumps of the brewery taproom. (Photo by Pete Flynn.) Report on page 12.

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

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Welcome

...there may be no festival but there's a lot going on

AT THIS TIME of year, we are usually busy preparing for the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival at the Town Hall, but this year the event is cancelled. Turn to centre pages for a full explanation, and with CAMRA head office also cancelling the 2026 Great British Beer Festival, you have to wonder if the days of the large festival are numbered.

Smaller events in conjunction with local pubs and breweries could be the way forward, and we are developing our plans for 2026 and beyond. Apart from our year-round social programme, we are celebrating the launch of the 2026 *Good Beer Guide* in late September, with two local pubs in it for the first time ever – see pages 20-21.

Guest writers from behind the bar are a regular feature of *the Oxford Drinker*, and in this issue we welcome back landlord Paul Silcock who addresses the thorny issue of tipping. News that the Well & Boot bar on Waterloo station, London is adding 4% to all bills, including just drinks, received national coverage, but if you tip for meals in a restaurant, why not in a pub if you receive good service? Paul's thoughts on the issue are well worth reading.

In this issue we are increasing our coverage of local breweries through Patrick MacMahon who has taken up the role of brewery reporter – welcome Patrick! Read his first report on pages 10-11, while our regular writer Pete Flynn profiles the success of Vale Brewery on pages 12-14.

We also have the usual news of pubs that have closed



or re-opened, including some that their owners want converted into private housing. Pubs face major challenges due to the cost-of-living crisis, and are looking to the Budget in November to bring some relief from the tax, duty and other regulatory burdens. Can we really expect a sympathetic hearing, with national finances in such a poor state? I suspect not, but the fight must go on and all who care about pubs should use them or risk losing them – it's as simple as that.

The latest threat is a consultation on lowering the legal drink driving limit, so that the same will apply in England as in Scotland where you can't even drink one pint of beer to stay within the limit. No-one is advocating drink driving, but if you can't even have one pint in a country pub, that's another big challenge that not all of them will face successfully.

Research by the Scottish Licensed Trade Association showed there was an immediate negative impact when the drink driving limit was lowered in 2014, although this evened out over time. At least there are better "no and low" alcohol drinks on offer than a decade ago, but arguably country pubs are less able to face this challenge today because of escalating costs.

Your news and views are always welcome – see Branch Contacts on page 34.

DAVE RICHARDSON





Volunteers at the 2023 Oxford Beer Festival in the Town Hall.

Beer Tubthumping

"I GET KNOCKED down, but I get up again." So sang the mighty Chumbawamba.

It was a tough call by the team to cancel the Oxford Beer Festival. Like thousands of others, it was an event I had enjoyed many times. To my surprise the two I enjoyed most were the last ones, where I was volunteering rather than just attending.

Ultimately a lot of factors were against us but this chatter is not a postmortem. No one has died and no friendships have been broken. And the Oxford area is still blessed with a great range of beer festivals, large and small.

Because the Oxford Beer Festival in the Town Hall was such an enjoyable event, the Oxford Branch was very focused on making it a success. Along with our flagship magazine *the Oxford Drinker* it is something the branch can

rightly be very proud of.

As we pick ourselves up from the blow of the cancellation it's a chance to think about what's important to us. I'd say beer and cider, breweries, pubs and people.

The variety of real ale available in Oxford has probably never been larger. The number of pubs is down a little, but not as dramatically as in some areas. We can help make sure choice remains strong and pubs open. And there are no pubs without breweries -- Oxfordshire has a couple of dozen, from the historic Hook Norton (1849) to Twisted Tree, founded in 2024. Promoting these local breweries will remain a core branch goal.

Without our blockbuster festival it's my hope that we'll look afresh at the campaigning we do and together we can find... not a replacement for the

festival, but a variety of things we hadn't been doing to promote those things that matter to us. Some ideas will be old things we'd let lapse; others we'll borrow from elsewhere and adapt to Oxford. And some things we haven't even imagined yet. Resurrected, Stolen and Yet to Be -- sounds like a great heavy metal album, well, maybe not a great one.

We have a chance to have a new set of songs. Some will be old classics, some become classics, a few might work once but age badly, and others just flop. We'll have some fun experimenting. Throw your ideas into the ring, as you could have a hit on your hands.

"You're never gonna keep me down!"

JOHN WINNEY

See also "Oxford Beer Festival cancelled" on page 18.



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Pub News

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

White Hart Wytham at risk

Villagers in Wytham, near Oxford, have mounted a campaign to try to save their pub after its owners applied for permission to convert it into a house.

Vale of White Horse District Council is due to consider the application shortly, after owner Ace Pubs claimed it had lost a huge amount of money in the years leading up to its closure in September 2022. It invested heavily in outside covered accommodation and dining pods when re-opening was allowed after Covid, but this is now derelict.

Over £300,000 had been lost by 2019, according to Mark “Baz” Butcher of Ace Pubs who took over in 2015. Electricity costs had risen from about £2,000 to £7,000 per month, and gas was up by 50%. Marketing by Fleurets led to only 27 viewings of the property in three years, with only two offers being made and then withdrawn. Guide price was lowered from £975,000 to £600,000.

Ace Pubs now wants to convert the 17th-century building into a four-bedroom house, saying: “It is clear after three years of market-



The White Hart in 2016.

ing the White Hart, on both a freehold and lease basis, that the premises, as a public house, is no longer viable as a business concern. The property will never operate as a public house again unfortunately, and an alternative and viable use of the premises will be required.”

Dave King, chair of Wytham Parish Meeting, said: “This would be a terrible end for such a historic pub, and we have been trying hard to get as many people as possible to comment on the planning application.”

Plans have also been submitted to convert the Woodman Inn in North Leigh, near Witney, into a private house.

Sheffield “the best beer city in the world”?

Sheffield CAMRA’s latest beer census on 31 May found that 375 different cask ales from 159 breweries were available in 158 pubs, after visiting eight daytime pub routes around the city followed by an evening focus on the city centre.

The final total nearly matched the pre-Covid 2019 record of 407 cask ales from 189 breweries, and Sheffield CAMRA estimates that if independent craft keg ales are added, more than 500 different beers are on offer.

Sheffield is served by direct CrossCountry train services from Oxford and Banbury, with a more frequent service if you change at Birmingham New Street.

Greene King 25% discount offer

Greene King is continuing the spirit of Cask Ale Week (18-28 September) by offering CAMRA members a 25% discount on real ale right through until 26 October. The offer applies only at GK-managed pubs (rather than tenancies or franchises), which in Oxford include the Wig & Pen, Turf Tavern, Jude the Obscure and Duke of Monmouth.

A 10% discount normally applies to CAMRA members at its 600+ managed pubs around the country. It is also offering a tasting paddle of three one-third pints for £3 on the same dates, but this can only be ordered via the GK app. The 25% discount offer on ales is available at the bar.

Broad Face closed awaiting new tenant

The Broad Face in Abingdon closed on 25 August with Greene King advertising for a new tenant. In recent years, it has been allowed to source some of its own cask ales and it offered up to eight, with rarities for Oxfordshire such as Jail Ale from Dartmoor Brewery in Devon. It was voted Oxford CAMRA's Town and Village Pub of the Year in 2023 and appears in the 2026 *Good Beer Guide* but has now been removed from CAMRA's website.

Annual rent is advertised as £25,500 plus 5% of weekly net sales, with entry costs of £22,625. Annual turnover is estimated at over £500,000.

The previous tenant – Vital Events UK – had appointed liquidators. It also ran two other pubs in Berkshire which are both now closed, with the King Charles Tavern in Newbury – also a real ale

pub – put up for sale freehold and free of tie for £450,000.

Whether the Broad Face continues to be a real ale pub showcasing independent breweries remains to be seen, as it will be tied to Greene King.

"The pub has previously won awards from CAMRA and is known for a great range of beers and other drinks," says the brewer. "The food is home cooked and delivered to a high standard, with the pub seeing a sales split of 60/40 in favour of drinks. The current offer should be continued going forward and the Broad Face offers a great opportunity for an experienced operator, who is well versed in these types of offers within an historic environment."

Greene King is also seeking a franchise holder for the Bowyer Arms in Radley, one of its Hive Pubs division.

Old Anchor Inn re-opens with 10% loyalty discount offer

Thames riverside pub the Old Anchor Inn in Abingdon re-opened in August after more than two years of closure, run by an independent company with a few pubs in and around London.

Cask & Crew operates pubs including the Woodpecker in Battersea and the Bricklayer's Arms in High Wycombe. Formerly known as Peacock Inns, it aims to position the Old Anchor as a food-led pub with a strong community focus, including 10% off all drinks and food for people living within a three-mile radius who sign up for its loyalty scheme.

General manager Jonathan Mills said: "We have taken a 25-year lease and we aim to be a gastropub, but with a wide range of cask and keg beers. Cask beers will come mainly from Greene King's range as they came up with the best offer by a long way. The menu at Cote restaurants is the kind of thing we're aiming for. I intend to stay here for the long term and make this our flagship."

The pub will not be tied to Greene King so the prospect of selling local ales remains, but at first it offered only a GK selection – easy to find



Cask & Crew general manager Jonathan Mills at the Old Anchor Inn.

around Abingdon. The gastropub focus might be surprising at a time when many pubs are cutting back on food because of cost-of-living pressures and staff shortages, but Jonathan said the riverside location – on St Helen's Wharf near St Helen's Church – would make this a success.

The pub has been thoroughly refurbished and a new dining area opened up, and in the courtyard there are plans to bring back Aunt Sally. In the longer term, it hopes to have a barge moored opposite that could be used for functions.

Pub News

2 more pubs for Oak Taverns

Oxfordshire's top independent pub company, Oak Taverns, has bought the freehold of the Rose & Crown in Charlbury and Three Pigeons in Banbury to bring its total in the county to 12. Renowned for its focus on real ale and policy of not serving food (but with a wide range of food vans visiting many of its pubs at busy times), it has successfully re-opened some village pubs that had been long closed.

Director Emma Stevenson said: "The Rose & Crown marks the first time Oak Taverns has purchased a pub already trading at the levels we usually aim to achieve, with exactly the type of trade we look to develop. Thankfully, we have maintained those levels and perhaps even increased them slightly. The pub offers eight cask beers and four real ciders.

"The Three Pigeons is a thatched pub just outside Banbury town centre, which has been refurbished to a very high standard over the last few years. It is also the first of our pubs where you can now stay overnight, with three very well-appointed letting bedrooms. We have increased the cask beer range from one national beer to three local or interesting options. In addition, we have introduced three real ciders."

Managing director Simon Collinson told the *Morning Advertiser*: "I saw the Rose & Crown the same day I heard it was for sale and thought, 'this is the finished article for Oak Taverns'. This is the sort of thing we want to try and get our pubs to over a period of time, and this is the first time we have just bought a pub like this."



The White Horse in Stonesfield, which has just celebrated its second anniversary as a Community-Owned asset, was one of three Community-Owned pubs visited by a group of American students in Oxford to study English pub culture – the others being the Red Lion in Northmoor and White House in Bladon. The group, from Maryville University in St Louis, is seen with Professor Kent Bausman (back row, centre) and Oxford CAMRA members Douglas Rudlin, Tony Goulding and Dave Richardson.

QUICK ONES

Jason Bolger, head brewer at Tap Social since it started operations in 2017, is leaving to set up his own brewpub or small brewery with taproom, and is looking for premises in Witney. No brewing has taken place in the town since Wychwood was closed by Carlsberg Marston in 2023, although nearby breweries include Church Hanbrewery in New Yatt and Little Ox in Freeland.

Closed for refurbishment in June, the **Bear Inn** has re-opened with double the indoor space and revamped outside space, after taking over a former tanning salon next door which has been fitted out with modern seating for up to 30, TV for live sports and more toilets. The original small pub is unchanged, still boasting its impressive collection of old ties.

Scottish-based craft keg brewer **Brewdog** announced closure of its Cowley Road, Oxford branch in July – one of a series of 10 closures nationwide including its flagship site in Aberdeen. The long, narrow pub was formerly known as the Corridor, and interest now focuses on its future role as a pub or some other kind of hospitality outlet.

The **North Star** in Stevenston, a quaint 17th-century pub, was expected to close in September due to a change in tenancy. It is Grade 2 listed and its lack of a bar – it only has a serving hatch – has assured it of recognition by CAMRA as "a pub interior of outstanding national historic importance".

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Brewery News

Tap Social at Waitrose

Oxford's **Tap Social** has agreed a deal with national supermarket chain Waitrose to supply 220 supermarkets nationwide. The contract, which followed a tightly contested tendering process, will see the Oxford brewery's Time Better Spent (Juicy IPA) and Home and Dry (Hazy Pale Ale) hit UK shelves this month. Local Waitrose stores in Oxfordshire will stock up to two additional beers subject to availability.

The deal represents Waitrose's commitment to businesses with a social cause, and will give **Tap Social** a wider base through which to champion its own mission to provide former inmates with training and employment opportunities following their release. So far, it has delivered over 105,000 hours of paid employment to prisoners and ex-offenders.

The brewery will move from a 9-to-5 brewing schedule to a longer shift pattern to meet the greater volumes required by Waitrose, facilitating an expansion in its employment and training programme. Wider growth plans include an additional venue in South Oxfordshire and national expansion thereafter.

The deal coincides with two Great Taste awards for **Tap Social's** session pale ale, Jobsworth (1 star) and Time Better Spent (2 stars), further recognition of the quality of its beer.

Head brewer Jason Bolger will not be at the brewery to oversee delivery of the contract, however, as he parts

Our new brewery reporter **Patrick MacMahon** (below) on how Tap Social's "criminally good beer" breaks into a UK supermarket for the first time, and other news



ways to set up his own brewery in Witney. **Tap Social** wishes him every success.

Abingdon's **Loose Cannon** celebrated its 15th anniversary in August, releasing a brewery taproom exclusive, a double dry hopped ale which head brewer Alex Scott described as "all grapefruit zap". The brewery was also joined by **Hook Norton** and **Loddon** at Wallingford Bunkfest, with all three breweries producing exclusive beers for the occasion. Seasonal **Loose Cannon** brews Whiter Shade of Ale (extra pale ale) and Maltster Mash (Schwartz Beer) will be released from September.

Church Hanbrewery is approaching seven years at its Teardrop bar in Oxford's Covered Market and has introduced a guest line to its excel-

lent array of house-brewed ales and lagers. **XT's** nitro stout is a frequent occupier of this space.

One of Oxfordshire's youngest breweries, **Twisted Tree**, celebrated its first birthday in August and will continue in the festive spirit with an Oktoberfest celebration on Saturday 27 September at the brewery near Bicester. Two interesting brews will mark the occasion, a Dunkel lager and a traditional lager, both in cask but with small packs also available.

The brewery also hosts monthly "meet the brewer" events, a good chance to discuss the beers and the thinking behind them with their creators. These are announced via its website and social media so do keep an eye out.

If you can't wait for that, its flagship Twisted IPA, a delightful demonstration of British hop character, packed with East Kent Goldings, Fuggles and Challenger hops, is available on a permanent line at the White Lion in Fewcott or the Red Lion in Yarnton.

Heading west, Oxfordshire stalwart **Hook Norton** is finalising the installation of new hot liquor tanks and boiler alongside continuing repairs to the stable block after the fire in May last year, with the windows and roof now in place. In a rare nod to the beer industry of old, the brewery also hopes to have



*Tap Social directors
Tess and Amy Taylor
go shopping.*

shire horses, which are currently delivering to the Pear Tree in the village every Thursday, back in place by the end of the year.

More importantly for some, the **Hook Norton** Flagship IPA is celebrating its 20th anniversary, originally brewed in 2005 to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. The Castle tavern in Oxford will stage a “meet the brewer” launch night on 25 September with free samples, prizes and talks by the brewers.

Elsewhere, September is a busy month for events; look out for **Amwell Springs**’ Burnout BBQ on 26 September with fresh beer and DJ Binge, and **Loddon** Brewery’s Octoberfest on 27 September for Bavarian food, steins of fresh Loddon beer and live performances from Oompah band and Big Smoke Brass UK.

If you prefer to celebrate with a malty German amber lager in the comfort of your own home, **Renegade** brewery’s delightful Festbier is now

available to order online.

Finally, a huge congratulations to **Wadworth** Brewery celebrating its 150th anniversary. You can join the celebrations at several of its pubs on 27 September, with further details to be announced on its website. The brewery marked the occasion by pedalling an extraordinary 150 miles from the King’s Arms in Fulham, London all the way to the Riverside Inn in Saltford, near Bristol. A well-earned pint no doubt followed!

AS I TRAVELLED out to Ludgershall, a small village near Brill in Buckinghamshire, to meet some of the team at Vale Brewery, I was thinking not much happens around here in this quintessentially English village. But that notion was soon set aside once I started chatting with Joe Brouder, managing director of the brewery.

The small but stylish taproom is where we met, and I was delighted to see six Vale beers on cask which, as you would expect, are always available and in perfect condition. I declined a sample and sensibly opted for a coffee as I was driving.

Vale Brewery was founded in 1995 by Mark and Phil Stephens, starting in Haddenham and moving to the current location in 2007. It was not until 2010 that new kit arrived to enable the business to expand to a 20-barrel plant, equivalent to 5,760 pints.

Mark and Phil decided on an exit plan as they wished to retire, and this is where Joe and brother Jimmy declared their interest.

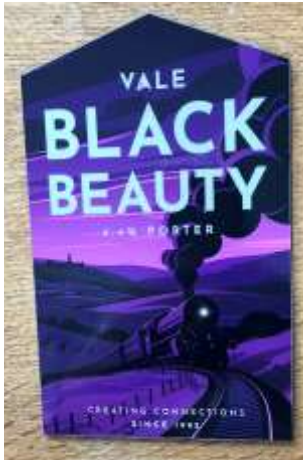
Joe explained: "At 19 years of age I decided not to complete my university course, leaving to run a pub in St Albans much to the annoyance of my parents. But this early insight into pub culture provided invaluable experience and the pub even sold beer from Vale, so I knew of them. I then went on to work for Britvic, Carlsberg and Timothy Taylor, which complemented my experience of the pub and drinks retail trade.

"Unlike me, my brother concluded his university studies as a history student," he continued. "Jimmy became a graduate trainee with Heineken's Star Pubs group where he quickly gained ex-

Beer Heroes

Gravitas and growth

Pete Flynn goes inside the heart of Vale Brewery to meet MD Joe Brouder



Vale's Black Beauty is a smooth and comforting Dark Chocolate Porter with an ABV of 4.4%.

perience in sales and marketing, so you can see where all this is heading."

While you might conclude that they set up their vision for Vale Brewery at this stage, this was premature. The brothers established their own sales and marketing agency, working with over 50 brands during a four-year period with the emphasis on sales, and it was not until September 2021 that they and fellow shareholders were able to buy Vale Brewery.

Joe explained: "While my brother and I had considerable experience within the retail operation, you need the ability of a lead investor to negotiate financing the buy-out. We were able to convince our shareholders of our vision for the future, raising money from friends and family."

I gained the impression that Joe is a charismatic leader who really engages with the team, and he invited me to view the entire operation where I met head brewer David Renton. Joe looks at David with affection as he has a loyal following for his legendary brewery tours, with hundreds of members benefitting from this generous scheme costing £80 a year. It is now in its second year.

"It is not just about selling your product but engaging with your local community so they want to return repeatedly," said Joe. "In our case, members are given a branded growler which holds 3.3 pints, which they can refill 13 times for free throughout the year. As part of the deal members are given two brewery tours, when they can drink for free throughout an evening. In addition, we hold various events in the taproom throughout the year, bringing more opportuni-



Joe Brouder (far left) and his brother and fellow director Jimmy outside the brewery.

ties for members to meet on a regular basis.”

While some brewers are struggling to keep sales going up to restore pre-Covid levels, Vale has seen sales double over the past four years with a 26% increase during the past year. Joe attributes this to a focused approach with a mix of sales channels including the independent free trade, a successful taproom and online activity.

The 10 full-time employees really enjoy the vibe, and it is a great working environment with David having worked at the brewery for over 25 years, where he started as a drayman and was then encouraged to learn brewing.

It is good to know that Vale has a signature brew which can really lift sales and provide a solid foundation for the brewery. This is of course Gravititas, a 4.8% pale ale. I asked Joe what

makes it special.

“It’s a 100% smash beer using UK Cascade hops and 100% pale malt, with the length of the brew time and the profile of the liquor differentiating the mash. Add to this the nuances of the head brewer’s methods and you have a winning beer.”

I would certainly agree as I first came across this beer many years ago at our CAM-RA Oxford Beer Festival,

where I served it to our thirsty customers. Other beers in the core cask range include Brill Gold; Red Kite, a bitter; Ticky Brew, an amber ale; Electric Sheep, a Citra pale ale; Black Beauty, a porter; Wychert, a bitter; and VPA, a pale ale. A rebrand a few years ago really makes them stand out on the bar, and they are seen around Oxford much more often.

I asked Joe about future challenges and directions for Vale: "Certainly beer taxation continues to be a major issue with 53p in every £1 of revenue going to HMRC, which is a big challenge to our much-loved brand and brewery. It is up to us to focus on what is controllable, like getting our customers to return repeatedly. It's a fun way to spend what I call a perfectly repeatable week, and we love doing

what we're doing."

Joe mentioned that Vale has room to expand with the ability to fill more casks and bring in more fermenting vessels, enabling the business to grow organically which is a far less risky a proposition than growing by acquisition.

I was impressed with how clean the operation is, and Joe told me that Vale has been awarded a SALSA accreditation. This is a tailored for safety certification designed for small and micro-sized breweries in the UK and a type of quality assurance, with only 7% of brewers obtaining this mark.

You will find the full range of Vale beers around Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire but mostly in the free trade, with Wetherspoon selling the beers within a 30-mile radius including some specials. If I

had to choose just two of their beers my favourites would be Gravitas and Black Beauty, the latter being a smooth and comforting Dark Chocolate Porter with an ABV of 4.4%.

I so much enjoyed my brief time at Vale that I will arrange for a cohort of CAMRA members to visit the taproom. I thanked Joe for his time and asked for an overview of the future for Vale.

"I am excited and optimistic, and we are open for business. So visit our taproom (open from 3-8pm on Fridays, 12-5pm on Saturdays and 12-4pm on Sundays) and enjoy a brewery tour with David, to join the throng of existing members."

I have little doubt of continuing success for this small but vibrant brewery.



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



The Masons Arms

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Down Memory Lane

Beer on buses 2

In the second and final part of his survey of advertising on Oxford buses, **Grahame Wareham** looks at some of the national brands that appeared on City of Oxford Motor Services (later Oxford Bus Company) vehicles

BY THE 1950S, bus advertising was growing and advertising space was becoming increasingly congested, resulting in ads appearing on the rear of double deck buses and on the roof cantrail of single deck buses. Another type appeared on the rear lower corner position known as a target, and was an 18-inch circular round sometimes applied as a transfer.

By the early 1960s a new form of advertisement appeared in the form of an illuminated perspex-based panel about 20 feet long between decks, illuminated by fluorescent tubes behind. The perspex didn't take very kindly to being pasted with paper ads and didn't see much continued use as an illuminated panel. But one bus – an ARC Bridgemaster of 1962 – did receive a permanent acrylic design on behalf of Morrell's Ales, which lasted the entire life of the bus in Oxford.

In 1955, the Brewers Society (which became the British Beer and Pub Association in 2000), a trade organisation formed in 1904, launched a general advertising campaign designed to give the industry a boost. It needed to counter what was becoming a worrying trend of poor beer sales brought on by the advent of television, with people's social habits changing towards drinking at home. With many



pubs owned by the larger breweries, this national campaign was welcomed.

It probably had more to do with the post-war “baby boomer” years and lack of money that people had to change their habits, but there was somewhat of an over-capacity in brewing at that time. This was to have a knock-on effect in the early 1960s, when many of the smaller breweries were taken over and in a few cases closed down.

One advertising slogan from 1959 read “Beer: The best long drink in the world” and this appeared on two local buses as an effort was made to get a message out.

The “best long drink in the world” ad is seen on a 1948 vintage vehicle at Gloucester Green bus station.



The Tolly Cobbold advertisement on a white background was a sign-written affair with a bold message. The bus, of 1954 vintage, stands on Oxford Station Approach on service 1 to Littlemore.



A 1960-vintage forward boarding bus has arrived at Gloucester Green from Chipping Norton. Guinness has adopted a somewhat local twist on the cartoon advertisement with the rowers, hopefully raising a smile!

This was in the days before national television advertising had a stronghold.

Here are some of the regional and national brands that advertised on Oxford buses.

Tolly Cobbold of Ipswich was an amalgamation of original breweries Tollemache and Cobbold in 1957. It was later taken over by Brent Walker and the brewing of Tolly Cobbold was transferred to Cameron's. The brewery was sold to Ridley's and eventually swallowed up by Greene King.

Brewmaster was brewed by **Flowers** of Stratford at its Cheltenham brewery. It was then taken over by Whitbread until Whitbread ceased brewing in 2001.

Perhaps one of the most famous of the big brewing empires belonged to **Guinness**. Originally a Dublin brew

dating back to 1759, Guinness opened a substantial brewery and bottling plant in Park Royal, London during 1932 which finally closed in 2005. Guinness is a Stout-type composition using roast malt extract, barley, hops, brewer's yeast and water, and up until the early 1960s was cask conditioned.

From then onwards all Guinness was keg conditioned using nitrogen, giving it a unique smooth taste and differentiation from other brands. There are different strengths and styles of recipe to suit the worldwide export market but in the main the name Guinness is recognised as a dark, almost black Irish Stout that probably advertises itself adequately through its taste and unique texture. The sides of a bus were probably the most effective way of introducing

this beer to the "man in the street".

Harp Lager was brewed by Guinness, Dundalk from 1960 but later brewed by Courage at Alton Brewery, which was sold to **Bass Charrington** in 1979 when it was brewing mainly for Carling and Tennents. Bass Charrington was absorbed by Coors in December 2001 and closed by Molson-Coors in May 2015.

Watney Mann's origins go back to 1837 when James Watney open the Stag Brewery in Victoria, London. Further acquisitions and amalgamations in 1898 with Combe Delafield Co and Reid & Co resulted in a new Watney's Stag Brewery in Pimlico, London. Watney's merged with Mann, Crossman & Paulin to become Watney Mann in 1958. Watney Mann later absorbed Wilsons of Manches-



A 1964 bus loads passengers in Queen Street for its run to Blackbird Leys. Watney's Special Bitter was a last-ditch effort by Watney Mann to try and regain some of its share of the decreasing beer output.

ter, Phipps NBC of Northampton, Websters of Halifax and Ushers of Trowbridge before being itself finally bought out by Grand Metropolitan Group in 1972, closing in 1979. Grand Metropolitan sold out to Courage in 1991.

Samuel Whitbread & Co opened in Chiswell Street, Islington, London in 1750 and consolidated two other breweries in Brick Lane and Goat Brewhouse. Whitbread brewed at Chiswell Street for 225 years before closing the brewery down in 1976 and selling off the brand names Tankard and Trophy to be brewed under licence. Whitbread had seen the light with too many of the larger breweries making the same kind of product. Lager was becoming more popular and the keg process did not taste the same in most people's eyes.

Worthington & Co was founded in 1761 in Burton-upon-Trent by William Worthington, and was the second oldest major brewing company in England. In 1927, Worthington merged with its biggest rival and neighbour, Bass of Burton, established in 1777 by William Bass. The company became known as Bass Worthington ranking as a major national brewer, but in 1965 the Burton brewery closed. Brewing was contracted out elsewhere until 2002 when the company was bought out by Coors, and brewing of the brand then resumed in Burton.

Tuborg lager, a Danish product and part of **Carlsberg** Group, was originally imported as part of a contra deal by Allied Breweries until it took over the brewing of Skol in Alloa, Scotland in 1958. Later, Skol amalgamated with Carls-

berg and for a while was marketed as Orangeboom, later becoming part of Interbrew.

Bombardier was a brand of **Wells & Youngs**, originally Charles Wells of Bedford and Youngs of the Ram Brewery in Wandsworth, London. It acquired McEwans, Youngers and Courage in 2011, and since 2017 has been part of Marstons, whose brewing interests were more recently acquired by Carlsberg.



All pictures are from the author's collection. Gra-hame Wareham worked for the Oxford Bus Company from 1974 to 2015 and was involved with the Oxford Bus Museum at Long Hanborough. He is a member of the Cherwell Bus Preservation Group which has 20 historic vehicles.

Oxford Beer Festival cancelled

Problems with Town Hall, shortage of volunteers, rocketing costs and falling attendance to blame



Above: MP for Oxford East Annaliese Dodds kindly helped out at the 2024 festival.

Left: The bar at the White Hart, Wolvercote was borrowed to present Steve Lawrence (right) with an outstanding service award for his work at the festival. Doing the honours is Oxford CAMRA chair John Winney.

ONE OF THE highlights of Oxford's autumn calendar, CAMRA's annual Beer and Cider Festival, was called off in August. It was due to be held from 23-25 October at the Town Hall, where it had been held every year since 1998 with the exception of 2020 and 2021 due to Covid restrictions.

Now it would appear that last year's 25th event at the Town Hall could be the last, which will come as a major disappointment to many people. Attendance has been falling for years, and even if CAMRA could overcome its problems with the Town Hall, it hasn't enough fit volunteers to do the heavy lifting involved in setting up the festival.

Oxford CAMRA chair John Winney said: "Deadlines were upon us, and we had no choice but to call the festival off, which we did with great regret. We thank the Town Hall for working with us two years ago to manage costs, at a time when cancellation of the festival was looking likely.

"But this time around we have faced a lack of communication and an obstructive attitude by Town Hall management, particularly over the cost of providing security and the refusal by their appointed events caterer, Elegant Cuisine, to allow any other kind of food into the building to feed volunteers and judges of the SIBA beer competition.

"A more positive attitude by the Town Hall would have helped, as we get the impression that they don't really want this kind of event. But we have our own problems too, especially an ageing workforce and a lack of younger volunteers to handle things like social media and sponsorship."



The Oxford Beer Festival has been held at the Town Hall since 1998.

CAMRA was facing a major increase in security costs after the Town Hall insisted on using Scope, its own contractors. CAMRA had been using Aphis Security, a company that actually trains Scope and many other security companies.

There has also been a dispute over an incident last year when police had to be called to remove an abusive and violent member of the public. The Town Hall felt this reflected negatively on its licence to hold events, but CAMRA said that Aphis had co-operated fully with police who had made no complaint about how the incident was handled. Changing the security provider would not prevent such an incident happening again, it added.

Attendance at the festival peaked in the 2010s at up to 3,000 visitors over three days, but has not recovered since Covid. Last year only about 1,600 attended, and the festival would have lost money if not for support from SIBA – the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates. It held the Midlands Indie Beer

Awards before the festival opened and was planning to do the same this year.

While some festivals continue to be successful, others have been lost with Reading, Banbury and Wantage among the casualties in recent years. CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre in August racked up a £320,000 loss, and both this and the winter beer festival won't happen next year.

There are many reasons for the declining attendance in Oxford, including a younger generation who drink less beer or no alcohol at all; lingering fears by older visitors over mixing at busy events; the wider availability of quality beers at pubs throughout the city; and the increasing cost of almost everything involved in putting a festival together.

It was sad to have to cancel, especially for festival manager Grahame Allen who had led the event since it moved to the Town Hall in 1998, and for Steve Lawrence, Oxford branch secretary, who organised the volunteers.

A search for possible alternative venues two years ago failed to find anywhere in the city centre that was suitable, but Oxford CAMRA is now considering other events it could lend its name to, possibly in collaboration with local pubs and breweries.

John Winney added: "We would like to apologise to all those who have been looking forward to this year's event, including the many beer and cider producers who would have supplied us, and to SIBA.

"Oxford and the surrounding area are now blessed with a busy calendar of beer festivals and similar events. Some are CAMRA, but many are not. Oxford CAMRA will continue to support all these events, as customers and volunteers. No decision has been made about an Oxford CAMRA festival in 2026, but the challenges are significant.

"In the meantime, we will be continuing our work promoting real ale and cider, consumer choice, protecting and supporting pubs and breweries, and continuing our busy social calendar."



3 pubs make debut in *Good Beer Guide 2026*

THE REAL ALE scene in East Oxford has taken a big step forward with two pubs added in the new guide published in September – the Star in Rectory Road, and the Oranges & Lemons in St Clement’s.

The guide was first published in 1974 but the Star has never been in before – while the Oranges & Lemons last featured in 2014 when it was known as the Angel & Greyhound. Also completely new to the guide is the Red Lion in Yarnton, a village pub off the main A44 road saved from closure in December 2023 when re-opened by independent pub group Oak Taverns.

Altogether there are 24 pubs listed in the Oxford CAMRA branch area, which covers Abingdon, Kidlington, Witney and nearby villages, as well as Oxford city. One pub included in the printed guide but since deleted from CAMRA’s database is the Broad Face in Abingdon, currently closed.

Pubs are chosen based on beer scores by CAMRA members from all over the country, judging the quality of real ale rather than the number of real ales offered, and not taking into account food, ambience or any other factors. Due to restrictions on numbers allocated to each branch, many good real ale pubs fail to make it.

These additions to the guide are very welcome, but we should also pay tribute to



Above: Daisy Mulford with Jamie Livermore and Gus Rogers (right) celebrate at the Star in Rectory Road. Left: Jess Dixon at the Red Lion in Yarnton.



pubs which appear in it every year. These include the Rose & Crown in North Oxford (every year bar one since 1997), the Mason’s Arms in Headington (since 2005) and the Brewery Tap in Abingdon (since 2008). Other regulars in recent years include Oxford pubs the Royal Blenheim, the Gardener’s Arms in Plantation Road and the White Rabbit, plus the White Hart in Headington.

The addition of two pubs in East Oxford for 2026 is

particularly welcome as there hasn’t been a pub in the guide from the Cowley Road area for many years, while Iffley Road pubs have appeared only occasionally.

The Star is an independent pub just off Cowley Road leased since 2020 by Gus Rogers, and over the last couple of years it has increased its focus on real ale with a very eclectic range. On draught recently were Utopian Brewery’s Best Bitter, Marble Beers’ Late Summer Pints,

and Young Leith Steam from the Pilot brewery in Edinburgh.

"Trade has been good since taking over and our large garden saved us when Covid restrictions kicked in," said Gus, son of Ian Rogers who was joint owner of Wychwood brewery in the 1990s. "We get a cross-section of customers here, and were still busy in the summer when the Cowley Road pubs were dead because they appeal mainly to students."

Bar manager Daisy Mulford, who joined recently from the O2 Academy, added: "We get quite a few families before about 8pm at weekends. Customers like to see their favourite ales like Bass back, but will often ask, 'What's next?'"

An even wider range of ales is available at the Oranges & Lemons, reverting to its

previous name after re-opening by Morgan Pub Collective – which also runs the Grapes – last February. On the bar recently were regular Harvey's Sussex Best plus Oakham's Oranje, Tempo Pale Ale, Ossett X and Rooster's London Thunder porter, plus two real ciders on hand pump.

Real cider is also a feature at the Red Lion in Yarnton, with up to 10 served from boxes in summer and five usually available all year from names including Seacider, Lilley's, Hitchcox and Old Rosie. Real ales on a recent visit were regular Trunk IPA from new local brewery Twisted Tree, Rebellion IPA from Marlow, and Wipeout from Little Ox.

The village is on the S3 bus route from Oxford towards Chipping Norton or Charlbury,

operating every half hour during the day and hourly in the evenings. The Red Lion was closed and put up for sale by Admiral Taverns in 2022 and subject to a failed community buy-out bid, but Oak Taverns now successfully operates the pub which also has a large garden.

Landlady Jess Dixon said: "It means a lot to get into the guide for the first time as we are really trying to push real ale in this area, and I would like to keep expanding it. The village really wants the pub to succeed after various changes of ownership over the years."

Live music is played on some weekends and although it doesn't serve food – like all Oak Taverns pubs – it welcomes food vans at weekends and on Wednesdays.



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The former Marlborough Arms pub (left) and the former Morrell's Lion Brewery in St Thomas Street. (Photos by Steve Thompson)

Lost Pubs of Oxford

Tom's breweries

St Thomas parish in the western part of Oxford city centre is known for its railway station and its brewing history. **Steve Thompson** reports

“THE PARISH OF St Thomas is one of the oldest in Oxford, and was the home of two medieval abbeys, Osney and Rewley,” writes Derek Honey in his *Encyclopaedia of Oxford Pubs, Inns and Taverns*. “A low-lying damp area of town, with several branch streams of the Thames going through it, the parish occupies an area from Worcester College in the north, the Thames at Osney to the west, Oxford Castle and the old prison to the east, and Osney Lane to the south.

“As early as 1452 the abbots at Osney (original spelling) had encouraged industrial development in the area, and they built a brewhouse just north of the present Quaking Bridge, near

the castle. From that a tradition of brewing was established in the area.”

St Thomas was once dominated by two breweries, Hall's in Park End Street and Morrell's in St Thomas Street (three if you count the earlier Swan Brewery).

The Swan's Nest Brewery, later the Swan Brewery, was established in 1646 in Paradise Street. In 1795, it was bought by William Hall and was renamed Hall's Oxford Brewery, taking over other local breweries.

Hall's Brewery was acquired by Samuel Allsopp & Sons in 1926, after which it ceased brewing in Oxford.

Many of its houses featured wall-mounted plaques with the

“Hall's Hare” trademark, and in St Thomas these include the Chequers Inn in St Thomas Street (now a private house) and (according to the Brewery History Society) the Nag's Head in Hythe Bridge Street (now the Oxford Retreat).

Morrell's Brewery (“the Lion Brewery”) began in 1797 when brothers Mark and James Morrell entered into partnership with Oxford brewer Edward Tawney.

The Tawney family were Oxford's first successful independent brewers, graduating from disreputable boatmen in the 17th century to Edward's brother Richard who inherited the brewery from his father in 1768. Richard went on to become mayor of Oxford three times, be imprisoned for corruption and be knighted by





Hall's Brewery in Park End Street. (New Maltings, Brewers Journal, 15 February 1904, courtesy Brewery History Society)

King George III (not all at the same time!).

Sir Richard died in 1791, and the brewery was passed on to Edward. The Morrell brothers gradually bought out Edward's interest in the brewery and in 1800 bought the freeholds and the lease of the brewery. The

brewery was now owned by the Morrell family and remained in their hands until it closed after an acrimonious family dispute in 1998.

The Morrell family lived at Headington Hill Hall (now the Oxford Brookes University School of Law) and their es-

tate included South Park. In 1929-31, Morrell Avenue was built along the south side of South Park.

The **Marlborough Arms** in St Thomas Street, named after the first duke of that name, was the only pub next door to a brewery in Oxford. In 1996, it was renamed the Brewery Gate, as the local for brewery staff, with walk-in tours of the brewery meeting there and a large room upstairs used as the brewery barroom.

There are no pubs left in either St Thomas Street or adjoining Hollybush Row, but two that are now in residential or commercial use are still recognisable.

The **Chequers Inn** on the corner of St Thomas Street and Hollybush Row closed in 2007. In 2004, it received a scathing review on the Oxford Pub Guide website:

"Grotty side street local with no real beer, rust-coloured walls



The Chequers Inn at 44 St Thomas Street (left) and the Albion at 8 Hollybush Row. Note the bottling stores of Hall's Oxford Brewery on the corner of Hollybush Row and Park End Street. Although Hall's ceased brewing in Oxford in 1926, it maintained a distribution depot here until quite recently. (Pub photos © M.J. Crook)



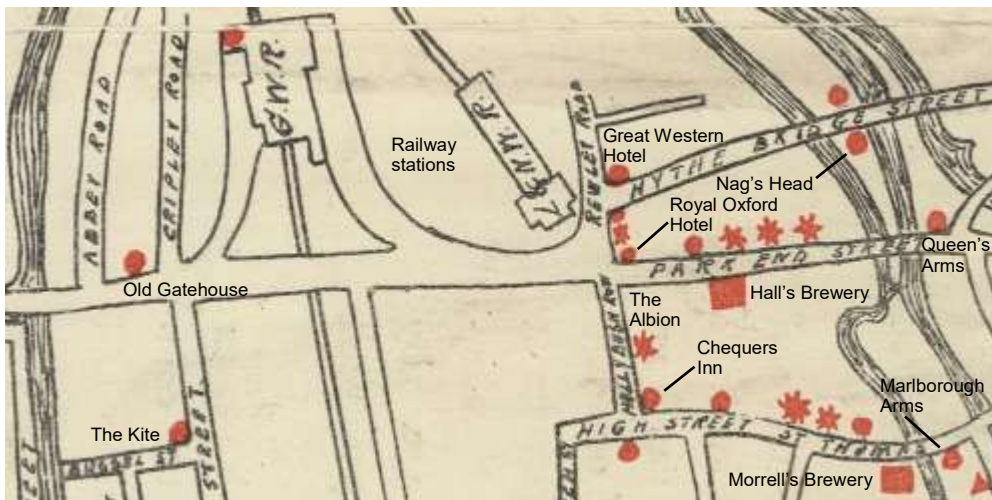
Clockwise from above: The Great Western Hotel on the corner of Hythe Bridge Street and Rewley Road, the Queen's Arms in Park End Street, the Royal Oxford Hotel in Park End Street and the Nag's Head in Hythe Bridge Street.

and several pool tables. The main bar area has a strange mixture of odd farming implements and American baseball rubbish. The only keg bitter was Tetley's, so I went for the Guinness, which was by default Extra-Cold."

The **Albion** in Hollybush Row was another pub that underwent a number of changes in name and appearance during its lifetime. Until it finally closed in 2015 (the building is now in commercial use) it was popular with students and travellers as it was near the railway station.

Closer still to the station was the **Old Gatehouse** in Botley Road, so named as the building was the toll house on the Botley to Witney road until 1868, when it became a pub. Also nearby was the **Kite** in Mill Street. The Old Gatehouse is closed but the Kite is now the Porterhouse steak house and bar.





This detail is taken from the *Drink Map of Oxford* published by the Oxford Temperance Union in 1883. Red stars indicate beer houses, red dots full licensed houses and red squares breweries. 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. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, C17:70 Oxford (7).

Besides the breweries, the other major presence in St Thomas was (and is) the railway station.

In 1852, the Great Western Railway (GWR) built a new station at the eastern end of Botley Road, near another station built the year before by the London & North Western Railway (LNWR). The GWR station was on the site of Oxford's present railway station, and the LNWR station was where Said Business School is now.

The railway brought travelers to Oxford – business and leisure – who needed somewhere to stay, and so hotels were built nearby.

The first of these was the **Great Western Hotel**, which stood on the corner of Hythe Bridge Street and Rewley Road, opposite the LNWR railway station. Called the London & North Western Hotel in 1872, it was leased by Morrell's Brewery in 1868 and bought by them in 1893. The hotel closed in 1970

and was demolished, the site sold to bookseller B.H. Blackwell and replaced by a giant dark glass block.

The **Royal Oxford Hotel**, which still exists in Park End Street facing Frideswide Square, was built by Hall's Brewery in 1934. It deserves special mention in this article as it replaced three "lost pubs", from top to bottom on the 1883 map above the Robin Hood, the Five Ales and the Railway Inn.

Finally, two pubs that still exist, but under different names.

According to Derek Honey, the **Nag's Head** in Hythe Bridge Street was "a typical barge-man's beer house, a poor-quality building, which probably flooded during the winter". The novelist Evelyn Waugh drank there as an undergraduate in 1924. It is even mentioned in his best-known work, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), as one of several Oxford pubs visited by Charles Ryder and Sebastian

Flyte when they "formed the taste for lower company".

Today, as the Oxford Retreat, it has successfully rebranded itself as an upmarket nightspot in the city centre.

The **Queen's Arms** in Park End Street was built around 1770 and was probably established as a pub during the building of the Oxford Canal wharf in 1790. It may have been named after Queen Sophia Charlotte, consort of King George III.

In 1996, the name was changed to Irish-themed Rosie O'Grady's, then in 2009 the Duke's Cut (named after a section of the canal in North Oxford), and finally in 2014 the Lighthouse.

With its "Nautica-Steampunk" theme and a few old photos from the canal age, and only one real ale on tap, the Lighthouse nevertheless shines a light as perhaps the last traditional pub in St Thomas.



Gardener's World

Tipping point

WHEN DID THE trend to start ordering bitter by the most obscure and smallest piece of writing on the pump clip start? I'm over 50 now, so maybe I missed this on TikTok. Is it some kind of playful prank, or some attempt to "appreciate" every bit of text on a pump badge? Wherever it started, it's a strange thing.

You probably haven't even noticed that it's a thing, unless you work behind a bar though. Or pay particular attention to what the person in front of you is ordering. Seemingly though, when confronted with an unknown beer, perhaps one in four customers will opt to order said beer not by the name of the beer, as in "A pint of Bombshell please," or by the brewery name, "A pint of Chadlington, if I may."

Instead, they'll search the pump clip before ordering, "A pint of session ale," or "Just half a 4.2% ABV," or even "A glass of the Designed and Printed by InstaPrint." This is not the point of this article, so why am I going on about it? As a way of demonstrating people's selective observational skills.

They might not be able to pick out a brewery name from an ABV, but everyone can spot a tip screen, even if it's just to skip it. And there's no judgement there either. Which is more than can be said for some people's reactions when faced with a tip screen. I won't detail every grumble I've heard, but mainly people feel

Paul Silcock (right) of the Gardener's Arms in Plantation Road, Oxford, tackles the thorny subject of tipping in pubs



they're already paying enough for beer and they're probably right. Beer's not cheap, and having to add a tip on top does seem a bit harsh.

But here's the thing, you're not expected to, it's completely voluntary. But if you're settling the bill after dinner, when multiple staff have been involved in the pouring of beer, cooking and delivering of food, as well as the clearing away of all the used plates and dishes, not to mention the washing up, and you've enjoyed yourself, then maybe tipping is a little bit more acceptable.

Just remember as I explain how valuable tips are, that tipping is, and always has to be, purely voluntary. Otherwise it's not a tip, it's a cost. Like the booking fee cinemas and live venues slap on your ticket price when you buy a ticket online. If I have to pay it

anyway, why even show it? If I buy a pair of trousers I don't expect to find the price doesn't include a left leg, and I have to pay a Legging Fee at the cash desk. Just roll it into the price.

I digress.

I'm going to try and explain what tipping can mean for staff without going into actual numbers, and just using the tip screen on the card machines at the Gardener's Arms as an example. First though, it's worth pointing out we always had a tip screen on our card machines. But it was just a numeric keypad, a blank tip screen asking customers to enter their own tip amount, or skip to payment. Which just about everyone did.

On a whim I changed the tip screen to one that simply displayed tips as set financial options, including two options to add No Tip, just to see what would happen. Remember my

earlier point about selective observation? When faced with a tip screen with actual amounts on it, rather than a blank keypad, people noticed. People noticed in two ways:

They tipped more, a lot more. With the need to stop and decide what they would like to add done for them, customers are much happier, it would seem, to tip.

Or they would exclaim how ridiculous it was to tip for a pint, given how expensive beer is. And I don't need to go over the facts about No. 2 again.

So to the point of this article: the value of tipping versus humanity's selective observational skills. Faced with a pre-selected set of tipping options, instead of a "tip what you like" screen, tips have risen tenfold. I mean that literally. And not literally like people use the

word literally nowadays, I mean literally *literally*. People are tipping 10 times the amount they were. The effect of this, when passed on to the staff, is a substantial pay rise.

(I should humbly and modestly point out at this juncture that neither myself or my business partner take any of the tips. All tippage* goes entirely to the staff.)

If I wanted to give the staff the same pay rise as this new tip screen has, per month, I would need to increase the price of all my cask ales by a pound, as well as adding a pound to the best-selling lager on the bar, *and* the best-selling keg ale (Time Better Spent by Tap Social, in case you were wondering).

I know everyone in small business always talks about the problem of increasing costs, either through bills,

national insurance or the minimum wage, but it is hard to find the money to pay staff competitive wages when it's already hard to find the money to pay the rent. So bless everyone who can find a spare bit of cash for the staff.

You don't have to do it on every trip to the bar, you don't even have to do it on every visit to the pub. But if you can, and only if you can, tipping is very much appreciated, certainly by all the staff at the Gardener's Arms.

Who, it must be said, have been far friendlier, helpful, smiley and dutiful since the new tip screen appeared.

I couldn't possibly say if there's any correlation.



* Tippage – it's a perfectly cromulent word.



(Photo Wikimedia Commons by Nan Palmer)

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Tony Goulding heads to a town with some impressive statistics

WITNEY, I BELIEVE, is unrivalled as a town or city for the low number of pubs that have been lost and developed for other uses. Over the last 40 years, some towns and cities have seen losses as great as 30-40% but not so Witney, which had 24 pubs in 1985 but still has 23 today.

Most of them are concentrated on High Street and Corn Street but we will start in the suburbs with the **Rowing Machine**, built new for Morrells on the then new Smiths Estate. It's now a Greene King house where you can expect a couple of GK beers and a Hungry Horse food menu.

The first pub in Corn Street as you come into town is the **New Inn** which serves Doom Bar, Marston's Wainwright and Greene King IPA. No food is served but there is plenty of family entertainment and live music. A short walk past the long-closed **Butcher's Arms** will bring you to the **Three Horseshoes**, a comfortable, popular food and conversation pub serving St Austell Tribute and Marston's Hobgoblin, which used to be brewed across the road at the closed Wychwood brewery.

The strangely renamed **Fleece & Flagon**, formerly the **Chequers**, is a Craft Union Pub Co house serving Hobgoblin, Wainwright and Timothy Taylor Landlord in a sports-led setting with no food served. Almost next door is the **Hollybush** which has gone through some recent changes of direction but is now on a more positive path as a pub again. Two cask

Tony's Travels

Winning in Witney



The Olde Cross Keys in Market Square.

beers are served in this Greene King house with a badged Hollybush bitter and another from the brewery's extensive cask offering.

A couple of minutes along the street is the **Eagle Tavern**, a popular Hook Norton pub with up to four of its beers on the bar. It is closed Monday and Tuesday and also Wednesday and Thursday lunchtimes, with food served Friday to Sunday lunchtimes. The last pub on Corn Street is the **Red Lion**, a busy, noisy sports bar with no cask beer or food.

In complete contrast, just around the corner facing

Church Green, is the ever-popular, all-ages-welcome **Angel Inn**. This busy community-focused pub serves Landlord, Hobgoblin, Brakspear Gravity and Angel Ale, with good-value food served most of the day.

Almost opposite is the **Company of Weavers**, a Wetherspoon pub serving up to seven cask beers and so named as Witney is famous for its past tradition of blanket production and other woollen material. A few steps towards the church is the **Fleece**, another destination pub serving four cask beers, including Purity's Greedy Goose. Fine



*The Angel Inn
in Market
Square.*

dining in a comfortable ambience makes for a special experience.

A five-minute walk across Church Green to the High Street brings you to the **Blue Boar**, an old coaching inn recently acquired by classy pub group Brunning & Price. Be prepared for top-class food and a good selection of cask ales including from Little Ox, with guest rooms available.

Almost next door is the **Beekeeper**, a bit like an up-market Wetherspoon where I couldn't find any bees or cask beer. Its former name the

Eagle Vaults sounded more sensible.

A few doors down is the town's newest offering the **Part & Parcel**, a former post office now run by Oxford-based Dodo Pub Co serving two cask beers from Little Ox, a real cider and food all day. It's a spacious, quirky and vibrant venue.

Directly opposite is the **Olde Cross Keys**, a busy and lively Greene King pub serving four of its beers plus a real cider. Food is served all day in this sports-led old coaching inn, where the large side and

rear garden leads to the River Windrush.

Cross the road to the **Royal Oak**, a free house serving up to four Butcombe cask beers in comfortable surroundings. Its rather odd opening hours are Tuesday till Thursday 10am-7pm, and Friday/Saturday 10am-midnight. Tasty food is served at lunchtimes.

Through one of the alleyways opposite towards the car park by Waitrose is the town's top choice of independent beer, albeit with only two cask ales plus plenty of

craft keg and a “proper pub” with no food. The **Crafty Pint** micro-pub was formerly **Drummers Bar** and started as **Oxbrew**. It is now 2025 Oxford CAMRA Town and Village Pub of the Year, and is closed Monday and Tuesday.

Follow the High Street down through the traffic lights to the **Plough** to another comfortable food pub where up to three cask beers are served, Landlord, Wadworth 6X and Proper Job. These ales and good food can be enjoyed all day in the super riverside garden. A little further out is another former coaching stop, the **Old Court Inn**, now the **Gurkha**, a Nepalese restaurant. Forty years ago, it sold proper John Smith’s Bitter but has no cask beer these days.

Just around the corner on the Hailey road or West End, you will find a fine locals’



The Blue Boar in Market Square.

boozer, the **Elm Tree**. London Pride, Landlord, Doom Bar and a guest ale are served but no food, with weekly live music.

If you continue along the Hailey road you will soon pass

the **House of Windsor** and the **Robin Hood**, both long closed and now housing.

A short walk up to Wood Green will find the old **Three Pigeons**, with a new landlord serving London Pride and Tribute, and this fine old locals’ boozers will shortly be serving food. About half a mile out on the Oxford road is another locals’ pub, the **Griffin**, a Wadworth house for over 50 years. No food is served in this sports-themed pub where you can expect up to three cask beers from the brewery. On the same road is the former **Carpenter’s Arms**, now a Cambodian restaurant.

On the other side of town is the ever-popular **Windrush**, with fine views of the river valley. Really good food is served along with Greene King Abbot Ale and a guest cask beer.



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More Tales from the Nose & Frown

Wedding belles

Grenville Reeves and **Graham Shelton** recall the day a posh wedding came to their village pub

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS always held a special place in village life, and no better spot to observe than from the comfort of the Nose & Frown, conveniently placed next door to the church. Joe tells us this story is all true, although some of it

has a slightly dream-like quality! Of course that may just be the booze. I couldn't say.

"Fred, Harry and me was in the public bar one Saturday," Joe said, downing the second of his specials. "Harry was sitting by the window, and

all of a sudden he spots a line of cars coming down the road. They looked as if they was all full of gorgeous women! Fred says, 'You don't see that every day. I tell you what, let's go outside into the pub garden and have a closer look. It's either a funeral or a wedding, and I reckon that's a wedding judging by their get-up'.



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"All these cars pulled up by the church, blocking up the road, and then Big Jim comes down the road on his bicycle. He'd been checking on some cows for a local farmer. 'I didn't like to say no,' he says, 'and he's offered me a couple of pints.' Fred looked at me and winked, saying 'Time for another round of drinks then.'

I ordered my usual pint of mild and Fred says, 'No, have one of your specials.' So o' course I said yes."

Now, Jim's a b****, 'e never buys his rounds, and Fred said: "Jim, you're paying today!" Unusually, Jim didn't seem to mind, and when that round was finished, he ups and orders another round for all of us! I suppose

we should have smelled a rat, but we was taken up by all them lovely girls.

A few minutes later a big red Bentley comes down the road. Sitting in the back was the bride and the bride's father. They waved at us and give us a smile as they pulled up by the church. The driver had a chauffeur's hat on, and he takes it off and puts on a top hat. Then off they go into the church.

Next there's a kerfuffle and an old Peugeot comes roaring down the road, weaving round all the cars and pulling up outside the church. A woman leaps out, puts her mug of tea on top of the wall by the gate, and rushes into the church clutching her hat onto her head.

Then we gets back to the drinks and, without having to ask, another round of drinks comes out! We was feeling a

"Life was simple in them days but, in truth, it hasn't changed that much. We still love a drink in the Nose & Frown, and we still like a pretty girl! And if there should be more than one, that's all the better!"



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bit wobbly after all that booze, I can tell you, so we lost track of time a bit. But then the bells start, the red Bentley comes back, and the bride and groom get in.

I knew who the driver was by then. I said: "That bloke always wanted a Bentley. He's just retired and he's bought one, but he doesn't want anyone else to drive it, especially his wife, because she leaves her tea mugs balanced wherever she goes: on the fence posts, on the church wall, in the car, it's a nightmare."

Then Sue comes out of the pub with a round of sandwiches. "We got mixed up," she says. "We thought it was a funeral this week and a wedding the next. It's the other way round, but you might as well have the sandwiches and not let them go to waste."

Jim jumps up, grabs some sandwiches and rushes out. "I better go and do them animals," he says. So off he goes. I says

to Sue, "Jim must have spent a fortune with you today." "No," she says, "the groom's father come in yesterday and said if any of the boys come in on Saturday, they're all to have a drink, whatever they want, on me." "Ah," said Fred, "Jim's had us again. He knew he wouldn't have to pay!"

"Never mind about that," I said. "We need to hope that in nine months' time or so, the happy couple are blessed with a baby girl. That chap in the Bentley always wanted a daughter. He had three good sons and loves them all, but if they have a christening and it's a baby girl he'll be buying double drinks for us all to wet the baby's head."

Life was simple in them days but, in truth, it hasn't changed that much. We still love a drink in the Nose & Frown, and we still like a pretty girl! And if there should be more than one, that's all the better!



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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 4 October 12-10pm

Beer festival at Oxford Downs Cricket Club

Abingdon Road, Standlake, Witney OX29 7QH

12 cask ales

Entry £12 includes glass, programme and 2 tokens for a half

Friday 10 and Saturday 11 October 12-11pm

Beer festival at Plum Pudding, Milton near Abingdon

Free entry, usually 16 real ales. 33 bus from Abingdon (Stratton Way northbound)

Thursday 23 (6-11pm, £8), Friday 24 (11am-4pm £10; 6-11pm £10), Saturday 25 October (11am-7pm £5)

Swindon and North Wiltshire CAMRA Beer Festival

Steam Museum, Swindon SN2 2EY

Entry includes glass, programme and half pint token for CAMRA members

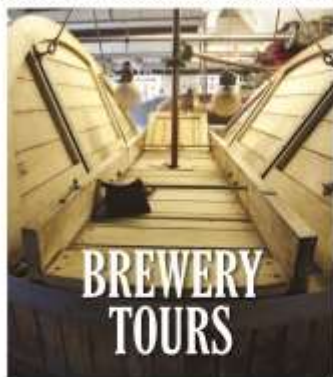
Wednesday 10 December
"A Very CAMRA Christmas" (Oxford CAMRA Christmas Social)

Star Inn, Rectory Road and Oranges & Lemons, where CAMRA members will pay £3.50 a pint all day

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

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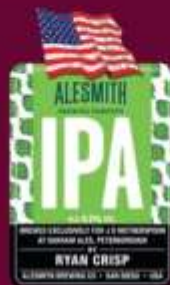
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For the facts
drinkaware.co.uk jdwetherspoon.com