

Issue 81  
December 2013 - January 2014

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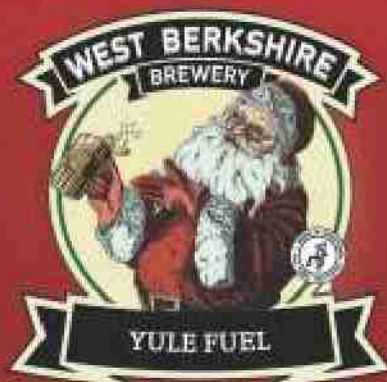
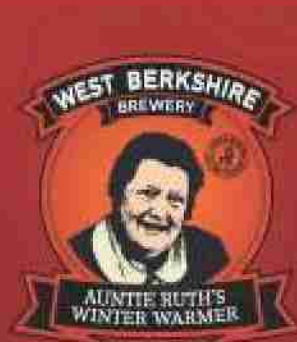
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5000 copies are distributed free of charge to pubs across the two branches' area, including Oxford, Abingdon, Witney, Faringdon, Eynsham, Kidlington, Bampton, Wheatley and Wantage and most of the villages in between.

This newsletter is also available to download in pdf format from our website: [oxfordcamra.org.uk/drinker](http://oxfordcamra.org.uk/drinker)

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Valuable contributions have been received for this issue from Richard Quersait, Dick Bosley, Harry Hudson, Steven Green, Neil Crook, and all those who have provided pub news.

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

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of Oxford or White Horse Branches of CAMRA, or of CAMRA Limited.

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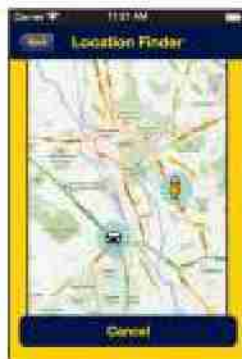
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# Welcome

...who goes to the pub these days?

**THE ANSWER** might seem obvious – all sorts. But it's worth taking a couple of minutes to consider this, as understanding the pub customer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is vital not only to real ale and the licensed trade, but to the communities which have – or maybe no longer have – a pub at their heart.

If we look first at real ale, then the customer base is much wider than you might expect with increasing numbers of young people and ladies taking each other to cask and enjoying every minute of it. But while you may see many young people at beer festivals, they tend to be particular about where they drink and some traditional pubs just don't appeal. See elsewhere in this issue for the views of CAMRA's Young Member Marketing group, and how people aged 18-30 could be playing a bigger role in the Oxford branch.

So while many young people might be keen on real ale but not old-fashioned pubs, who are the core clientele for many of our hostelrys? Gastro-pubs certainly attract many

customers even in hard economic times, and there are many examples around Oxford with more certainly to come. But according to one big brewer, Marston's, families are now a core market – something which will resonate with Greene King which operates the Hungry Horse family pub brand.

In November Marston's announced that it had sold over 200 of its 2,000-plus pubs to New River Retail, the UK's fourth largest owner/manager of shopping centres. Marston's will continue to manage these pubs for five years, and is spending the £90 million proceeds on building more high turnover pub-restaurants. It aims to "reduce its exposure to smaller wet-led pubs" – in other words, traditional pubs concentrating on drinks rather than food.

That may come as no surprise, but it's increasingly clear that traditional pubs will play a smaller and smaller role for many large brewers. Some pubs will always find the right balance between "wet" and "dry" sales and achieve a good mix of customers, but an

increasing number of traditional pubs could be free houses in future – especially if the Government legislates to weaken the power of the big pub owning companies, as CAMRA is pressing it to do.

In the meantime the number of independent brewers continues to increase, as the first of a series of features on local breweries in this issue confirms. It's time for CAMRA members to vote for their Champion Beer of Britain, with nominations open until 31 December at [www.cbobvoting.org.uk](http://www.cbobvoting.org.uk). Also check out our national pubs database, Whatpub ([whatpub.com](http://whatpub.com)).

News of pubs, breweries and beer festivals is always welcome here at the Oxford Drinker, as are ideas for longer articles. Use the contact details provided on page 3, with the deadline for the February/March edition being 17 January. Oh, and watch this space – the Oxford Drinker might be making the news soon, as well as reporting it.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**



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## Keeping in touch with Oxford Branch:

Get all the latest news and events, and share information about what's happening in your area. Sign up to our e-mail list at [www.oxfordcamra.org.uk/mailling-lists](http://www.oxfordcamra.org.uk/mailling-lists)

To receive copies of the *Oxford Drinker* by post, please send A5 sized, self addressed envelopes with postage to cover 100g letter to: **Oxford Drinker, 55 Gainsborough Green, Abingdon OX14 5JL** and we will send you as many issues as you send envelopes.





# Six of the Best

## City Pub of the Year 2013

Voting for Oxford CAMRA's City Pub of the Year has now finished and the winner will be announced in the next issue. **Dave Richardson** visits each of the six finalists

**LEFT:** Steve Edwards  
at the Chequers  
**RIGHT:** Liam  
McWhirter at Prince  
of Wales



**LEFT:** Martin Siggery  
(left) and Andy  
Carveth at Lamb &  
Flag  
**RIGHT:** Deborah Hall  
at Rose & Crown



**LEFT:** Chris Meeson  
at the Masons Arms  
**RIGHT:** Josh Shortt  
and Alex Mzuhali at  
White Hart





## Chequers Oxford

130a High Street, Oxford  
OX1 4DH  
01865 727463

One of three Nicholson's pubs in Oxford – the others being the Crown and Eagle & Child – the Chequers is easily missed if you don't know where to look. But venture down a narrow passage off the High Street, close to Carfax, and you will find an ancient split-level pub with a very strong focus on real ale.

The three permanent brews are Nicholson's Pale Ale, Brakspears Bitter and Doom Bar, but there are six more hand pumps dispensing between 12 and 15 guest beers every week. On offer during my

visit were Mordue Brewery's IPA, Yasisi Black Lager, Milestone's Olde English Ale, Westoe's IPA, Nicholson's Porter and Gadd's Rye Pale Ale. There's yet more for the cider lover, with Thistly Cross on hand pump and Hogan's Picher's Passion and Explorer in boxes.

The Chequers is true to Nicholson's principles, not only sourcing a wide range of guest ales but also brewing its own. Cask master Will Lusted has been to Brains brewery in Cardiff recently to brew a Christmas ale, while other Nicholson's pubs may sell Christmas ales from Adnams or Harviestoun. Another seasonal drink that might appeal is Brewski, a warming mixture of Nicholson's Pale, Monkey Shoulder whisky and ginger beer.

Manager Steve Edwards says parts of the pub are over 500 years old, and it may be haunted. A tunnel behind the fireplace leads under the High Street to the Mitre pub and restaurant, and was used by monks trying to escape during King Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. Some were said to be buried alive in this tunnel..... but on a more cheerful note, the Chequers oozes atmosphere with many nooks and crannies, a carved ceiling, the crests of many Oxford colleges, and a courtyard for sunny weather. It started life as a pub used by money lenders who put their cash on a chequers board.

Watch out for autumn and spring beer festivals, and sign up for the Nicholson's Cask Ale Club to receive discounts.

## Lamb & Flag Oxford

12 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3JU  
01865 545787

With five regular ales and two guests, this popular old pub has always been near the top of the list for Oxford ale drinkers. A free house owned by St John's College – which owns much of the land around here – the pub takes its name from the lamb as a symbol of St John the Baptist, carrying a flag with the cross of St George.

Five regular and two guest ales can be sampled here, the regulars including Palmer's Best Bitter, Shepherd Neame's Spitfire, Theakston's Old



Peculier, Skinner's Betty Stoggs and Lamb & Flag Gold (also by Palmer's). The guest beers during my visit were White Park's Nightjar Bedfordshire Porter, and – at a tasty 7% – Slater's Mad Jaffa, from a range of about four guest beers served every week. Crossman's Sweet Spot cider is also available on draught, and it stocks many Belgian bottled

beers. Although no CAMRA discount is offered, it claims to be cheaper than many pubs with guest ales from £2.80 a pint.

The Lamb & Flag is a large yet cosy hostelry with stone or wooden floors, dating from medieval times with more recent additions up to Georgian times. No music or entertainment is on offer, so it's a great place to chat in its many quiet corners.

Manager Martin Siggery says: "Real ale isn't new for us, but people are looking for more choice and cider is becoming more important too. The ambience has been the same for years with a third of our customers being regulars, a third students and a third tourists. Conversation ranges from the everyday to stuff not many people understand."





## Masons Arms Headington

2 Quarry School Place,  
Headington, Oxford OX3 8LH  
01865 764579

Rather out of the way if you don't know it but essential to visit for lovers of ale and traditional pubs, the Mason's in Headington Quarry could be described using Banks's old catchphrase – "totally unspoiled by progress". TV is the only "modern" form of entertainment, but if you like traditional pub games you're in for a treat as it has darts and Aunt Sally teams, and claims to be the only pub with a team in the local bar billiards association. Poker is also played here, so it might be better to keep a clear head however tempting the range of beers.

Five real ales are usually available, and during my visit these included the regulars West Berkshire's Good Old Boy and Marlow Brewery's Rebellion Mutiny. Harviestoun Bitter and Twisted has been a regular for years, but landlord Chris Meeson decided recently to offer it no longer. Dark Star's Hophead is the new regular, while "guest" ales on this occasion were Cavalier from Two Cocks Brewery near Newbury, and Tring Brewery's Moongazer. Sheppy's cider is also on hand pump.

The Mason's also has its own brewery on site, the Old Bog, but as production is limited, these beers are usually available only at weekends. Quarry Gold, Blonde and Bitter, Monstrous Mild, Half Wit and Dancing Morris are its brands. Chris's brother Andrew does the

brewing and there is some possibility of expanding production, time allowing.

Chris has run the pub for over 16 years, always as a free house. "I've seen some amazing changes in that time, and the choice of real ale in Headington alone must be ten times what it was back then," he says. "We are an old traditional locals' pub, a pub like pubs used to be, and we don't get side-tracked by food. I choose beers with the benefit of many years' experience, and I listen to my customers some of whom travel all over Britain to taste beer."

The Mason's runs the very successful Headington Beer Festival every September, and the large function room where this is held is available for hire. It also has a large garden.

## Prince of Wales Iffley

73 Church Way, Iffley,  
Oxford OX4 4EF  
01865 778554

Iffley village on the edge of Oxford is a pleasant place for a stroll on a summer's day, and the Prince of Wales is very much at the heart of it and a true community focused pub. It's only a five-minute walk from Iffley Lock on the River Thames and it has a large



garden, but it is well worth seeking out at any time of year for its cosy atmosphere, good ales and tasty home-made food.

The Prince of Wales is a Wadworth house and usually has three of its ales on tap – Henry's IPA (3.6%), 6X (4.3%)

and Bishop's Tipple (5%). Guest beers are also supplied by Wadworth and this time these were Wychwood's Hobgoblin and Young's Winter Warmer. The ales are dispensed from very unusual "hammer head" hand pumps, while a range of whiskies and other spirits is hung above the bar. A "real coffee" machine and no fewer than 55 varieties of tea are available for those who prefer a hot drink.

Originally a bakery, it became a pub in 1883 and provides a traditional pub atmosphere despite the importance of food. Books, magazines and board games are available, with a daily newspaper being available to order for pub regulars to save a longish trip to a newsagent. Aunt Sally, darts and crib teams are based here and the pub's blackboard announces a series of special events.





## Rose & Crown Walton Manor

14 North Parade Avenue,  
Oxford OX2 6LX  
01865 510551



If ever you go in a pub in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but feel you're back in the 19<sup>th</sup>, this is it. The Rose & Crown in charming north Oxford is an absolute gem of a two-roomed cottage-style pub, run by Andrew and Deborah Hall for 31 years, the last few years as

a free house. Three regular ales and one guest are on hand pump, the guest on this occasion being Dark Star's Partridge Best. Two of the regulars are local – Old Hooky from Hook Norton and Scholar by Shotover Brewery, with Adnams' Southwold Bitter also being a fixture.

The couple's son, Adam, buys the beers – and other local breweries including Vale Brewery, Oxfordshire Ales, Loose Cannon and Compass are regularly featured. Seasonal beers are also available, and there is a wide choice of Belgian bottled beers.

"This was a very basic Halls tenancy when we arrived, and we have grown old with it," says Deborah with a smile. "Change has been gradual, adding the courtyard on what was a piece of grass which adds a lot of

seating capacity year-round. Food has also been introduced, but in some ways the pub is now more traditional than it was in the 1980s. We have got rid of things like the vinyl floor and washable wallpaper – we have re-traditionalised it. But the nicotine coloured ceiling at the entrance has stayed the same!"

Andrew is a keen Rugby fan and this and other sports are featured on the walls. There is no TV, music or slot machines, but jars of pickled eggs, wooden chairs and benches, and a great environment for a quiet chat with friends. Deborah adds that it's the kind of place where a lady can come in and feel comfortable alone – everyone is made to feel welcome. A CAMRA discount of 20p per pint is offered from Sundays to Thursdays.

## White Hart Headington

12 St Andrew's Road,  
Headington, Oxford OX3 9DL  
01865 761737



This hostelry in the rather genteel back streets of Headington is a finalist for the first time in the Oxford Pub of the Year competition, and is well worth seeking out if you take Old High Street north from London road, and then a left turn. Unusually for Oxford this is an Everards house, with the Leicestershire brewer also now owning the Black Boy gastro-

pub just around the corner.

The White Hart is very traditional in style, with three ales from Everards and two guests. Tiger and Sunchaser Blonde are usually available from Everards, and Regimental IPA was also on. Guests on this occasion were Butcombe Bitter and White Horse's Village Idiot. Father Mike's Dark Rich Ruby,

from Everards-owned Brunswick Brewery in Derby, is expected shortly.

The pub is a very old listed building which was previously part of a church, and then became a brothel! A poem on the wall, The Alehouse of Joan of Headington, is worth reading and dates from 1712. It attracts an eclectic mix of regulars, nurses from local hospitals and students from nearby Ruskin College which relocated here a few years ago. Many special events are held, with food including Sunday roasts and the very tasty Pieminster pies.

Regular staff members Josh Shortt and Alex Mzuhalu are very excited about being shortlisted, and with some regulars are hiring a minibus to check out the competition. Be sure to pay them a visit.



# Pub News

## Abingdon

**CROWN & THISTLE:** The hotel and bar reopened in late November after a substantial refurbishment. We hope to have more news next issue.

## Bampton

**HORSESHOE:** A new landlord, previously at the Lord Kitchener in Curbridge, was due take over this Greene King house in late November following the death of the previous tenant, Alan Clarke, in September. The new landlord at the Lord Kitchener hails from the George & Dragon at Long Hanborough.

## Oxford

**ANCHOR, HAYFIELD ROAD:** This Wadworth house in North Oxford re-opened in November under the management of Julian Rosser, who runs cocktail bars the Duke of Cambridge in Little Clarendon Street and The House in Blue Boar Street. Julian will also re-open the Crown in Woodstock in early 2014. The Anchor has had a major refit as it aims to re-establish its reputation as a gastro pub selling real ales. It has a range of Wadworth ale on hand pumps including 6X, Henry's IPA and Bishop's Tipple.

**CHESTER ARMS:** Re-opening of the former Chester Arms off Iffley Road has been postponed until February as structural work continues, including a new kitchen and toilet block. It aims to be a community focused pub with a strong focus on real ale and may even brew its own beer with the help of Compass.

**FAIRVIEW:** The long drawn out saga over the future of this pub on the Glebelands estate, Headington, was drawing to a conclusion as we closed for press. Put up for sale by Enterprise Inns earlier in 2012, it was subject to interest from housing developers and a failed attempt at a community buy-out. Latest indications are that it has been sold to a local businessman and will close temporarily in December, but it will re-open as a pub. However, landlord Glyn Millard was likely to leave after running the pub for nearly 30 years.



**HONEYPOT:** Cat Delany (above) took over this Admiral Taverns pub in October, having previously run a pub in New Zealand. There are currently two real ales, Sharp's Doom Bar and Hook Norton Old Hooky, but Cat plans to increase the range, including local beers and others from Admirals supply deals with SIBA members. Trade is on the up; food will be introduced soon, and Cat plans a number of events, including a quiz which takes

place early on Sunday evening. The Honeypot is open all day, every day from 12 noon.

**MAD HATTER:** The former Cricketers Arms on Iffley Road has re-opened as a themed cocktail bar holding 'tea parties' and other events.

**PERCH:** This popular riverside pub in Binsey village, off Botley Road, has been taken over by John Ellse who runs the Portabello restaurant and Mamma Mia pizzeria in Summertown. The 300-year-old thatched building and free house will have a make-over and new menus.

**STAR:** This free house in Rectory Road, East Oxford has a much improved range of ales which now includes two from Compass (Isis Pale on a recent visit) and a guest beer, which was Robinson's Trooper.

**WHITE HART, WOLVERCOTE:** The landlords of this free house, Jon and Ann Antoni, are likely to be moving on shortly as a community association continues negotiations to acquire the lease from a local businessman who owns the property. It became a free house in September 2012 having been owned by Punch Taverns, and has a strong focus on real ale including two regular beers from Ramsbury Brewery near Marlborough, Wiltshire (Kennet Valley and one other). Other more local breweries including Oxfordshire Ales are often featured.

Please send your pub and brewery news to:  
pub-news@oxfordcamra.org.uk





# Brewery News



Jon and Ann Antoni at the White Hart, Wolvercote

## Witney

**BUTCHERS ARMS:** Closed for redevelopment, it is to become an Indian restaurant.

**CHEQUERS:** Closed, and being converted from a late night venue with no real ale into a food oriented pub – hopefully with hand pumps.

**WINDRUSH INN:** Licensee Yvonne Laight has won a lifetime achievement award from Star Pubs and Bars, the Scottish & Newcastle pub company, having taken over the then ailing hostelry in 1995.

**AND FINALLY....** Congratulations to North Oxfordshire CAMRA branch chairman John Bellinger, who has gone back into the pubs business as licensee of the Pear Tree in Hook Norton after a spell working as a bus driver. The pub is Hook Norton's brewery tap and continues John's long association with the brand, with whom he has won many cellar and other awards since becoming tenant of the Bell Inn in Adderbury in 2005. John's "Life Behind Bars" started at the Halls pub the Gloucester Arms, Oxford way back in 1972, but we think we can regard his return to the pubs trade as a release, not an incarceration....

**WEST BERKSHIRE:** West Berkshire Brewery has launched the Good Old Boys' Club, named after its best-selling beer. Annual membership costs £55 for which you receive £130 worth of benefits including a 10% discount on all beers bought in the brewery shop or online; a polo shirt, branded glass and bottle of the beer, and quarterly brewery tours where you can enjoy three free pints, meet the brewer and taste beers brewed especially for club members. You can also take a guest along free during these tours, and you'll get a monthly e-newsletter.

The first members' evening was held in November with about 30 people in attendance, and advance tastings of seasonal specials including Auntie Ruth's Winter Warmer and Yule Fuel. Brewery founder Dave Maggs, who set it up in 1995, also ran an intriguing "spot the hops" tasting competition.

Good Old Boy is regularly available at several pubs in our branch area, including the Mason's Arms in Headington, the Brewery Tap in Abingdon and the Cricketers Arms in Littleworth. More pub outlets are being sought around Eynsham and Witney, and West Berkshire

brews house ales for the Royal Oak in Wantage. Dr Hexter's Wedding Ale was originally brewed for Paul Hexter, landlord of the Royal Oak, and is now permanently available.

Head brewer Will Twomey says: "Our beers are traditional in style, full flavoured and using only English ingredients, including barley from Norfolk. We used to use American hops but as this market is saturated, we now only use English hops which have had a very good year. But because we don't use ingredients such as passion fruit or citrus, some drinkers don't consider they are exciting."

Eight core beers are produced, plus monthly specials, and all bottled beers are available online ([www.wbbrew.com](http://www.wbbrew.com)) and at the brewery shop at Yattendon, near Newbury, where tours cost £12.50. Yattendon isn't the easiest place to find, the brewery being on a working farm, but I can assure you it's well worth a visit!

**LOOSE CANNON:** The Abingdon brewery picked up three awards at the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) regional beer competition: Gunners Gold (Gold - Standard Bitters), Abingdon Bridge (Gold - Best Bitters) and Bombshell (Bronze - Bottled Gold Beers). Congratulations!

**FISHER & CO:** The Fisher brewery at Noke, Otmoor – which started only in 2012 – hopes to increase production, including a limited bottling facility, in the New Year. Its beers are generally only available at the James Street Tavern in Oxford and the Rock of Gibraltar at Enslow Bridge.





# Seeing Red

Wetherspoon's new pub in Abingdon, The Narrows, is themed around the Post Office that formerly occupied this site - as Dave Richardson discovers

**BEING CAUGHT** short before even ordering a pint, I scampered upstairs at The Narrows to find the bright red door I'd heard about that leads to the Gents. But I wasn't prepared for what I found inside - bright, Post Office Red urinals with pictures of telephone boxes behind. It felt almost like p'ssing on the Post Office, but some would say that's exactly what the Government has done by selling off such a great institution on the cheap.

This modest looking building, on the High Street, ceased to be a Post Office in January 2009. Away from public view it also housed a large telephone exchange, and although it looks small from the outside, the new pub is enormous with over 160 seats and a capacity for fire safety reasons of 624 people. It is called The Narrows as this stretch of the High Street was so named until destroyed by fire in 1883, but the name is also very relevant today as it has a narrow frontage but goes back a very long way.

The Post Office theme can be found throughout, from the genuine old telephone box (currently occupied by a Christmas tree) to the artwork made from telephone wire. Pictures on the wall towards the rear tell about the history of the site and some of the characters of Abingdon, making it popular with the older clientele who were here in abundance when I visited one lunchtime. The Narrows is set to become a major meeting point due to its central location, plentiful seating and keen prices, Wetherspoons having spent £1.25 million on developing it while creating 69 jobs.

And as for the real ales, as in all Wetherspoons pubs, they are many and varied. Ten hand pumps are available and all or most should be dispensing at weekends, with rather fewer being on midweek. Always available are Ruddles and Greene King's Abbot, with the rest chosen from a range of about 40 made available to all Wetherspoons pubs nationwide,

about 20 of which are offered permanently and a similar number which vary each month.

On this occasion the beers included White Horse's Blowing Stone and Black Beauty; Banks and Taylor's Golden Fox; Milk Street's ZigZag, from Frome in Somerset; Whale Ale; Pundie from Inverlaldmond Brewery in Perth, Scotland; Hooky; and an American interloper - Jack D'Or from the Pretty Things brewery in Somerville, Massachusetts - one from Wetherspoons' American Craft Beer Showcase.

I enjoyed my pint of Black Beauty while chatting to Becky Schwartz, manager of The Narrows, who was most recently manager of the Falcon in High Wycombe. The main thing CAMRA members will want to know about Becky is her pedigree in choosing real ale, and that is impeccable. She succeeded in getting the Falcon into the 2014 Good Beer Guide, and regularly hosted "meet the brewer" evenings and customer trips to local breweries. She'll





be doing the same in Abingdon – and who's to say we won't see The Narrows in a future edition of the GBG?

"I choose beers from seven or eight local breweries after requests from customers, including a monthly special," she says. "I may order from random or I may take suggestions from CAMRA members, and there is usually a wide range of regional ales that I can choose from. We serve about 2,000 pints of real ale a week, and I like real ale because it brings the local community together to support local breweries."

Opening of such a major new competitor is bound to have an effect not only on other pubs in Abingdon, but also on cafes and restaurants. But as we reported in the last issue, some publicans in Witney (where Wetherspoons opened in 2012) have welcomed the pub chain as bringing new people, especially real ale drinkers, into the town. Becky comments:

"We will hit some pubs, but a lot of them have hard-core regulars."

Menus are the same throughout the country, and – like the real ale mostly costing £2.29 a pint but £1.99 for Ruddles – the food is great value. You can have a burger with a pint of Ruddles for £6.89, two meals for £6.99, a traditional breakfast for £3.29 (867 calories) and a large breakfast for £4.60 (1,463 calories!) Some of the calorie counts make you stop and think, but at least Wetherspoons has the courage to print them.

And the loos? Truly they are quite an experience, and I'm now looking for a female volunteer to tell me what theirs are like!

*The Narrows is open from 8am-midnight Sundays to Thursdays, and 8am-1am on Fridays and Saturdays. Children accompanied by adults are welcome up until 8pm, but a licensing condition is that if the adult drinks alcohol, both adult and child (not babies or toddlers) must order meals.*

## Oxford Branch Diary

### Monday 6 January Branch Meeting

Butchers Arms, Headington

Pre-meeting socials as follows:

18.30 Britannia, London Road

19.30 Butchers Arms

Our first meeting of the year where we shortlist pubs for the Good Beer Guide 2015.

### Saturday 25 January Minibus Survey Trip

Departs Stratton Way, Abingdon, at 11.00 am and the Lamb & Flag, St Giles, Oxford, at 11.30 am. Call Tony 07588 181313 to book a seat. Itinerary to be confirmed.

### Oxford Branch Contacts:

#### Chairman

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#### Secretary

Steve Lawrence  
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#### Vice-Chair and Chairman of the Pubs Group

Dennis Brown  
vice-chair@oxfordcamra.org.uk



# On the write track

North Oxfordshire CAMRA hosted a Beer Writers' Day at Hook Norton Brewery. The Oxford Drinker's Editor **Dave Richardson** went along.

**WHAT** makes a good beer writer? The ability to hold a pen, a notebook and a drink at the same time, you might say, but there's more to it than that. That's why CAMRA's North Oxfordshire branch held a Beer Writers' Day at Hook Norton Brewery in November, and examples of what members came up with can be found below.

As a journalist for 40 years myself, I would say the same qualities are needed when writing about beer and pubs as in any other branch of journalism. You need an eye for detail, an insight into human nature, a way with words and a sociable outlook on life. I can almost hear you spluttering into your beer as I write this, but you also need to be scrupulously fair, honest and respectful of people's right not to be in the media if they so wish – unless it is in the public interest, which is hardly likely when writing about beer and pubs. The long drawn out trial at the Old Bailey of tabloid journalists accused of hacking phones may persuade you otherwise, but the vast majority of journalists in all fields hold to these principles –

even though meddling proprietors, the political bias of their editors, and financial expediency sometimes put that fairness at risk.

When it comes to writing about beer and pubs in CAMRA publications, most writers are of course not only amateur journalists, but also unpaid volunteers. The same principles apply, however, and at the workshop participants learned a lot. Guest speakers were *What's Brewing* editor Tom Stainer, who spoke about "Finding and Writing News Stories", and Tim Hampson, who gave "Tips for Writing Feature Articles". Branch Chairman John Bellinger, who had the idea to run the workshop, covered the topics of libel, copyright and the use of photographs. After discussing what was news, where to find it and how to write it, the delegates went out in groups to search for interesting newsworthy stories in local pubs, before returning to write them up under the critical eye of the experts.

John said, "I've had some really positive feedback from all who

attended. Our guests, who earn their living writing about beer and pubs, added a real professionalism to the day, and the knowledge gained by those who attended will help to further enhance the quality of our branch magazine *Beer on Tap*."

There are of course some perks to writing about beer, as the day was rounded off by a tutored tasting in the Hook Norton Brewery Visitor Centre, followed by supper at the Gate Hangs High pub as guests of Hook Norton managing director and head brewer James Clarke, the great-great-grandson of brewery founder John Harris.

Fancy having a go yourself? I'm always looking for news about beer and pubs in our branch area, so why not find a story yourself and send it to me ([editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk)) – I will publish the best stories in the next edition. When looking for news, just ask yourself the five "W"s – who, where, when, what and why – and how? Read on to see what we produced that day, and the sort of thing we're looking for.

**DAVE RICHARDSON**





**Group one visited the Norman Knight pub and Patriot Brewery, just over the county border in Whichford, Warwickshire:**

The Patriot Brewery is to reopen having been mothballed for about three months, but landlord/brewer Tim Young has warned that production will be limited. Tim will start with an ale for the Christmas season called Bah Hum Pug, named for his two pug dogs, Winston and Clementine. The temporary closure was due to him having to man the kitchen, following a management reorganisation. Assistant brewer, Matt Findlay, injured his back six months ago so could be of little help. However, ex-chef Jean-Michel has returned to the kitchen, so Tim is now able to start brewing again.

Tim explained that due to time limitations and intense price competition, Patriot beers are unlikely to be widely distributed. Greene King, for example, offers three firlins free with every order of 10. However, Patriot ales can be enjoyed as far away as The Cricketer's Arms, Wheatley.

The Norman Knight free house has had an on-site brewery since 1995, which was renamed Patriot when the last owner took over. Tim and partner Jane Bishop acquired the pub in 2009 and have been brewing their beers ever since. The range includes Longbow (4.2%), Missile (3.6%), Nelson (4.0%), Bulldog (4.5%) and more.

The pub's hand pumps are dispensing six ales, currently from Hook Norton and guests, and there is also a selection of European beers, plus three ciders and perries. On offer during the visit were Wye Valley, Cotswold, Black Sheep, Turpins and Whale Ale brews, plus Hooky. The pub offers CAMRA members a 20p discount on guest ales.

**Group two visited The Sun in Hook Norton:**

Great news from The Sun is that the pub now has six handpumps, with Hooky Bitter, Old Hooky and Lion as regular ales, along with the seasonal Hook Norton beer and two guests.

After dropping back to just five pumps some years ago, landlord and landlady Mick Howe and Amber Wheatley have seen such a recent increase in beer sales – of six to ten firlins of Hooky Bitter and two of Lion per week – that the sixth pump has been restored. This reflects the national trend of increased real ale sales.

This popular village pub is right at the heart of the local community, where it hosts regular live music and a monthly comedy club (which attracts comedians on the local circuit). In addition to the usual pub activities, it is the meeting place for a dance group, a literary society and even a ukulele club. Mick reports: 'The ukulele club consists of around 30 members, most of whom are keen real ale drinkers.'

Food is very popular at The Sun with a varied menu that includes Hooky sausages sourced from local butcher Trevor Beadle. The pub also offers good value accommodation which has recently seen a refurbishment of the six letting rooms.

**Group three visited The Chequers in Chipping Norton**

London brewer Fuller's latest limited edition bottled brew, Imperial Stout, is on sale at its only tied pub in the area, The Chequers. Master brewer John Keeling is recreating beers from recipes held in the brewery's archives, some of which date back more than 100 years. The third in the series is a rich, dark stout weighing in at a hefty 10.7%, and is brewed with Centennial hops and the unusual addition of rose buds. On sampling, it had the sweetness and lightness of a barley wine, with an overlay of chocolate and a lingering licorice aftertaste.

The Chequers, which was voted North Oxfordshire CAMRA's Pub of the Year earlier this year, stocks the full range of Fuller's draught and bottled ales. Landlord Jim Hopcraft said: 'I love to offer the rarer beers to my customers, and bottle-conditioned Imperial Stout is proving to be very popular. I am hoping to be able to obtain a cask of the beer in the near future.'



# Nag's Head wins Pub of the Year



**THE** Nag's Head in Abingdon has won this branch's Town and Country Pub of the Year award, beating off five other contenders including the previous holder, the Brewery Tap also in Abingdon. Congratulations to owner Dushan Salwathura, who has turned the pub around most impressively since it re-opened in November 2012 and helped secure a place in the 2014 Good Beer Guide. He is pictured (left) with branch secretary Steve Lawrence receiving the award. Thanks to Michael Sibbald for the photo.

*The pub also held its first beer festival, as Steve Lawrence and Dave Cogdell report:*

The first (probably of many) beer and cider festival was held over the first weekend in November. Individual pints were a bit pricey but all the ales could be bought via a discounted multi-beer (10 halves) ticket, which made them much more

reasonable. There were 24 beers and six ciders on the temporary chilled stillage, supplementing the eight beers on the bar. About half were dark beers, including the new Loose Cannon Porter at 4% and, at the other end of the scale, Tring's Death or Glory at 7.2%. A favourite was Bartrams' 4% Porter – Rye Last Drop, which was one of the first to sell out. Old Bog weighed in with its Half Wit at 5.5%, this being a dark wheat beer which was a bit sweet and clear! On the cider front the very pale, clear Moonshine was a front runner.

All the ales were in good condition when sampled at the well-attended branch social held on the Saturday afternoon, and if you stayed around there was also a firework display in the evening. You could also enjoy live music on the Friday and the Sunday and good food in the restaurant.

## Young's Bitter?

**ONE OF** my most vivid impressions while volunteering at the Oxford Beer Festival is the number of young people who come along to enjoy it. Oxford has an advantage of course in having so many students, but even so the number of beer festival customers in their Twenties or younger – both men and women – is impressive.

Young people are quaffing real ale and cider not only at festivals, but at pubs up and down the country. Local publicans tell me that more young people are trying and sticking with real ale as the trendy "new" drink of today. CAMRA has marked the trend by setting up the Young Member Marketing group, as 11% of its 156,000 members are now aged 18-30. Opposite is an article by one of this group's members suggesting ways we could reach out to more.

Every CAMRA branch has a Young Members Contact, but that position within Oxford CAMRA is currently vacant. Would you like to get involved? Drop a line to our secretary, Steve Lawrence (contact@oxfordcamra.org.uk), who can send you a summary of the kind of person we're looking for - basically someone under 30, with a commitment to real ale, who will arrange social events, recruit more members and build on our existing links with the Oxford University and Oxford Brookes real ale societies.





# Time to be Brand Aware

**THE BRANDING** on particular beers has a huge impact on who drinks it; I see this reflected in my peers' choice of ale. My local brewery Robinsons, based in Stockport, has just produced bestselling ale Trooper endorsed by Iron Maiden, one of my personal favourites. Elbow also brought out a brew called Build a Rocket Boys to appeal to the younger market.

Real ale has increasingly become more fashionable with the help of some clever marketing, and an increasing interest in drinking something often cheaper and more varied than other bigger brand alternatives. This switch in habits is evident all over Manchester, particularly in the Northern Quarter, where the age of drinkers has noticeably decreased to people under 30. The question is how do we recruit the new emerging group of youngsters?

There has never been a better time to increase young members within CAMRA. The target audience is already interested in real ale and in turn supporting their local pubs. In order to both engage and maintain members, recruitment needs to be strategically co-ordinated. Recruitment needs to be targeted at the younger based beer festivals, for example at Didsbury where more students and young professionals reside and also at Chorlton, with a similar demographic. Potential members need to be educated



**ABOVE:** Heather's ideas about recruiting young members in Manchester are equally applicable in Oxford

about the importance of pubs and their reduction in binge drinking. It would be beneficial to improve the discounts at beer festivals to increase membership. Alongside this, bringing a non-member for free admission to the festival can help to create further interest.

Once more young members have been recruited, the dynamics of CAMRA meetings can gradually progress, with more meetings held at pubs with live music or a comedy venue. The use of Twitter and Facebook should also be increased to help young members become more active and to spread the hard work of

CAMRA. Reminding people of celebrity involvement may help recruit more young members – for example, Madonna's favourite drink was once cited as Landlords. Maybe certain celebrities can be made honorary CAMRA members to develop the brand.

Prior to becoming a young member of CAMRA, I too wondered why did I need to? Not only is it worth the fee for the Wetherspoons vouchers, but more importantly we need to sustain the amazing work that CAMRA has already done and help to maintain pubs and develop the brand. This would ensure that pubs can thrive and provide live music, comedy nights and band themed pints created just for people like you.

## HEATHER PEEL

### Author Bio: Heather Peel

*I am currently a member of the Young Member Marketing group, helping to recruit and retain more young members, vital to CAMRA's survival. I have been a CAMRA member since 2010, after seeing the hard work of CAMRA and how active changes can be made. I also feel strongly about maintaining local pubs.*

*One of my favourites is the community pub of the year, The New Oxford in Salford, which does an excellent pint of Chocolate and Vanilla stout from Titanic brewery.*



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# Beer Festival Diary

Further details of festivals in the area can be found on the Oxford CAMRA website [www.oxfordcamra.org.uk/festivals.php](http://www.oxfordcamra.org.uk/festivals.php)

**Friday 29 November -  
Wednesday 18  
December**

**Grapes Beer Festival**

7 George Street, Oxford OX1 2AT  
01865 793380

**Tuesday 10 - Saturday  
14 December**

**Winter Beer Festival**

Far from the Madding Crowd,  
Friars Entry, Oxford  
01865 240900  
[www.maddingcrowd.co.uk](http://www.maddingcrowd.co.uk)

**Saturday 14 December**  
**Haddenham Winterfest**

Village Hall Complex, Banks  
Road, Haddenham, nr Thame

24 beers plus cider  
[www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk](http://www.haddenham-beer-festival.co.uk) (open noon - 5pm)

**Friday 24 - Sunday 26  
January**

**Rose & Crown Beer Festival**

Market Street, Charlbury  
20 beers plus cider & perry  
01608 810103  
[roseandcrown.charlbury.com](http://roseandcrown.charlbury.com)

**Thursday 20 - Saturday  
22 February**

**CAMRA National Winter**

**Ales Festival**

The Roundhouse, Roundhouse  
Road, Pride Park, Derby  
Note new venue.

Includes 'Champion Winter Beer  
of Britain Competition'  
350+ beers, ciders & perries  
[www.nwaf.org.uk](http://www.nwaf.org.uk)

**Friday 21 - Sunday 23  
February**

**Littleworth Annual Original**

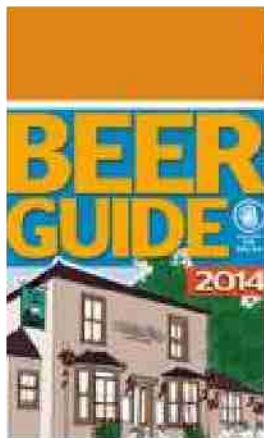
**Beer & Sausage Festival**

Cricketers Arms, Littleworth,  
01865 872738  
[www.cricketers-arms.co.uk](http://www.cricketers-arms.co.uk)

**Friday 28 February -  
Saturday 1 March**

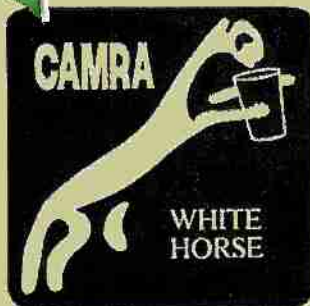
**Merton Beer Festival**

Merton Village Hall, Islip Road,  
Merton, nr Bicester  
20+ beers, ciders & perries



## THE MASON'S ARMS





White Horse Branch Contact

Neil Crook

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www.whitehorsecamra.org.uk

## Branch Diary

### Friday 13 December Christmas Pub Social

#### Wantage

Meet at 6pm at the  
Royal Oak

The Royal Oak is a traditional town pub located 5 minutes walk from the town's market place. Here you will find the ideal combination of a superb range of perfectly kept ales and an extremely friendly environment. Then from 8pm at the Shoulder of Mutton.

Every day is a beer festival at the Shoulder of Mutton. They have ten handpumps pouring real ales in perfect condition from a selection of breweries.

## Not much Wasted at Wantage

The Wantage Beer Festival was again a success. The sixth event, held for the third year at the Civic Hall, attracted over 600 drinkers during the two days, with 96% of the 28 ales on offer being consumed. The selection was widely praised, including a range of styles and strengths, with some brews specially commissioned for the festival. Highlights included Kinver's Over the Edge, which at 7.5% was the strongest beer available; Hank by Tiny Rebel from Newport, which proved popular, as did Ramsbury's Rhubarb Stout; and Betjeman's Wantage Bells made a welcome appearance.

Neil Crook, White Horse Branch

chairman, said: "Thanks again to all the helpers who gave up their time to make the event so worthwhile. We were also pleased that so many people took the trouble to come to what is a small festival in comparison with other local events. However, it proved once again that, even in Wantage, which is blessed with the award-winning Royal Oak and Shoulder of Mutton, there is a place for our event featuring well-chosen beers and ciders. As our prime aim is spreading the word for CAMRA, we were especially delighted to sign up another 19 new members, bringing our branch membership to over 300."

## Plum Pudding

We are pleased to see that Jez and Mandy Hill have bought the old Admiral Benbow in Milton, now called the Plum Pudding, as a freehouse, plum pudding being a colloquial name for an Oxfordshire sandy and black pig. Although technically out of our area Milton can be easily reached by foot from Stevenon or by bus (X2 or X32) from

Oxford and Abingdon. Jez and Mandy managed the Cherry Tree in Stevenon for several years before moving to the Blue Boar in Aldbourne in 2007. They got both pubs into the Good Beer Guide and so hopes are high for their new venture, with beers to be sourced from local microbreweries and from the Marston's range.





# An Odd Shower go to Bath

**Dick Bosley** reports on the next stage of his Cotswold pub walk

**FOLLOWING** our first foray along the Cotswold Way (see OD 80) in the spring, a one-day stroll of 22 miles was left to fill in the Old Sodbury to Bath stretch of this lovely route. Sadly, we could not find a date in our busy schedules suitable for us all and so our old stalwart Tim missed out so that he could play with his band, Cooper Black.

After an early train to Bristol we jumped into a taxi that took us to the Dog Inn in Old Sodbury. This meant that we could set off in a light drizzle with several hours of daylight, or should I say a light gloom, before us. This stretch of the Way does not have quite the stunning views that we had seen back in May but there were still enough hills to increase the heart rate and the need for beer but, sadly, as we found before, whoever designed the Cotswold Way was not a pub goer. This meant we had walked 13 miles before we reached the Civil War battle site of Lansdown Hill.

Here we had our own minor dispute about detouring to a pub for lunch. Far be it from me to accuse Jane of taking the role of the puritan, as I'm sure

she would not want to call me a cavalier. In any case I was too tired for laughing – but after debate a short detour led us to the Blathwayt Arms overlooking the Bath racecourse. Bankers Draft from the Counter Culture brewery and Bellringer from Abbey Ales revived us for the final push. A quick gallop around the racecourse led us to a viewing point at Prospect Stile with a wonderful view across the Avon Valley before heading south-eastish towards Weston and Bath.

For some obscure reason the others entrusted me with the guide book from here, but despite this we reached Weston without getting too locationally challenged. Referring to the book I was able to inform John and Jane that the hill towards Bath was “relentless” – a fact I think we would have noticed for ourselves.

The approach to Bath from this direction led us past Royal Crescent and through The Circus, Gay Street and Queen Square before John and I were able to start looking for signs of pubs. Our first dilemma was when we realised that we were

equidistant from the Salamander and the Raven. Choosing the latter, John had the Raven Gold while I had Mudskipper from Butts.

Suitably refreshed, we started our meander towards the railway station which led us past the Hobgoblin and it would have been churlish not to call in, especially as the Trooper from Robinsons was in excellent condition. Despite these delays we had plenty of time before our train was due to check out the new Bath Ales pub, Graze. The steps up were a challenge to our weary limbs but this ultra-modern pub is well worth the effort. By now there was sufficient October sunshine to allow us to sit on the patio, which is adjacent to the station, where John tried the SPA while I couldn't resist the Platform 3 which is brewed on the premises. In fact, this 5.9% IPA was so good I tried it thrice. As we were able to hear the station announcements, little time was wasted on the platform before the train home and a couple of pints of Wadworth's Horizon in the Cherry Tree to round the day off.

**DICK BOSLEY**



# Festiv-ale success story

**Dave Richardson** looks back at the Oxford Beer and Cider Festival.

**TO QUOTE** a slogan from the now defunct News of the World, "all human life is there". That aptly describes the experience of serving the public at our beer festival, to which I might add there was also a super-human – our tireless organiser, Grahame Allen – and the occasional sub-human, like the guy warning of "a riot" after queuing to get in and then finding many of the beers were sold out.

We had about 4,100 visitors, up from 3,800 last year, meaning an average of over 1,300 a day over the three days of the festival in October. We made a healthy surplus to support CAMRA activities and have given £340 to the local Sobell House hospice charity, raised from unused beer tokens and donations received.

Organising a major event like this is a fine art but one that requires an awful lot of leg-work, especially when you consider almost everyone involved was a volunteer giving

their time for free. Grahame deserves heartfelt thanks for all his hard work, but as ex-US President Abraham Lincoln famously said, we can't please all the people all the time.

Friday evening is always the busiest time and at one point there were about 250 people queuing down St Aldates to get in. We had feared the situation could be worse as for the first time in 2013, the Town Hall insisted that two professional security people be employed on a paid basis. Their job was partly to ensure that the building's occupancy level did not exceed a safe total, but queues were no worse than on previous Fridays. Beer supplies were running low by about 9.30pm on the Friday, and some visitors were disappointed. But demand is hard to predict, and a whole row of casks had to remain unopened to quench the thirst of many more visitors expected on the Saturday.

One of the highlights for me was joining the tasting panel to judge the champion beers of the festival – which had to be LocAle-accredited, brewed within a 30-mile radius of Oxford. No fewer than 26 breweries put forward a candidate, the gold winner being Soundwave IPA (5.6%) from the new Siren Craft brewery in Finchampstead, near Reading. The silver award went to Bingham's Brickworks Bitter, and bronze to XT's Lest We Forget.

This was actually a "blind" tasting – one or two of us almost went blind in the process! – with the beers being unceremoniously poured into empty, but clean, plastic milk bottles for us to savour. The table I joined was very erudite including Matt Heritage, landlord of the Brewery Tap in Abingdon, and Loose Cannon's John Travis. The bucket on the table for left-overs (the slops all mixed together are called Editor's Ruin) spoiled the





ambience a bit, and it was definitely the first time I have washed a glass with water between different brews. There were comments including "a little bit of blackcurrant in there", "a bit of blue cheese" and "a lawnmower beer" – good for when you're very thirsty but not too discerning. I learned a lot.....

But back to the festival proper, and all that human life. This year I spent most of my time on the merchandise desk rather than dispensing some of the 140 ales and over 40 ciders and perries on offer, which meant plenty of opportunity to observe human nature as I sold top-up beer tokens and copies of the Good Beer Guide. The vast majority of customers were courteous, including quite a few handing over their fivers as if this was the last of their cash. But there's always an "Awkward Squad", like those trying to bypass the queue to get in, those wanting to pay by card for £5 worth of tokens, and a few

offended that there was no CAMRA discount on the beers.

By 6.30pm on the Friday the Town Hall was heaving as wave after relentless wave of customers arrived. There was hardly time to have a beer myself and by 9pm, with the beer starting to run low, the sub-human was predicting a riot. At times like this you do query why you put yourself on the line for CAMRA. But most customers were fine, and what struck me was their diversity. OK, there were plenty of middle-aged and older "Crusties" but also plenty of young folk – including women – and lots of students. We would like to see more young people get involved in CAMRA locally – see elsewhere in this issue. We might not be the sexiest of organisations, but with so many young people enjoying it, the future of real ale looks rosy.

Still they kept coming. Some were queuing for refunds as the beer ran low, but there were no

refunds on the festival's own beer glasses which were included in the entry package. One customer gave a whole £5 worth of tokens to the Sobell House charity box, while others stood by grimly awaiting a refund of 20p. One girl was delighted to be offered free bottled water, and we shared a laugh when I told her this was because CAMRA promotes responsible drinking! By closing time at 11pm the Town Hall was eerily empty, with long rows of casks labelled Sold Out. Forty casks remain unopened, ready for Saturday.

And what about my own beer? I didn't have much time to drink but enjoyed the odd half, including Hopcraft's Prince of Bengal, Great Heck's Citra, and Henley Brewhouse's Scull Duggery. Oh, and a third of Halfpenny's Old Lech – I am human, after all! The 2014 Oxford Beer & Cider Festival has been provisionally booked at the Town Hall from 16-18 October.



# What's Brewing LocAle-ly

In the first of a series of reviews of local breweries, **Steven Green** brings us up-to-date with the ever-growing number of breweries within a 30-mile radius of Oxford

**IF A PUB** regularly serves beer from local breweries, it can receive a Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) LocAle accreditation. The actual definition of LocAle is defined by individual CAMRA branches, and in the Oxford branch we define it as a beer being served in a pub within 30 miles as the crow flies from the brewery.

In recent years, CAMRA has seen a huge growth in the number of breweries in the UK. The Good Beer Guide 2014 lists 1,147 breweries of which 187 were new breweries that opened in the last year. This is in stark comparison to the 1974 edition which listed 108 breweries of which only five were local to Oxford (Brakspear, Morland, Morrells, Hook Norton and Arkells).

In issue 59 (December 2009) of the Oxford Drinker I reviewed most of the local breweries within 30 miles of the Oxford branch area, of which there were approximately 21. There are now over 60 breweries within 30 miles from Oxford. They cover a wide spectrum of styles from the historic Hook Norton (brewing since around 1856), Brakspear (1711) and Arkells (1843) to the new (Fisher, Siren, Bubble); the large (Wychwood) and the small (Adkins, Old Bog, Thame and

Patriot). They vary from traditional beer styles (White Horse, West Berkshire, Old Forge, Loose Cannon, Shotover, Vale) to new, interesting and unusual styles (Compass, XT/Animal, Aylesbury Brew House and Siren).

There are seven breweries within our branch area – the independents Shotover, Loose Cannon, Compass and Fisher; the national Wychwood and Brakspear; and pub brewery Old Bog, at the Mason's Arms in Headington. Two new breweries are in the process of being set up: the Bubble Brewery which is somewhere in Oxford (see <http://bubble-brewery-oxford.com>) and a pub brewery at the Cricketers Arms in Littleworth. Hopefully there will be more news about these in the next edition of the Oxford Drinker.

The Shotover Brewery started brewing in 2009 in a converted stables in Horspath. You can find their beers in local pubs including the Queen's Head in Horspath just a few hundred meters from the brewery, as well as pubs in and around Oxford such as The Bear, White Horse in Broad Street, and Prince of Wales in Shippon. There is a strong emphasis on quality with a small range of

consistently good beers. The two regular beers are Prospect (3.7%) and Scholar (4.5%). Both are copper coloured ales, with larger quantities and variety of malt than other beers of their strength, and lots of well-balanced hops combining to make the ales taste much stronger than they are. Two seasonal beers are also made: in the winter Oxford Porter (5%), which has proved to be very popular, and in the summer Trinity (4.2%), a hoppy American-style golden ale.

The Compass Brewery also started in 2009 by Swedish brewer Mattias Sjöberg. For the first few years, Mattias was using the Cotswold Brewing Company's facilities near Bourton on the Water, but last year set up its own brewery in Carterton. Compass makes unusual styles of beer often combining ideas from other countries. Regular beers include Isis Pale (4.1%); Kings Shipment (6%), a strong pale ale, dry hopped with oak chips; Baltic Night (4.8%), a black ale that uses the German decoction style of mashing to get a dry and lighter body; and Torp (7%), a Belgian style beer with lots of unusual flavour. You can sometimes find its beer in local pubs, but is also available in bottles and in restaurants such as The Big Bang in Oxford.





Following the takeover of Morland by Greene King and subsequent closure of Morland in 1999, Abingdon was left without a brewery and a limited range of beers in local pubs which had almost all become Greene King pubs (not helped by the 1998 closure of Morrells brewery in Oxford, which sold most of its pubs to Greene King in 2002). This situation improved in 2012, when the Loose Cannon Brewery was set up in Abingdon by Will Laithwaite, reviving Abingdon's brewery tradition. Regular beers are Abingdon Bridge (4.1%), an easy drinking bitter; Loose Cannon Pale (3.7%), a light coloured, delicate tasting ale; Bombshell (4.2%), a light coloured ale with plenty of hops; and Gunners Gold (3.8%), an easy drinking session ale with fruity peach flavour named after local Lancaster bomber war hero Stan Branford.

When developing a new recipe, Loose Cannon often makes several trials with variations available at the brewery shop and local pubs, inviting feedback to help perfect the recipe. Most recently Loose Cannon Indian Pale Ale (5.4%) went through five trials with a text service set up for drinkers to vote on their favourite. A Porter is now going through a similar process with the first version available in several Abingdon pubs including the Nags Head, Brewery Tap and Kings Head & Bell.

The Fisher Brewery in Noke (a few miles north-east of Oxford) started brewing in mid-2012 using equipment from the former Best Mates Brewery near Wantage. You can sample most of its beers in the James Street Tavern off the Cowley Road in Oxford. Regular beers

include Piper at the Gates of Dawn (3.9%), a light malty bitter; Vicar's Daughter (3.7%), a light, hoppy session beer; Confessor (4.4%), a well hopped golden beer; and Solicitors (4.2%), a smoky, full bodied bitter.

The Mason's Arms in Headington Quarry has been brewing its own beer since 2005 in the Old Bog Brewery, a small, one barrel brewery behind the pub. Brewer Andy Meeson only brews at the weekends and most of the beer is consumed quickly in the pub with the occasional cask going to local beer festivals. Beers include Monstrous Mild (5.6%), Quarry Gold (4.1%) and Half Wit (5.5%).

The Wychwood and Brakspear Breweries in Witney are part of the national Marston's range. Both breweries are located in the same premises sharing some of the same equipment for mashing and boiling. However, Brakspear has its own section of the brewery containing the fermenters from the original brewery in Henley-on-Thames which closed in 2002. The fermenters feature a unique double drop system where the beer is dropped into a secondary fermenter after a day separating the beer from the trub (dead yeast), resulting in a healthier fermentation. The Brakspear brand is probably Oxfordshire's oldest brewery brand (founded in 1711), and the move from Henley to Witney has kept the beers as similar as possible, using the same yeast strain and recipes. Brakspear beers can be found in many pubs in our area and include Oxford Gold (4%), a hoppy, fruity, golden ale; and Brakspear Bitter (3.4%), an easy drinking English bitter. If

you are lucky you may also find Brakspear Triple (6.7%) in bottles, so named because it is triple hopped and triple fermented.

Wychwood brewery was set up in 1983 and is located in the former Eagle Maltings in Witney, taken over by Refresh in 2002 which is part of Marstons plc, which also owns other good breweries such as Jennings and Ringwood. The brewers at Wychwood seem to be very proud of their work and you can find their beers throughout the UK with their distinctive fantasy style artwork. The most popular is Hobgoblin (4.5%), a dark, malty ale, and a bottle was famously given to US President Obama by David Cameron in 2010.

Many pubs are now making an effort to sell locally produced beer with even some of the national pub companies allowing landlords to have a guest beer from a local brewery. The Cricketers Arms in Littleworth was the first pub in our area to be given LocAle accreditation. This pub, which is consistently in the Good Beer Guide and in recent years has been our branch's Town and Country Pub of the Year, only stocks beers brewed within 36 miles of the pub. Its beer and sausage festivals usually include rare or new beers.

In the next issue I will move on to some of the local breweries outside of our branch area, including those that were winners at this year's Oxford Beer Festival LocAle champion beer competition, our winner, Siren Sound Wave (5.6%), and runners-up Bingham Brickworks Bitter (4.2%), and XT Lest We Forget (4.2%).



# Long Live Hooky Street



**HOOKNORTON** Brewery boss James Clarke hosted a beer writers' workshop in November and took the opportunity to update CAMRA members on his full range of beers – and reassure them that its new keg range in no way undermines its principles.

Two keg beers, Flagship and Double Stout, were launched early in 2013 as some pubs need a beer that lasts for longer, with sports clubs for example having limited opening and being unable to serve real ale in ideal conditions. I tried both and they tasted good, the bottled version of Double Stout having been named beer of the month in October by Good Beer Guide editor Roger Protz. Flagship (also bottled) is aimed mainly at the export market.

"We haven't neglected our principles, but there was a demand and there was an opportunity," James told us. "The keg beers are totally complementary, and are sterile filtered rather than pasteurised. These beers bear no relationship to the keg beers of the 1970s, except for the name keg."

Hook Norton – a traditional "tower" brewery founded in 1849 and still run by the same

family – remains fully committed to real ale with four core beers. James also confirmed that it remains committed to producing Hooky Mild (2.8%) although this represents a very small proportion of sales. Thirty years ago it represented half of all sales being particularly popular in working men's clubs around Coventry – thirst quenching but of low strength.

"Hooky Mild is not commercially viable on its own, but it is viable as part of a range of four core beers," said James. "It helped the business survive in the bad years and we will keep it going, although you can only find it in a handful of pubs."

Hooky bitter (3.5%) remains the top seller representing about half of all sales, and it continues to be marketed strongly as volume sales are necessary to cover fixed costs. But the up and coming beer is Lion (4.0%), which started life as Cotswold Lion a few years ago but is now known simply as Lion – "the Pride of the Cotswolds". With four hop varieties this is very distinctive, with a fresh taste that reflects a trend towards sweeter beer. This is set to become the joint best seller.

Old Hooky (4.6%) remains the premium beer, first brewed for

the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 and currently the second biggest seller by volume. "It's my favourite beer but the one I drink the least of," said James. "It all depends on the company you're in, but as a premium ale with a decent strength, it goes very well with lamb or venison."

Six seasonal beers will be produced in 2014, along with bottled varieties including Hooky Gold, Haymaker, and the Christmas ale Twelve Days (5.5%0. Interestingly, James – from the fifth generation of the founding family – felt that younger people were moving away from high-alcohol beers, partly because of the health lobby. But Twelve Days, brewed with chocolate malt and which he described as "liquid Christmas pudding", remains a seasonal favourite.

It's well worth making the trip to north Oxfordshire to tour Hook Norton Brewery, with twice-daily tours (not Sundays) giving the opportunity to see the original steam engine. Hook Norton ales are available at free houses around Oxfordshire, but the only one of its 40-plus tied houses in our branch area is the Eagle Tavern in Witney. As for Oxford city, if a freehold opportunity were to come up, watch this space.....





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# A letter to the Editor

Last month's report on the Oxford CAMRA visit to Berlin brought back memories for Steve Alcock

**ASAN** Oxonian ex-pat living in rural Hampshire, I always look forward to reading the Oxford Drinker sent to me by my father via my "other" local, the wonderful Mason's Arms in Headington. I usually get there once a month, and I miss the beer festival on pain of excommunication by landlord Chris Meeson and my father, Ron!

I read with great interest the article on the Berlin beer trip in the October/November edition, as I was stationed there from 1980-1982 with the RAF, working both in East and West Berlin at various times [don't ask.!] Living in an apartment on Theodor-Heuss Platz, my local across the square was Joe's Bierhaus, not mentioned in your article. It was famous for serving weissbier flavoured with either greengage or raspberry syrup. Definitely an acquired taste!

We RAF guys usually drank in West Berlin either Schultheiss or BK [Berliner Kindl, or in the RAF clubs, drinking blue label Beck's -- stronger than the red label -- now it's a non-alcoholic beer! Other favourites were Pilsener Urquell, and BK's own Dunkel [Alt] bier. There were

too many bar names to remember -- Die Grunewald and Die Grunemann [Greenwood and Jack-in-the-Woods] in the West spring to mind. But everything in East Berlin, even around the Alexanderplatz area, was grey and bland, and that also applied at the time to most of the beer. I can't remember specific breweries or many bar names.

One of my abiding beer memories of Berlin was standing on my balcony with an RAF mate from Devizes on New Year's Eve 1980 in sub-zero temperatures, watching the fireworks over the city while drinking (to his surprise and delight) Wadworth's 6X and Old Timer, brought by my parents in Party Fours from Harry and Joyce at the Star, Stanton St John.

Happy memories! Thanks for a great magazine, which gets passed to a colleague who's a CAMRA member from Swindon -- football is never mentioned!

Kind regards,  
Steve Alcock

*The editor welcomes letters for possible publication; send them to [editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk](mailto:editor@oxfordcamra.org.uk)*

## Last orders.....

As we reported last month, CAMRA has launched its pub database, Whatpub, to the general public. It lists all pubs in the United Kingdom, and is slowly being updated with a wealth of information that will prove invaluable to the beer and cider drinker. Take a look at [whatpub.com](http://whatpub.com) and let us know if you can spot any mistakes or updates in our entries.



Reaching the parts that other beers (and the Oxford Drinker!) don't usually reach. Branch chairman Tony Goulding poses with a copy outside the Mountain Smokehouse and Brewery at North Conway, New Hampshire, USA. To read about Tony's trip stateside and his views on the North American craft beer revolution, you'll have to wait until the next issue.



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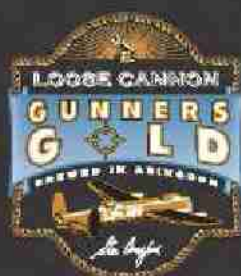


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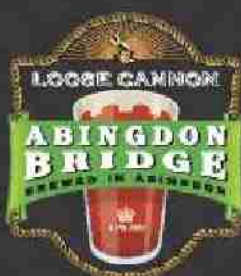
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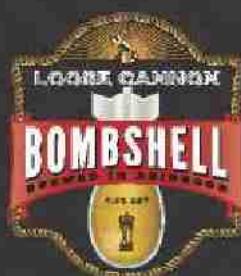
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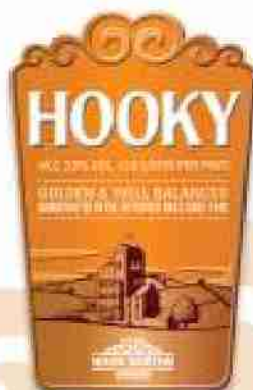
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