

The Cherry Tree

Gerry and Pat Knowlden opened their refurbished Cherry Tree in September 2003. The pub has long been a feature of Flackwell Heath as a pub, a very successful wine bar and more recently one of the less attractive pubs of the village.

Gerry and Pat looked at the pubs in Flackwell and saw that there were more pubs than the customer base would allow without attracting people from outside the village. As well as six pubs the village has three clubs with regular bars – the Royal British Legion, the Football Club and the Golf Club. In case you want to know what Gerry considers the second best place for a 50th birthday bash he is having his at the British Legion. Pat says that in his own bar, birthday or not, he would never stop wiping the counter and checking the toilets.

They visited a lot of bars and found that the more modern the feel of the bar the more people were there and the more money they spent. They decided that their pub should be a bright bar with plain wood floors, comfortable armchairs, a range of fashionable drinks, a selection of wines available by the glass, bright lighting everywhere, fresh flowers and clean toilets – in short a bar where women would feel comfortable.

They think they have got the feel of the bar right. It attracts business people at lunch time and local residents in the evening starting with people who drop in on their way home from work.

The building is owned by Punch Taverns along with some 9000 other pubs. Gerry and Pat lease the premises and buy their drink from Punch. They give Punch a gold star for helping their licencees apply for the new style licences with a good application and in good time. The Council have been processing it since April. Other pubs and clubs be warned!

The big issue for the future will be the possible smoking ban. If your pub sells food you may have to ban smoking. A significant number of smokers would move to other pubs. The Cherry Tree only does food at lunch time so it is not a major element in their business. They may decide to cut out the food and keep their smoking drinkers. On the other hand there is a paucity of eating places in the village and certainly no “gastropub”.

Big decisions but Gerry and Pat believe they have established good relations with their customers and a firm basis to develop in any direction circumstances make possible.

Tim Kendell