

**The Woolpack Inn – A village pub steeped in its history but with  
contemporary multiple identities**

**and**

**A year in the life of the Woolpack**

**(Picture of the Woolpack Inn)**

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## **Introduction**

Rural areas have been hit particularly hard with 14 pubs shutting each week in 2012 and reported beer sales are lower than at any point since the depression of the 1930s. The presence of services, communal spaces and wider social activities is often tied to the presence of a pub in the area, particularly in rural localities. However as Kingsnorth points out, once a village pub is lost, while the location might remain, it is no longer a 'place' (Mount and Cabras, 2015). Only half of rural settlements now have a pub (Maye et al. 2005). The causes are numerous, including: an increase in the number of pub chains offering cheap food and large comfortable surroundings; themed pubs attracting younger drinkers; drink and drive laws restricted alcohol consumption when visiting country and village pubs and therefore a loss of trade; continual rising prices and taxes; the increase of cheap off sales from supermarkets; home entertainment and the smoking ban. All have contributed to a fall in trade for village pubs (Cabras 2011).

This case study is one of four from research that explores how these changes have affected village pub and the nature of the current relationship between the village and the pub as they strive to maintain its existence.

**The Woolpack Inn (WH) in the village of Slad**, population 308 in the 2011 census is 2 miles from the nearest town and has one bus a week. It has a church opposite the pub, the old school house, now a private residence. It is owned by a local environmentalist who purchased the pub when it looked as though it was going to close at the turn of the millennium. He wanted to keep the pub as it had always been. A local writer's life is celebrated in the pub and walks around the valley, in which he lived, are signposted to begin at the pub. The pub is a merging of two small cottages with four parallel rooms all entered from the road outside the pub which is a cross country thoroughfare. Parking is outside the pub on the main road and vehicles passing the pub have to give way to oncoming traffic as there is only enough room for one car to pass it at a time.

The nearby town has an industrial history developed during the locally dominant wool era of the Cotswolds in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has a canal which was during this period connected to London and the west. There are many water mills in the valleys in the locality, which were used in the process of wool development and industrial support was developed along the rivers and canals. When the processing of wool became dominant in the factories of Manchester and the north the town's fortunes diminished. The town has had both Conservative and Labour MPs with the latter representing the area from 2015 and an earlier period in the early 2000s.

The area surrounding the town was mainly villages rooted in the farming community but in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became part of the Arts and Crafts movement some of whose supporters made their homes and industries in this area of stone built cottages. The post war period and rising general affluence in the late 20 century attracted not only more artists to the area but also incomer wealth from London and Birmingham who began to buy up village properties for first and second homes as well as in the town. Being only an hour from Birmingham and an extra half an hour by train from London the whole area became popular with those with wealth from the cities. A thriving service industry exists now to provide a wide range of services, from house and building renovations to run down rural properties, through maintenance and catering including pub interest.

Consequently, the town and surrounding areas became in the early 2000s a place where one could bump into a wide range of people, artists, trades people of all descriptions, well off pensioners from the cities and wealthy financiers from the city as well as well-known artists, food critics and TV presenters and actors and government advisors; representatives of all these and more have been seen in the Woolpack Inn in the last few years.

The Woolpack Inn is owned by someone from the arts world as well as engineering whose family came to live locally in the late 20 century and they reside in an old Manor House with land.

## **A sense of Place**

The 'English village', in general, is not a place of the past where little has changed. In the Lowlands, in the middle ages, enclosures encouraged the development of village and church from the previously isolated farms, but in Victorian times, farmers built on their own land so now only church, manor house and a few cottages predate the industrial revolution. The only villages to claim an autonomous existence are the textile towns which reverted to agriculture after textiles moved to the north, (Newby 1985-p156). Stroud is one of these textiles towns, exemplifying a continuity of village life over the last 2-300 years and Slad is village close to it. However, the Woolpack Inn was, in the early 2000s, a dying village pub for all the reasons we have identified, supermarket pricing, taxation, the recession, the smoking ban, 'cultural change' and government regulation.

### ***Pub history and maintaining its historical identity***

A local landowning family has evidence of the nature of the local village pub, 'A hundred years ago, everybody in this village would have worked locally. They, the men, would have come to the local pub, probably nightly whereas now a lot of villagers do not work locally; they travel to work by car and then come home. They're divorced from each other and they're divorced from the pub. Some of them come in, some of them don't, (Walter).

The pub, like the church, is a place where one can soak up the past life of the village and its pub in a form of communion,

I sit next to the bar and I know that a hundred years ago people were sitting in that same space. I know that they are all around me, I can feel them. I can feel their presence. It's not in the furnishings; I can feel it in the space and that's important to me; I like to be surrounded by ghosts. It's the space, it's the air. I feel the past. I don't know if other people feel it. I feel it. I feel the depth of the past; I feel the generation before me. I see their cloth caps; I can smell their wet leather; it's all around me; it's in the space, (Walter).

The past plays a large part in the attractiveness of the village pub and even more so if it can be connected with literature based on the locality,

I liked that pub and I used to come and see Walter here sometimes on Sunday evenings. And I just fell in love with it. There was an old man driving a tractor and his little grandson was standing on the rear fork. There was so much smoke coming out of the chimney that the old man couldn't see where he was going, and the boy was saying, 'left a bit. No, straighten up, straighten up' and he couldn't see a thing. It came past and I suddenly felt I was in another world. I was in the world of our famous author, (Owner).

Pubs provide the settings where individuals or groups of people start initiatives that generate positive outcomes for the community or whole society, such as volunteering and charity activities, or a channelling passions and interests into a more structured effort, such as a

social club or sports team (Cabras and Mount, 2017). These pub social activities were highly prized in the past, although the nature of them has changed,

We used to go to Stow Fair. It was quite good. George booked the bus for one trip one year and before we were about to leave to go we found it was on the week before, so we had a round of golf. Then we went down the docks in Gloucester, (Duncan).

The village pub activities tend to me more localised today to the pub's environs, 'An onion competition, just bring in your biggest onion. I've won that a couple of times, and the biggest pear, the smallest, and one year they had the best dressed onion. The kids would put clothes on the onion. It was really quite comical. It was a good laugh. Derek made a wooden trophy for us shaped like an onion, (Duncan).

Being attached over time creates a wide variety of narratives that hold the pub's history,

At the time, the current owner and I started spending more and more time here, and we became embedded here by 1990. It was a friendly pub, even though there were only five or six people in it. All those characters are now dead, which is kind of frightening; they're all on the wall in the main bar. There would be occasions when Mark who he was a part time mechanic and a full time drinker, would sit in the corner with a pile of coins. He would be here at 5.30 or six o'clock on the dot. If he was ten minutes late, search parties were sent out to find him. People cared. They cared where the others were, they cared about each other. Occasionally, we would sit there and discuss the 1973 harvest for ages and it was fascinating. I suppose that also gave us a sense of security, (Walter).

For the owner of the WP, buying into the community was also about maintaining a past community as well as the current one.

It was for sale for so long that the For Sale sign rusted off its hinges and crashed into the ground in the winter of 1998. There were only two or three of us in the pub and one of them was the daughter of our famous author. We came out and we heard this horrible noise and this awful For Sale sign was on the ground and everybody said, 'Oh, no, what will happen?' and I drunkenly said, 'Oh, I'll buy it. I'll do it'. I loved the quiet pub with the clock ticking and that's why I bought it really because I wanted to protect it. It got cheaper and cheaper by the minute until the sign fell off. It was that bad. Nobody would touch it. They looked at it, looked at the site of it, looked at the parking and looked at the septic tank; the whole thing added up to failure. I have several other businesses so my whole life is not pubs but for me it was simple. I bought this little pub for £X but it's probably going to go up in value over time. Up until recently I have had nothing to do with running it. I couldn't bear it. I let people do it and I gave them my full trust, full confidence - and my cheque book, (Owner).

The new owner, who took it over in 2001, wanted to preserve the past.

Well, I think it was a coincidence. I think the reason the current owner liked the pub was because it was preserving the traditional pub as the centre of the community. The reason he bought it was because it was at the centre of the community. And the way he's run it is to ensure that it remains at the centre of the community. He didn't want the place overrun by the famous author's groupies, although it's great that he is an important part of the recent history of this pub. However, this pub has been here for hundreds of years. We're sitting now in what was the living area. The pub used to be down there. The main road used to be the one that is behind the pub. Then this new road was put through in front of the pub and the pub was elevated to take up those two rooms. When I first started coming here, it was just those two rooms. We're now

sitting in a past publican's kitchen. So the pub had a history long before our famous author lived here, (Walter).

The villagers recognised his commitment, 'a lot of it is due to the owner. He takes a lot of interest in the place and he makes you feel part of it. He resisted any change. I think it's important to him, not just as a way of earning an income but I think it is the place that's important to him and that comes through', (Alison).

In an owners case it is even more of a commitment when, 'these pubs are never going to make a great deal of money. So once you realise that, you're okay. They just need to be treated like pandas; they need to be protected and nursed along a bit' (Owner). However, when he bought it he reconstructed the interior seating by adding in black wooden Settles in all the bars. It's not clear whether they ever had these in the pub but it confirmed the importance for the owner of maintaining the pub appropriately as it was, or might have been, in the past as his friend recalls,

I have a great love of the past and I see the present as one moment of some expression in the past. You walk into the pub, there's a very strong sense of the past. You know you're sitting in a space where people have drunk for generations, for centuries. That gives you a certain solidity. It's not a random room; it's not a random space; it has roots. You're reaching into ancestors here. Although the owner has made some internal changes such as installing the high backed settles he is dignifying it, creating prestige. It's amazing the number of people who come in here and say, 'Wow, they've kept it as it was'. Well, it was nothing like this when I came here; there was a rotten old red carpet next door and it stank of cigarettes. The far bar was closed off by a door because it was where women used to come and drink, (Walter).

It was not unknown for owners of our pubs to influence the look of a pub for both cultural and commercial purposes but these alterations were to recreate the pub's past as he saw it, 'I would say that owner tried to downgrade it in a way when he put those benches in. He deliberately wanted them to be scuffed. It was all rubbed down to look as though it had been there forever. He wanted the distressed look', (Lacey).

### ***Pub character: continuity and change***

There are other differences that mark out the Woolpack Inn Inn as being unlike the other three pubs in the research. As one enters these other pubs one sees a clean smart look with all the tables set for meals, the pictures on the walls have generally similar co-ordinated frames and everything that is displayed appears to be ordered and tidy. However, the Woolpack Inn Inn, although clean, has an air of domesticity about it with newspapers left untidily on a dilapidated wooden chest, pictures sloping on the walls, window frames filled untidily with filler to prevent draughts, scratched marks on the settles showing the tan wood beneath the black paint, the odd paint smudge on the walls, cobwebs attached to the international bottles of ale in a glass case, a broken optic, unexplained brick-a-bat on window sills, an old fashioned dial telephone and a general air of it being a homely environment. Two ceiling lights in the snug have flickered on and off for years and were only fixed recently, however, all of them now fade from time to time and then brighten as if by magic. The physical nature of the pub is partly what makes it attractive,

I like the fact that it doesn't have TVs all over the walls and a carpet, a horrible, sort of, stained carpet. It keeps it real. We have a pale ale but it's not an American pale ale, it's not too floral. All the drinks are not too fussy but people seem to enjoy them. It's just not pretentious in any way. There's something about the fact that it's not overly modernised, not overly sanitised. Sometimes you go into an establishment and you

feel it just doesn't have any soul, whereas there are dusty corners here and I think it has a homely feel, (Lucas).

The owner was reluctant to change the pub in order for it to survive. He wanted to maintain its older culture of it being just a pub and he did not want anything from the modern technological world in the pub or any attractions that were from the modern world, 'It has no background music. The second thing is that it's just a cosy sort of pub, it's not tartyed up, it's not chrome plated. There are no leather armchairs, I prefer a simple pub. They don't muck about with the décor or the outside; there's no touch of Farrow and Ball', (Alison).

It is the culture of the pub that dominates not any individual, 'It doesn't change, no matter who is the publican. They seem to fit into the way of things rather than imposing themselves. They fit in' (Alan). The pub, for William, the chef for the last six years and Co-Director for four years, is, 'authentic, not trying to be anything it's not, no frills, no gimmicks. It's very honest and not necessarily trying to be the best or trying to do everything perfectly, it's just comfortable in its self', (William). The owner appreciated the past encapsulated in photographs from a time past and wished to keep his pub looking like a pub from the past, to show respect for the past.

However, being a drinkers' village pub predominantly is not a feasible economic option, 'There was a little bit of a personal connection with the pub and I felt protective about that and when I bought it I liked the way it was; I liked the way it was quiet and it didn't have very good food. I liked that. However, when I looked at it in terms of survival, it became clear that times had changed and pubs just couldn't exist on its boozing trade alone', (Owner).

The WP owner eventually had to relinquish his idealist vision and compromise in order for it to survive financially,

I wanted it just to survive as a pub. I just wanted sausage rolls or whatever. But as time's gone by we now have this lovely food and it's French, and I've understood the whole economics of the deal and that pubs have to have food so you might as well have nice food and I love it now, (Owner).

Things had to change. From about 2007 the pub became a pub/dining room/café, firstly leased to an experienced chef whose food was reviewed positively in the Daily Telegraph newspaper. However, he moved on after a couple of years and the next leaseholder lasted about five years serving good wholesome pub food but claimed when he left it was very difficult to make a decent income from managing the pub. In 2014 two Co-Director friends took on the lease with her managing the bar and he was the chef. This is the French food referred to by the owner above. He is a very original chef who produces very flavoursome dishes, significantly different from the previous pub food and from many other pubs in the locality,

The price of quality produce is the main factor, not cutting corners, ethically it's about sourcing responsibly, local farmers who farm ethically and non-intensively. I buy my roast for Sunday dinner for about three times the price of the big distributors. I make the gravy during the week from bones. I don't think any other pub would do that. I don't cut any corners. I start at 9 am and I don't finish here until 10 at night. I work 60 odd hours a week and don't see my family. That justifies the price more than anything. We rarely take breaks; we are always cooking, making everything fresh. I think that should cost a premium and is totally justified in the prices we charge, (William).

His menu is always inventive, original, delicious, packed with flavour.

Around 2010 the anniversary of the famous author's birth was celebrated and a local society who supported the generation of his work installed some walks around the pub and added signposts and some details of his life in the village. This gave the Woolpack Inn some national publicity and there has been a constant trail of visitors since then keen to see his local pub and village. This initiative clearly matched the owner's interest in maintaining an historical atmosphere for the pub. So, to avoid significant losses the pub needed to celebrate the famous author, to maintain the pub's historical ambiance and to attract visitors from further afield.

However, a fourth factor affected its survival. The Woolpack Inn also began to attract regulars from the nearby town, as a place keen to retain a drinking culture; a place where conviviality was unavoidable in its small spaces; where one could immerse oneself in the past and where social relations across the classes and cultures were evidenced in the main bar and outside on the 'common table' but it still a collection of small bars where friends and family groups could experience the past in small intimate dining areas.

Rural villages in the UK are now seen as attractive places to live, to visit, to explore the architecture and old buildings and as a walking paradise. A visit to the village pub is an essential part of the trail, an imagined idyll (Neal and Walters 2008). To this end the Woolpack Inn provided quite a unique experience, one of entering the past as it was lived in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps, in a visitor's imagination, much earlier. It's small confined spaces and a pub being maintained in aspic added to that experience.

I think this particular pub is very different to any I've ever worked in previously and it is different from any of the pubs that I'm used to. They were far less dynamic and there was far less going on. We get so many different people coming in here, and there's always an atmosphere which is quite magical; the way it looks is old without trying. It's got its history and a mix of people that makes it have an air of excitement and of the unexpected. You can walk in and sometimes there'll be people playing music and people eating who may say, 'oh, come and join our table'. It's a fine mix of regulars and colourful characters that make it that way, (William).

It became in the mid-2000s 'a place to visit regularly, a place that was only a two mile walk up the beautiful valley from the town or a few minutes on a bike. It has become a place for young people as well, who are often to be seen sitting on the common table or inside the main bar conversing across the generations and class.

It's the spirit of the place that gives a pub its place, which includes its history,

Everybody lives their current, present life on the back of the past and the spirit still lives here. In a lot of pubs the spirit no longer lives because they have no real history. Our village pub is like going into a museum. It's living the past as well as the present. And people feel warm because the pub is important to them; its people's roots and it leaves them feeling secure. I think the spirit carries forward. However, you go to many pubs where they may have ancient histories but they've been microwaved out of existence. You see tables all isolated. I've been to pubs that have been mentioned in literature and you walk into them and they're cold, they're soulless and they have that National Trust feel about it. Everything is over-cleaned, everything's too sharp and you think actually they've preserved a structure and they've lost a soul and one of the beauties of this pub is that anyone who walks in here is immediately embraced by the pub, (Walter).

To some extent, as in every pub, its uniqueness has been constructed by those that either own or run the pub but in the case of the Woolpack they appear to have less influence,

It's a funny old place. It's tiny. But it's got such character. I think it's its history with a famous author and going back beyond him. I think the current owner has been vital, having bought it and saved it really because he's got that artistic background as well; it fits a little bit with our author. On the other hand, look at it, in this beautiful location. It's the only thing in this little village. It's so important. It defines it. So maybe it's got that old fashioned, traditional need that a local inn has in a small community like this. I think the mixture of that together with the characters, its history and the fame it's got with the tourists is what makes it unique. We get all sorts and I think it keeps the locals a bit more open minded and not too cliquey. They have to be quite accepting (Fergus).

William, who gave up the shared lease after four years is now employed directly by the owner, staying on as chef, because he is,

very committed to here. I love this pub. I don't think there are any other pubs like it. I don't think there could be any other setting where I could do what I do. I wouldn't want to go elsewhere. I am very loyal to the owner and love working for him. I think what they do in most pubs is terrible and I couldn't work in them. There wouldn't be any other options around here. Most pub owner's motivations are to make money. They have to cut corners, particularly where staff welfare is concerned and the produce that they would allow their chefs to buy. I wouldn't want to work with someone like that. I share some of the values of the owner and an appreciation of the pub and what it is and what it that a pub should be. It's a lifestyle really.... It's an honourable thing to do. I don't think there is a lot of money to be made. However, there's enough money to be made if the right people are running it in the right way and everyone can have a nice life doing it, (William).

### **A sense of space: The effects of a small four bar pub on social mix and intimacy.**

By the late 19th Century London pubs had a saloon – higher prices - and two public bars, one for superior artisans and one for labourers. In Salford the 'Best room' and the vault (tap room) was for artisans. The saloon bar in the village was for craftsmen, farmers, farm bailiffs, gardeners, and tradesmen whereas the main bar was for labourers with food being served in the other three bars. The overall biggest single change was the opening out of interiors as the traditional variety of rooms was consolidated into just one, as has happened in our other three pubs. However, the Woolpack Inn has retained its four separate bars, (See Fig 1). The Woolpack Inn is like a spaghetti junction with its four separate bars, outside Common Table and its sunny terraces.

All the bars in the Woolpack Inn are small. The largest is the Dining Room (see Fig 1) but it is still small being approximately 4x5 metres. It can seat about 22 people along three walls all with black wooden settles and an unused fireplace on the fourth end wall, now used to host two purpose built pizza steel grills manufactured by the owner. The Staff Bar, named because this is where the staff hover, filling the glass washer, pouring wine, posting food orders and hosting the cutlery and napkins. There is one table which can seat 7, some with their backs to another settle and again it has a non functioning fireplace which is used as a log store.

The main bar does have a log burner now but until recently it was an open log fire which occasionally gave forth clouds of smoke into the bar as does the burner from time to time, all part of the Woolpack's eccentricity. This is the bar, which in the early evening and at weekends is occupied mainly by people who work as builders, mechanics, farm labourers and

engineers but they are often joined by public sector workers, those with entrepreneurial and administrative skills as well as artists, local landowners and local property landlords.

The Snug, was apparently used by women only in the past. It has three tables backed again by Settles running the width of the pub with a piano and other musical instruments laid on top and an dilapidated wooden chest with newspapers on top and children's games inside. It again is small, measuring four metres by three. There are pictures of the pub's famous writer, of the mid 20th century, all with different frames, all looking faded and one of them is a painting done on an unframed piece of stiff card. A scruffy glass case exhibits all his books and there is a long line of bottles of ale from across the world in another glass case above the long settle and entitled The (Authors) Collection. However, the pub does not belong to the famous author although the pub gains from the many visitors, who come to see his 'place', 'It's important to fit him into the pub, not the pub into the author. He was part of this community but he doesn't define it, nor does he define the pub. There's a bar dedicated to him and they sell a few books across there but we don't want to become an extension of him, (Walter).

### ***The Main Bar and the Common Table (Pictures of the Main bar and the Common Table)***

The main bar and the Common Table outside the front of the pub are populated by drinkers. Everyone who knows the pub is aware that these areas are for drinking and not for meals. No meals are allowed in the main bar and although the odd starter or pizza are seen occasionally on the Common Table both are mainly drinking areas. Those reserving tables for meals are hosted inside the pub in the other three bars, although in the summer 'blow ins' are able to eat outside on the terrace. The main bar and the Common Table maintain a space for the regulars requiring conviviality due to the small space available in the bar and the unavoidable contact with someone else or as one sits opposite each other on the Common Table benches. Space and place merge into the welcome one gets, 'It's the type of pub that you can come into on your own. If you're on your own and just wanted to have a drink and you walked into the bar, it doesn't all of a sudden go quiet with everyone thinking, 'who's this guy'? People say hello and smile and they would advise you what to drink and ask where you're from', (Jack).

Just as the village pub has become a pub/café/dining room/information centre so have the 'locals' come to constitute a broader category of villagers and regulars who may come from some miles away and join with those villagers that use their pub regularly.

I called in the pub in the next village at about six o'clock and there were about half a dozen guys round by the bar and nobody would let me in. I forced my way in and I eventually got a pint and then they elbowed me out and no-one spoke to me. I thought I'm not very impressed with this. The next day I had a meeting in Bristol and coming back I thought 'oh I'll pass the Woolpack Inn', so I called in. There were about half a dozen, ten people in here. Somebody started showing me photos and I had two and a half pints, but by the time I left they knew my life history, everything about me, so it was a case of, 'oh see you Toby'. The next time I came in later that week it was 'Toby, nice to see you again'. What a difference. I've been coming in here ever since, (Toby).

New staff are quickly absorbed into the pub's terroir, 'I guess I appreciate the locals and the way everyone knows each other and how I used to come out of the kitchen and everybody would say hello to you and after work you'd go out and have a beer with the locals. It's a good friendly place to work whereas somewhere like Harrods is so un-personal isn't it because there are so many people' (Francis). Having a very small main bar increases the necessity to engage, 'Well, I like the conversation; you can go in and you can sit in the main

bar. I wouldn't go and sit in the other bars. I do it as a refugee when I can't get in the other one. I ask myself sometimes "Shall I go to the Nelson or should I go to the Woolpack Inn. If I go to the Nelson I'm going to sit there in a nice comfortable chair with nice central heating and a nice beer and talk to myself. Or I can come here and join in a conversation here. It's a conversation pub", (Thomas),

Above the bar and on the surrounding walls are differently framed past publicans and other well known pub regulars who have passed on. It is called 'the Death Wall' by the regulars and no-one really knows who makes the decision as to whose framed picture is allocated a space. It is probably a consensus of the regulars over time. 'I think that's the reason why people come back as well, because surely this is a sort of pub you find yourself visiting again and again and somewhere you feel welcome, somewhere you feel you matter, for example the pictures above the bar of people who have deceased; locals who used to come are honoured on the wall', (Lucas).

The Common Table and the Main Bar attracts a wide range of: drinkers; artists, reflecting the owner's heritage; young people who don't like the corporatist and commercial character of many town pubs, a place where they can mingle with other generations and classes and trades people who provide an endless source of practical advice and a wide range of services. 'You get all different types of people in here from professional people to tradesmen, employed people to self-employed people. There's always somebody who knows somebody that can get something so if want some decent meat or just eggs or if you wanted your central heating fixed or whatever (Emma).

There are notices and cards of local businesses on the wall of the arch through to the Main Bar and it appears anyone can exhibit. These advertisements indicate the wide range of trades and services offered by regulars to the pub. The trades include: Artisan tiling, Cotswold Lime Pointing, D.S Property Services internal and external property maintenance service, Digger Hire, Kitchen porters and chef, Sympathetic repair and conservation using traditional crafts and materials, Window Cleaner, Wood burning stove and fireplace installation and chimney sweeping. The services include: Abbey meadow Flowers, B+B, Cotswold House Sitting, Dog walking services, Holistic and Beauty Massage, Original Paintings and limited edition prints, Welsh Institute of Chiropractic.

Social intercourse is extensive in the small main bar and there's always something new to learn, 'Listening to a group in the main bar discussing Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo as this is the 200 anniversary. They share information and make the odd analytical comment. Their relationships are connected through common experiences including those via the media. John is then invited to join them as he sitting on his own. They start to discuss alcoholism in Cuba' (FN-Thu 19 June 2016). In many ways the main bar in this village pub is a club itself, 'All of us need a point to belong. All of us need a tradition. All of us need a community. All of us need a place where we can come and feel warm, loved and cared for. And this is what the pub does. It's like a club in a way, (Walter).

Neal and Walters (2008) develop Coen's argument that community exists in the minds of its members and should not be confused with geographical socio graphic assertions of fact and concludes that people construct community symbolically making it a resource, a repository of meaning and referring to their identity. They suggest that while they agree with Coen they suggest is that the imagined community gives rise to a series of material activities and everyday labours to realise more tangible and more concrete structures of community feeling. In other words they suggest there is a space between the yearning for human togetherness and a sensibility of community, and this space is taken up by the routine practices and

performances of community making. It is the networks experiences of belonging and conviviality that stem from these that require an analytical focus (ibid.).

Beth, who is Spanish, is convinced the Woolpack is unique and is imbued with its own form of conviviality,

It's the way it looks and the energy of the pub. It's always nice, even when you cannot sit down, it feels comfortable. It feels good and the people who are here are different. It is not a pub that is directed to a particular group of people. Some pubs are full of young people or older people whereas the Woolly is a pub that welcomes everyone, it's open and cosy or it can be wild. We were once here until 4 in the morning and that was my best night out ever here with ten people. It feels magical, really over the top. When you walk in you feel as though anything could happen. Every time I come here I meet very interesting people, there's lots of spontaneity, (Beth).

For many regulars at the WP buying into community is based upon historical connections that go back generations,

Well, my dad's lived in Slad now for 30 odd years, so this is his local, so he's been bringing me in since before I could walk. So, this is the kind of place where everyone knew me well and I felt more welcome. When I first started working in the bar here...because I knew everyone from my father, it just felt more of a home, really and I knew everyone and it's my second home; I just felt welcome here. I get on really well with the locals and regulars, so it didn't really feel like work, to be honest. It just felt like I was chatting to friends and friends of the family and just giving them a few pints here and there, (Anna).

From the very beginning of brewing and the development of pubs women have played many roles. In the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> century they ran the pubs for their tradesmen and farmer husbands and after separation or death of their partners they continued that role with 14% doing this in the late 18 century. The 1<sup>st</sup> World War was a period where women made great strides in terms of membership of pubs however, after the war village pubs became, generally, the preserve of men. In the 2nd World War, there were again more women in pubs. 33% of customers on a Fri/Sat were women in Fulham pubs. Vauxhall women continued to use them on Mondays. In Bolton they were 25% at the weekends but in pubs outside the centre where tap rooms and vaults were not open to them the lounges might contain half of women. The increase of women drinking was in the better class pubs and there were more middle class women but in mining communities they lost respect by going in them. In the 1970s, 26% of women said they visited a pub regularly. By the mid-1990s nationally 57% of women reported visiting a pub within the previous three months (Jennings, 2007).

In the distant past in the WH, there, was 'a women's bar. The snug used to be where the women were allowed, and apparently in the old days, there used to be a bench at the far end and it was the only room to be carpeted, (Walter). However, as times have changed they are more integrated nowadays in pub cultures,

We just thought we'd give it a go. Maybe it was a nice sunny day, I don't know. We just thought we would try it, but I quickly became aware that it was a proper pub; it wasn't like going into a pub with carpets and a jukebox and fruit machines and lots of young kids; it was nice and then I discovered that I knew a few people from the past, that I hadn't seen for years. So that's why I started coming down here but yeah, it did take a bit of courage, but they welcomed me really quickly and then over the last six years, I've got to know a lot of people and a lot of them have become really close

friends. There's always the banter. It's really nice hanging out with men because they're easy and straightforward. What you see is what you get. If they have a little falling out with each other, it's over by the next day. You just feel quite safe because you know who they are; it's very clear, they don't change really. I also found that the women that come down here are generally quite independent women like me, (Emma).

Adventuring into the main 'men's' bar of our village pubs is no longer a trial but an experience to be enjoyed, 'If I walked in and there's ten men I'm delighted, it's brilliant. I mean some women would hate it; they wouldn't like it but you just get on; they're always so friendly and they're all really kind to you and really good', (Megan). Social health is felt through 'a real sense of community here. I just feel like it's really good for me. If I'm feeling a bit down, a bit fed up I come down here; they soon cheer me up. They all take the mickey. A lot of women of my age, if they're on their own, feel invisible, but this pub actually makes me feel quite young, (Emma).

As strangers develop casual relationships they add well-being to their time in the pub and may well be encouraged to do it more often. Closeness in a small space encourages the development of the self and social relations, a social investment.

It's a massive part of my life coming here, yeah. We definitely create more laughter, I don't know about tone down things; I think we can be worse than the blokes sometimes. The blokes do sometimes whinge and say 'will you lot stop talking about shoes and stuff'. It's like this is a man's bar but it's not, there are more women here today than there are men sometimes. Emma makes us laugh all the time and that's made it even more attractive. Sometimes you come in here and you can just laugh constantly from the moment you get in here until the moment you leave and you almost feel that you don't want to leave, (Fay).

Some women also take full ownership of their place in the pub, 'I told a child off just now for being naughty and badly behaved. I can't bear badly behaved children and badly behaved animals. Some men will actually never swear in front of you ever; they might do when they're with their mates but they won't, when we are there but others don't worry', (Megan).

Women now are accepted and hold their own in the general mix at the common table,

You can't help but join in when you're sat on a big long table can you; it's like the family style in Italy and France when they're all sat at long tables having meals and it's everybody; it doesn't matter who you are, from whatever walk of life you just talk to each other, (Fay).

In particular, village pubs facilitate social mixing a lot quicker and more effectively than town pubs. 'I never ever used to like going to pubs. I found the town was a just non-personable, I suppose; you would just go in there and you would be sat there and nobody would talk to you whereas you walk in here and if you're on your own, even if you don't know anyone they all talk to everybody. I've never known a pub like it to be honest, (Fay).

### ***The Other Bars (Pictures of the other three bars – the snug, the staff bar and the dining room)***

This spaghetti junction of small bars provides an opportunity to get away from the intensive conviviality, 'If it's busy it doesn't feel as if there's hundreds of people being loud and noisy and you can have a quiet pint. You can find a quiet corner and have a drink and read your newspaper or you can get involved with conversation. You're more than likely to know more than one or two people. It's the choice of socialising or being antisocial; you can do both here, and it's quite warming, especially in the winter, with the fire going; it's just quite a

warming, welcoming place', (Jack). The mix of dining room, café, bar, meeting house, and its varied class, gender, race and generational mix all contribute to the atmosphere of a village pub that makes it an attractive space and place,

However, during busy periods, from Wednesday to Sunday the dining room, the staff bar and the snug usually have reserved notices put on them in the early evening and some at lunch time if a party have booked. Customers who come to eat are aware that the pub is a small one and so reserve a table. As the owner acknowledged earlier, the pub could not cover its costs just as a drinkers' pub or just as a village pub and so it was necessary to encourage customers from across the county to make this a destination pub for fine dining. The current chef is dedicated to a particular style of cooking which focuses on very flavoursome dishes, unique and adventurous cooking and gets high praise for his menu although it is also considered expensive by some and is on average the most expensive of all the pubs in our research but only by a £2 or so.

Those that reserve tables often expect to be waited on and the staff are encouraged to create the impression of the pub being a good dining room and hover ready to take orders from those sitting at the tables. The customers take over 'their space' for the time they are there and often take little notice of those in very close proximity in these small pub, taking ownership and focused inward to their party.

A village pub's survival today relies very much on making the customer feel welcome and effectively renting out a space for an hour or so,

The staff bar has a reservation for 7.15 and six people arrived with their three large thin dogs looking like Irish wolfhounds and greyhounds. Three carpets or mats are put down for each of them – two behind the chairs the people will occupy and in the path of the staff who use this to get to the downstairs kitchen to bring up meals for all the customers who have reserved all the tables throughout the pub except one this particular evening. One of the dogs is in such a space that the staff have to step over it as they frequently use this path. One of the party tries to make it more accessible and one of the common phrases heard from the group is 'lie down'. The dogs lie quietly which is more than can be said for the occasional screaming of a child, heard in the dining room area two nights ago. These village pubs have to accept all and sundry in order to survive.

One wonders if the dog customers know the pub well well and have booked this particular table, which is the only table in this bar because it can fit in their dogs. More of the party arrive and the dogs bark their welcome. This is now the party bar and space and the dogs are greeted with a stroke prior to sitting. One of the dogs sports a coat probably because the group knows how cold pub is in the winter and particularly in this particular bar close to one of the entrances. They order a jug of tap water with ice and one of them is heard saying they have only eaten here at lunchtime after a walk with the dogs. When the coated dog begins to wander it is told quietly to lie down and commended for being a good girl. However, all the dogs quickly make their views known with loud barking as another dog on a lead dares to enter their domain. Eventually, one pint of beer and 1 glass of wine arrives and an orange juice for two of the party of six, but they, like the dogs, talk very quietly and preserve the quiet dining room style, (FN-Fri-13 Jan 2017).

At times of popularity, entailed by the necessity to be a destination pub, they are sometimes unable to satisfy interested visitors, who have not reserved a table,

There's a party occupying the whole of the snug; another drinking wine occupy the middle staff bar and all the tables in the dining room are reserved for a party of 36 at

8pm. In the main bar a well-dressed foursome sup some wine and ale and at the other table a Spanish family of two parents and one child focus on their own tablets together with earphones, the table is covered in empty crisp packets and empty half pint glasses. The regulars and smokers sit outside as do some of the main bar drinkers who cannot find a seat in their bar. About 10 persons occupy some of the 6 or more benches under a covered awning adjacent to another set of uncovered benches but they are plagued with showers in the wettest June ever. The kitchen cannot offer any small starters ordered by a regular couple because the kitchen is prepping for the large party arriving later. You can't please all the people all the time, (FN-Sat 2 July16).

The Woolpack Inn is well known across the district for its distinctiveness and a 'place' to go regularly. However, the other three rooms provided a place for a different clientele from those using the main bar and the common table. All conversations are overheard in each of the small rooms, creating an intimacy that people appear not to find daunting and again arts and culture are often the subject matter.

On a much quieter night the pub turns into space where people move slower and the chatter is more monotonous with varied subjects discussed, 'A group of six women are discussing literature - a book club. In the opposite corner sat a trio enjoying a pizza and adjacent to them is an arts group who are talking quietly about their university programmes. A pleasant quiet atmosphere lit by dimmed lighting and candles full of people generally talking quietly, except for the occasional enthusiastic comment and laugh from the reading group (FN-19 Aug16).

However, this intimacy may, sometimes, be too much, when, on occasions, there are loud parties or an enthusiastic reveller strikes up the piano and a friend takes up the shakers which is appreciated as a serendipitous event or as an intrusion into the quiet chat some were enjoying and they move to another bar to carry on in peace. Sometimes children are being entertained by parents with loud games, where shouts of exclamation are declaimed as they knock over a dominoes house built by the parent. One may then search, sometimes in vain, for a quieter corner. Nevertheless, intimacy leads to an authentic experience of being a regular member of the pub, 'it's honest as in what you see is what you get, unpretentious. It's also honest, a place where people can be honest with each other and speak their mind, (Lucas).

The pub also attracts TV personalities, 'Such a unique pub; ramshackly; and the décor hasn't been changed for years' (C. Life 2018) and other well-known people as well as locals with high incomes. It has become a fairly unique space, attractive to a wide set of regulars. 'There's such a wide mix; everyone from the guy who doesn't have much money to the multi-millionaires who use this place. There are some very, very wealthy people in there and there are some very poor people in there' (Whitney). That mix of characters includes for the Woolpack Inn, 'your locals, your London lot, your trendies and walkers', (Thomas).

You get a cross-section of people and there are some people in here who are rather different. To sum it up, my sister said 'Annabelle, it's like *Brideshead Revisited* in here', because there are some who have that background. Its country life, isn't it? They do mix, the classes, don't they? We were invited to the house of a wealthy landowner. Friends of ours went but we thought it was a bit late so we didn't go to his wedding at his very expensive country house, (Annabelle).

The social mix in this village pub was greater than many city pubs and cross generational, 'I love the multigenerational aspect; I like speaking to everybody; in London you got really stuck just speaking to people who are within five years of your own age and it's quite boring. Everyone had the same idea and the same activities. It's fascinating, that here you have a

complete spectrum of life experience, and in terms of age and profession, it's a real hub. In my past I used to be an artist, a sculptor, I used to write poetry, I used to love the inspiration that you get from the people around you, and I don't think it's ever been richer than while I've been here behind the bar, there's so many people to talk to, (Wendy).

To summarise the main bar and the common table are places of inescapable conviviality whereas the other bars are places a closed group can 'own' for a few hours or where smaller intimate couples and groups own only the table and they often share their life's stories with other couples or small groups as a background to their intimate conversations. One may be able to escape the convivial spaces but customers cannot escape intimacy unless it is a quiet cold time in January when one can, occasionally, have a bar to oneself but this is rare.

## **Conclusion**

The Woolpack Inn has a most eclectic mix of regulars and visitors. They come from across social class: artisans, labourers, farmers, landowners, technicians, engineers, artists, writers, all the professions and TV personalities. The pub has featured in the Sunday Telegraph a few times and other national newspapers. It is famous for its author who lived in the village and wrote about the valley and the lives of the villagers as well as his journeys in Europe in the 1970s. There are walks around the pub dedicated to him and the Snug contains his memorabilia. The nearby town of Stroud has been listed in a top ten of places to visit in the Times Newspaper, which mentions the Woolpack from time to time in the paper.

The pub attracts a regular group of working people and retirees who populate the main bar and the common table outside every day from about 4pm to 8pm and then there is another group, a mix of artists, some affluent and those engaged with intellectual activities such as writing and digital services. The other bars are filled when the pub is cooking, with families, friends, work groups and those meeting for more formal meetings. Most tables are reserved for these groups throughout most of the year, although in the winter it is a little quieter and in the summer many more take their ease and eat outside on the three terraces looking across the attractive valley.

This small pub feels intimate just because there is little space to escape each other but at the same time one can find separation in one of the end bars, however, not quite out of hearing of the constant chatter and badinage that echoes across the main bar. This intimacy is one of the main attractions of the pub, one has to engage with strangers and one has to accept that everyone might overhear your intimate conversations with your friends and company very easily. One overhears details of many different lives being lived just as those in close proximity hear your intimate conversations.

Yet, at the same time there are blurred boundaries that exist between those who congregate at the common table and the main bar and those who reserve their tables and take ownership of their small space for an hour or two and there are, sometimes, few words spoken between those arriving for a meal and those whom they pass by as they enter this tiny pub. If a pub was ever 'all things to all people' this is a very good example.

So, how does it survive? It is lucky to have the patronage of its owner who has a close personal connection to it and the village. It is fortunate that it is only two miles from a good sized town, which in its own right has a wide range of classes, users and supporters. It is fortunate that this small village pub with an ancient feel has become valued as a way to get away from the consumerist world with its never ending discourse of more consumption.

The Woolpack Inn is an exciting place to eat, a picturesque and unique place to explore, an invigorating place to be social and a unique overall experience. Long may it be so.

The Co-Directors of the Woolpack gave up their lease in the autumn of 2017 although the Director/chef still works there on a salary paid by the owner who has taken control of the pub again and he has extended and renovated the cellar and added a new extension to the dining room which opened after the Covid 19 lockdown in July 2020. He has employed a manager for the time being and turnover has increased.

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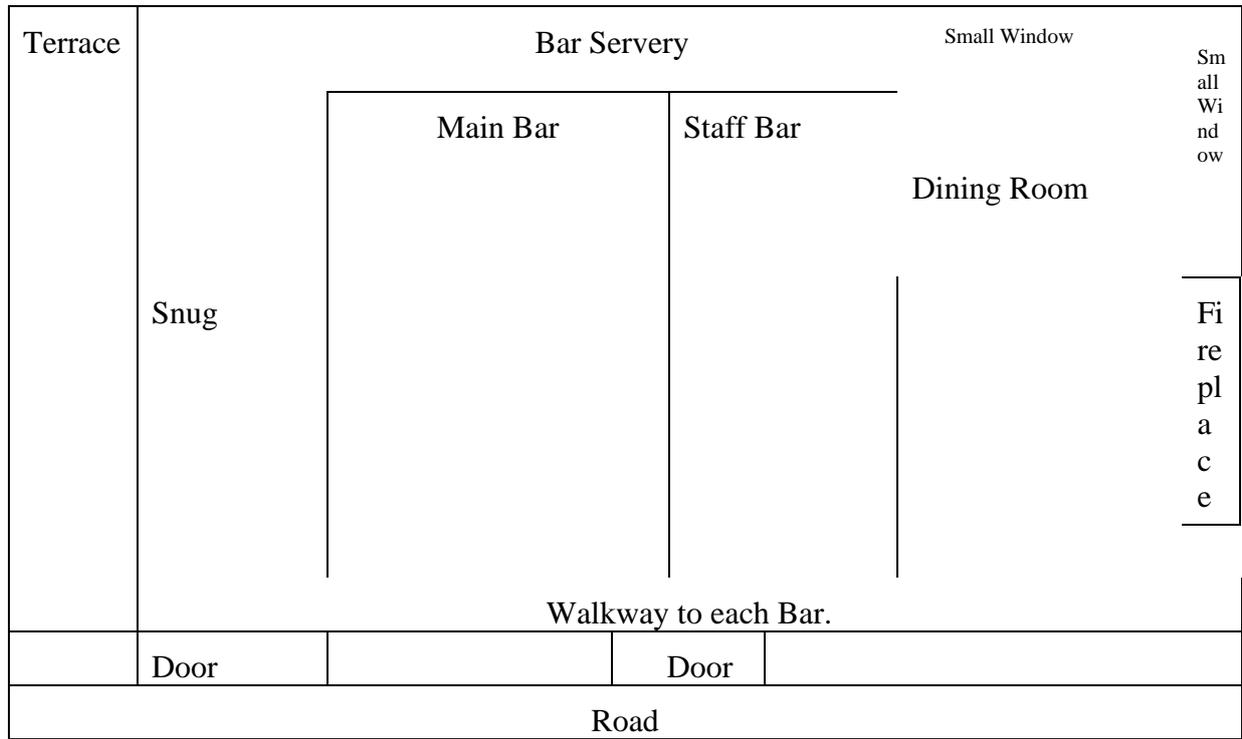
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**Fig 1**



## **A Year in the Life of the Woolpack**

### **Thu 7 Jan - 7pm - A small world on a cold January evening**

It's a cold empty dining room but within minutes Wendy (the Bar and Co-Pub Director) is telling the couple in there that she has turned up the heating and after some discussion about it becoming colder she brings them a blanket purchased from an upmarket Oxfordshire woollen emporium, Filkins, and a hot water bottle. It is quiet, as is expected at this time of year, and another couple with dogs come into the room but move towards a warmer one. The couple are appreciative of a wonderful meal of homemade soup, confit duck with a sweet sauce and perfect mashed potato and a delicious apple tart with homemade ice cream. Another pair of elderly men sits at an adjacent table, drinking soft drinks and they have a meal while discussing local land ownership and details of holidays in tiger inhabiting countries.

Another five person party arrive in the dining room having booked a table and one of them is a European resident. It is a quiet January evening with only a few people in the main bar next to the warm fire but it is a varied group. Wendy recognises a picture of Nicola Benedetti on a concert leaflet one of the customers is perusing and says William's wife - the Catering Director - is one of her cousins and they exchange stories of her good works and pleasant character. What a small world when a person from the west coast of Scotland comes to live in our area and is related to a world famous violinist. The soft drinkers compliment Wendy on their meal and it is noted that we are extremely lucky to have this quality of cooking on a cold January evening and the warmest of welcomes.

### **Fri 17 Feb - 6pm – The village pub as home from home**

The main bar is crowded and overflowing into the snug with three women in the space in between the two bars with one of them breast feeding her young infant. Another regular single mother is with her seven year old son who plays chess with a much older friend/relative and football outside with him. The three women find a space in the middle of the bar with their two men friends and an eight year old boy. One of them perches on the piano and one of the woman chats to the lad asking him about his rugby interests and that one of them will be supporting Scotland over Italy. The breast feeding continues discreetly but in a group with the eight year old holding his father's hand tightly and his father kisses the top of his head. One of the women with the baby group tells them she is off to watch Chelsea play Swansea with considerable enthusiasm. She looks up the position of Swansea in the league table on her phone for the eight year old. The babe, having been satisfied now chews his mother's scarf.

Charlie, the older man is heard describing the state of the chess board game. The young chess player then demands his mother join him outside and she leaves her enjoyable pint. They return and continue to chat together. The father of the babe holds him and the eight year old sticks closely to his dad and the father of the babe kisses him and chats to his wife. We can hear the seven year old's mother saying 'If I take your bishop here you can take me with your queen'. The snug has an atmosphere of warm family life as Charlie asks how old is the babe - five and a half months is the answer and the chess discussion continues.

### **Fri 19 Feb – 7pm. The welcoming host**

Wendy is good at welcoming people, with an instant warmth and intimacy that makes one feel good, recognised, included and embraced. It implies 'we are here for you. We value you and we will look after you' and customers know she means it. She, along with the rest of the staff are the public hosts. Every table is booked. It is half term and Wendy welcomes the upsurge as it has been quiet recently and 'things have been difficult'. People will go out

saying 'she was nice' because it's her job to make them feel comfortable. They feel welcomed and special. She puts people at their ease as she talks to them as if she has known them all her life. A customer asks her about the fish stew and Wendy talked to her for about three minutes about it. The customer may have anticipated she would not know and that was why she was so tentative but Wendy reassured them that she knew her business and her product.

## **Tuesday 20 Feb - 7.45. Engaging the regulars in the stocking of the pub wines (Photo – Wine Tasting)**

Wendy has advertised a Wine Tasting from a local company and gets the regulars to play a part in selecting the wines for the pub. She has twelve willing participants who have paid £15 which includes some nibbles from the kitchen. There are eight women and four men all between 35 and 50. A wine merchant has given them a Prosecco to start – Italian. The host tells them there will be a short wine quiz later. He then tells them about the prosecco, low frizzante which means low fizz-Casa Defra. Everyone obviously pays attention as he tells them about the production of the prosecco and how his wines are directly from producers. The company has been going for eight years and they are based in Cheltenham selling to restaurants.

They get their first glass of white wine, Torre solar Macabeo Spain. 'It's quite light, best drunk in warm weather in Spain....wines always taste best drunk in the vineyard...this is an upmarket Macabeo. It's quite a fat bottle' he says. Wendy says 'I always like a fat bottle'. Gradually the chat becomes louder, calling across the snug to each other. The second white wine arrives and people ask for a second glass before having finished the first. The second is an Italian Baccola Bianco, Appassimento, Parzile, Sauvignon Blanc and Garganino grapes. He compares it with the New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and two of the group own up to being from there. Someone takes a picture of themselves drinking. The next set of wines are white from France - Languadoc duc de Mornay picpoul (grape) de Pinet. 'This is the most popular white wine in their line, the same, consistent, organic grapes and a better class of hangover, great with fish'. And then they taste three red wines from Chile, Italy and South Africa.

Wine glasses pile up on the tables and Wendy sits down with them for a while and then jumps up guiltily as she notes two of us are waiting at the bar. Someone asks which restaurants they supply in Cheltenham as they live there. There are pens on the table as the tasters comment on the handout that has been supplied. The main bar is quiet with only four people having a business/arts meeting.

The wine merchant enjoys talking to the regulars about wines in general and Italian wines in particular. Evelyn then brings a regular a pigeon dish with beetroot he had ordered and the wine merchant offers him a South African Merlot which is gratefully received. Some snacks arrive and the tasters dig in and Wendy calls out 'does anyone want more snacks' to the main regulars bar. There are lots of glasses half full and the volume of chat grows as he gives out quiz sheets and organises them into teams. The wine merchant puts on his glasses and also moves the tapas plates from the tables so they can record their answers to the quiz. They all have to have a team name. They are multiple choice questions. Wine and sports quizzes. A glass is broken but they continue with quiz. The laughter rises and it becomes noisier. They all cheer at the end of the quiz and announcement of the winners.

## **Fri 18 Mar - 2pm - Gold Cup Day at the Woolpack (Photo)**

It's gold Cup day at Cheltenham racecourse in the largest and most prestigious jumps race meeting in the UK and Ireland. It's a busy and buzzy week in Gloucestershire and the lilt of Irish discourse is everywhere along with shouts of winning delight and woeful cries of disappointment.

The Woolpack has a tradition of celebrating this event with televised races from Gold Cup day and punters make sure they have laid their bets for all the televised races and they enjoy a drink and some camaraderie with the regulars.

The main bar is fairly full as is the snug where a small TV is seated 8ft high on a small shelf. A previous cellar manager, Elizabeth, who now works for one of the owner's businesses, is amongst a number of regular punters are present including the owner, a local brewer, the landlord of another Stroud pub who likes his beer, and some of the regulars who frequent the main bar in the evenings.

The other two bars are quieter but have served a few lunches to walkers and visitors to the area. The pub owner sits next to Elizabeth and charts the bets that have been made and so everyone becomes aware fairly quickly who is successful and who has been disappointed but who generally shrug it off as they enjoy the 'crack'. Regular pub goers from across the valleys have gathered for this annual event and they all seem to know one another. Outsiders would be unaware of this event as it is not advertised widely.

Someone broadcasts some Irish music from a lap top and the 'Crack' progresses happily. A latecomer greets a regular 'Hello Babe' and gives her a kiss. She says 'good to see you. How's things' and he says 'fine'. They discuss her bar jobs and talk about local pubs closing. She greets the fellow's partner with a hug and tells a friend in an Irish brogue a story about her Irish mother and betting.

A member of a group of middle aged men not seen regularly in the pub tries to turn down the volume and loses the race meeting on the TV to much laughter and ribaldry. Wendy is called and he says he has fixed it and then the TV crashes down just missing a punter sat below.

Beer is spilt over his jacket and Wendy apologies for it. They move from their seats and Wendy stands on the seat and replaces the TV and finds the channel and everyone cheers and claps her. She suggests that they do not touch it again with a wry smile. The snug empties a little as punters leave for a smoke or to visit the facilities, most of which are, unfortunately, out of action but Dyna Rod is apparently on the way. Everyone takes it all in their stride.

Punters like being amongst the throng. 'I've put on £4 to win' is heard from one of the regulars and a part time member of staff. A dog looks anxiously as she eyes the comings and goings. She cheers up as her owner looks to move but she is 'only 'getting one in'. As the time for the Gold Cup arrives the main bar begins to empty and the TV snug fills up. At the same time Dyna Rod arrives. It's all go here.

In the TV race bar a smart couple with a tie and cufflinks and an expensive coat sit under the TV unaware of the earlier incident. The race begins and there a shout of 'GOOOOO on' is raised. The bar staff try to peek through two large punters to follow the race. Half the bar chatters and the other half follows the race. We can hardly here the commentary so punters are following the colours of their choice. Six to jump and a call of 'looking good is heard'.

Many are on the same horse, 'Cue Card. 'He's going well' but falls at the next fence and a groan of despair resonates through the pub. There is a shout of delight as one punter who backed the favourite celebrates. Wendy arrives to ask which horse won. It's a bit of a damper really but punters quickly recover to continue their afternoon at the Woolpack Gold Cup.

Wendy has a break outside on the common table with a couple of regulars having secured a speedy Dyna Rod arrival, fixed the TV and backed the winner in the Gold cup unlike most of her punters. She's everywhere and she fixes everything.

As the afternoon's TV coverage ends punters begin to disappear a hard core remain and are supplemented by those regulars who had to work joining them. Wendy and William are beaming as they had three winners in the last race and they celebrate by passing round scotch eggs to those remaining, ending another regular's event at the cherished Woolpack Inn.

## **Pizza Night - Monday 2 April 2018 (Add Photo)**

It's pizza night on a Bank Holiday. Jack, who has been a part time barperson here since he was 17-18, for the last 10 years at least, has been organising this for a couple of months and he uses the owner's special ovens manufactured by him. There are two ovens, so the rate of production is 2 every 8 minutes, so tonight they have at least 12 orders which will take about 40-50 minutes. Jack rolls out the pizzas on a low table that strains his back and then he adds the extras on top of the tomato base. He carries out this production in the dining room where an inset has been created by the owner to hold the two ovens and cables lead from them to a gas canister. The pizzas are very much appreciated by those who consume them and one of the regular bar staff, Tim assists with the delivery. It's a jolly atmosphere in the dining room as friends of Jack and Tim chat and two other pairs sit, one eating, one about to order, with at least 12 in the queue. Jack slides a pizza metal base under a filled pizza pastry base and shunts it into the oven as Tim moves the heavy chili oil carafe towards another customer wiping the outside as he does so. A regular and occasional bar person here, Phil, sits on a bench adjacent to the main pizza table, sipping his wine and studying his laptop which he has plugged in to a pub socket to charge it. Tim clears a table and Jack keeps spreading tomato and cheese over his pastry bases while rubbing his back. Phil's friend invites her brother via a phone call to come next week for a pizza who lives about 40 miles away and she tells him she will book a table but no tables are actually allowed to be booked on a Monday but she will ensure they have one. She puts a reserved note on a table in the pizza/dining room while she and Phil slip out for a cigarette. Tim and Jack crack jokes as they work continuously to deliver their orders. It's 8pm and there are still 10 orders to be cooked. It's a tense time when they wonder whether they will be able to meet demand or whether they will run out of bases but they take it all in their stride.

The owner arrives and has a chat with Jack who is still busy painting the pizza bases red and then perches on a bench with another customer and someone with a rucksack calls out 'thank you' to Jack for the pizza and they agree to meet up for a drink. People are piling in on this Bank holiday evening and someone asks if he can join Phil's table. It is, again, a jolly atmosphere in this warm and welcoming pub, where the culture is created by the people that inhabit it.

A TV actor is spotted arriving in the dining room with his very young daughter and an older one and perches in the vacant seat the owner has vacated but they leave quickly as a table is spotted in the staff bar. Another tray of pizza bases arrive, courtesy of Tim and that means they have another 24 available so Jack will be pinned to the table for another hour or more. Phil asks if Mary, one of the staff clearing tables if she could get him another red wine and then leaps up to assist Jack as Tim has disappeared. Jack continues to chat as he cooks. There's nowhere like the Woolpack, Slad.

## **Monday 16 April – The Easter Egg Hunt. (Photo-Easter Egg Hunt 5)**

It's Easter Monday. The pub has an Easter egg hunt. Children arrive to go on a treasure hunt around the outskirts of the pub answering clues and filling in a crossword and arriving back with the completed answers. They then decorate some biscuits and then they are given an Easter egg in a box. Inside the pub the staff bar table is loaded with cups and saucers and everyone is encouraged to take a cup of tea or coffee and then move into the dining room where the tables are loaded with croissants. The Slad society organises the event and gave the pub £100 for refreshments. Free blackcurrant and orange squash is available for the children. Some walkers join the fun as do a bevy of dogs on leads.

The children work quietly decorating the biscuits with coloured edible tubes of 'paint' and tiny sprinkles that stick to the 'paint'. Gradually more hunters return and begin their painstaking task of decorating biscuits and dipping into their chocolate egg. Once the dining room fills up families grab a coffee and croissant and use the terrace tables and some older guardians take the opportunity to have an early pint prior to the usual pub opening times. This is an inter-generational activity with many grandparents joining their grandchildren for this family activity centred at the pub.

Gradually more piping voices are heard rising above the adults' quiet engagements. The organiser has to keep apologising for the obvious mistake in the crossword but it is all taken in good heart. Around 90 people are now here at 11.45 with children queuing to hand in their crosswords and receiving their Easter egg gratefully. Another loud piping voice is heard saying 'mummy I need some more'.

A girl presents her decorated biscuit to Wendy in the staff bar and she says 'Allora, you have made me cry'.

It's 11.45 and the sun comes out; the 'common table' is packed with children and surrounded by adults; the terrace is full and a jolly Bank holiday mood is evidenced. Wendy slides through the throng, clearing up, and making things look attractive as she goes. Gradually the families begin to depart and the pub gets back to its day job serving lunches to hungry walkers and ales to thirsty holidaymakers

## **Tues 19 April – It never was easy to be lonely in a pub but with new technology and a dog it's impossible.**

A woman sits in a corner with a pint of beer and a dog next to her for company who she feeds regularly from a packet of crisps and strokes it fondly all the time. However, given the digital age she is able to conjure a friend instead of a fellow drinker by phoning a friend and having a loud conversation with her or him. Once the conversation is over she encourages another dog to come and sample her crisps. Pubs are never now and never have been places of loneliness but there are other ways of conquering it if there is a dearth of companions.

## **Saturday 2 May – A common village outdoor event (Photo – Mummers and Tricia)**

The Mummers arrive on Bank holiday Saturday afternoon to entertain at the front of the pub. One of the staff joins in the dancing. Not many people at the pub - 20 - but a jolly atmosphere. There didn't appear to be much advertising for it. Could the pub become too popular if they used a lot of advertising? Later on the owner of a local brewery used by the pub sits with the regulars and chats about local pubs. The Mummers and other folk groups come and go throughout the year, all part of the life of the pub.

### **Thursday 7 May - 6.30 - The Polling Station Woolpack - (Photo – WP - Polling)**

It's Election Day and one bar is out of action due to it being a polling station. The pub still has a full menu but once the reserved tables have been made people have had to go elsewhere or eat outside. They were going to do a BBQ but the weather forecast was not good so they cancelled it. A pity. As the polling progresses the range and good quality cars that draw up to let someone out to vote and then speed off at a pace is noted. Some local trade's people make it a chance to catch up and vote at the same time.

### **Thursday 4 June - 8pm - Cocktails at the Woolpack -**

A party of women have booked the Snug bar for a party. Wendy, perhaps with some of the group, has decorated the bar and the table is laid out in a formal style. They are greeted with mojitos cocktail made by her with mint from the local area and they sit outside on the common table that is normally occupied by the regulars early in the evening. They have come here because it is the birthday girl's favourite pub, 'the food is good and the people that run it are so helpful and wonderful'.

### **Friday 5 June – 5.30 - The Woolpack's Common Table - (Photo – Common Table)**

About twenty people sit outside in front of the on the long oak common table constructed by the owner and it is so popular that an inferior bench has been added to increase the seating numbers. They are a mixed group of about seventeen men and three women, though sometimes there are more women. Some smoke but not all of them. They sit on the bench seats opposite each other dressed in working or casual clothes. Most of the regulars who usually use the main bar, with a fire and no reserved tables, are outside on this sunny but breezy evening. The common table is in constant use throughout the year and the drinkers can be seen by all the traffic that passes the pub and often have to negotiate the highway due to the number of cars parked in a long line outside it. It is here at this table that certain people choose to sit to join this group of builders, mechanics, gardeners and bar staff as well as teachers and website designers.

Apparently, it has been hard to break into this group in the past but the good weather means anyone can sit wherever there is a space and join in. New relationships are made, old ones renewed but according to them no one who fancies themselves lasts long.

Nearly all the staff joins them from to time, when off duty, including the kitchen workers and chef. It is a place where you cannot avoid joining in and where you go if you enjoy sociable engagements. Its popularity may well because it is a place of connection and joviality, a place where taking part is an imperative. Those who wish to be less convivial sit inside at tables separated from one another and they are able to shield their privacy.

An hour later a local family arrive and look for a table for a quick meal and Wendy finds them one and they ask if Wendy knew her brother was getting married in the church in July and ask if they could put up some decorations at the pub - all agreed. Then another small group arrive, who have booked a table and one of them samples some of the beers. In the meantime two regulars, in working clothes, discuss a job for the following morning alongside those, dressed in more social casual clothes, who are sampling beers. A young couple join those outside and two of the staff joins them, making three, and they order cocktails. Wendy has to be free to do it. Now the number of women sat at the long table equals the number of men. The social structure of the common table reflects a wide clientele as does the main bar.

## **Thu 19 June - Global issues in the main bar of the Woolpack**

Overheard in the main bar a group discussing Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo, as this is its 200th anniversary. They share information and make the odd analytical comment. Their relationships are connected through common experiences including those via the media. John is then invited to join them as he sitting on his own. They start to discuss alcoholism in Cuba. The global world inhabits this bar.

## **Saturday 2 July 16-6.30 – The joy of a popular pub, on a wet weekend in June**

There's a party occupying the whole of the snug; another party drinking wine and occupying the middle staff bar and all the tables in the dining room are reserved for a party of 36 at 8pm. In the main bar a well-dressed foursome sup some wine and ale and at the other table a Spanish family of two parents and one child each focus on their own tablets together with earphones, the table covered in empty crisp packets and empty half pint glasses. The regulars and smokers sit outside as do some of the main bar drinkers who cannot find a seat in their bar. About 10 persons occupy some of the 6 or more benches under a covered awning adjacent to the pub on a terrace trying to avoid the showers. The kitchen cannot offer any small starters ordered by a regular couple because the kitchen is prepping for the large party arriving later. This pub is restaurant, bar, cafe, a walkers resting place, an outdoor revellers smoking space and a local history venue all rolled into one.

## **Monday 22 June 6.30 – A Socially Diverse Third Home**

Two male customers are in the dining room discussing Literature: their likes and dislikes of Henry James, Patricia Highsmith, Shakespeare, Marlow, poetry and sonnets quietly. They don't appear to feel uncomfortable. One of them is talking about leading a session at the Cheltenham Literary Festival on the subject of authors born one hundred years ago. A loud cacophony of noise is heard from the main bar where they are celebrating someone's birthday and when that dies away there is the distinctive sound of a regular loud voice that permeates the whole pub. There is a wide social mix in this pub, perhaps because it is the only one in the village. This diversity may not be found in a town pub where people have much more choice of pubs and they may choose to inhabit a pub that reflects their own social homogenous group.

## **Thursday 28 Aug - 6.30 – Woolpack Displays (Photo – Wendy-Kelly Design)**

There is an attractive window display, which is obviously Wendy's creation, for she is forever altering bric-a-brac in the pub as she sees fit. She has a creative/qualitative eye and has said she enjoys this aspect of space. Someone mentions the artistic arrangement and she says in an understatement 'Oh that'. She then slides back behind the bar and is seen saying to someone in the main bar 'Oh I like your shirt. I wish I had one like that'. Wendy says it was Evelyn that did the window display and that staff feel free to re-organise artefacts at will. These small re-arrangements are noticed by regulars who appreciate the care and interest taken by the staff.

## **The Woolpack Festival – Saturday 5 Sept – (Photos – WP -Fest)**

It's their festival day, two years since Wendy and William – Co-Directors - arrived and six months after they took full control of the lease. The main bars are fairly free of customers as the festival includes outside sitting decks, one above the other on three levels, beginning with the lane level outside tables, another level a few steps down to a long terrace and a lower one

on a level below which contains the music tent, vegetarian food and a small bar. This is the Stroud valleys after all and the total drop is about 100 feet. On this lower level children play on the natural slope and some of them have spent the afternoon clambering into the sycamore tree looking very serious as they climb upwards and emitting joyous cries having achieved a specific target branch. Others build temporary huts from the branches or dig up the soft soil using tools made from branches. Most of them have their faces painted, some by Wendy. In the background a two person band churn out folk songs and what seem like sea shanties. Obviously it is a jolly atmosphere but with a quiet hubbub, of people conversing naturally, with no excess shrieks or screams except occasionally from the children. Mostly groups know one another but I hear a small group introduce themselves as they sit in adjacent seats. However, one solitary individual is enjoying a pint and reading the Sports section of the Telegraph.

All the regular staff appears to be employed this afternoon except for two. Two new sous chefs run the burger bar and two strangers run the Vegetarian bar - presumably employed for their food production from outside. William has been around all day and well into the afternoon he says goodbye to his wife and child who are heading home after a long day. There is a cider bar and lager is sold on all levels but the real ale remains available from the main bar at prices 15% above the normal to pay for the event.

A small girl clambers up the grassy bank collecting mud as she goes. A previous worker here, sports a hat adorned with peacock feathers but there is not much dressing up. A boy aged about ten with a red face painted mask and black rims to his eyes consumes a burger, looking like something from the deep forest and a young women with face painted stars on her forehead rolls a cigarette and talks of her recent trip to Croatia.

The steep steps down to the third level require care and some perch on the iron railings including the sous chef who takes a cigarette break from the burger bar with her mates. Dogs bark ferociously from time to time but people are tolerant, smiling as they pass strangers on the steps or accept you with warmth to join their table, 'If there's no room you can sit on her lap', is one welcome from a stranger. The children continue to adventure around the tree seemingly oblivious of the rest of the activities, but occasionally returning 'home' to reconnect and sometimes carrying out a dangerous manoeuvre near a steep drop that requires stern warnings from their parent. There is a long line of cars parked in the grass verges into the village, with people still pouring in towards a festival of joy, friendliness and lots of laughing, representative, perhaps of the Slad valley and the welcoming Woolpack Inn.

### **3 Oct - 5.30 - A Leaver's Celebration**

Jack has done his last session before he goes travelling to South America and then to live in Canada. There is a presentation from the regulars wrapped inside a newspaper with about twenty people present. Elizabeth, a previous employee, returns with partner to be part of it. They present him with a large card with comments written in the card and they have contributed cash as a present to assist his travels. It is a private regulars group. They are a club within the pub. One of the previous chefs turns up and presumably he still returns drink regularly at the outside table. Wendy is part of the group, having established herself as a part of this regulars group and I hear sitters near her asking her about her origins. She makes a phone call with a stripped cover on her phone that matches her top and she sips a glass of wine. There are jolly conversations, similar to any party. As people leave they quietly to walk home through the valley they must feel a warm connection to the pub, and aware that this situation and jolly atmosphere will continue for ever, beyond their existences.

## **Tues 4 Oct 7pm – The pub as a safe space.**

There's a new kitten introduced by Wendy. It frightens the bar staff (Jack) by hiding in a cavity as he reaches in for some bar clothes and he jumps back with a quiet shocked exclamation. The cat then wanders into the snug and teases the small snappy dogs in the main bar by sitting on the children's games chest staring at the dogs, presumably aware that the dogs won't be allowed to savage them. This is a pub that welcomes all sorts and one that embraces a wide range of regulars and everyone is welcome, tolerated and socially engaged. The cat settles down on the chest as the frustrated dogs stretch their leads and scuffle to and fro trying to engage the cat but they unperturbed. A large black dog arrives and stretches its lead to get to the cat but it remains unperturbed and the two small dogs spend their time staring at the cat, maybe realising that their co-existence is now mutual and accepted as is all who frequent this sociable pub. It's a safe place

## **Wed 7 Oct 7.45 - Harvest Festival at the Woolpack**

It's a harvest celebration and the pub is busy with regulars and locals who have bought a variety of produce including baskets of nuts, flowers, root vegetables, salad materials and fruit. A member of the congregation from the church opposite the pub hands out song sheets throughout the pub, including to those in the dining room, who may not have realised this event was taking place. The pub has clearly decided to carry on as normal and serve a full menu. We find a seat at the only table in the 'staff bar' alongside Wendy's relatives from Scotland, one of whom is going through a Burns song he might add to the celebrations for Burns, for as he informs us he was a poet of the soil.

The main bar is full of harvest fare which adorns the unlit fireplace and the produce flows onto the bar and back through the small archway into the snug. Food orders continue to be taken as a bell rings and the vicar introduces the event.

A fairly deep tone arises from the depths of the pub as the regulars and locals are heard joining in four verses of 'All good things around us.....' interrupted with normal pub discourse such as 'can we pay our bill'. Most of Wendy's relatives begin their meal and choose to eat and talk rather than sing and eat. There are a few quiet minutes from the snug and eventually light clapping as a reading is applauded. The piano then strikes up and the deep tone of another hymn begins while those in the restaurant and in the 'staff bar' continue to chat. There is another reading in the hollow between the snug and the main bar and they all listen with respect while those in the staff bar and the restaurant continue chatting. Another reading and the pub's work continues with attractive plates arriving from the kitchen cellar to be presented to those in the eating end of the pub.

There are about thirty people in the snug and another twenty in the main bar and as another hymn begins Wendy and family join in. A French woman from Calvados, who enjoys her cider, tries to follow the hymn sheet. A final prayer is spoken by the vicar and the main bar is unusually silent. There is a break 'to refresh glasses' before the auction of the harvest produce takes place with the proceeds being donated to the Lymphoma society, selected by Wendy, and the hymn sheets are collected. Wendy sings while she gathers a bottle of wine for some diners and someone says 'you enjoy your work, don't you' and she smiles and says 'yes' emphatically. More people arrive to fill the tables of the few diners who have left.

The bell rings and the auction begins. The Vicar stands in the hollow arch between the snug and the main bar acting as the auctioneer and the first basket of a bottle of wine goes for £9. Two young regulars take part to raise the prices as a gamble. What will happen if they win? 'Let's start with a fiver and these are lovely red onions and 7 and 10 is heard'. 'I'm saving myself' says one wag. A large squash is offered 'grown in the Slad valley' quips another and it goes for £15. 'How do you cook it?' is heard. Two very large onions are held aloft by the

vicar and some slightly smutty laughter is heard, meanwhile the restaurant diners at the other end of the pub carry on chatting, not quite oblivious, but choosing to distance themselves. As this part of the pub gradually empties the auction gathers momentum and one wag, on the phone says 'the owner will offer £20.' A jam sponge is offered and Wendy offers £21 and is gazumped with £22 followed by £25 and Wendy rises to £26 'at the bar'. A round of applause greets Wendy's acquisition.

Another group of customers arrive, emanating from Germany and Wendy fits them into the staff bar alongside her family and her uncle from Scotland engages them with warmth.

Another squash is offered and raises £15.

A large sprout stick is offered and the owner is on the phone again as it reaches £90 at the bar and the local from the land owning family and the owner bid against it to take it to £100. A local introduces herself to Wendy's uncle and says 'you know Ray'. They start to chat and she says 'We all love her' - Wendy.

The auction has been going for at least half an hour and is still going strong but the laughter and amusing asides are subsiding as one wonders whether everyone has bought something and they are running out of bidders. Wendy serves some coffee to a couple in the restaurant, Lucas takes some plates down to the kitchen and Rose washes some glasses. A Panacotta passes by me, carried by Lucas, to a couple who have been in intimate conversation all evening and Phil, an ex-staff member shows off his prizes from the auction to his girlfriend who has just arrived.

Johnnie, Wendy's uncle, has bought down a bottle of highland whisky to auction. He is clapped as he introduces himself as a seed farmer in Scotland, but before that he tells a story of Burns and sings his song. He said earlier he was a busker and was used to this sort of event. He is received with respect as he gives his Gaelic tune. A loud cheer greets his ending together with loud clapping. The bidding for the whisky gets to £50 quickly, then £55 stays for a while and the vicar cannot coax another bid. That seems to end it.

There is a round of applause for the vicar/auctioneer and the two bars revert to their normal use, as a haven of conversation and social interaction. The German group continue to chat alone and without food and those in the restaurant continue their evening interactions and the pub reverts back to its normal atmosphere as the church group gradually depart and spaces appear in all the bars. Unusually, those leaving the main bar depart with baskets and trays full of local produce, local baking, and wine and a whisky bottle. The pub has been doing what it does every day of the week, 12 hours a day, acting as a centre of the community, entertaining, providing sustenance and a warm social space for visitors from near and far and adding to the life memories of everyone who passes its portals.

### **Thursday 20 Oct – 6.10pm - The pub as a haven**

A woman comes into the 'staff bar' and says 'hello darling' to Wendy. 'Which bottle will it be' asks Wendy, 'the Sauvignon Blanc' she replies and exclaims, 'I need it'. 'Oh dear says Wendy, 'what's up?' I've just off the train from London and went to the stables and nobody has done the horses. So I set to and do that and when I get home I find my ex-husband sat in the kitchen chair chatting to my daughter. So, I've left them to it and will stay here until he's gone'. Wendy asks if she wants a larger one and everyone laughs. Jack says 'hello, how are you' and everyone says 'don't ask'. Another friend arrives, gives her a hug and they exit for a welcome smoke. Pubs are also havens.

### **Mon 2 Nov - 6.30 - A new engagement in the Snug at the Woolpack -**

In the snug a woman sits in the window seat with a quiet dog tethered to the table. She is reading and viewing her phone. An elderly well-built man wanders in rifling among the papers and unsure where to plant himself. He ignores a corner individual settle and asks if he

can sit at an adjacent table apparently not realising that someone was occupying it and he therefore asked the woman if he could sit at her table and she agreed. The man sat and said he was expecting a pizza and muttered on about not being able to find the Economist in the pub which is usually available. There is a short period of silence and then he asks her about her dog. Their conversation develops discussing it and his experiences with animals. She then offers him a drink after he has asked her if she would like some of his pizza. They continue to chat about her PhD in Planning in Japan. Apparently she is waiting to talk to Wendy and buys his drink of water with a card although the minimum amount is £5 but Anna relents. The woman has just got a job with the Gloucester Wildlife Trust. One wonders if she wanted to be left alone to do her business or did she want to engage with someone?' The same could be said of him or did neither of them mind? Certainly they were well matched as they continued to chat about their lives. She wanted a meeting with Wendy but it turned out she had another comfortable experience as well.

### **Wed 23 Dec Christmas Carols at the Woolpack**

The pub is packed. It looks like there is a Christmas party in the Snug -full with lots of decorations. The main bar is packed and the staff see it as quicker to walk outside to get back behind the bar because it is so crowded. Walter and friends occupy the staff bar and more join them though not known to all. The owner and Elizabeth and, presumably, the pizza workshop group are here for their 'works outing', sitting on table 1 in the restaurant. Wendy serves drinks to the owner's table uncorking another bottle of prosecco and providing the owner with a good whisky. Customers stand in the corridor between the staff bar and the restaurant perching on the narrow window seats which are only used when it's busy as there is nowhere to put one's drinks except on the Wendy inspired attractively decorated window sills. There are four male staff serving drinks constantly and occasionally carrying food to tables from the kitchen. Wendy tells the staff that 'she will take the floor' and all queries and food orders are to go through her as there appears to be jam downstairs in the kitchen. One of those at the owners table takes his coat, a rolled cigarette and another two of the group outside for some inhalation. Elizabeth passes and kisses someone 'Merry Christmas'. The owner discovered that she had an engineering degree and he offered her a job which she is enjoying immensely. The pub is so packed and latecomers cannot get near the choir. This restaurant end of the pub will clearly not be joining in very much as the people from the States begin giving orders to Wendy for their dinner.

A bell is heard ringing from the Snug and Walter bangs the table to ask for quiet so everyone can hear the announcement, however, the hubbub is too much but gradually it becomes clear that the carols have started. Walter encourages everyone to join in using his deep bass voice-over however they are at least a line behind. At the end Walter and a colleague suggest that the number of the Carol is passed down the pub and he positions himself in the corridor to make sure this happens. He leads the middle bar contribution to 'While the shepherds watch...'. He and his group die away from time to time as they 'realise they are out of synch and one of his colleagues says 'we need to be synchronised'. There is a pause as it is believed there is a religious reading and Walter asks for silence, which apart from a couple of shushes, is ignored by most of the people in the restaurant. One of the bar staff asks 'if he minds passing by 'to get to the kitchen' and one of Walter's colleagues explains that some 'fire and brimstone is going on' during the pause in the singing. Number 10 is called out and 'While Shepherds' starts up and at the beginning of the second verse Walter announces 'Women only'. 'Nowell, Nowell' is loudly proclaimed and Wendy slips through the 'out of tune throng' with three dinners on her arms. It appears that all in the main bar are singing lustily. William appears looking harassed but in control and searches for Wendy and then slips back through the throng, back to the refuge of the kitchen. A number 8 is called out but it is then corrected

to 9 'Silent Night' and someone asks if there is a spare song sheet. Walter and company sing out amid the general chatter of the staff bar and a shushing is heard again but ignored in the restaurant. One tall fellow says 'we just: have to watch the vicar's lips as he stands tall in the Snug leading the singing and readings. Carol no. 1 is announced - another Shepherds song, appropriate for this rural community.

The clientele is wide ranging from young men in jeans and popular tops to older women well made up and in traditional good dress. There is very little opportunity to move through the throng as it is thick and stationary. A nearby customer says 'oh it's a fag break' and another asks someone who is singing 'if he is religious?' and the answer is equivocal. Wendy appears carrying an array of drinks down the kitchen that was apparently William's request. It thins out as people use the opportunity to relieve themselves from the internal crush. There are five deep queues at each bar.

Hark the heralds begins the second part and everyone joins in, including Wendy, as she takes plates to the kitchen. More customers arrive and the singing gets louder as they queue for about fifteen minutes for a drink. Suddenly 'Away in a manger' breaks out and it seems that most have joined in and seem to be moving towards the centre of this event but it may be a tobacco break as they carry their drinks and press their way through. As one looks through the corridor of uncertainty it appears as though they are waiting for a sign or a signal as to what they should do/sing next. The uncertainty is relieved as the call is answered 'number twelve, only the first three verses' and all join in including the young people who have just arrived and some of the women sing the descant' and another 'part'. As they hit the high note and it ends they all cheer and applause. Lucas passes me with a plate of mussels. The ending is expressed as 'We wish you a Merry Christmas' but doesn't quite get going. The jolly young women decide to keep going with their own renditions of carols of their choice and resist giving up their song sheets. 'In the bleak winter' is struck and the women join in enthusiastically. Some of them work their way outside to continue. A few glasses are taken around collecting for 'Crisis at Christmas' and they become full of notes and the Song sheets are collected. Christmas is well under way in this popular and much loved village pub.