

Do You Remember...

the George?

This summer Botley lost the fourth and oldest of its five pubs. Anthony à Wood, Oxford's 17th Century diarist, reported that students of the day would take themselves to Botley for a pint, because it was outside the city limits and the University's jurisdiction (and presumably the beer was good). It's unlikely that the pint would have come from the George though, as its name reveals that it was built in the 18th Century. This suggests that Botley may have lost other, even older pubs, and such records as exist name one of them as the Red Lion, though its exact location is lost.

The George flourished in the 19th Century, as the famous Henry Taunt photo of 1892 shows. In it, Oxford's Mayor and corporation are beating the bounds from the Seacourt Stream in a punt. Huge letters on the wall say that Fred Daniels was the publican (he was also the miller at Botley Mill next door). The pub is hardly recognizable – an 18th Century building with roses round the porch!

A big change came in the winter of 1923, when the old stone bridge that took Botley Road over the Seacourt Stream was demolished and replaced by the current structure. The mill had declined, and was pulled down around the same time. The 1924 photo is very dark but it is just possible to make out the mill on the left, the building materials for the new bridge in the foreground, and the George itself, looking rather bleak in the wintry landscape, and now belonging to Morrells (© Oxon County Council).



The pub was always full of life. It was a good place for pub games. Aunt Sally flourished on the riverside terrace – a pleasant place to play on a summer evening. When the terrace was glassed over to become a dining room, the Aunt Sally team struggled on in the strip below the road for a while. There was an annual sausage-eating competition. Last January the Oxford Mail had a picture of the 1981 winner, David Blackwell, then twenty, who ate 18 sausages in 10 minutes. You could get a great game of darts at the George. I well remember many a lively evening spent round the darts board. In the 90s, when Anne was the enterprising manager, the George entered a home-made raft with an all-woman crew for the Osney Raft Race. In the photo you can see how it looked then. (© Oxon County Council)



As a teenager, Matt Smith long believed that there was a pole dancer in the back room. What back room? you may ask. Well, there was one – scarcely big enough to swing a cat, but a pole doesn't take up much space, after all! More recently, it had a lively presence on the music scene, and the joint was usually rocking with coloured lights and joyful sounds on a Saturday evening. The George still has its fans who will be sorry to see it go – its Facebook page proclaims it the Best Pub in Botley although no one's written on it recently.

It was apparent for some time that the pub was struggling to survive. What did for it was the constant floods. Here's Martin Ash, who was the landlord in July 2007 (© *Daily Telegraph*). The constant flooding must have made insurance untenable – yet it must have always flooded in the past, and managed to keep going. For a while it became the home of Michel's Creperie, offering lunches to office workers from Minns' office blocks nearby. But after a trial period, the brewery upped the rent, and rather than hand over all his profits, Michel took his business elsewhere.



And now it's a shop. Richer Sounds say they are very happy with their purchase (the brewery sold it outright). They'll be fine until it floods, and then what? Perhaps it'll be sold on to a family who can live upstairs till the waters go down as used to be the custom, and make the most of the riverside setting. Will it ever be a pub again – who can say!

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