

Jollyboys Oxford event (Thursday 3rd December 2015)

What's happening to Oxford? The recce platoon (Phil Spracklen, Mick Lay and Rod Payne) found several of their target pubs either closed and boarded up (the **Far from the Madding Crowd** which we used last time (September 2011)), or laid waste in the name of becoming beer & pizza parlours (the **White Rabbit**), or bottled (**Jam Factory**), or "craft" beer outlets (**The Grapes** – now called "**Beerd**" (subtle word play, see!) and also selling pizzas). However, all is not lost as, although we only have four pubs (plus Wetherspoons) on the list this year, we think that you'll find that the variety of ales available across these outlets makes up for the shortage of locations.

We will start, as previously, in Wetherspoons' **Swan & Castle**. There is major road redesign work going on in St Frideswide, the main square outside to the right of the station so, as we need to make our way towards the Castle, it may be easier to turn immediately right out of the station entrance and keep right to go back parallel to the railway, over the pedestrian bridge and then down the ramp there and then fight your way through the various bollards, barriers and bumps whilst making your way, in as near a straight line as possible, away from the railway. In doing so you will eventually enter Park End Street. Continue forward to take a slight right-hand bend into New Road, passing the Castle Mound and old prison on the right and continue past the County Council Offices and then right into Castle Street where you will find the pub some 40 yards along on the right. Breakfast and/or the usual multiple choice of ales. **(till 1100)**

Then, out on to Castle Street, cross carefully to the opposite side and go left as we need to return to make a right turn back on to the continuation of New Road, and follow it, curving slightly left, as it becomes Queen St., staying to the right. (Beware though, as Oxford has some strange traffic rules with some of what you might think are "pedestrianised" areas being used by buses as well, including this road!). At the cross-roads cross at the lights and turn right down St Aldates past the Town Hall and then turn left into Blue Boar Street, continuing along to find the **Bear Inn** on the left at the junction with Alfred Street. Fullers/Gales selection plus a couple of locals – Shotover Brewery from Horspath, Oxford most likely. For the pipers and cigaristas, they are smoker-friendly with all-weather areas out front. **(1110 - 1140)**

Return back the way we came along Blue Boar Street for 25 yards, then turn right and go up Wheatsheaf Yard (past the **Wheatsheaf** pub itself (limited selection and the staff didn't seem keen on wanting customers to disturb them so we decided to "Walk on by"!)). Make a left on the High Street and almost immediate left into the **Chequers**, a Nicholson's place, with a bit of a "Harry Potter" ambience, which we also visited last time, and which has a significant range of Ales and a very knowledgeable Canadian lady (from London, Ontario) behind the bar. Selection when we were there included Exmoor Silver Stallion and offerings from Navigation, Tiny Rebel and Itchen Valley. **(1145 - 1230)**

Back out on to High St, turn left again and continue to the cross roads. Cross St Aldates, turn left, then walk down there to **St Aldates Tavern** (although it doesn't stand out so it might be better to look for the **Ladbroke's** sign as the betting shop is next door!). Wide choice including, when we were there, Box Tunnel Vision and Old No 8, and stuff from Dark Star, Welbeck Abbey and XT. **(1235 - 1320)**

Leave and turn right to continue down St Aldates and then turn right along Pembroke Street to find the **Royal Blenheim** on the corner of St Ebb's Street serving a wide choice of their own (White Horse) ales, plus guests. **(1330 – 1415+)**

All the pubs serve food, of various quality and price (not necessarily related), so no specific recommendation is made, though the recce platoon ate in the **Royal Blenheim** and were well pleased with what was provided, including an excellent Pint of Chips!

Discounts – remember your Wetherspoons' vouchers for the **Swan & Castle**. The **Royal Blenheim** gives CAMRA discount, and Nicholsons do if you have their Phone App (don't ask me, I only worked with computers!)

To return to the station, exit the pub and turn right to go up St Ebb's Street where you will find yourself back where you started from after leaving the 'spoons this morning, so then proceed back down New Road (on the left-hand side to avoid getting snared in a net of orange barriers on the right!) and back through the general maze of bollards and barriers in Frideswide Square. (On the other hand, if anyone fancies a cheap(er) pint of Sam Smith's (no other choice, as usual) we could wander off into town to the **Three Goat's Heads**.....??)

Trains to London are at xx01 & xx31, which take an hour, with additional CrossCountry trains to Reading and the Bournemouth direction, as well as local trains to Didcot to connect for South Wales. For those heading north there are half-hourly trains to Birmingham with connections beyond at xx11 & xx39 ("ish"- as there is some minor variation of up to 4 minutes depending on which xx you mean!). I don't know much about buses but understand that you can get easily from Milton Keynes on the half-hourly X5 service which accepts the oldies pass and is scheduled to take 55 minutes. There should also be, by then, the option for any real gricers to come on the new Chiltern service from Marylebone to Oxford Parkway and on into the city on the Park'n'Ride bus connection.

Cheers!