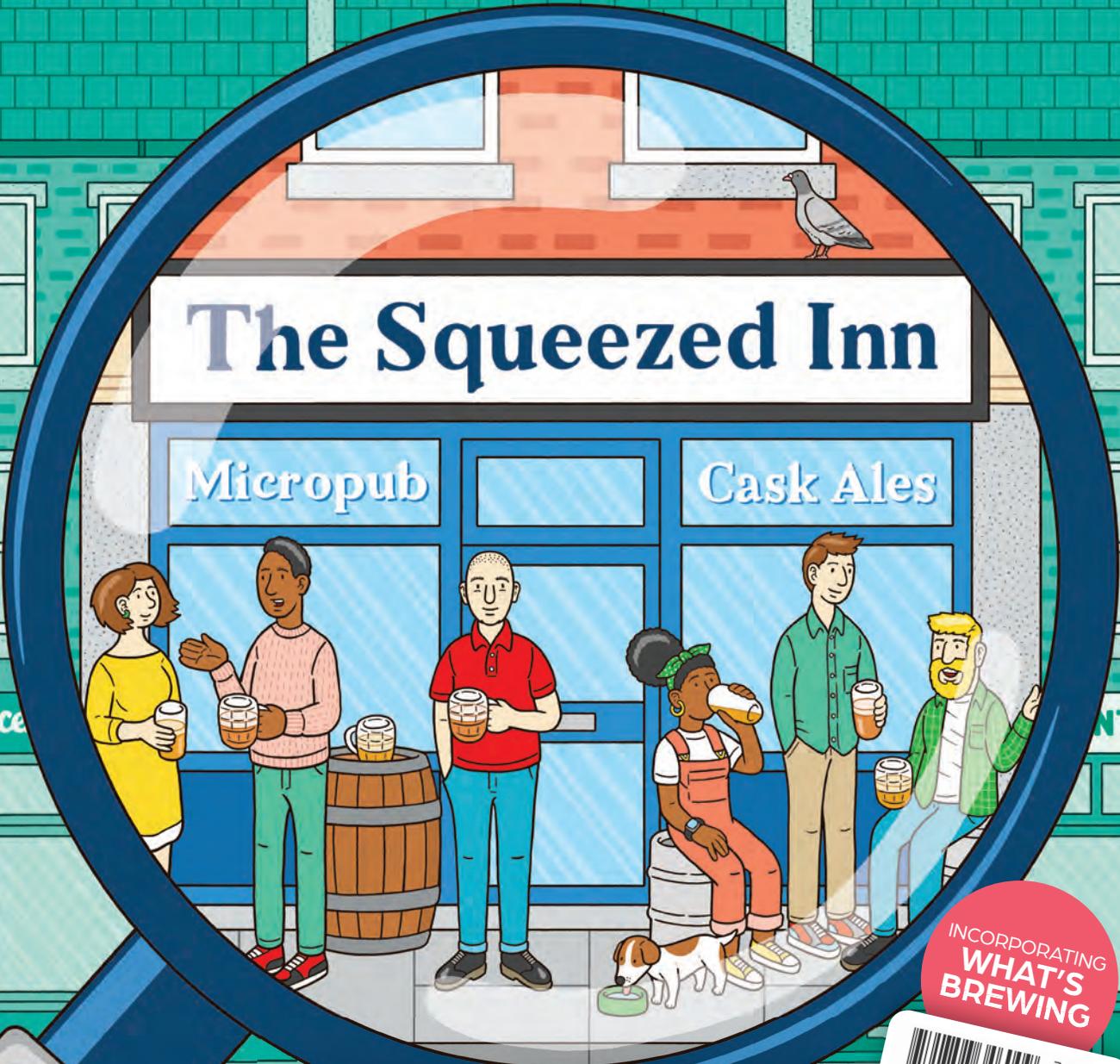


BEER

 CAMRA

ISSUE 71 / SPRING 2026



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From the editor



● In the dedicated *What's Brewing* section, you will find some news of CAMRA's Members' Weekend and AGM held during St Albans City of Ale weekend from 17-19 April. More news, including tributes to Des and Ted, can be found at wb.camra.org.uk

Pubs. For many, they are a vital part of life's rich tapestry.

People go to pubs for many reasons. We like to socialise, we want to join in on community activities and we use them to celebrate the ups of life.

But we also use them to mark the downs of life. So, it is with great sadness we must note the recent passing of two people who have made a significant contribution to CAMRA, *BEER*, journalism and our understanding of pub culture.

BEER's bottles and cans correspondent of more than 20 years Des de Moor has died. His understanding of the cultural importance of malt, hops, yeast and water made his work stand out from the crowd.

Des was one of the industry's best-loved characters and writers. He started writing about beer around 2000, contributing to various CAMRA publications. He also wrote several books, including the award-winning *Cask: The Real Story of Britain's Unique Beer Culture*, that won Silver in the book category at the Guild Awards in 2023. He also conducted frequent beer and history tours of London and travelled the world as a well-respected beer judge.

Beer was not his only passion, and he wrote for *Ramblers* magazine *Walk*, as well as having a career in music. He specialised in European-influenced musical cabaret and chanson, running a club night in London for more than 12 years from 1994.

Ted Bruning, journalist, historian, prolific author and former *What's Brewing* editor has died after a period of illness. After beginning his career on the *Workshop Guardian*, Ted joined pub trade newspaper *The Morning Advertiser* in the 1980s, when it was still a daily. He went on to work for CAMRA for 13 years, editing *What's Brewing* for eight of them. Post-CAMRA, he wrote many books including handbooks for microbrewers, distillers and bar owners, histories of London pubs, coaching inns and gin, and many more.

Elsewhere in this issue, we explore some fabulous pubs in North Wales, visit the Jurassic Coast for a taste of Palmers beers and visit some fabulous historic pubs in London.

Tim Hampson

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



Glynn Davis looks into the phenomenon of the micropub



Ruvani de Silva explores why cask is the new cool in the US beer scene



David Jesudason examines the soul of a micropub in Hartlepool and its vital role in its community

BEER

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Sub-editors: Kim Adams and Rica Dearman
Published by: CAMRA Ltd
Produced on behalf of CAMRA by: Think, 65 Riding House Street, London W1W 7EH Tel: 020 3771 7200
Group art director: Jes Stanfield
Client engagement manager: Jack Watts
Printed by: Acorn Web, Loscoe Close, Normanton Industrial Estate, Normanton WF6 1TW.

BEER is printed on Galerie Brite Plus, which is PEFC accredited, meaning it comes from well-managed sources.



BEER is the quarterly magazine of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA). CAMRA campaigns for pubs, pints and people. It is an independent, voluntary organisation with more than 145,000 members and has been described as the most successful consumer group in Europe. *BEER* is available online to all CAMRA members. To receive a hard-copy version every three months, members need to opt in. Our campaigning newspaper, *What's Brewing*, is now online at wb.camra.org.uk. To join CAMRA, help preserve Britain's brewing and pub industry, get *BEER* and *What's Brewing* updates – and a host of other membership benefits – visit camra.org.uk

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SMALL MAY BE BEAUTIFUL

No lager, no food, no spirits, no music, no smoking and no TV – **Glynn Davis** investigates the phenomenon of the micropub

As well as having a famous palace, the South East London borough of Eltham is also home to three very different pubs that highlight the evolution and increasing impact of the micropub on the country's drinking landscape.

The Long Pond sticks rigidly to the original thinking behind the micropub concept in focusing strictly on offering a range of cask beers from local microbreweries, while the nearby Rusty Bucket offers a broader mix also encompassing keg on its taps. Meanwhile, the Berry & Barrel stretches the micropub model even further with cask merely a supporting act for its cocktails and keg beers.

While the variety of micropubs now cropping up across the UK might be growing exponentially, and their definition becoming evermore flexible, there is no doubt where the phenomenon began: in Herne, Kent, where Martyn Hillier opened the Butchers Arms almost 20 years ago on 24 November 2005 and created the model for the micropub.

Visiting Martyn in Kent, he told me, over pints of Gadd's No 5 best bitter (4.4 per cent ABV) and Kent brewery's Session Pale (3.7 per cent), that he had been running an off-licence in the back of a former butchers shop while his wife ran a florists in the front. Their marital split coincided with the local licensing officer informing him that he could



turn his beer shop into a pub as the law had just been changed.

The new rules made it more difficult for objections from competitors to be made against new licence applications. The only grounds for rejection were health and safety, a licensee's criminal record, law and order or being detrimental to children.

It would have been easy to brush aside the licensing officer's suggestion, but Martyn's interest was piqued. His friends were far less enamoured with the idea of a miniature pub – especially when he told them his tiny premises would have no lagers, food, spirits, music, smoking or TV.





Left and above: Where it all began – the Butchers Arms in Eltham and Martyn Hillier's minimalist micropub model

capacity of 20. Martyn recalled the time he squeezed in 37 drinkers and two dogs. Despite his friends' reservations and the untested nature of the model, he said: "It was no surprise it went well because people told me it was the best beer in the Canterbury area."

The layout was another key factor behind the Butchers Arms' success because there is no bar and customers face each other across the cosy room, meaning conversation invariably flows among drinkers. The height of all the tables is the same to further encourage conversation around the room.

"Everyone told me that 90 per cent of people would be alienated, but I only wanted the other 10 per cent"

"I thought we'd have none of those things, just cask beer. Everyone told me that 90 per cent of people would be alienated by this, but I thought that's no problem because I only wanted the other 10 per cent and the pub would be 10 per cent the size of a normal pub," he recalled.

He had created the template for the micropub, which harked back to the beer houses that proliferated in the 1850s when the licensing regime was relaxed on beer supply as a route

to weaning people off the demon gin. Coincidentally, gin was also not on the menu at the Butchers Arms because Martyn saw offering such items as a diversion away from cask and the start of the slippery slope.

"Once you have one gin, then people who drink gin will come in and they'll then be asking for other types and, before you know it, you'll have loads of gins. I know a micropub that in the end had 30 gins, which reduced the turnover of beer and they had to shut," said Martyn.

What was integral to his model was the compact size of the pub – a trading space of a mere three by four metres and a comfortable

Despite proving the model at the Butchers Arms, there were few followers initially. Martyn disliked the idea of opening further micropubs himself, but wanted to instead promote the idea of the concept to others. At CAMRA's AGM in 2009, he encouraged members to follow him and open their own places.

Although six of his customers have since gone on to set up their own pubs, he said the revolution had a surprisingly slow start. When I first interviewed him in 2012, there were only 11 micropubs nationally. But when CAMRA gave him its Campaigner of the Year award in 2015 and a front page story in

What's Brewing, the touchpaper was then truly lit.

To Sam Cullen, author of *London's Lost Pubs*, micropubs are a "re-interpretation of the pub that takes them back to their roots". He added: "Pubs have become over-engineered with more going over to food and they invariably serve a different purpose to the traditional pub."

Michael Wren very much bought into this thinking, and the original Martyn-created micropub concept, after he was taken to the Tankerton Arms in Whitstable, Kent. This led to



him opening the Long Pond in Eltham in December 2014, according to son Jack, who took over the running of the pub following Michael's death.

Chatting to Jack in the packed bar during a Sunday afternoon session over a superbly conditioned pint of IPA (4.8 per cent) from Tonbridge brewery – which also produces the house beer Pond Life (3.6 per cent) – he recalled: "Dad absorbed the atmosphere in the Tankerton bar with its high tables and saw people chatting, and he had an epiphany. He thought one would fit perfectly in Eltham. He was working in the city at the time and left to open the Long Pond in a plumber's shop in December 2014."

Jack said there had not been a new pub in Eltham in his lifetime until the Long Pond, and it shows how exciting micropubs are that we can now add the Rusty Bucket and Berry & Barrel as further newcomers in the borough. "Ours is a 100 per cent

Left and below: Jack Wren now runs the Long Pond in Eltham that was established by his late father, Michael



hard-core micropub with four cask beers. There's no keg, no lager and no food, although we have relented with [stocking] a bottle of gin. And we've always done wine."

Richard Reeve, owner of the Little Green Dragon in Enfield, also "fell in love" with the concept of the micropub after a friend introduced him to the Harbour Arms in Margate and, spurred on by this, he decided to cycle 2,200 miles around the UK to visit all 100 members of the Micropub Association at that time.

Like Michael Wren, he was inspired by the early micropub owners and also felt compelled to leave his job in order to open his own place. "I wanted to get out of IT and, meeting micropub owners on my bike ride, I realised they'd mostly never run pubs before. They were just beer enthusiasts. Martyn's great idea was

"By not focusing on Bacardi Breezers and food, we probably sell more cask than any other Enfield pub"





Left and below: Richard Reeve adopted much of the Hillier format when he opened the Little Green Dragon



Over the years, micropubs have invariably flexed the model beyond Martyn's original template, and this has included broadening the mix of drinks on offer. At the Little Green Dragon it now comprises four cask, four keg and four ciders. "Most micropubs were just about cask [in the early days], but the majority now also have keg – but they are interesting keg beers," said Richard.

When I visited the Little Green Dragon, the cask included Hammerton N1 (4.1 per cent), New River Blind Poet (4.5 per cent) and Vibrant Forest Pupa (4.5 per cent) alongside four keg including Vibrant Forest Supa Pupa (8 per cent).

Back in Eltham after my visit to the Long Pond, my second stop took me to the Rusty Bucket that is also a little larger than a regular micropub and has a broad mix of beers – including a couple of excellent casks on at all times. I enjoyed a choice of Kent brewery Pale (4 per cent), Tonbridge brewery Ebony Moon (4.2 per cent) and SureShot Brewing Tim the Human Carp (4 per cent).

Although co-owner Stu Gyles does not necessarily badge the venue as a micropub, as it took over the space of a long-closed compact-sized pub, he said: "We've always said it is a 🍺"

to let the ordinary person set up a pub. Previously, you'd have needed thousands or even millions of pounds for a freehold or be a tied tenant," he said.

Richard opened the Little Green Dragon in a former hairdressers with a total budget of £30,000, kitting the place out with eBay-sourced fittings and a second-hand cellar kit. He cites other micropubs outside of London that have been able to open with budgets of a mere £5,000. He adopted much of the Martyn Hillier micropub model including being present for most of the opening hours, even though he has help from three part-timers.

"It's important to do cask ale, which should be at the forefront of micropubs. It's a USP because at many traditional pubs it's now sub-standard and not looked after. By not focusing on Bacardi Breezers and food, we probably sell more cask than any other Enfield pub even though I've got the lowest [overall] sales in Enfield," he said.

For Adam Davies, co-owner of the Beer Engine – housed in a former

wedding dress shop in Skipton – cask beers are also a focus: "At 7am, [co-owner] Steve will be racking the ales. You've got to be interested in the beer and to be drinking it so you can tell the quality. We both put on what we would like to see in a pub."

Below: As the name suggests, cask ale remains the focus at the Beer Engine in Skipton, a former wedding dress shop





small but perfectly proportioned pub. We're not limited by the rules that many micropubs adhere to."

He mirrors the typical micropub in having the beers held in a chilled room behind the bar, though, which is a necessity because the majority of micropubs have been converted from former retail units and have no formal cellars beneath the bar. Stu says this arrangement enables gravity dispense for cask, and the keg beers are stored at the same temperature at which they are to be served rather than crash chilled when pulled up from a traditional cellar.

As well as also having a variety of keg beers on the taps at the Beer Engine, the co-owners have broken the micropub mould in taking over

Above: "Perfectly proportioned" Rusty Bucket is larger than most micropubs
Below: Colne's world's smallest pub crawl



"Friday evening is now like ladies night because we're a safe space. We're not a circuit pub"

the unit next door and knocking through to create larger premises, with more than one room following it being taken over by Adam and Steve during Covid-19. Adam is keen to highlight it is still a micropub at heart, though, with no food, no spirits and the owners being very much present during opening hours.

The Beer Engine's larger premises has also made it more inclusive and more comfortable to women than when it was a one-room pub. It's a similar scenario at the Rusty Bucket, which very much attracts a mixed clientele that can differ from many micropubs such as the Long Pond that has a core customer

predominantly male aged 50-plus years and certainly above late-30s.

Adam said: "The Beer Engine used to be an older man's pub, but now we've more women and we want to appeal to a wider market by also bringing in younger customers including young professionals. And it is working," adding that the pub had been up for CAMRA's Pub of the Year award for the third time. It sat alongside two other micropubs on the shortlist for 2025 – the Station House in Durham and Royston in Broadstairs.

My final stop in Eltham is at the Berry & Barrel that is also proving especially attractive to female customers. It had a limited cask offer during my visit that included Bexley brewery's Hills & Holes (3.8 per cent) pale ale, alongside a variety of keg beers and, most notably, cocktails all served in a light and airy space.

Owner Tugbay Caganaga said: "Friday evening is now like ladies' night because we're a safe space. We're also [like many micropubs] not on the high street, so we're not a circuit pub and we attract customers by word of mouth."

He had originally converted his dry cleaning shop into a traditional micropub, but the Long Pond proved





Above and left: Berry & Barrel attracts more women than many micropubs by offering cocktails as well as beer

a strong competitor in the area and he switched to offering a broader product mix and also securing a deal with nearby Fireaway Pizza for food to be delivered to the pub.

This ability for micropubs to adapt to their local markets – and to each other – is certainly a positive for the longevity of the concept, and nowhere is this more obvious than in Colne, Lancashire, which now has three micropubs – Boyce’s Barrel, Cask ‘n’ Keg and Mojo’s of Colne – that are remarkably located right next to each other.

Nina Bates, co-owner of Boyce’s Barrel, previously worked at beer wholesaler Flying Firkin where she had supplied the Butchers Arms and been intrigued by Martyn’s pub. “It’s very different to the traditional pub model. But it all made sense, it was novel and in 2014 micropubs were bubbling up as a concept. We went out and found premises in the annex

of the local town hall and opened Boyce’s Barrel.”

What she did not expect was that within six months of opening that a second micropub would set up shop right next door and then a third followed on the other side of her pub. After serious initial reservations, Nina said: “As it’s transpired, it’s worked very well. The other two are big on live music and in the last five years we’ve started cooperating and have coordinated on events. We now

“We call it the ‘world’s smallest pub crawl’ or the ‘world’s largest micropub crawl!’”

encourage people to take drinks between the pubs. We call it the ‘world’s smallest pub crawl’ or the ‘world’s largest micropub crawl!’”

Adopting a flexible approach suggests the future for micropubs is very bright, according to Nina, who says people have taken the same original concept but with very different interpretations. “You should take the elements you like and adapt it to the way you want to work it. Most micropub owners will not have met

Martyn who has been forthright about the rules of what are a micropub, but people just need to do their own thing,” she suggested.

Whether or not new micropub owners choose to follow Martyn’s original ideas, there is no disputing the impact the Butchers Arms has had on the pub sector. As well as being awarded an MBE in 2024 for his services to hospitality, business and for founding the Micropub Association, he has watched micropubs sprout up around the UK.

Sources such as the Pubs Galore website say there are now around 1,000 micropubs, and Micropub Adventures puts it at more than 1,400; the collation of such lists is tough because many outlets do not necessarily define themselves as micropubs and might not easily be identified online. There is no doubt, however, that after a very slow start following the Butchers Arms’ opening, the number of applications for new micropubs has continued to grow, and right now there is a constant flow of approvals from local councils for new pubs across the whole country.

Back at the Long Pond, Jack, just like his dad, is considering whether to continue in his day job or to call time on it and instead spend more time running the pub to put his mark on the place. “It will still be a cask pub at its core, but maybe we’ll have some lager in the fridge and host quizzes. It’s ticking along by itself, but I’m really excited about spending some more time here.”

With the next generation enthusiastic about the micropub model pioneered 20 years ago, Martyn’s modest-sized idea looks set to continue to have an outsized impact.



Glynn Davis is a business writer specialising in the retail and food and drink sectors.

Winning at the Rat Race

David Jesudason examines the soul of a micropub in Hartlepool and its vital role in its community

"This was the junk room," said Pete Morgan. "Now people have a heck of a good range of beer."

He had travelled from the North with his wife, Katie, dreaming for a better existence in a world still marked by the social inequality caused by what he calls the "monster" that was former Tory prime minister, Margaret Thatcher.

The fear of the monster, who had devastated traditional working class areas, impelled him to study for a desk job and, after a quarter of a century of joylessly working with computers for other people, he was about to lose his position.

Katie and Pete had taken the trip to attend the CAMRA AGM, where he heard a speech by Martyn Hillier that made him realise for the first time that he could take charge of his life. He was no stranger to cask beer from organising festivals in South Cumbria, joining Furness CAMRA in 1990, but the idea of being a publican seemed a distant dream.

Martyn had opened one of the first micropubs and this presentation was intended to outline to others how they could follow suit by adapting closed retail units into licensed premises.

"I was sitting there thinking, 'this is brilliant'," said Pete. "As soon as he shut up, I said to Katie, 'I'm doing it!'"

Katie was sceptical, but Pete had already earmarked where he believed the first micropub in the North would be – somewhere that occupied his thoughts when he was feeling

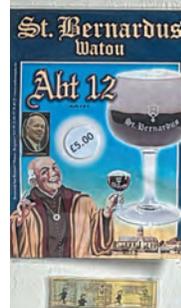


miserable on his commute to Newcastle. A small abandoned room in Hartlepool train station.

"I heard Martyn on the Saturday and on Monday lunchtime, I was talking to the station manager," Pete said.

It takes a true visionary to see a small dusty space full of old posters and fire extinguishers as the ideal venue for a successful pub, but when Pete sets his mind on something, there's a determination to overcome any obstacle.

He was also inspired by his time in Furness, when legendary publicans Stuart and Lynda Johnson ran the





Pete 'greet's' customers wanting lager, who get a one-word answer: "Wetherspoons"

sadly now-closed Prince of Wales in the Cumbrian village of Foxfield by the train station. He was Furness branch secretary when the Johnsons bought the building 25 years ago, and used to visit when it first opened, before they attracted any regulars.

"There was one January where there was a gale blowing off the Irish Sea and the window looked like it was bending," said Pete. "I knew [though] that trains and beer go remarkably well together, so as soon as I heard Martyn's idea, I thought, 'railway stations.'"

In terms of geography, for Pete it was either Hartlepool or Durham, but because the latter was a mainline station, it would've been too busy and too demanding.

I tease him that he has a singular mind and he admits he isn't patient, especially when he has to deal with property agents and licensing officials. That said, he gave the landlord the price he was willing to pay, it was accepted and then it was on to dealing with the police who believed he couldn't control drunkenness on match days.

"I told them, 'there won't be lager, there won't be music, there won't be clowns', and 16 years later, I can say I was right," he said. "I don't have fights, I don't have problems. No one has thrown a punch at me – which is quite surprising!"

It took a visit from a British Transport police sergeant to realise that Pete was running something different to the rest of Hartlepool, especially because he was concerned about people hiding in corners, conspiring.

The thought of criminality at the Rat Race is a perverse one and, in fact, Pete has created a world within

"I don't have fights, I don't have problems. No one has thrown a punch at me – which is quite surprising!"



a world, where Hartlepool residents can find an escape from the harshness of the high street.

And from someone who grew up in a town that once had the most shuttered shops in the country, even I was taken aback by the dereliction that surrounds Pete.

I like to think I'm hardened to modern deprivation, but when I saw shop after shop boarded up on the main high street, I admit I shed a tear. Which shows how micropubs can thrive in areas like this, growing like fireweed did in the debris of the Blitz. (Shout out to the Owl, too, which offers craft beer and decent grub just off the high street.)

"I'm doing it like this because it works for me," said Pete, who has helped numerous people set up micropubs. "When you're micromanaged by a brewery, it makes the pub less of a place to



be and you might as well be in a supermarket. There are still a few full-size pubs that have personality, but they're few and far between. Some chain pubs are drinking warehouses."

This individualism is shown in the pump clips displayed on the ceilings and floor that act like a museum to modern cask beer – BrewDog, believe it or not, can be found among the Thornbridges and Dark Stars. It's also shown in the way Pete 'greet's' customers wanting lager, who get a one-word answer: "Wetherspoons".

Most of all, though, it's the four barrels of beer that Pete has colour-coded on the menu board when I visit; there's a pale (green), session IPA (white), higher ABV IPA (blue) and



dark beer (orange) being dispensed. The only person who serves you is Pete, and that's when you're sitting at your table.

"You couldn't pay me enough to run what's classed as a 'normal' pub," he admitted, "especially tied pubs where you're answering to a brewery. You're told how to deal with people. Well, no. I deal with people my way."

This might make him sound like a grouch, but he smiled warmly when I returned for my second visit. He also isn't totally inflexible when it comes to his rules. In fact, when one of his customers was dying, he allowed him to come in and bring in some tins of alcohol-free Guinness to savour the pub for the last time.

After this visit, I felt like I had to relay to Martyn how he had changed so many lives after that presentation and took a trip to the village of Herne in Kent to the Butcher's Arms.

Martyn was happy to hold court and when I waxed lyrical about how I believe micropubs have enriched community life by favouring the local, he did feel a bit irked on how the CAMRA leadership hadn't backed his campaign to open up more around the country before 2009.

In fact, apart from Pete, who just happened to be at the AGM, a lot of soon-to-be micro publicans, like Lucy Do at the Dodo in West London or the guys behind the Shirker's Rest in South London, only came across the concept by chance when visiting the Kent coast.

Martyn told me he even had to bombard CAMRA to allow him to do a presentation. I guess we're here now, with so many opened up around the UK, but it's important to ask why people like Martyn feel sidelined especially when recent news of financial losses at the Great British Beer Festival has angered members and non-members alike.

I think CAMRA should've taken the micropub concept and promoted it way before 2009, because there's no easier route for cask brewers to directly serve customers. Maybe Martyn's boldness scared them or they saw the signs (no effing lager, no mobile phones) and prevaricated; there's also a MAGA hat at the Butcher's.

But rolling out what Martyn – and Pete – achieved nationwide would've breathed life into the high street in the noughties and I sense he would be more than happy if a diverse bunch riffed with his template – as the Shirker's and Dodo have done.

"Do whatever works for you," seems to be his mantra.

But when you strip away the politics of why Martyn wasn't championed earlier – his customers were the ones that petitioned for his MBE – you can't



'Martyn told me he even had to bombard CAMRA to allow him to do a presentation'

forget the social cohesion micropubs offer. He told me about an elderly regular who has to come to his pub to hear conversation – "he's not a great talker" – because his wife is so grief-stricken, they no longer communicate.

Martyn's hoping to crowdfund to

buy the property his pub is part of and then maybe it can become a permanent museum to micropubs. But Pete is leaving Hartlepool for France next year, so I impel you to take a train and visit the Rat Race.

"I was diagnosed with autism 18 months ago," Pete said. "I've got no problem with being neurodiverse. I can't do fake – it's not one of my traits."

And if you visit the Rat Race – and the Butcher's – you can see how two men have imprinted their souls in their micropubs and inspired so many to open up others with similar unique personalities. Micropubs with micropersonalities.



David Jesudason is the current British Beer Guild of Writers beer writer of the year.



THRIVE AND SURVIVE

Mike Clarke visits Palmers brewery and finds evolution, not revolution, is the order of the day

From the outside, with its thatched roof and cottage garden, the New Inn in Kilmington looks barely changed from the days of Thomas Hardy's rural Wessex. But inside, I'm in the pristine, state-of-the-art pub cellar where Palmers brewery's trade technician, Eduardo Mamanta, is entering data on an iPhone app.

He's completing a 40-point checklist to assess standards of hygiene, stock rotation, temperature control and equipment maintenance. Happy that the beer is being served in optimal condition, Eduardo downloads the data to the brewery to help the trade quality team. The modern technology provides a surprising contrast to the rustic low-beamed, flagstoned pub and is a recent innovation considering that Palmers has been brewing since the 18th century.

Eduardo invited me to judge a sample of Palmers Dorset Gold (4.5 per cent ABV) on appearance, aroma, taste and finish. Holding the glass up to the sunlight that streams through the window, it's a brilliantly clear golden colour with an appealing citrus hop aroma and

biscuity malt in the mouth. There's a satisfying, but subtle, bitter finish. Assessments are recorded, CAMRA beer-scoring style, again in the app.

"When a pub down the road's selling beer at £2 a pint, then you need to compete on quality," said licensee Gary Needs of the Axminster Inn in Axminster, a multi-time winner of Palmers' highly competitive Cellar Champion award. He showed me around his meticulously kept cellar where the arrival, venting and tapping of every

'The concentration of pubs, all tenanted, around the Bridport brewery allows close, beneficial relationships to thrive'

barrel of cask is scrupulously logged on a specially designed whiteboard.

Attention to quality is fundamental to pubs in Palmers' estate. The concentration of pubs, all tenanted, around the Bridport brewery in West Dorset allows close, beneficial relationships to thrive, like those between Eduardo and the licensees.

It's an area that appears to have defied the national decline in rural pubs. Around West Dorset, virtually every village seems to boast a thriving pub, often one of the 52 Palmers' houses. The traditional appeal of the pubs certainly complements the area's secluded, laid-back tourist appeal, encompassing the UNESCO-listed Jurassic Coast and classic seaside resorts like Lyme Regis.

On entering a Palmers pub, CAMRA members will be impressed by the typical sight of four or five cask ales, especially as the beers are much easier to find on Palmers' local patch than elsewhere.

The core range is: Copper (3.7 per cent), a session bitter; the traditional Palmers IPA (4.2 per cent); Dorset Gold (4.5 per cent); and a stronger premium ale, Palmers 200 (5 per cent), first brewed to mark the brewery's bicentenary. Seasonal offerings include in winter old ale Tally Ho! (5.5 per cent) and in spring and summer Colmers (4 per cent) with Citra hops. And to cater to the craft beer market, 



Cask beer remains a major part of Palmers' production and business

a session keg pale ale Dorset Pale (4 per cent).

Focusing on the range of beers in the pubs rather than concentrating marketing on one brand is a deliberate strategy, says CEO Emily Palmer Ramus, who is one of the small, but growing, number of women UK brewery bosses. "As a cask ale drinker myself, I like to have a choice of beer, as do many of my friends who also drink real ale."

Compared to countless modern breweries, the historic, family-owned Palmers might initially appear to be like one of the many ancient fossils found in its locality. But as with archaeological excavations, a visit reveals unexpected discoveries.

The brewery's appearance is tourist catnip. On my visit, the famous roof was being rethatched, making it good for the next 40 years. It enjoys an idyllic setting on the banks of the River Brit, home to the brewery's water wheel. It's no surprise there's demand for brewery tours twice daily.

I'm told by head brewer Darren Batten, and a Palmers' employee of some 37 years, that the Brewery History Society is a particularly keen visitor. There's no shortage of venerable brewing equipment to view. Much is still in use, but historic, retired kit is also left in place for the interest of visitors, such as an ancient grist mill and a decommissioned washboard wort cooler.

Darren starts my tour at the top of the traditional tower brewery where malt, almost exclusively British Maris Otter, is winched up to the loft. Water is sourced from the brewery's natural spring around half a mile away. The supply's integrity is safeguarded as the brewery donated the land the pipe runs beneath for use as playing fields for the local sports centre – an example of the company's commitment to the local community.

The new mash tun was installed in 1967 and the hopback is from the

1930s. It predates automatic cleaning systems. This means one of the more athletic brewery staff has to jump inside (once the wort is drained!) with a shovel and clear the hops by hand, which are donated to local gardeners. It's intensive manual work but allows the traditional equipment to remain in use.



Above: Emily Palmer Ramus now heads Palmers, having taken over in 2023
Below: New thatch for brewery building
Bottom: Cask at heart of fermenting room



'The brewery operation confirms tradition is in Palmers' DNA, albeit with modern innovations'

The brewery still uses an extremely rare open-topped copper. Its original coal-fired boiler remains preserved beneath. Darren tells me the room enclosing the copper even has its own microclimate. There's a vent in the roof to allow the condensation to escape. Depending on the direction and speed of the wind, the cowling on the vent can produce a Venturi effect: decreasing air pressure, which influences boiling temperature.

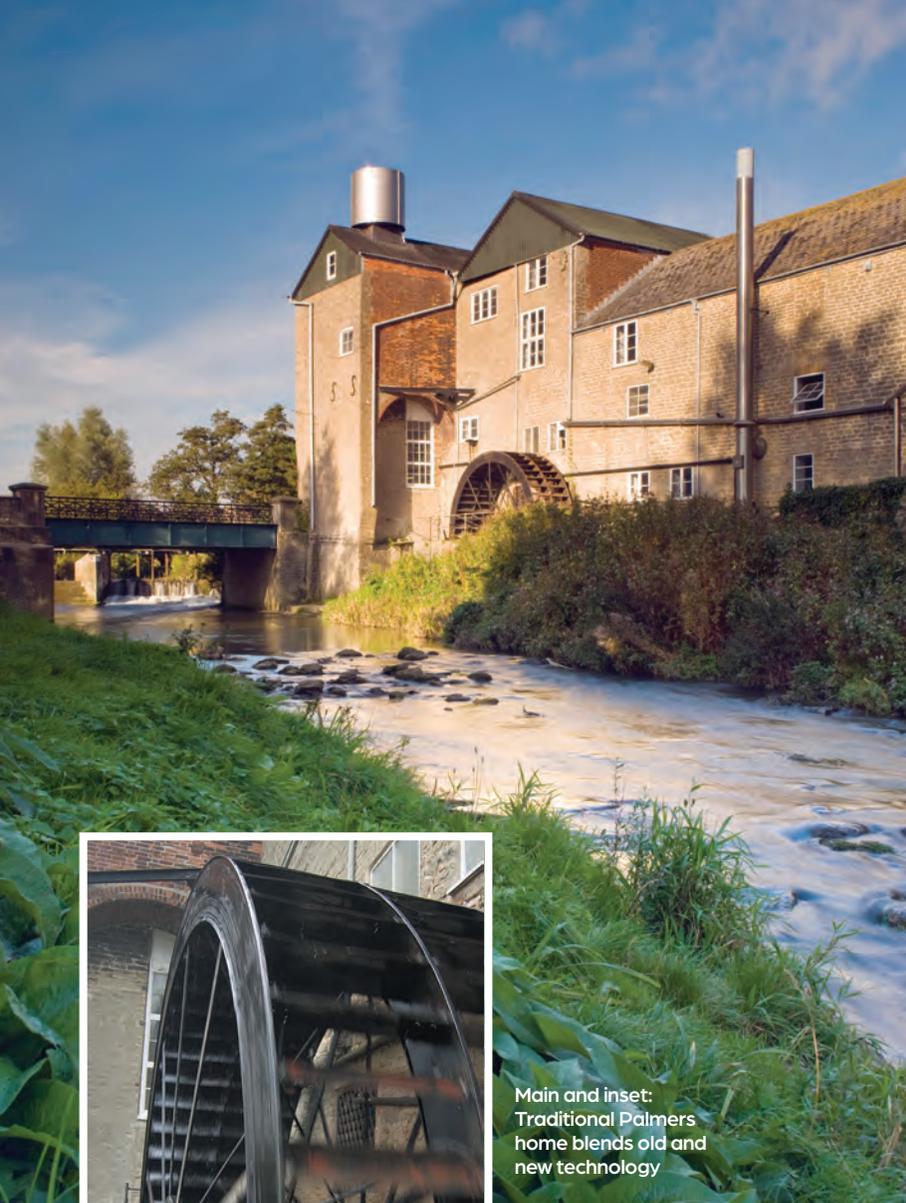
Darren said: "The boil literally depends on which way the wind blows! Determining the boil length is more an art than a science."

The brewery adds whole hops into the copper for virtually all its brews. Varieties are mostly English Goldings, although a couple of the beers use Styrian Savinjski from Slovenia and Citra for aroma.

Fermentation takes place in open-topped vessels. Temperature control is not left to the vagaries of the weather. An example of the brewery using state-of-the-art technology where necessary, the cooling system around the tanks is computerised and can be controlled from Darren's mobile phone.

It's in the racking area on the ground floor where I make a discovery that explains why Palmers can maintain a wide range of well-conditioned cask beers in its pubs: the majority of casks are pins (36 pints). These allow smaller quantities to be delivered more frequently, with the casks turned over more quickly, ensuring freshness.

The brewery operation confirms tradition is in Palmers' DNA, albeit carefully melded with modern innovations intended to enhance and ensure quality. But, following the example of some other regional brewers, isn't the way of the future to move brewing to a characterless light industrial estate and sell off the renowned old brewery for bijou holiday apartments?



Main and inset:
Traditional Palmers
home blends old and
new technology

“We are all looking to preserve our breweries while investing to ensure they are fit for the future”

Absolutely not, says Emily, who’s a descendant of the Palmer brothers that bought the brewery in the late 19th century. “We view ourselves as custodians of the business. For us this means preserving our beautiful heritage brewery, investing in wonderful characterful pubs and into our local community with the hope we leave both in great shape for the generations to come.”

Significantly, Emily started her career by working outside the family business, which has prepared her

for navigating the current tough economic environment. “I had work experience placements with Timothy Taylor and Fuller’s. Both gave me a great introduction to the industry. After graduating, I then went to work for Rothschild, the investment bank, in mergers and acquisitions and in corporate strategy.”

Taking over the brewery’s reins from her father in 2023, Emily is keen to emphasise the advantages of running a family-owned brewery: “We can be surprisingly nimble,

allowing us to make decisions very quickly.” The brewery’s technical innovations support the view that tradition isn’t indulged for its own sake, as does the company’s lively social media presence.

The business maintains deep links with the local community. Cask beer is a circular economy in a local area like this. By preserving relatively labour-intensive brewing practices and delivering direct to every customer, Palmers employs 50 people at the brewery, many living locally. Including Palmers pubs, it estimates 1,000 jobs are associated with the brewery.

Referring to the network of family brewers that helped with her internships, Emily said: “Family brewers are habitually very supportive of each other. Being locally based we tend not to compete directly in our heartlands. We are all looking to preserve our breweries while investing to ensure they are fit for the future and keep people drinking cask ale.”

With its pubs concentrated in an area where its beers are relatively ubiquitous, Palmers offers a look back to the past when a patchwork of local brewers covered the country. But is this supposedly outdated model now a guarantee for the future of cask beer in straitened economic times?

Emily talked about her and her father’s approach both being one of “Evolution not revolution. Investing in the brewery, our pubs and our people for the long term. Preserving the business, its heritage and its traditions, but also driving the business forward and strengthening its foundations for future generations.” For cask beer fans in this corner of the West Country, that’s something we can raise a glass to.



Mike Clarke’s writing appears in many publications including *Pellicle and Ferment*. A long-standing CAMRA member, he is chair of his local branch.

USALE

Out with the old, in with the older – **Ruvani de Silva** explores why cask is the new cool in the US beer scene

Stroll the steep old-school

brownstones and industrial-chic converted warehouses of Brooklyn's uber-hip Gowanus neighbourhood on the right Saturday and you may encounter the NY Cask Crew brewery-hopping between handpulls and gravity casks newly tapped at some of the most popular breweries in New York City. Hit up Portland's beer scene and look out for groups of eager young drinkers sipping 20oz pints of mild while ticking off stops on their city-wide Cask Ale Passport. On a visit to the historic Texas Hill County town of Dripping Springs, you can find fresh cask and country music at Acopon Brewing's laid-back taproom.

These are not isolated examples. Cask service is quietly appearing at breweries and bars around America, from Denver to DC, Iowa to Albuquerque, North Carolina to Seattle. Local cask festivals can be found in spots like Georgia's Atlanta Cask Ale Tasting and Arizona's Real Wild and Woody Festival in Flagstaff. But don't expect just ageing expats. American cask brewers and drinkers are increasingly young and knowledgeable.

While there's no getting around the fact that cask beer remains niche in America, it is growing in both numbers and cache. Cask is cool – in the place you might least expect it to

'A perfect storm of interest in lower-ABV beer and the search for something different'

be. There are many reasons why some American drinkers are becoming cask-curious. A perfect storm of interest in lower-ABV beer, traditional styles and the eternal search for something different among both drinkers and brewers, plus a post-pandemic desire for a communal pub-drinking experience, has placed cask in the proverbial right place at the right time.

At Jones Wood Foundry (JWF),

a British-style pub in New York's Upper East Side, you'll often find expat and beer aficionado Nigel Walsh sipping a fresh pint of Strong Rope or Old Glenham – local breweries specialising in cask. Nigel has been drinking cask in the United States for more than 30 years and blogs as the Cask Whisperer on the JWF website, attending a wide range of cask festivals across the tri-state area. "More recently, it has been young 30- to 45-year-old folks who have 'graduated' from other craft beer styles, namely IPAs, who are looking for a little more nuance and authenticity and drinkability," he observed of contemporary cask drinkers.

Ryan Leonard is head cellarman and US/UK cask beer coordinator at New England Real Ale exhibition (NERAX), the largest cask festival in the United States, now in its 25th year. He said that in the last five to 10 years, "there's been a definite increase in the amount of women and younger people (under 40) who've been attending". 🍷





As more drinkers, particularly Millennials and Gen Zs, become 'zebra stripe' or 'alcohol fluid' – moving between alcoholic and low/no beverages, and are more selective about what they spend on – cask's drinkability and focus on fine-tuning fits the bill. Head brewer at Portland's Steeplejack Brewing Anna Buxton has seen this shift. "Historically, a Portland cask ale customer was a middle-aged cask enthusiast." This, she explained, is "drastically different from the new consumer I'm seeing, who more consistently is late 20s and early 30s, are alcohol fluid, and who like that cask ales tend to be lower in ABV and are highly drinkable. The beer still tastes great as it warms up, since they may take up to two hours to drink a single pint."

John McIntosh, co-owner of Acocon Brewing in Dripping Springs, Texas, agreed. "I think aside from the novelty, people are very appreciative of the more nuanced flavours, they comment on how much less bloated they are than when they drink force-carbonated beer and they appreciate that most of our casks are more session-strength beers, which allows them to enjoy a few, not just one or two, high-strength IPAs," he said. Paired with an equally enthusiastic growth in the market for traditional European lagers, particularly Czech side-pull pours, American interest in cask is reflective of a surge in interest in skilled and historical production and service. "I think American craft beer in general is at the beginning of a longer trend towards nostalgic and classic styles," said Anna.

The desire among more

adventurous and nerdy beer drinkers to seek out something different also feeds neatly into contemporary brewers honing their skills and spreading their wings. Beer writer and NY Cask Crew founder Kevin Kain said: "A handful of highly skilled



brewers and publicans have gained their customers' trust by making and serving other styles of beer. This trust has led the customers to explore other styles they may not have otherwise tried, like cask beer."

Ryan Leonard added: "Most brewers are stepping up their game in terms of cellaring and cask knowledge – it's certainly better than it was 10 years ago and the quality of US cask beers at NERAX has noticeably improved."

There is an immense passion among American brewers making cask, and while many experiment with non-traditional styles, a new fidelity for perfecting traditional styles seems to be taking hold.

"I think traditional real ales are poetic and nuanced and beautiful. I want to make something that is both new and ancient; something that pulls you out of time and makes you feel present all at once," said Anna, who focuses on classic cask

"I think American craft beer in general is at the beginning of a longer trend towards nostalgic styles"



styles at Steeplejack, highlighting the importance of quality cellar skills and recipe development in cask. "There is an evolution in very good brewers making complex beer – brewers who truly care about process and flavour, and styles not previously considered craft are now in the craft field," added Wild East's Lindsey Steen.

Cask is at once known and unusual, old and new, and undoubtedly a little on the geeky side. Lindsey highlighted a key difference between US and UK drinkers – the idea of 'normal' versus



Clockwise from main: All ages are embracing cask beer in the US; cask beer events are popular; tapping into a growing market

"If vinyl can make a comeback and become trendy, then hopefully cask can, too"

beer writer Jeff Alworth. "That it is only available at the pub is a big part of the appeal. It's also kind of secret and weird, which always attracts a certain kind of drinker."

The weirdness offers a community-building talking point for drinkers with handpull beer. "I've noticed consumers are always asking about the beer engine and that's always

a fun conversation. I believe there's a crowd for cask beer when you see that people are curious to know," said Alyston Upshaw, whose Philadelphia Concrete Blues brewery showcased at last year's Great British Beer Festival.

While tradition gives American brewers an

opportunity to show off their skills, offering more diverse options has been a successful way to bring new drinkers into the cask fold.

Cask Marque's Steve Hamburg

is keen to emphasise that its accreditation is not style-dependent. "We must be open to the fact that hazy IPAs are popular and will be served on cask," he explained.

Anna Buxton also highlights the importance of making sure cask is inclusive. "If the only real ale you can get everyone on board with is highly experimental, then that's great and still worth making because cask beer is for everyone and that includes the folks primarily interested in hype beers."

At Wild East, despite its traditional bent, it also plays around with different styles. "When we do light fun stuff like a bitter rested on

applewood chips or a stout with coffee, people come out for the cask tapping and we will get rid of a whole cask that night," said Lindsey.

The idea of branding and perception is another significant factor in cask's cool rep in the US. There, cask is seen as a premium product – its status reversed with that of traditional craft beer. "In the US, cask pretty much spun off of the craft brewing industry, so there is no real animosity between cask and craft. In the UK, cask was there first and craft came out of the blocks trying to establish itself to the detriment of real ale," said Nigel Walsh of the discrepancy.

This inverse relationship can cause frustration among American cask lovers who feel cask isn't given the respect or heritage status it deserves in the UK. Steve points to 'premiumisation' as a potential solution. "People in the UK must be reminded that [cask] is your national treasure," he said, suggesting making cellars more visible so people realise serving cask is more of a premium experience than keg.

While the UK remains the world's cask epicentre, its embrace by a new generation of Americans has the potential to highlight its value to a waning home audience. "I just wish younger drinkers would recognise the value in the strong cask culture you have in the UK before it becomes just another niche there," said Ryan Leonard. "Not only is cask a premium, artisanal product that requires certain cellaring skills to serve well, but from my point of view, it's also a part of the UK's cultural brewing heritage. If vinyl can make a comeback and become trendy and highly valued again within the music scene, then hopefully cask can, too, within the beer scene."



Ruvani de Silva was the 2024 British Guild of Beer Writers' Beer Writer of the Year. She lives in the US. Read more at ruvanidesilva.com

niche and unusual. "In the US, 'normal' is hazies and pastry stouts while cask and Lukr pours, which are seen as normal in the UK and the Czech Republic, are in line with craft beer nerds here," she explained.

The experiential aspect of cask is still very much a curiosity for Americans, and in a positive way. Wild East opened during the pandemic, serving crawlers and growlers to survive. Although cask service had always been part of its plan, it became a key draw as restrictions lifted. "We were trying to get people to come out of their houses and recover from pandemic mentality," said Lindsey. "We knew we must provide experience that was only available in the bar."

"There's something very honest and tactile about cask, which picked up steam following Covid," explained

A master of the modern pub



Kris Gumbrell is chief executive of award-winning brewpub group Brewhouse & Kitchen. Starting as a pot boy, he's had a long career in brewing and pub-running and is delighted to report a growing demand for cask beer, finds **Roger Protz**

Kris Gumbrell was destined to have a career in pubs. He's from Cardiff where his family ran several working men's clubs in South Wales. From the age of eight or nine, Kris worked in the clubs, collecting glasses and picking up skittles for £2 a night.

So, from an early age, he was imbued with a love of clubs, pubs and the pleasures of good beer even if he wasn't able to drink for many years.

He's now the chief executive of the Brewhouse & Kitchen group, which has 21 sites across the country. He's been involved in the pub and brewing industry for 38 years and worked for Bass, Greene King and Scottish & Newcastle.

"But I always wanted to be an entrepreneur," Kris said. "So, in 2008, I set up Convivial London Pubs with Simon Dunn and opened a brewpub at a time when there was growing interest in craft beer."

They chimed with the times: "Customers wanted something more interesting than big brewers' beers," he said.

I met Kris in his Highbury Corner branch of Brewhouse & Kitchen in North London, close to where David Bruce had one of his legendary brewpubs, the Flounder & Firkin.

Kris said the Firkins were one of his inspirations. He travelled with David to the United States where he helped

"I always wanted to be an entrepreneur. So, in 2008, I set up Convivial London Pubs with Simon Dunn and opened a brewpub at a time when there was growing interest in craft beer"

set up several brewpubs and then went to France to establish the Frog & Rosbif chain.

From this experience, Convivial London Pubs morphed into Brewhouse & Kitchen, with the first outlet established in Portsmouth in 2013. Most of the current 21 sites have been created in closed pubs or empty buildings. 







The Highbury branch is in a former tram shed, while the central Bournemouth branch is in a pub previously owned by Eldridge Pope of Dorchester and retains the old brewery's tiles and windows.

Learning from David, Kris and Simon launched Brewhouse & Kitchen with £6m from the Enterprise Investment Scheme, a government-backed system of supporting small business start-ups.

The government funding was vital as Brewhouse & Kitchen sites don't come cheap. The Cardiff branch, for example, cost £600,000

'Kris and Simon launched Brewhouse & Kitchen with £6m from the Enterprise Investment Scheme'

to equip and each brewpub has kit built in both Britain and China that should last for 40 years.

"Each brewery can produce 2,000 hectolitres a week," Kris said. "The recipes are specific to each location. In total, we have produced 350 beers, regulars and seasonals."

The encouraging news is that sales of cask beer grew by 8 per cent between 2024 and 2025 and are a major source of profit for the group.

The success of cask is helped by the fact that a pint in the Highbury branch is just £3.50 – it's closer to £6 in surrounding pubs in the area.

"Cask is taking sales back from craft," Kris said. "Cask has a sound future." The importance of cask beer to the company is underscored by the group's Ale Law: all new members of staff have to raise a hand and swear they will commit to selling cask in tip-top condition.

A healthy 60 per cent of sales come from the group's own beers. Lager is supplied by Shepherd Neame, but Kris is developing his own lager brand. Bravely,



he doesn't stock Guinness and produces his own Nitro Stout (5 per cent ABV) to meet demand for the black stuff.

He said the group has recovered well from Covid-19 and lockdowns. "We lost 8 per cent of our staff, but we sold a lot of beer for take-home."

The Brewhouse & Kitchen model is for each branch to be based in a sizeable building, with space for drinking, eating and brewing. The Highbury site, for example, as befits a former tram shed, has a large and imposing interior with tables and benches laid out for drinking and

eating, with copper brewing vessels at the back of the room.

Food plays an important role in the business and accounts for 40 per cent of turnover. Kris has noticed customers are now eating and drinking earlier: "7pm is now the new normal – what used to be 9pm."

The group employs 600 people, with an operations team across the country monitoring each branch. A senior brewer trains apprentices who are placed on a Level 4 Apprenticeship Scheme.

"The scheme runs for 18 months," Kris explained, "and is as good as going to university."

The brewer at Highbury Corner is

Alexander Sicilia. "He's an Italian who has developed a great passion for cask beer," Kris said. Alexander trains other brewers in the group. His kit at Highbury is a conventional one of mash tun, copper and fermenter.

He says the local water is hard – ideal for brewing ale – and he uses English malting barley and hops for his beers, but blends in American hops for some styles. He will import German hops when the group launches its lager and he will have to soften the water.

At present, he brews twice a week, usually on Fridays and Saturdays.

His Hazy Pale Ale (4.5 per cent) is a New England style and uses American hops, including Simcoe. Best Bitter (4.2 per cent) and IPA (4 per cent) are true to the English styles, using Admiral and Bramling Cross hops.

Kris and his team treat customers as part of the enterprise. They run brewery experience days where customers can discover the skills of brewing along with beer masterclasses that explain the history of the different styles and how they're brewed. Food dishes on the extensive menus are matched with suggested beers.

The group is performing well, with a reported turnover of £16.3m in

2024 and cutting the losses accumulated during Covid. But, in common with all pubs and breweries, Brewhouse & Kitchen is not immune to the problems of high business rates, VAT, excise duty and National Insurance.

"We're milked by the government," Kris said with quiet anger.

"Government thinks we're a money tree it can shake for more income.

"The increase in National Insurance is a tax on jobs. We've had to stop hiring."

He's annoyed – to put it mildly – that having survived Covid lockdowns and accepted the government's lockdown of pubs, Brewhouse & Kitchen is now facing a new and challenging world with taxes and other imposts piled on to brewing enterprises.

"We're milked by the government. It thinks we're a money tree it can shake for more income"

But Kris has weathered many storms in his long career in brewing and pub-running, and he will battle on. A framed chart on one wall lists the impressive number of awards the group has garnered over the years, including the prestigious Pub Brand of the Year in the National Pub & Bar Awards in 2022.

Kris will continue to innovate, with new beer styles to suit modern consumer demand. He said Brewhouse & Kitchen was the first to sell NoLos – no-and-low alcohol beers – on draught and he's also added a gluten-free beer.

The cask beers are excellent – well balanced with rich malt and hop aromas and flavours. The fact that their sales are increasing and bringing young drinkers to the delights of traditional beer is good news for the future.

Just tell the government to get off the boss's back.

WELSH WONDERS

Mike Clarke takes to the bus to explore great pubs in Wales

North West Wales boasts some marvellous pubs serving excellent locally brewed beers. But surely exploring the pubs of this mountainous, rural area with long distances between pubs requires a car to get about?

Not so, the Traws Cymru T2 bus service runs frequently on a route through the Snowdonia National Park, over mountain passes and winds through breathtaking valleys. On its scenic way it passes right by the doors of a succession of characterful and traditional Welsh pubs.

Over a couple of days, I travelled the route northwards. Due to the bus timetable, which in some places is two-hourly, I couldn't visit every pub on the route. Nevertheless, I stopped off at some whose easy accessibility by public transport was a pleasant, if pretty startling, surprise.

The T2's route starts in Aberystwyth on the northern curve of Cardigan Bay. It's a congenial Victorian seaside resort, with a popular pier plus funicular cliff railway and the commercial centre of Ceredigion. The town is further livened up by more than 8,000 students who attend the university based above the town.

The Ship & Castle sits in a dense grid of stone buildings above the town centre, close to Aberystwyth Castle. This down-to-earth local with a piano and warming stove is a keystone for local cask beer. It's famous for its Five Pump Platter – a sample of third pints from the pub's five real ales, mostly sourced from Welsh breweries, although the Green Man (4.4 per cent ABV) from Clun brewery that I drank on my visit there was from just over the English border.



A little downhill from the Ship & Castle is a well-regarded micropub, the Bottle & Barrel, tucked into a Victorian terrace. On my visit, I sampled the curiously named CAMRA Man (4.2 per cent) from (even more curiously named) Weirid Dad brewery. Other good beer venues include the Glengower Hotel, which has a Tardis-like interior, and the Hen Orsaf, a Wetherspoon pub in the railway station building. I overheard on the bus that many T2 customers habitually head into Aberystwyth from a considerable distance for a cheap pint there.

I boarded the T2 heading north out of Aberystwyth. My first stop was in the village of Tal-y-bont, where the White Lion or Llew Gwyn overlooks the village green. I enjoyed a pint of Wainwright's Golden Ale (4.1 per cent) while looking over the pub's extraordinary collection of breweriana in its back room.

Machynlleth, with a population of 2,000 or so, punches well above its weight culturally and historically with a modern art museum, popular comedy festival and the site of 15th-century Welsh independence leader Owain Glyndŵr's parliament.

'The bus climbs up the spectacular valley, twisting through ancient forests in an area designated by UNESCO for its biodiversity'



The town's six pubs are located on the main roads leading to the Victorian clock tower.

The bus schedule only allowed me to try two. Hidden among the restaurants and lounges in the Wynnstay Arms Hotel is a cosy back bar offering four cask beers. I tried Grey Trees brewery's Mosaic Pale Ale and Monty's brewery's Sunshine (both 4.2 per cent). The White Lion, conveniently located right by the T2 bus stop, offered an eclectic range of cask beers, including Wye Valley's Shaka (4.1 per cent) and Tudor's Bloreng (3.8 per cent).

The bus crosses the River Dyfi outside Machynlleth and climbs up its spectacular valley, twisting through ancient forests in an area designated by UNESCO for its biodiversity. Corris nestles in a deep, wooded valley just off the T2's route. A stroll downhill to find the Slater's Arms reveals the trade that led to the establishment of the village in such a remote location. Mining ceased in 197, but the pub still thrives at the heart of the community, selling basic groceries and gaining a reputation for serving three fine cask beers. I enjoyed a pint of Evan Evans Welsh Pale Ale (4.1 per cent). It's a sturdy



Clockwise from main: Cadair Idris pass; Royal Ship Hotel, Dolgellau; Cross Foxes, Britdir; Torrent Walk Hotel, Dolgellau; Ship & Castle Five Pump Platter; T2 tour transport



'The driver had trouble passing a parked car with passengers guiding him. No English was spoken'

Stockport's Robinsons has more than 20 pubs in this part of Wales, but it's much quicker to travel to North West England than South Wales.

The multi-roomed Torrent Walk Hotel is built around a wonderfully cosy front bar with thick stone walls, a tiled floor and a huge inglenook fireplace where drinkers can sit around a woodburning stove on stools hewn from tree trunks. The beer is good, too, with four cask ales, predominantly sourced locally. I sampled more Welsh ales at the nearby Unicorn, enjoying Cwrw Llŷn's Porth Neigwl (4.5 per cent) from the Llŷn peninsula.

This part of the route runs through the heart of the Welsh-speaking community. Conversation broke out when the T2 driver had trouble manoeuvring around a badly parked car with passengers jumping off to help guide the bus. Not a word of English was spoken.

From Dolgellau the T2 climbs through Coed y Brenin Forest Park and past the decommissioned Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, deliberately sited in a sparsely populated area, but one with spectacular views of the rugged Eryri mountains (known in English as Snowdonia). 🇬🇧



'The inn is popular with plane enthusiasts as the optimal location on the Mach Loop: an aerial circuit flown by very low-flying fighter jets'

three-roomed pub with wooden furniture and an inglenook fireplace.

From Corris the bus offers views of the beautiful Tal-y-llyn lake. After navigating a pass close by the Cadair Idris mountain, the bus stops at the Cross Foxes Inn at Brithdir.

At the junction of two mountain passes, the inn is popular with military plane enthusiasts as the optimal viewing location on the Mach Loop: an aerial circuit winding through the Welsh mountains

frequently flown by high-speed, very low-flying fighter jets.

The Cross Foxes' chief attractions for me were three Purple Moose beers on the bar, dinner and a very comfortable bed for the night. It's a traditional stone-built inn and has been sympathetically extended since reopening after a fire in 2007.

Three miles South West in the River Wnion valley lies Dolgellau, a hub for a wide range of outdoor activities in the surrounding mountains and forests. Its compact town centre boasts five pubs and the Royal Ship Hotel, which serves Robinsons' beers. I had a Dizzy Blonde (3.8 per cent). At first it seems surprising that

'It approaches Porthmadog along the Cob, a colossal piece of 19th-century engineering that crosses the Glaslyn estuary'

The bus descends towards the north of Cardigan Bay, within a couple of miles of Ffestiniog and passing the stunning Italianate village of Portmeirion. It approaches Porthmadog along the Cob, a colossal piece of 19th-century engineering that crosses the Glaslyn estuary, linking Porthmadog to Ffestiniog, playing an essential part in creating the local slate quarrying industry.

Just across the Cob is the Australia.

This has been Porthmadog's Purple Moose brewery tap since 2017. It's a roomy, laid-back place that's playfully themed with purple banquettes in booths decorated with a moose's head. Blackboards decorate the walls, one listing the many awards that the brewery has received, another tells of the mysterious legend of the Purple Moose (I won't disclose it, you'll have to visit for yourself!).

The pub offers a range of up to six of the brewery's cask beers. I talked to the brewery's founder, Lawrence Washington. I asked about the brewery's strong connections with the local area. He said: "From the outset in 2005, we wanted to name our core beers after nearby places. We started with Glaslyn, which is the river that comes out through the harbour at Porthmadog. The next was Madog's Ale. That's named after William Maddocks who built the Cob. Then in 2006, we got our first brew of Snowdonia Ale, an easy-drinking session beer at lower strength. It was only meant for that summer, but we've never stopped brewing it!"

I really enjoyed the brewery's pale, floral Elderflower Ale (4 per cent). Since Purple Moose beers featured regularly in pubs along the T2 route, I was able to try plenty of its range.



Clockwise from above: Black Boy Inn, Caernarfon; last stop was at the Anglesey Arms, Caernarfon; Purple Moose beers are popular en route



From Porthmadog, the T2 diverts off the main road to take in the seaside town of Criccieth, with its castle overlooking the sea. This stretch of the route offers magnificent views over the bay towards Cadair Idris and, as it turns inland, of the peaks of Eryri. The route heads north towards Caernarfon through gentle farmland, passing the Bragdy Lleu brewery taproom in the village of Penygroes.

The bus continues to Bangor, but I made Caernarfon my last stop. The walled town is dominated by its medieval castle. In the shadow of the castle stands the Black Boy Inn. As with many pubs of the same name, there's a debate about the name's origin, specifically whether it's a

reference to King Charles in the English Civil War. A large blackboard inside ponders the name's origins.

One of the many pub signs outside pictures a floating marine 'Black Buoy' although some of the other signs' interpretations of the name are maybe better consigned to the pub's 17th-century history.

The inn itself is a fascinating warren of connecting rooms, with a large restaurant at the back. The public bar is snug and atmospheric and serves up to six cask beers. It's one of the diehard pubs to have continued serving Draught Bass (4.4 per cent) before its recent resurgence in popularity.

My last pint was in the Anglesey Arms in Caernarfon. Its superb views over the Menai Straits allowed me to reflect on my two-day journey on the T2 bus, a winning combination of breathtaking scenery and great beer in an extraordinarily tranquil part of the world. *Iechyd da!* as they say in these parts.

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Cairngorm Black Gold

Jeff Evans tells the story of a beer that was born of two breweries and became a surprise success after being tweaked to work in a new brewhouse



When Tomintoul brewery in the Scotland highlands fell into administration in 2000, the idea that one of its beers would go on to win some of Britain's most prestigious awards seemed unlikely to say the least. To the rescue, however, rode neighbouring Aviemore brewery which bought the company's assets.

Both brewery names continued for a while but then, in 2001, the business was consolidated in Aviemore as Cairngorm brewery, referencing the soon-to-be-opened Cairngorms National Park, which surrounded the site. This gave a new impetus to some Tomintoul beers as they settled into their new home.

Responsible for adapting the beers to life in the new brewhouse was Sean Tomlinson, formerly of Tomlinson's brewery in Pontefract, who had been brought in as production manager. "I tweaked the beers so that they'd suit the brewlength and the kit they were using," he explained. "We looked at the water and the ingredients – just tried to make things work properly on this other brewery."

The beer he proved most successful with was Black Gold (4.4 per cent ABV), a milk stout which had barely registered with drinkers during its time at Tomintoul but which was about to embark on a stellar career on the bar. Sean took the already solid Black Gold recipe

and worked his magic. The ingredients, broadly, he did not change. Pale malt from Scottish barley, Black malt, Crystal malt and some malted wheat still went into the mash tun, but Sean believes he was responsible for introducing Chocolate malt to counter the bitterness of the Black malt. "I think that might have been a tweak of mine," he recalled.

Challenger hops were added in the copper for bitterness and Fuggle for aroma. In the copper, too, went some lactose. There was no inkling that this beer would turn out to be a runaway success, as dark beers were not particularly popular at the time, but the beer found its stride, helped along by another brew that Sean created specifically for Cairngorm.

"The biggest thing I did for it was the Trade Winds recipe, which really set the brewery on its feet," he said. Trade Winds – a 4.3 per cent pale ale – was an instant success, picking up the Champion Beer of Scotland title in 2004. "Cairngorm started to get noticed," said Sean. The following year the same title was presented to Black Gold, which – remarkably – has since claimed three more Champion Beer of Scotland titles, as well as three category golds in the national Champion Beer of Britain contest.

'There was no inkling it would be a success, as dark beers were not particularly popular at the time'

THE STORY BEHIND THE BEER

To crown things off, in 2025 it was Champion Winter Beer of Britain.

Since Sean's time in charge, Black Gold has been modified slightly to help the beer retain its popularity. "The recipe has evolved, with quality always our priority," said today's head brewer Liam Anderson. The hop varieties have not changed, but quantities and addition times have been adjusted. "The goal is always to find the perfect balance of bitterness and sweetness so that these flavours complement one another rather than fighting for dominance," he said.

The most recent change has been to extend the conditioning time, with Black Gold now cold-conditioned for three weeks. It's not a cheap option. "This requires investment in conditioning capacity, and funding the stock for longer periods, but the benefits are an improvement in quality," Liam said. "Extra conditioning time allows the contrasting flavours of sweet lactose and hop bitterness to mellow. This also helps to highlight the subtle caramel flavour of the Crystal malt and the caramelisation which takes place during the boil." Two or three more conditioning tanks will be added this year.

But some things remain as before.

"We exclusively use leaf hops to keep things traditional. Leaf hops in the kettle act as a filter at the end of boil and this filtration is a huge contributory factor to the end-product flavour." The Cairngorm house yeast is also still used,



'It drinks quite differently to many milk stouts, with the lactose adding body and a light sweetness'

contributing subtle banana and tropical fruit notes to the finished product, Liam said.

Black Gold – deep, dark brown in colour – is robust and flavoursome, despite its modest alcohol. It drinks quite differently to many milk stouts, with the lactose adding body and a light caramel sweetness rather than obvious creaminess. Biscuity, bitter chocolate notes run throughout and there's a teasingly delicate, hard-to-define fruity note underneath.

The name of the beer originally referred to the North Sea oil industry off nearby Aberdeen and the pump clip initially featured an oil rig. But such imagery did not suit the brewery's change of name.

"We decided that all the images we used were to reference our base in the Cairngorms National Park," said Liam. "Black Gold now uses an image of a Highland bothy [a rural cottage] from a painting by local artist Anne Vastano."

Although the cask version has won

CAMRA trophies, bottles of Black Gold – packaged on-site – account for most of the sales. There is also a kegged version, available using mixed gas. "I believe our mixed gas

kegs to be up there with some of the best stouts worldwide," said Liam.

The awards keep rolling in, but there may be no bigger fans of the beer than its brewers. Sean has always been a lover of dark beers. He thinks Black

Gold is "a cracker", partly because of the way the lactose and chocolate malt balance the harsher notes of black malt. Liam, on the other hand, admits to previously shying away from beers like this. "I didn't drink much stout until I started at Cairngorm and Black Gold was the beer that converted me," he said. "I love the stuff."

Brighton rocks

Christian Gott heads south and finds Brighton packed with great pubs, beer and food

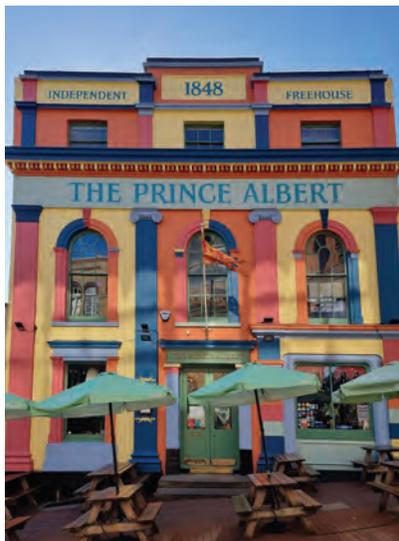
By the time you read this, spring will

be in the air. The flowers starting to bloom, the birds singing in the trees and everyone thinking of stepping out in the sunshine. And what better way to enjoy warmer weather than a trip to the seaside? When I lived and worked in London (see my last review), my perfect day out was a jaunt to Brighton, the queen of the south coast. A splash in the sea, a few beers in the many splendid hosteleries, perhaps some seafood and back home in time for last orders.

With these happy memories in mind, I decided to take a trip to Brighton and head out and about in search of great pints and some decent food. When you first leave the station concourse on a bright Sunday morning, you are assailed with the sights, sounds and smells of an array of shops and restaurants. From a luxury truffle emporium to a Belgium fries shop and everything you can imagine in between. Strolling down to the sea, my overall impression is of fading grandeur. But the streets were busy and everywhere from 'Spoons to itsu are packed with people eating breakfast.

I had decided earlier

I needed help, a long-time resident to guide me past the chain pubs and tourist hangouts along the seafront. Someone to be my spirit guide and show me the real heart of Brighton. Author, critic and writer of the *New Statesman's* Down and Out column, Nicholas Lezard selflessly stepped in, and we arranged to meet at the Prince Albert pub and music venue. Now, if only I had turned at the



Starting point for Christian's tour was the Prince Albert, which not only serves a great pint, but is also a music venue

station instead of following the lure of the distant sea I could have saved myself an unnecessary walk.

Head down the underpass bearing right and past the entrance to the Brighton Toy and Model

Museum and you emerge to an artist's delight, bright colours glowing in the daylight. Take a minute before you enter to study the mural on the side, complete with an original Banksy called *Kissing Coppers*.

The pub is an attractive hodgepodge of small rooms dating back to 1860, with a well-stocked bar; we settled straight in with a couple of

'Take a minute before you enter to study the mural, complete with a Banksy called *Kissing Coppers*'



pints of Burning Sky's Dignified and Old (5.4 per cent ABV), with rich flavours of molasses and vanilla.

Just a couple of minutes away, the quirky, charming the Pond serves a mix of cask and craft beer, including its own pale ale, alongside delicious Asian-inspired street food. I could not resist trying a delicious melt-in-the-mouth pork belly bao bun with cucumber and hoisin, and a tasty couple of grilled chicken skewers with satay sauce. These were washed down with a pint from another Sussex brewery, Downlands. Its Best bitter (4.1 per cent), is classic in style, with toffee aromas and a fruity finish.

Suitably fortified, we braved the crowds now packing the North Laine, full of record shops, tattoo parlours, second-hand emporiums and boutique coffee shops where all the baristas look like supermodels. This is



‘Recently refurbished, it retains the cosy vibe, lots of nooks and crannies, and a great roof terrace’



Clockwise from main: Asian-inspired chicken skewers; Lion & Lobster bar; Lion roast chicken that took the dish to a new level

the bohemian quarter of Brighton, lots of tie-dye clothing, neon hair, multi-hole Doc Martens boots, and I love it all. Tucked away at the end of one back street, Nicholas led me to one of his favourites, the Basketmakers Arms. Part of a small, independent group this tiny pub was packed with character and contented customers.

There were some good-looking Sunday lunches, but my guide had brought me to see the pub walls. Every one is covered with vintage tobacco tins and each contains a handwritten note with a message or story. The pub serves Fuller’s beers,

and I took the opportunity to try one new to me, Red Fox – a pleasant Irish-style, tawny red ale (4.3 per cent) with lots of fruity and toasty malt notes. Sadly, there wasn’t time to try the food offer as Nicholas had plans.

Making our way in the direction of the seafront, we walked past the Grand Brighton, then turned off down another back street to the Hole in the Wall. Reputedly Brighton’s smallest pub, it was previously known as the Queensbury Arms and is a former local CAMRA Pub of the Year. Small it maybe, but the range of craft and cask beers is not. Kernel Wet Hop

Bitter (4.4 per cent) is made with green hops within 24 hours of harvesting, giving it a fresh, bold almost floral aroma with a light, bitter finish, and it was superb.

And then we were off again, heading for our final destination. The Lion & Lobster is like so many of the pubs we visited, close to the heart of the city but a little off the beaten track. Recently refurbished, it retains the cosy vibe, lots of nooks and crannies, character and a great roof terrace. This is another popular venue and was heaving; for reference,

Sunday lunch is booked out weeks in advance. We squeezed ourselves onto a free couple of stools at the corner of the bar and sampled a pint of Portobello Lobster Ale (4.3 per cent) before tackling an epic roast.

These may seem a little pricey, but are well worth it. The 28-day-aged beef sirloin with a gruyère gougère filled with beer and black garlic braised beef is to die for, and the

corn-fed chicken, pork-sage-and-onion stuffing, truffled chicken leg ballotine, crispy wing, chicken skin wafer and sourdough bread sauce takes roast chicken to the next level. Both served with Yorkies, roasties, the most amazing veg and lashings of gravy. Food at the Lion & Lobster is an absolute delight. I found Brighton packed with great places to eat, wicked pubs and top pints. I will return.



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*.

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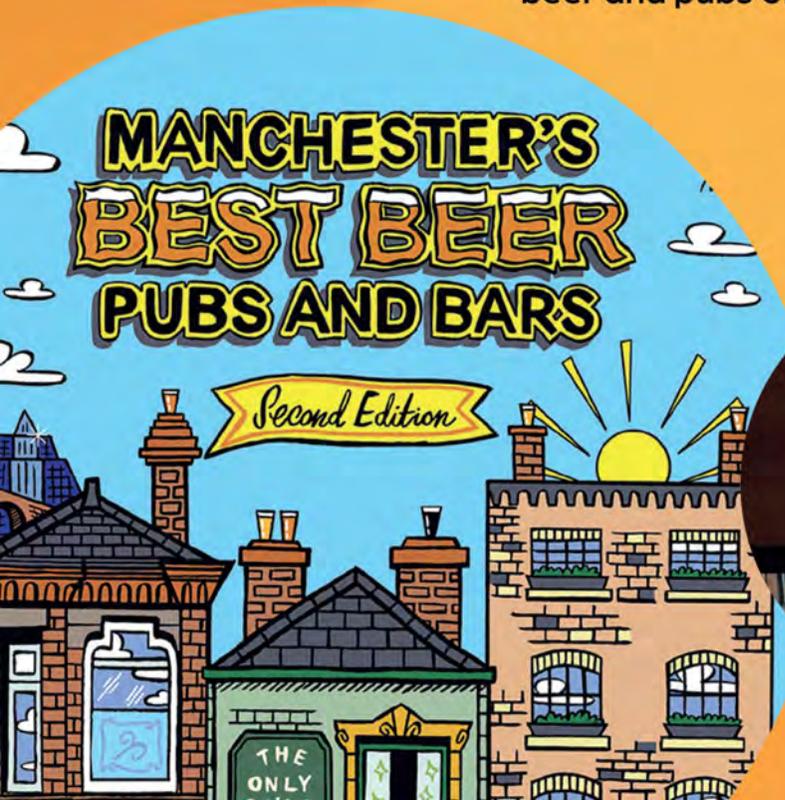
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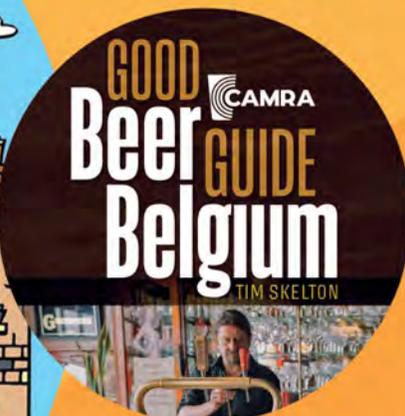
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The wonders of wood

Before modern brewing, wood shaped the flavour of beer for centuries

My first visit to the Pilsner Urquell

brewery was in the 1980s when its home city of Pilsen was in a country called Czechoslovakia under communist control. I was assailed by the aroma of boiling pitch in the brewery yard and found workers busy painting it inside wooden staves.

When the pitch was dry, the staves were assembled into wooden casks destined to contain the latest batch of golden lager that was maturing in ice-cold cellars. When I asked why the interiors of the casks were lined with pitch, I was told it was to prevent a multitude of flavours from the wood infecting the crystal-clear beer with its superb balance of malt and hops.

Scroll forward to 2016 when for my book *IPA: A Legend in Our Time*, I made an India Pale Ale using an 1850s recipe from Bass. The beer, called Catalyst, was brewed at UBREW in Bermondsey, South London. It was 7.6 per cent ABV and had a mighty 81 units of bitterness.

We stored the beer in a wooden cask and left it to mature for three months, replicating the sea journey to India in the 19th century. When we tapped the beer, it had an aroma and palate of tart lemon and spicy hops with a funky note from a wild yeast strain called Brettanomyces.

The name means 'British fungus' and it was scientifically analysed in the 18th century when the first porters and stout were aged for several months in wood and emerged with

an aroma that brewers call 'horse blanket'. Brett, for short, is buried deep in the wood and can't be removed by washing or even scraping.

As a result, I have drawn the conclusion that the original IPAs sent to India would have tasted radically different to today's interpretations.

In between Pilsen in the 1980s and UBREW early this century, I have visited several of the breweries in Belgium that produce lambic and gueuze. These are beers made by spontaneous fermentation that allows wild yeasts in the atmosphere to turn grain sugars into alcohol. Further

'A growing number of brewers are relishing the opportunity to produce beers from the wood'

fermentation is the result of activity from yeasts and other micro flora locked in wooden storage vessels.

Lambic and its blended version

gueuze are the world's oldest beer styles, brewed for centuries before scientists and chemists were able to analyse modern yeast cultures.

I have had the opportunity to sit down with master brewers in Belgium and learn that researchers at the brewing faculty of Leuven University have identified two main types of Brett active in the breweries.

But when all the wild yeast strains from the atmosphere, brewery cellars and oak casks are added together,

they number as many as 35. The end result is beers that are acidic and funky. They are the Marmite of the beer world. I adore them but I have seen seasoned beer drinkers politely refuse a refill when visiting a lambic plant.

Most beer today is served from sterile stainless steel casks and kegs. But a growing number of brewers are relishing the opportunity to produce beers from the wood.

There have been two pacesetters, Innis & Gunn in Scotland and Goose Island in Chicago. I&G was founded in 2003 and has achieved international sales with its oak-aged beers matured in whisky and rum casks.

Goose Island produces an annual Bourbon County Brand Stout (14–15 per cent), using oak casks obtained from the Kentucky bourbon whiskey industry. American oak imparts a distinctive "woody" character to the dark malts and hops used in the beer.

Inspired by the success of both I&G and Goose Island, a number of brewers on both sides of the Pond have launched beers aged in wood. They include a Double Stout from Hook Norton (4.8 per cent) in Oxfordshire. It's based on a 19th-century recipe and aged in wood for 18 months.

Stunning beers thanks to the wonders of wood.



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)



POETIC LICENCE

Martin Ellis discovers pubs are at the heart of renewed interest in poetry

Over the last 15 years or so there has been an explosion in interest in poetry. Book sales have significantly increased, poetry events take place across the country and thousands of people are writing poetry. Pubs are at the core of the mushrooming live poetry scene, so why do the pair dovetail together?

Pubs hosting poetry and spoken word evenings is not new and trendy – it's been going on for decades. The proliferation of poetry nights is new. The Chester Poets has been meeting monthly at the Boot Inn since 1973. It's a National Heritage-listed, Grade II building and a Sam Smith's pub, so my guess is that the poetry avoids the industrial language that may be encountered at some poetry events. Chester has an annual Poetry Pub Crawl, which is part of the Chester Literature Festival. People follow a prearranged route visiting pubs, and on arrival a poem is read out.

My first experience of poetry in a pub was in the fondly remembered and much-missed Broken Doll in Newcastle in the mid-1980s. Henry Normal introduced himself as a poet, he told the audience that poets can get Arts Council funding and comedians can't. Henry later set up Baby Cow Productions with Steve Coogan, and he is still writing and performing poetry.

Poetry events have a range of formats: most take place on a weekday evening, some are held on a weekend afternoon; some charge an admission, others are free. There are nights where there is a bill of guest poets, the audience sits, watches and listens. However, it may be a night where most of the people attending take turns to read poems they have written.

While most poetry events have a relaxed, supportive ambience that encourages 

'Pubs hosting poetry and spoken word nights is not new, but the proliferation is'

people to write and read out their poems, in contrast, poetry slam events are competitive. Poets sign up for a slot, they are then called to the stage to read a poem they have written. Knock-out rounds whittle down to the final two poets. The poets are judged on their performance and the quality of their poem. Judging may be by a panel of judges, who may be drawn from audience members or invited poetry experts. Alternatively, the competition may be judged by who gets the most applause – somewhat similar to Hughie Green's *Opportunity Knocks* clapometer (which I am sure CAMRA's more

audience." He founded the Glastonwick Beer Festival because he wanted to have one with poetry and great music. Another of his achievements was getting cask beer stocked at the new Brighton & Hove Albion ground. So, obviously, I asked why he thought beer and poetry go together: "It's a DIY punk thing – small independent brewers and venues, grassroots music and poetry share the same sentiment."

Many pubs hosting poetry events are well known as a music venue, often for traditional folk nights. In some ways there is a similarity, folk clubs often have 'floor singers/performers' who start the evening before the main act. This approach is repurposed for the spoken word performers. The Cumberland Arms in Newcastle during the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s was one of the few pubs in the city where you could find cask beer. It now has five changing beers and a reputation for cider.

I asked Amy Langdown, one of the founders of the Out of Your Head! night at the Cumberland Arms, why she helped set it up. Amy told me she was approached by the pub as it was keen to start a poetry night. She is now regularly asked by pubs and bars to host a night in their venue – clearly, they see poetry and spoken word events as an attraction to drinkers. Amy said: "It's the great oral tradition, it's what people do in pubs – they sit with friends, tell stories and drink beer."

Rowan McCabe, who is perhaps best known nationally as the Door-to-Door Poet, told me he developed writing and performance skills playing in pubs.

Nottingham is a UNESCO City of Literature, one of 53 across the world. Nottingham-based poet Keith Ford, who is involved in running the Speech Therapy night at Nottingham's Bunkers Hill, told me his interest in poetry came from songwriting in bands and that, for

Amy Langdown



'It may be judged by who gets the most applause – similar to the Opportunity Knocks clapometer'

mature members will remember, or possibly most CAMRA members). Hi-tech events have started using QR codes to enable the audience to vote with their phones.

Since the early 1980s, punk poet Attila the Stockbroker has performed more than 4,000 times. He told me more than half his gigs have been in pubs and said: "If it's a pub with shit beer, I only get half the



Attila the Stockbroker

'Keith Ford said, for many people, the gateway to poetry is listening to pop songs'

many people, the gateway to poetry is listening to pop songs. He also said people often come for the first time and say "I am just here to watch", however, most want to participate and only about 20 per cent don't participate in writing and reading poems at some point. The Bunkers Hill is a former Barclays Bank; it has a large, single-room bar downstairs with five handpulls and a large function room upstairs.

The Liver Bards meet once a month in the basement of Ma Boyle's Alehouse and Eatery. Originally a coffee shop, then an oyster bar, it's now a quaint old pub popular with tourists and jazz fans plus supports beers from local breweries.

In London, Jackie Lowe set up the Creative Souls night at the Bedford in Balham. Creative Souls is held on a Sunday night once a month. There are 22 slots for participants to read and perform their poems. She said: "Poetry is better than any therapy. In an era of wellbeing, writing poetry



is cathartic." Jackie's poetry nights "have a great social aspect, they are a great way to connect with people, make friends and a safe place to discuss emotions". The Bedford was built in 1931; it is Grade II listed and serves local and national beers.

Also in London is Borough's Roebuck which regularly hosts POW – Play on Words. It's not held on a specific night, so you need to check with the Roebuck. Essentially and proudly it's an open-mic night. The

Roebuck policy is to source beer from South East London, making it a good place to find brews from the Bermondsey Beer Mile. A large, Victorian pub, it's big on sustainability and community engagement.

The only brewery I found with a poetry night is the Doncaster Brewery and Tap, which runs Well Spoken! on the second Thursday of every month. It's an open-mic night with occasional guest poets. Four Doncaster brewery beers and two guests are available; additionally, there are 10 keg lines in the upstairs Dystopia Bar.

Gorilla Poetry is a monthly open-mic night at the Gardeners Rest in Sheffield. Its policy is that anyone who wishes to perform will get the chance. It doesn't have a strictly poetry-only policy and welcomes prose and music. The pub is community-owned with six regularly changing craft beers.

Poetry Plus takes place monthly at the Red Lion in Manningtree, Essex. People are encouraged to join in and

'Everyone I spoke to when researching this article highlighted the friendly and social aspect of poetry'

'It may have been in *Observer Food Monthly*, but it doesn't serve meals; but you can bring a takeaway'

read poetry, and it doesn't have to be something you have written. It's a free house dating back to 1603, which has three cask beers plus cider. It's the oldest pub in town, and is described in the *Observer Food Monthly* as "a great traditional free house, with a focus on East Anglian ales". It may have been in *Observer Food Monthly*, but it doesn't serve meals; you can, however, bring your own takeaway and there's cutlery and crockery.

So, why have poetry and spoken

word nights become so popular? One suggestion was they appeared in American comedies such as *Friends*; another suggestion was the younger generation has been turned on to poetry by hip-hop. Lockdown apparently stimulated people to have a go at writing poetry and share it on social media. However, I think the best explanation came from Keith Ford who told me that people attending poetry nights become passionate about it; if they don't have an event locally, they set one up.

Everyone I spoke to when researching this article highlighted the friendly and social aspect of poetry events. I was told it's a great way of meeting people as poetry attracts people across a wide age range from different backgrounds. I have highlighted a selection of poetry events held in great pubs with cask beer, and there are many more events happening throughout the country. Attila the Stockbroker's view that poetry, beer and pubs go together is clearly shared with thousands of beer drinkers.



Martin Ellis is a book publisher. A member of CAMRA's Tyneside & Northumberland branch, he was on the Books Committee for more than 25 years.

Rowan McCabe





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BROKEN PROMISES

HELP FOR PUBS SHORT-TERM AND SHORT-SIGHTED

Responding to the Treasury's announcement of extra help for pubs in England with business rates, CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins said: "This short-term announcement is not the 'permanently lower business rates' that pubs were promised. While it is positive that the chancellor has listened and announced extra discounts for pubs facing the threat of closure, it is short-sighted to think that today's statement will give publicans the certainty they need.

"The plan to review the unfair way pubs are assessed for business rates is welcome, but this leaves them in the same situation as they have been for years – still facing a long wait for promised and fundamental reforms to make the system fairer.

"CAMRA will keep campaigning to get the government to support great pubs and independent breweries so they can compete against online businesses and cheap supermarket booze."

On changes to licensing hours and relaxation of planning rules, Ash said: "Letting pubs stay open for longer or extending their premises is not going

to solve the fundamental problem where otherwise viable businesses face being taxed out of existence. Licensees are already limiting their opening hours and can't afford to invest in their buildings. The government should review the tax burden on pubs and independent breweries from things like VAT and alcohol duty to see if those can be made fairer, to give our locals a fighting chance against cheap supermarket alcohol."

On the impact on pubs in the devolved nations, Ash added: "CAMRA is urging governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ring-fence any money they get off the back of this announcement to also provide extra support specifically for pubs in those nations who are also facing the threat of closure from huge increases in their business rates bills, too."



London's treasures

Neil Pettigrew takes a look at some of London's most famed pubs that feature in the latest edition of CAMRA's *London's Real Heritage Pubs*

The recently published *London's Real Heritage Pubs* is the latest in a series of regional guides produced by CAMRA's Pub Heritage Group. Like the other books in the series, its chief focus is on pubs which still have intact historic interiors or which have retained important interior features. The book describes 249 such pubs in Greater London, accompanied by a wealth of colour photographs.

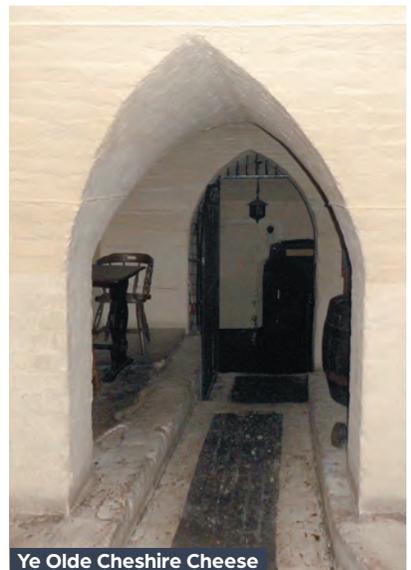
There is also a host of feature articles on related subjects, including Victorian craftsmanship, London's oldest pubs, architects Nowell Parr and Sidney C Clark, London's past breweries and much more. Sadly, in this article there is only room to mention a few fine examples of the pubs featured in the book.

It doesn't matter how many times you visit the **Black Friar** (174 Queen Victoria Street, Blackfriars EC4V 4EG), you will always notice some interior feature that you haven't spotted before (such as the small stone frog sitting in a fireplace). Built in 1873, its extravagant 1905 interior makeover is full of images of jolly friars engaged in the business of eating, drinking and generally having a good time. The barrel-vaulted area at the back of the pub was added in 1917–1921 and is enhanced by much alabaster and marble. There isn't another pub like it in London.

No consideration of London's pubs is complete without a mention of **Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese** (145 Fleet Street EC4A 2BP). The pub was rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1666, and its entrance is tucked away down a dark, Dickensian alley. The small



Black Friar



Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese

room on the right of the entrance contains wall panelling and other features which may well date from the 17th century. The larger room on the left, also panelled, is perhaps the nearest thing we have to the atmosphere of eating in an old tavern. Easily overlooked are the cellars. I had drunk in the cellar several times without noticing that there was a small, low door in one corner. To my surprise, it led to more cellars at lower levels and which are said to be the remains of a 13th Carmelite monastery. There are so many rooms and so many steps to lower levels that it feels like something out of an

'There are so many rooms and so many steps to lower levels that it feels like something out of an HP Lovecraft horror story'



Salisbury

HP Lovecraft horror story. If you have been to the pub but failed (as I did) to explore these lower cellars, then you need to return!

The **Salisbury** (90 St Martin's Lane, WC2N 4AP) is a Victorian pub that positively glitters inside and out. Built in 1892 and spectacularly refitted in c.1898, the pub retains its original barback containing highly decorative etched mirror panels up to the ceiling.



Hand and Shears

'The effect is to create an exciting labyrinth, with pleasant surprises at every corner, full of sparkling tiling and glittering etched glass'



Princess Louise



Scottish Stores

today, you would be lucky to find one. Built in the 1850s, most of the fittings are from an 1896 refit. Sitting in here really does feel like stepping back 130 years.

Until fairly recently, the **Scottish Stores** (2–4 Caledonian Road, King's Cross N1 9DU) had been all but written off by pub aficionados.

It was known as the Flying Scotsman for many years, its windows were blocked by ugly black boards and it was frequented by men throwing pound coins into pint glasses to watch women undressing. That is all a thing of the past now and today we can enjoy this Grade II listed Victorian pub with its remarkably intact interior consisting of three small rooms and an island servery. The rooms are separated by two floor-to-ceiling screens that contain some etched glass panels.

Built in 1872, the **Princess Louise** (208 High Holborn WC1V 7EP) is one of the great historic pubs of London, with an exuberant display of superb Victorian tiling and mirrors, a highly ornate, patterned ceiling and a three-section mahogany barback. In 2008, it was reopened by owner Samuel Smith, which restored the pub

to its original floorplan, reinstating partitions that create seven distinct drinking areas. The effect is to create an exciting labyrinth of a place, with pleasant surprises at every corner, full of sparkling tiling and glittering etched glass. Soon after the restoration, I remarked to a customer that I thought the restoration was splendid. "I don't like it," he said. "Why not?" I asked, surprised. "I like to be able to see who else is in the pub." Oh well – it takes all sorts.

The book has been compiled by a team consisting of co-editors, myself and Rex Ward, as well as Jane Jephcote, Will Johnson, Luke Jacob and Andy Shaw.

● **London's Real Heritage Pubs is published by CAMRA. Price: £8.99 (£6.99 for CAMRA members). Available from the CAMRA website.**



Neil Pettigrew is pub protection officer for CAMRA's South East London branch.

A four-bay partition boasts some highly ornate glass and some of the exterior windows contain attractive patterned glass. Fixed banquette booths in the front room are separated by five small shelves on each of which stand statuettes of young women holding aloft bouquets of flowers containing light bulbs. The Salisbury's superb woodwork and glasswork make it a pub not to miss.

For me, visiting the **Hand and Shears** (1 Middle Street, EC1A 7JA) is one of the great experiences of London pub-going. Not because it is a grand Victorian extravagance, in fact, quite the reverse. It is a rare surviving example of a humble Victorian corner pub that has retained its original layout, with several small rooms radiating around a central island servery. Once there were thousands of pubs like this;

INDIE VS INDUSTRY

Brewers organisation SIBA says independent beer is handmade by real people who truly care about the quality and flavour of the beer they are producing. And drinkers should choose independent beer for a great-tasting pint as they have much more choice of styles and flavours than you get with global mass-produced beers.

Importantly, “you’ll be supporting local business, protecting local pubs and making a more sustainable choice, too”.

Is SIBA correct? Have the global international brewers had their day?

In my view, SIBA is correct as far as the UK is concerned, but there are still some very good beers coming out of internationally owned brewers in Belgium. It is also worth noting that not all independent brewers are members of SIBA – not least because small brewers find their membership fees difficult to meet in their particular financial circumstances.

John McLaughlin

Independent beer is handmade by real people who truly care about the quality and flavour of the beer they are producing. Ideally, the head brewer will either own the company or have a significant stake. Beer should be brewed by brewers, not assembled by accountants!

Paul Donatantonio

SHUTTERSTOCK





I agree. Sounds great. Independent brewers are here for us all to try their good-tasting produce.

Valerie Evans

Obviously very careful about the wording by SIBA, but I am sure the people making beer in a huge factory care about the quality of the product and also the company will want consistency of the product also.

These places are also huge local employers, so even though we think of them as mega corps, real people work at them.

But I do feel they are on a bit of a doom loop as they struggle with declining sales. I read that one had more revenue from soft drinks for the first time.

On buying these products as a drinker, that's the choice of the venue to stock the product, and I am still putting money across its bar regardless of what I buy.

Mark Gibson



SIBA is correct, but that doesn't mean that big international brewers have had their day.

James Williams

Have they had their day? Sadly not. Their abuse of market power will keep them in business, to the detriment of beer.

Tim Webb

SIBA is correct generally in its comments about styles, flavours, locality and passion. However, in places this is also true of multinationals.

David Halliwell

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

Spring into lager

Some beers are perfect as the days get longer and warmer

Tasting an excellent cask version of Wimbledon brewery's Keller Helles (4.8 per cent ABV) at a local festival reminded me of just how much lager's place in the UK beer scene has advanced from its undistinguished past. Less expressive yeasts, lower fermentation temperatures and long, cold lagering typically yield a less complex flavour than found in ales, foregrounding the delicacy of the malt and hops. There's nowhere for the brewer to hide in beers like these, and problems like astringency, harshness, oversweetness and fermentation faults are cruelly exposed. But skill and patience can yield a supremely refreshing and drinkable beer of tantalising subtlety like those below, all from unpasteurised, unfiltered cans and ideal for longer and warmer days.

Hilltop Lager (4.3 per cent) from Vocation in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, is so-called as the brewery, founded in 2015, sits amid the rugged South Pennines on the summit of England's longest continuous incline. This fresh-tasting, warm gold beer has slightly sweet malt flavours dried by perfumed grass, straw and white pepper hop notes, with gentle hints of apple, peach and nutty sesame.

Another easy drinker is New Bristol's **Bristol Lager** (4.6 per cent), from a smallish but high-achieving city-centre brewery also dating from 2015. This uses classic Czech Žatec (Saaz) hops to lend a delightful lemongrass, vanilla and dried herb aroma with hints of mandarin. The delicate palate is floral and lightly citric, with honeyed malt and a lingering rather bitter and piny finish. A beer you can happily glug down but rewards lingering.

Reece Hugill was inspired to brew during a sojourn in Germany, founding Donzoko as a cuckoo in 2017. It's evolved into one of Britain's most



interesting craft lager specialists, since 2024, based in Newcastle upon Tyne with its own kit sourced from Vienna. Its flagship brand is the excellent Northern Helles (4.2 per cent), but I particularly enjoyed the **Helles Spezial** (5.2 per cent), a nod to the maltier style associated with Dortmund. This lightly hazy golden beer has a classic aroma of shortbread malt, grass, pollen, lemon and a splash of sweetcorn (DMS) appropriate to the style. It's firm but clean and refreshing, finishing with light salad-leaf bitterness and hints of floral vanilla and fruit.

UK brewers rarely produce darker shades of lager, but one exception is Verdant's **Munich Dunkel** (5 per cent) from a Cornish brewery better known for its hop-forward ales, opened in Falmouth in 2015 and expanded to Penryn in 2020. This glassful of red-brown bliss has notes of digestive biscuit, chocolate spread on toast, plum and cinder toffee, but remains rounded and soothing, with both

creamy Tettnanger hops and toasty Munich malts lending a lightly bitter, crisp note on the finish.

A more unusual malt bill is used for **Otherworld Scottish Smoked Lager** (5.5 per cent), from a 2022 start-up in Eskbank near Edinburgh. A hazy, amber beer with a huge beige head, it has an unmistakably smoky aroma with notes of savoury smoked salmon and beech that persist to the palate, softened by red berry, chocolate and toffee. Lightly bittering hop notes emerge through the peat on the finish. Fusing German and Scottish traditions by using Franconian smoked malts and former Islay whisky casks for maturation, it's an uncompromising beer, but a fine demonstration of lager's scope.



Sadly, veteran *BEER* contributor and columnist plus CAMRA author **Des de Moor** passed away in February. See From the editor (page 5) for a reflection on the excellence of Des' work. His writing can still be found at desdemoor.co.uk

YOUR SHOUT



Write to *BEER*, CAMRA 9 Finway, Dallow Road, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU1 1TR or email editor@camra.org.uk

Receiving your announcement of the latest *BEER* has reminded me I should have written earlier, having seen the following articles within days of each other:

"If I read once more that porter got its name because it was 'popular with the porters of Covent Garden, Smithfield and Billingsgate' I am going to slap someone with a malt shovel."

Quote from *The Guardian's* obituary of Martyn Cornell, August 2025, his words, quoted by the paper.

Yet, last issue we learnt again that "Porter, developed in London in the early 18th century, is deeply intertwined with the city's brewing history, earning its name due to its popularity among porters working in the capital's markets and docks." (*BEER*, autumn).

Malt shovel for Mr Phelan! Oh and it should read the "famous Bermondsey Beer Mile", in the same article. Look up infamous in a dictionary if you don't believe me...

Dr Matthew Lee, Cambridge



I understand the circumstances, but it's such a pity that the winter edition of *BEER* magazine had to be published as an online version only.

Tim Hampson has done a great job as usual, finding some interesting features from knowledgeable writers.

However, despite being far from a technophobe, I find that I just don't take so much in from a screen as opposed to a paper copy, however hard I try.

Richard Adam via email

Issue 70, the winter edition, made me realise that *BEER* magazine has been about for a quarter of my life.

Paul Mudge, Stafford



I have to say that I am delighted to read that Leeds University still has an active real ale society.

I was secretary of the very first real ale society at Leeds in 1975. I set it up with my friend from school Glyn Armstrong who was the chair. We called it the LUU True Brew Society. I am pleased to see that somewhere along the line it changed its name to a less ambiguous real ale society!

I scurried off to my filing cabinet and dug out my membership card (above). We had great fun organising beer festivals plus pub and brewery tours. Things were so much different then, we felt like we were the last stand before the looming demise of real ale. Thank you for rekindling those memories. I hope you find this interesting.

I must go now to start preparing for a home brew day tomorrow. I hope it will be a decent Baltic porter ready for the autumn.

Paul Millard, Skyreholme, Wharfedale

I just love it when people sing in pubs

For beer sommelier Jane Peyton, an enduring passion for cask ale began with a cheeky half of Tetley Light Mild

I grew up in a small town called Skipton in

North Yorkshire. My first taste of beer would have been sneaking a mouthful of a great-aunt's brown ale at a funeral party. And when I was a bit older (but still at school), I used to go to the pub at lunchtime. The beer I drank was a cask beer called Tetley Light Mild. I loved the theatre of how it was poured and then presented with this lovely, big, creamy head. It was delicious – and that was where it all began.

During the first part of my career, I worked in PR, journalism and producing TV documentaries. It was all educational storytelling, and great preparation for my decision in 2008 to establish the School of Booze. I'd always thought I might become a teacher, and here I am – it's just that my subject is booze!

My original intention was to focus on corporate events. I really wanted to do beer tastings, so it was fortunate for me that 2008 coincided with the credit crunch. Because of the financial crisis, a lot of corporate clients didn't want to be seen popping Champagne corks, so I started getting business from companies that felt beer was more appropriate to the times.

Becoming a beer sommelier seemed like a natural next step and I qualified in 2012. I enjoyed the Beer Academy (Institute of Brewing and Distilling) course so much that later on I became the UK's first accredited cider sommelier. A lot of my activity since then has been about convincing people that beer is very much worthy of putting on the dining table and pairing with food.

Three styles I enjoy time and time again are porter, barleywine and a bitter IPA. I don't want a hazy pale ale or a New England IPA; it has to be what some people call a West Coast IPA, like a Brewster's IPA. But the last outstanding pint I had was in a beer café in Tunbridge Wells called Fuggles. I had this amazing American red ale called Level Up by the Elusive Brewing Company. It was absolutely gorgeous, lovely and bitter, with lots of Crystal malt.



"I really feel for pubs that are struggling – we need to support them"

My passion for beer led me to establish Beer Day Britain in 2015. It takes place every 15 June with thousands of people celebrating in pubs and on social media. This year it falls on a Monday. That's no bad thing because – more than ever – we need people to go to the pub on quiet days. So, come on everyone, get down to the pub on 15 June and have a pint – even if you can't get a cask beer or just want a non-alcoholic one. Let's celebrate together!

As well as writing several books about beer and cider, I also write fiction under the name of BA Summer. My novels feature a local called the Weasel – and it's the perfect pub. For me that means it should be independently owned with well-kept cask beer, knowledgeable and friendly staff, great food, free newspapers and interesting interiors with a variety of spaces. But most of all it needs character, soul and authenticity – you can feel that when you walk in. It should also have a piano. I just love it when people get together and sing in pubs.

I really feel for pubs that are struggling – we need to support them. As the Frenchman Hilaire Belloc wrote back in 1912: "When you have lost your inns, drown your empty selves, for you will have lost the last of England."

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Way forward for BEER revealed



KEEP UP TO DATE with all the campaigns, news and events at: wb.camra.org.uk



WHAT'S BREWING

SPRING 2026

CAMPAIGNS, NEWS AND VIEWS

Tap's unique title hat-trick

● Tamworth Tap takes unprecedented third win

CAMRA's National Pub of the Year 2025 crown has been won by the Tamworth Tap in Staffordshire, bagging the title an unprecedented three times.

Since the start of CAMRA's Pub of the Year competition in 1988, no local has ever won the Campaign's most prestigious award three times – until now.

Beating thousands of entries, the Tamworth Tap was judged on its atmosphere, decor, welcome, service, inclusivity, overall impression and, most importantly, top-quality cask beer, real cider and perry.

Home to Tamworth Brewing Company, the multi-award-winning pub

boasts a range of eight cask beers along with a wide selection of ciders, gins, wines and bottled beers.

The Tudor building has a 16th-century shop front and its historic courtyard beer terrace offers views of Tamworth's Norman castle. As part of the pub's popular CAMRA Corner, the Tap's stairs have been decorated to look like a display of *Good Beer Guides*, along with other Campaign titles.

The pub is the centre of its community, becoming a social hub by hosting a huge range of events from craft clubs, painting nights, and faith groups to sell-out tutored tasting sessions.

Owners George and Louise Greenaway (pictured far right) and their team support



local charities, including the Royal British Legion's Tamworth branch, and making Christmas hampers for St Editha's Parish Church. George and Louise were awarded the town's Freedom of the Borough in recognition of their commitment to the town.

George and Louise said: "A heartfelt thanks to every single person who has been part of our journey, from day one when we opened a pop-up in a shop window, with a makeshift counter and two barrels of beer. Thank you for supporting and believing in us."

Rethink demanded on new threat to pubs

CAMRA is calling on the government to rethink plans to weaken protections in the planning system in England, which it believes could lead to thousands of pubs being lost.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is consulting on plans to change the National

Planning Policy Framework. Existing rules mean councils have to protect all pubs, as they are considered vital community facilities.

Pubs are offered protections including the need for planning permission to be granted before a pub can be demolished or converted

into houses, shops or takeaways. But under the government's new plans, protections would only apply if a pub were the last one in the area.

The Campaign is warning that this could see thousands of pubs converted into flats, houses, shops or takeaways by greedy

developers even when local people want to save it as a community local.

CAMRA argues it doesn't make sense for the government to give help with business rates bills to stop closures and then change planning rules which could lead to more pubs being lost forever.

Essential changes made to magazine schedule

● BY CATHERINE TONRY
Campaigns and
Communications director

FOLLOWING the recent financial difficulties faced by CAMRA, the National Executive has taken the difficult decision to produce *BEER* twice a year in print and digital formats.

While this is a move from the current four editions, it will continue to feature the same high-quality content from award-winning authors, respected voices from the industry and CAMRA news in the *What's Brewing* section.

This is not a decision which has been taken lightly, and we know the membership will be disappointed. We fully appreciate our members enjoy receiving *BEER* in print which is why we took the decision to continue with two editions, rather than moving it all online, a route taken by many similar organisations.

We fully appreciate how valued *BEER* is, but this is part of safeguarding our future and is a significant saving for the Campaign, in the region of £190,000 a year. This will go a long way to ensure we survive and thrive, while we address the significant issues we faced last year.

With the current financial situation, we are



not in a position to print, post and fund writers four times a year. Postage and paper alone have soared in the last year, with more rises in the pipeline.

However, we will continue to produce high-quality *What's Brewing Online* content, provide branches with more articles for use in local magazines and look to ensure *BEER* continues to support our overarching campaigning aims with a focus on pubs, pints and people.

As part of the budget planning for 2026 onwards to ensure CAMRA's ongoing success, a range of areas were looked at to ensure sustainability.

As you may recall, we took the tough decisions last autumn to cancel national festivals, undertook a staff

restructure and a digital only version of *BEER*.

As with all CAMRA initiatives and benefits, this will be kept under review.

However, our main priority is ensuring the Campaign has a sustainable future. This will be reviewed once finances have stabilised further.

You can also change your preferences to receive *BEER* by email in the future, which will help the Campaign reduce posting costs further.

WHAT'S BREWING

SPRING 2026

MEMBERS' WEEKEND SUPPLEMENT

Stability after tough year

● BY ASH CORBETT-COLLINS
CAMRA chairman

I AM excited that we are heading to St Albans for Members' Weekend in 2026. It will always hold a special place for CAMRA, a city where our ambitious beginnings are firmly rooted and grew to where we are today. I would also like to thank the local organising committee for its hard work not only hosting us, but pulling out all the stops with the weekend-long City of Ale celebration,

CAMRA has been monumental in fighting back against the threats to real ale and the pubs and clubs that serve it. And this has all been built on the hard work and dedication of our volunteers. Without our branches campaigning at grass-roots level, running festivals, celebrating pubs, pints and people through awards and the *Good Beer Guide*, we would not be the organisation we are today.

Yet the last year has been one of the toughest we have faced financially. The National Executive acted swiftly, taking the difficult decisions to safeguard our future. I was open and honest with you about why these needed to happen.

We are now in a more stable position with the building blocks for recovery and growth firmly in place. In St Albans we will present our new strategy and approach that will



underpin all we do and as we look forward and work together to not only survive, but to thrive.

New initiatives have been launched such as free festival entry for members, our national committees are leading the way to improve the experience you have as a valued volunteer, our awards programme not only showcase pubs, pints and people, but provides vital campaigning opportunities, and we ensure quick and effective responses to emerging issues pubs face.

Yet pubs and clubs face uncertainty daily. National Insurance hikes, energy costs and the business rates debacle only make our jobs harder.

I sent a clear a message to government: "Short-term solutions are short sighted". We will continue to

campaign hard for wholesale reform and a better deal for pubs, across all four nations. In Northern Ireland we saw another shortsighted decision about the surrender principle, while business rates decisions impact across Wales and Scotland. The lack of understanding about how important pubs are in our communities is nothing short of astounding.

We are pushing hard to reverse the stranglehold global brewers have. We are challenging how independents are being stifled, while consumers are being robbed of choice. We want independent brewers to not only get a foot in the door, but to make sure that door is wide open.

Last year I said I wanted everyone to be proud of our Campaign and proud to be part of one of the most successful grassroots campaigning organisations in history. This is still my priority as both your chairman and as a local volunteer, for a stronger and successful future.

I would also like to thank my National Executive colleagues for their work and give thanks to those standing down this year. Your contribution, time and dedication are both appreciated and inspiring.

I look forward to catching up with you over the weekend, to talk and listen about our future and achieving this together, through our collective voices to achieve change.

MOTIONS

1 This Conference agrees to adopt the Policy Documents presented for adoption at Conference 2026, subject to any amendments to policy decided at this Conference.

National Executive

2 This Conference instructs the National Executive to prioritise motions for debate in the Members' Weekend schedule, and wherever possible all motions shall be adequately debated on the Saturday of Conference.

Bradford

3 This Conference instructs Conference Procedures Committee to amend section 6.1.5 of the Remit and Procedures to give, wherever feasible, higher precedence to motions, classified under sections 6.1.5.2 and 6.1.5.3, which have been submitted by two individual members or by regions or branches, over those submitted by National Committees and the National Executive.

Bradford

Members can now submit Emergency Motions and Amendments to motions on the Order Paper for consideration by Conference Procedures Committee. Amendments will only be accepted during debate at Conference in exceptional circumstances. Information on deadlines and how to submit Emergency Motions and deadlines in at camra.org.uk/members-weekend

4 This Conference instructs the National Executive to change the title of the National Pub of the Year to reflect the year that the award is presented, if that differs from the year that judging took place.

South Herts

5 This Conference instructs the National Executive to develop a financially sustainable business model for the printed version of *BEER* magazine, working with the editors of CAMRA's cost-neutral branch magazines.

South Herts

6 This Conference instructs the National Executive to produce bilingual membership application forms and other promotional materials for use in Wales.

Wales

7 This Conference instructs the National Executive to bring proposals to the 2027 Members' Weekend to restore the Great British Beer Festival at the earliest opportunity.

Roger Protz and Iain Loe

NOTICE OF CAMRA AGM 2026

Notice is given to all members of the Campaign for Real Ale Limited (Company No. 01270286) that the 2026 Annual General Meeting will be held at 10.30am on Saturday 18 April 2026 at the Alban Arena, Civic Centre, St Albans AL1 3LD.

The following Ordinary Resolutions will be put to the meeting:

1 To receive CAMRA's accounts for the accounting period to 30 November 2025 and the reports of the Directors and Auditors.

2 To re-appoint RSM as Auditors to include the preparation of CAMRA's accounts to 30 November 2026.

3 To authorise the Directors to fix the remuneration of the Auditors.

Election of the National Executive (Board of Directors)

The nomination period has closed, and more candidates have offered themselves for election than the three vacant places on the National Executive. In order to comply with our Articles of Association, an election will be held.

AGM notes

1 As Ordinary Resolutions, Resolutions 1 to 3 each require a simple majority of votes cast to be approved.

2 Voting will be by a poll (private ballot) taken at the AGM; there will be no show of hands on the resolutions.

3 Any member unable to attend the AGM may appoint the Chairman of the AGM as their proxy to vote on their behalf in respect of the resolutions. Proxy votes will be cast by the proxy in the poll.

4 Proxy votes can be confirmed either online via the Mi-Voice Services website: mi-vote.com using the voting code that will be provided by email, or by post using the

voting code sent to members. Postal proxy forms are available from the Company Secretary upon request. One proxy per non-attending member.

5 Any member wishing to amend their original online or postal proxy appointment may do so by written request, to the Company Secretary for postal votes, or to Mi-Voice for online proxy appointments, but must do so before 15 April 2026.

6 Members may raise questions on the resolutions at the AGM. Non-attending members may propose questions to the Company Secretary for consideration for inclusion at the AGM.

7 In respect of Ordinary Resolution 1, a summary of the accounts for the year to 30 November 2025 and the reports of the Directors and Auditors is published in the Spring edition of *BEER* magazine. The full Report and Accounts to 30 November 2025 and the current CAMRA Articles of Association can be viewed ahead of the AGM on CAMRA's website. Members may also ask to receive a full copy of the accounts by writing to the Company Secretary, CAMRA, 9 Finway, Dallow Road, Luton, LU1 1TR.

8 There will be two Special Resolutions to be voted on in the AGM. Details of these are in the voting insert and online.

Should you have any questions regarding the AGM please email the Company Secretary, anita.newlandsmith@camra.org.uk.

Ansh Corbett-Collins

**Chairman of the National Executive
February 2026**

**All information is correct at the time of going to press.
Latest information can be found on the CAMRA website.**

**CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE LIMITED
STRATEGIC REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 NOVEMBER 2025**

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

CAMRA is the independent campaigning voice of pub and club goers, encouraging real ale, cider and perry drinkers. We work to promote real ale, cider and perry and thriving pubs and clubs in every community. The Campaign organises its activities into strategic objectives as follows:

1. Secure the long-term future of real ale, real cider and real perry by increasing their quality, availability and popularity.
2. Promote and protect pubs and clubs as social centres and part of the UK's cultural heritage.
3. Increase recognition of the benefits of moderate social drinking.
4. Play a leading role in the provision of information, education and training to all those with an interest in beer, cider and perry of any type.
5. Develop products and services which promote the Campaign as widely as possible, grow and diversify the membership and activist base, and generate campaigning funds.
6. Develop and maintain the necessary ethos, governance, structure, capabilities and financial resources to deliver CAMRA's objectives.
7. Develop CAMRA's organisational systems, membership, infrastructure and staff to ensure financial and corporate sustainability.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

During 2025 CAMRA finalised the office and warehouse refurbishment and move to our new property in Luton, a new and exciting chapter for the Campaign that will see us bring the office and the warehouse onto one site. By owning our warehouse space, we now provide a better experience for our volunteers and festivals, while reducing rental costs. Following the financial situation that was announced to members, we are concentrating on getting back on track with a view to returning a small surplus and looking for small membership growth. Campaigning remains at the heart of all we do and this continues to be our main priority, working closely with our branches and regions, while lobbying government for change. A key priority is change to business rates and also supporting independent beers on the bar.

The Finance and General Purposes committee and the National Executive continue to scrutinise the costs, ensure tight controls during the year and constantly review and reforecast to ensure early identification of any concerns. Following a difficult financial situation in 2025 this is more important than ever and we will continue work to ensure financial sustainability and campaign viability. It is expected that 2026 will again prove to be a challenging year but cost savings were identified and implemented in 2025, including a reduction of staff. We are seeing festivals return, although there are some challenges for some branches with venues closing and rising costs. The online festival planner (FOCUS) has received good feedback from users and allows us a fuller live picture of our events. Campaigning and increasing member numbers are at the forefront of our events.

MEMBERS AND BRANCH NETWORK

The Campaign was hoping to see an increase in membership this year, however, with economic pressures continuing across the UK we are not seeing a return to post-Covid numbers, which other membership organisations are also experiencing. Member numbers have declined to a eight year low at year-end to 143,038, which is a 2.41 per cent decline from 146,570 at the end of November 2024. CAMRA has more than 220 branches throughout the UK, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Branch campaigning, including the organisation of local and regional beer festivals, is at the core of CAMRA's operational activity and remains crucial in the long-term to the organisation's continued success.

BUSINESS REVIEW

There have been many campaigning achievements in the period to 30 November 2025. The most notable of these were:

- Part of our budget campaigning in 2025 included a range of asks both in the run up to and after it. Our work with branches saw thousands of contacts made with MPs and a range of questions asked in the house about pubs and financial strain. A budget drop-in event saw around 40 MPs attend. We also attended All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group (APPG) events at the three main political conferences to raise our concerns on a range of strategic campaigning areas.
- A large part of our campaigning focused on fairer taxes, that would recognise and encourage the social benefits of consuming beer, cider and perry on licensed premises. Extending the difference between tax paid on draught beer and cider in the pub and that sold in off-licences and supermarkets, combined with a reduced VAT rate on beer and cider sold in the on-trade, CAMRA also called on Government to open

up the pub market to make it easier for independent beer and cider makers to see their products on the bar, supporting independent producers but creating consumer choice. Surveying found that 77 per cent of people support changes to give licensees the ability to serve independently brewed beer.

- We continued with our Handpump Hijack campaign which was in response to consumers being misled and Fresh Ale products served through a handpull, which could be seen as presented as cask beer.
- We campaigned for the duty charged and also a reduction in business rates. While the recent Government budget did not achieve this, we have campaigned hard in this area, while there has been a U-turn we will continue to push for a reform of business rates and a better deal for pubs. Work in devolved administration continues to campaign for change in similar areas, while we work hard in Northern Ireland to push for reform.
- Independent breweries were also considered with a government review on access to market which we are awaiting more information on. CAMRA will work closely with the Government to make more beers available and improve consumer choice.
- Work to support Belfast Beer Festival in November 2025 with campaigning activities took place, which included meetings with MLAs.
- Work to ensure the Scottish Government remains committed to the implementation of a statutory Pubs Code and Adjudicator in Scotland despite several judicial reviews; and made a strong representation for improvements as part of the second statutory Review of the Pubs Code and Adjudicator (England and Wales).
- Encouraged more people to drink more real ale, cider and perry: 50 per cent of drinkers surveyed in 2025 reported that they have tried cask beer, however, a decline compared to 57 per cent in 2017.
- We regularly meet with civil servants in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss working with government to develop new right-to-buy policies to make community ownership more accessible and help more groups across the UK save their pub.
- Worked to mobilise consumers to respond to the Scottish Government's plan for bans on alcohol sponsorship and promotion, helping to force a delay and rethink from Scottish Government ministers; and worked with industry colleagues to delay the Scottish Deposit Return Scheme to avoid a reduction in choice for consumers if small and independent breweries stopped selling into the Scottish market.
- Raised awareness of competition issues in the beer and pub market with relevant authorities. Through CAMRA's campaigning on taxation, regulation and competition policy; CAMRA tries to ensure that both the fiscal and legislative environment is beneficial for small brewers and cider makers, allowing pubs and social clubs to provide genuine choice at the bar for consumers.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Appropriate key performance indicators are measured and reviewed on a regular basis to enable the business to set its performance targets and monitor its performance against those targets. Management accounts are prepared on a monthly basis for comparison against budget and previous year's performance. Cash controls, debtors and creditors are monitored daily. Membership and trading indicators are reviewed continually along with other relevant operational monitoring.

Financial Returns

Total income for the year to 30 November 2025 was £9.44m (2024: £8.87m), an increase on the previous year by 6.4 per cent. Festival income was £5.56m (2024: £4.88m), an increase of 14 per cent. Membership income was £3.06m for the year (2024: £3.10m), a decrease of 1.4 per cent. Publishing, advertising and other trading income was £0.81m (2024: £0.89m). Total contribution in the year was £2.61m (2024: £2.88m) being 9.3 per cent down on the previous period.

The increased deficit for this year is due to a further decline in membership, the two national events making a deficit and, of course, the major refurbishment works at our new premises; difficult decisions were made during the year to stabilise the Campaign. Unfortunately, that meant cutting various office costs including making redundancies. We secured an overdraft with the bank that is secured against the new Luton site while the sale of Hatfield Road is ongoing and due to be finalised in March/April 2026. The difficult decisions made during 2025 will enable us to rebuild our reserves, and put the Campaign on a much better footing for the coming years.

Operating expenses for the year were £3.45m being 3.3 per cent up on the previous year. The increase resulted from increased campaigning and administrative costs. Campaign costs of £1.30m. (2024: £1.28m) were 2.4 per cent above previous year. Administration costs of £2.20m. (2024: £2.07m) were 3.9 per cent above previous year.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The provision for tax at year-end has seen a charge of £80.6k (2024: credit of £7.9k). The deficit after tax is (£871.0k) for the year (2024: deficit £262.8k).

As a result, at the end of the financial period the Campaign held reserves of £2.84m (2024: £3.71m). Fixed assets including tangible and intangible assets are £4.98m (2024: £3.38m), the increase is due the major refurbishment works. Fixed asset investments are £0.06m (2024: £0.8m). Net current liabilities are £0.23m which includes Cash and Cash Equivalents of £0.15m (2024: £1.89m).

The Directors have reviewed the latest available financial position. They have projected forward for more than 12 months beyond the end of this reported financial year, considering the potential liabilities and income. They have considered what actions they would take should the financial projections not be as forecast. Noting the strength of the balance sheet, the likely trading scenarios and the controls in place these accounts have been prepared on a Going Concern Basis.

Non-Financial Performance

A range of non-financial key performance indicators are measured and reviewed on a regular basis by the Directors, to provide visibility of the organisation's performance from a non-financial perspective. The most important of these are:

1. Monitoring the numbers of net pub closures: CAMRA continues to be aware of the challenges faced by pub operators. High and increasing business rates and energy costs are an important factor in the viability of pub businesses and have a knock-on effect for consumers as prices at the bar increase. This has been further impacted by the 2025 UK budget which saw the removal of business rates reductions. While the promise of "lower business rates for pubs" means in reality pubs facing higher costs, in conjunction with the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) new rateable values for pubs in England being published. We continue to work with governments, parliamentarians and cross-party groups to push for fundamental change to business rates systems across the UK to ensure they are fairer for pub businesses. Our live database on pub closures giving us up to date figures to aid our campaigning work.

2. Securing stronger pub protection policies across the UK: CAMRA continues to work at a national and local level to ensure greater planning protection for pubs, and to provide advice on how to save your local pub to community campaigners across the UK. Part of our campaigning in 2025 included a range of asks including pub protection and securing meetings with ministers. Branches support in lobbying has been fundamental in getting our trusted voice heard. We also attended APPG events at the three main political conferences to raise our concerns on a range of strategic campaigning areas. Regular updates and guidance documents are provided for campaigners and sent to local authority planning departments. We continue to push a strengthened planning system in England to stop pubs being illegally converted or demolished – and for them to be rebuilt brick by brick if necessary.

We continue to lobby for similar protections in Wales and for the closure of planning loopholes in Scotland to ensure similar rights for communities to have their say and save their locals.

3. Encouraging more people to try and drink more real ale, cider and perry and support pubs: 50 per cent of drinkers surveyed in 2025 reported that they have tried cask beer. Cask ale sales in pubs continue to be squeezed. CAMRA will continue to raise awareness of different beer styles and to encourage people to try cask beer through its festivals, awards, publications, and digital media. We have continued our campaigning activities on Cider Month, Mild Month and a focus on perry. Our Handpump Hijack campaign – in response to consumers being misled and Fresh Ale products being presented as cask beer – continues with branches reporting these to us, to strengthen our case. We continue to push Trading Standards in this area.

We campaign for fairer taxes, to recognise and encourage the social benefits of consuming beer, cider and perry on licensed premises. Extending the difference between tax paid on draught beer and cider in the pub and that sold in off-licences and supermarkets, combined with a reduced VAT rate on beer and cider sold in the on-trade. The price of a pint of beer remains a key concern for consumers, with a mere 12 per cent saying they consider a pint affordable. CAMRA's manifesto also calls on Government to open up the pub market to make it easier for independent beer and cider makers to see their products on the bar, supporting independent producers but creating consumer choice. Surveying found that 77 per cent of people support changes to give licensees the ability to serve independently brewed beer.

4. Developing resources to help to campaign to represent consumers in the debate about the linkage between the consumption of alcoholic drinks, health and wellbeing: We continue to signpost to educational content. However, our approach to this will be developed to be more volunteer focussed following a staff

restructure, reduction in funding and changes to our approach. We have an extensive library we will continue to promote across our digital channels. The CAMRA website features a range of new features and is proving successful with our members and offering different levels of access. The website is our main digital product and has been well-received with a raft of innovative features bringing everything into one place.

5. Developing relevant policies and resources to ensure CAMRA is a growing organisation that is able to attract new members:

The embedding of the recommendations of the Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Review has continued this year with national committees taking responsibility for key areas to develop and work on. Training is available to volunteers on key areas and CAMRA has further developed strong crisis communication processes in order to respond well to inclusion, diversity and equality issues. We continue to update and improve our consumer facing campaigns, to ensure branches have new and updated content to help with their local campaigns and recruitment. Dedicated members of staff supported recruitment at festivals as part of the CAMRA Village at key events across the year, to support increasing membership from recruitment at CAMRA festivals, which will continue into 2026 and beyond. The free festival initiative has now been launched which will help drive recruitment and attendance our festivals.

PRINCIPAL RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

A comprehensive risk register is maintained and reviewed by the senior staff team, the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the National Executive. Risks are managed actively and mitigation strategies implemented to restrict our levels of risk. Key strategic risk areas are shown below.

1. Reputational

CAMRA's reputation as an independent campaigning body is essential to the Campaign's continued success. Strict guidelines are in place for branches and to govern national campaigns. Strong financial controls are maintained and reviewed annually and systems are in place to ensure compliance with Health and Safety, Data Protection and other legal requirements. High standards of governance are aimed for and governance processes are subject to continuous review. The governance and performance of the organisation are subject to continuous review.

2. Organisational

In order to support the growing campaign, it is essential to attract, retain and develop key staff and volunteers. A review into disciplinary processes and how to make them better for members is currently underway. Staff surveys are conducted regularly and their findings acted upon, salary and benefits structure is reviewed on a periodic basis but we do have a pay freeze for 2026. We have developed clearer communication of volunteering opportunities, and this work will continue in 2026, alongside the continued enhancement of resources available to volunteers to help them in their work for the Campaign. A staff restructure took place in 2025 which was an unsettling time and means there is less resource available.

3. Financial

CAMRA faced a tough financial situation in 2025 with difficult decisions taken to ensure the organisation's future. This involved reducing costs and ensuring resources have been carefully managed to ensure a stable financial business model centrally, equipped to support the branch structure and encourage participation of members. The Finance and General Purposes Committee and the National Executive ensure there is a consistency of approach and careful management of the Campaigns resources. Measures have been taken to control costs to maintain a stable central function. It is anticipated that changes that have been implemented will continue to be successful and see CAMRA have a stable future without drawing significantly on the available reserves to fund operational capabilities.

4. Events, notably festivals

The success of local, regional and national beer festivals is crucial to raise the awareness of cask ale, cider and perry, to recruit members and to help fund the Campaign. It is anticipated that CAMRA will continue to strive to ensure the safety of members and the public at all events. Key risks to CAMRA being able to run such events are recruiting committed, knowledgeable volunteers, obtaining suitable premises, meeting compliance issues and ensuring future festivals remain relevant to potential customers. However, the decision has been taken to no longer run either national festival.

We have confidence that in 2026 and beyond, we can further enhance the Campaign and be a proactive voice for the championing of cask ale, ciders and perries and the promotion and protection of the nation's pubs and clubs.

Approved and signed by order of the National Executive.

A Corbett-Collins Chairman 14 February 2026

Give a gift membership to the beer lover in your life!

Beers are best shared with others. So, treat someone you like to a CAMRA gift membership and bring them along to the pubs and festivals that matter.

Set the membership to start on someone's special day!

They'll receive £30 of beer vouchers, discounts on real ale, free entry to 100+ beer festivals around the UK and more.

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camra.org.uk/gift-membership



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to all 100+
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festivals



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FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE LIMITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 NOVEMBER 2025

Company Registration Number: 01270286

A short form of the accounts for the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd for the year ended 30 November 2025 are shown on these pages, along with a diagram illustrating the main sources of funding and items of operating expenditure. We have chosen to use this simpler presentation in *BEER* this year, rather than the usual full replication of the statutory accounts and notes, in order to provide an easier to read version of the main financial statements for members. The full accounts, including all the required notes and reports can be found at <https://camra.org.uk/members-weekend/notice-of-agm/2026> or by contacting the CAMRA Office, 9 Finway, Dallow Road, Luton LU1 1TR
Tel: 0330 153 9924 accounts@camra.org.uk

STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 NOVEMBER 2025

	2025		2024	
	£	£	£	£
INCOME	9,438,637		8,868,464	
Cost of Sales	(6,830,115)		(5,993,008)	
CONTRIBUTION	2,608,522		2,875,456	
Operating expenses	(3,454,276)		(3,342,347)	
	(845,754)		(466,891)	
Other operating income	12,875		14,997	
OPERATING (DEFICIT)	(832,879)		(451,894)	
Income from fixed asset investments	81		81	
Interest receivable and similar income	22,848		68,949	
	22,929		69,030	
Fair value gains on Investments	19,659		112,214	
(DEFICIT) ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	(790,290)		(270,650)	
Tax (liability)/credit on ordinary activities	(80,590)		7,869	
(DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	(870,880)		(262,781)	

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 NOVEMBER 2025

	2025			2024		
	Retained Earnings Reserve £	Fair Value Reserve £	2025 Totals £	Retained Earnings Reserve £	Fair Value Reserve £	2024 Totals £
At 1 December (Deficit) for the year and total comprehensive income	3,637,823	73,555	3,711,378	4,012,818	(38,658)	3,974,159
Transfer to Fair Value Reserve	(870,880)	-	(870,880)	(262,781)	-	(262,781)
Disposal of Fixed Asset Investments	(19,659)	19,659	-	(112,214)	112,214	-
	93,214	(93,214)	-	-	-	-
At 30 November	2,840,498	-	2,840,497	3,637,823	73,555	3,711,379

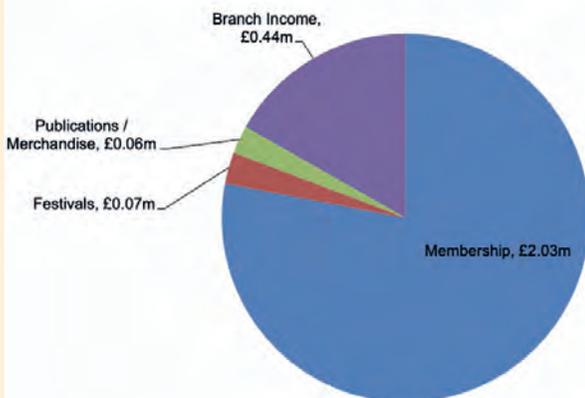
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2025

	2025		2024	
	£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS				
Tangible assets		4,978,953		3,380,939
Intangible assets		-		948
Investments		10,944		835,056
		4,989,897		4,216,943
CURRENT ASSETS				
Stocks		177,361		179,565
Debtors		386,074		474,641
Cash and cash equivalents		636,228		1,895,474
		1,199,663		2,549,680
CREDITORS: Amounts falling due within one year:		(3,019,070)		(2,777,149)
NET CURRENT ASSETS		(1,819,407)		(227,469)
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		3,170,490		3,989,474
CREDITORS: Amounts falling due in more than one year		(248,081)		(251,440)
PROVISIONS FOR LIABILITIES		(81,912)		(26,655)
NET ASSETS		2,840,498		3,711,379
RESERVES				
Fair Value Reserve		-		73,555
Retained Earnings Reserve		2,840,498		3,637,823
		2,840,498		3,711,379

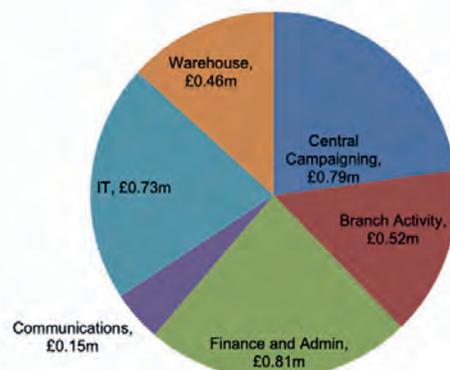
The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Board of Directors on 14 February 2026 and were signed on its behalf by: A Corbett-Collins – Director, I Hill – Director.

ANALYSIS OF INCOME SOURCES AND OPERATING COSTS

Contribution £2.61m



Operating Costs £3.45m





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DEPARTS: 2nd July & 10th Sept 2026

5 DAYS



TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- * Enjoy a tour and tasting at Thatcher's Cider Farm
- * Visit Cheddar Gorge and step inside the pre-historic caves
- * Sample the world famous 'Cheddar Cheese'
- * Visit the world's first great luxury liner, Brunel's SS Great Britain
- * Explore Bristol's Floating Harbour by boat
- * Ride behind steam on the East Somerset Railway
- * Step aboard supersonic Concorde at Aerospace Bristol
- * Discover the history of the Clifton Suspension Bridge on a guided tour



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Fares From **£955**

DEPARTS: 15th June & 10th August 2026

6 DAYS



TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- * Sample Welsh whisky at the award-winning Penderyn Distillery
- * 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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