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Issue 132
Autumn 2026

the Oxford Drinker



Mick Jagger at the Half Moon:
Not Fade Away

The free newsletter of the **Oxford** Branch of CAMRA
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**TIME TO BOOK
YOUR CHRISTMAS
PARTY**

Cover: In June, Mick Jagger joined a folk session at the Half Moon pub in St Clement's. (Photo from a video by @dthersz on Instagram.) Report on page 10.

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

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

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Welcome

...to an ever-changing
beer scene

CAMRA PUT IT bluntly when launching its in-depth report *Beer in the UK* – “You’re being lied to about British beer” – as four foreign-owned conglomerates produce 80% of it. This report is one of the best things CAMRA has done recently, so turn to page 16 to read more and what CAMRA hopes can be done to give independent breweries a better deal.

At local level we also support independent breweries and independent pubs whenever we can. This report is withering about big brewers trying to pass off their mass-produced beer as something authentic and true to its origins, and for buying up craft beer brands that may still appear to be independent.

When I go for a curry I usually have a Kingfisher or a Cobra as that’s what you do. I didn’t know Kingfisher comes from Hartlepool and Cobra from Burton-on-Trent. The original recipes of “foreign” beers may well have been changed and the beer brewed to a lower strength, and if nothing else the water will be very different.

“Spanish” lagers are a particular sticking point. One of the fastest growing is Madri – “the soul of Madrid” – with clever marketing and imagery. Owner Molson Coors is pushing this hard while closing its Sharp’s real ale brewery. Madri is brewed in Tadcaster, Yorkshire, but “the soul of Tadcaster” doesn’t have the same ring. According to Wikipedia, Madri is unknown in Madrid.

Cruzcampo (“Sevilla 1904”) comes from Manchester, and Estrella Damm, originating in Barcelona, from Bedford. Sol’s



“taste of Mexico” also comes from Tadcaster while Kronenbourg hails from Northampton. And so it goes on. If you couldn’t care less where your beer actually comes from, then you could be a willing partner in the deception.

So we fly the flag for independence, and in this issue you can read about the rebirth of OXBREW, a profile of Rebellion, and news from Tap Social, Hook Norton and others. The local pub scene is fairly buoyant, with more reopenings than closures, and concessions on business rates are very welcome.

Talking of local beers sold in independent pubs, I was surprised recently to find takeaway real ale (above) available in a country pub for £2 a pint less than over the bar. I thought this was no longer allowed, but it’s a grey area. I won’t say where this was, but I’m sure other independent pubs would welcome the opportunity.

For the first time with this issue, we are extending distribution of *the Oxford Drinker* further into North Oxfordshire, especially around Banbury. North Oxfordshire CAMRA has supplied a couple of pages of news, so use the contact details on page 35 if you want to get in touch.

Happy drinking in the meantime. We will be back with another issue before Christmas, but get the latest news online at oxforddrinker.camra.org.uk.

DAVE RICHARDSON



Chair's Chatter

I SAID IN the last edition that I'd be back to raging but I'm still in a (mostly) positive mood. As I write this it's way too hot. In my lifetime CO₂ levels have increased by over 35%, which is insane.

So why not raging? I've been impressed by the ability of many pubs to keep cask in great condition despite the heatwaves. On our ramble in July through Iffley and East Oxford I was particularly struck with the beer quality at the **Isis Farmhouse**, **Magdalen Arms** and the **Star**.

They demonstrated brilliantly that even in hot weather, cask can be delightful. My love of dark beers knows few limits, so I didn't let the heat put me off having the wonderful Ossett Thunder Rat at the **Oranges & Lemons**. Victorian styled, a collaboration with Amity, and a reminder that many Milds were over 5% before WW1.

These collaborations are a trend I have noticed that keeps me in a positive mood. There is nothing wrong with liking what you like, but in recent years more brewers have been working together on limited editions. A shout-out to **Hook Norton** who have done a couple of great examples this year (Points of Brew with **Five Points** and Hooked Up with **Oakham**).

Too hot to handle



Despite my bias to the dark side, another thing keeping me feeling positive is the beers that suit hot weather.

Hook Norton Haymaker is a great example, that perhaps drinks just a little too easily. My other warm weather shout-out is **Little Ox** Hufflepuff (above). Initially I was put off by the name – silly me. This is a great golden session bitter that stands up well in the heat.

I'm going to swear now – keg. There are some great keg IPAs that are well suited to the summer heat. A shout-out here to **BMAN**, who have multiple great examples of this hard-to-define style. And now the bigger swear – lager.

Growing up, my brother was the lager boy. Other than

Budvar what he drank was all terrible. With the fake not-actually-imported big beer brands (see "New CAMRA report slams big brewers" on page 16) it's still all pretty poor.

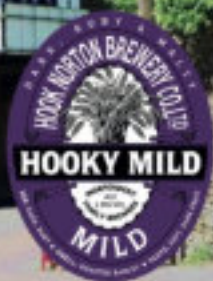
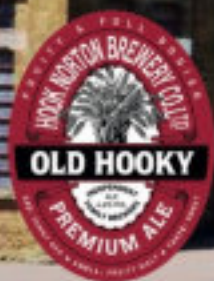
Yet go to Europe and you find great local lager, well suited to hot weather. Almost all our local breweries do really good examples of the many different lager styles. Even if like me you spent years mocking lager boys, don't be afraid to try a local indie lager. It might just hit the spot.

If you happen to be reading this on a cold November evening, however, I recommend Theakston's Old Peculier!

JOHN WINNEY

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Pub News

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OXBREW prepares for a comeback

Oxford is about to gain a major new brewery, taproom and smokehouse restaurant as OXBREW gets ready to open, and unlike some new ventures it will brew cask ale as well as kegged and canned beers.

Founder Aaron Baldwin (right) and his business partner are investing around £500,000 in the project, in the former Symm building company headquarters in Osney Mead, West Oxford. He hopes it could open by late autumn but there is still much work to do, although the brewing equipment and food smokers are already on site.

OXBREW can produce up to 1,000 litres of beer per batch, and up to five different types of beer can be made at one time. Theoretically it could produce up to 6,000 litres per week but initial targets are more modest.

The taproom can seat up to 100, plus at least a further 100 outside, and OXBREW hopes to host major events including possibly beer festivals. Its smokehouse menu will include beef and chicken that have been slow cooked in specialist equipment for up to 16 hours.

OXBREW previously operated as a micro-brewery in Enstone, north of Woodstock, when set up by Aaron and his stepfather, Simon Scamp. Aaron later merged it with Little Ox in Freeland, but he then sold his shares in Little Ox and started looking for premises while Simon opened the



OXBREW micropub in Witney, now trading under new management as Crafty Pint.

The Osney Mead site is the third Aaron considered in Oxford, and will be the first bar and brewery to operate there. Getting people there could be a challenge but a new footbridge and cycle route will open next year linking Osney Mead with Oxpens Road, close to the ice rink. Road access is from Botley Road, due to re-open as a through route from the city in late September. A footpath also runs from near the Punter pub beside the Thames.

"I would love to sell all the beer we make on site, but I will also sell to independent pubs and through our on-site shop," Aaron said. "Events will also be important, and we

can even offer cans branded for event organisers.

"Cask ale is a great platform but some breweries just forget about it. We want to have two or three rotating cask ales available, and our full range will include red and malt-forward ales and stout, as well as more hoppy styles IPAs and lagers. We won't disguise the fact that this is a former industrial unit, but the taproom and restaurant will have plants, nice furniture and good lighting.

"There is a redevelopment plan for Osney Mead, but we will be here for at least five years. I'm aware that we need to get people here, but we are only about a mile from the city centre and we are hopefully close enough for people who enjoy good beer and an authentic experience."

by Nick Fryer

Tap Social Movement has opened a new community space called Day Release at Signal Yard in Milton Park, near Didcot. The new venue sells beers, pizzas, snacks and coffee, and a Brew School is also due to be re-launched.

Signal Yard is a new social and retail space in Milton Park providing those working there and living locally somewhere new to eat, drink and shop. It appears likely the name is a nod to the Great Western railway line that runs alongside.

It is easily accessible from Oxford (X32 bus) or Abingdon (X2), with the bus stop which I used when travelling from Abingdon conveniently located just across the road. The X32 also stops at Redbridge Park and Ride, with a journey time of only about 20 minutes from the city centre – the same as from Abingdon. Didcot railway station is just 10 minutes away.

Cask-conditioned ales were not being sold at Day Release when I visited, but traditional free house the Plum Pudding in Milton village is only a 20-minute walk away and LoveBeer, also in Milton, has regular open days.

Tap Social Movement describes Day Release as a community venue. When I visited it was late afternoon on a Friday and it was busy with customers sitting inside and out, some with children. It had a relaxed and welcoming feel, and I left with a warm feeling that makes me want to return.

Alongside an extensive selection of 10 Tap Social keg beers plus cans, produced at the Kidlington brewery, Day

Day Release for Didcot



Day Release community space. (Photo by Nick Fryer)



From left: Tap Social directors Paul Humpherson, Amy Taylor and Tess Taylor. (Photo Tap Social)

Release also sells wood-fired pizzas, using dough prepared at its Proof Social Bakehouse in Kennington. Day Release is open from 7.30am Monday to Saturday and until 9pm on Fridays and Saturdays.

The Brew School previously operated at the taproom off Botley Road in Oxford. You can make your own beer under the guidance of an experienced brewer and enjoy the brews at home.

The new venue is Tap Social's fourth location and largest yet, over two floors. It also operates the Market Tap in Oxford's Covered Market but closed its bar at Lock29 in Banbury in March.

Since it was founded in 2016, Tap Social has created more than 115,000 hours of paid employment for people in prison and prison leavers, demonstrating how commercial success and social impact can go hand in hand.

Co-founder and director Tess Taylor said: "Day Release is the culmination of everything that Tap Social has built over the last decade. It's our most ambitious venue to date and, for the first time, brings together our bakery, cafe, pizza kitchen, taproom and brewing experiences in one exciting, friendly space.

"Hospitality is an incredible way to bring people together. Every coffee served, every meal shared and every shift worked help create opportunities for people rebuilding their lives after contact with the criminal justice system."

Pub News

Reassurance over Eagle & Child?

The Ellison Institute of Technology (EIT), which owns the historic **Eagle & Child** in Oxford that has been closed since Covid hit in 2020, has reiterated that it still plans to re-open the pub next year.

It is under extensive renovation to restore the historic aspects of the pub while creating better facilities at the rear where a 1960s extension has been removed. Work will also open up the garden.

Little can be seen from its frontage in St Giles, but people who have ventured down a passageway to see it from the back report that little appears to be happening. The pub is revered by Tolkien fans as the meeting point for many years of writers known as the Inklings.

EIT released a statement saying: "The E&C is indeed on course for re-opening in 2027. There is a full refurbishment/restoration going on behind the large hoardings that may not be visible to the casual passerby. We'll keep you up to date with more news when we have it."

While functioning as a traditional pub on the ground floor, it will have meeting rooms above giving EIT a foothold in the city centre. EIT is a major American biotech and medical research company that is building a campus at Oxford Science Park in Littlemore, to include more than 300,000 sq ft of research laboratories, educational and meeting spaces. This is also due for completion next year and could employ up to 7,000 people.



Frontage of the Eagle & Child behind protective cladding, with inset photo of the back of the pub by Kent Bausman taken in July.

North Star back in business

A historic village pub in South Oxfordshire has now re-opened following the completion of roof repairs.

The **North Star** in Steventon, near Abingdon, re-opened in June having been closed since September last year. It required extensive roof repairs but is now open daily from 11am-11pm, and is an experience not to be missed.

The North Star is on CAMRA's list of Historic Pub Interiors, and is described in its book *Britain's Best Real Heritage Pubs* as "one of the great village pub rooms of Britain".

Its entry on CAMRA's website reads: "Despite appear-

ing in the news for being partially demolished on New Year's Day in 2003 and being closed during restoration, the North Star remains one of Oxfordshire's finest pubs.

"Standing on the Causeway, it is one of a series of 17th-century half-timbered houses and buildings, fully deserving its Grade 2-listed status. It has been in the hands of the same family over a long period of time. The North Star has barely a bar as such, merely a servery from the beer store to the tiny low-ceilinged public and lounge bars, the former with impressive high-backed seating surrounding the fireplace."

THE GRAPES

— OXFORD —

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STEAK THURSDAY

Steak, fries, sides, sauce, salad
+ beer, cider, wine or soft drink
Ribeye £17.95 – Fillet £18.95

TAPAS FRIDAY

4 small plates
+ a bottle of house wine £29.95



Opening hours

Wednesday to Saturday 11am-2am

Sunday to Tuesday 11am -midnight

Pub News

Lord Kitchener revival



Photo by John Winney

The **Lord Kitchener** at Curbridge, near Witney, re-opened in July after four years of closure. Three local cask beers are usually available, including from Little Ox and Hook Norton, and some real thought has been put in on the keg side, with Wye Valley's Nightjar stout appearing.

Publicans Paul and Lianne Newton have spent two years working to get the pub ready and have done a fabulous job. Despite its size the pub re-

tains many areas that have the feel of a delightful village local.

The menu is seasonal and currently heavily Majorcan influenced – Pamboli, Tapas, Asado, plus some pub favourites. It may be a food destination, but the smaller areas that make up most of the space don't feel at all like a restaurant. There is also plenty of seating in the garden.

Mick Jagger at the Half Moon

Mick Jagger was back to perform in Oxford recently – 62 years after his first appearance here.

On Sunday 7 June, the 82-year-old joined the weekly folk session at the **Half Moon** pub in St Clement's and sang *Handsome Molly* with his Rolling Stones keyboardist and other musicians.

Earlier that evening, Mick was at Oriel College for Even-song and High Table, and was then part of a small group that went to the Half Moon after drinks in the senior common room.

According to the *Oxford Clarion*, the Rolling Stones played at the Magdalen College commemoration ball in 1964. Having been booked for a £100 fee before their fame, they tried to escape the contract but flew back from the US after receiving legal advice.

The Half Moon is one of Oxford's great character pubs. Originally one tiny shop unit but extended to two in 2001, it is surely the smallest venue ever graced by a Rolling Stone!

QUICK ONES

 The **Broad Face** in Abingdon re-opened in July under the joint control of Sanderson Pubs, which owns the Chequers at Burcot, and Fluxu Pubs, which owns the Three Horseshoes at Benson and the Shepherd's Hut at Ewelme. The Broad Face continues to be owned by Greene King and sells a range of its beers.

 The **James Street Tavern** in Oxford was being advertised as available to new tenants at the time of writing, and Morgan Pub Collective has been in the running to take it over. The College Oak in Abingdon, Boat Inn in Thrupp and Ye Olde Cross Keys in Witney were other GK pubs looking for new teams to run them, with the College Oak advertised as a Hive franchise pub.

 The **White Horse** in Stonefield, near Witney, has applied to West Oxfordshire District Council to expand its bar area, add a dining extension to its beer garden, create a new porch and new toilet facilities. Community-Owned, it was bought by a group of local people in September 2023 and re-opened in June 2024.



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Brewery News



WITH THE SUMMER heatwaves finally dissipating, we can look forward to an autumnal flow of real ales and exciting events from Oxfordshire's real ale breweries, while appreciating the fine work of all the keg and cask beers that have kept us refreshed over the past few months.

We start with **Chadlington**, which has been exceptionally busy, releasing a range of specials and continuing to spread the Indian lager Kati Patang to venues across the country. While summer brings the lager drinkers out in us, Summertime Gold has kept the pins and firkins flowing with the good stuff for Chadlington, which also has a delectable range of IPAs. These range from a keg and cask NEIPA to an English IPA, a rarity these days and one that showcases all the wonderful fresh, grassy and earthy characteristics of British hops in a sturdy pint. Its ESB has also been popular over the summer, proving that a well-kept cask is as refreshing as anything.

Indian summer and more

Good news around Oxfordshire, reports **Patrick MacMahon** (left)



Loose Cannon continues its book-themed beers as of late; David Hopperfield, a deliciously light Kölsch, has been keeping Abingdonians refreshed over the summer, and literary fans can look forward to Jungle Bock as we veer into Oktoberfest season. Adding to the wonderful array of beers is Italian Cob, back by popular demand and a super-drinkable 4.6% to boot.

Keep an eye out also for some events in the coming months. Following Bunkfest in Wallingford over the first weekend of September, Loose Cannon is hosting events including live music on 5 September, Oktoberfest on 2-3 October and its regular guided tours every second Saturday of the month.

Continued on page 14



ORANGES & LEMONS

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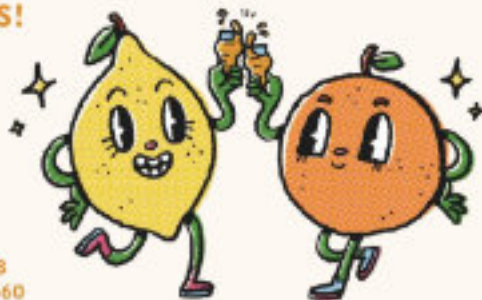
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Brewery News

Twisted Tree, remaining true to its roots, has brewed up a delightful roster for an Indian summer across the county. With half an eye on Oktoberfest, a delightful Dunkel has made its way into casks and kegs following its crowning as Untappd's best lager earlier this year. For a family-run brewery established only two years ago, things are going strong for the Bicester outfit, which is embedded in the community and now making a splash further afield with consistently excellent beer. Keep an eye out for an eagerly awaited Oxfordshire collaboration, with details yet to be announced. It will use locally grown heritage barley for some mouth-watering flavours, no doubt, as well as a new and improved Oktoberfest.

Tap Social's growth drive in the retail sector continues apace, with expansion into a further 50 Waitrose stores bringing the total to over 300, as well as entry into 80 Co-op stores for the two award-winning drops, Time Better Spent and Jobsworth. And as if that wasn't enough, Ocado is also getting in on the breakout success of Tap Social, with products set to be available straight to your door from early September.

All very impressive for a 2,000-litre brewhouse and an example of how good-quality products will always rise to the top. Even the alumni of Tap Social continue to grow within the industry, with Jason Bolger's **Scarlet River** opening in Witney earlier this year and doing really well in its opening weeks.

Over at **Hook Norton** new brews are aplenty with a



particular focus on “no and low” alcohol in keeping with wider trends. The legendary Old Hooky is going zero, with the original recipe being released in zero alcohol form as an exciting addition to the sector.

Managing director James Clarke explains: “Old Hooky has been the heart and soul of our pubs, and a favoured pint of real ale lovers for nearly five decades. With Old Hooky Zero, we wanted to prove that you *can* teach an old dog new tricks. It's our very first zero alcohol beer, and making it gluten-free means even more people can raise a glass.”

September's cask ale roster at the Victorian tower brewery includes a 2.5% Lock Steady gluten-free pale ale

and a limited run of a fresh hop beer. These will complement collaborations with fellow brewing heavyweights Oakham and Thornbridge, being brewed in August and October respectively.

In wider national news, independent brewers group **SIBA** has reported that the rate of brewery closures is down on last year, with only one closing a week, down from three per week last year. This is bolstered by four of its nine regions experiencing growth in overall brewery numbers. The industry still faces strong headwinds, however, of rising prices, consumer demand and taxation, with SIBA chief executive Andy Slee advocating greater duty relief for draught beer in on-trade venues.

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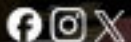
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New CAMRA report slams big brewers

A NEW REPORT published by CAMRA proves how independent brewers are being shut out of pubs across the UK, as it calls for the Competition and Markets Authority to take action.

Beer in the UK is the authoritative consumer view on how the UK beer scene actually works, or doesn't, for drinkers and independent brewers. British brewing is dominated by four international conglomerates with little affinity with our brewing heritage, or what beer drinkers want.

Seven of the top 10 selling "craft beers" in the UK are made by just four global brewing conglomerates. These are Beavertown, Camden Town, Goose Island and Meantime.

Many of the UK's favourite "continental" and "imported" lagers are in fact brewed in

the UK. These include Stella Artois, Kronenbourg, San Miguel, Madri, Cobra, Kingfisher, Red Stripe, Sol and Estrella Damm.

Data from the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA) shows demand for independent beer is 280% higher than its share of the pub market.

CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins said: "Ordinary drinkers are being short changed when it comes to choice and quality at the bar. Our report proves how the global players are exploiting the status quo to squeeze out independent brewers, to the detriment of ordinary publicans and beer drinkers."

"The government needs to step up, start taking the issue seriously, and take action that matches up to its statements

about supporting pubs and the communities they serve.

"If this report makes you as angry as it makes me, that's good. CAMRA is fighting for changes to the status quo, and I hope you'll join us and get involved."

Report editor Tim Webb said: "The fact that a narrow clique of multi-national corporations dominates the UK brewing industry is a national embarrassment. They only make beers that suit their production facilities, ignoring the types that beer lovers want to drink. They do not know how to reverse beer's downward spiral, make little profit, and brew nothing worth exporting. They cannot grow the UK economy."

"The way that better, independent, brewers are excluded from the on-trade beer

market is scandalous. Brewing is a business that competition authorities need to investigate, take apart and re-assemble, so the UK can return to playing a leading role in the world of beer."

SIBA chief executive Andy Slee said: "As Europe's largest beer consumer group, CAMRA is right to call for change for a UK brewing industry which is dominated by global beer giants, restricting access for British independent breweries."

"At the heart of its excellent report is a call for greater consumer choice, transparency around brewery ownership, and lower taxes for small independent breweries – which SIBA wholeheartedly supports."

"SIBA's own Indie Beer campaign has sought to highlight the lack of transparency

of ownership in the UK. We are making it easier for consumers to find beer from genuine independent brewers, rather than global-owned craft beer brands."

Since 1979 annual beer production in the UK has fallen from 12 billion to 6 billion pints per year, with annual per capita beer consumption falling from 122 to 63 litres, or from 18 to 9.2 pints per month.

Yet UK alcohol consumption remains the same today as it was in 1980, when beer made up 65-70% of the market. Beer has lost out as those wanting reliably flavourful drinks migrated to wine.

Until 1990, UK brewing was 96% British-owned. Today over 80% of UK beer is produced by foreign firms. Meeting consumer demand for more interesting beers is

left to smaller independent breweries, who are routinely excluded from pubs by international brewers who distort the beer market by controlling distribution and sales.

Meanwhile, UK beer lovers must pay far more for beer than those in most other European countries, due to beer taxes that are the highest of any major beer-producing nation in Europe. The UK beer market must be freed up for smaller independent producers to have fair access to it, and incentives must be found to develop distinctive British beers for export. This requires a market investigation from the Competition and Markets Authority.



To read the *Beer in the UK* report in full go to camra.org.uk/beer-report.

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www.themasonsarmshq.co.uk

Yarnton Yarns

Beer cocktails: don't you love them?

Jess Dixon (right) of the Red Lion Yarnton on ways to drink beer in a more refreshing way

HERE WE ARE for another ramble in the *Oxford Drinker*. As I write this, I wonder if we have we all lost all enthusiasm for the insane heat of summer, or do we have to love it so we're not seen as ungrateful?

The warmer weather definitely changes people's habits; you wouldn't expect to regularly consume stews in the heat, so why wouldn't people's drink choices also change?

People expect pubs to get busier on par with the thermometer but the truth is that once it hits 30 degrees outside, unless you have aircon in your pub, people would much rather sit at home with their feet in a pool or in front of a fan sweating profusely. Give me low to mid-20s, a breeze and a clear sky any day, that's peak beer garden weather.

From a beer point of view, people who may typically drink ale may shift their habits and start drinking lager or a cheeky craft keg beer as it is chilled a few degrees cooler. Guinness sales sadly fall through the floor (it's not just a winter drink, people!). So why



not have a look into some alternative ways to consume beer in a more refreshing way, for instance a beer cocktail of sorts?

Shandies

When we cast our minds to lighter beer alternatives, you might envision a shandy, or you might not. Shandies do get a hard time and in my opinion do butcher a cask ale, but in the heat it doesn't get much better than a lager shandy. There are also other

drink variations similar to this classic British invention, depending on geography and ingredients, which I'll touch on shortly.

Looking into some of the history you'll find that shandies in the 1850s were originally made with ginger beer or ginger ale before lemonade became the norm. These ginger derivatives were also originally alcoholic until the mid-19th century, when they were produced without the alcohol and their names became misnomers.

The original name for this beverage was "*Shandygaff*" and if you're a fan of etymology then here's one for you. Although the drink and the history of its name are unclear the theory is this: *Gaff* means "nonsense/loud talk", and was also used to describe "fun fairs", a place of lower class amusement.

Alternatively, *Gaff* has also been thought to be a combination of the words ginger and half to shorten its name in this context. *Shandy* was used as an adjective for "boisterous or wild" and was commonly used from the 17th century onwards to describe the lower classes.

Lots of speculation around the name seems to originate from the lower classes who made up the majority of shandy drinkers, and, in theory, how rowdy they got sub-



Radler means cyclist in German and it's also sometimes called Bikers' Brew from hydrating cyclists in pubs and mid-ride. (Photo by Stephen Craven, Wikimedia Commons)

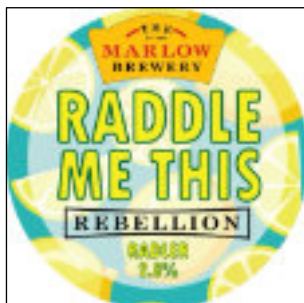


sequently. It would be really cool if more research was done to solidify the origins.

Radlers

If you're into your craft beers and follow various breweries then you've probably seen the term *Radler* thrown around and you may wonder... isn't that just a shandy? Radlers actually have a far more defined history than shandies and originate from 1920s Bavaria.

Radler means cyclist in German and it's also sometimes called Bikers' Brew from hydrating cyclists in pubs and mid-ride. And much like shandy, its name has also been shortened over time



from the original *Radlermass*, meaning cyclists' litre.

The core difference between these drinks is that Radlers are a complete product with a more defined taste profile, as you don't just stick lemonade in 50:50 and hope for the best. This citrus-forward option usually ranges in ABV from 2-3% so fits well with current drinking habits, allowing drinkers to enjoy a different style of beer and feel refreshed.

Higher demand for lower ABV drinks means room for innovation. Craft breweries take the simple concept of a lager base with citrus soda and experiment with fruit juices and purees, different base beers and botanicals.

Some great examples of modern Radlers are Renegade's Rhubarbie Girl, which uses rhubarb for a tart but rounded flavour (2.3% ABV); or Raddle Me This by Rebellion which provides a classic lemon hit at only 2.8% ABV.

Fun beer

It would be a bit rude when talking about beer cocktails not to mention some of the fun concoctions people drink from time to time.

Has anyone else had to pour a shandy using Coca-Cola? Has anyone else been asked for a Guinness shandy? Snakebite? Black and Tan? Black Velvet?

If you're really feeling adventurous maybe try something like the Michelada, a Mexican drink that combines beer, lime juice, hot sauce and chillies in a chilled glass with a salted rim. Or a Beer-garita, when you mix a beer of your choice with Tequila and lime to create something that hopefully tastes better than Desperados but may also send you to sleep if you have one too many.



Ale ramble from Iffley

Dave Richardson joins a branch pub tour around this part of East Oxford



Map by John Winney. Inset: Knight's Oath at the Chester.



WE ALL TEND to have favourite pubs, but the Oxford branch of CAMRA is organising a series of rambles around parts of the city not everyone knows. Our chairman John Winney has designed a London Underground-style diagram of East Oxford pubs to start us off, complete with suggested walking times between stops provided by Google.

I knew I wouldn't be doing all the pubs down Iffley and Cowley Roads and up to the Plain, but I joined for the Iffley Road part to visit some pubs I hadn't been to for years. This was during the July heatwave, when cool but not cold beers would be much appreciated.

The meeting point at noon was the **Prince of Wales** in Iffley Village, which still has a village feel with its thatched buildings, ancient church and narrow street, despite being



just 2½ miles from the city centre. The pub is now one of just two in Oxford owned by Wadsworth, with two of the Wiltshire brewery's real ales on offer – 6X and Henry's IPA – its golden ale Horizon being off.

6X is my usual choice in any case and I enjoyed a half as I looked around at this all-rounder of a pub, with a strong dining offer, garden space and special events. These include neuro-diverse games once a month and the adults-only Brush Party. This was intriguing, but my blushes were spared when bar staff explained it was painting classes!

It was now time to head across Iffley Lock and alongside Old Father Thames – or the Isis, as the river is known in Oxford. The **Isis Farmhouse** pub stands right on the riverbank just on the city side of the lock, and has a huge

garden very popular in weather such as this. It has limited opening hours in winter, but as there is no road access for customers you may need a little fortitude to navigate the towpath on a dark night, even though it is lit.

"Rustic charm" is probably the best way to describe the quirky interior, but it's a successful business too with large marquees for special events such as live music ("Gypsy Jazz" and Oxford-based Cuban band Ran Kan Kan were advertised) and weddings. The pub has had a long relationship with Oxford Brewery (formerly Shotover) whose Trinity pale ale and more malty Prospect were available. A few years ago, the beer here would definitely have been warm on a day like this, but I'm pleased to say a new cooling system has put paid to that.

The tour group at the BMAN taproom. (Photo courtesy Mark Geeson)

It was now time for something completely new to me – the **BMAN** taproom, opened earlier this year just off Donnington Bridge over the river. It's only a 10-minute amble along the river from the Isis Farmhouse, but not that easy to find and not visible from the towpath or the road. Cross the bridge coming from the Abingdon Road direction and then turn right – or turn left into Meadow Lane just before the bridge if coming from Iffley Road. Keep going until you see an apologetic little sign for BMAN, and turn right.

BMAN doesn't do real ale, but founder Alex Berryman carved out a niche for quality craft keg at its previous base in Chalgrove before moving here earlier this year. Its own

beers are brewed on the premises and it also has some guests, and our group enthused about the black lager and the stout, which I tried, both having great depth of flavour. It's only open from 5-10pm on Fridays and 1-10pm on Saturdays. Facilities are spartan to say the least with little seating inside but plenty in a field, which didn't look inviting in full sun and would be rather wet if it ever rains again!

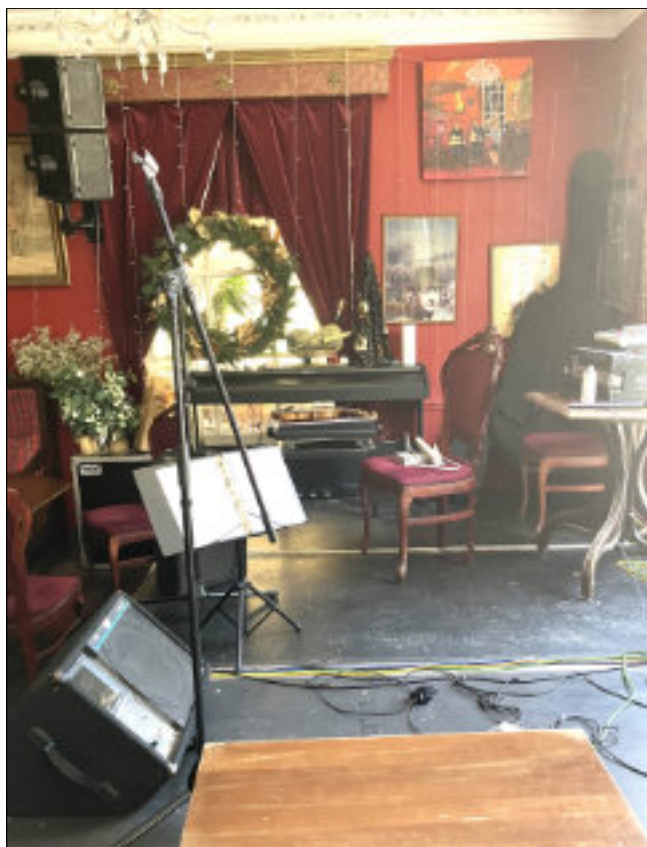
Our group now began to divide as some headed up to Iffley Road and over to Cowley Road, but I had decided not to visit Cowley Road as I think there's little real ale worth drinking there until you get up to the **Star**, off St Clement's. Instead, we crossed Donnington Bridge Road and continued up Meadow Lane and along a footpath for about 10-15 minutes, then turning right into an alley to find the **Chester** right in front of us.

Formerly the Chester Arms, this independent pub was closed for some years a decade ago but is now thriving, with a garden dominated by an ancient tree and a good reputation for food. You need to seek it out as it's in a back street, but worth the effort as I had my "beer of the day" here – an excellent half of Rebellion's Knight's Oath, a 4% golden ale with tastes of biscuit and is very well rounded. Loose Cannon's Abingdon Bridge is the house real ale but the Knight's Oath was a great find.

The Chester is renowned for "Hamza's Steak Platter" – an enormous dish for two (£50) or three (£70) taking 45 minutes to cook, served since 2009. Gourmet food is also central to the next pub, the **Magdalen Arms** in Iffley Road, which has retained its



From top:
Prince of Wales,
Chester and
Magdalen Arms.
(Photos by Dave
Richardson)



From top: Alex Berryman (right) and Jack Adams of BMAN Brewery, Isis Farmhouse.

gastro-pub image at a time when many others have dumbled down their menus. Anyone for Pappardelle, Wild Rabbit and Chorizo Ragout (£19.80)? Maybe next time.

Since my last visit, the Magdalen has struck a deal with Hook Norton to be its real ale supplier, offering Hooky, Off the Hook IPA and Haymaker, a 5% premium Pale Ale generally available in July and August. I enjoyed a full pint of Haymaker while looking around this large pub, with more outside space than would appear, and planning a return visit.

What proved to be my last stop was just along Iffley Road towards the city centre – the **Fir Tree**, the only pub on my route run by Greene King. You wouldn't know it, however, as there was no sign of Abbot or IPA as the only real ale was Deuchars IPA, now brewed by GK-owned Belhaven in Scotland. It tasted good but it was disappointing to find only one real ale on a Saturday afternoon – perhaps it's quiet around here during university holidays. It's a quirky old pub, open until 2am, with pizzas Monday to Friday evenings.

I had intended to visit the **Oxford Blue**, a Wells & Co pub just off Iffley Road, but as this didn't open until 5pm I had to give it a miss. So, what had I enjoyed most about the day? The friendship and conversation, of course, and the river walk. None of these pubs are stand-outs for real ale, but all except the Prince of Wales and Fir Tree were serving local, independent ales and there's now a taproom, albeit keg, with beer brewed on the premises. Reasons to be cheerful – and to visit.



Gardener's World

VAT's the problem

Paul Silcock of the Gardener's Arms in Plantation Road, Oxford, on cutting tax in the hospitality industry

DO YOU KNOW what's worse than a tired old sash window? A tired old sash window in a conservation area. Don't get me wrong, I approve of conservation areas, fingers crossed they can be implemented correctly and stop everywhere turning into identikit Lego builds.

That's not to say I don't see the value in modernisation either. Otherwise we would still be living in a world where ice cream sellers sold the ice cream on top of a glass cone that you licked your ice cream from – and then handed back to the ice cream seller who would rarely, if ever, wash them. They were called penny licks, and that's how you bought your ice cream on the go.

Take that, social distancing.

Seriously, we did this until the turn of the 19th century before someone pointed out that maybe there was a link between this and tuberculosis. Honestly, it's one of those moments in history that make you wonder how we as a species have survived.

What on earth does this have to do with beer, and therefore the right to be included in *the Oxford Drinker*?

Because tired old sash windows are a great illustration point for this article – the current state of not just the pub but the hospitality industry as a whole, those



Photo MorrisOxford (morrisoxford.co.uk)

seeking a solution, and what you can do to help.

I admit that whole bit about ice cream was just a bit of a diversion, but it does blow my mind that essentially we had communal licking posts spreading disease just over a hundred years ago. And paid for the privilege. I digress again. No more ice cream.

So here's the actual thing. The sash windows on the front of my pub are tatty. I've done my best in the past to patch them up, and I'll do it again very soon. But I'm no sash window repairman. That's a skilled job, done by professionals with more woodwork tools than I've got pint glasses.

Sooner or later the sash windows will need replacing, and that won't be cheap. Like over £10,000 not cheap. It's going to be so not cheap because they need to be replaced in a manner sympathetic to the neighbourhood, which, if you hadn't guessed, is in a conservation area. So I can't get the slightly cheaper PVC options, before anyone suggests it.

This is the crux of this article.

I need windows in the pub. Sure, it's lovely weather as I type this, but come winter, you'll want a bit of glass between you and the outside world. In the past I've talked about there being pubs for all



Photo vatstheproblem.co.uk

sorts of evenings – sports, quiz, dining, socialising. Not sure there's a market for a pub where you freeze your bollocks off. But profit margins are making this sash window expense tricky to say the least.

I don't want to paint a picture of poverty and horror for the pub industry. Sure the profit landscape has changed, but we're not on the verge of extinction yet, although the worrying dark cloud on the horizon does seem to be getting closer. I don't want to be seen wringing my hands in woe, and this article is absolutely not a begging letter. It is to highlight how important Tom Kerridge's #VATsTheProblem campaign is.

Tom Kerridge, just in case you don't know, was the first chef to win two Michelin stars for a pub, the Hand & Flowers in Marlow. His second pub also won a Michelin star. He's opened other restaurants since then as well, and all this in the time I've been running the Gardener's Arms. That's impressive. The man knows a thing or two about the hospitality industry. So when he spearheads a movement to get the government to reduce VAT for the hospitality industry to 10%, you should pay attention.

The #VATsTheProblem campaign is not motivated by greed. Tom Kerridge doesn't want a VAT cut so he can finally buy that gold speedboat he's been after. The cut is so

those in the hospitality industry can afford to re-invest in their businesses. Whether that's putting money into marketing. New furniture. Sorting the plumbing. Or, I don't know, wild stab in the dark here, getting your sash windows fixed.

I know it sounds a bit "poor me", and so many other sectors are struggling too. (Though not in the oil market, as strangely those guys seem to be doing alright.) I'm not writing this article for other sectors of industry though. I'm writing it for you, the beer drinker reading it in the pub. Or possibly on the bus home. Wherever you read it, you have an interest in pubs, certainly in what we sell but almost certainly in the pub itself. This article isn't just to make

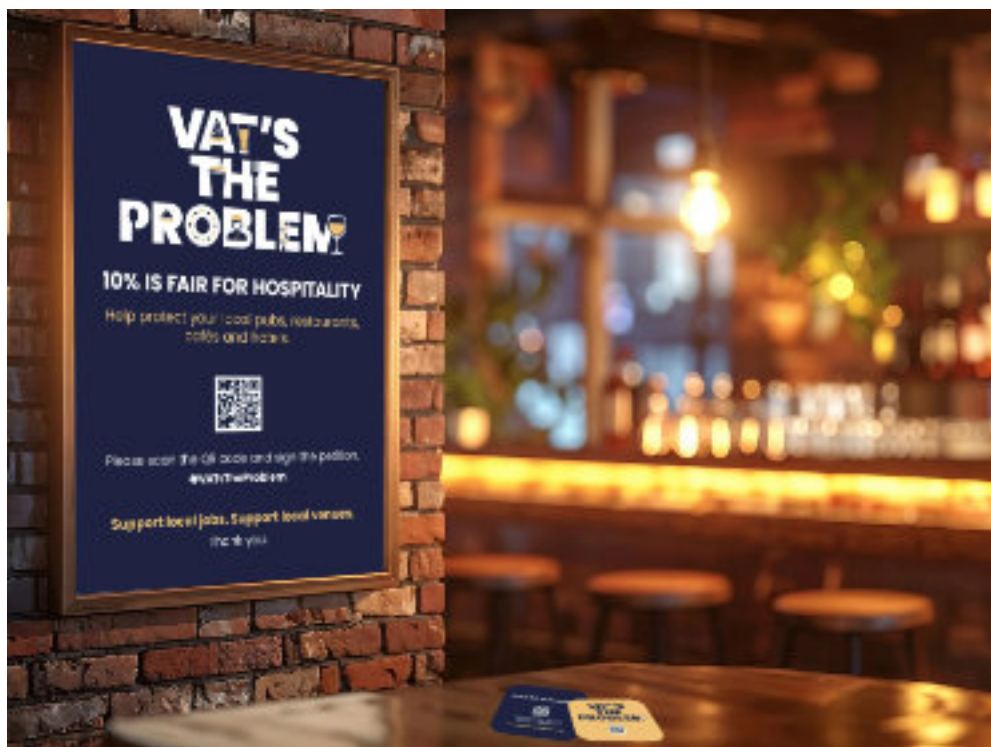


Photo vatstheproblem.co.uk

you aware of Tom Kerridge's campaign.

Just to be clear, he's the spokesman for this campaign, but it's also backed by UK-Hospitality, the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA), the British Institute of Innkeeping (BII) and others.

This article is to ask for your help with the campaign.

And it's really simple to do.

Just go to vatstheproblem.co.uk and sign the online petition. Like, two minutes of your time, on your phone. Name, email address, and done.

Then, and here's the bit where you have a chance to go above and beyond the call – ask a friend to do the same. Obviously with their own name and email, otherwise it would be pointless. But ask

them, because this is a real case of the more the merrier.

Like I've said, I know other sectors are struggling, but if you care for pubs, do this simple thing. It will help, if nothing else. At least you know you tried. Otherwise, to horribly misquote Pastor Martin Niemöller:

They came for the pubs, but I was not a pub, so I did nothing,

They came for the cafes, but I was not a cafe, so I did nothing,

They came for the restaurants, but I was not a restaurant, so I did nothing,

They came for the wine bars, but I was not a wine bar, so I did nothing,

I came to go out, but there was nowhere to go, so I did nothing.

Yes, lowering VAT is a big ask for the government and the country's finances. So is short-sightedly scrabbling for as much tax as possible as quickly as possible and then wondering where all the small businesses have gone. But if enough people show they care about the hospitality industry, if enough people sign that petition, maybe, just maybe, the government will listen.

And I can get new sash windows.



Note: Pastor Martin Niemöller (1892-1984) was a German theologian who opposed the Nazi regime during the late 1930s and was sent to a concentration camp.

OXFORD HAD BEEN on my list for quite some time. While it's famous for its university and iconic skyline, I was there for a different reason – to explore its pubs. With a superb mix of traditional ale houses, independent beer bars and a brewery taproom, all within easy walking distance, it proved to be the perfect city for a day discovering somewhere new, one pint at a time.

After arriving by rail my first stop was the **Punter**, where I met up with Nick Clements and John Winney from Oxford CAMRA. Tucked away near the river, it immediately felt like the ideal place to begin. Relaxed and welcoming, it set the tone for the day as we chatted about Oxford's beer scene and the route ahead. My first pint was Hop Kitty from Animal Brewing Co, a bright, refreshing pale ale with plenty of citrus and tropical fruit flavours. Crisp and easy drinking, it was the perfect way to get started.

Next came the **White Rabbit**, where Oxford CAMRA's Dave Richardson and Pete Flynn joined us. The pub already had a lively atmosphere, with people enjoying both the cosy interior and the spacious beer garden. It's easy to understand why it's become one of Oxford's best-loved independent pubs. I chose Abingdon Bridge from Loose Cannon Brewery, a smooth, well-balanced ale packed with flavour. It was another easy-drinking pint that disappeared quickly as conversation turned to favourite pubs and local breweries.

A short walk brought us to the **Lamb & Flag**, one of those pubs that instantly makes you feel at home. There was no pretence, just

Market and more in Oxford

Scott Spencer, whose *Micropub Adventures* blog ranges far and wide, comes to town



From left: Scott Spencer at the White Rabbit with Oxford CAMRA members Pete Flynn, Nick Clements, John Winney and Dave Richardson. (Photos by Scott Spencer)

well-kept beer, friendly faces and a comfortable atmosphere. My beer here was Middle Earth from Elusive Brewing, a pale ale full of bright hop character but beautifully balanced. It continued the impressive standard we'd enjoyed since arriving.

From there we headed to the **Grapes**. Completely different in character, it reinforced how every pub in Oxford seems to have its own personality. Leaf It Out from

The Punter.





Twisted Tree Brewery was my choice, a refreshing pale ale with a crisp finish that showcased the quality of Oxfordshire's independent breweries.

By now we were heading towards one of my favourite parts of the city, Oxford's Covered Market. Full of independent businesses and character, it also hides three excellent places for a beer.

Our first stop was **Teardrop** by Church Han Brewery. Hidden among the market traders, it's easy to miss but well worth finding. Although cask is usually my first choice, I couldn't resist Teardrop Citra. Fresh, zesty and bursting with citrus flavours, it showed just how good locally brewed beer can be.

Just a few steps away was Tap Social's **Market Tap**, where the shared seating creates a relaxed atmosphere as shoppers, traders, locals and visitors all mix together. While watching the market carry on around us, I enjoyed Jobsworth from Tap Social Movement. Full of flavour

To market, to market... From left, Teardrop by Church Han Brewery, Market Tap by Tap Social and Gulp Fiction.

without being heavy, it was the ideal beer for sitting back and taking in the surroundings.

The third stop inside the market was **Gulp Fiction**, also a bookshop. Small in size but big on reputation, it offers an ever-changing beer list and a warm welcome. Bright Spark from BMAN Brewery was light, refreshing and packed with tropical fruit notes. Full of flavour yet wonderfully balanced, it was another standout pint.

Leaving the market behind, we headed to the **Royal Blenheim**, where we caught up with Steve Thompson from Oxford CAMRA. This was one of the highlights of the day, a traditional pub that still feels welcoming to everyone who walks through the door. I chose Dunk, a collaboration between Tiny Rebel and Titanic Brewery. Smooth, rich and full of flavour, it suited the surroundings perfectly and



was one of my favourite beers of the crawl.

One of the pleasures of exploring Oxford is simply walking between the pubs. None of the distances are particularly long, and every stroll reveals another independent shop, cafe or hidden side street. Having local CAMRA members leading the way made it even better, with plenty of stories about the city's pubs and breweries shared along the route.

Our next stop was **Oranges & Lemons**, another



Tile Shop Ale House.

pub with a completely different feel. Bright, welcoming and relaxed, it offered another change of pace. Easy Pale Mosaic from Stardust Brewery was crisp, refreshing and full of gentle citrus hop flavours, making it another pint that was easy to enjoy.

From there we visited **Tile Shop Ale House**, a micropub regularly recommended by local drinkers. Comfortable, friendly and unpretentious, it's exactly the type of independent pub I enjoy discovering. Ridgeway Bitter from Tring Brewery was a classic session bitter with balanced malt flavours and a clean finish. It proved that a well-made traditional bitter can be every bit as satisfying as the latest hop-forward pale ale.

We next visited the **Star**, which immediately felt like a proper local where everyone receives the same warm welcome. Into the Haze from DEYA Brewing Company rounded off the day's pubs perfectly. Juicy, hazy and

packed with tropical fruit flavours, it provided a modern contrast to many of the cask ales I'd enjoyed earlier in the day.

To finish, we headed over to BMAN Brewery and Taproom at Donnington Bridge. After spending much of the day exploring traditional pubs and independent beer bars, it felt like the perfect place to end the crawl. The modern taproom offers something different while keeping the relaxed atmosphere that had become a theme throughout the day. Tap Rickster, brewed just a few metres away, was fresh, full of flavour and served in perfect condition. Ending at a brewery highlighted another strength of Oxford – alongside its historic pubs, it continues to support exciting independent brewers producing excellent beer.

As always, cask ale was my main focus wherever possible, and the quality throughout the day was exceptional. From traditional bitters and

golden ales to modern pales, lagers and collaborations, every venue offered something different while maintaining consistently high standards. Not once did I have a disappointing pint.

Just as memorable were the people I shared the day with. Spending time with Nick, John, Dave, Pete and Steve made the experience even more enjoyable. Their enthusiasm for Oxford's pubs and local knowledge helped create a route that showcased a genuine cross-section of the city's independent beer scene rather than simply ticking off the best-known venues.

Looking back, what impressed me most wasn't just the quality of the pubs or the beer, but the sheer variety. Every stop offered something different, from cosy ale houses and lively independent pubs to unique venues inside the Covered Market and a brewery taproom to finish. At no point did the crawl feel repetitive.

As I headed back towards the station, I was already thinking about the places I hadn't managed to visit. That's probably the biggest compliment I can pay Oxford. Even after 12 excellent venues, it still felt like there was plenty left to discover. I'll certainly be back, because this is a city best enjoyed one pub at a time. Whether you're a lifelong real ale drinker, someone keen to explore independent breweries or simply enjoy discovering characterful pubs, Oxford delivers in abundance with warm welcomes, outstanding beer and a wonderful variety of places to enjoy.



For many more beer blogs visit micropubadventures.co.uk.

Beer Heroes

From rebel to icon

Pete Flynn visits Rebellion Brewery in Marlow, Buckinghamshire

THERE ARE PROBABLY more conventional ways of starting a brewery than getting drunk with your best friend and deciding that the two of you should go into business together. But then Rebellion Brewery has never been a particularly conventional brewery.

When I met Tim Coombes at Rebellion's brewery in Marlow, I began by asking him when he first thought Marlow should have its own brewery again.

His answer was wonderfully straightforward.

"Mark and I used to tease each other about starting our own business," Tim explained. "One night, after we'd had a very good night out and were getting very drunk together, we decided that if we were going to start a business, it should be brewing."

The idea actually made sense. Mark Gloyens was working for Watneys and had experience of the brewing side, while Tim was working for Esso in its marketing department. Their skill sets were complementary, although neither had rushed into entrepreneurship. Both were already in their late 20s before they finally decided to take the plunge.

And so, in 1993, Rebellion Brewery was born at the Rose Industrial Estate in Marlow, Buckinghamshire.

The ambition was never to remain a tiny brewery.



"Our idea was eventually to grow to producing around 200 barrels a week," Tim told me. "But initially it was a small operation."

Growth came surprisingly quickly. Before 1996 production had risen to around 35 barrels a week, helped in part by the government's introduction of the guest beer policy, which gave smaller breweries an opportunity to gain access to tied pub estates.

But the early years were far from straightforward.

"The margins were terrible," Tim recalled. "The big four were undercutting each other."

There were other lessons to be learned too. Rebellion had to recruit new staff, establish systems and, perhaps most importantly, learn that making beer and collecting money owed for it were two entirely different things.

"The biggest challenges during the first two or three

years were new staff and not focusing enough on credit control. Everything was new and we didn't know where we were going to fit in."

Competition locally was fierce, with Brakspear and Fuller's already well established. Yet Rebellion gradually began to find its place.

The first pub to take Rebellion beer was in central Marlow, and the company received a major boost when Brakspear sold its Henley brewery.

"Brakspear made a real mess of supplying beer to their pubs," Tim recalled. "We picked up 10 pubs."

Rebellion was also able to recruit some experienced personnel from Brakspear, including a head brewer and a bottling expert.

For a young brewery trying to establish itself, it was a significant opportunity.

By 1999 Rebellion had outgrown the Rose Industrial Estate and moved to Bencombe Farm, where the brewery remains today.

The move was not to a shiny purpose-built brewery. Instead, Rebellion began with a centuries-old barn and gradually expanded into the surrounding farm buildings.

"We were always seeking new premises," Tim explained. "Bencombe Farm was ideal because we knew the owners and were able to rent units ad hoc as we expanded."



That flexibility proved invaluable. By the time of the move Rebellion was brewing around 50 barrels a week and the old premises were “creaking at the seams”.

Long-term planning with the local farmers also helped make the move possible.

Perhaps appropriately, one of the most treasured pieces of equipment in the brewery’s history came from another brewery.

Tim told me about a brewing tank acquired cheaply from Courage’s Reading brewery.

“It is an amazing piece of kit. We knew Courage wanted to get rid of it and there were no other buyers around.”

Getting it into the new brewery was another matter altogether. Moving large brewing equipment is hard enough; but getting it out of an old brewery and into its new home was a different challenge.

That tank has consequently become rather more than just another piece of brewing equipment. It represents something of Rebellion’s early history and the resourcefulness that characterised those formative years.

Growth became frightening

For many breweries, growth is the objective. But Tim admitted there was a point when growth itself became rather frightening.

That came around 2015.

“We were thinking, what do we do now? Lager sales were increasing and new breweries were starting up.”

Rather than simply attempting to brew more beer, Rebellion decided to future-proof the business.

It took a long-term strategic approach, investing in what Tim described as the best available equipment. The brewery introduced antibacterial walls, strengthened its cleaning and filling regimes, built a new shop and, perhaps most significantly, brought distribution in-house.

There was a clear philosophy behind that decision. Rebellion only delivers within a 30-mile radius of Marlow and has dispensed with wholesalers.

“We decided to take all our distribution in-house.”

It is a strategy that has allowed Rebellion to remain close to its customers while controlling the way its beer reaches the pub.

Walking tours of the Rebellion Brewhouse are conducted on Thursdays and Saturdays. (Photos Rebellion Brewery)

What about the beer itself? Did all this growth change it? “Not at all,” said Tim.

There is a neat division of responsibilities between the two founders. Mark has always concentrated on the manufacturing side of the business, while Tim deals with everything else.

That partnership, which began with two friends discussing business over a few beers, remains central to Rebellion more than three decades later.

Then came March 2020.

For a brewery whose customers were overwhelmingly pubs, the sudden closure of the hospitality industry was an existential threat.

“I cleared my desk and started with a blank sheet of paper,” Tim told me. “It was very stressful.”

But within days Rebellion had found a different way to get its beer to customers. The government subsequently declared breweries an essential service and Rebellion established a drive-through operation at the brewery.

Its 70 employees were put to work in different ways, with drivers becoming an important part of the brewery’s new direct-to-consumer operation.

At one point around 800 cars a week visited the shop.

“It was an excuse to get out of the house,” Tim said.

What began as a response to an extraordinary crisis ultimately created something that has become an important part of Rebellion’s business – a much closer relationship with its customers.



Social nights open to the public are held on the first Tuesday of the month.

That relationship subsequently helped Rebellion develop its successful Tap Yard.

Another development has been the small development brewery.

For Tim, this has changed the creative possibilities available to Rebellion's brewing team.

"The small development brewery has changed our creativity."

Instead of every experiment having to be conducted at full production scale, the smaller brewery allows Rebellion to produce specialist beers and explore styles outside its traditional range.

It has consequently given the brewery a stronger craft presence while allowing customers to participate in the experimentation.

This seems an important part of Rebellion's evolution. The brewery has grown substantially, but growth hasn't meant standing still.

Water and sustainability

One of the most interesting developments, both technically and environmentally, is beneath the ground.

Rebellion now obtains its brewing water from an on-site borehole.

Tim explained that the borehole water is essentially the same water but contains a greater concentration of naturally occurring minerals than the mains supply.

"Those minerals contribute to the taste and quality of the beer."

The water utility company permits Rebellion to extract up to 80,000 litres a day, although Tim says the brewery could make use of around 100,000 litres.

Interestingly, using borehole water does not make the brewing process more difficult.

"It is no more difficult to brew using borehole water than from the tap."

The borehole is therefore an excellent example of how Rebellion's sustainability philosophy can also make practical sense for the brewery.

Water is only part of the sustainability story.

Around 40% of Rebellion's beer containers are returned to the brewery. Tim was refreshingly frank about the

economic as well as environmental benefit.

"It is effective because otherwise we would haemorrhage profits."

There is something very Rebellion-like about that answer. Sustainability doesn't have to be separated from running a successful business. If a reusable container reduces waste and saves money, then both objectives are achieved.

The brewery's approach extends to its local sourcing, re-use of brewing by-products and efforts to minimise unnecessary waste.

Perhaps the strongest impression I took away from my conversation with Tim was that Rebellion sees itself not simply as a business operating in Marlow, but as part of the community.

"The community has always been important to Rebellion," Tim explained. "We base ourselves locally and engage with the local community in a caring way."

That involvement ranges from supporting the local hospital and raising money for charity to a regular pro-

gramme of events for both the trade and retail customers, and brewery members.

There are comedy and quiz nights, social events and opportunities for customers to meet at the brewery. The site can accommodate around 400 people.

And this is where Rebellion's stated values – quality, community, independence, innovation and sustainability – become more than words on a website.

"Those values have always been there," Tim told me. "It is trust that embraces our values."

There is another ambition behind them too.

"We want our customers to think of the brewery as theirs."

That is an unusually powerful statement for a business which has grown to be-

come a significant regional brewery.

It is now more than 30 years since Tim and Mark sat together after a night of drinking and decided that, if they were to start a business, they should brew beer.

The journey since then has taken Rebellion from a small unit at the Rose Industrial Estate, producing a few barrels a week, through the move to Bencombe Farm, successive periods of expansion, the challenges of competition, the arrival of the development brewery and Tap Yard, a global pandemic and the introduction of its own borehole.

Yet perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Rebellion's story is what hasn't changed.

It remains independently owned by the two men who started it. Mark remains fo-

cused on brewing and manufacturing; Tim on the wider business. The beer has retained its identity despite the growth in production, and the brewery continues to concentrate its distribution within its own local area.

And, importantly, Rebellion has become part of the history of the town that inspired its creation.

Tim believes the brewery is now "a huge part of Marlow's heritage".

It is a fitting conclusion to a story that began when two local friends decided that, if Marlow was to have its own brewery again, perhaps they should be the ones to create it.

Three decades later, Rebellion is no longer simply a brewery in Marlow.

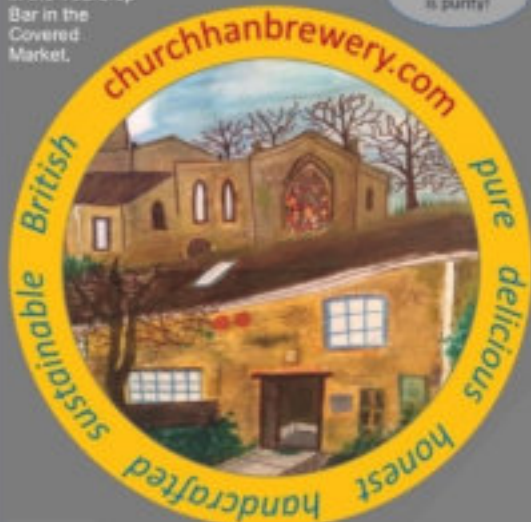
It is, in many respects, Marlow's brewery.



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North Oxfordshire News

The content on these two pages is provided by the North Oxfordshire branch of CAMRA – see contact details below

Two presentations to top pubs

North Oxfordshire CAMRA presented its branch Pub of the Year award to Kate and Simon Francis Smith of the **Butcher's Arms** in Balscote in July. The pub, built in the 19th century and once a slaughterhouse (still with the icehouse in the garden), has been a Hook Norton pub since 1878 and serves two or three of the brewery's range, usually Hooky and Old Hooky and often a seasonal ale. The pub can be found in the village of Balscote off the A422 Banbury-to-Stratford road.

The presentation date was chosen to enjoy the launch of Hook Norton Haymaker, the seasonal summer beer of the brewery, served directly from casks behind the pub. On this occasion, it was served by the landlady and landlord dressed as Aunt Sally and Worzel Gummidge, to go along with the brewery launch theme of Scarecrows.

Also present was CAMRA Oxfordshire area organiser Graham Hards, who made the second presentation of the night. The Butcher's Arms is also the Oxfordshire Pub of



The Butcher's Arms in Balscote. (Photo by Graham Hards)

the Year, and a certificate was presented to reflect this. James Clarke, MD of Hook Norton Brewery, was also there to enjoy the celebrations.

Kate and Simon are no strangers to receiving awards as this is the second time they have been branch and county winners, having won previously in 2023.

Runner-up award coming

The branch will present its Pub of the Year runner-up award to the **Bell Inn** in Adderbury in September (date to be confirmed), another Hook Norton

pub, where Michelle Coles and Rhys Owens are at the helm.

You may also have heard of pub dog Jarvis, who is famous on social media for his

enforced ban from Mini Chedars and other snacks. Jarvis may be banned from snacks, but he still loves to say hello, and is happy to be made a fuss of while you sample the range of up to six Hook Norton beers.



From left: Lynne Baldwin, Kate and Simon Francis Smith, and Graham Hards. (Photo by Bob Smith)

Pubs re-open under new names

The pub in Steeple Aston reopened in July with new proprietors Jonathan Perritt and Paolo Cangiano and a new name. Previously known as the Red Lion, the pub has now become the **Chequers**. In fact, it has returned to its original name, as it was the Chequers when the building became a pub in 1765. It became the Red Lion in 1830 and was purchased by Hook Norton Brewery in 2005.

The pub is currently open five days a week, being closed on Tuesdays and

Wednesdays, but the intention is to open seven days a week as soon as possible.

Another pub which has reopened under a new name is the **Fire Sprite Pub & Grill** in Minster Lovell, previously known as the Horse & Radish, which is owned and run by Nigel and Rachel Bailey. The pub serves two ales, including St Austell Tribute at time of writing.

Chandler's Arms re-opens

The **Chandler's Arms** in Epwell, near Banbury, was due to re-open on 26 August as EMBER at the Chandler's Arms, with Matty Cartwright and Harry Flockhart at the helm. There will be craft beers from around the world and house-made cask ales brewed in Warwickshire. Live fire cooking will be featured, and surplus bread will be incorporated into the brewing process to help reduce food waste.

The Fox returns to Middle Barton

A much-loved pub has reopened in Middle Barton after several years of closure. The **Fox** re-opened its doors on 18 July as a Wine Devil pub, and has been lovingly restored. Two cask beers are served, which were North Cotswold Shagweaver and Hook Norton's Off the Hook on opening day.

In a previous incarnation, this was a North Oxfordshire Pub of the Year several times, so it's good to see it open again.

Do you have any news from North Oxfordshire?
Contact chairman@northoxon.camra.org.uk

Tales from the Nose & Frown

The 'Ome Guard

How Northmoor was defended from the Nazis is recalled by **Graham Shelton** and **Grenville Reeves**

I DON'T KNOW what had got him on the subject, but when I went into the Nose & Frown for a chat and a quiet pint of mild, Joe was holding forth about how the Second World War came to Northmoor. His story managed to be funny but also bitter and brutal, and we were all a bit quiet at the end.

Any road, it made a change from cribbage, I suppose, and pretty soon Joe had everyone joining in and asking questions. Landlords Bert and Sue were happy because they knew that an animated conversation got everyone drinking more, and Sue soon brought out some hot, salty roast potatoes to help things along. Clinch's Brewery did well that night.

Joe reminded all of us too young to be there at the time about Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's broadcast to the nation on the Home Service. It was on 3 September 1939, and Chamberlain solemnly told everyone we had declared war on Germany as they had failed to respond to our ultimatum. It was good, if sobering, stuff and was followed by King George VI who gave a rousing speech to the whole Empire.

We felt that right was on our side, of course, and no-one thought it would take long to put Hitler back in his box. But he'd been preparing for years, and we hadn't, so into 1940 the government became increasingly worried that the Germans might invade.

It's a good job we had Joe and his mates at the Nose & Frown ready to go, because just over eight months later, on the evening of 14 May 1940, the newly appointed secretary of state for war, Anthony Eden, was on the wireless again. The Germans could drop parachute troops almost anywhere in Britain,



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Northmoor Lock, "an important staging post... to stop the Germans coming up the river to invade us".

he said, and we needed to mobilise to stop them!

By morning, men were volunteering all across the nation to be part of the newly formed Local Defence Volunteers (LDV). Within 24 hours, a staggering 250,000 men had joined.

Joe and his mates cycled straight into Witney to do their bit, joining the long queue of volunteers at the police station on Church Green. When they got back they were soon busy hunting out every kind of shotgun, rifle and bayonet left over from the Great War, ready to shoot down and skewer the parachutists.

The LDV had no uniforms or proper instructions about what to do to begin with, and it's just as well the Germans didn't come at once. Joe was an expert shot with his muzzle loader on rabbits and pigeons, and would have

happily shot every German who came within range.

Those early anarchic weeks were a joy, and quite a long way from the disciplined Home Guard force which "our lads" eventually became. The first step towards some kind of order came with the issue of LDV armbands, one for every volunteer, in lieu of proper uniforms.

The telephone message came in that the armbands were coming. "What?" says Len Simpson, platoon sergeant and a little hard of hearing. "Yes, they'll be coming tomorrow from Witney."

"Right," says Len – wrongly interpreting the message as "armed bands are coming from Witney". "We'll be waiting for them!" Believe me, there was bitter disappointment when they realised the petrol bomb ambush they set up would not be needed.

To begin with, there was a large element of "watchful waiting", parading and patrolling. "Our platoon used to meet in the village hall," said Joe, "just a stone's throw from the Nose & Frown in the centre of the village."

Len worked out a rota of bridges and roads for us to guard. And somehow, with petrol rationing and very little traffic, it never seemed long before one by one our intrepid band made off to the pub.

"We did eventually get some proper 303 rifles and ammunition", said Joe, "and that changed everything." They were a bit big for shooting rabbits, but Len soon worked out how to use home-loaded .410 cartridges in them. Even though there was food rationing, that was the last time anyone wanted for meat in Northmoor after a night or early morning patrol!

Fred May was the Northmoor lock keeper at the time, and the lock was an important staging post for the Upper Thames Patrol which went from pillbox to pillbox along the river to stop the Germans coming up the river to invade us.

Fred was armed with a rifle, ammunition and hand grenades. He was to shoot the Germans and destroy the lock and weir with the hand grenades.

The poor chap was petrified! He'd been trained to use the rifle, but was frightened to death of the grenades, which he didn't know how to use. So he buried them in the pigsties at the back of the lock.

There were lots of aerodromes around us, of course, with Hampden bombers at Stanton Harcourt and fighter bombers at Shippon, near Abingdon. In those days there was little in the way of air traffic control: just a man with binoculars on the control tower.

That's how it was that two British bombers, coming back in the morning from a German raid, crashed into each other right above Fred's house. Len and the rest of the Northmoor Home Guard came straight down, and as soon as it was light they were able to see what happened.

There was debris everywhere: painted metal and shiny metal, the navigator's maps, and a flying boot still containing part of a leg.* We were a bit quiet after that, I can tell you, thinking about those poor young lads, all dead.

"So," said Joe, "it wasn't all 'appiness and dancin' in the 'Ome Guard, at least not where we woz."



***Editor's note: There was an RAF plane crash in Northmoor in 1942. Accounts differ about what actually happened, but Joe is adamant that his story is correct.**



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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

Friday 4 to Sunday 6
September

Headington Beer Festival

(including Branch Social Saturday)
Mason's Arms, Quarry School Place, Headington, Oxford OX3 8LH
40+ casks, keg and cider
Free entry

Friday 11 and Saturday 12
September 11am-11pm

Moreton-in-Marsh Beer Festival

(including Branch Social Saturday)
Moreton-in-Marsh Cricket Club Ground, Batsford Road, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire GL56 9QA
45 real ales, 20 ciders and perries

Free entry for CAMRA members

Saturday 3 October Oxford Downs Cricket Club Beer Festival

Abingdon Road, Standlake, Witney OX29 7QH
12 cask ales
Entry last year cost £12, including glass, programme and 2 tokens for a half

Wednesday 7 to Sunday 18
October

Wetherspoon Autumn Beer Festival

Four Candles and Swan & Castle, Oxford
30 cask ales, often including some one-offs and collaboration brews

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

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