

## **Witney History**

The market town of Witney is the largest town in West Oxfordshire and lies on the River Windrush. First recorded in AD 969, there is evidence of both Iron Age and Roman settlements in the area.

By 1277 at least one cloth fulling mill was established in the area. By the end of the Middle Ages Witney was a lively market town with a developing industry making blankets and gloves. So, for centuries, Witney has been associated with blankets and, although the last blanket mill closed in 2002, the association will live in the minds of locals and visitors alike for many years (though the locals may more readily recall the black hole discovered in their pension scheme when the last mill - Early's - finally closed!).

The Early family business was founded in 1669 and a later Early - Charles - in conjunction with other mill owners, sponsored a railway line - The Witney Railway Co. - opened in 1861 from Yarnton to Witney. Then the East Gloucestershire Railway, which had initially been conceived as a cross country route linking Witney and Faringdon to Cheltenham via Andoversford, was scaled down to a purely local line to extend the existing line from Witney to Fairford. In 1869 work commenced on this less ambitious plan, although the through-platform layout of the station at Fairford clearly shews that it was never intended as a terminus, Cirencester and a connection with M&SWJ being the goal. The line from Witney to Fairford opened on 14 January 1873 and the resultant 22 mile branch line was operated by the GWR, the original Witney Railway Co terminus becoming the goods station. (if you're interested, there is an excellent web site, with lots of pictures - steam, diesel, horses and planes - at "[www.martin.loader.btinternet.co.uk/Fairford\\_Branch.htm](http://www.martin.loader.btinternet.co.uk/Fairford_Branch.htm)").

## **Getting there**

Although locals may choose other transport modes, the assumption is that most JB's will route through Oxford Rail Station. Stagecoach service S1 buses to Witney leave from Frideswide Square - out of the station, right and then down past the bike park to the traffic lights - Stop R9 for the westbound S1 service is on the opposite side of the Square. Buses leave at xx13/28/43/58 and take approximately 30 minutes. Therefore, for a start time of 1100 in Witney, the 1028 would seem to be most appropriate. The fare (for those either still young enough, or from distant lands beyond the Severn) is £5.50 Return.

Those wishing to breakfast first, or craving a Wetherspoons, of which there are none, as yet, in Witney, may wish to patronise the **Four Candles** in George Street, less than 10 minutes walk (or an even shorter Trishaw ride from outside the Said Business School). Turn right out of the station entrance and go down past the bike park to the traffic lights on the main road, then turn left and walk forward, across the junction and along Hythe Bridge Street to the next junction where you do a slight right/left shuffle to continue along George Street. The 'Spoons is on the right just beyond Pizza Express. It now opens at 0700, of course, so you will avoid the line that develops outside before the bolt is drawn - reminiscent of a Salvation Army handout queue - but the big breakfast IS very good and the staff are fine.

You don't have to go back to the station to catch the bus as the S1 leaves from Stop A5 in George Street, outside the Pizza Express (a couple of doors along). The times quoted above for the station are actually the scheduled departures from this stop so no maths is required!

The bus is routed via Botley Road and then turns off right, through Farmoor (past the reservoirs), the Toll Bridge (over the Thames) at Swinford, struggles through the narrow streets of Eynsham, and then rushes along the A40 for a little way before turning off on to the B4022 to drop down into Witney. After negotiating a complicated/busy little double-roundabout junction it crosses the River Windrush and comes to a set of traffic lights. This is the signal to ding the bell and de-bus at the subsequent stop as you should already have noticed the FIRST VENUE on the left so, after getting off, you will have to go back across the traffic lights to.....

**The Plough Inn** (98 High Street) - 1100 to 1145 to allow late arrivals a chance to catch up.

Butts, Ringwood - Best, Taylor's - Landlord, and guest (Old Mill Brewery - Nellie Dene all the way from Snaith, Yorkshire when we first visited! Harvey's Sussex Best subsequently.)

Open (including kitchen) from 1100 and slightly surprised to see us so early but not phased by our explanation of why we were there!

Five minutes of zig-zagging along the High Street past the **Royal Oak** (Wychwood - Hobgoblin, Brakspears - Bitter and Oxford Gold, plus guest (Jennings - Stickle Pike), choice of 8 lagers plus Guinness and two smoothies - Banks Original and John Smiths - a really fine place to take a lady but a bit short of bar space for a crowd of 'boys, the **Cross Keys** (Brakspears - Bitter, Wychwood Hobgoblin plus Marstons - Pedigree) and the **Eagle Vaults** (Greene King rubbish outlet) to reach .....

**The Angel** (42 Market Square) - 1150 till 1220

Local Brakspears Oxford Gold, plus Courage Best, John Smiths Cask and a guest (Theakston's when we called originally and Courage Directors latterly). Pub food available.

Then 2 minutes just round the corner to the ...

**Red Lion** (1-3 Corn Street) - 1220 to 1250

Greene King - St. Edmunds plus guests (St Austell - Proper Job on the first visit, Tolly-Cobbold - Phoenix and Holden's Golden Glow second time). We nearly dismissed it after the first visit, with the ash-trays in the outside smoking area un-emptied for what must have been at least a week, but it seemed less dog-eared this time round, so we have reinstated it but may depend on what is on the Guest Beer list posted outside on the day?

Just across the road is the .....

**Eagle Tavern** (22 Corn Street) - 1250 till 1350 or more!

(Whatever you do, don't confuse it with the Eagle Vaults!!) A cuckoo in the Wychwood nest as it serves Hook Norton beers - Bitter, Gold, Old Hookey and the monthly changeling (Copper Ale when we did the initial recce, 303 on the second. It should be a brand-new single-hop brew - Cotswold Lion (actually named after a very pretty (!?) breed of sheep)- in June).

"Pub of the Town" as far as we're concerned and the one in which we also chose to eat (Home-cooked ham, Double-yoked eggs and Crispy chips were ace on the first trip and, despite the cook being off at the dentist's when we were there last, the wide variety of sandwiches were equally scrumptious, and they were still able to do side orders of chips!). All the other pubs do food, so the choice of time and place to replenish the body sugars is, of course, yours.

We will then have time to trot on down the road a little way to .....

**The Three Horseshoes** (78 Corn Street) - 1350 to 1430

Serving the local Wychwood Hobgoblin, plus guests (Caledonian - Deuchars IPA and Butcombe - Gold first trip, then White Horse - Bitter and Sharp's - Doom Bar latterly) for a top-up (or drain-down?) before catching the S1 bus from just outside back to Oxford at xx08/23/38/53.

There is the option to progress a little further along Corn Street to the **New Inn** and/or the **Butchers Arms** but we didn't feel the need to go that far on either of our trips!! Furthermore, whilst we were on the second recce we had a call on Phil's mobile from Ian Osborne to enquire if we were in the **Marlborough Hotel**. We weren't, and hadn't been, so we leave it open to Ian to persuade us otherwise on the day - perhaps we'll send him in first! The pubs are all so close together that we can be ultra-flexible on the day anyway, and play it according to the mood, or taste, of the assembled throng (once they are assembled!).