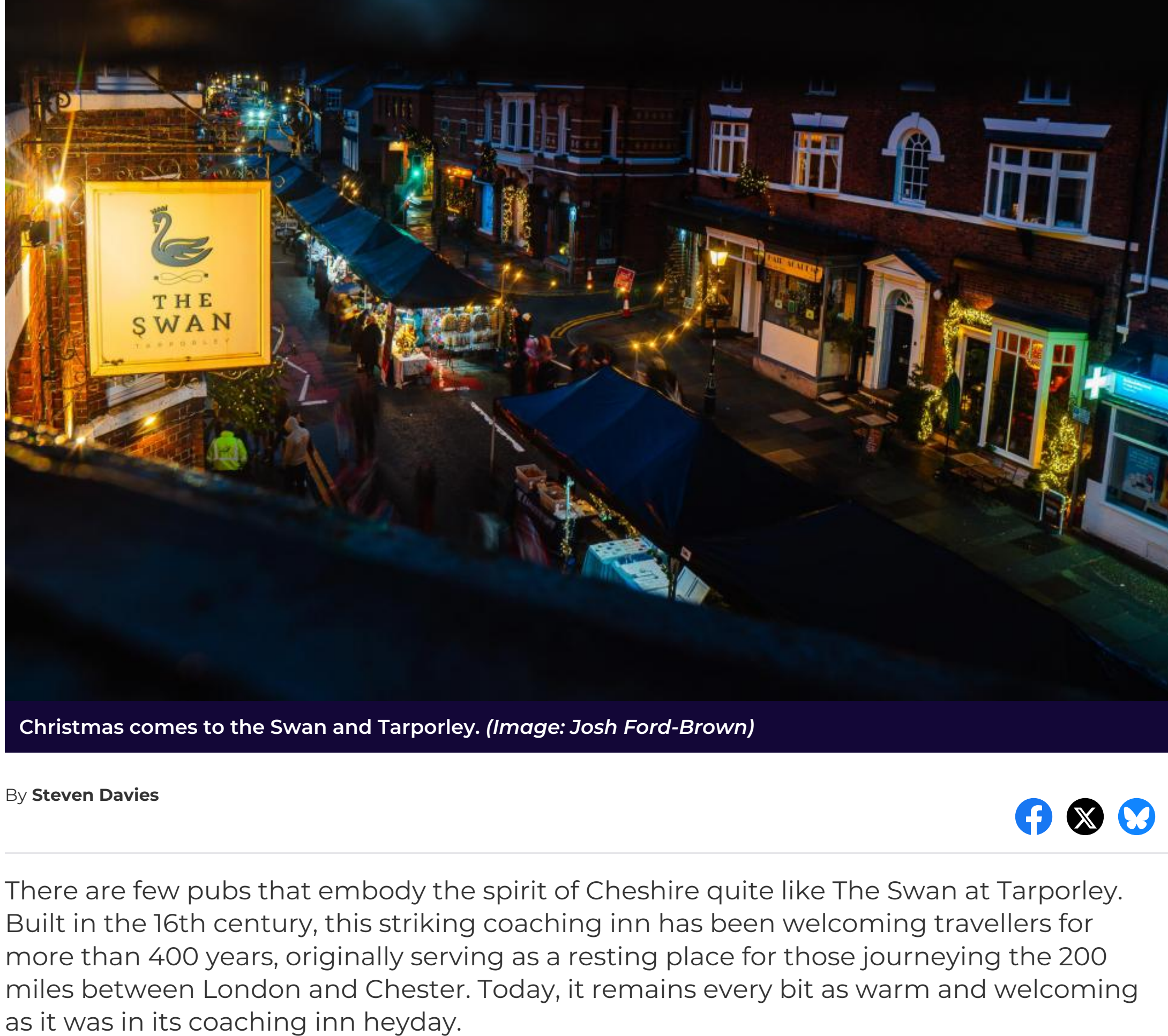
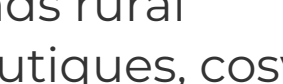


# In Tarporley, The Swan pub is the village's social hub



Christmas comes to the Swan and Tarporley. (Image: Josh Ford-Brown)

By Steven Davies



There are few pubs that embody the spirit of Cheshire quite like The Swan at Tarporley. Built in the 16th century, this striking coaching inn has been welcoming travellers for more than 400 years, originally serving as a resting place for those journeying the 200 miles between London and Chester. Today, it remains every bit as warm and welcoming as it was in its coaching inn heyday.

Set amid rolling Cheshire countryside, Tarporley is a village that perfectly blends rural charm with refined appeal. Its elegant high street, lined with independent boutiques, cosy cafés and welcoming pubs, gives it a stylish yet unmistakably traditional character.

Beyond the village, scenic walks, ancient woodlands and views across the Cheshire Plain make Tarporley an ideal base for exploring the region. The nearby Sandstone Trail, Beeston Castle and Delamere Forest lie within easy reach. And as we soon discovered, there's no better base for exploring the area than this iconic Cheshire pub, where comfort, character and local charm come together seamlessly.



The Swan at Tarporley. (Image: Kirsty Thompson)

The Swan, with its grand façade and timeless character, commands the heart of Tarporley High Street. Inside, there are exposed beams, roaring fires, spacious dining areas and cosy nooks that make winter evenings here something special.

The pub underwent a full refurbishment in 2020 thanks to the Bear Inns family, operated by Woody Barlow, who also runs sister pub, The Lion at Malpas. Under Woody's stewardship, the Swan continues to thrive as a community hub and destination for food, drink, and relaxation, while the historic Tarporley Room for private dining and events, complete with its own bar and roaring open fire, is an atmospheric space for celebrations.

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'Our 16 bedrooms offer our guests a home from home,' says Woody. 'Our pub has more than 400 years of history and is at the very heart of the community. Whether in front of a warm fire in winter or enjoying the terrace in summer, guests can relax, enjoy good company, and some of the best locally sourced food in Cheshire.'



The Swan at Tarporley has been at the heart of the community for more than 400 years. (Image: Josh Ford-Brown)

I caught up with Woody to uncover what makes this iconic Cheshire pub so special and what better place to start than with its exceptional beer selection?

Woody's philosophy on beer is simple: keep it local and keep it consistent. 'It's really important to support local breweries,' he explains. Here, you'll always find Weetwood Ale's Best Bitter and Cheshire Cat on cask reflecting the pub's long-standing friendship with the nearby Weetwood Brewery. 'We know the team at Weetwood really well,' says Woody. 'Their beers are authentic, reliable, and consistently excellent – exactly what our customers expect.'

Alongside its permanent fixtures, the Swan offers two rotating cask ales – one from Weetwood, the other from local favourites such as Salopian Brewery's Oracle, Three Tuns Brewery, or Loweswater Gold. The pub also works closely with Moberley Brewery, which now focuses on keg beer. And good beer needs great care. 'We clean our lines every week,' Woody tells me. It takes dedication and focus.'



Woody's food philosophy is built around three key rules: dishes must look exciting, be consistently produced, and make commercial sense. (Image: Josh Ford-Brown)

General manager Wesley Hagger-Knight, who's been running the pub for three years, oversees that precision. 'You have to manage from the pub itself,' Woody adds, 'not from an office somewhere else.'

Beyond the hand-pulled pints, the Swan boasts a varied wine list, balancing Old and New World choices, including an orange wine currently proving popular. Cocktails, low and no-alcohol options and locally made spirits complete the offering. 'Weetwood does a fantastic gin, whisky, and vodka,' says Woody. 'And we also stock Three Wrens Gin from just down the road in Nantwich.'

While the Swan doesn't brand itself as a gastropub, the food could easily rival one. 'People see us as a really good and reliable pub,' says Woody. 'All our ingredients are 100 per cent fresh. This isn't art on a plate – it's just really good, honest food.'



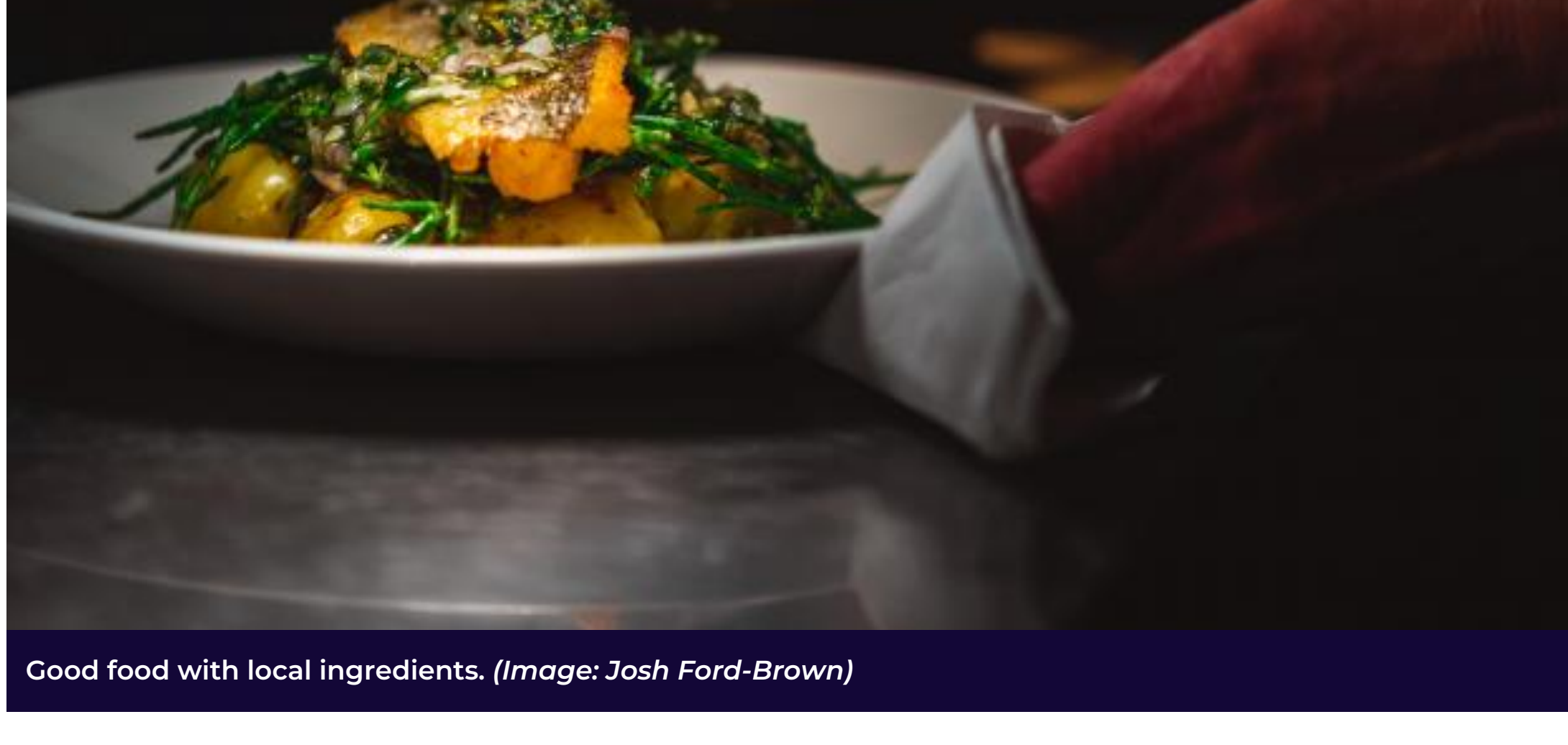
There's a warm welcome in every room of the Swan at Tarporley. (Image: Josh Ford-Brown)

Almost everything comes from Oliver Perry's in Middlewich, bread from Woody's own Bradwall Bakehouse near Sandbach and wines from a merchant in Sandiway. Menus change with the seasons – asparagus in May, wild hedgerow flavours in autumn, for example – and are crafted through a rigorous creative process involving the entire kitchen team.

Woody's food philosophy is built around three key rules: dishes must look exciting, be consistently produced, and make commercial sense. Customer feedback is the final ingredient. 'The key is to send people away feeling they've had great value and wanting to come back again,' he says.

Ask Woody what makes The Swan truly special, and his answer is immediate: 'It's the people on both sides of the bar. We call it black and white service with colour hospitality.'

By that, he means the essentials – efficiency, warmth, a friendly smile – come as standard. But the 'colour' comes from connection. 'Whether a customer wants to read by the fire or chat with the bar team, it's about making sure they leave feeling better than when they arrived.' We agreed that this is what makes our pub culture in the UK unique.



Good food with local ingredients. (Image: Josh Ford-Brown)

The Swan's sense of community is unmistakable. From comedy nights and quizzes to French classes, walkers' groups and the Tarporley Independents business network of 75 local companies, the pub is the village's social hub.

On the third Sunday of every month, the Makers Market fills the car park with stalls selling artisan breads, cheeses, brownies, jewellery, art and more. 'On a sunny day, it reminds me of Provence,' Woody says with a smile. 'The quality of the produce is second to none.'

At Christmastime, the Swan truly comes alive with its annual Swanderland celebrations – a highlight of the Cheshire festive calendar. Festivities begin with the Tarporley Christmas lights switch-on on Saturday, November 23, followed by the Christmas menu launch night on Friday, November 28, complete with bratwurst and mulled wine.

There are Christmas Party Nights on Friday, December 5, 12 and 19, offering an arrival drink, three-course meal, DJ, and late bar and private parties in the Tarporley Room for up to 80 guests. The showstopper? The 12 Days of Christmas Party with six festive dishes, six drinks, music, and dancing. Tribute nights, including Kylie Minogue and Elton John, complete the celebrations.

The Swan's collaboration with the Lion at Malpas has inspired the Bear Inns 'Walk and Stay' package – a two-night countryside adventure along the Sandstone Trail linking the two pubs. Guests enjoy dinner, bed, and breakfast at both inns, luggage transfers and even a free stay for the dog. And for those who prefer a shorter visit, the walk can easily be done in a day, with the bonus of a top-quality pint waiting at either pub on arrival.

The route inspired a charity run, in memory of former landlord Simon Lees-Jones. Around 40 locals took part, raising more than £15,000 for North West Cancer Research. The winner completed the 13-mile route in just under two hours and Woody hopes it becomes an annual event.



Father and son Ron and Steven Davies on their Inn Crowd visit to the Swan at Tarporley. (Image: Supplied)

For Woody, the Swan is more than a business – it's a legacy. 'We're just the current custodians,' he says. 'It's our responsibility to leave it better than we found it.' Recent investments include £25,000 in furniture, with a kitchen refurbishment and enhanced staff training planned next year. 'We're always investing in our people, he adds. 'We take the team on away days, we visit suppliers – it's all about passion and pride.'

The Swan is a classic British Inn full of charm and comfort. As Woody puts it: 'We pride ourselves on creating a place where people can sit back, relax, and enjoy the company of friends and family. The Swan isn't just part of Tarporley, it is the heart of Tarporley.'

Whether you drop in for a pint of Weetwood, a perfectly cooked steak, or a winter's night by the fire, the Swan at Tarporley offers something timeless: the comfort of good food, good company and genuine Cheshire warmth.

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