

BEER



ISSUE 70 / WINTER 2025

WHAT MAKES A PUB PERFECT?

From a warm welcome to great beer,
we look at why some pubs just feel right

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BREWING**



70

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for a pint of his
favourite...



Time for that taste of Taylor's



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Pubs, pints, people

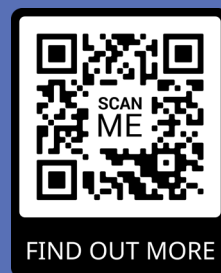


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From the editor



● In the dedicated *What's Brewing* section, you will find some of the latest news from CAMRA, including info on the new *Good Beer Guide* and this year's bumper apple cider harvest. More news can be found on our dedicated online platform at wb.camra.org.uk

We love pubs.

CAMRA has been campaigning for pubs, pints and people since 1971. It is part of our DNA.

So it is great to see the government is giving communities first refusal on buying their local to save it as a community-owned pub, should it be under threat.

The move could be a game changer, but it is useless if those local groups trying to save pubs can't access the capital to buy it before it is converted or demolished.

But there are no guarantees that those areas getting the new Pride in Place money will be able to spend it on saving and restoring local pubs, and it appears there is no money at all for communities outside of the areas the government announced in September.

The prime minister has talked about tackling pub closures, but words alone will not save locals.

The Campaign is calling for action on VAT, business rates and National Insurance contributions. But more than that, there has to be structural change to the market for beer sold in pubs.

The ongoing Access to Market review for independent breweries needs to make fundamental changes to end the stranglehold that global brewers have on bars across the UK. Local beers should be for local people.

In her feature on what makes the perfect pub, Katie Mather describes how it doesn't have to sell the most obscure or rare beers. But it is a place that makes everyone feel welcome and comfortable. And we must recognise that most pub owners face enormous financial pressures to keep them open.

Katie concludes with the words "a perfect pub in 2025 might just be the one that's still open, serving great beer, making the community feel welcome, doing its best".

The best pub in a community should not be the last one open serving beer. There is no reason why a community should not have more than one great pub – run by people who care about their customers, beer and the pub itself. It's not too much to ask, is it?

Tim Hampson

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



Katie Mather muses on what makes the perfect pub



Steve Hobman meets a man who has been brewing great beer for 50 years



Roger Protz travels to Melton Mowbray and finds the town should be famed for beer and not just pork pies

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CAMRA is a company limited by guarantee, run at a national level by an elected, unpaid board of directors (the National Executive) and at regional level by its regional directors, both backed by a full-time professional staff. CAMRA promotes good-quality real ale and pubs, as well as acting as the consumer's champion in relation to the UK and European beer and drinks industry. It aims to: 1. Protect and improve consumer rights; 2. Promote quality, choice and value for money; 3. Support the public house as a focus of community life; 4. Campaign for greater appreciation of traditional beers, ciders and perries, and the public house as part of our national heritage and culture; and 5. Seek improvements in all licensed premises and throughout the brewing industry. *BEER* will not carry editorial and advertising that counters these aims and we only accept advertisements for bottle- or cask-conditioned products.

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THE GREEN SCENE

Green spaces enhance the pub-going experience, writes **David Jesudason**

The sun-baked, off-kilter synth funk of Nigerian enigma William Onyeabor drifts down from the bar's speakers as I sit among the greenery and feel at one with nature.

It's apt I can hear William jauntily singing: "I'm going to explode like... atomic bomb" because – even though I am the only customer – I feel that this indoor setting has erupted with fauna. Bushes as big as buses burst past outside. Tangled leaves. Overgrown ferns. Climbers. Droopers. It's like this room is a miniscule planet that has rewired like in JG Ballard's novel, *The Drowned World*.

This is the Robin Ale & Cider House in Finsbury Park, North London, and this is the world cultivated by Nick Bailey to provide drinkers with a green space in a busy part of the capital. The Robin is not just a beautiful eye-catching pub but it shows the extra effort publicans can put in to make their establishments a unique extension of their personalities. It just so happens that Nick's obsession is gardening.

"This isn't the primary reason, but I'm showing what can be done in confined spaces," Nick told me. "You can grow so many things in such a small space and you can change that space."

His primary reason is what horticulture gives back to him. Nick starts the day gardening and tending the plants which he admits is blissful and meditative but also euphoric, which is also a very good description of how many people experience the Robin. The euphoria he





'The Robin is not just a beautiful pub but it shows the extra effort publicans can put in to make their establishments a unique extension of their personalities'

describes is from seeing the plants grow – they've increased 80 per cent in size since he opened in 2023. "The way I see gardening is that I feel like a jazz musician back in the day," Nick said. "I go by intuition and see what works."

He believes a professional gardener wouldn't pair similar plants together, but his riffing saves huge amounts of money as well as creating unusual but striking combinations. He even planted a living wall himself on the exterior of the pub after enlisting some friends to build him the frames needed. A fraction of the £25,000 he was originally quoted was spent.

When he shows it to me, I am enthralled by the colours and the verdancy of a side of a building. As we speak, bees hover around us and ladybirds land on our pint-holding

'He believes a professional gardener wouldn't pair similar plants together, but his riffing creates unusual but striking combinations'

hands; passersby touch the leaves and instinctively rub the herbs, hoping for some delicate scents before they have their senses assaulted by the Victoria Tube line.

"I wanted it to look like the natural world," Nick admitted. "When you come to the pub in the autumn, you see the colours you see in Hampstead Heath. It changes with the seasons.

"For people who work in offices, sometimes they lose track of the seasons and what's happening out there. If they walk past here, they can see if it's spring or autumn."

Nick's mum was a keen gardener and he started growing tomato plants when he was aged just 12. He carried on with this obsession when he studied at the University of Leicester, where he was teased by



Nick Bailey has cultivated a green space in the city at Robin Ale & Cider House in Finsbury Park

his fellow students for tending to pot plants in their halls of residence.

But it was when he was at the nearby Southampton Arms that the homegrown horticulture really took off and he ensured the Kentish Town beer garden flourished.

Now, I have to be careful here as Nick didn't create the garden in that celebrated pub and, in fact, he's far too humble to claim that but it's clear he spruced it up at a vital time. During the first Covid lockdown when the pub was shuttered, he had time on his hands and grew hanging baskets and tomatoes, but he says this wasn't for commercial reasons and was through a personal need to garden.

And this continued when he moved here and has never stopped. Literally without any pause, as Nick has never taken a holiday as he knows that training someone to work at the bar doesn't necessarily mean they can look after plants.

This level of commitment is why perhaps the Robin is a rare case of a pub aligning with a passion project; gardening is such a personal statement that it only lends itself to very special free houses far removed from the gaze of corporate departments at beer companies.

"If you don't love gardening," Nick said, "you wouldn't do it. I wasn't



asked to do it at the Southampton Arms, but it was my own pride I take in a space: I'm going to look after this space and do the best I can with it. I wouldn't ask anyone else to do it as it's not their job."

Overhanging at the Robin bar, you'll notice a lot of devil's ivy (AKA golden pothos), which is a plant I favour myself and in my experience it prefers sunlight (not direct) and weekly watering. In fact, this is the biggest problem with delegating plant care – volunteers often err on the side of overwatering, which these varieties hate. That's even

"I wasn't asked to do it. It was my own pride I take in a space: I'm going to look after this space and do the best I can with it"

'He stood as an MP last year for Richmond Park so that his business could be advertised on 77,000 ballot papers'

a pub run by another quirky publican – a man who stood as an MP last year for Richmond Park so that his business could be advertised on 77,000 ballot papers.

Before these political ambitions, Chris French took over the Mitre in Richmond in 2015 and the pub – although a beautiful building – needed a lot of work as it hadn't been looked after: there were even old carpets in the toilets. When he was handed the keys of the Mitre, he sat in every seat admiring its layout and then realised it needed painting.

He changed the colours to make it look more tasteful, put a new floor down and revolutionised the beers on offer – today there are eight cask pumps dispensing quality ales, including the spectacularly underrated Shere Drop pale ale (4.2 per cent ABV) brewed by Surrey Hills.

But because of the amount of funds needed for the overhaul, he locked the beer garden up for the first few months, leaving the rotted decking and garden furniture to fester. There was even a pool table out there exposed to the elements. All this was then stripped out with the funds accumulated from six months of successful stewardship.

He worked with tradespeople to expose the original brick wall of the pub, which was once a Victorian coach house (alcohol licence granted in 1865) and then it evolved to have troughs on the walls and wisteria growing above the tables.

Wisteria flowers twice a year (spring and autumn) and at the Mitre there are two colours (purple and white) that zigzag above with a few weeks' sweet spot where both are in bloom and put on a show.



before you factor in the many different plant species that have varying levels of thirst.

It could also be that Nick is so meticulous with the day-to-day running of the pub that he has to manage every detail; in the past six years Nick has racked 90 per cent of all the pub's barrels and taken in all of the deliveries despite marshalling a band of well-trained staff. The beer, the records, the hanging baskets: they're all part of Nick's personal ecosystem, and he's tending to them so that everyone who visits feels special.

He's not the only publican who fosters this love of creating something memorable through gardens and rejuvenation. Across the capital in West London stands



"We get compliments about it all the time," Chris told me.

What's interesting is that nearly all of his clientele are new and very few frequented the Mitre when it was in the aforementioned near-dilapidated state. They're also coming because he made it into a destination pub as it's actually a bit of a walk from the Thames, and from Richmond Park; the Mitre is an alternative to the tied pubs common in the area.

"You appreciate the environment but when you're with people [having fun], the background just disappears," he said. "People are coming to the Mitre because they want to try different beers and they want to come because we have this beautiful courtyard garden."

"Our clientele appreciate what we've done for them and how quaint and beautiful it is. It's a beautiful place to relax, enjoy yourself or sit with your memories."

On a scorching summer day, I sit at the Dog and Bell in Deptford, South London, and I'm joined by Jen Ferguson, who runs two Hops, Burns & Black shops with her husband, Glenn. The name relates to beer (hops), hot sauce (burns) and

coffee (black), and this eclectic mix is mirrored in Jen's love for pubs and gardening.

As the empty kegs glisten and the geraniums droop in the hot sun, Jen revealed how she – like Nick and Chris – created an oasis in a small space when she moved into her current home in nearby Peckham. The process of rejuvenation was done in the pandemic, but it wasn't because her and Glenn had a lot of time on their hands – it was to give them respite from the huge amount of deliveries they were having to make.

"I have 60 plants inside and god knows how many outside," she admitted. "We were so conscious that during the pandemic we were very lucky to have an outdoor space."

Jen gazes around at the outdoor area while we enjoy our two pints of Brew York pale (called Calmer Chameleon; 4.1 per cent) and said: "This garden is fantastic. Everything is by design, but it doesn't feel like that. There's space to fill and it's filled with colour. I associate beer gardens as a social space. Busy and a little bit rowdy."



Saint Mars of the Desert's (SMOD) taproom in Sheffield

"This garden is fantastic. Everything is by design, but it doesn't feel like that. There's space to fill and it's filled with colour"

This might be one of the flip sides of the mindfulness of gardening – the process might have been meditative, but the end result is hedonism. I pose this question to Dominic Driscoll, production manager at Thornbridge brewery



Jen Ferguson of Hops, Burns & Black



and current British Guild of Beer Writers' Brewer of the Year.

Dom is a keen allotment gardener and competitive cabbage grower, but he believes beer and horticulture are – for him – vital to separate.

"If I didn't have the allotment," he told me, "I'll just be in the pub. The people at the allotment aren't beer people, so it provides an escape from that world. They don't care about the latest IPA."

That's not to say Dom hasn't created a space for beer people like Nick and Chris have, and if you visit the brewery of Saint Mars of the Desert's (SMOD) taproom in Sheffield, you can see plants inspired by his toil, in an unpromising semi-industrial location.

As part of a Thornbridge collaboration a few months after the taproom opened in 2019, Dom worked with SMOD's Dann Paquette and Martha Simpson-Holley to pick plants for their wildlife garden which has made it perhaps the most rustic

'In many ways, the living wall outside is a metaphor for the cask beer he serves, as he wishes it can influence people to alter their habits'

'He hopes the younger crowd will become converts when they see his passion for keeping the best ales Britain can offer'

taproom in the country. This also led to a Belgian-style pale ale called Pépin – French for seed – being brewed, but Dom was more keen to enthuse about the yellow rattle and tomato plants he plucked from his garden.

"That was a hell of a day," said Dom. "Best collaboration day ever. There were some that were ready then, and there were also some that would flower later on in the season; it wasn't just a display of bedding plants you often see at pubs."

At the Robin, I have bittersweet

feelings about how much these types of obsessions can be all-encompassing. And this could be about how Nick spends his time gardening and looking after the beer. Because the twin pursuits – I feel – make the pub flourish, but if Nick can't have a holiday there's a lot of personal cost. Perhaps even ruining the mindfulness gained from

gardening (and enjoying beer) all the sources talk about.

"I can rest easy that I've done all I can do even if it goes wrong," he said.

But Nick wants his plants to flourish and for people to be inspired by them so they go away and create their own greenery even in the smallest of spaces.

He also feels like this about cask, and he hopes the younger crowd he attracts at weekends will become converts when they see his passion for keeping the best ales Britain can offer. That they'll take this love and try cask throughout their lives.

In many ways, the living wall outside is a metaphor for the cask beer he serves, as he wishes it can influence people to alter their habits and see how special pubs like this can be when they look after what matters.

"I'm not a proud person, but when I see people walking past the pub, touching the wall [plants] – especially older people when they stop; that's when I feel it's really nice," Nick said.



David Jesudason is the author of *Desi Pubs: A Guide to British-Indian Pubs, Food & Culture*, published by CAMRA Books.



WHAT MAKES THE PERFECT PUB?

From the beer to the atmosphere, **Katie Mather** looks at what makes pub perfection

CAMRA's Good Beer Guide (GBG) is published every year to help thousands of pub-goers find a great place to drink in every town, village and city in the UK. Obviously, the main reason to buy each new edition is to flick through the pages – like a 1990s child going through an Argos catalogue compiling a Christmas list – until your own favourite pub appears. Vindication. Where the GBG has strict rules to follow when choosing which pubs and bars get to appear within its hallowed pages, our personal checklists vary wildly.

In the GBG, it's about beer quality and service above all else – not ambience, not comfortable seating, not menu items. Some choices may raise eyebrows, but if it's in there, one thing's for sure – no matter who frequents it, or what it looks like inside or out, the beer it serves is spot on.

It's harder to pinpoint what makes a great pub overall. I've found over my drinking lifetime that there are a few parameters I lay out to begin with, and these are measurable factors I can focus on with scientific precision.

They include the attentiveness of the bar staff, appropriateness and beauty (or otherwise!) of the décor, glassware, beer selection and, of course, its quality. But there are other, less quantifiable data sets to delve into. The vibe. The atmosphere. The calibre of the tall tales. How welcome I feel, the pub feng shui of it all. A perfect pub is not only judged on the quality of its beer, but on its character, too. A person could spend their life on a quest to find theirs. But what a life!

It's incredibly hard to find a perfect pub, mainly because they exist in our memories and our imaginations. The enduring nostalgia of a perfect pint in immaculate surroundings on a day that just felt right can never be accurately replicated, and should you try, it would feel forced. Some pubs try hard to emulate the sensations of a perfect local, ticking all the right boxes, but in trying they lose some of the tangible but extremely hard to define authenticity that makes a great pub so great. They start





'A perfect pub is not only judged on the quality of its beer, but on its character, too'



tipping over into something ChatGPT might generate for a lazy interior designer using a prompt like: "Cosy pub with wooden bar and patterned carpet, roaring fires and antiques on shelves. Make it clean, everyone is happy and talking to one another. Make it big enough for large groups to stand at the bar on match days. Include two dogs and a menu featuring fish and chips, beef and ale pie, and lasagne."

This is how you end up feeling like you've accidentally entered a glitch in the Matrix. You're not imagining it. Some pubs just really do feel like Disney versions of pubs – the smiles are a little too wide, the pictures on the walls are a little too aesthetic. A great pub is more about the reality of the place than any additional bump you can buy to adorn it. There's certainly a strong appeal for pubs with history and charm,



'All my favourite pubs have something in common: a licensee or bar manager who cares about their customers, beer and pub'

but a new bar can be just as perfect as one that's 200 years old if it has its own character. An old pub doesn't necessarily have the goods just because its cellar was built during the Norman conquest.

All of my favourite pubs have something in common: a licensee, owner or bar manager who cares deeply about their customers, their beer and their pub. When I picture these perfect places, I see enough space to squeeze in at the bar, or a seat in the corner just waiting for me, and a friendly face behind the bar welcoming me in. I see a good selection of beer on draught, and a decent choice of crisps, too.

Funnily enough, I always imagine my favourite pubs in the winter, a haven inside away from the howling wind and rain, lit brassy and golden against the early encroaching night. There's a romance in a perfect pub that you can't fake. An instant feeling of warm relaxation and escape.

On a perfectly grey day in Edinburgh, I stepped into the Bow Bar and everything felt good, from the level of gentle conversation coming from the friendly groups of drinkers huddled into the small one-roomed bar together to the selection of beer at my disposal. It was so perfect that I proposed to my husband. To attempt to recreate that day would be a foolish mission – every pub visit is as unique as a cobweb.

Occasionally, you will be let down. The atmosphere is wrong, your favourite bar person has left, the music is bad, there's a weird smell. When it's too busy to read, or too quiet to hide



away in the hustle and bustle. Recommending pubs is a dangerous game, particularly your perfect picks, because what if your recommendee turns up while there's a wake on? Or the place is uncharacteristically empty? What if you've implored them to visit, only for them to go out of their way to do so and they have a rare

'People must think I'm fancier than I am, because the pubs they send me to serve lunches that should be on Masterchef'



Waddington is a food pub I love eating at, but I have also spent hours in a captain's chair by the log burner reading and drinking Landlord (4.3 per cent ABV). This. Is. What. I. Want.

We all want our perfect pubs to be available whenever we need them, but the reality is they are closing at a rate of one every day, according to the British Beer and Pub Association. Hundreds of our favourite places to meet, converse, read, drink, socialise and enjoy some precious alone time just don't exist any more. However perfect they were, they are now empty, flats or mini supermarkets. Rising business rates, beer duty, VAT and energy bills are not going away – this is what killed off my bar Corto in 2023. While it's not our sole responsibility as customers to keep our favourite bars open, we should do what we can to support the places we love. Show our face a bit more, or choose the pub for a family gathering instead of a chain restaurant. Leave a positive review, and tell them that you appreciate them.

Our perfect pub might exist in our mind's eye, but a fantastic micropub or a stunning Edwardian inn you found on holiday will do just as well. I realised lately my priorities have changed. I'm not asking for the Moon Under Water any more, no rare beers or obscurities, just a place to feel comfortable and warmly ignored while I drink something delicious and scribble in my notebook. We expect perfection while pub owners are under more pressure than ever to deliver it while profits are dwindling to a stop. It's unsustainable. Sometimes, I think a perfect pub in 2025 might just be the one that's still open, serving great beer, making the community feel welcome, doing its best.



Katie Mather is an award-winning beer writer and deputy editor of *Pellicle*. She is Northern, and therefore insists on a sparkler. Twitter: @katiematherkm

bad pint? Or someone is rude to them? It's risky. Sometimes I think I'd better keep my opinions to myself.

I get a lot of recommendations sent to me by people who know I love pubs. I've noticed that quite often, people must think I'm a bit fancier than I actually am, because the pubs they send me to are immaculate and frequently serve lunches that look like they should be on *Masterchef* (sometimes because the chef was on *Masterchef*).

I'm flattered – thank you for believing I would put on makeup and shoes that aren't trainers to go to the pub – but these types of places are all too often the ones that leave me devastated. In the cookie-cutter world of gastropubs, of which there are many near me in the Ribble Valley, perfection has been sought and replicated to infinity, like a JPEG that's been saved and resaved into pixelated oblivion. Tartan in pastel colours, shining brass fixtures in a modern style – never Edison light

'Hundreds of our favourite places to meet, socialise and enjoy some alone time just don't exist any more'

bulbs or pallet wood like the micropubs from the same era. Menus that make it unclear whether this is a chain pub, brewery-owned or a freehold with a niece who works in graphic design.

The gastropub has always searched for a more low-key, medium- to high-end vibe. I have a well-known beef with gastropubs, or, I should clarify, the type that wishes it wasn't a pub. These will never be perfect locals because they are restaurants. Conversely, they will never be perfect restaurants because they are pubs with dining tables. If I step inside a food pub just for a beer and I feel welcome, it has retained the honour of calling itself a pub. If I feel there's no space for drinkers or I get given a menu when I don't want one, I probably won't go back. The Lower Buck in



IN THE ROUND

Melton Mowbray is famous for Stilton cheese and pork pies. You can now add beer. Round Corner Brewing was founded in 2018 by two Irishmen and, with a Brazilian brewer, they are expanding production, as **Roger Protz** discovered

Beer and cheese have long enjoyed a harmonious relationship. A pint of bitter and a chunk of Cheddar are surely the perfect partnership – unless you prefer Blue Stilton.

In which case, head for Melton Mowbray, birthplace of the blue-veined cheese and home to Round Corner Brewing. A truckle or wheel of Stilton has round corners, hence the name of the brewery that's based in the old cattle market that provides milk for the cheesemakers.

Round Corner was launched in 2018 by two Irishmen, Colin Paige and Combie Cryan. The former hails from Belfast while Combie comes from Leitrim over the border in the Republic.

They raised £1m for their brewing kit that can produce 21,000 barrels a year. In its short life, Round Corner has won a surprising number of awards from such prestigious competitions as the World Beer Awards in 2024 and the European

Beer Challenge a year later. Colin and Combie also won a gold medal in the International Brewing Awards in 2021 for one of their leading brands, Steeplechase, a 4.4 per cent ABV pale ale that's packed with juicy flavours from New Zealand and American hops.

Kiwi hops feature in a number of their beers as the hop plant cements their first meeting from which came plans to build their own brewery back in Britain.

Combie worked in finance and went to New Zealand to look at how breweries were run. He met Colin who was brewing at Mac's brewery in Nelson, a pioneering small-craft producer in a region where the fruity Nelson Sauvignon hop is grown.

'Kiwi hops feature in their beers as the hop plant cements their first meeting from which came plans to build their own brewery'

Colin had also brewed in Cambodia and Vietnam and, before heading to Asia and Down Under, he trained at Heriot-Watt University's School of Brewing and Distilling in Edinburgh, and then brewed with Butcombe and Fuller's.

Combie knew how to raise finance, Colin knew how to brew beer, so they moved to Britain and found a spacious area in a former sheep shed in Melton Mowbray's market. They chose Melton Mowbray following in-depth research of potential beer markets.

"The region lost Ruddles in 1999," Combie explained, "and in 2018 there were not enough small indie beers around."

Covid and the multiple lockdowns proved a double-edged sword for Round Corner. Its on-site taproom in the market had to close and no draught beers could be sold to pubs.



Clockwise from above: Combie sees demand for cask among younger drinkers; Lara has expanded range; Thirsty Traveller is a mellow amber ale; Combie and Colin met in New Zealand



"But we sold beer in takeaway growlers," said Combie, "and people just went mad for them. We sold several thousand."

Growlers are glass or plastic containers for fresh draught beer and they are said to growl or hiss when opened and natural gas is released. At Round Corner, growlers were backed by cans. The brewery installed a canning line in 2020 and it now enjoys big sales for cans, which represent around 20 per cent of annual production.

Draught beer for pubs returned after Covid, and the brewery now sells to outlets in Leicestershire and the neighbouring counties of Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire, South Yorkshire and Northamptonshire.

For a small brewery, the output is prodigious. It produces 40 beers a year, with the emphasis on dark beers in winter. They include a rum-barrel-aged imperial stout with the daunting



'For a small brewery, the output is prodigious. It produces 40 beers a year, with the emphasis on dark beers in winter'

strength of 12 per cent and the equally daunting name of the Society for the Encouragement of Virtue.

It commemorates an 18th-century organisation in Melton Mowbray that punished vice, profanity and immorality – but presumably turned

a blind eye to the consumption of strong drink.

A second dark beer is Underwater Song, an 8.2 per cent Baltic porter, a style that began life as ale but became a lager beer in Central and Eastern Europe. This version is fermented with lager yeast and then cold-conditioned to bring out the rich flavours of coffee, chocolate, molasses and caramel.

Lagering is in good hands at Round Corner. Colin and Combie are on the road much of the time building trade, and brewing is now in the hands of a brewster, Lara Lopes, from Brazil. She trained with Ambev, the Latin-American arm of the global brewer AB InBev, and she said it was a major culture shock when she arrived in Britain and had her first taste of cask beer.

Her brewing kit at Round Corner was built in China and is based on the European system of mash mixer 

'Her background has allowed her to turn Round Corner into a multifunctional brewery, producing lager as well as cask'

and lauter tun. This enables four to five brews to be made every day in 2,000-hectolitre batches. After the initial mash, the sugary extract or wort is filtered in the lauter vessel, allowing the next brew to start in the now empty mixer.

Lara soon earned her spurs at Round Corner. In 2022, she was named Young Brewer of the Year in the Brewers' Choice Awards. Her background has allowed her to turn Round Corner into a multifunctional brewery, producing proper lager as well as cask.

And she fully supports Colin's and Combie's determination to help the environment and strictly control the amount of water, gas and electricity the brewery uses.

Colin's and Combie's slogan is Farm Fresh, Market Brewed, and they use British malts and hops for their ales. Even their lager is hopped with Fuggles, though German pils malt is the main grain. New Zealand, American and German hops are also in the mix.

Combie said they are now brewing at full capacity and may soon need to move into bigger sheds in the market in order to install additional fermenting vessels.

When the brewery was launched, at first only keg beer was made, but Colin and Combie soon added cask. They've been criticised for not making sufficient cask beer, but Combie thinks that's unfair and points out they had to stop real ale production during Covid and the subsequent lockdowns.

"We're now back into cask," he stressed. "We see a strong demand for cask, especially among younger drinkers who are concerned about provenance – they want to drink local beers using local ingredients."



● Round Corner Brewing, Melton Mowbray Market, Gate 2, Scaford Road, Melton Mowbray, Leics LE13 1JY. roundcornerbrewing.com

"We see a demand for cask, especially among younger drinkers who are concerned about provenance"

There are two permanent cask ales, Market Pale (4.2 per cent) and Market Bitter (3.4 per cent). There are also 10 seasonal cask beers.

The demand for beer has changed, Combie said: "The market is now settling on session beers – super hoppy beers are going out of fashion."

Drinkers concerned with provenance will be intrigued by the local story behind the brewery's Steeplechase pale ale. It celebrates a bizarre event in 1890, when 11 riders in pyjamas went out on horseback in the middle of the night to jump fences they could hardly see, cheered on by a crowd that could see even less. It's believed a substantial consumption of local beer fuelled the spectacle.

Round Corner also has fences to jump. Colin, Combie, Lara and their team survived the travails of Covid, but now face new problems. In the summer of 2025, they took the

decision to close their taproom during the week, only opening on Saturdays and Sundays.

The reason for the cut in opening has been the government's increases in National Insurance and the Minimum Wage.

Combie can scarcely believe the government can't see the problems it's causing.

"The trends have a chilling impact on breweries," he said. "It stops us engaging in people-intensive activities and to belt tightening rather than expansion."

"Brewing doesn't enjoy high margins, and avoiding losses has become harder."

There is nevertheless an air of optimism at Round Corner, with a growing demand for its beers and appreciation of its commitment to the best ingredients and support for the environment.

If you visit the taproom, you can enjoy a wide choice of beer along with samples of local Stilton and the other Melton Mowbray speciality, pork pies.

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BREWING NEW FOREST

Jacopo Mazzeo heads for the enchanted New Forest to check out the beer and cider scene

The New Forest is one of those magical places that reveals year-round breathtaking beauty. In summer, sunlight glimmers through the lush green foliage of its trees, while blooming heather blankets the heathland in a gorgeous purple haze. Autumn transforms the landscape into a painter's tapestry, with golden, crimson, russet and vermilion canopies. Spring lights up with bright yellow gorse, mesmerising carpets of bluebells and a burst of blooming flora that fills the warming air with intoxicating fragrances.

The New Forest isn't just a bucolic idyll, as a marked element of understated luxury adds to its unique charm. Its capital, Lyndhurst – a quaint village of just 3,000 residents – captures the essence of the region. The peaceful high street, charming

teahouses, boutique shops and cosy inns exude quintessential English countryside appeal, yet all this is intriguingly juxtaposed with the South East's sole official Ferrari dealership. This harmonious blend of idyllic landscapes and high-end elegance has provided the perfect setting for one of the country's pre-eminent fine-dining scenes and luxury hotels.

Brewing, on the other hand, has struggled to reach similar heights – at least in modern times. Independent pubs are a rarity, and the only historical brewery of note, Ringwood, located in the namesake town near the Dorset border, lost its independence to Marston's (now Carlsberg Britvic) in 2007, and ultimately ceased operations earlier



this year. The closure of this historic brewery has been a substantial loss for the New Forest's beer landscape. Yet, while that particular chapter was closing, new life was being breathed into the local brewing scene elsewhere in the region.



Inside Downton brewery's taproom
Right: A selection of Miners Cider beverages





PIG BEER brews a solid core range
Left: A Vibrant Forest brew
Above left: Follow the sign to the brewery

'The brewery now boasts a spacious taproom where locals can enjoy a selection of Vibrant Forest's beers, including some not widely available on the market'

The oldest brewery currently operating in the New Forest opened just over two decades ago, a few miles north of Ringwood on the forest's north-western edge. "We actually opened back in 2003, but Covid was the real turning point for us," explained Downton brewery owner Martin Strawbridge. "We offered free delivery within a 10-mile radius, which helped us reach lots of new customers. Our taproom got so busy that we had to open a new one."

Situated just across from the brewery, the new bar doubles as a shop during the week and serves as an event space for hire. Open for pints on weekends, it offers several of Downton's beers served straight from

the cask. The line-up might feature monthly specials alongside any of the brewery's core selection of about 10 beers, including a richly malty Best Bitter (3.8 per cent ABV), a delicately aromatic honey blonde and a hoppy session bitter brewed with a blend of traditional Challenger, East Kent Goldings and Styrian Goldings hops, along with Pioneer and Citra.

Launched as a modest 1BBL brewery near Hardley, Vibrant Forest brewed its first pint almost a decade after Downton was established. It has since grown significantly, expanding its capacity and relocating to the south-eastern edge of the forest. The brewery now boasts a spacious taproom where locals can gather to enjoy a wide selection of Vibrant Forest's beers, including some exclusive brews not widely available on the market.

The brewery has established itself as one of the most ambitious in the region, continually releasing new beers and developing a robust

barrel-ageing programme. Earlier this year, it also became the first local producer to open its own off-site watering hole. "We inaugurated the Vibrant Tap last May in Lyndhurst, after the success of our brewery taproom," said general manager Ryan Dack. "There's always something happening there, like live music, quiz nights and beer tastings, and we also have a kitchen where guests can order food."

The Vibrant Tap offers locals and visitors alike something alternative to traditional tea rooms. It carries the lively energy of a modern craft brewery while capturing the relaxed vibe typical of country life. The PlayStation 2 gaming area, where people can unwind with a pint and some nostalgic gaming, certainly embodies this unique blend.

The area surrounding Brockenhurst, which boasts one of the highest concentrations of restaurants in the region and serves as a popular

hub for tourists with its direct train link to London, has seen the greatest concentration of new breweries.

There, PIG BEER brews a solid core range that appeals to the many visitors who flock to the area, especially during the warmer months, with brews like Sauber (4.9 per cent), a take on a Bavarian kristallweizen. The brewery's standout feature is its ever-expanding beer garden. Sheltered under a tent and equipped with heaters, it is now a welcoming space for drinkers during the New Forest's cold winters. Just behind the garden, the team has also started a small hop garden, frequently grazed by free-roaming sheep.

A few minutes away, nestled in a small industrial estate off the main road and surrounded by everything from an upholstery shop to a dressmaker, is Brew Forest. This is likely the region's smallest brewery, all its equipment fitting into a tiny



'The brewery's standout feature is its beer garden. Sheltered under a tent and equipped with heaters, it is now a welcoming space for drinkers during winter'

corner of its otherwise rather spacious bar area. Open to the public over half the week and offering a generous selection on tap (around 12 beers and a cider), Brew Forest has literally

transformed the life of the local community since opening a couple of years ago.

The Monkey Brewhouse, a true historical landmark, is a mere three-minute drive south towards the coast. Located next to an old toll house, it originally opened to serve the many travellers passing through its gate. The pub changed ownership several times over the decades, until it was acquired by Will Bradshaw, who launched his brewing operation on-site during the Covid pandemic and gave the pub its current name.

"The building next to the pub was used to collect tolls from people entering Lymington," said Will. "That's actually how the pub came about; there was so much custom in the 1850s that they decided to open it." In fact, the pub began life as the Crown, but was known by the locals as the Monkey House. "A woman used to live here and people knew she would keep monkeys. When the

Barry Topp (left) of New Forest Cider





Clockwise from main: Brew Forest's brewing equipment sits in a corner of the bar; PIG BEER's beer garden; Monkey Brewhouse offerings

'To say the cidery isn't heavily advertised is an understatement, yet John does put a sign by the road during opening hours'

plenty of stories to tell visitors. The most crucial for cider fans is how he set up a shop in London's Borough Market. Today known as the London Cider House, the site has made a major contribution to promoting British cider to a wider audience.

Nearby Miners Cider could be considered a legacy of New Forest Cider, too, its founder, John Narey, having previously honed his craft with it. John sources apples from two local orchards and produces a range of dry, medium and sweet ferments, along with a selection of single varietals. To say the cidery isn't heavily advertised is an understatement, yet John does put out a sign by the road to draw in visitors during opening hours. Those who stop by are rewarded with a compact and cosy bar, offering John's selection of ciders on tap, a cask beer on handpump and all of the above for takeaway. The walls are decorated with paraphernalia and the couches enriched with musical instruments that punters are encouraged to play – the presence of multiple accordions clearly hinting at John's musical preferences.

With its charming aesthetic, inviting atmosphere and unique character, John's encapsulates the spirit of the New Forest's thriving beer and cider landscape – a vibrant scene offering high-quality brews to be enjoyed against the enchanting backdrop of a fairy-tale forest.

latest owner bought the property, he officially changed the name to Monkey House – around 2014, I think – so when I put a brewery in it, I decided to call it Monkey Brewhouse."

Will brews a wide range of delightful traditional cask beers, including the aptly named Tollhouse (3.8 per cent), a classic malt-driven bitter with a fresh citrus note, a touch of dark roastiness and a honeyed backbone, alongside more modern styles served from kegs. The diverse selection of ales isn't Will's only source of pride, as the creation of the brewpub has also benefitted an area known for its lack of free houses with a sizeable independent pub.

"I would love to see more free houses in the New Forest," he said, "that's actually the reason why we

'Will's creation of the brewpub has also benefitted an area known for its lack of free houses with a sizeable independent pub'

ended up where we are. The huge influx of tourism here attracted the big chains, but their pubs just survive on summer sales. That's enough for their bosses and they don't look after their locals. Free houses are the real soul of the Forest... People really cherish independence, so we're very much supported by the local community."

Yeast activity has also increased on the southern side of the New Forest. This area has welcomed a new brewery in recent years (Drop the Anchor), but it is also a haven for cider lovers. New Forest Cider is the oldest maker in the area, by the village of Burley. It has a wide range of ciders, from a scrumpy to an intriguing bouché style – the pomaceous equivalent of a pet-nat wine, where bubbles are created through refermentation in the bottle.

Owner Barry Topp is quite the character. He founded the business in 1988 and, having now largely passed the reins to his children, has



Jacopo Mazzeo is a freelance journalist, photographer, consultant and former sommelier. He regularly contributes to leading wine, beer and spirits publications, and judges international competitions.

FIFTY YEARS AND COUNTING



Steve Hobman meets David Smith, the low-profile brewing guru who has had a hand in creating some of the UK's best-known beers and breweries

Countless people have drunk his many beers from a veritable host of breweries he has helped create. However, outside of the industry, few may have heard much of a man at the very epicentre of the changing British brewing scene for several decades, a man who can claim to have had a hoppy hand in many of your favourite tipples – brewing guru David Smith.

Along the way, he has worked on many leading names in cask: Skinner's Betty Stogs (4 per cent ABV), Coniston No 9 (8.5 per cent), original Sharp's Doom Bar (4 per cent), Arran Blonde (5 per cent), Acorn Barnsley Bitter (3.8 per cent), Oakham JHB (3.8 per cent), Castle Rock Harvest Pale (3.8 per cent), Leeds Brewery Pale (3.8 per cent) and Bradfield Farmers Blonde (4 per cent) are among a very long list of collaborations.

Yet, when chemistry graduate David turned up for an interview at his namesake Tadcaster brewery in the sweltering heat of summer 1976, he confessed to knowing nothing about beer – just drinking it.

Near 50 years on, I enjoyed a pint with the affable York-based brewing consultant to tap into a barrel full of tales spanning his astonishing half a century. Over the afternoon, beer names cascaded from his lips like *Humulus lupulus* from a brimming hop pocket. There's much to talk through

as the 50th anniversary approaches; 38 of those years were spent helping brewers make the best beer they can.

We start by revisiting his 1970s roots with the brew he cut his baby beer teeth on – Sam Smith's Old Brewery Bitter (OBB; 4 per cent), a traditional cask beer fermented in stone Yorkshire squares. With Scouting friends, he got away with drinking halves in the Trafalgar Bay, York, still a little under age – “Well, it was near the Scout hut”. Perhaps it

'When graduate David turned up for an interview at his namesake brewery in 1976, he confessed to knowing nothing about beer – just drinking it'

was his youthful way of adopting teetotaler Baden-Powell's Be Prepared motto for the years ahead.

Unfortunately, his erstwhile Nunnery Lane haunt is firmly shut – a closure victim of somewhat eccentric brewery boss Humphrey Smith it seems, so it's the splendid Burns Arms instead. We share affection for OBB and the pubs, despite, nay, because of Smith's no phones, music or machines ruling.

It all really began for him with a sort of epiphany while studying chemistry at the University of Essex. Asked by

his tutor where his interests lay, he said: “I like beer!” Then, why not brew? Supplied with a Brewers' Society leaflet, he began the slog of approaching brewers and was met by a solid wall of rejection.

Then, serendipity strolled in. Sam's head brewer, David Lindsey-White, was about to advertise for a trainee when his letter landed. David was called – saving the Yorkshire-thrifty head brewer the cost of an advert. Despite the clear declaration of beer ignorance, ex-Spitfire pilot Lindsey-White clearly recognised a recruit with good potential when he saw one. David started on 12 June 1976, kitted out including company tie he paid for from his £2,000-a-year salary.

Soon Lady Luck struck again, at least for David. A shift brewer, very unluckily, fell from a bus, catapulting the trainee into the brewing cockpit to learn his trade the hard way. “I was one of those guys sent for a bucket of steam or a long stand,” he recalled. However, those early years, brewing with quality malts and hops, care and balance, were to leave an indelible imprint on his beer psyche for the uncharted years ahead.

Moving to quality assurance, he relished tackling recalcitrant Yorkshire club stewards over dubious cellar work. After 12 years, he had itchy feet, and he looked around without success. Timothy Taylor



wanted him to move near to the Keighley brewery.

Determined to stay in York, he thought about starting a brewery, but consultancy was checked out – “a stop gap” – when “mini brewers” were still few. He saw a trend and was invited into a fledgling Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA), which said it needed someone like him on board. Membership business took off and he became technical director and trustee.

By now, we are in the Hole in the Wall, drinking the delightful Blonde (3.9 per cent) from Yorkshire Heart, another protégé brewery. David works out he has mentored around 250 brewers since 1988. But how many beers? Well, he has collaborated on thousands of recipes.

While the consultancy can advise on brewing any type of beer and has built lager breweries, David has been a CAMRA member since 1989 and is an enthusiastic champion of cask. “Cask is not served as cold as keg, so you get a better, deeper flavour. I’ll keep drinking it.”

The proof of his mash, as we might say, lies with several Champion Beer of Britain (CBOB) winners. Among them Coniston, which took the 2012 title for No 9 Barley Wine with David’s recipe; it was a second CBOB both for him – the first in 1995 with Cottage Norman’s Conquest 1066 (7 per cent) – and for Coniston, which took the honour for Bluebird Bitter (3.4 per cent) in 1998.

Moving Oakham brewery from its original 1993 Rutland site to Peterborough, he also remodelled CBOB 2001 winner golden ale JHB. Working with Castle Rock in 2010, Harvest Pale took the title. “I was with Castle Rock to improve production and, dare I say, quality, and so was very pleased when things turned around and it went on to win. I looked at how the beer was being brewed and changes to processes rather than

‘While the consultancy can advise on brewing any type of beer, David has been a CAMRA member since 1989, and is a champion of cask’

wholesale changes to the recipe – we do say, ‘it’s not what you brew, but the way that you brew it’ that really counts!”

What, then, is the secret of brewing a Champion Beer of Britain like No 9, we ponder. “It’s really hard to say what makes a beer like No 9 stand out,” David said. “With every beer you set out to make the best beer you can, I can only think No 9 clicked with the judges based on its elusive drinkability factor, and probably the same with Norman’s Conquest, to all intents and purposes bordering on a barleywine.”

David believes beer is ‘the oil of life’, to be enjoyed, and he has great faith in English hops to achieve quality, balanced cask beer, using traditional varieties such as Fuggles and Goldings, and the many new varieties that popped up over his career – Bramling Cross, Challenger, Pioneer, Endeavour and the like.

Looking to the future, he said, “Now, with the newer varieties coming along, such as Jester and Harlequin, etc., we will keep using them and adding them to the rich variety of English hops we have to play with and new styles of beer we are always looking to produce.

“You never know what is just around the corner and Acorn brewery proves a very good test bed for some of these new varieties with its ever-changing IPA series – my original recipe, but hundreds of changes to the hops over the years since we first produced it.”

But creativity must be handled with care. The consultancy delivers a Fundamentals of Brewing course. “Creativity is one thing, but you must get the fundamentals right to create

goodness for a beer of any style,” David said. “It’s not all about recipes – a chef learns by first boiling eggs.

“It comes down to upskilling; it is no good buying a fancy kit from abroad without knowledge and expertise. You have to start with the basics; for instance, hygiene is so important, and try to avoid the internet.”

David’s crusading passion for the industry is as clear as a freshly pulled pint. Most emphatically, he urges brewers: “Don’t practise on members of the public; people are paying good money for beer.” Saleability, he believes, is fundamental. “Brewers we set up years ago are still going





today. But it is a difficult tightrope; some brews are not as saleable as brewers think they are."

He shies from the title of 'Godfather of brewing' once suggested for him, but does regard his brewers as "a family", still working with many of them from earlier times on quality control and new brews.

Dave Hughes, founder of 22-year-old Acorn, said: "David has been our brewing consultant since our inception. With his vast experience, he helped us with our early recipes such as Barnsley Gold, the multi-award-winning Old Moor Porter,

"Acorn brewery proves a very good test bed for some of these new varieties with its ever-changing IPA series"

and the ever-changing 5 per cent, single-hopped IPA range."

We finish chatting in the Duke of York, over a pint of Leeds Pale (3.8 per cent), another of his legacy ales. That legacy now looks firmly safely set for the future, with the consultancy now joined by son, Rob, following years with Dartmoor, Freedom and Meantime in quality control, together with the talented Hayley Young, formerly of Kirkstall.

Is David ready, then, for quiet retirement, enjoying the odd OBB along with the memories? Not so, says the youthful 70-year-old: "My brain keeps going. I keep thinking of ideas. I'm not intending to stop just yet. But I might award myself a gold watch next year."

Yes, well-deserved. Come 12 June, we should all drink to that, and you are never far away from a David Smith cask beer.



Steve Hobman is a beer writer and founder of Beer Tours UK. beertoursuk.com

REBUILDING SOCIETIES

Has the decline of student real ale societies impacted the popularity of cask beer, or even jeopardised the future of CAMRA? **Matthew Curtis** puts his thinking cap on and investigates

Much has been documented of CAMRA's four founding members and their efforts to save real ale as we know it. The excellent *50 Years of CAMRA* by Laura Hadland explains in great detail how, on 16 March 1971, Michael Hardman, Graham Lees, Jim Makin and Bill Mellor drank in Kruger's Bar, in Dunquin, Ireland, and lambasted the homogenisation of mass-produced beer in the UK. The rest, as they say, is history.

But what is often forgotten when this auspicious quartet is referenced, is how young they were. Michael, born in 1946, was just 25 at the time, while Bill was reportedly even younger, at just 21. While the dyed-in-the-wool CAMRA stereotype is of a typically older gentleman, the truth is that the strength of the Campaign has often been born out of youth, and the inherent enthusiasm this brings with it. Case in point, Ash Corbett-Collins, the current chairman of the Campaign's National Executive, is just 33.

In those early days, it made sense for CAMRA to sign up enthusiastic young members while they were still attending university. Real ale societies were recruitment nodes, enlisting new recruits just as they came of drinking age. Many such individuals would go on to play key roles at branch level, and manage events including the prestigious Great British Beer Festival.



'Real ale societies were recruitment nodes, enlisting new recruits just as they came of drinking age'

John Cryne has been a CAMRA member for five decades and is perhaps best known for his work within the North London branch. In the early 1970s, he was a founder of the Reading University Student Union Real Ale Society, of which he was a member until he graduated in 1976.

But when I ask John if the society is still active, the answer is, sadly, no. A trend that, from the looks of things, appears to have been repeated at several student unions around the UK. It brings into question CAMRA's ageing membership, and how it manages to source a fresh pool of enthusiastic members who can keep it going for another generation.

"I think the issue[...] is succession within the society," John told me. "People move on, the enthusiasts who got the ball rolling graduate and move away."

In Greater Manchester, there are 15 higher education institutions, including the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Salford. During term time, approximately 100,000 students call the city home. You would expect that in an area with such a vibrant beer and pub culture, at least one of its higher education institutions would have a student union society dedicated to beer or pubs – but that isn't the case.

"So much has changed since the high point of university real ale societies in the 1970s and 80s," said Andy Shaw, who joined the Beer and Wine Society at the University of Salford when he enrolled in 1974. He quickly assumed the role of social secretary and the society was soon rebranded as the Real Ale Society. 🍺



During his three-year tenure, he organised many socials with what was then known as Manchester CAMRA – a link that, sadly, no longer exists.

Andy, who was part of the team of volunteers which helped develop the Campaign's WhatPub resource, is today chair of the Pub Data Advisory Group. He believes the diminishing interest in real ale among younger drinkers is down to both the closure of pubs and the lack of those selling it. According to data published by *The Morning Advertiser* in June 2025, only 8 per cent of beer now sold in the on-trade is classed as cask beer.

"The last 10 years has seen a steady decline in the level of interest in not just cask beer, but alcohol in general amongst the 18–30 age group," Andy said. "Given these trends, the decline in university real ale societies can be seen to be inevitable."

Will Steele, who acts as the Student Voice coordinator at the University of Salford, said they have records of its real ale society still existing as far back as 2004. Robin Baker, a former student who now works for Sheffield's Abbeydale brewery, confirms he was a member until he graduated in 2008, but somewhere between then and now, the society was abandoned.

This begs a question: if pubs are dying, and the number of young people who are choosing to drink real ale is shrinking, then what sort of future does cask beer really have? If there is no connection between ageing CAMRA members and new drinkers who are just beginning their adult lives, then surely the outlook for the Campaign is bleak? How does CAMRA reignite the same enthusiasm from today's student body that its founding members mustered 50 years ago?

"Volunteering at festivals might be more suitable than getting involved in a local branch because it's time-limited and roles are clearly defined," CAMRA's Ash said. "We need to



'If pubs are dying, and the number of young people drinking real ale is shrinking, what sort of future does cask beer really have?'

demonstrate that involvement with CAMRA has real-world benefits to their studies and future careers."

Ash also remarked that this is a question he is asked a lot. There's a certain level of reassurance that one of its most senior organisers is actively involved in finding a solution to the Campaign's age-related membership issues. There's also the fundamental problem that is finding and engaging with existing real ale societies in the first place. However, as explained by the current president of the (thankfully still present) Leeds University Union (LUU) Real Ale Society, Matthew Hutchison, the issue is less about finding ways to engage with organisations like CAMRA, and more about the beer itself.

"I believe the decline in real ale is due to people in their teens to their 20s happily enjoying a lager or a mainstream beer like [Beavertown] Neck Oil and not wanting to discover 'proper beer'," Matthew explained. "It's something

we've found difficult, trying to encourage uni-age students to try out something a bit different and open their knowledge of beer further."

The good news is that, Leeds being one example, the death of real ale societies like those at Salford or Reading is not the case everywhere. Sheffield, Cardiff and Newcastle universities also still have a functioning real ale society as part of their respective student unions. At the very least, this demonstrates that while the majority of younger drinkers might not be interested in real ale, or indeed, joining an organisation that lobbies for its continued survival, there are still some who are. It's worth remembering that CAMRA's journey began thanks to just four enthusiasts, and as long as some sort of connection to that experience remains, it could be that the Campaign's next wave of members is waiting in the wings for its turn to shine.

But this sort of thing doesn't just happen by itself. In Leeds, the LUU Real Ale Society is actively engaged with its local beer community, having brewed a beer with Kirkstall brewery, with members able to attend the brew day and then enjoy the beer they helped create in the student union bar. For Matthew, developing a sense of belonging via initiatives such as this is key to maintaining a healthy membership. Perhaps there's a lesson here that the Campaign could learn from the younger generation.

"Real ale in pubs is dying, but we don't want that to happen," Matthew said. "I would strongly recommend starting a similar society if your university doesn't already have one, because real ale is something we have to preserve and bring back stronger and better than ever."



Matthew Curtis is an award-winning journalist and founder of *Pellicle*, pelliclemag.com

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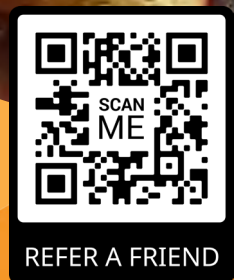
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Acorn Barnesley Bitter

Jeff Evans meets Dave Hughes to trace the development of one of the brewery's best beers and a taste of the past

Despite what global breweries with deceptive marketing will have you believe, heritage and provenance still count in the world of beer. Ask Dave Hughes of Acorn brewery and he'll tell you how important they have been to his business.

Dave began his career as a chef in his native Blackpool before he moved to London in 1999 to work at a pub in Pimlico. The pub had links to Barnesley brewery, an operation set up in the village of Elsecar in South Yorkshire in 1994. That's how he met his future wife, Jude, who was working as a salesperson for the business.

One thing led to another, and a year later he moved north to become a brewery assistant in her company. After six months' training, he was offered the role of lead brewer, which he held until early 2003, when the brewery closed and production – ironically – moved to Blackpool brewery. It was a troubling time and brave decisions needed to be made.

"Faced with unemployment and a young family, I took the plunge, chatted to my bank manager and purchased a 10-barrel brew plant from the Forester & Firkin in Stafford," Dave said. Thus, Acorn brewery was born in Barnesley.

The first beer Dave looked to produce was a recreation of Barnesley Bitter, a beer that had once been a favourite of local luminaries such as Michael Parkinson and cricket umpire Dickie Bird. The original Barnesley brewery had been taken over by John

Smith's in 1961 and closed 15 years later, leaving local drinkers without their favourite pint. Dave had already brewed one revival of it at Elsecar.

"The original Barnesley Bitter was very popular throughout the north of England," Dave explained. "I believe, from stories I have been told, that it gave the inspiration for Timothy Taylor's Boltmaker (4 per cent ABV) and no doubt a few other traditional Yorkshire bitters. I believed it very important for it to be brewed in Barnesley as it forms part of the heritage of the town almost as much as the coal from the pits around the borough."

There were a few complications, however. There were already two Barnesley Bitters. One came from Oakwell, which brewed on the site of the original Barnesley brewery until 2013. Another came from Blackpool brewery, where the former Elsecar beers were still being brewed. Dave was undeterred, however, assured that there were no trademark issues and thinking he could do a good job in recreating the once-famed local beer.

Following the original recipe that had been unearthed by brewing consultant David Smith [see page 24], he set out to get as close to the historic beer as possible. Maris Otter pale ale malt formed the

backbone – replacing the Halcyon used at Elsecar – with additions of Crystal and Pale Chocolate supplied by Fawcett's in Castleford. "The Crystal malt adds a mellow, digestive-biscuit background, while the

Pale Chocolate gives gentle dark chocolate flavours on the palate," Dave said. The hops were Challenger and were used for bitterness and aroma. The yeast was Barnesley's original, a twin strain dating back more than a hundred years,

which was discovered in, and purchased from, the Brewlab training and analysis facility in Sunderland. "We use the same yeast in all our beers," said Dave. "It brings out depth and flavour, even to lower-strength seasonal beers."

The beer was launched at the Market Hotel, Elsecar, and the Kelham Island Tavern in Sheffield, where it remains a permanent offering to this day. Initial feedback was very positive, including from one of those famous Barnesley Bitter connoisseurs. "We worked with Dickie Bird in the early years, brewing a beer for his charity foundation," Dave said. "He was always very complimentary about Barnesley Bitter." Bird also officially opened the new brewery site in 2007, when demand for Dave's beer saw expansion to a 25-barrel plant.

From the start, the beer stood out from its namesake competition, according to Dave. "I can't speak for the Oakwell version as I never tried it," he admitted, "but the Blackpool

'The beer was launched at the Kelham Island Tavern, Sheffield, where it remains a permanent offering to this day'

'Following the original recipe, he set out to get as close to the historic beer as possible'

THE STORY BEHIND THE BEER



version, in my opinion, was quite different due to the water being very soft, as opposed to our water in Barnsley being quite hard."

Inevitably, however, there was some irritation among his former employers. "They didn't take lightly to my brewing it," he recalled. "They created a beer called Snake in the Grass, with a pump clip image of a snake that had a caricature of myself! We gained national press exposure on the back of this, which I saw as a positive. I decided not to retaliate." Blackpool brewery closed in 2005.

Barnsley Bitter (3.8 per cent) has a recipe unchanged over 22 years and is a good, old-fashioned British bitter, brown in colour and with a fine balance of nut and caramel from the malt, and light hop

"They created a beer called Snake in the Grass, with a pump clip image of a snake that had a caricature of myself"

flavours. It's a great quaffing pint, at no time cloying or heavy, despite the rich malt profile. It's available today in cask, keg and bottle. Sales have held firm over the years and the beer currently accounts for around

30 per cent of Acorn's trade, despite the company branching out into numerous other styles.

The beer clearly remains central to all that Acorn does, historically important and yet appealing to today's local drinkers. "It's our identity," said Dave, "our heritage." When he says that, you sense he's speaking for the whole town and not just the brewery.

Capital fare deals

Christian Gott leaves his Channel Islands home to explore pubs in London

Researching my next trip in search of great beer and food, I took to social media and was soon lost in a stream of comments about commercial lager drinkers and a certain large national pub chain. Possibilities flew my way only to be quickly countered and shot down. Slowly, my idea developed into an almost military plan to visit a cross-section of some of London's best pubs.

But all of the online sensory overload was nothing to that of my first stop, the hustle and bustle that is Borough Market.

After an early start, I was starving. My first visit wasn't really a pub, but I had seen my visit was the launch day of Wright Brothers Fisherman's Breakfast. Think seared scallops and bacon served in a toasted bun with lashings of rich hollandaise sauce. You might think for someone who lives on an island travelling more than 200 miles for seafood is a little crazy. What made it epic was a 10am pint of Wright Brothers' own Oyster Stout

(4.5 per cent ABV). Brewed by Harbour Brewing in Cornwall, the bitter coffee and chocolate notes married perfectly with the seafood breakfast special.

After a browse around the numerous stalls selling fresh meat, fish, an abundance of cheese, spices, breads and all manner of sweet treats, I popped over to the Wheatsheaf. This is something of a curiosity, for despite being a Grade II listed historic building, the entire top storey was removed to make way for the Thameslink rail upgrade.

The busy market traders beneath vie with the thunder of overground trains rumbling out of the nearby London Bridge station. It is a Young's pub, and the second pint of the day was a very good Young's London Special (4.5 per cent). Hoppy with toasty overtones, this was one of four cask beers available on the day. The pub is divided with an outside seating area and does a fine line in stacked burgers and freshly made artisan pizzas.

After a very short hop on the Tube, which was nowhere near as awful as everyone suggests, I jumped off at Embankment. Heading away from the river, I was looking out for one of the top London beer pubs as recommended by CAMRA; indeed, it was the first London pub to win the overall Pub of the Year competition in 2010. The Harp in Chandos Place is a true beer drinker's paradise with an interesting mix of tourists and locals as well as the odd stagehand and cast member from nearby theatreland. Long and narrow, it soon fills up, but there is also space on the second floor. A word of warning, though, pack climbing gear for the interesting ascent to either the



Breakfast of champions – Oyster Stout and seared scallops with bacon and hollandaise sauce

'A word of warning, though, pack climbing gear for the ascent to either the upstairs room or the toilets'

upstairs room or the toilets up very narrow stairs. The beers were mostly Fuller's and Dark Star, and I sampled a London Pride (4.1 per cent). I was in London, after all!

Continuing my travels, I skirted around Chinatown, heading to one of my favourite pubs which I knew well from working just over the road: the Coach & Horses in Greek Street. Please be careful, as this is one of the most popular pub names in London and there are several in the area. The one I went to is the most (in)famous and was home to celebrity drinkers like Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, John Hurt and Peter O'Toole. It was also





Half pint of Windjammer paired well with a half pint of prawns and a seafood sauce with a healthy kick of cayenne at Mall Tavern

'Here, the menu pairs beer with each dish from a range of brews from independent breweries'

now, I had walked off my breakfast and was thinking about lunch, however, the Coach does not do food but it does have a superior range of bar snacks. A pint of Gales Seafarers English Ale (3.6 per cent), a rather moreish amber session beer with Tayto crisps, and off I went to my last port of call.

After another quick trip on the Underground to Notting Hill Gate, where there is a wealth of good food and drink venues from hipster bars right through to top-end gastropubs, I was following a recommendation to a busy little free house, the Mall Tavern. Here, the menu pairs beer with each dish from a range of brews from independent breweries such as Kernel, Pressure Drop, Verdant and Theakston's, as well as European options.

There was a bunch of welcoming and knowledgeable staff and some exceptional food and beer. The menu is full of excellently prepared pub classics, and I couldn't help going for a half pint of plump prawns. The seafood sauce had proper depth and a kick of cayenne. It was washed down with an expertly matched half of



Padstow Windjammer (4.3 per cent) and followed by a perfectly cooked steak with a green peppercorn sauce and crisp, well-seasoned fries. I thoroughly recommend you try it.



Chris AKA An Island Chef regularly writes a blog about food; he loves to cook using top ingredients and local produce. His recipes appear regularly in *What's Brewing Online*.



Mall Tavern in Notting Hill Gate pairs beers with food

the location for long editorial liquid lunches when Richard Ingrams ran *Private Eye*. Little has changed since the last makeover in the 1930s, and the walls are festooned with cartoons and pictures of its many famous patrons down the years.

There was a wide range of cask and craft beers and very friendly staff. This is something of a change from the former landlord Norman Balan, known as the rudest landlord in London. I can attest Norman had a vast knowledge of the saltier words in the English language. He ran the Coach for 63 years before finally retiring in 2006. By

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CHANGING TACK

AB InBev belatedly backs Bass and Boddies

One global brewery has seen the error of its ways. While Carlsberg and Heineken have swung wrecking balls at real ale breweries, AB InBev has changed tack and is putting its muscle behind two famous cask beers, Draught Bass and Boddingtons Bitter.

AB InBev is a colossus, producing 30 per cent of all the world's beer and is best known for Budweiser and Stella Artois. In 2000, it took on brands owned by Bass and Whitbread when those two companies left brewing.

But the new owner left the beers to wither on the hop bine. Boddingtons became a keg and canned beer while Draught Bass, once worth close to a million barrels a year, was sidelined until it accounted for just 30,000 barrels a year.

Unless you drank in the Burton and Derby area, it was almost impossible to find Draught Bass. To prove my love for the beer, I occasionally catch two trains and a bus in order to enjoy a glass or three in the Express Tavern at Kew Bridge in West London.

The pub is so devoted to the ale that it has a giant version of the famous Bass Red Triangle trademark on the exterior. It was the first registered trademark when new legislation was introduced in 1876 and Bass used it to good effect to sell the beer worldwide.

While Bass never labelled the beer IPA, it became part of the craze for India Pale Ale in the 19th century. It was popular in the United States, reached Australasia and appeared on the bar of the Folies Bergère in Paris in a painting by Manet.

Demand for the beer continued well into the 20th century. There were no fewer than 500 cases of bottled Bass on board the *Titanic*, and they are still on the seabed. If the beers were



'I haven't been able to taste it as every pub that stocked it sold out within a few days. Who says there's no demand for cask beer?'

bottled with live yeast, it would be fascinating to sample them to see if they survived the iceberg.

For several years, Bass aficionados have staged a Drink Draught Bass Day and this has not gone unnoticed at AB InBev HQ. Now the beer will be promoted with new pump clips and literature about its history.

There's one oddity about the revival. Draught Bass is now produced at Marston's in Burton upon Trent, a

brewery owned by AB InBev's arch-rival Carlsberg. How long this situation lasts remains to be seen.

Boddingtons brewery in Manchester has a similar lineage to Bass, dating from the late 18th century. It became the major beer maker in the North West with a large estate of pubs and an impressive annual barrelage.

It was said the taste of Boddingtons Bitter made strong men weep, but I was unimpressed when I first tasted it at a beer festival, served straight from the cask and as flat as the proverbial millpond. It was only when I had a pint in a pub, served with a tight head of foam that gave the beer its nickname of "the cream of Manchester", that I was able to appreciate the magic of the brew.

It was a superb balance of rich malt and spicy, peppery hops. Its unique character came from a special malt syrup made for the brewery by Tate & Lyle in London, best known for its Golden Syrup.

When Tate & Lyle stopped making the syrup, Boddingtons replaced it with cane sugar. After years in the wilderness, AB InBev has given a contract to the Manchester brewer JW Lees to produce the cask version of the beer again.

Lees can't reveal the recipe as it's a confidential arrangement with the owner, but I have to assume it will be similar to the old recipe of pale malt, cane sugar and Fuggles, Goldings and Whitbread Goldings Variety hops.

I haven't been able to taste it as every pub that stocked it sold out within a few days. Who says there's no demand for cask beer?



Roger Protz's book, *World's Greatest Beers* (2022), is on sale from CAMRA's online bookstore. Follow him at [@RogerProtzBeer](https://twitter.com/RogerProtzBeer)



BACK IN BUSINESS

Jennings, a much-loved and historic Cumbrian brewery, dating from 1828, was shuttered by Carlsberg, but it has been saved and reopened by a husband-and-wife partnership and is once again brewing popular Lakeland ales. **Roger Protz** reports



Reopened Jennings is full of bustle and optimism with plans for a visitor centre to join the taproom



The Fourth of July, has a special significance in Cockermouth, for it's the day in 2025 when Jennings reopened. The historic Cumbrian brewery, dating from 1828, had been axed by Carlsberg in 2022, but two local entrepreneurs, Kurt and Rebecca Canfield, found the cash to buy the company and start making beer again.

The guests invited to the opening party raised their glasses to cheer the brewery and its new owners. It's said that even hard-bitten CAMRA members had tears in their eyes as their local brewery brought back such much-loved



local ales as Cocker Hoop (4.6 per cent ABV) and Sneck Lifter (5.1 per cent).

Jennings has had a turbulent history this century. It stands at the confluence of the rivers Cocker and Derwent, and it's twice been flooded when the rivers overflowed their banks. In 2005, the brewery was bought by Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries (W&D), which, as the result of a reverse takeover, became Marston's in 2007.

The Cockermouth takeover was strongly opposed by the West Cumbria branch of CAMRA, which pointed to the danger of

a big national group traducing the classic Jennings' cask beers.

On the positive side, without Marston's financial muscle, it's likely the brewery would have closed as a result of the 2008 floods. Phil Tattershall, a now retired former tour guide, recalls the ground floor of the brewery being six feet under water.

"Fifty tonnes of malt turned to concrete," he said, "and casks of beer floated out."

'Marston's MD told the Jennings' manager, the brewery would reopen "whatever the cost"'

Marston's MD Stephen Oliver told Gaynor Green, the Jennings' manager, the brewery would reopen "whatever the cost".

In the event, it took £1m and four months to clean up the brewery and restock it. The beers were brewed at Banks's in Wolverhampton and Marston's in Burton-on-Trent. This was made clear on pub pump clips and local drinkers were supportive and understanding. When flooding occurred again in 2015, the brewery was better prepared and was out of action for only three weeks.



'Maris Otter, England's finest malting barley, was replaced by a cheaper variety called Tipple'

On the debit side, Marston's, which became the junior partner of the Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Company, was keen to cut costs. Maris Otter, England's finest malting barley, was replaced by a cheaper variety called Tipple, and Sneck Lifter was discontinued and replaced with a beer called Atomic Theory. Castle Bitter (3.4 per cent) was rebranded Night Vision, a name that was never accepted by local drinkers, according to local CAMRA member Stephen Walker.

When Carlsberg closed

the site in 2022, the last beer brewed there was Lancaster Bomber, which is not a Jennings' beer but originated in Thwaites brewery. By this time, Marston's – once a famous name in British brewing, with Pedigree Bitter (4.5 per cent) and the Burton union system of fermentation – was just a pub company.

It seemed Jennings would go the same way, sent down the sluice by a Danish lager maker, and ending as a footnote to British brewing history.

And then the Canfields came riding to the rescue. They are Cumbrian to their roots and proud of their heritage. They also run successful local businesses that enabled them to buy Jennings. They faced tough negotiations with Carlsberg, which at first demanded £1m for the brewery.

Kurt, from a local family, runs Delkia in Whitehaven, an engineering and technology company that supplies the defence and nuclear sectors in the region. Rebecca, Cockermouth born and bred, owns Wine and the Wood, a retail company that is now part of the Jennings business.



They both needed new warehouse facilities for their companies and looked at Jennings as a possible base. But Kurt, in touch with local feelings, realised the site had to reopen and make beer.

"I knew the brewery well," he said. "I'd been on brewery tours and supported its events. I knew we had to bring the heart back into Cockermouth."

There were no takers when Carlsberg demanded £1m for the brewery. The lager brewer reduced the asking price to £750,000 and Kurt said he and Rebecca didn't pay anything like that, though he won't put a precise figure on the amount. He says it took two years of complex and protracted negotiations to reach a

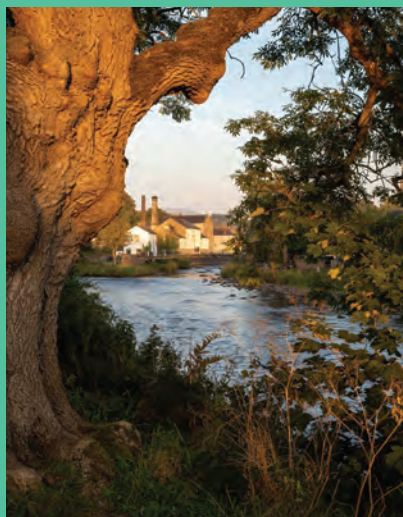
"I knew the brewery well. I'd supported its events. I knew we had to bring the heart back into Cockermouth"

settlement that gives them all rights, trademarks and intellectual property.

Kurt describes brewing as "a challenge" and the Canfields recruited people with tried-and-tested experience of the industry to run the brewery day to day.

The MD is Chris France, who owned the retailer Beer Hawk, helped other small breweries start up and was commercial director at Black Sheep until it was bought by London investment company Breal in 2024.

The head brewer is the vastly experienced Buster Grant, most recently at Batemans in Lincolnshire. He didn't want to use the Marston's recipes and found the Jennings originals in an old filing cabinet. He uses these originals and has returned to tried-and-trusted Maris Otter malt and Fuggles and Goldings hops. Water comes from a well in the



The Jennings story

The Jennings family comes from the village of Lorton, close to Cockermouth. John Jennings Senior was the son of a maltster and he used the local grain to open a brewery in 1828.

His beers proved popular and he outgrew the site. He moved to Cockermouth in 1881, buying a brewery owned by the Wyndham family who lived in Cockermouth Castle.

The business prospered and it became a limited company in 1887. Jennings expanded and bought several other breweries in the region plus built a large estate of 127 pubs throughout the Lake District and across into Northumberland.

There were still more than 100 pubs in the estate when Wolverhampton & Dudley arrived on the scene. The number of outlets was attractive to a group keen to sell its own beers and with little or no interest in Jennings ales.

That has now changed for the better and Jennings beers, brimming with rich malt and hop flavours, are once again back on the agenda.

Main: MD Chris France, left, and head brewer Buster Grant are at the heart of reviving Jennings brewery
Inset: New owners Kurt and Rebecca Canfield

grounds of Cockermouth Castle that stands proud over the brewery and the rivers. Buster said the water is "incredibly soft" and he adds salts to make it suitable for pale beers.

Celeia hops from Slovenia are used in Cocker Hoop (4.6 per cent) with the English version of American Cascade, which gives notes of grapefruit and lychees to the beer.

All the hops are whole leaf, not pellets. Buster thinks Jennings is one of the last breweries to use hops in this form.

Sneck Lifter is a complex, dark brown ale brewed with Amber and Chocolate malts and invert sugar. It's thought the beer may have been Jennings' interpretation of London Porter, but there's no written proof of this.

The other regular beers are Castle Bitter and Cumberland Ale (4 per cent). A special beer called Back

Yam (4 per cent) was brewed for the reopening – local dialect for Back Home. A green hop beer was brewed in September 2025, and Chris and Buster plan regular seasonals. They may add a stout, which could be either cask or nitrokeg.

Chris said W&D, and then Marston's, had no long-term interest in running the brewery, and the 30,000-barrel capacity was reduced to 15,000. He's full of praise for the local CAMRA branch, whose vigorous campaigning "tipped the balance and kept Jennings running".

Buster is using a new 10-barrel kit to produce his beers. He's brewing

'He's full of praise for the local CAMRA branch, whose vigorous campaigning "tipped the balance"'

to capacity, supplying the local free trade, but with most beer currently sold through a large on-site taproom that's open seven days a week.

It holds regular events such as quiz nights and poetry readings. Local groups, including rowing and cycling clubs, are also taking the beers.

Bottled beer accounts for 15 per cent of production, with 40 per cent of bottles sold through Booths supermarkets.

The glaring anomaly in the region is the presence of 110 Marston's pubs, all signed Jennings, but not selling any of its beers.

Chris thinks they will eventually take his beers, but negotiations are complex and Jennings would have to increase production and probably install new fermenters to cope with the demand.

At present, he and the Canfields are putting their energy into developing the site. They are getting old brewery artefacts and memorabilia from the Jennings family that will be used to decorate the taproom.

A shop will be added, and an old maltings could be turned into a hotel and visitor centre. An area of land close to the confluence of the two rivers will be turned into a drinking terrace. All the old brewing kit is still in place and Kurt thinks they could form the basis for a brewery museum that would attract visitors.

The reopened Jennings brewery is full of bustle, optimism and fine-tasting beer. It's achieving Kurt's desire to bring it back into the heart of the community.

And it's independent, free from the shackles of a global brewer with no interest in cask beer.



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YOUR RIGHTS IN THE PUB



CAMRA BREAKS DOWN TWO OF THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS IN THE PUB AND WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO A FULL PINT?

What's the deal?

Draught beer and cider can only be sold in pints, halves or thirds, in a UKCA-marked glass – the rules are different for canned or bottled products. However, consumers don't currently have the right to a full pint as the industry standard is for 95 per cent liquid, with a five per cent allowance for the head of the beer or cider.

What's CAMRA's view?

CAMRA wants to see the right to a full pint enshrined in

legislation. That means defining a pint as 100 per cent liquid, with a head served on top. It's why CAMRA festivals use glasses that hold slightly more than a pint, with markings on them.

How can I exercise my consumer rights?

You can always ask for a top-up, and most pubs will honour a polite request. If you think a venue is persistently serving short measures, you can report it to Trading Standards through the council.

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO PRICE INFORMATION?

What's the deal?

As long as they're not deliberately misleading consumers, then pubs aren't required to specifically show a price list, but they do have an obligation to provide 'sufficient' information before you buy.

What's CAMRA's view?

CAMRA thinks it should be compulsory for licensed premises to display a prominent price list – clearly visible from where customers are expected to place orders.

For more information on consumer rights, go to camra.org.uk

How can I exercise my consumer rights?

Make sure to ask politely about prices before you purchase, and tell pubs that a clear price list would help if it's not displayed. If you're not informed about prices before you buy a drink, then you may also have the right to refuse it after it has been poured and you've been told the cost.





WHERE RAILS MEET ALES

Tim Hampson celebrates the first railway pub securing listed status

There is a close link between the evolution of the pub and the development of the railways.

Trains have carried hops, barley and even brewing water around the UK. Steam trains transported barrels of beer for sale in distant pubs and even to ports for export overseas. And trains took carriages of people to the newly developed coastal resorts where they could enjoy beers from their hometown while on holiday.

The brewing industry quickly embraced the development of the steam engine. By the 1880s, three of Bass's massive breweries were powered by 32 steam engines. Nine locomotives were running on 12 miles of private track carrying brewing materials and beer



around the breweries and to the town's rail heads.

And of course, where there were rail halts, there were people, with thirsts to be slaked.

Within a brief time, more than 200 pubs, many of them newly built, had taken on names associated with the iron road, with names such as the Railway Arms.

Now, the oldest purpose-built railway pub in the world has won a special designation from Historic England, as the organisation commemorates the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Historic England works to protect and promote England's pubs, from centuries-old coaching inns to unique mid-20th-century designs, recognising their cultural and architectural significance through listing.

The Cleveland Bay in Eaglescliffe, Stockton, is now a Grade II listed building, and one of seven heritage

'And where there were rail halts, there were people, with thirsts to be slaked'



Cleveland Bay licensee Peter Rafferty has been in the trade for almost 30 years

sites to gain listed status as part of the railway celebrations.

Opened in 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway is credited with pioneering the development and expansion of British train travel.

The pub, originally named as the New Inn, was built to oversee the coal and lime depot at the end of the Yarm branch line.

The pub was built close to the site of one of the country's early proto railway stations, built before the concept of the railway station had fully evolved.

Historic England incoming co-chief executives Claudia Kenyatta and Emma Squire said: "The development of England's railway system was one of the greatest achievements of the Victorian era.

"The protection of these sites means they will continue to be enjoyed by visitors for generations to come"

"These new listings highlight key milestones in its growth and demonstrate how the railway has shaped our local places today.

"Every newly listed station announced today is open to the public to visit, so the protection of these sites means that they will continue to be seen and enjoyed by visitors for generations to come."

The Cleveland dates from 1825 and the very start of the railways' era, where today's licensee, Peter Rafferty, fast approaching 30 years' service to the trade, is equally

enthusiastic about cask beer, as he is about music, and where on Fridays at 9pm it becomes the North's most intimate live blues setting.

According to the pub's website, it is "a traditional English pub, consisting of Bar, Snug and Lounge, it hasn't been ruined like most pubs – knocked through into one big room".

Four cask beers are sold, along with two guest beers all served in oversized glasses.

As part of the Railway 200 celebrations, Historic England has chosen to protect not just the Cleveland but an overbridge and engine shed located on the Swanage railway line, two village stations in Norfolk, the Isle of Wight's 1920s Havenstreet railway station, and Devon's Woody Bay transit hub.

ICE, ICE, MAYBE

Ice cubes in beer – is this popular pub order atrocious or ingenious? A new survey has found more than a quarter of adults under 35 commit the sin of dilution to keep their pint cool. Is this alarming new trend here to stay? Do you or would you add ice to a beer?

When you look at the fads over the years of what's been added to beer, ice cubes aren't that big of a deal. Lime tops, lemonade, other beer.

Adding ice will change the mouthfeel, 'diluting' it in a way to make it thinner and easier to drink.

But in the end, let folks drink what they want.

Steve Dunkley

Nope, can't see 1 April anywhere.

Still, in 2003, the C&C group revolutionised the packaged cider market with the novel idea of marketing its concentrated apple pulp product by the addition of ice (and lots of it) to the glass before serving it, making Magners the 'in' drink for a while. I can also categorically state that some Carlsberg drinkers, at least in Morecambe, were adding ice to their beer before this marketing ploy came along, as early as 2002, and probably before as well. Obviously, *What's Brewing* missed this first time around.

Christine Jane

Each to their own.

But... my only concern is if a pint glass full of volume-filling ice cubes takes the place of half the beer, and the pub still charges for a full pint.

John Buckley

First encountered that in about every pub in Thailand. They had a very small seat at every table. My wife thought it was to keep her handbag off the floor. Next thing, they came with my 660ml bottle of beer, a tiny about 200ml glass, ice bucket and tongs. I never used it after my first beer as it got too watery.

Graeme Ross

I'm 37 and pretty shameless about adding ice to beer these days if I find it too warm or it's been on my table a while or it's 27 degrees outside, etc. When I Googled it, it seems it's quite common to put ice in lager in very hot places like Thailand.

Alex Wright

I've never had ice cubes in beer, but all too often need my hands clasped around a pint glass for a few minutes to warm the beer enough to taste properly.

Paul Mudge

I would never put ice in my beer. Waters it down, messes with the flavour and mouthfeel. However, if others want to do it, so be it.

Steve Thompson

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send your thoughts to wb.editor@camra.org.uk

All comments are taken from a discussion on CAMRA's online forum at discourse.camra.org.uk



If we're talking
cask ale, or any
beer come to that,
surely any added ice is
going to destroy the
intended profile?

Mick Ayres

Fine, festive fun

We sample some ageworthy beers that you'll want to seek out

Compiling this seasonal round-up of strong and special treats happily coincided with Wimbledon brewery's first vertical tasting of **XXXX Vintage Ale** as part of a CAMRA-supported beer festival. Our genial host was Derek Prentice, a London brewing legend who began his career at the original Trumans in the 1970s and subsequently worked at Young's and Fuller's. Having brewed Fuller's Vintage Ale, he was keen to create an ageworthy barleywine when he co-founded Wimbledon in 2015, especially as the historic brewery of the same name, burnt down in 1889, offered an XXXX.

The result is a great example of what a simple traditional recipe (largely Maris Otter pale malt, Fuggle

'We also tried that vintage from a steel cask, brimming with apricot, glacé cherry and nutty notes, and enticingly spicy bottled versions from 2017 and 2019'

and Golding hops) can achieve in the hands of a skilled brewer. The 2025 version (10.5 per cent ABV, unfiltered unpasteurised 750ml bottle) of this rich amber beer is already drinking well, with vanilla and light berry fruit aromas, a hint of orange on a sweetish, rounded marzipan palate and quite a tannic hop note in the finish. There are brandy notes, too, as it was blended with a dash of the 2023 brew aged in an Armagnac cask. We also tried that vintage from a steel cask, brimming with apricot, glacé cherry and nutty notes, and enticingly spicy bottled versions from 2017 and 2019, all showing the complexity such beers can acquire with patience.

Another big heritage beer I've enjoyed this year is Czar's **P2 Imperial Stout** (8 per cent, bottle-conditioned), a Bass brand from Burton upon Trent in its mid-19th century heyday. More recently, it was recreated by another brewing legend, Steve Wellington, at the now sadly defunct National Brewery Centre. These days, it's in safe hands at veteran microbrewery and brewpub Burton Bridge, founded in 1982 by ex-Bass brewers and now run by Emma Cole (ex-BrewDog and Cloudwater) and Al Wall. Although currently fermented with Burton Bridge's house yeast rather than the Bass version, it's still a fine example of its style, with a particularly creamy texture and notes of blackcurrant, tart apple, greengage and smoky umami alongside the expected rich cocoa, finishing with a throb of earthy hop.

Two Belgian-inspired beers, both can-conditioned, complete this year's festive choice. RedWillow in Macclesfield, founded by Toby and Caroline Mackenzie in 2010, is one of my favourite UK breweries, so I couldn't resist its **Trappless English Tripel**. The Englishness shows in its 7.6 per cent – light for the style – and a slug of peppery endive bitterness on the finish, but it nonetheless boasts a classic yeasty aroma with ripe banana and light spice, while heritage Chevalier malt shines on a beautifully smooth, clean, orange-tinged palate.

Emmanuel is a 150-litre nanobrewery in a Sheffield cellar founded by Nick Law in 2014, specialising in beers 'of biblical proportions' with ecclesiastical



branding, partly inspired by monastic models. **Ale Mary** (10 per cent) is a barleywine fortified with honey and molasses, and dosed with spices including star anise and dried orange peel. This brown beer has a gently spicy, slightly dusty aroma with notes of cherry cake, sweet spiced pear on a rounded palate and well-placed cinnamon and clove on a gently warming finish. Such flavourings can sometimes overwhelm a beer, but here they're handled with saintly restraint.



Des de Moor is one of the country's leading writers on bottled beer, and author of *Cask: The real story of Britain's unique beer culture*. Follow him at [@desdemoor](https://twitter.com/desdemoor) and read more from him at [desdemoor.co.uk](https://www.desdemoor.co.uk)

YOUR SHOUT

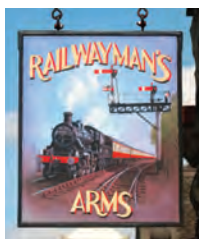


Write to *BEER*, CAMRA 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4LW
or email editor@camra.org.uk

It was nice to see you using a picture of our old Railwayman's pub sign (*BEER*, autumn).

A shame there wasn't a credit as, like all pubs, we need the publicity.

Roland Bull,
Severn Valley Railway



Editor replies: *The illustration was of the old sign that hung over the platform side door of the Railwayman's Arms pub at Bridgnorth station on the Severn Valley Railway.*

The line has two pubs, and they are both worth visiting: the Railwayman's Arms at Bridgnorth and the King and Castle at Kidderminster (both Good Beer Guide entries).

sequence in a retelling of the Easter story (I think), and the crews had taken it over after closing Saturday night, and I think all day Sunday into Monday morning. Unfortunately, I can't remember the name of the drama, but it was a one-off. As I recall, the designer was BBC Scotland's Bob Smart.

At the time, a friend worked in the bar and she said it was a useful addition, giving them a handy place to keep glasses handy for the founts.

It had to be removed, though, since it was not firmly attached.

I reckon it must have been in the mid-1970s, since bars didn't open on Sundays until some point around then.

Chris Wyatt, Bearsden,
East Dunbartonshire



On reading the article *The Bar's the Star*, (*BEER*, autumn), I was reminded of a visit to the sadly missed Halt Bar on Woodlands Road in Glasgow.

It had a large U-shaped bar in the main room. I visited on an occasion in, I believe, the 1970s, and I almost walked straight back out again, thinking I was in the wrong place, much to the amusement of the punters. They had all done the same double take as there was now a gantry on top of the bar, hence then confusion.

It must have been on a Monday, since the pub had been used by the BBC for filming a

I am not confident about the future of cask beer. I love and cherish good cask ale. It is our unique heritage and provides the highest-quality beer available. A pint of keg beer compared to an identical pint of fresh cask has no resemblance or flavour to it when it is served on handpull.

But I despair, so many pubs are completely lacking in cellarman's skills. Beer is rushed, it hasn't been

vented and given the time to cask condition in the cellar. The cask ale is often sitting in cellars full of keg beer, where chillers pump out heat.

Pubs do not use the cooling cylinders on the handpulls, so the first pint is often too warm.

My point is keg beer is cold and refreshing everywhere you go. Whereas cask is often lacking because of poor skills and discipline in the cellar.

How many cask beer drinkers are being lost due to the poor-quality standards in the pubs?

What can we do? Maybe invest in training for pubs and bars. Something has to be done, and done quickly.

Greg Williams, via email

Brewing is 90 per cent cleaning

After a lockdown adventure in brewing, YouTuber Robbie Knox is revelling in further beer-related capers

I got into drinking quite late by British

standards. Despite growing up in Kent with its hop fields, I didn't touch alcohol until about 18 and, even then, it was just cider because I didn't really like the taste of beer. But after university, I went to Whistler in Canada for a year and worked in a restaurant. My boss had this thing on payday where anyone who had made a mistake at work had to buy a jug of beer for the team. I said I didn't like beer but agreed to make an exception and have one with everyone every two weeks. It would have been Kokanee, which is a lager from British Columbia. Then, when I got back to the UK, I started exploring ales and, eventually, craft beer.

During lockdown, I bought a home-brew kit expecting it to be awful, but it was actually really good. I upgraded bit by bit, gave some to friends and even to a brewer, who said, "I was getting ready to lie and say it's nice, but it actually is nice." So my mate Mike Millar and I decided to start our own little adventure called Bin Day Brewing, collaborating with breweries such as Lervig in Norway, the Wild Beer Company in Kent and Docks Beers in Grimsby. It was great fun, but eventually my YouTube channel got really busy and Mike was busy, too, so we had to choose between going full-time with brewing and setting up a proper facility, or stopping. It had been great fun, but we knocked it on the head. What did we learn about brewing? Well, 90 per cent of it is cleaning, eight per cent is maths and two per cent is, "I wonder what this hop would be like?"

I like a variety of beers – the only ones I don't really go for are wheat beers. I tend to change with the seasons, with porters and stouts in the winter, and lighter stuff in summer. One of my



favourites is a keg beer called London Black, brewed by Anspach & Hobday. But generally, I just love going to new pubs, seeing what's on tap and trying local ales – sometimes based on the barman's recommendation, or just picking something by the label.

For me, a good pub is somewhere you feel you belong. Studying economics at the University of East Anglia, we went to the Firkin pub. Back then it was called the Finnesko & Firkin (it's now back to the Reindeer). The landlord greeted us like friends, asking if we wanted "the usual". As a young man away from home, that sense of belonging was powerful. I also think good pubs adapt to the seasons with a beer garden in the summer and a fire in the winter. I really like a traditional country pub that is easy to get to by public transport.

After working on Sky TV's *Soccer AM* and various production roles, most of my work now is to do with my YouTube channel and podcasting. With my YouTube videos, I've noticed the ones that do best tend to combine drinking and expensive stuff, such as when I did a pub tour in Harrods. That was interesting, but I probably wouldn't do it again. I'd be sitting there having a drink, thinking, "this is quite nice", and then remember that I was in the middle of a clothes shop, which is a bit weird.

"During lockdown, I bought a home-brew kit expecting it to be awful, but it was really good"

WHAT'S BREWING

WINTER 2025

CAMPAIGNS, NEWS AND VIEWS

Guide's urgent message

● Guide is "testament to resilience of licensees"

CAMRA has launched the 2026 *Good Beer Guide* (GBG) along with a clear message to the chancellor that it is a make-or-break moment for the future of independent brewers and consumer choice.

The GBG is the definitive guide to pubs that serve great cask beer across the UK, and uses an independent, volunteer-led selection process that makes it the authoritative voice of real ale drinkers.

However, CAMRA warned the latest figures show another drop in brewery numbers across the UK,

almost all of them smaller and independent operators, which the Campaign said are vital to consumer choice.

No less than 149 breweries have closed and only 71 have opened. CAMRA has also revealed 35 pubs that featured in the 2025 guide have closed. One has been converted and the rest are shut with uncertain futures.

There are 900 new entries, showing pubs are beating the odds to provide quality and choice despite tough economic conditions.

CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins said: "This really is a make-or-break Budget for the chancellor. It's time for the government to decide if it is pro pubs and



independent brewers, or if it is going to reign over the demise of the great British pub. Consumers want decisive action to get independent beers onto bars

and allow pubs to thrive. Each edition of the *Good Beer Guide* is a snapshot of beer and pub culture that year. This year's guide is a testament to the remarkable resilience of publicans, continuing to achieve excellence and choice for consumers despite a backdrop of sky-high tax bills and a lack of action from government. The chancellor needs to use the upcoming Budget to slash the tax burden on pubs."

The guide is sponsored by Midland Snacks Traditional Pork Scratchings and endorsed by Cask Marque. Get your copy here: shop.camra.org.uk/product/good-beer-guide-2026/

Actor pulling pints to keep village local open

ACTOR Rupert Everett has joined the Campaign and has been working behind the bar as part of a community effort to save the Swan, the only pub in the Wiltshire village of Enford.

Rupert (right), who lives in the area, said: "There has been an amazing effort by the community to keep this pub open. I have recently joined CAMRA as I



know real ale is the lifeblood of pubs. Our small breweries need our help, cask ale must survive."

Salisbury and South Wiltshire CAMRA branch secretary Steve Stringer said: "I am excited Rupert has chosen to support the Campaign. As a lover of cask ales, it is only natural that he wishes to join us."

The Swan reopened in

August after a massive effort by the community, which repaired and painted the Grade II-listed building, tidied the garden and then took a crash course in bar work. The pub, which has been on the site for 350 years, had been closed for a few weeks after the last licensee departed, but the village was not going to be left dry.

Festival launch for low-alcohol push

● Bid to make NoLo beers more visible

UNIVERSITY of York researchers are behind a project to get more no-and-low alcohol beers in pubs across North Yorkshire.

Launched at the CAMRA beer festival in York, researchers from the University's School for Business and Society have developed a no-and-low alcohol (NoLo) guide with the City of York Council to help publicans understand how to offer alcohol-free



drinks options and why.

The project includes the development of free point-of-sale (POS) material which build on the team's work showing the need to make NoLo more visible in hospitality venues.

The project is part of an initial pilot study to see if the POS material helps to encourage further sale of NoLo drinks.

University of York lecturer Dr Nadine Waehning said: "The CAMRA beer festival may seem an unusual place to kickstart this project, but we have had a surprisingly positive response from publicans. Our research shows that NoLo drinks could support public health goals without financial downsides for pubs."

Women's Brew Day expands

INTERNATIONAL Women's Collaboration Brew Day (IWCBD) will be back for 2026 with funding in place to increase the campaign's impact.

The global campaign organised by Women On Tap CIC brings together beer and International Women's Day by inspiring communities to gather at breweries on or around 8 March to brew, network, learn and celebrate women.

The beer industry remains male-dominated, with women making up just 30 per cent of the overall UK workforce – a figure unchanged since 2022.

IWCBD aims to drive change by boosting representation, promoting the growth of support networks, and inspiring breweries to reflect on workplace inclusion.

First launched in 2014, the brewing celebration ran for 10 years before taking a break in 2024.

Later that year, Women On Tap CIC announced it would be picking up the reins. IWCBD returned this year with 61 brew days, 837 participants, 66 beers, and £26,921 raised for 44 women's causes.

Women On Tap has now secured funding and put in place the building blocks for IWCBD 2026, with backing from the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates, Wine and Spirit Education Trust and Simpsons Malt.

Bridge not too far for campaigners

A DEDICATED group from a County Durham village has formed a community benefits society aimed at purchasing its beloved pub, the Bridge Inn in picturesque Whorlton near Barnard Castle.

The move comes in response to a planning application, which has recently been refused by the county council, that threatened to convert the pub (right) into a residential dwelling.

After the application was made, the group recognised the need to preserve the pub not only as a gathering place but also as a vital element of the village's identity and heritage. The Whorlton Community Benefits Society (WCBS)



held public meetings to gauge support, and has already raised more than £200,000 in pledges.

WCBS chair Elisa Hargreaves said: "The pub is far more than just a place to have a pint. It's a much-needed space where residents and visitors alike can come together to meet, socialise and support one

another. Although the application has been refused, which is fantastic, we still have a long way to go. We need to keep going, the fight is not over yet!"

WCBS aims to manage the pub in a way that prioritises inclusivity and sustainability while providing a space for events and social gatherings.

Blackfriars' joy at title success

● Great Yarmouth local is CAMRA's cider favourite

CAMRA's Cider and Perry Pub of the Year 2025 crown has been won by the Blackfriars Tavern in Great Yarmouth.

The Blackfriars Tavern (right) is a Victorian corner pub, which has quickly become a must-visit destination for cider and perry lovers with more than 20 locally sourced real ciders available and some from further afield.

Not only has the pub won the cider crown, but it is also in the running to win CAMRA's overall Pub of the Year 2025 title.

The other finalists were: Carpenters Arms in Westrip, Gloucestershire; last year's winner That Beer Place in Chester, Cheshire; Bull and Dragon in Meeth, Devon. The regional winners were: East Central – Little R'Ale House, Wellingborough; East Midlands – Red Lion, Kniveton; Greater London – Owl and the Pussycat, Northfields; North East – Blue's Micropub, Whitburn; North West – Petersgate Tap, Stockport; Scotland – Jolly Judge, Edinburgh; South Central – Woodman, Bridport; South East – Green Man, Worthing;



PHOTO: HELGE NAREID

Wales – Myrddins Tap, Barmouth; West Midlands – Roberto's Bar, Halesowen; Yorkshire – Doncaster Brewery Tap, Doncaster.

Winner Pharez Smith said: "Oh my word! We are overjoyed. This award is a tribute to our wonderful customers who create the welcoming atmosphere."

Perry pear protector's Pomona prize

THE Hartpury Heritage Trust has won CAMRA's Pomona Award for its role in preserving the UK's perry heritage.

Celebrated for its work in preventing the extinction of perry pears, the Hartpury Heritage Trust's nomination impressed

judges. Since 2006, it has planted and maintained the Hartpury Orchard Centre in Gloucestershire, becoming a home to the National Collection of Perry Pears. It now boasts more than 100 varieties of perry pear trees.

The trust's Jim Chapman

said: "I have always felt a close affinity for perry since I enjoyed my first glass in the 1960s, so was delighted when I was asked to take over the National Collection at Malvern. Then, having inherited land in Hartpury, I established a second

national collection. Today, the centre is looked after by the village charity, Hartpury Heritage Trust.

"While preserving the heritage varieties and making perry, the centre also runs courses and events, including an annual perry pear day and wassail."

Heatwaves and rain deliver bumper cider apple crop

BRITAIN is heading for a record-breaking apple crop with the long, hot summer producing super sweet fruit that promise an exceptional cider vintage.

One of the country's leading producers, Showerings, is expecting a

"monster crop" of 2,500-3,000 tonnes of apples, compared to the 1,000 harvested last year.

Orchard master Bob Wadley believes the heatwaves boosted sugar content, while the rain allowed the apples to swell.

● DEVON-BASED

Sandford Orchards has installed eight 50,000-litre tanks ahead of the expected bumper harvest.

The company plans to increase production of its core ciders and create new varieties from this year's

exceptional apple haul.

Owner Barny Butterfield said: "With our newly increased capacity and these fantastic raw ingredients, we will be pressing six days a week to produce more ciders for next summer."

AWARDS

Marvellous Mild takes top title

● Penzance Brewing wins coveted crown

MILD by Penzance Brewing Co was crowned CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain 2025 at the Great British Beer Festival in the NEC Birmingham.

A dozen finalists were whittled down to the Gold, Silver and Bronze winners by the expert judging panel.

The long-standing CAMRA title is one of the most coveted in the cask beer world. It is also fiercely independent, with judging taking two years to complete. Each year kicks off with nominations from CAMRA members and volunteer tasting panels, then regional competitions with every round using blindtasting.

Richard Hickman and Lewis Elliott of Penzance (pictured, from left, above) said: "It's quite overwhelming. I'm really glad the style has come back. It's down to the founder of our brewery Peter Elvin and his nephew Rob, who showed me the



ropes. I can't believe we are here right now, it's mad!"

Judging coordinator Christine Cryne described Mild as: "The aroma of this classic dark mild has all the enticing aromas one would expect. Chocolate and sweet cocoa on the nose. Chocolate, sultanas and dry roast on the palate where the gentle sweetness is balanced by a roasty, subtle, dry bitterness. Packs a lot of flavour for a 3.6 per cent beer!"

Silver went to Snowflake

from Sarah Hughes which judges described as: "A gorgeous barley wine and a classic example of the style. The flavour is complex, with sweet, bitter marmalade on a smooth palate."

Fallen Angel by Church End took Bronze, which judges said had: "A sweet honey toast, butterscotch aroma with a little spice. It's a rich pale ale with bitter spicy hops that are balanced by notes of honey."

CAMRA awards director Gary Timmins said: "I'm

over the moon for Penzance. From CAMRA members nominating their favourites, through to those tough regional rounds, to the final panel of judges, this is a vigorous and fiercely independent competition, and Mild has come out on top."

The winners of the Champion Bottled Beer of Britain were also announced with St Austell's Proper Job claiming Gold.

Brewing director Georgina Young said: "We are honoured and delighted to be recognised in this category with our amazing Proper Job IPA, which was first brewed in 2004."

Judges described it as: "The forerunner of many New World IPAs. A gorgeous-looking, gold-coloured IPA with strong, fruity nose and a perfect balance of biscuit, citrus fruits and bitter hops, with an ABV of 5.5 per cent this is a beer to savour."

Silver was won by Monty's Mischief and Bronze by Kernel's Imperial Brown Stout.

Champion Beer of Britain overall and category winners

OVERALL

Gold: Penzance, Mild

Silver: Sarah Hughes, Snowflake

Bronze: Church End, Fallen Angel

CATEGORY WINNERS

Session Bitter

Butcombe, Butcombe Original

Milds

Penzance, Mild

Premium Bitters

Cairngorm, Wildcat

IPAs

Elusive, Oregon Trail

Session Pale, Blond and Golden Ales

Track, Sonoma

Premium Pale, Blond and Golden Ales

Church End, Fallen Angel

Brown and Red Ales, Old Ales and Strong Milds

Tintagel, Caliburn

Session Stouts and Porters

Cairngorm, Black Gold

Strong Stouts and Porters

Grain, Slate

Specialty, Differently Flavoured

Siren, Broken Dream

Breakfast Stout

Specialty, Differently Produced

Allendale, Adder Lager

Barley Wines and Strong Old Ales

Sarah Hughes, Snowflake

Magic stout casts spell over judges

MATTHEW Winter (right) with his Black Magic – Tropical Stout (7 per cent) beer has been crowned winner of the Champion Homebrewer of the Year 2025 competition at the Great British Beer Festival at the NEC Birmingham.

The title-winning brew also topped the strong stouts and porters category.

Sponsored by Nailmaker Brewing Co and Brew At Home, the award seeks out the best of homebrewing

and showcases the brewers of the future.

Matthew said: “I was absolutely chuffed to have made it as far as winning my category in the first round of judging, and that was prize enough for me. So, to hear that I'd won best in show at the NEC was the cherry on the icing on the cake! I still can't really believe it and I'm very grateful to all the people that have given me feedback over the years.”



The Silver went to Richard Taylor with The Bishops Tripple (4.4 per cent) and Bronze was won by James Bailey with his Because I'm Hoppy!

CAMRA awards director

Gary Timmins said: “A massive congratulations to Matthew, and to everyone who put themselves out there and entered their beers for judging by our expert panels.”

Who won what

Gold: Matthew Winter
Black Magic – Tropical Stout

Silver: Richard Taylor
The Bishops Tripple

Bronze: James Bailey
Because I'm Hoppy!

CATEGORY WINNERS
Milds

Richard Roseblade
Brolly Wobbler

Session Bitters

Phill Turner
Harlequin and Jester Bitter

Session Pale, Blond and Golden Ales

Ian Benefell Admiral Nelson

Premium Pale, Blond and Golden Ales

Richard Roseblade
Sun's out, Pints out

**Brown and Red Ales,
Old Ales and Strong Milds**

Richard Taylor
The Bishops Tripple

Session Stouts and Porters

Mark Robotham
Hogg End Porter Brew

Premium Bitters

Les Manley
The Full English

**Speciality Beers, Differently
Produced or Flavoured**

Stuart Hubbard
Pink Octopus

British and New World IPAs

James Bailey
Because I'm Hoppy!

Barley Wines and Strong Ales

David Lutman
Delahop Ernest Asian Bitter

**Strong Stouts and Porters
including Imperial Stouts
and Baltic Porters**

Matthew Winter
Black Magic – Tropical Stout

Budget must make pubs more accessible

AS the Great British Beer Festival opened its doors to host the Champion Beer of Britain awards, the Campaign had a stark warning for government.

New polling from YouGov revealed 45 per cent of pubgoers say they are going to the pub less often in the past 12 months due to the rising cost of living.

A clear signal urgent action is needed to protect the nation's pubs, publicans and brewers.

CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins said:

“People want to support their local pubs, but the reality is, they're being priced out. With lower disposable incomes and publicans being forced to

put up prices through no fault of their own by rising running costs, for a lot of people a night out at the pub just isn't affordable.

“This is a warning sign for the future of our locals. If people can't afford to go, pubs can't survive. But the chancellor can use the Autumn Budget to help fix this. We are demanding the

government uses the upcoming Autumn Budget to help make pubs more accessible: starting by rolling back on the disastrous hike in National Insurance contributions, cutting VAT for pubs, introducing lower business rates bills for pubs and brewers, and cutting tax on pints served in pubs.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

MP opens SIBA's new Ripon HQ

● Sir Julian Smith, MP for Skipton and Ripon, officially opened the new headquarters of the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA) in Ripon.

Smith visited SIBA's new premises on Dallamires Lane, where he was welcomed by chief executive Andy Slee and members of the SIBA team. The new office will serve as a hub for SIBA's operations.

Westminster gets a taste of Wivey

● EXMOOR brewery of Wiveliscombe, Somerset raised a glass of its Exmoor Gold at the seat of government after local MP Rachel Gilmour chose it as the guest beer in the Strangers' Bar inside the House of Commons.

Exmoor Gold, 4.5 per cent ABV, was the original "golden ale" in Britain, a style of beer now brewed by most breweries.

Bigger and better Celtic celebration

● ONE of Cornwall's biggest and most popular charity beer festivals is back and this year there's even more to raise a glass to.

St Austell has revealed the Celtic Beer Festival is returning on Saturday 22 November and, for the first time, festivalgoers can enjoy a special preview night on the Friday offering a behind-the-scenes experience at the historic brewery.

For more than two decades, thousands have

gathered at the brewery for a day of great beer and live music all in aid of the St Austell Brewery Charitable Trust. For more information go to: staustellbrewery.co.uk/celtic-beer-festival

Cask beer hero says goodbye

● AFTER 36 years of running Bedfordshire's award-winning Engineers Arms – 30 of them in the *Good Beer Guide* – landlord Kevin Machin has pulled his final pints.

They were on the last night of a month-long "leaving party" for the popular former miner, who has won more CAMRA awards during that time than he can remember.

CAMRA county co-ordinator Roger Stokes presented Kevin with a farewell gift of a miner's lamp engraved with the pub's logo and a certificate.

Revenue and turnover rise

● NORTHERN pub operator and brewer Robinsons has achieved a record turnover in its latest financial year.

Revenue at the family brewer for 2023 was £92.3m (£83.1m in 2022), which delivered an increased operating profit of £6.1m (£5.9m in 2022).

Robinsons has also reported the highest level of annual investment to date on both its brewing and pub estate, with a combined year's investment of £20.7m.

Robinsons said it is continuing to look for freehold pubs and small



Roger Stokes, left, with Kevin Machin Photo: Mel Draper

companies which match its current portfolio to add to its estate.

Branch magazine celebrates 50 years

● HALF a century ago in the summer of 1974, *Parish Pump* joined the printed material which jostled for space in Sheffield's pubs and clubs. This was the first edition of the Sheffield and District CAMRA magazine. It was a few sides of A4 stapled together – very different from today's professionally produced, 32-page, full-colour *Beer Matters*.

The intervening 50 years tell a tale of major changes in the Sheffield beer and pub scene. Over almost 600 editions of the free magazine it has included month-by-month reporting of these many changes.

Local CAMRA meetings were the original information conduit to the editor. Today, in addition to the various meetings, internet resources are extensively used.

New city pub walk guide released

● THE third in the Sheffield Pub Heritage Walk series has just been released covering Neepsend.

The new booklet (below) includes a map, images and covers the area's pubs and its history.

The series will continue with Kelham Island in 2026 and Riverside in 2027.

Like its predecessors, the booklet is 32 pages, A5, full-colour and costs £2.99 with a print-run of 1,000 copies. For copies contact pubheritage@sheffield.camra.org.uk

**YOUR NEWS**

If you have news for this page email editor@camra.org.uk



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AWARDS

UK's top 16 pubs named

CAMRA has revealed the 16 regional and national winners in its Pub of the Year 2025 competition.

The shortlisted pubs have beaten thousands of entries to be crowned the best in their region or country and will now battle it out for the chance to be named CAMRA's overall Pub of the Year. The final four pubs in the running for the overall title will be announced in October with the winner revealed in January 2026.

Judges are looking for great atmosphere, décor, welcome, service, inclusivity, overall impression and, most importantly, quality cask beer, real cider and perry.

The 16 pubs have been recognised as the best of the best in the UK and their shortlisting for the competition is testament to their quality and commitment to their communities.



PHOTO: RODGER MOLYNEUX

This year's contest comes as many pubs across the UK tackle their toughest year yet. They face high costs, heavy tax burdens and unfair

business rates. Pubs need sector-specific support, including the reform of the business rates system, an extension of the reduced draught beer and cider duty and a reduction in Employer National Insurance to help with staffing costs.

Which pub will follow 2025 champion, the Hope, Carshalton (above) or will Greater London's favourite take back-to-back wins?

CAMRA's Pub of the Year coordinator Andrea Briers said: "It is a real pleasure to announce this year's top 16 pubs, each of which has demonstrated exceptional quality, warmth and dedication to their communities."

"Achieving this in the face of rising costs and other pressures is no small feat, and we want to see these pubs, and thousands of others like them, continue to thrive. That's why we're calling on the chancellor to give pubs a fair deal in the Autumn Budget."

THE FINALISTS

East Anglia

Blackfriars Tavern,
Great Yarmouth

East Central

Orange Tree, Baldock

East Midlands

Burnt Pig, Ilkeston

Greater London

Hope, Carshalton

Merseyside and Cheshire

Cricketers Arms, St Helens

North East

Station House, Durham

North West

Cumberland Inn, Alston

Northern Ireland

Dog and Duck Inn,
Lisbellaw

Scotland

Volunteer Arms (Staggs),
Musselburgh

South Central

Bell Inn, Aldworth

South East

Royston, Broadstairs

South West

Hole in the Wall, Bodmin

Wales

Rhos yr Hafod Inn,
Llanon

West Central

Pelican Inn, Gloucester

West Midlands

Tamworth Tap,
Tamworth

Yorkshire

Beer Engine, Skipton

Wishing all members of CAMRA

A Hoppy Christmas

From David Bruce, whose brewing highlights include:

- 1966** – He first brewed cask ale
- 1969** – Brewer at Theakston's Brewery
- 1979** – Founder of Bruce's Brewery and the Firkin Pubs
- 1980** – Co-founder of SIBA
- 2013** – Chairman of The West Berkshire Brewery, now Renegade Brewery
- 2015** – Liveryman of The Worshipful Company of Brewers
- 2025** – Published his business memoir, The Firkin Saga



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- * Experience an exhilarating steam-hauled journey up the Brocken Mountain
- * Marvel at the panoramic views at the summit of the Brocken
- * Explore the beautiful UNESCO World Heritage city of Bamberg
- * Discover historic Nuremberg on a guided tour
- * Tour the Fels Labyrinth of Altstadt Hof Brewery
- * Visit the home of bock beer in Einbeck
- * Enjoy free time to explore Munich
- * Indulge in lunch at the world-famous Hofbräuhaus
- * Take a guided walking tour of picturesque Wernigerode



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- * Marvel at reservoirs and mountains on the Brecon Mountain Railway
- * Steam on the picturesque Dean Forest Railway
- * Discover the history of Welsh coal mining at the Rhondda Heritage Park
- * Explore the capital city of Cardiff and the historic town of Chepstow
- * Learn the story of Wales at St Fagans Museum
- * Enjoy a guided tour of the Royal Mint Experience



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