



CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

ISSUE 50
March - April 2008



the Oxford Drinker

Sometime in the summer of 1999, in a pub that is now just a distant memory, a few members of Oxford City CAMRA took the brave decision to begin a newsletter, and so it was that the Oxford Drinker was born. That meeting in the Elephant and Castle in Bampton has led to nine years worth of Oxford Drinkers doing the rounds of the region's pubs and as we reach this special 50th edition, it's worth considering what has changed in those intervening years since issue one was thrust upon an unsuspecting drinking public.

Few of you will have seen Issue 1, as more than half its limited production run were disposed of during the clear up of the 1999 Oxford Beer Festival. To set the record straight, a copy is included this time in the centrefold so that you can complete your collections.



An A4 single sheet, the first issue contained no adverts, and its headline announced the impending closure of Morland's site in Abingdon by its new owners Greene King.

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the free newsletter of the
Oxford City Branch of CAMRA
www.oxfordcamra.org.uk

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issue 50

Good old Greene King have got a bad press over the years and the Oxford Drinker has been critical of their dominance on more than a few occasions. More recently, they seem to have got the message that drinkers want choice, and the recent arrival of Hook Norton and Holdens beers in their pubs is a change for the better. Sadly the prediction about Morland was correct and the brewery closed in 2000. Since then, Oxfordshire has seen something of a revival in brewing, with the arrival of several new micro-breweries, including the Old Bog Brewery, at the Masons Arms in Headington Quarry, that announced its arrival on the scene in issue 35.

I think it's fair to say that real ale has enjoyed something of a revival nationally over the past ten years; Oxford's premier real ale outlets have thrived and a handful of new pubs such as Far from the Madding Crowd have become established; others such as the Lamb and Flag revived. Nevertheless, the impending smoking ban first headlined in issue 32 is now beginning to have a detrimental effect on pubs, the final nail in the coffin for licensees trying desperately to make ends meet when the odds seem stacked against them. Very recently we have lost the Marlborough House, Duke

of York, Wharf House, Fox and Hounds and the Woodstock Arms, and there wouldn't be space to list all those that have closed since Issue 1 rolled off the press. A recent straw poll of licensees I conducted shows that 90% have suffered a drop in trade since the smoking ban came into effect, and though it's far from scientific, the results of my survey do not bode well for the industry.

As we celebrate our fiftieth issue, the ninth in the capable editorship of my successor Sam French, the Oxford Drinker is at something of a crossroads too. Even the humble CAMRA magazine has moved on in the last ten years, and we're trying to embrace the glossy colour era whilst facing dwindling advertising revenue as publicans start to feel the financial pinch.

Without the articles and contributions from our members, the Oxford Drinker would not exist, and I'd

like to thank all those who have taken time to write down their thoughts and experiences over the years, and to those pubs and breweries that have supported us by advertising in our magazine.

As the public house we know and love faces an uncertain future, our next challenge is to move the Oxford Drinker forwards, who knows, maybe towards out 100th issue, and we hope you will continue to enjoy our publication for a few more years to come.



TIPPLEFAIR

2008

SUNDAY 18TH MAY
(Beer, Spirits and Drink Related Collectables)

Buckingham Community Centre
Cornwalls Meadow, Buckingham, MK18 1RP

80 + Stalls
Early Admission 9am - £4.00
General Admission 10.30am - £1.50
(Finishes at 2.30pm)

Visit our Website – www.tipples.net
For Booking Details
Telephone 07818 810896

WHISKY & SPIRIT ITEMS
BREWERY ITEMS
BOTTLES & LABELS, WATER JUGS,
BAR FIGURES, PLAYING CARDS, ASHTRAYS,
PUMP CLIMPS, BAR FONTS, OPENERS,
BEERMATS, BOOKS, SHOWCARDS AND MANY
OTHER RELATED ITEMS

**Come and Join like minded Collectors for
A Social Gathering**

beer festival diary



Wednesday 12 - Friday 14
March

London Drinker Beer & Cider Festival

Camden Centre,
Bridborough St., London,
WC1
www.camranorthlondon.org.uk

Tuesday 18 - Saturday 22
March

Far From The Madding Crowd Beer Festival

Friars Entry, Oxford
01865 240900
www.maddingcrowd.co.uk

Thursday 20 - Monday 24
March

Hop Pole Easter Bank Holiday Beer Festival

Hop Pole Inn, Bicester
Road, Aylesbury
30+ beers & ciders
01296 482129
www.hop-pole.co.uk

Friday 21 - Monday 24
March (Easter weekend)

Woodman Beer Festival

New Yatt Road, North
Leigh, nr Witney
01993 881790

Thursday 27 - Sunday 30
March

Kings Arms Beer Festival

The Moors, Kidlington
From 5pm Friday
01865 373004

Friday 25 - Monday 28 April

Cherry Tree Beer Festival

Steventon
01235 831222

Thursday 1 - Sunday 4 May
(May bank holiday weekend)

Reading Beer and Cider Festival

King's Meadow, Napier
Road, Reading
Thurs 4.30-11pm, Fri & Sat
11am-11pm, sun 12 noon 9pm
430+ real ales, 140+ foreign
beers, 140+ ciders & perries,
30+ wines
www.readingbeerfestival.org.uk

Sunday 4 May
(May bank holiday weekend)

Fox Beer Festival

Henley Rd, Sandford-on-
Thames, Oxford
01865 777803

Thursday 8 - Saturday 10
May

8th Banbury Beer Festival

TA Centre, Oxford Road,
Banbury
07525 720515
www.northoxfordshirecamra.org.uk/festival/

Wednesday 14 - Saturday
17 May

25th Rugby Beer Festival

Thornfield Bowling Club
www.rugbycamra.org.uk

Friday 23 - Saturday 24
May

Oxford City Football Club Beer Festival

Court Place Farm Stadium,
Marston
Beer festival and Aunt Sally
team competition
(see advert page 4)

Thursday 17 - Saturday 19
July

Reading Real Ale and Jazz Festival

Christchurch Meadow,
Reading
www.raaj.info

Missed an
issue of the
Oxford
Drinker?

Seen an
interesting
article you want to
read again?

All new issues of the Ox-
ford Drinker are now
available on the
Oxford City CAMRA
website, including some
back issues

www.oxfordcamra.org.uk

Further details and
updates are available
on our FESTIVALS
webpage at
www.oxfordcamra.org.uk



Oxford City Football Club BEER FESTIVAL 2008

**This year it's a BEER FESTIVAL &
AUNT SALLY TEAM Competition
~ cash prize and trophy to winners ~**

**Friday 23rd MAY and
Saturday 24th MAY**

This innovative event takes place in the unique setting
of the clubhouse and terrace adjacent to the football pitch at
Court Place Farm Stadium, Marston, Oxford OX3 0NQ.

Opening times:

**Friday 7pm to 11pm
Saturday 11am to 11pm**

Circa 15 real ales available including many interesting guest beers
and a special brew from the Old Bog Brewery

The event is fully supported by
Marston's Beer Company and CAMRA (Oxford)

For an entry form to compete in the Aunt Sally Team Competition
Call 01295 811392 or 07756799800

Friendly welcome ~ Hot and Cold refreshments ~ Free parking

CAMRA's....other campaigns

Richard Queralt

CAMRA is best known as the organisation that saved Britain's traditional cask-conditioned beers from extinction at the hands of the brewers, who attempted to kill them off and substitute inferior products in pursuit of bigger profits. Mainly due to CAMRA's efforts there is now a bigger and better range of real ales than ever before. But we haven't just sat back and congratulated ourselves. There's still work to be done, and lots of it. The following gives some idea of CAMRA's ongoing campaigning and how you could help.

Full Pints Campaign



Pints of beer are regularly served up to 10% short because the Government will not legislate to give beer drinkers the same rights as other consumers. If you buy a litre of petrol you can expect to receive a full litre of petrol. If you buy a pint of milk you can expect to receive a full pint of milk. Beer drinkers are denied their basic consumer rights and as a result are frequently served short measures.

Three key facts in the Full Pints campaign:

1. 26.6% of pints are more than 5% short measure.
2. Short measure costs consumers £481 million a year, or over £1.3 million a day.
3. Pubs serve customers 208 million more pints than they buy in by serving short measures.

CAMRA needs your help to ensure you receive a full pint of beer every time. Please visit www.camra.org.uk to sign to sign CAMRA's National Full Pints Petition calling on the Government to keep its promise by putting an end to short measures.

Cyclops

The 'Cyclops' generic real ale campaign is an initiative that has been created to help and educate pub goers that are interested in giving real ale a try for the very first time, or have only tried a few pints and want to find out more!

Real ale can be a complicated subject as a lot of craft goes in to the brewing of our national alcoholic drink. Some beer experts in the past have used very 'flowery' language to describe a beer and some consumers have found this hard to understand.

The new 'Cyclops' campaign has been designed to inform new real ale drinkers of what style of beer they are drinking, what its alcohol content is, what the beer should look like,

what it should smell like and of course, what it should taste like using very simple but informative language.

CAMRA and 14 real ale brewers launched this campaign in August 2006 at the Great British Beer Festival to help more people understand what different real ales taste like. There are over 2,500 different real ales being brewed in Britain by over 600 breweries. Nobody can know what they all taste like and this campaign will inform consumers of what the beer is like on beer mats, posters and other point of sale material. The imagery will also be placed on the back of beer pumps to educate pub staff and hopefully this will encourage more people to try real ale and understand why thousands of people are so passionate about the best style of drink in the world!

Saving Pubs

While planning permission is needed to convert pubs into homes, full planning permission is not normally required to demolish a pub or convert a pub into a shop or restaurant. CAMRA wants to prevent pubs being demolished or converted to another use without planning permission. It is after all only right that local people are given a chance to object to the loss of their local pub.

CAMRA's own research shows that 84% of people believe a pub is as essential to village life as a shop or post office. The loss of pubs whether in

rural or urban areas can undermine the local economy and community life. CAMRA has set up the Community Pubs Foundation (www.communitypubs.org.uk) to provide advice and small grants to communities campaigning to save their local.

Over recent years it has become harder for developers to get planning permission to convert pubs into houses. However developers know that once a pub is knocked to the ground the Local Authority will be more likely to grant planning permission for another use such as housing. CAMRA's research suggests that over 40% of the pubs lost in England are demolished.

In the last few years CAMRA has successfully campaigned for greater protection for public houses:

Changes to planning law now mean that the conversion of a pub into a fast-food takeaway cannot take place.

National policy requires local authorities to introduce policies to retain rural public houses.

Over 60% of local authorities have adopted policies which provide additional protection to public houses.

CAMRA has for many years campaigned to ensure that any change of use to a public house requires planning permission. As a result of the increasing number of pubs being demolished, CAMRA is now campaigning to prevent pubs being demolished without the need for planning permission.

The Queens Arms, Kelburne Road, Oxford, above, is one of several pubs in the Oxford area closed and pulled down in recent years to make way for housing.



CAMRA also campaigns for good pubs; after all, the best place to enjoy a good-quality beer is in a decent pub. CAMRA runs a number of initiatives to recognise and promote excellence in pubs and to encourage pub going. This includes a host of awards schemes for the best pubs and the inclusion of high-quality pubs in our annual publication the Good Beer Guide as well as a range of local guides and newsletters.

Clubs. Many clubs already serve real ale, and CAMRA has its own awards scheme for clubs serving a range of real ales in good condition. The winning club is that which is deemed to have shown the greatest commitment to real ale over the last 12 months. If your local club doesn't stock real ale then why not try to convince them to do so?

Find out more about CAMRA's Pubs Campaigning at www.camra.org.uk

Pub heritage is an important issue for CAMRA. Our historic pubs, especially our historic pub interiors, are under continuing threat from inappropriate alteration or even complete closure. CAMRA has developed a National Inventory of the most precious of our true heritage pubs, along with Regional Inventories of other pub interiors worthy of both protection and celebration.

Our historical pubs are a unique and precious part of our heritage and way of life; if you want to find out more about them, please visit www.heritagepubs.org.uk

Guest Beer Rights

The vast majority of pubs in the UK are tied to either a pub company or a brewer. This means they are often unable to stock beers from brewers of their choice. A guest beer right would allow these pubs the choice of stocking one cask conditioned beer of their choice. This would have two huge advantages:

1. Increasing consumer choice. Allowing pubs to stock one beer of their choice will help them attract new customers by allowing them to stock an appealing guest beer.
2. Supporting small brewers. The biggest hurdle facing Britain's small brewers is access to market. A guest beer right would transform the fortunes of small brewers by enabling all of Britain's 60,000 pubs to sell one beer from a small brewer.

Research commissioned by CAMRA shows clear consumer demand for locally brewed beer. 55% of people indicated that they would like to see at least one locally brewed beer in every pub. In addition 31% of all adults who visit pubs would buy a locally brewed beer in a pub over non- locally brewed beer.

A guest beer right was introduced in 1989 and was initially very successful in delivering greater beer choice for consumers. The old guest beer right however only applied to tenants of brewers that owned more than 2000 pubs, and by the millennium only a few hundred pubs continued to benefit from the guest beer right. In 2002 the Government removed the guest beer legislation.

CAMRA is now campaigning for a new guest beer right which applies to tenants and managers of pub companies as well as brewers.

Endangered Beer Styles

CAMRA's Light and Dark Supporters Committee seeks to highlight all beers that are light in strength and all beers that are dark in colour. These include: Stouts, Porters and Old Ales, Light and Dark Milds, 60/- Ales and Light Bitters (those with an ABV of 3.4% or less or OG of 1034 or less).

All these styles of beer are under threat of extinction; in so much as they are much more difficult to find in cask-conditioned form than the bitters that you normally see on handpump.

However, many are actually growing in popularity.

Consider the statistics. A check of the beers listed in the rear pages of the 2006 Good Beer Guide shows that out of over 2000 beers listed there are 171 (up 11% from GBG 2005) Cask Conditioned Milds, and 60/- Ales in regular production, plus another 24 (up 20%) that are produced seasonally. There are also 28 Light Bitters (a decrease of 10%, making it the most threatened beer style currently) and 122 Old Ales (up 94 %, partially as a result of including some barley wines which are now felt to be part of this style).



This contrasts with 216 Cask Conditioned Stouts and Porters that are either regularly or seasonally brewed, a decrease of 3% from 2005. The Republic of Ireland microbrewers now offer 11 stouts or porters, some available in cask-conditioned form - some are even available in the UK. However, whilst a lot of Mild is brewed by Regional and some National brewers, most of the Stouts and Porters come from the much smaller microbrewers, so Stouts and Porters are in fact much in the minority in terms of barrelage.

So what is being done to promote these styles of beer?

Mild Month

Every year, drinkers are encouraged to make May Mild Month. This is supported by

activities organised by CAMRA branches, including tastings and trails around pubs selling Milds and 60/- Ales. Brewers and pub chains also lend support. May 2005 saw the launch of new posters and leaflets to promote mild, and it is hoped that May 2006 will see an even more successful Mild Month campaign. Please click here or the title for more information.

Light Bitters

During the summer months Light Bitters are promoted with a poster campaign featuring the slogan - 'Really Refreshing!'

Summer 2007 saw local CAMRA branches continue to put their weight behind this worthy campaign, especially as it is this style which is most under threat currently.

Stouts, Porters and Old Ales - Beers with Real Personality!

Stouts, Porters and Old Ales are promoted through the winter months. Artwork which illustrates different cartoon characters for each of these beer styles was launched in January 2006. Beer mats, posters, and pump clip crownners have been produced to promote this campaign.

The logo below appears on various bottle-conditioned beers. There are presently around 125 stouts, porters, old ales, light bitters or milds now available as Real Ale in a Bottle (RAIB).



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At one time, all bottled beers were bottle-conditioned but, as with draught beers, the brewers found it cheaper and easier to filter and pasteurise their products. The result was a longer shelf life at the cost of taste and quality.

Cider and Perry



Real cider and perry - perry is made from pears rather than apples - also have a place in CAMRA's list of campaigns, through its APPLE arm. October has been designated

as cider and perry month to coincide with Apple Day, October 21st, when apple related events take place all over the country.

Each year in early summer CAMRA's Cider & Perry Committee consider who or what has done the most the previous year for cider or perry and bestows upon them the prestigious Pomona Award, which is presented in October.

As with real ale and keg beer, there's a world of difference between real cider and most of the cider on sale in pubs, off-licences and supermarkets.

Keg beer and keg cider is filtered, pasteurised and artificially carbonated resulting in a bland, fizzy product usually served chilled to mask its lack of character. While real

cider in pubs is rare today its growing popularity should see it more widely stocked in the future.

Although CAMRA's headquarters is based in Hertfordshire, its 85,000 members are spread far and wide across the UK. Grouped into 180 local branches, they are the organisation's eyes and ears at a local level. They organise beer festivals - over 160 of them - publish local pub guides, produce regular branch magazines and newsletters which are distributed free to the area's pubs.

If you're not already a member and would like to join, there's a membership form inside the back page of the previous issue or join online at www.camra.org.uk

The Cricketer's Arms Littleworth

**HOT &
COLD
SNACKS
NOW
BEING
SERVED**



**HOOKY
BITTER
&
WEEKLY
GUEST
ALE**

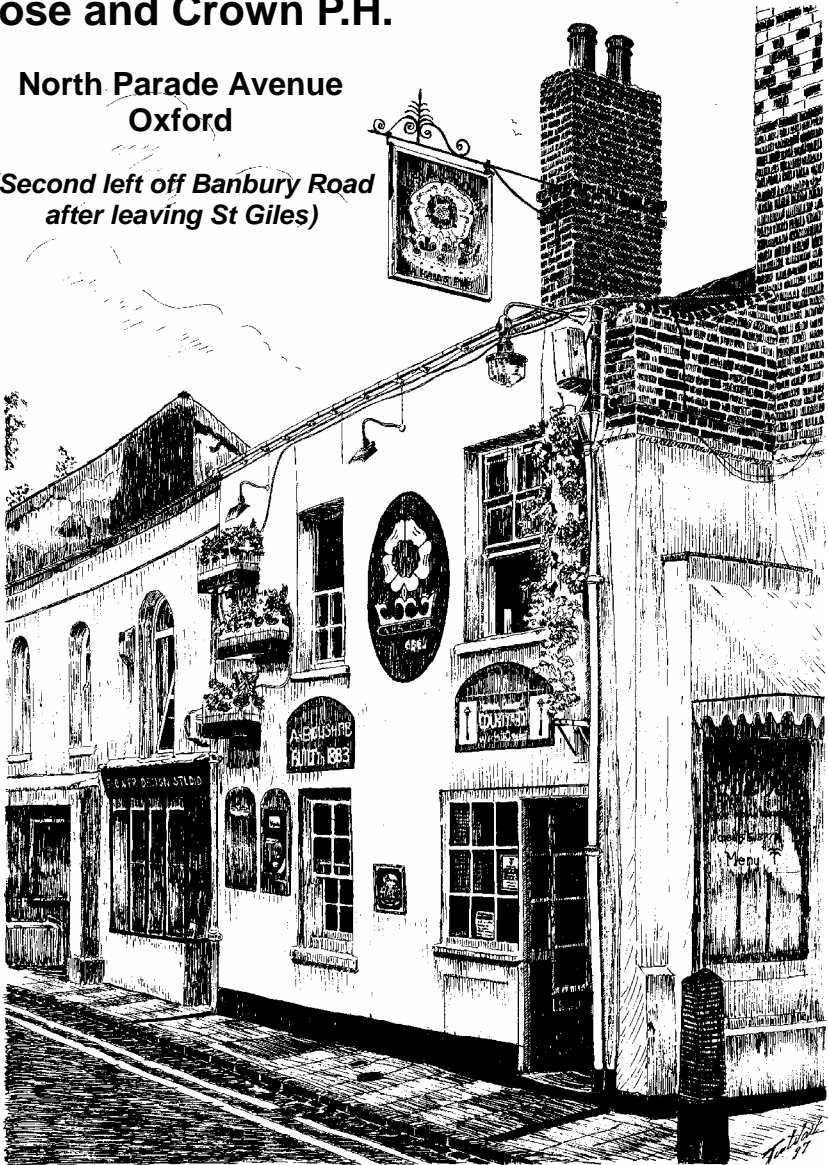
Visit our website for our 2008 Events Calendar

www.cricketers-arms.co.uk
01865 872738

Rose and Crown P.H.

North Parade Avenue
Oxford

(Second left off Banbury Road
after leaving St Giles)



Oxford City CAMRA Pub of the Year 2001
Listed in the Good Pub Guide 2006
www.rose-n-crown.co.uk

merton winter beer festival

15 - 16 February 2008

'A view from the wrong side of the bar' by Fin

Merton Beer Festival took place on a cold, crisp February weekend this year, fearing that it might be a bit nippy we had taken the sensible precaution of bringing in some high octane warming beers to counteract Jack Frost, phew, thank heavens to the beer gods that we were so well prepared.

The Beer Festival started on the Friday evening, and it's fair to say that this night is a more pub like affair. We don't go out of our way to advertise that the event is open on the Friday other than around the local villages and to our local CAMRA branches, it's always a nice to have this pub like atmosphere on the Friday and lets face it we get more beer to ourselves in adopting this approach.

Both of our local CAMRA branches came out in force on the Friday and like kids in a sweet shop it didn't appear to be to long before they were tucking into the three rarities and big hitting beers, namely Old Chimneys Good King Henry, Milton Marcus Aurelius and Milton Mammon, the first two being Imperial Stouts and the latter and Old Ale.



All three of these beers are rather tricky to come by and

your average man in the street is more likely to bump into Lord Lucan. To be honest after drinking these beers at 9%, 7.5% and 7% respectively there's a good chance that you'll return home and tell the family that you sat in the pub chatting to Lord Lucan whilst Elvis Karaoke'd his own songs and Vera Duckworth served you. All three of these beers didn't disappoint; Good King Henry was my pick out of this trio. Interestingly the beer takes its name, not from a former Monarch, but from a once popular but now long forgotten vegetable, now considered a weed but once regarded as a poor mans asparagus.

My personal favourite over the weekend was the Oakham Oblivion, this was a truly stunning beer that in this current era of more experimentation with hops, really delivered and did so with some style and panache. It really was a wonderful 'full on' hoppy assault on the taste buds with more juicy fruitiness than you'll get down the local greengrocers. Of all the breweries best placed to cope with the current shortages and huge price hikes in some of our more popular varieties of hops you can well imagine Oakham carrying on with very little interruption to their schedule. The other beer on the list at Merton from Oakham, was a new beer called Delirium, this used the Japanese Sorachi Ace Hop along with Amarillo and Cluster presumably the two American hops were used for their aromatic and bittering qualities, this was yet another top draw beer from Oakham

that carried a great punchy citrusness to it and some lovely tropical fruits.

Of the other beers on offer at Merton. There were a few more newbies and Buntingford Boadicea, an interesting single hop beer, drew considerable praise from all those who tried it. Castle Rock Great Crested Grebe and Abbeydale Deception were also well received, and the two from Bartrams also slipped down nicely the Bill Bartrams Best Bitter was interesting in that it offered a glimpse back flavour-wise to a more traditional style of English bitter.



On the beer front it's always something of a worry when putting together a beer list the fear is that you'll get it wrong or that it'll be unbalanced. I hope and think that we did a pretty good job this winter when you consider that we have limitations on how many we can reasonably expect to offer. There were some very seldom seen beers, a handful

of new beers and plenty of decent session strength beers along with some big hitters. If there is anything that I would have changed, it is that we never had a Porter on offer although I would counter that by saying that there were enough stout's and milds to keep most of the dark beer fans happy. The Cider and Perry list continues to grow and it's also quite refreshing to see plenty of experimentation going on in these circles. I particularly liked the Olivers Oak Aged Whisky Perry and had I have been on the correct side of the bar I can well imagine that after a few of these I would have resembled Bambi on ice.

Working behind the bar and only having time to try the occasional slurp can be something of a bind when you

can see fellow CAMRA members having the most beerific evening, and then your feet, legs and back starts to ache, and you wonder what on earth you are doing.



On the flipside people watching can be great fun, people watching at a beer festival even better. Great pleasure can be derived from working behind a bar, and if your local branch are looking for volunteers to work at a beer festival take them up on it, its great fun.

Merton Summer Beer Festival (our fifth summer fest') is on the 18th and 19th July sshhh.. don't tell everyone it's our little secret.



6X equality



Every drop of 6X is Handmade in Devizes and brewed especially to suit both half and pint glasses at a pub near you.



OXFORD DRINKER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE OXFORD CITY BRANCH
OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

ISSUE No. 1

SEP-OCT 1999

April Closure for Morland

Britain's second-oldest independent brewery, Morland of Abingdon, will close its doors for the final time on 3 April 2000, ending a brewing tradition which dates back to 1711. Suffolk brewers Greene King, who celebrate their 200th anniversary this year, have acquired the Morland business, along with its 400 pubs, for £180 million.

Greene King, who made an un-successful bid for Morland back in 1995, will now have an estate of some 1500 pubs, spread across the south and east of England. Greene King will brew the Morland brands it chooses to retain at its Westgate Brewery in Bury St Edmunds.

The news is a devastating blow for brewing in Oxfordshire, which lost Morrells only last year. Greene King were also thought to have been front runners in the race to buy Morrells, but were eventually outbid. Morrells beers are now brewed by Thomas Hardy in Dorchester.

The Morrells site was recently advertised for sale for £7m; Morland's Abingdon brewery will probably fetch less, but is definitely to close despite a £5m investment only two years ago. Despite this, only the distribution depot in Abingdon will remain after April next year.

It is highly likely that successful brands such as Old Speckled Hen, and more locally known Original Bitter, will continue to be brewed under the new regime. Whatever your opinion of Morland beers, the closure of this historic brewery is a sad loss to the Oxfordshire real ale scene.

Good Beer Guide 2000

The 2000 edition of the Good Beer Guide, CAMRA's best-selling publication, goes on sale in October. The Guide lists 5,000 of the very best pubs which serve consistently good real ale.

The Guide is also an invaluable resource of information on all of Britain's breweries, and the beers they brew.

Features included within the book are articles on the closure of Britain's breweries, as featured on this page, and targets the decline of real ale as national breweries concentrate on major brands.

This is one edition of the Good Beer Guide you cannot afford to miss. Attractively designed and packed with information, it is a fitting memento to mark the new century and the new millennium.

The Guide costs £11.99, or just £7.50 for members as last year.

Mansfield under threat

Mansfield Brewery, one of Britain's most successful regionals, is under threat of take over and possible closure.

The preferred bidder appears to be Wolverhampton and Dudley, who trade as Banks's, and have several pubs in Oxford. Banks's recently took over the Burton brewery of Marstons, and so have too much brewing capacity to need to keep Mansfield open.

Full Pints soon?

The Government White Paper on full measures will be a victory for the consumer according to CAMRA.

Although it is unlikely that legislation will require pubs to serve full pints in lined glasses, it is likely that a minimum 19 ounce "pint" will become the law, thus opening the door for pubs who consistently serve less than this to be prosecuted.

The *Oxford Drinker* is the newsletter of the Oxford City Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA).

It is published bi-monthly, in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Over 1000 copies are distributed free to pubs throughout Oxford and the surrounding area.

The views expressed in articles and letters are those of individual contributors, and are not necessarily the views of the Oxford Branch. The Campaign for Real Ale, or even the editor.

All contributions, enquiries, letters or complaints should be addressed to:

The Editor,
Oxford Drinker,
44 Butler Close,
Oxford OX2 6JG

The Editor reserves the right to amend or shorten contributions for publication.

© Oxford CAMRA 1999

Introducing the Oxford Drinker

The *Oxford Drinker* is the newly-launched newsletter of the Oxford City Branch of The Campaign for Real Ale. It will be published six times per year and will be available free of charge from pubs and off-licences across the city and in the surrounding villages.

The Oxford City Branch area covers the City centre, and also covers the towns of Burford, Bampton, Witney, Kidlington and Woodstock, and in total contains over 350 pubs.

The intention of the news letter is to enable local drinkers to be kept informed of local issues with regards to breweries, pubs, and beers which will be of interest to them and may affect when, where and what they are able to drink. The *Oxford Drinker* will be available free of charge and copies will soon be available in pubs throughout this wide area.

Contributions, in the form of articles, letters or items of news are always most welcome, from readers, licensees and CAMRA members alike.

CAMRA needs your support to help fight brewery closures and the decline in investment in Cask Ale. Drinkers in the Oxford area (and elsewhere for that matter) are urged to join their local branch of CAMRA using the form on this page. New members are always welcome at meetings and social events, a list of which appears on this page.

News in brief.....

New Pubs for Oxford

The new Hobgoblin, formerly the Ampney Cottage, on Cowley Road opened on 19 August, the second Wychwood pub in the city. Bass are soon to open an *All Bar One* on the High Street, and it is believed that Young's are looking at a site on Holywell Street for a new venture.

Meanwhile, the Good Beer Guide-listed Fir Tree on Ifley Road has received the Morrells 'Ale House' branding, and has been renamed 'The Old Ale House' as a result. Six guest beers are on offer alongside Morrells beers.

Oxford Branch Diary

16-18 September

Oxford Beer Festival, Town Hall, St Aldates
Thursday 8-11, Friday and Saturday 11-11
Around 100 beers from across the country.

Saturday 2 October

Kings Arms, Kidlington
Oktoberfest Beer Festival
Evening social with probably 10-12 beers on offer

Tuesday 5 October

Branch Meeting
Old Tom, St Aldates, Oxford
8.30pm - all welcome

Saturday 30 October

Minibus trip to The Black Country
All day trip. Limited places available. Telephone to book your seat or reserve a place at any branch meeting.

The Oxford City Branch Secretary is Matthew Bullock, and he can be contacted about branch social events on 01865 553662 (evenings only), or by e-mail at matthew.bullock@member.nba.org

Advertise in the
Oxford Drinker
and let over 1000 local drinkers
know about your pub

An advert the size of this
costs only £35

Call 01865 553662 or
contact the Editor for details

JOIN CAMRA NOW!

Just fill in this form and send with a cheque (made payable to CAMRA Ltd) to:
The Membership Secretary, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road,
St. Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 4LW
Current rates are £14 (Single) and £17 (Joint)

Name(s):.....
Address:.....

I/we wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale and enclose a cheque for £.....

Signature:..... Date:.....

did you know.....?



A Beer Swillers "Did You Know ...?" by Hop Bine.

- 1) How many grains of barley, approximately, are used to make every pint of beer?
a) 100 (b) 1000 (c) 2000 d) 5000
- 2) For those on calorie counting diets, which of these drinks has LESS calorie content than ½ pint (4.5% ABV) of bitter?
a) Milk shake (1/2 pint)
b) Sparkling wine (125 ml)
c) Cola/soft drink (1/2 pint)
d) Gin and tonic (25ml + 180ml tonic)
- 3) In 1916 the Carlsberg Brewery (Copenhagen) made a major contribution to 'modern life'. Was it?
a) The introduction of a new strain of lager yeast
b) Stainless steel, refrigerated storage tanks
c) Quantum mechanics
d) Free health and education services for its employees
- 4) What is an "Irish Pint"?
a) A drinking vessel that is perpetually topped up
b) A recognised standard measure
c) A lined measure of liquid with lots of froth above
- 5) What is "Cock Ale"?
a) A beer containing chicken
b) Brews from the Cock & Hen Brewery pub
c) The term for beer before the addition of clarifiers
- 6) Which famous artist has depicted bottle Bass in a work of art?
a) Damian Hurst
b) Edouard Manet
c) Andy Warhol
- 7) In Aston, a village north-west of Witney, is a pub. Is it?
a) The Mason's Arms
b) The Bull

Have a go then turn to page 22 to check your answers.

good beer guide



Tony Goulding

It is the time of the year that the Oxford branch of CAMRA is in the final stages of selecting the pubs for the 2009 guide. The local branch area covers Oxford, villages within 6 miles of it, and a large slice of West Oxfordshire, including Eynsham and Witney, along with Abingdon to the south. The pubs in the branch are surveyed on a regular basis but are dependant on the numbers of volunteers available. Some years a good number of pubs are visited with the occasional rare newcomers appearing. Major towns and some

villages will find themselves without a pub in some editions of the guide. Again this depends on members' decisions on the quality of the beer.

Looking through the GBGs from 1977 to the present is an interesting pastime. In 32 editions, city pubs that have been regular entries include: The Prince of Wales, Iffley; The Kings Arms; The Turf Tavern; The Cricketers; The Black Boy; The Rose and Crown; The Fir Tree; The Old Tom; The Gardeners, Plantation Road; Temple Bar; White Horse, Broad Street; Angel

and Greyhound; The Butchers, Headington; and The Marlborough house.

A grand total of 67 different pubs have appeared in the GBG, some of them for just one year, several no longer with us. Every year there are moans and groans with much discussion when the details of the next year's successful entries are announced. There are 330 pubs in the branch area split evenly between city and county and of this large number only 17, **yes 17!**, will appear as the branch allocation in the GBG list.

The King's Arms

The Moors, Kidlington

Spring Beer Festival

Thu 27 - Sun 30 March
open from 5.30 Thu
and all day Fri-Sun

12 beers and 2 ciders
Hog roast on Saturday

Listed in the 2005 CAMRA Good Beer Guide
Oxford CAMRA "Country Pub of the Year 2003"



For more information ring Gerry on: (01865) 373004

death of the oxford pub

Rob Walters



What a miserable title! But these are miserable times. I live in St Ebbes, just beneath the renovated castle and prison, and six pubs have closed within my vicinity in the past six months! You will know of most of them from the recent Oxford Times article featuring John Mackie and the article by Tony Goulding in last month's Drinker. They are: The Duke of York, The Wharf House, the Marlborough, The White House, The Cock and Camel and, a little further afield, The Fox and Hounds. What's going on?



Of course there is a plethora of reasons for closing pubs including: the smoking ban, redevelopment, individual bankruptcy and so on. But make no doubt about it - if these pubs had been thriving businesses then someone would have snapped them up as going

concerns before they shut up shop. But they weren't snapped up so down come the signs and up go the shutters. Though there are star pubs in the Oxford scene like the Turf, most pubs are marginal businesses nowadays. And there is very little elasticity in the business for those that are not stars - raise the prices and you lose custom, renovate and the rent goes up, innovate and you find yourself in competition with a host of other customer hungry businesses from restaurants to clubs to trendy bars.

Are there any 'real pubs' left in Oxford? Naturally that depends on the definition of real. Though there are plenty of pubs in the centre that I like there is not one that fulfils my ideal of 'real'. Like George Orwell and his mythical perfect pub, I have a dream. It's a pub which is always warm in winter, with a characterful personality behind the bar and many more in front. Naturally it has a range of well-kept, constantly changing real ales, a smoking room (!), darts, pool and other games, an Aunt Sally team, locals who can answer questions on any topic without reference to the Internet, regular draws particularly at Christmas, music nights with a variety

of live performances in the function room, small scale commerce in the public bar (particularly the supply of garden produce) and so on - and on. This is a merging of many pubs that I have known - in Oxford think a mixture of the best bits of the Wharf (as was), the Mason's Arms, The Turf and The Shelley.

The last pub on this list I only discovered recently when I met Tony Flatman (ex-owner of the Wharf) there recently on one of his frequent visits to Oxford.



Though The Shelly is not a sophisticated or glitzy place, it has many of the ingredients of a real pub. There are characters and it has character. It was busy: a darts match in one room and a bar billiards competition in another. Dogs were welcome. There was one real ale (a mystery one since the landlord had lost the pump clip!) and there were people of all ages who seemed to belong there.

"This is a real pub," I said to someone, as I looked

around contentedly. "Make the most of it," was the reply from someone at the bar. Nodding towards the extremely busy and efficient landlord he continued, "he's had enough. The rent keeps going up and they [the pubco] don't do anything to improve the place. He's going soon."

So there we are, another real pub faced up for the shutter treatment. Of course someone else might take it on – but that's part of the problem too. A good pub needs stability. The Marlborough did well for years under its droll landlady and her chap, but when she left for a career as a shelf filler at a Sainsbury's supermarket the place was taken on by a succession of people, none of whom stayed long enough to establish a presence - and so the clientele gradually declined to near zero.



Meanwhile, running a pub does not get easier. Responsibility from anything to paying the performing rights society to

policing the smoking ban increases by the year – yet the returns fall. 'Run your own business', yell the signs that decorate failing pubs. What they do not say is 'work all the hours of the day and night, face an ever more demanding public and endless red tape ... and earn less than the man who comes to check that you are doing your VAT returns properly.'

All of the above defines the problem – but what is the solution? In the early days of CAMRA we had a clear objective and a well-defined enemy – we wanted decent beer and the big brewers were preventing us from getting it. They were taking away our choice. Now with over 600 breweries we have plenty of choice, but increasingly less pubs in which to make our choice. Who is the enemy now? It is not the brewers, not the pubs, not even the pubcos – it's the drinkers. The fundamental reason why all of these pubs have closed in my area is that not enough people were going into them. If the drinkers had been there then they would all have been unassailable as successful businesses.

So what can we do? I think the efforts of CAMRA to support the local pub are excellent – but misdirected. As I travelled to London by bus recently I had an awful glimpse of the future. There

is a sign besides the road some way beyond the main Headington shops. The sign advertises 'THE LOCAL'. And set back from it is an off-licence also bearing a sign, this one states in large letters – 'CHEAP BOOZE'. How is it possible to persuade people that a visit to the pub is better than the unrestricted freedom of their own homes where, for the price equivalent of two pints of ale you can share a decent bottle of wine and some crisps/olives and even smoke a cigar if you wish? Conversely, how can you persuade a youngster that the 'oh so cool' bar where they go to meet others of their own age – where music of their era is playing and the beer is ultra cold – that all this should be forgone for the pleasures of the a traditional boozier? I don't know the answers; all I do know is that we are fast losing a national pleasure. Is it all doom and gloom? Mostly. But there are still good pubs in Oxford and a marvellous selection of ales. So let's be thankful that we live here just now. There is little doubt that, save some miraculous revitalising revolution, the decimation that is so clearly visible will continue unabated. Perhaps we will return to the very old days where brewing was mostly a cottage industry and taverns were small-unregulated places.

inn and around oxford



Old time drinkers in the Witney area will be saddened to hear of the death (10 Feb. 2008) of **Gordon Rollins** who, with his wife Cecily, were the last licensees of the old style **Eagle Tavern** in Corn Street. They were both well-known smokers and Gordon left to live in Cornwall for a while but returned to live in this area. The pub made quite an impression during a recent branch survey trip. It's changed considerably since Gordon's day. Now a Hook Norton establishment, the landlord is proud of his ales and delighted by the comments of customers. He even insisted, on our visit, of showing us his excellent cellar and has recently been awarded Hook Norton brewery's best cellar award. Look for the octagonal bar billiard table.

His brother runs the **Griffin**, on Oxford Hill, a Wadsworth pub, recently much improved, with two real ales.

The Saddlers in New Yatt, Witney, is currently closed (most of the time) pending the legalities of the transfer of lease. It is owned by Oxford Hotels and currently only open on Friday and Saturday, so no cask ale is available.

The White Horse, Forest Hill (nr Wheatley) is now being managed by a Thai family. Owned by Goldfinch Brewery in Dorchester, Dorset, the beer on a recent visit was very highly rated, so much so that the Goldfinch Midnight Sun had to be rated at CAMRA top score 5 – the only time the reviewer has awarded it – and the other beer, Vale VPA, was a 4. The pub is divided into eating and drinking areas. Popular with the local drinkers, the areas are separated by an open log fire. The Thai food is superb and inexpensive - £5 for a 2 course lunch – and received a very favourable review in the Oxford Times recently.

The Court Inn, Witney, is to reopen after the summer monsoon floods and should be in full operation by the time this edition of the Oxford Drinker is published.

There is no news on **The Plough** at Kelmscott but **The Plough** in Witney's High Street seems to be near to reopening. However, there is still no floor!

The Swan at Long Hanborough (just outside our region) is closed. It is reported to be in the ownership of Steve Chick

who is well known for converting pubs into eating establishments. His more recent revamp was the New Inn, on the old A40, at Minster Lovell – a small dim drinking hole closed by dog fighting contests and now a large gastro pub.

The Romany in Bampton is shortly to have a new landlord and sometimes only has one real ale on offer.

The Red Lion, Aston, is a good example of how a pub can be turned around and now holds a "Pub in the Hub" trophy. It has, and is continuing to be, improved in the best sense of a local. It hosts vibrant entertainment such as quiz nights and recently unamplified trad jazz, with standing room only. Only two cask ales are available at the moment and a rotation is in the offing – currently Courage and Ringwood, both well kept. When the kitchen is revamped the landlady, Lorna, hopes to serve up a basic food menu.

The House of Windsor, Witney, was excluded from the current 2008 GBG on the grounds that the freehold was for sale. The new owners have done great things and the beer

quality has improved. Time will tell if they can continue in this vein to allow more CAMRA members to visit and rate their ales.

The Lamb, Crawley (nr Witney), is closed. We hope that this Brakspear Holding property will soon be reopened. The Crawley Inn, nearby, has reverted to a noisy but popular drinking place, easily found by looking for the large group of motorcycles.

The Butchers in Witney is now under new management, the lease having been transferred. No news as yet on the beer quality.

The Talbot, Eynsham, was closed on a recent CAMRA survey trip. This was just for a few days while a new stone floor was laid. The beer is now served direct/gravity from behind the bar where there are eight saddle-coded pins (4.5 gallons) of Arkells ales. Apparently the brewery don't like racking these up. However, the system does mean that a cask is not hanging about long compared to a firkin (9 gallons) and no pipe cleaning is needed. Generally any beer variability or quality is in the hands of the brewery. It does, however, mean that anyone mean that anyone wanting a head on their glass of beer is disappointed. Further

improvements in the bar seating area are underway but will encompass the retention of the local country pub.

The Fox in Sandford-on-Thames is now being run by Brian and Kelley Spacey. This plain two-room establishment, perhaps, has more of the feel of a traditional pub than any other around Oxford. Although it is soon to have much-needed redecoration, Brian and Kelley intend to retain the style and feel of the pub and keep its local beer drinking clientele. It is an Admiral Taverns house and the beers are Theakston Bitter, Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter and Adnam's Broadside.

The Bear in Alfred Street has long been known to be owned by Fullers although operated by Mitchell & Butlers. Now, however, Fullers have moved in properly and are selling their own beers there. In January they had London Pride, Chiswick, ESB and Gales HSB with Brakspear's Bitter as a guest. They have put in a new landlord who has changed the menu using more fresh rather than pre-prepared food and has gone with upmarket with snacks including Piper's crisps.

The Holly Bush in Osney Island, a Greene King pub,

is desperately trying to branch out to offer our customers a wider choice of cask ales. The current tenants, Ricky and Kate, have been in place a year have regularly feeding back to GK the fact that Oxford is saturated with GK beers and therefore needs to offer something a bit more as far as real ales go. As a protest, they REFUSE to sell IPA in the pub, something which Greene King are not terribly happy with, but instead offer whatever monthly limited period ales that they have to offer. Being a wet tied tenancy, it's very difficult for them and they hugely need the support of real ale drinkers in order to reinforce their argument to GK. Show them your support if you can!

Angie and Stuart Bull took over as the new landlords of the **Cricketer's Arms** freehouse, Littleworth (Wheatley) in November last year. After assessing demand they introduced Real Ale sourcing their staple session beer, Hook Norton Hooky Bitter, direct from the brewer and having a weekly guest ale. So far this year customers have been able to sample guest beers from Batemans, Hook Norton, Adnams and Brakspear. They have also started serving snacks every day during opening hours (until 9pm), are now serving a selection of wine by the glass and have

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introduced a calendar of events, which continued with the 1st Littleworth Sausage festival on 16th February. The event was heralded as a great success. The Lincolnshire sausages (brought down fresh that day from Cherry Willingham in Lincolnshire) were a firm favourite. The real ales also went well, the event being supported by Oxford CAMRA members, who seemed to enjoy the free quiz that came with every meal sold. A "King and Queen of Sausages" was crowned to mark the occasion and establish it as an annual event, we hope!

The **Cock and Camel** on George Street, Oxford, has been gutted, intentionally. Young's have sold it to Jamie Oliver to make one of a chain of 'neighbourhood' restaurants imaginatively called *Jamie's Italian*, planning to offer high quality authentic Italian food at an affordable price. Due to open mid-May.

The **Copa**, also on George Street, has reopened after a minor refurbishment. It's had a repaint, as has **The George** next door, and the pumps have changed but not much else.

The **Exeter Hall** in Cowley remains shut. The former manager, Al De Boss, had refused to pay the fine imposed by the Performing Rights Society and so the PRS had her declared bankrupt in January. Punch Taverns aim to reopen the pub in March with new management.

The landlord of the Red Lion in Old Marston has bought the **Chequers Inn** in Headington Quarry but the owner of the **Friar**, in Marston, has applied for planning permission to develop the site as shops and a cafe/wine bar.

what's on



Matt Bullock

Meetings and events are relaxed and friendly. Members and non-members are welcome at all events.

Wednesday 5 March

7.30pm

Branch Meeting

Wychwood Brewery tasting room - 6.30 for a quick tour of the brewery. Review of beer scoring and GBG selection mechanism. Bookings being taken for the Black Country Trip (see below)

Friday 21 March, from 7.00pm

Social

Far from the Madding Crowd Beer Festival, Friars Entry, Oxford

Friday 28 March from 7.30pm

Social

Kings Arms Beer Festival, The Moors, Kidlington

Monday 7 April

7.30pm

Branch Meeting

The Talbot, Eynsham (on 100 bus route by Swinford Toll Bridge)

Tuesday 6 May

7.30pm

Branch Meeting

The Brewery Tap, Abingdon.

Friday 9 May

from 7.00pm

Social

Banbury Beer Festival, TA Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury, OX16 9AN

Saturday 31 May

All day trip

The Black Country

A minibus trip (16 seats max) for our annual day out to the Black Country, featuring some old favourites and some new pubs not easily accessible by public transport.

Bookings will be taken from the next branch meeting (5 March) onwards, on a first come, first served basis - a £10 deposit will be taken to reserve a seat. Estimated cost around £12-14 dependent upon filling the bus, which compares favourably with the train/bus around £24.

Wednesday 4 June

7.30pm

Branch Meeting

Possible location is the Original Swan, Cowley. TBC

There will be another minibus trip in August/September to the Cotswolds, visiting several Donnington pubs, a few free houses and possibly a brewery. Bookings for this trip will be taken at the June meeting and, again, a deposit will be required.

happy birthday old bog!

David Hill

This February was the third birthday of Oxford's only brewery. The Old Bog brewery is in an outbuilding, a former toilet in fact, behind the Masons Arms in Headington Quarry, a local CAMRA award winning pub run by brothers Chris and Matt Meeson.

The brewery plant came from the Bitter End microbrewery in Cockermouth, Cumbria, which up-sized in 2004. Andy Meeson, a third brother, saw their old kit on eBay, fancied it, and put in a bid.

When his bid won he thought he might as well start brewing. So he began in February 2005 and he seemed to have the knack as his first brews were pretty good. Three years later the brews are still pretty good.



It is a one-barrel plant which means each brew produces four nine-gallon firkins. As Andy can only brew at weekends and can only do one brew per weekend, four firkins per week is the maximum output. Most of the product is sold at the Masons, which usually has an Old Bog beer on at weekends. The brewery concentrates on quality rather than quantity, but there is variety with a number of regularly appearing beers like Quarry Gold and Wheat Beer and the regular appearance of new beers and one-offs. My favourite is still the Munt's Pit which hasn't appeared for at least a year.

So get on up to the Masons and have some really good beer you are unlikely to get anywhere else. But don't worry too much if there's no Old Bog beer on as you will still be in a great pub with great beer.

For a bit more information on the pub and brewery, they have a web site:

www.masonsquarry.co.uk/

It may tell you if an Old Bog beer is likely to be available.

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Vale of the White Horse

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"did you know...?"

1. C: 2000 grains of barley are needed. It is interesting to note that the amount of carbon dioxide liberated during fermentation is about one quarter of that absorbed from the atmosphere by photosynthesis of the growing grain. So drinking beer is saving the earth!

2. None of them
Milk shake is 284 cals,
Sparkling Wine 131 cals,
Cola/Soft Drink is 136 cals,
Gin and Tonic is 121 cals.
Beer is 110 cals – it's the crisps, nuts and kebabs that add calories!

3. C: The brewery provided money to build the Nials Bohr institute which challenged Einstein's Theory and subsequently has shown the structure of the atom.

4. B: An Irish Pint is 446 mls.
An Imperial Pint is 568 mls.

5. A: Believe it or not, chicken is part of the recipe! Wait for a later edition of the Oxford Drinker for the complete recipe.

6. B: Edouard Manet (1832-1883) painted "The bar at the Folies Bergere" which depicts atleast two bottles of Bass.

7. C: The Red Lion. The previous edition of the Drinker had it down as the Mason's so this is by way of a correction. The Bull in Aston closed many years ago and is recognised by Bull Street.

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