

**Project Title**  
Oxford Brewery Rebrand

**Client Company**  
Oxford Brewery

**Design Consultancy**  
WPA Pinfold

# The story of how a little-known micro-brewer became an Oxford icon

Before



After



Section 1

Executive Summary

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The new owners of Shotover Brewery had taken on the business in 2018 and were making a significant investment to expand capacity. However, the beer market had dramatically shifted since the Brewery was first formed in 2009 and the brand had not kept up with the pace of change – by the time of the takeover it had lost touch with the market and its consumers. The beer market had become saturated with an explosion of new brewers and their beers entering the market and the new generation of discerning drinkers were demanding choice, provenance and premium quality over quantity. Everything that the current brand lacked – sales were declining. There was a compelling need for a total redesign and repositioning to ensure that the brand was contemporised, engaging and proud in an increasingly overcrowded sector – on-bar, on-shelf and online. It also needed to build on its Oxford provenance and extend its appeal beyond its core traditional consumer to the new generation of craft drinkers and the beer aficionado.

Our rebrand and comprehensive design activation had to radically realign the business, in order to: extend the ranges; increase sales; expand distribution channels; increase on-trade, off-trade and online presence; and move the brand to the high-end. The launch was planned for the beginning of 2020, then came the pandemic and total lockdown for the hospitality sector... The brewing sector was facing meltdown and it was probably the worst time for the industry in living memory. The roll out was postponed to Spring 2021 and we worked diligently through lockdowns and everything else Covid threw at us to ensure that we delivered success. The results have been phenomenal and the rebrand has effectively saved the business.

**Key Objectives**

- / Reposition the brand to build equity, widen market appeal and help drive growth.  
**Delivered:** + 300% increase in overall sales (against pre-pandemic levels).
- / Build on Oxford provenance and move the brand to the high-end and premiumise the ranges – to support pricing.  
**Delivered:** 'We were able to increase prices within market parameters and position as a premium brand. We have not had to discount to gain sales. We have increased our GP margins.'
- / Raise profile with stockists through engaging branding.  
**Delivered:** REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA
- / Increase presence and sales both online and in the Brewery shop, through more visible and relevant branding.  
**Delivered:** REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA
- / Build traction with traditional cask ale (a core customer for the Brewery) with a more contemporised presence.  
**Delivered:** REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA
- / Extend reach to the new generation of craft drinkers and also appeal to the beer aficionados.

**Delivered:** 'We have had positive feedback from customers and even competitors too, and have achieved a broader reach since launch, for the first time finding ourselves being listed in 'on trend' bars across the UK.'

'Our partnership has been truly invaluable in dissecting our previous, tired image and reflecting our goals and strengths in developing Oxford Brewery's stunning brand image, clarity of message and visual language and defining our brand journey. The collaboration across the brand & product strategies, their admirable creativity and client focus make the team formidable and we are delighted with the outcome and loved working with them. They have literally saved our business at a time when we had gone through the worst period for hospitality in living memory.'

– Alastair Ross, Managing Director, Oxford Brewery



Section 2

Project Overview

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In 2009, a new micro-brewery was founded in Oxford, it was one of the new generation of pioneering craft brewers that were about to revolutionise the UK beer sector and it was the first craft brewery in Oxford. The business was named Shotover Brewery, after a little-known suburb of Oxford. All went well for the Brewery for the first few years, however, by the middle of the last decade it had lost momentum and sales had plummeted – the brand was no longer engaging its consumers. Sales were declining and, whilst the quality of the beer was excellent, the market was being driven by highly visible premium brands (on-bar, on-shelf and online) that were engaging with modern drinkers who demanded style, choice, and provenance. We were briefed to reinvigorate the brand, building on its core more traditional customer base, whilst also emphasising its craft credentials, thus widening its appeal to the new wave of drinkers, as well as beer aficionados – no mean feat. The new brand needed to be premiumised, widen its appeal and be more market relevant and build on its Oxford credentials.



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**The Challenge**

The new owners of Shotover Brewery had taken on the business in 2018 and were making a significant investment to expand capacity. However, the Shotover brand was not fit for market, also the brewery name (Shotover, a lesser known suburb of Oxford) was not understood and its relevance to future customers was negligible. Sales were declining and, whilst the quality of the beers was excellent, the market was being driven by brands that were engaging with modern drinkers who demanded style, choice, and provenance. There were no equities in the existing Shotover brand that we could build on, apart from the Oxford connection. There was an urgent requirement for a revolutionary (not evolutionary) brand repositioning if the Brewery was to survive and thrive.

**Market Context**

In 2018, the business was taken over by new owners with the aim of developing and revitalising the Brewery, however, by now a second wave of craft brewers had flooded onto the market and transformed the industry. The beer sector had become fragmented, disrupted and overcrowded. In the overall beer market, sales had dropped by 11% since Shotover was first founded and in the same period the number of UK breweries had increased by 330% from 740 to almost 2,500 and rising... The market had diversified and become all about choice, innovation and flavour. There was a divergence between the traditional drinkers and the new younger generation of more adventurous craft drinkers, with a third type of beer aficionado who straddled both sectors. In addition, the new beer market had shifted to the high-end and according to Mintel this end of the market has developed a 'quality over quantity mindset', with consumers favouring 'authenticity over artifice' and where they 'do not want more things – they want to have things that actually mean something to them'. This was a perfect storm for Shotover, it had been brewing the same beers since it was founded and the brand looked tired, dated and cheap – it was no longer fit for market. Desperate times.



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Strategy

The new owners had to act fast to rescue their investment and reinvigorate sales, however, everything about the strategic model was broke and needed fixing – except the quality of the beer which was exceptional. It was imperative that the Brewery brand was repositioned and premiumised.

We carried out audits, insights and diagnostics to clarify the segmentation of the market, targets and positioning. We ran health checks and brand workshops with the client to develop the strategic brand plan and align this with the business strategy. Our tracking of the beer sector revealed that the sector was becoming saturated with brands that were either targeting ‘old school’ traditionalists, with pedantic designs or the ‘too cool for school’ new wave, with ephemeral and gratuitous graphics. There was an opportunity to move to the high-end and create a more intelligent, ‘thinking beers’ approach to the rebrand, that was both quirky and edgy enough to appeal to the new generation of drinkers, and that had real provenance and substance to engage the more traditional drinkers and the aficionados.

Oxford and its catchment area (from the Cotswolds and Banbury to Swindon and London) was identified as a prime target area that afforded ample growth opportunity (49% of drinkers prefer local craft beer, rising to 58% in the London catchment area) – the population included a high proportion of professionals, students and tourists. Provenance had become a key driver for the beer market and the city of Oxford is held in high esteem globally with its great heritage and academic reputation. The Brewery had been the first of the new wave of craft brewers in Oxford – a compelling reason to regain its crown and rename to Oxford Brewery. The Oxford provenance was to be magnified and given further meaning through mining the rich stories and legends that abounded in the City, these inspired the naming strategy for the beers and the stories that went with them.



Section 3

Project Design Solution

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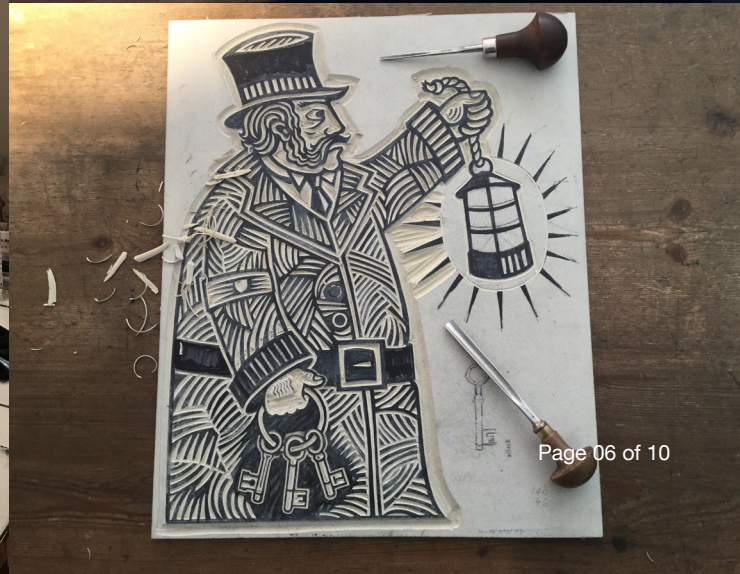
**Client Company**  
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/ Rebrand + Scope – There was a need to make the rebrand transformational, it was not simply a change of symbol, it was to become a symbol of change. This involved a name change to Oxford Brewery to help support its strategy to ‘own’ the Oxford region and re-establish its credentials as the original craft brewer in the City. The new brand ‘Oxford Brewery’ was given a confident and contemporary typographic twist – splitting the name into its components OX and FORD (the inspiration for the city’s name) whilst the hand drawn letterforms were based on a classic font, befitting of this academic city. The waves and brand colours were inspired by Oxford’s Coat of Arms. Myths and legends abound about Oxford and we built on these as inspiration for the naming strategy and as an opportunity to engage customers and consumers with stories that build on Oxford’s rich reputation and also align with the provenance of the Brewery itself.

/ Illustrated stories – We commissioned and art directed a series of woodcut illustrations to help narrate the stories, using a very traditional medium, given a contemporary twist through the quirky images and simple fresh, vibrant colours. In addition, a new range of innovative beers were given a more artistic approach. Each new beer was also inspired by myths and legends and supporting stories were developed.

/ Slogan – To build on the ‘thinking beers’ brand thought we created the strapline ‘CERVISIA ILLUMINATIO MEA’ (Beer is my light) – a nod to the Oxford University motto: Dominus illuminatio mea.



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/ Range extensions – New branding was developed for the new keg and canned beers, the pack format of choice for the new craft drinkers (such as Matilda’s Tears) that built on the storytelling, illustrated with more contemporary art styles that appeal to younger drinkers. A simpler abstract style was also developed for the experimental batch brews (Vivid Dreams...) to enable easy updates, as these are small volumes. In addition a super-premium beer was developed, aimed exclusively at the beer aficionado (Headless Laud IPA).

/ POS and merchandise – Branded glassware, drip mats and merchandise were designed to build on the brand and its assets and spread the stories.

/ Website – We built a new website as a showcase for the new brand and beers. This was revolutionary in raising the profile of the Brewery, especially for the younger market.

The brand, typography and illustrations align the brewery with its roots in Oxford and the activation of the brand has been carefully managed to maximise impact and enable the Brewery to punch above its weight. Positioning it as the Oxford Brewery with a portfolio of beers that has universal appeal (appealing to traditionalists, the new generation of craft drinkers, aficionados and tourists alike) and is uniquely and distinctly recognisable as Oxford Brewery. Thus building up a strong, diverse and loyal fanbase.



Section 4

Results

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The new brand was planned for launch during the second half of 2020, then came the pandemic, the most challenging period for the hospitality sector in living memory. The lockdowns closed down the industry and by Spring 2021 it was make or break for the Brand. The rebrand had to effectively save the business. The results and designs speak for themselves...

**Client Response and Results:**

*'The rebrand and activation across on-trade, off-trade and online has exceeded all expectations.'*

**Objective one / Reposition the brand to build equity, widen market appeal and help drive growth.**

- / From an effective standing start in Spring 2020, overall sales have increased over 300% against pre-Covid levels.
- / REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA increase in cask ale – Recent data from the BBPA indicates that cask ale sales have plummeted by -40% since the pandemic. Cask sales for Oxford Brewery have bucked the trend by a factor of REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.
- / Bottle sales to trade outlets: Increased by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.
- / Direct brewery shop sales to public: Increased by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA.
- / Can sales: *'As part of the confidence in the rebrand we introduced canning for the first time in two products. This has been incredibly popular craft beer drinkers (a new market for us) and we are looking to introduce further canned lines for 2022. We literally sold out of our first run within 4 months, in excess of 8000 cans.'*

**Objective two / Build on Oxford provenance and move the brand to the high-end and premiumise the ranges – to support pricing.**

- / Pricing: *'We were able to increase prices within market parameters and position as a premium brand. We have not had to discount to gain sales. We have increased our GP margins.'*





Section 4

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**Objective three / Raise profile with stockists through engaging branding.**

/ Increase in distribution and reach: *'We have increased our wholesale orders significantly to existing customers and attracted new smaller wholesale customers who are finding that the new branding is driving sales in pubs. This has resulted in a far greater spread of sales and distribution across the South East, South West and London.'*

/ Increased sales to wholesale distributors: Increase by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA and still increasing significantly

/ Direct keg sales to on-trade: Increase keg sales by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA led by new branding and positioning for craft beer drinkers

/ REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA new accounts won in 6 months

**Objective Four / Increase presence and sales both online and in the Brewery shop, through more visible and relevant branding.**

/ Design impact: *'The biggest innovation is without doubt the immediate recognition of the Oxford Brewery brand imagery and name. The clearly identifiable bespoke lino cut images for each of the core beers are a total standout and that coupled with the white background, strong imagery and bold colours, as well as each beer having a strong local/Oxford storyline, has been a massive success. We stand out on every bar and shelf.'*

/ New Tap Room: *'On the back of the name change and rebrand we opened our first Brewery Tap Room. This has proved an incredible success, is open 3 days per week and we have already started work on expanding the area. The local reaction to the rebrand has been incredible and has attracted new customers who simply did not know of the existence of Shotover.'*

/ *'Our new brand and name (Oxford Brewery) has added enormous value to our brand identity, customer awareness and importantly it has resulted in our brand not only being seen as a premium beer but increased recognition of the fact it is a premium product. We would say we are strongly hitting above our weight in terms of recognition and this has literally happened overnight. The instant we launched we received local and trade press reaction, pieces in local press and that coupled with social media resulted in immediate reaction which translated to immediate orders from existing and encouragingly, new customers. We have had positive feedback from our competitors and have achieved a broader reach, finding ourselves on new on-trend bars across the UK.'*

– Alastair Ross, Managing Director, Oxford Brewery

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**Objective 5 and 6 / Build traction with traditional cask ale (a core customer for the Brewery) with a more contemporised presence.**

/ Extend reach to the new generation of craft drinkers and also appeal to the beer aficionados.

/ Social Media: Instagram increase in activity and followers. Up by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA (averaged)

/ Facebook increase in activity and followers. Up by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA (averaged)

/ Quotes Social Media 'Love the ales, love the rebrand and equally impressed with the new keg.'

'What a game changer, great rebrand, the name says it all, local beers and family crafted.'

'Oxford Brewery's passion for beer can be seen in all they do – you can feel their love for their exceptional job.'

/ Web activity: Visits to the website have increased massively by REDACTED CONFIDENTIAL DATA plus it is fair to say web activity has increased massively.

/ Extend reach to the new generation of craft drinkers and also appeal to the beer aficionados.

**Other influencing factors**

/ **Sector** – Prior to launch (pre-pandemic) overall beer sales were down and post-pandemic overall cask beer sales (the Brewery's core beer style) was down 40%. Oxford Brewery has bucked the trend.

/ **Advertising, PR and promotional support** – The investment was in the rebrand itself and it had built business through its presence and both trade customer and consumer engagement. There was no advertising or PR support and the promotion was through the POS and website that we designed. An additional part-time member of staff was employed to manage web enquiries and support the increase in social media traffic.

/ **Price promotion** – There was no price promotion or discounting, which was a key objective of the rebrand. GP was increased on the strength of our premium positioning.

/ **Covid** – The pandemic had a significant impact on the business and despite a national increase in take-home sales the lockdown struck before the rebrand could impact on sell-in to the off-trade and direct deliveries were by word of mouth as the website was still in development.

/ **Stats Source** Statista / Brewers Journal / Barclay Perkins / CGA / Asahi report / Mintel: A Need for Real Brands 2019

Before



After

