

BEEER



ISSUE 72 / AUTUMN 2026



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From the editor



● In the dedicated *What's Brewing* section you will find some of the latest news of CAMRA's campaigns, award-winning pubs and the latest brews.

● For up-to-date news about beer and brewing do follow the CAMRA news pages on the dedicated website. The news section is updated daily.

There is much in this issue.

Our lead feature, written by CAMRA veteran campaigner Tim Webb, offers some of our thoughts on how the beer market can be revitalised and rebuilt.

Of course, cask has a problem, coming from the loss of its natural habitat – the pub. But that should not make us give up on it.

We are all familiar with the problems facing pubs today and the impact these are having.

However, while it is true to say we are losing pubs at the rate of two or three a day, the more sobering statistic is that this has been the case continuously over 40 years. When CAMRA was founded, the UK's 80,000 or so pubs supplied 85 per cent of the nation's beer. The 40,000 that remain in business supply only 35 per cent of the total – which has itself halved.

In this issue, we explore pubs and breweries where beer sales are heading in the right direction – up.

Yes, it is possible to make pubs busy again.

Tourism is one of the keys to growing beer sales, be it in Sheffield or Düsseldorf, and Jacopo Mazzeo suggests pubs and breweries can learn much from the wine industry. As fans of cask and pubs we must not live in the past – there is no longer a pub on every street corner. And

people rarely seem to pop out to the pub when they finish work.

Planning is already well underway for the Spring 2027 issue of *BEER*. Roger Protz is writing the lead feature on the huge contribution writer and author Michael Jackson has made to formidable beer journalism. He knew a lot about whisky too.

Some of you may have a memory of Michael Jackson's work. If so, then do let the editorial team know. We'd love to hear from you.

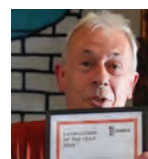
Also please don't hold back on topics you like to see in *BEER*. Like a good conversation over a pint or two in a pub, your contribution is invaluable.

Tim Hampson

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



Will Hawkes visits thriving pubs that sell lots of cask



Dave Pickersgill reports on the rise of Sheffield Beer Week



John Westlake travels to Düsseldorf to try a top-fermented beer style that is still going strong despite lager's popularity in Germany

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

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THE BUSINESS OF BEER

Tim Webb gives thoughtful insight into the future of cask

Whenever suggesting to someone that a large part of the way they approach a subject is wrong, be prepared for a hard sell.

For example, how do you explain to those who head up the UK's largest breweries that the business model they have followed religiously for the last 70 years is responsible for bringing their industry to its knees, and that some of it may be illegal?

Alternatively, how do you persuade government finance experts that by applying the highest rates of beer tax in any of Europe's major brewing nations, less money is raised for the economy than if they were lower?

Or convince a lifelong cask supporter that if beer is to be saved, they need to help independent



breweries get more of their keg beers into pubs, and canned ones into supermarkets?

Fortunately, I have always relished a seemingly impossible challenge.

A CAMRA first

In June 2026, for the first time, CAMRA published a report on the state of the UK brewing industry, seen from the consumer perspective. The *Beer in the UK* report was the culmination of five years' work, seeking out the real problems that threaten the future of cask, and better-tasting beers more generally, in a country where the brewing industry has lost its way. Beer production and sales in the UK have halved in the last four decades,

despite overall alcohol consumption being the same now as it was in the 1980s. This impressive fall in beer's share of the alcoholic beverage market began with the rise of wine in the 1970s, continued with the growth of supermarkets as Britain's favourite off-licences and is now cemented by the exclusion of the breweries that make the most interesting beers, from a market that is badly distorted in favour of the multinational corporations that control it.

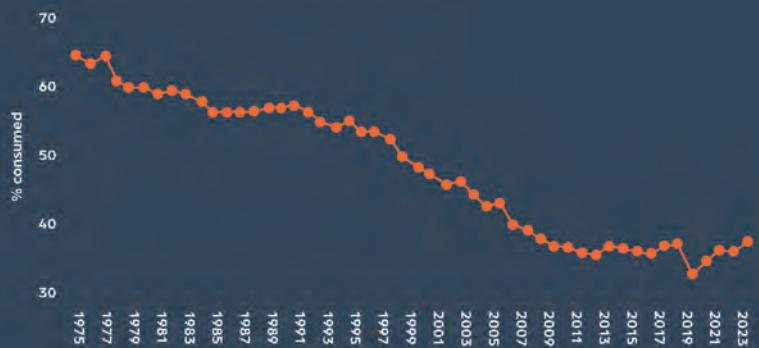
All this comes against the background of persistent misrepresentation of beer brands to consumers, and a uniquely punitive system of beer taxation. It should be said this is a very British cock-up – elaborate, nonsensical and not something we like to talk about in public. CAMRA's *Beer in the UK* report concluded that if UK brewing is to dig itself out of its current mess, the methods used to exclude independent brewers from the beer market need to be formally reviewed by the Competition and Markets Authority; the routine deception of customers around beer provenance must end; and the whole purpose of beer taxation needs to be rethought and revised.

How wine beat beer

In the late 1950s, the leaders of the UK brewing industry decided, either in cahoots or by following each other's tails, to make beer a commodity. Big brands would be created that were simple, reliable and cheap to make, distinguished only by their advertising straplines and ditties, rather than flavour or style. These brands would be targeted at the blokes who drank in the many tied and subsidised pubs and clubs those breweries controlled. 🐱

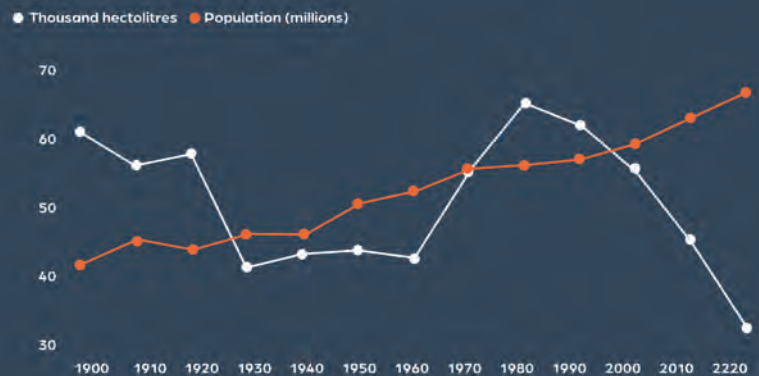
'It was the culmination of five years' work, seeking out the real problems that threaten the future of cask'

Beer as a proportion of alcohol consumed



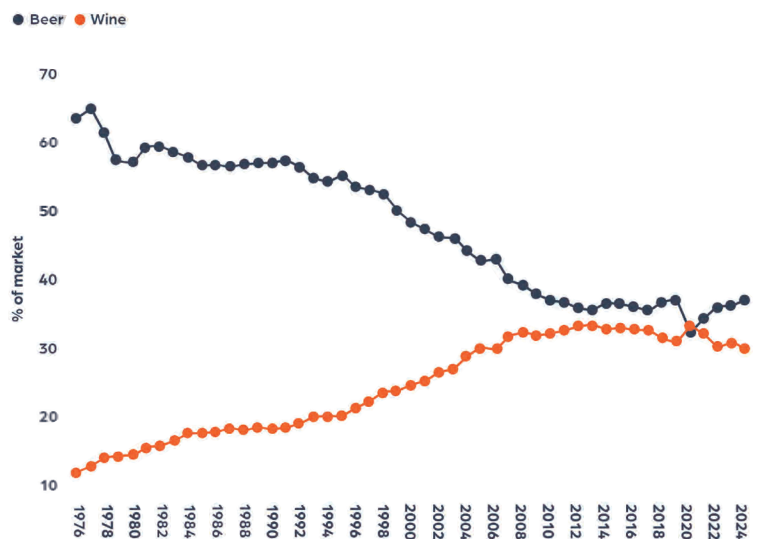
Sources: HMRC, National Statistics, BBPA

Beer production vs population



Sources: BBPA and ONS

Beer and wine percentages of the market

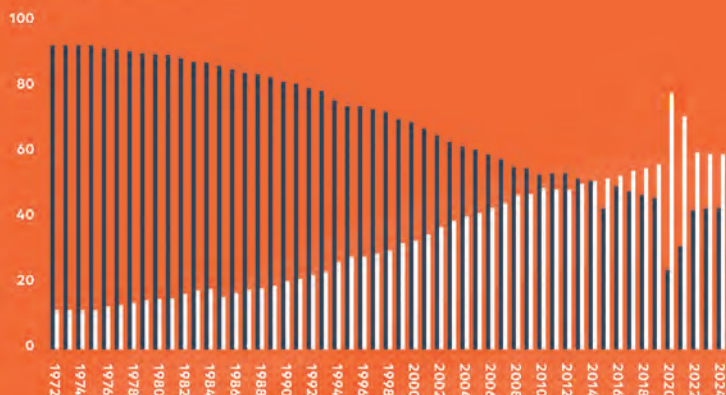


Sources: HMRC, National Statistics, BBPA

On vs Off Sales (UK)

● % On Trade ● % Off Trade

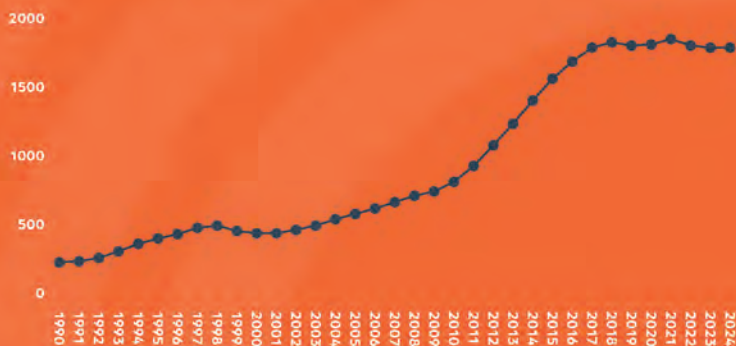
1972



Source: BBPA

In parallel with beer's loss of its share of the UK alcoholic beverage market ⁽¹⁾, sales of beer have shifted from the social setting of the pub to drinking at home ⁽¹⁴⁾.

UK breweries in production



Sources: HMRC, National Statistics, BBPA

Of the 3,730 breweries known to have opened since 1980, fewer than 1,700 are still in production ⁽¹⁶⁾. Despite the high number of start-ups, these small independent firms share only around 7% of the total UK beer market.



'Wine was targeted at the aspiring post-war generation, who were busy spawning baby boomers'

Around the same time, the leaders of Europe's wine industries decided to do the opposite. They improved production quality, but then showcased different grape varieties and regional styles, celebrating individuality. Wine was targeted at the aspiring postwar generation, who were busy spawning the baby boomers and learning to share a glass or two on Mediterranean holidays. Wine was to be their sophisticated but affordable treat.

UK wine sales increased sevenfold in the 1970s, as emerging national chains of supermarkets stacked ever-longer shelves with discounted bottles. They trebled again in the 1980s, at the expense of beer, as wine drinkers leaned towards those with fuller flavours, and beer drinkers learned to love reliable versions of mundanity, from a tin.

Change of ownership

Until 1990, UK brewing was dominated by six large British-owned brewery companies. By 2008, all had been taken over by four rapidly growing, foreign-owned multinationals – AB InBev, Heineken, Carlsberg and Molson Coors – which went on to down other well-known names, like Marston's, Banks's and Young's.

It was not the foreign ownership of these companies that mattered. It was the absence of affinity with, or connection to, British brewing traditions, such as cask, and the styles of beer that originated in the UK and were influencing 'craft' brewing around the world. Pale ales and IPAs, porters and stouts, oak-aged ales, barleywines and others were left with no major advocates or expert producers in their home country.

Today, around 85 per cent of our brewing industry is foreign owned.

Technically, the largest British brewer is Guinness, owned by London-based drinks group Diageo, but seen by all as Irish. The UK owns no other significant brewers overseas. Greene King is Chinese, Fuller's Japanese, Tennent's Irish, BrewDog American and the old Wells brewery in Bedford is operated by the Barcelona, Spain-based Damm group.

Provenance problems

British brewing has developed a second regrettable tendency, which is the routine misrepresentation of a beer's provenance – what it is, where it comes from, and from whom.

Most of the UK's 50 biggest-selling lager brands are portrayed as imported, using foreign languages and images to market them. In practice, most are brewed in the UK, with a special ingredient added for the British market – extra water. This is also added to many of the lagers that are genuinely imported, some shrinking from 5 per cent to just 3.4 per cent ABV, to slide them under the lower duty threshold, making them doubly cheaper to produce.

There are also many examples of carefully imaged 'local' beers, shipped from giant breweries at the other end of the country, and 'heritage' or 'legacy' beers, badged to long-closed breweries and bearing little resemblance to the original. In most other countries, the term 'craft beer' is restricted to those that come from independent breweries, while in the UK seven of our top 10 'craft' brands come from multinational or industrial brewers. And, of course, we now have keg beers served by handpump.

In a potentially complex area, CAMRA's simple ask is that every label should state where a beer is brewed, and which company owns the brand – by convention or, if needs be, legislation.

'The unwritten rule, to put uninspiring brands ahead of the rest, still dominates'



Distorted beer market

Where things become really sneaky is in the ways independent breweries are excluded from the beer market.

Back in 1989, the number of pubs a brewery company could own was cut, briefly, to a maximum of 2,000, with most of these entitled to stock one 'guest' draught beer. This move failed to improve competition because huge new pub chains were spun off from the big brewery estates, almost immediately adopting the same approach, of stocking dull, big-brand beers, usually acquired at substantial discount.

The unwritten rule, to put uninspiring brands ahead of the rest, still dominates, with pub-chain bosses blaming cheap supermarket prices for their massive fall in beer sales. They would be wiser to question whether selling the same brands as supermarkets, at twice the price, was ever going to be a good business model.

While it is easy to see pubcos as

'Many independent pubs are just as tied to the same failing beer styles, by a different method'

authors of their own fate, why should the same issue commonly affect the 40 per cent or so of pubs described by the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) as "independent and free of tie". After all, they can buy whichever beers they want, surely? Except, of course, most cannot.

Restricted freedom to choose

Many independent pubs are just as tied to the same failing beer styles, by a different method. To reduce overheads and make life easier, many pub operators sign contracts to hand over care of their draught lines to specialist line-servicing companies, for a keen price, provided they only stock certain beers.

The most successful line-servicing company is Innserve Ltd, which provides and manages beer and

'It is not uncommon for a pub wishing to serve a local cask beer to have to pay a premium for the privilege'

soft drink supply systems to around 90,000 premises in the UK. It is owned mostly by Heineken and Carlsberg. Yes, both of them. Molson Coors offers a similar service.

Of course, some pubs go out of their way to stock beers that are not found in supermarkets – like cask and the more interesting beer styles made mostly by independent brewers. However, even these have a further hurdle to overcome. The 'independent' wholesalers on which many rely for regular beer deliveries are often subject to strong incentives to fill their depots with beers from guess who?

It is not uncommon for a pub wishing to serve a local cask beer to have to pay a premium, often hefty, for the privilege. However, in an issue that challenges CAMRA's own priorities, if independent brewers are to survive and thrive, they also need to have a regular presence on the pub's keg lines. Ironically perhaps, it is this that is more likely to save its cask range.

Beer tax and the UK economy

The UK was once the most important brewing nation on the planet. The historic spread of pale ale, porter, stout and even IPA, across the world, can trace its origins to when Britannia ruled the waves and her brewers' exports defined much of beer's diaspora.

Today, Britain's beer exports are piddly, always outstripped by imports, and add little to the economy. This is because most UK beer is brands made elsewhere by the same companies.

Brewers do not contribute much to economic growth through their profits either, because they don't make many. AB InBev alone lost £200m on its UK operation

between 2023 and 2026. Brewing's major contribution to UK PLC comes from the two main taxes on beer – Excise Duty and VAT – but with production halved, so is HM Treasury's income.

For most of its time in the European Union, the UK gathered more duty from beer than the rest of the EU put together. Among the other nine major European brewing nations – Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain – only Ireland taxes beer anywhere close to the UK level, though with its median wage now 25 per cent higher than Britain, it stings 25 per cent less.

That said, socioeconomics is not all about money. Independent brewers create jobs because their operations are more labour-intensive – they connect with their local communities; and they pay their taxes in the UK. The multinationals cut jobs to become more efficient; see local communities mainly as marketing opportunities; and pay their taxes where their accountants tell them. Also, 98 per cent of wine is imported.

Where does this leave cask?

Qualitative data from when CAMRA was founded, back in 1971, suggests roughly 21–22 per cent of British beer ended up in a cask. In 2025, BBPA reckoned only 1.1 per cent of beer was cask, a number also cited by market analysts Kantar. However, this does not gel with data from the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates, which has independent brewers supplying roughly 7 per cent of UK beer, of which just over half is cask. We suspect that the BBPA figure refers to the other 93 per cent of the market, and that the real total for cask is around 4.5 per cent – still

'In 2025, half the beer drunk in the UK was bought in supermarkets, businesses well-versed in discounts'

shocking, but four times less bad than the official data suggests.

The biggest threat to cask comes from the failure of UK brewing, and its leaders' cluelessness about how to stop it. Their belief systems tell them that to make a business work you must keep costs down, control the route to market, concentrate on the image of your product and charge what the market will stand. The idea that the liquid must be enticing does not compute.

The unacknowledged truth is that industrial lager will never entice enough to save British brewing, however clever the marketing. If CAMRA is to save cask, and better-tasting beer more generally, it must take on these bigger issues, explaining to politicians that a dead duck industry is harmful to the UK economy, and needs improving.

Pubs problem

Of course, cask has a second problem, coming from the loss of its natural habitat – the pub.

We are all familiar with the problems facing pubs today and the impact these are having. However, while it is true to say we are losing pubs at the rate of two or three a day, the more sobering stat is that this has been the case continuously for more than 40 years. When CAMRA was founded, the UK's 80,000 or so pubs supplied 85 per cent of the nation's beer. The 40,000 that remain supply only 35 per cent of the total – which has itself halved.

In 2025, just over half the beer drunk in the UK was bought in supermarkets, businesses well-versed in discounted supplies. However, while admitting awareness of consumer surveys that show 80 per cent of beer drinkers want the choice of authentic beers from independent breweries, the big supermarket groups are unsure how to respond. Big breweries can discount deep – smaller breweries can't.



'Last time around, Prohibition resulted in the creation of the world's first organised crime syndicates'

I admire it hugely, but for a couple of weak spots. It is lousy at weighing things in the balance and, like all fundamentalists, is a little bit nuts. Last time around, Prohibition resulted in the creation of the world's first organised crime syndicates, and assisted the prolongation of the Great Depression. It doesn't mention that bit.

The lobby is plausible, not least because it makes a lot of valid points. Alcohol can be dangerous to health and safety, and restrictions on its use are a good idea, provided they are thought through, and keep people on side. However, alcohol used sensibly is a great social lubricant, and can be a key ingredient to creating welcoming 'third spaces' – places where people interact that are neither home nor work – like a well-run pub. The neo-Prohibitionists' refusal to acknowledge the usefulness of units by which to measure the social benefits of alcohol is unhelpful, but is essential to their claim that beer is always harmful and should therefore be banned. This is a shame, given the influence they have in the World Health Organization and elsewhere.

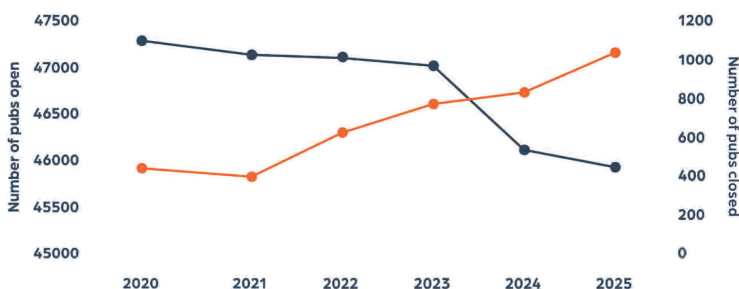
What has this to do with the rest of the story, you may ask. It is that in a country that failed to spot the decline of beer until 50 years in, and which still has no plan to revive the industry, we need to be far better prepared for the next wave of people who are unaware that a large proportion of the way they approach their subject is wrong.



Tim Webb is chair of the Beer and Cider Campaigns Committee, which plans CAMRA's beer strategy. To date, he has written 18 books about beer in the UK and around the world, and was lead author of CAMRA's *Beer in the UK*.

Pubs open vs pub closure

● Number of pubs open ● Number of pubs closures



Since 2000, the price of beer in pubs has risen roughly in line with the Retail Price Index, while in supermarkets the average rise has been less than a quarter of that. Larger brewers may or may not use pub sales consciously to subsidise their supermarket sales, but either way, it is hard to see the price differential being bridged soon.

At the risk of being cancelled by CAMRA, I suggest a more interesting approach would be for us to engage actively with the supermarket groups nationally, on behalf of beer consumers, to encourage them to stock a far wider range of independent

beers. That way, even the least-imaginative pub operator might see the point of serving similar beers on draught, likely at a much smaller price differential.

Coming over the horizon

The biggest threat to beer for over a century is still at the mustering stage. Masquerading as health campaigners, and superb at grabbing the attention of healthcare professionals, the neo-Prohibitionist lobby, coordinated by Movendi.com, is well-funded, tactically brilliant and utterly dedicated to a single cause – eradicating the production and consumption of alcohol.

WET-LED LEGENDS

Will Hawkes talks to operators bullish about the future of the traditional pub

The Roebuck, an attractive village pub in Herefordshire, could easily have become the poster boy for modern pubs' woes. Once a popular local, this Grade II-listed, 17th-century inn closed in 2023, apparently short of custom, and then – to add insult to injury – failed to sell at auction, despite £30,000 knocked off the price. It looked doomed, like so many of Britain's pubs.

But it wasn't. In May this year, the pub was bought by Black Country Ales, a brewery based 26 miles away in the West Midlands. By the time you read this, a full refurb should be well underway or even complete, removing the kitchen and extension to return it to being a wet-led, community-focused pub. A licensee will be in place. The Roebuck, all being well, will be back.

A cheering story, but not an unusual one. Black Country Ales has an estate of 58 pubs – quite a lot for a modern brewery, but its passion for traditional inns is increasingly common.

At a time when the financial pressures on pubs have never been greater – from increased employment costs to business rates to raw materials – small breweries around Britain are helping to keep classic wet-led pubs alive.

This is as true in Margate as it is in Dudley, in Leeds as in Nottingham. The traditional British pub is fighting on, and independent breweries are playing a key role.



CLAIRE WOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

Steve Holt in the Victoria and Commercial

Victorian dreams

Steve Holt spent the first eight years of his life in a pub, the Bay Horse in East Cowick, Yorkshire (it's now Shapla, an Indian restaurant). Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that his career has led him in that direction, through his brewery, Kirkstall in Leeds, and the pubs it runs (not to mention his remarkable collection of brewery memorabilia).

At the end of last year, Steve and Ed Mason (owner of Leeds pub Whitelock's and co-owner of London brewery Five Points) collaborated to reopen the Victoria and Commercial, one of Leeds' most important pubs.

'The traditional British pub is fighting on, and independent breweries are playing a key role'



Around £600,000 was spent on refurbishing the pub, which had been closed since 2020, and it really shows. There's an opulently detailed central foyer (complete with mosaic floor, uncovered during the restoration) leading to a variety of rooms. The largest includes a long main bar, faced with a series of opulent booths; there's etched glass and carved wood, there's

magnificent tiling. It's a real delight. "It's one of those pubs that a lot of local people will have a story about," said Steve. "They either met their partner there, or went there with their friends – it's been part of so many people's lives over the years."

After the pub closed, the bedrooms upstairs – unused for many years, according to Steve – were converted into student

'There's etched glass and carved wood, there's magnificent tiling. It's a real delight'

accommodation. It was only when this was completed that Steve and Ed were able to get into the pub, two years after having agreed to take it on. "We were quite shocked," said Steve. "They'd be using the pub to 📺

store materials so quite a lot of the original features had been damaged.

"We had a restoration project on our hands, but it's such a beautiful pub that, actually, it was a pleasure."

It looks and feels like an Edwardian gin palace but, according to Steve, much has changed since that era, courtesy of a 1980s revamp and the recent work. The latter saw the toilets and kitchen relocated, and much of the decor updated. "People say 'oh the pub hasn't changed' but it's changed quite a lot!" he said.

Steve is no stranger to heritage pubs, having run the Cardigan Arms, a Victorian classic on Kirkstall Road, since 2017. It has a central foyer with four rooms running off it, full of comfortable bench seating and elegant touches.

"I think [with these heritage pubs] there's a style and comfort [to them]," he said. "With a good pub you feel at home as soon as you walk in. A good traditional pub is now becoming a rarity, which has led to a revival of interest in that tradition and history – not just in terms of pubs, but in what people are drinking too."



Devout Floc

The grandness of the Cardigan Arms feels a long way from the Lifeboat in Margate. This charming street-corner pub is very different. Once a wine bar, then a sort of micropub, now a more traditional pub with an untraditional diversity of beer catering to Margate's population.

Floc, a Canterbury brewery known for its hazy modern beer, is responsible for the current iteration. "Both [founder] Ross [Shields] and I spend a lot of time in pubs because we like pubs, but they don't sell our beer," said head of operations Eddie Hollis. "The Lifeboat was the perfect solution – we didn't want our first step into the world of pubs to be somewhere massive."

Much of modern beer culture, in Britain and elsewhere, has aped American craft-beer culture, but the

"It's a small pub, a cohesive environment, people talk to each other"

Lifeboat is very different. Dark wood panels, banquettes, cast-iron Britannia pub tables bought from salvage. Cask beer too.

All this is an acknowledgment that this is what customers want now, according to Eddie. "We get a really varied crowd. People from their early 20s right through to their 70s and beyond. It's not people you'll see at our taproom, or who are huge beer enthusiasts: most of the time I'm there, I don't know anyone. It's a small pub, a cohesive environment, people talk to each other."

Has this experience led to a desire for more pubs? "I'm only just recovering from this one!" Eddie said. "But yes, the dream would be more pubs of a similar ilk – traditional, maybe a bit larger, more outside seating. For a brewery of our size, with the market the way it is, it's a sensible way of doing things."



Graham Manwaring
in the Craven Arms

FABIO DE PAOLA

Country classics

Black Country Ales MD Graham Manwaring would agree with that. His company has been pursuing this business model for more than 30 years – since 1992, in fact, when founder and chairman Angus McMeeking bought the Lawford Arms in Rugby. With the addition of the Roebuck it now runs 58 pubs, a significant stable in a part of the world where wet-led pubs still rule. And beyond now too.



Over the past few years, it has begun looking for pubs outside its patch – and has found them, from Leicester to Coventry to Herefordshire. All these pubs share characteristics – traditional decor, from William Morris wallpaper to fixed seating and a plush carpet; low-level music; and lots of cask beer, both Black Country's and other breweries'. Half the company's sales are cask beer.

A typical Black Country Ales pub, in terms of decor, is the Pretty Bricks, a

delightful back-street venue in Walsall. There are three rooms, the aforementioned William Morris wallpaper, handpumps aplenty and a host of quirky period details – including a series of pictures on the wall commemorating the founding of Walsall CAMRA here in 1972 (in one image, a young man brandishes a banner featuring the irresistible slogan "Ban Bubbly Beer").

What makes the Black Country Ales stable particularly interesting,

"We tend to buy pubs that others have decided are not going to work"

perhaps, is that they seek out pubs others might avoid. "We tend to buy pubs that are a bit tired, that others have decided are not going to work," Manwaring said. "[For a pub to work] we need a lot of people of a certain age who drink ale. The pub needs a good history – maybe it's an old tired pub that nobody's invested in, maybe it's been a good real ale pub in the past. That's what we're looking for."

The Roebuck fits the bill, although it's different in that it's a village pub: fewer chimney pots as he puts it. But Manwaring believes the demand will be there. "There aren't many traditional pubs around there. It's a drinking pub, with simple pub food – cobs, pork pies – and we think people will come from further afield."

Is there a renaissance going on for traditional pubs? "I think so," he said. "People don't want to go into pubs where people are sitting eating – they want to have a conversation."

This is the key element, he said. "A good pub is a place where people can get together, where they can have conversations, where they can meet other people."

Exactly the sort of thing that, we've been told, people no longer want – but perhaps the world has changed. Covid-19 and the financial crunch have shifted people's priorities, with the result that a night out in a traditional pub – whether that be a Leeds gin palace or a mellow Margate street-corner boozer – looks more appealing than for many years. Maybe the Roebuck will turn out to be a poster boy for the revival of traditional pubs, not their demise.



Will Hawkes is the author of *London Beer City*, covering the capital's pubs and breweries.

Artistic licence

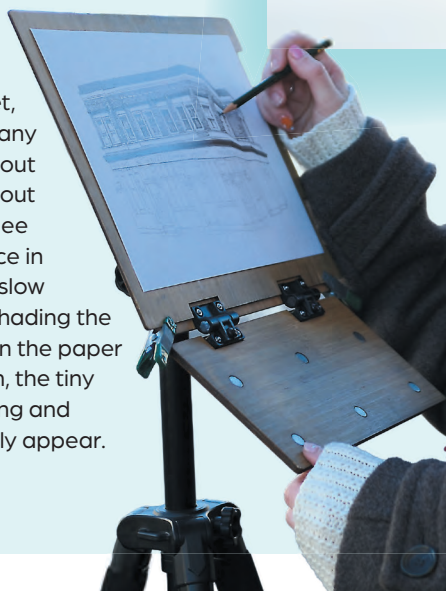
David Jesudason meets the artist whose ambition is to paint or draw every London pub

"That's amazing. Superb. Have you got an Instagram? It's really nice that you're doing the Birkbeck: it's a great old pub."

I've braved the cold to interview illustrator and soon-to-be author Lydia Wood during her quest to draw every London pub. The comment is from one of the many passers-by who stop in their tracks, notice the drawing board and effuse about Lydia's work in progress. Even when just a few lines have been lightly shaded, it's clear something special is happening.

"There's a guy called Bill who's been back about four times with different pubs for me to draw," Lydia tells me while working on her illustration, "and he's been telling me about the history of the Kray twins. My knowledge of the pub is quite blind but I'll learn it from the people."

And this learning process is simply magical. On a frosty afternoon in Leyton, east London, in a quiet residential street, any negativity about any aspect I may have about pub culture is rubbed out and I feel childlike to see such artistry take place in front of my eyes. The slow dance of her pencil. Shading the gaps. Like a mirage on the paper dappled by winter sun, the tiny intricate details of tiling and brickwork enchantingly appear.





Lydia Wood. Instagram @lydiawooddrawings

Maybe I was naive to expect anything different. After all, pubs are beautiful. But they sometimes need this charm coaxed out of them. After a few hours standing in Lydia's position, I find myself noticing the exterior's hidden colours, the peeling black paint revealing splashes of green underneath; the digestive biscuit ceramics; the glint in the peppermint-coloured stained glass windows.

Lydia tells me she loves drawing brickwork but she's also starting to fall hard for the ephemeral parts of the day.

"The fleeting moments like a shadow, a punter outside having a cigarette or even a pigeon that's been sitting on a roof a bit too long to ignore," she says. "I would not be able [to get these] from a photograph in my studio."

In fact, despite being in the middle of a weekday, there's always life (and death) around us. A horse-drawn funeral procession marching. Scaffolders' poles chiming. The bouncing of battery-powered food delivery bikes.

I start to see how Lydia's work breathes and pulses despite being a drawing of a building. A pub, as

we all know, isn't just bricks and her work deftly mirrors this with one flat page somehow containing so much depth of humanity, and all this from monochrome.

"I've done my outline and people come up and ask: 'Are you going to paint it?'. I say 'no' and always feel like there's an air of disappointment," she laughs. "The reason I stuck with pencil for this project is that it looks like it could come from another era as well – maybe you would have to look a bit closer to see a Sky Sports banner."

Drawing all the pubs in London was an idea Lydia had after her post-school-hours art teaching work for children was halted by the pandemic. It soon became a TikTok and Instagram phenomenon but there's no calculated cynicism here, no spreadsheet – it's a people-led approach. "I'm intuitive: I go by suggestion. I just like drawing pubs."

The aforementioned phenomenon isn't just about social media follower numbers or even traffic, although Lydia's craft gains a lot of this, but is about the vastness of reach outside of digital screens. She has a huge cohort of followers abroad, such as in the United States, where her work fits

'Drawing all the pubs in London was an idea Lydia had after her post-school-hours art teaching work for children was halted by the pandemic'

their romanticised – maybe even askew – views of what pubs are.

"Some of them haven't even been to the UK," she admits. "Others have come and are besotted by the pubs. But that's one of the reasons I also want to draw the undercelebrated pubs or the ones not known about in history books."

Inside the Birkbeck, though, the pints of cask Maldon Gold, by Mighty Oak Brewery, show why forgotten back-street boozers are so special and deserve wider attention. A fitting reward to Lydia's gifts; the golden ales on the brown tables framed in the winter glow are almost as eye-catching as her drawings.

Lydia isn't the only artist that draws pubs and, speaking to Frank Morris, I see how their stories chime. Frank also started illustrating pubs in lockdown and his first drawing was the Assembly House in Kentish Town,

north London with the leitmotif of wowed passers-by surprising him.

"Pubs are so important to local communities," he tells me, "and as artists we're naturally drawn to these spaces. I drew the Assembly House in three days in two pages of my sketchbook and that was where the project began."

"All the pubs were closed and the experience of passer-bys telling me how much they missed pubs and how much they liked my drawing gave me the energy to continue [the project] as long as I've been doing it."

Like Lydia, the project he mentions is to draw every pub, but this time in Bristol where he now lives. Since he moved to the south-west city three years ago, the affresco art has continued – each work takes six hours to complete – and so has the connections he's made with members of the public who walk past. This includes people telling him their marriages began in the pub or even the time they had an illicit lock-in.

The pub may be still-life but its surroundings aren't, which can create unique difficulties when you're in situ for half a day drawing. And as many of the photographers who have worked for this magazine will attest, the worst blot on the landscape is a sudden parked car or delivery van. "I've got to get creative and draw what's around it," Frank says.

When it comes to the types of pubs Frank likes drawing, it's not just the listed ornate Victorian ones, such as the Assembly House, but some of the more idiosyncratic Bristol pubs.

"There are a lot of beautiful, grungy, graffiti-covered pubs," he tells me, "which are completely different and that kind of poses its own challenges: to get the perspective of the pub but also the graffiti on the outside."

'The pub may be still-life but its surroundings aren't, which can create unique difficulties when you're in situ for half a day drawing'



Frank Morris. Instagram @frank_morris_art



Melissa Roskell.
Instagram @artbymellymel

"I never saw that in London and it makes Bristol pubs beautiful in their own way."

Back in London, I realised my local, the Shirker's Rest, has been drawn by two artists – Lydia and Melissa Roskell, who owns the nearby Greenwich gallery. After speaking to her, I also worked out that she is drawing pubs in south-east London with which she has a personal connection.

Melissa grew up in Blackheath and is very fond of one of those aforementioned grungy-type pubs,

which happens to be just round the corner from the Shirker's, in New Cross. Decades ago, Squeeze would play at the Amersham Arms and she felt embedded in this local, but thrilling music scene.

However, when she recently painted the pub, the next day they changed the exterior's colour, so she went back and both versions are displayed in her gallery. "I prefer [the first one] as it reminds me of my youth because [the paintwork] is peeling," she says about the pub that was renowned for its grottness. "We didn't care," she declares.

Melissa uses watercolours and micron pen, as well as techniques such as gold highlights, which really make certain features of the pub stand out. Looking at the gold finish on her paintings makes the viewer remember how regal some pubs appear in the right light.

Her paintings are more landscape than Frank's or Lydia's, often capturing the pubs' surroundings. The Hare and Billet in Blackheath is the perfect example of this where people sit outside by the pond (with the same name) and look at the view with a pint in their hand.

"The pub is part of the heath," she says, "and it's not just in its own right. Whereas a lot of other pubs that's what makes the street but the Hare and Billet is part of the whole heath."

She remembers visiting Greenwich's Richard I, when it was called the Tolly, and she loves painting pubs that have huge meaning to her or ones such as the Green Goddess that have become woven into the fabric of the local community.

"I took a photo [of the Green Goddess]," Melissa says, "then sat at home and painted it. The next day I drove past and all the cherry blossoms had come out so I had to go back."

And it's this meticulous level of detail that all three artists have in common. It's what makes their work compelling and prescient. But, most of all, it gives pubs the platform they deserve because we all cherish them come rain, shine or – as when I met Lydia – freezing cold.

Sometimes we take their beauty for granted but when you see the paintings or drawings it's like falling in love all over again.



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



COMING TO A COMPLETE ALT

John Westlake travels to Düsseldorf to try several versions of alt — a top-fermented beer style that's still going strong despite lager's popularity



Düsseldorf is the capital of

North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous state of Germany. It is the second-largest city in the state after Cologne and the sixth-largest in Germany with a population of more than 600,000.

Most of Düsseldorf lies on the right bank of the Rhine and the city has grown together with Neuss, Krefeld,

Hilden, Langenfeld, Ratingen, Meerbusch, Dormagen, Erkrath, Solingen and Monheim. Düsseldorf is the central city of Rhine-Ruhr, the second biggest metropolitan region by GDP in the European Union, that stretches from Bonn via Cologne and Düsseldorf to the Ruhr.

And the locals love their beer.

In 1838, Johann Matthias



Main: You're spoilt for choice in Düsseldorf city centre where our writer enjoys a Schlüssel alt

Schumacher purchased a small brewery on Citadellstrasse in the Rhineland city of Düsseldorf. His son took over the business in 1902 and 17 years later added the brewery run by his brother on Osterstrasse, to where all brewing operations were eventually transferred in 1925.

In those early days before the invention of effective cooling equipment, beers were made more easily using top-fermenting yeasts, which work best at notably higher temperatures than bottom-fermenting lager versions. But even as the paler lager beers gained much greater popularity across Europe, the good folk of Düsseldorf stayed faithful to their darker, spicier altbeers that Herr Schumacher first created. Traditionally brewed to a strength ranging from 4.7-5.5 per cent ABV and served at table in 25cl glasses by aproned waiters, who will score a mark for each glassful on the accompanying beermat and refills will continue to arrive until said beermat is placed atop the glass to signal no more is required!

Straddling the mighty Rhine,

Düsseldorf is a city that deserves making the effort to visit and the old town, or Altstadt, with its wealth of bars, beer halls and altbier brewhouses, is a particularly historic and rewarding area to explore.

It is here at Bolkerstrasse 44,



now somewhat ignominiously sandwiched between McDonald's and KFC, that the Schumacher family also opened Im Goldenen Kessel (Golden Cauldron), which remains to this day a wonderfully traditional and capacious beer hall offering typically hearty German fare, all to be washed down with glasses of Schumacher Alt.

A feature in this city is the large number of high tables to be seen outside many of the beer halls such as here, where locals prefer to stand to drink and chat to friends or, indeed, complete strangers, and the same will be seen outside the attractive facade of Zum Schlüssel (At the Key), diagonally across the pedestrianised street.

Originally three adjoining brewhouses, since 1850 it has been the home of Schlüssel Alt, another delicious and typically copper-hued, well-balanced brew, which can be enjoyed standing up outside or comfortably seated in the spacious, quarry-tiled interior.

'A feature in this city is the high tables outside many of the beer halls, where locals prefer to stand to drink'



Clockwise from above:
Uerige; Brauerei Kürzer;
Uerige; Goldenen Kessel;
Schumacher Alt

Not far away, on the corner of Berger Strasse and Rheinstrasse, stands the imposing home of Uerige Alt, the turret of the building topped by a suitably tankard-wielding weathervane and a real joy of a watering hole. The beer is reputedly one of the hoppiest produced in Germany and can be savoured in a warren of characterful rooms full of scrubbed-top tables, delightful stained glass windows and much dark wood panelling.



Established in 1862, the brand derives from the first landlord who was famously grumpy or "uerige" in German, and the name simply stuck!

Brauerei Kürzer on Kurze Strasse is certainly something of a contrast. Located in what is obviously an old building, this much more recent alt brewpub exhibits a very rustic feel, with basic seating arranged around a central servery amid plenty of exposed brickwork and metal ducting. Nevertheless, the brewing vessels can be clearly seen at the rear of the premises and what comes

'The beer is reputedly one of the hoppiest produced in Germany and is savoured in a warren of rooms'



out is a darker than usual beer with a tasty malt body tempered by spicy, slightly fruity hop notes.

Meanwhile, Brauerei Im Füchschen (Little Fox) will be found nearby at 28 Rateringer Strasse and faithfully rebuilt following its destruction during WW2. Founded in 1848 and easily spotted by its long, red-and-white banner flying from on high, it is another traditionally furnished, classic altbier beer hall, with some interesting prints and tilework about the walls. Once again the beer is well crafted and top notch, with a long, dry, hoppy finish and can be enjoyed here outside, sitting down for a change!

Brauerei Frankenheim was founded in 1873 and produces an excellent crisp altbier and, although it does not operate a city-centre beer hall, the beer can be sampled in its bar-cum-restaurant in the Kasematten, an entire row of such



Above and below: Alter Bahnhof is on the other side of the river from the centre and can be accessed via tram



'An expansive and leafy beer garden to the rear offers a nice alternative to vertical alfresco drinking'

establishments set into the lower level of the promenade overlooking the Rhine. A great place to while away a few hours on a sunny day!

A more recent and final addition to the local altbier scene is the Brauhaus Alter Bahnhof (Old Station Brewery) at Belsenplatz in the district of Oberkassel on the other side of the river, which can easily be reached via a short tram ride. When it started in 2011, the beer initially became known as Goulash Alt in honour of the founder's nickname, but following

a more recent change of ownership, it has been rechristened Belsen Alt and a very fine drop it is too, with a powerful, spicy hop presence. The gleaming copper brewing vessels can be inspected inside the comfortable and almost cosy beer hall, which also boasts a tempting menu of German specialities, while an

expansive and leafy beer garden to the rear offers a nice alternative to vertical alfresco drinking.

Finally, bars around the Altstadt can also be found advertising Schlösser Alt, which seems to have a slightly sweeter and less characterful palate. The brewery was founded in the heart of Düsseldorf in 1873, but sadly closed in 2002, with production transferred to the Radeberger in Dortmund, itself now part of the Oetker Group. One cannot help but feel the beer might have retained a more distinctive flavour if brewing had remained in its home city.



John Westlake is an award-winning member of the British Guild of Beer Writers and a founder member of Nottingham branch.

Robinsons defies the doomsters

Pubs and breweries may be closing, but the Stockport family brewer has bucked the trend, producing record sales and profits. It's investing heavily in its tied estate and has spent £8m on a new brewery. And sales of cask beer are outperforming the market, as **Roger Protz** reports

The numbers are impressive. For the first time in its long history, the Stockport family brewery founded in 1838 notched up annual sales of more than £100m in its last full year, with operating profit up £8.6m.

The global lager producers that dominate British brewing say there's falling demand for cask beer. Yet Robinsons' sales of cask increased by 5 per cent in 2025 and account for 38 per cent of production.

The success comes on the back of a move in 2025 to a new site in Bradbury costing £8.4m, leaving the old and much-loved Unicorn brewery in the centre of Stockport. Robinsons has had a packaging centre in Bradbury since 1976 and it was the ideal site for a new brewery.

Oliver Robinson, joint MD with cousin William, said the move was part of a strategic review in 2020. In 2012 a new brewhouse was built at the Unicorn but Covid lockdowns and changes to the industry forced a major overhaul of the business.

The review followed a decision in 2019 to sell the free-trade business.

"There'd been a drop in packaged beer sales and there was a lot of competition from the national

brewers," Oliver said. Beer for supermarkets and other retailers accounted for a large proportion of beer production but profits were low and even marginal as a result of the deep discounts demanded.

In spite of the loss of the free-trade business, the new Bradbury plant can produce an impressive 30,000 barrels a year, 10,000 more than the Unicorn. And it's a modern brewery designed to combat climate change.

"Carbon intensity has been cut," Oliver said. "There's been a 13 per cent reduction in the use of electricity, gas use is also down and less water is used. Total energy costs are down 12 per cent.

"As alcohol consumption is falling, we're able to make small-run brews and we can use lager yeast as well as ale yeast. We've evolved keg beers as well as cask as younger drinkers want something different.

"But, we're bucking the trend with cask. Cask is still our passion."

That commitment extends to supporting and sponsoring CAMRA's Stockport Beer Festival.

Sales of cask are five times the industry average. Oliver said the



William and Oliver Robinson, joint managing directors of Robinsons



success of his cask brands is down to consistency of delivery in pubs as well as the quality of the beers.

When he joined the brewery in 1998 he had, as his induction, to visit every pub in the estate.

"I had to check cellar conditions and beer-serving temperatures," he said. "There was a lot of inconsistency and it took 10 years to turn this around. When a publican owned the dispense equipment we took it over and, where necessary, upgraded the lines.

"We invested in line cleaning and cellar management. Our dray men visit all our pubs and report back on the quality they find. As a result of all this activity, we're now serving great cask ales."

Oliver manages the brewing side while William oversees the 245 pubs. They represent the sixth generation of the family to run the company.

In common with the neighbouring Manchester brewers, Robinsons' roots are in the cotton trade of the 19th century on which the region's wealth was built. The consumption of beer was prodigious at the time, with so many parched throats to lubricate. In 1859 an average of 22 gallons of beer per person was drunk every year – that's almost half a pint a day for every man, woman and child.

The Unicorn started life as an inn where beer was brewed. It came into the hands of the Robinson family in 1826 and it was Frederic Robinson who built the success of the business. He moved from a brewpub to the fully-fledged Unicorn brewery and also built an estate of tied houses.

Times and beers may have changed at Robinsons but an ale first brewed in 1899 remains one of its signature brews. In that year head brewer Alfred Munton launched a strong ale called Old Tom with a



redoubtable strength of 8.5 per cent ABV. Munton drew the image of a cat on the label and it's thought to be the face of the brewery feline whose job was to deter rodents from gnawing their way into sacks of malt.

Old Tom – which won the Strong Ale category in the Champion Beer of Britain competition in 1990 – is still on sale in draught and bottled versions. It's been joined by an unlikely modern beer that has boosted Robinsons' fortunes and underscored the need to build a bigger plant. The beer is Trooper (4.8 per cent). It was launched in 2013 and was the result of the Iron Maiden rock group asking the brewery to consider making a beer for them.

Lead singer Bruce Dickinson is a beer lover. He lives in Chiswick, West London, and drinks in a local Fuller's pub. He approached several brewers who made trial brews for him. He chose Robinsons after making a



'It's been joined by an unlikely modern beer that has boosted Robinsons' fortunes and underscored the need to build a bigger plant'

request for them to "use more hops".

"The demand for the beer was enormous," Oliver said. "Iron Maiden has 16m followers on social media and we're now exporting beer to 50 countries."

The beer is enjoyed at Iron Maiden concerts as far from Stockport as Brazil, and Trooper has been joined in export markets by Old Tom. The brand leader for the home market is Unicorn Best Bitter (4.2 per cent) that pays homage to the brewery's history and old site but it's a thoroughly modern pale ale.



It's followed by Dizzy Blonde (3.8 per cent), a golden ale with a controversial past. When it was launched in 2018 pump clips and labels showed a woman in a skimpy negligee. In the age of #MeToo and the increasing demand for women's rights, the image didn't go down well.

Robinsons moved quickly and the image has been redrawn to follow the "nose-art" design used on American planes in World War Two.

Trooper is in third place, followed by Cumbria Way (4.1 per cent), sold mainly in Lake District pubs once

owned by Hartley's of Ulverston, bought in 1982. The takeover and eventual closure of Hartley's in 1991 was controversial and created bad relations between Robinsons and local CAMRA branches but the dispute has been put behind them and relations are now cordial.

Cwrw'r Ddraig Aur/Golden Dragon Beer (4.1 per cent) is sold in Robinsons' pubs in Wales.

The pub estate today covers Stockport and Greater Manchester, along with North Wales and Anglesey, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and as far south as Stoke-on-Trent.

Against the dismal trend of pub closures, Robinsons' outlets are performing well. A few poor-performing pubs have been sold but new outlets are being bought and

"The government promised to help business but they've done anything but"

Robinsons is investing heavily in the estate, to the tune of £12m a year.

Of the 245 pubs, 32 are managed and eight are described as partnerships – joint ventures between publicans and the brewery. Wet-led pubs are doing well and the family is convinced outlets of all sizes, and types have a sound future.

There's one downside to this story of success. Oliver doesn't hold back when he talks about government's role where hospitality is concerned.

"The government promised to help business but they've done anything but. They've created additional tax burdens on pubs."

He ticks off the problems: business rates, energy costs, VAT, National Insurance and Minimum Wage increases that all add up to extra millions in tax a year.

He thinks the government – which he calls incompetent – doesn't understand the important role that brewing and pubs play in this country and their vital contribution to local communities and to jobs.

But there's still a lot to be cheerful about at Bradbury. The new brewery produces a strong range of cask beers, including many seasonals, as well as craft ales and lager.

For the first time in its history, Robinsons has taken on executives from outside the family, including finance director Tony Smith. But the family is still firmly in charge.

"We're keeping the brewery in good family hands. The seventh generation is coming through," Oliver said. They include Sara Robinson, who is on the board of directors, with Paul, John and Cordelia Robinson also playing key roles in the business.

"And no doubt at some stage they will add the eighth generation to work at the brewery."

Cask beer tourism: untapped potential

Jacopo Mazzeo looks abroad to see how the UK could effectively tap into the growing potential of food and drink tourism through structured beer trails

Enotourism – a niche of the tourism industry centred on visiting vineyards and wineries – has surged over the past decade. This sector is valued at nearly £81bn worldwide which is comparable in size to the global media streaming market (the likes of Netflix, Amazon Prime and Disney+). Enotourism has become such a profitable and dynamic branch of the global wine sector that some regions have made it a cornerstone of their business strategy.

Sunny Provence, in Southern France, has successfully maximised its reputation as a holiday spot by developing sophisticated hospitality offerings. Meanwhile, Ningxia – a remote desert region in North Central China – is rapidly transforming into a fully-fledged wine tourism destination with the same confidence, determination and level of investment that the country is pumping into AI and electric vehicles.

The enotourism boom brings countless benefits to those involved, whether directly or indirectly. It creates jobs, boosts local economies and promotes a more responsible model of travel while encouraging the preservation of cultural heritage and natural landscapes. Of course, producers profit from it as well, with tastings, tours, experiences, accommodation and hospitality all providing a lucrative source of revenues. And, at a time when wine is becoming an increasingly hard sell, strong footfall at the cellar door helps ensure steady bottle sales too.

Violante Gardini Cinelli Colombini, a Tuscan winemaker and the president

of Italy's Wine Tourism Movement, argues that sales to visitors now account for around 14 per cent of Italian wineries' total revenue, an especially important share for smaller producers, which often face limited market access and struggle to compete with larger players.



'Sunny Provence, in Southern France, has successfully maximised its reputation as a holiday spot by developing sophisticated hospitality offerings'

The reasons behind the sector's growing success are multiple, but one decisive factor is often the presence of well-structured routes. Managed by local councils or consortia of producers, these ensure that the offer is comprehensive, benefits the entire region, is well maintained, remains relevant over time, and is integrated into the area's broader touristic offer.

But while the wine industry is undeniably a frontrunner in gastronomy-led tourism, many other foods and drinks are now successfully tapping into the same trend, from

cheese to whisky. This is because the drivers of enotourism's prosperity aren't strictly wine-related: travellers are drawn more to its experiential appeal, the human connection behind the product, and its ties to the land.

Beer tourism, however, is still struggling to gain similar traction, at least in Britain, despite cask beer ticking nearly all the boxes of an ideal candidate for food-and-drink-led holidaying, with its strong heritage, craftsmanship and high cultural and historical value. This is not to say British beer tourism is entirely non-existent. Breweries of all kinds do welcome visitors with many offering informal or more structured tours and tastings.

There are also tour operators offering brewery or pub-focused private tours. The Ale Trail Company, for instance, runs bus-based brewery and pub tours in Shropshire and Oxfordshire, with more locations on the way. As private ventures, however, these tours differ greatly from well-defined, integrated trails that span entire regions and are managed by public bodies. They don't deliver the same benefits to the wider industry and local communities, nor do they carry the same broad public appeal. Initiatives of this kind are almost entirely absent in Britain.

A rare example of a structured, publicly managed beer route is the Ales of the Trail, developed a few years ago by the North Downs Way branch of Britain's National Trails. When active, it allowed hikers to visit breweries along the North Downs





Top and bottom:
Coordinated, multi-faceted
offering from all stakeholders is
key to Žatec Czechia's appeal
Left: Gigondas, Provence

Way and collect stamps in a special beer passport each time they sampled a brew made specifically for the project. The initiative was short-lived and has long been discontinued. According to Peter Morris, who is responsible for the maintenance and enhancement of the North Downs Way National Trail, the project proved extremely

'The trails allow travellers to visit breweries and traditional Brabant taverns while exploring the region's cultural and natural heritage'

challenging to sustain: liaising with the breweries was far more labour-intensive than anticipated and a lack of industry expertise within his team ultimately forced him to abandon it.

Other historical beer-producing regions in Europe have managed to tap more effectively into the potential of beer tourism. Managed by the Czech Republic's tourism board, Visit Czechia, the Krkonoše Beer Trail is 35km long and runs through the Krkonoše Mountains National Park near the border with Poland, connecting gastronomy with nature. It links four breweries, which

travellers can visit while attempting to hike the country's highest peak, the Sněžka mountain. Those who manage to sample beers at all the breweries are rewarded with a small gift at the final stop.

Magdaléna Škapová, spokesperson for the local tourism board that directly manages the trail, explained why it succeeds in attracting a broad audience and promoting Czech beer beyond the niche of enthusiasts: "The trail connects local microbreweries and gives them visibility, strengthening their brands," she said. "It brings beer culture into the context of tourism, supporting regional gastronomy and the Krkonoše brewing tradition."

Belgium's Flanders offers numerous elaborate beer trails too, many linking breweries with historical sites such as castles and monasteries, or through cycling routes. In the province of Flemish Brabant in particular, home to the renowned Pajottenland region, several tourist routes either focus exclusively on beer or feature it as a key element of a broader theme. The trails allow travellers to visit breweries and traditional Brabant taverns while exploring the region's cultural and natural heritage.



They are highly comprehensive, each providing useful details such as the percentage of paved roads, elevation, difficulty, rest areas, public transport links, weather forecast and searchable maps. They are also fully integrated into Brabant's broader cultural and natural landscape, thus presenting beer as an integral part of both the local culture and environment and – crucially – appealing to a wide range of visitors rather than just beer fans.

One route, for instance, guides cyclists through landscapes once immortalised by Flemish Renaissance master Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Along the way, replicas of his paintings help visitors recognise the scenery and some surviving buildings, while also highlighting how these lands have historically supported grain and hop cultivation.

Producing and developing well-structured routes is no small feat: it

'Producing and developing well-structured routes is no small feat: it requires careful planning and coordination among all stakeholders'



UNREAL VISUAL SRO/VISIT CZECHIA



Clockwise from main:
Grimbergen brewery;
lambic at Mort Subite;
Czechia beer tasting

'With beer tourism thriving in Czechia and Belgium, there is clearly plenty of untapped potential for the sector to grow in Britain as well'



too. Meanwhile, CAMRA branches can provide valuable support to councils and tourism boards. Existing hiking, cycling, boating and other recreational trails present a ready-made framework on which to build cohesive trails that link producers along a unified route, guided by a thread that places breweries, pubs and other beer-related businesses within their broader social, cultural and historical context.

requires careful planning and coordination among all stakeholders. "The first dedicated beer cycling routes in Flemish Brabant were created in the mid-2000s," explained Robin Dekelver of Visit Flemish Brabant. "Their development required close cooperation between us, local governments, breweries (both large and artisanal), and hospitality businesses. We had to map out the routes, install information boards, create digital maps and launch marketing campaigns to raise awareness among the public."

For the development of Czechia's Krkonoše Beer Trail, an additional challenge involved creating a competition leaflet to help visitors track brewery visits, securing rewards such as bottle openers and bandanas plus coordinating with businesses to organise prize draws like overnight stays and other gifts.

Yet, developing the trails is only the first step towards ensuring their success. Sustaining them requires ongoing coordination with participating breweries and other partners to keep everyone aligned

and satisfied, which can be challenging due to constantly evolving business needs. Equally demanding are the continuous efforts to produce marketing and other supporting materials, secure funding, maintain public interest and attract new visitors. "This can be achieved by updating rewards, refreshing promotion and reaching beyond beer enthusiasts," said Magdaléna. "There are also discussions about expanding the trail to encourage repeat visits with new beers and routes."

With beer tourism thriving in Czechia and Belgium, there is clearly plenty of untapped potential for the sector to grow in Britain as well. The involvement of councils and public institutions is critical, but both breweries and enthusiasts must play a central role too. Producers with sufficient investment capacity can move beyond the taproom, expanding offerings with full-scale restaurants, for instance, to attract a wider range of visitors, not just those seeking a pint. For those in appealing locations, accommodation presents a potentially lucrative opportunity

Beer trails would provide a boost to local economies, delivering tangible benefits to communities and supporting the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage. To brewers and publicans, they would ensure a steadier flow of visitors and attract a more diverse audience. By promoting a direct connection between them and producers, beer tourism could significantly contribute to a renewed, deeper appreciation of cask's immense cultural and historical value and highlight the vital role of the pub within this tradition. In turn, this would help revitalise our cask beer heritage and, ultimately, prove crucial in supporting its recognition as an intangible cultural heritage.

"These routes are vital for keeping our rich beer culture alive and visible," said Robin. "They connect visitors with stories, traditions and artisanal techniques, thus ensuring knowledge of beer as intangible heritage is passed on."



Jacopo Mazzeo is a journalist, photographer, consultant and former sommelier. Find out more at jacopomazzeo.com.

Wye Valley Butty Bach

Jeff Evans discovers how a one-off for the Cardiff Beer Festival in 1998 became Wye Valley's flagship brew and one of Britain's best-loved cask ales

Splott. Perhaps because of its

wonderfully onomatopoeic name, it's an area of Cardiff that even outsiders vaguely know. At one time it was home to a major steelworks that drove the local economy and today it's where the quiz show *Only Connect* is recorded. More relevantly for readers of this magazine, Splott is also where one of Britain's most popular beers first saw the light of day.

In the late 1990s, the leisure centre in Splott was home to the Cardiff Beer Festival, which offered a fine selection of ales from the growing number of Welsh breweries and also brews from further afield, such as Wye Valley in Herefordshire. In 1998, Wye Valley decided to brew something different, just for the event, little knowing that what it created at the time would change the fortunes of the brewery. The beer was called Butty Bach (4.5 per cent ABV) and it won Beer of the Festival.

The concept of the beer was rather clever. "At the time, cask-conditioned Worthington Bitter [3.6 per cent] was popular across South Wales. Although Butty Bach was a little stronger, our

intention was to create a beer with a similar malt character and drinkability," explained MD Vernon Amor, who had joined the brewery a year earlier. "We set out to create a premium cask ale that was smooth, malty and

full-bodied with wonderful drinkability, balancing gentle, rounded bitterness with a satisfying mouthfeel."

The grist was based on mild ale malt, Vernon said. "This gave the beer a rich flavour and gentle sweetness. We added a small proportion of flaked barley to enhance mouthfeel and help with head retention, and we chose to mash in at a slightly higher temperature to leave a higher final gravity in the finished beer with a touch more residual malt sugar."

For hops, the brewers paired Fuggle and Bramling Cross for bitterness, then added Goldings at the end of the boil for aroma. "Classic British hop varieties ideally suited to traditional cask ale," said Vernon. "Back then, and still today, the majority of our hops were sourced from local Herefordshire growers."

The beer was fermented with a strain of yeast from the old Whitbread

brewery in Cheltenham, a derivative of which is still used today, bringing a subtle fruity aroma, said Vernon.

As for its name, the idea came from sales manager John Gardner. "John came up with a name that he felt sounded right for the Cardiff Beer Festival," Vernon said. "We wanted the name to carry a distinctly Welsh flavour. Butty Bach, meaning 'little friend', felt like the perfect fit. These days, of course, everyone just calls it Butty."

As the first brew was voted overall champion at the festival, Wye Valley soon found itself receiving orders from local licensees. "It was a lovely problem to have," recalled Vernon, but it didn't take long for technical challenges to appear. "After only three or four brews, we began struggling to secure a consistent supply of mild ale malt. A couple of batches had to be written off because the colour came out too dark, edging towards porter territory."

With demand growing fast, it had no choice but to redesign the grist. "We switched to Maris Otter Pale malt and introduced a touch of Crystal malt to recreate the original colour and sweetness," Vernon said. "I remember it being quite a stressful period. Butty Bach had already become a firm





THE STORY BEHIND THE BEER



Butty Bach has become Wye Valley's bestseller with steady year-on-year growth
Far left: Brewery MD Vernon Amor

favourite in pubs across South Wales and Herefordshire, and we were brewing it in an incredibly tight space at the back of our brewery tap, the Barrels in Hereford. Keeping up with demand while refining the recipe under those conditions was a real test, but ultimately it helped shape Butty Bach into the beer people know today."

With a hit on its hands, Wye Valley decided to push ahead. "The reaction was so strong that, within just a few months, we made the decision to delist our existing best bitter, Wye Valley Supreme [4.3 per cent], and replace it with Butty Bach. The only real 'complaint' we ever received wasn't about the flavour or the name, but the strength. Some punters were convinced it must be stronger than the 4.5 per cent stated on the pump clip.

"We can assure everyone it genuinely is 4.5 per cent. Perhaps it's the moreishness that leads people to enjoy one or two more than planned which results in this belief."

Butty Bach now accounts for just under half of Wye Valley's cask output

and more than two-thirds of its bottled production. Casks are delivered directly to pubs roughly within a 70-mile radius of the brewery and the team also works with wholesalers to extend the reach even further. For the 500ml bottle, the beer is conditioned in a tank for at least a week after fermentation, before going through a fine filtration prior to reseedling with fresh yeast for a secondary fermentation in the bottle. It is available nationwide and stocked by major retailers.

Butty Bach is one of those beers that gradually pulls you in rather than overloading your senses with the first sip, offering subtle floral notes and suggestions of orange and pear, all wrapped around

a smooth, silky maltiness.

The finish is dry, with lingering, moreish malt and a rounded herbal bitterness from the hops.

"Butty Bach holds a special place for all of us at Wye Valley. It has become our flagship beer," said Vernon.

"Its steady, year-on-year growth is something we're incredibly proud of. It remains the beer that anchors our range and continues to drive demand."

"Perhaps it's the moreishness that leads people to enjoy one or two more than planned"

Views of Lewes

Christian Gott explores the pubs and their food offerings across a picturesque part of East Sussex

One of my heroes is the American

author and humorist Bill Bryson. If you have never read his work, he writes fascinating history books about everyday items and wonderfully quirky travelogues, especially those about his journeys, often on foot, around his adopted home of Great Britain. Now I am no Bill Bryson but, after rereading *Notes from a Small Island*, it got me thinking about how I could continue to write up my pub journeys for *BEER*.

Inspired, I decided to walk to my next destination from my last stop, Brighton and Hove, and head overland to the picturesque historic town of Lewes, working up a modest thirst on my way for an afternoon brewery tour at the venerable Harvey's that would be waiting at the end of my adventure.

Starting at the railway station, and with a distance of a touch under 12 miles ahead of me, I left the town, going past the racecourse and, after wandering through the nature reserve, started to climb up into the chalky hills of the South Downs. Looking back, I could see the whole of Brighton and Hove spread out along the coast. It's a great view and worth the climb.

Turning my back on the view and ascending on the track up over Castle Hill, roughly halfway to my destination, I continued heading towards the north east, passing Kingston near Lewes. On the descent down Juggs Road, if you have time, I heartily recommend a little detour to the 15th-century Juggs inn with its lovely garden, which I bet is packed in summer, some great-looking food and the chance to grab a restorative pint of Harvey's Sussex Best. The



Above: Stunning views on the walk to Lewes
Below: Try the Rights of Man padron peppers

unusual name of both the road and the pub comes from large woven baskets, once carried by local fishwives taking the morning catch to Lewes' market – that must have been quite a trek.

Twice Champion Beer of Britain

Harvey's Sussex Best Bitter, 4 per cent ABV, is made with four varieties of local hops, balancing the bready, caramel flavours and aromas of banana and spice. That and some crispy fried cockles with chilli vinegar did more than hit the spot.

The team at the Jugg make their own focaccia and cakes, and run an à la carte menu as well as more traditional pub favourites. It's definitely somewhere that I want to return to and try more of the menu, including the delicious-looking onion bhaji curry with tarka dhal, jasmine rice and coriander chutney.

Suitably fortified for the final push, I set off for Lewes proper. Lewes is

charming, with a Norman castle perched above the town. Built straight after the Conquest, it is one of only two castles in England with two keeps. Just a stone's throw away from the castle is the Tudor house given to Anne of Cleves by Henry VIII as part of their annulment. Anne survived the turbulent politics of the era and famously outlived Henry and all his other wives.

Lewes is also famous for its Bonfire Night celebrations, with six processions making their way through the town and the burning of





Clockwise from main: Make time for a Harvey's brewery tour; John Harvey beer-battered fish and chips; Juggs onion bhaji curry

huge effigies that have included Guy Fawkes, the Pope, political figures and celebrities.

With all this history it seemed appropriate to grab a bite to eat at the Rights of Man before my brewery tour. The pub is named after one of statesman, inventor and philosopher Thomas Paine's most famous works. His writing led to him being elected to France's revolutionary National Convention, despite not speaking French, and helped inspire American independence. He wrote his first political work while living and working in Lewes between 1768 and 1774. The Rights of Man is situated on the High Street, a little way from the castle and has a wonderful roof garden where you can while away the hours eating tapas in the sunshine.

Pacing myself, I grabbed a pint of Harvey's Sisters Table Beer, 3.4 per

cent, and some padron peppers, small sautéed green peppers sprinkled with

Maldon sea salt. If you have never tried this dish,

be warned: it's the culinary equivalent of Russian roulette – every so often the mild, sweet flavour is replaced with a hot one. The fragrant, hoppy bitter went down great with the slightly salty snack. I also dug into some delicious and crispy calamari with lemon and garlic. I can recommend a visit.

Next up was the brewery tour. I went early in the week, and we started at 4.30pm, but it's best to check the times. The 90-minute tour is fascinating and takes you through the brewing process, followed by a relaxed tasting. It was then a very short stroll – and I may have tried a couple more beers on the way to my

final destination, the John Harvey Tavern, a Harvey's-managed house. With music nights, quizzes and a regular open mic night downstairs and a 100-person function room upstairs, this pub covers all the bases.

The John Harvey has what I call a proper pub menu with ploughman's, scampi and a pie with mash and braised red cabbage. I went for mussels in cream sauce and another pint of Sussex Best, followed by fish and chips in a light ale batter. Both dishes were excellent and Lewes turned out to be both a food and cask beer paradise.

Walking to more countryside pubs and breweries should keep me writing for a while longer so I'm off to plan my next adventure.



Chris Gott 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*.

Science confirms what pub-goers
have known for years...

Pork Scratchings Make Beer Taste Better

For generations, ordering a pint and a bag of pork scratchings has been one of Britain's great pub traditions. But is it simply tradition... or does the pairing actually change the drinking experience?

New consumer research suggests there may be more to this classic combination than meets the eye.

A recent study was conducted in a pub environment where participants sampled the same beer under identical conditions, with one group enjoying their pint with pork scratchings while the other drank the beer on its own.

The results were striking...

More than three-quarters (76%) of those who paired their beer with **pork scratchings** said the snack **improved their enjoyment of the pint.*** In fact, the enjoyment increased by over 20%, with participants 4x more likely to rate the beer 9 or 10/10 when paired with pork scratchings.*

Pork Scratchings were also voted the **No. 1 snack to pair with lager****.

The beer drinkers reported that enjoying a pint alongside pork scratchings **significantly enhanced the overall drinking experience**, providing proof of something many CAMRA members have long suspected - they're a perfect pairing!

So, knowing that pork scratchings do make beer taste better, we then wanted to know why this was the case.

Beer scientist and Brewer of the Year, Jaega Wise, shared some insight into why the combo works so well.

"A lot of it comes down to contrast," Jaega explained.





“Beer can bring bitterness, carbonation and that uncanny ability to quench one’s thirst, while pork scratchings are salty, rich and intensely crunchy. Put them together and each one lifts the other. Making both the beer and scratchings extra moreish!”

Jaega went on to say saltiness is key and “Carbonation also plays an important role. It both provides an aroma lift, physically helping aroma travel up to the nose, enhancing flavour, whilst also giving the palate a sharp cleanse. The beer bubbles cut through the richness of the pork fat coating the tongue, resetting the palate, making every pork scratching bite feel brand new.”

Jaega agreed that “Texture plays a huge role as well. The crunchiness of pork scratchings

creates a massive sensory response. Crunch is in of itself multisensory. With the crunch engaging our hearing, jaw pressure, mouthfeel, taste, aroma and of course the subtle vibrations in the skull. All these sensory signals combined increase our perceived satisfaction.”

“There’s also something very nostalgic about pork scratchings. They are so tied to British pub culture that for a lot of people they’re connected to memories of pints with your mates, after-work drinks, of family get-togethers. We know memory and familiarity genuinely affect flavour perception, so all of that becomes wrapped up in the experience too.”

Great beer has always been about more than what’s in the glass. Atmosphere, service, company, conversation and, of course, good food all contribute to making a visit to the pub more enjoyable and memorable.

For CAMRA members, however, the results simply confirm what generations of pub-goers have always known... when it comes to beer snacks, **there’s no matching a scratching!**

Take a look at the in-pub research findings here: midlandsnacks.co.uk/beer-tastes-better

Why not do a little research of your own?
Get your Midlands Snacks Pork Scratchings here and see for yourself that Pork Scratchings **really do** Make Beer Taste Better
midlandsnacks.co.uk



*In-pub research, circa 100 beer drinkers, May 2026. **Censuswide: 2000 UK beer drinkers (those who drink beer at least once every 3 months) who ‘like’ pork scratchings, May 2026.

Raising a glass in the Steel City

Sheffield Beer Week celebrates the city's brewing scene with tastings, brewery events, food pairings and a music-inspired theme. **Dave Pickersgill** reflects on the festival that now runs across multiple venues in the city, including pubs, bars, bottle shops and breweries

March saw an annual event that

coincides with International Women's Day. Organised by Jules Gray and her colleague, Clare Tollick, the first incarnation was in 2015, with 27 events across 20 venues.

In 2013, Jules opened a labour of beery love: one of the first drink-in beer shops in the UK, the multiple award-winning Hop Hideout. Originally based in a former Yorkshire Penny Bank on Abbeydale Road, it moved to the Kommune food hall in the centre of Sheffield in 2019. Five years later it relocated to the Grade II-listed Leah's Yard when it reopened after restoration. This early 19th-century site was originally built as small workshops for the manufacture of hand tools.

Brought up in County Durham, her journey to Sheffield included a bar job in a local working men's club, studying in Sheffield, time in both Birmingham and Manchester and, after several other positions, working in technical support for a multinational brewing company in Burton upon Trent. After seven years, it was time to move on. The rest is history.

Jules said: "SBW [Sheffield Beer Week] was inspired by the early days of my newly launched business. I was getting excited by the independent beer sector. I noticed that there were lots of beer weeks in America, and also Norwich City of Ale was happening in the UK.

"It was joined up with the frustration



Above: Jules Gray – a passion for beer and a love for adopted Sheffield home

of hearing a lot of people talk about nearby cities and not mentioning Sheffield. Living in the city and seeing it – a tangible beer history, culture, brewers – I was getting quite frustrated as to why people were not talking about Sheffield. And I thought wouldn't it be great to shout more about the beer scene in the city that I had made my home.

"People saw the economic benefits: increased footfall, a heightening awareness and celebrating venues, the breweries and the culture, but also attracting people from outside

"I was getting quite frustrated as to why people were not talking about Sheffield"

the region to discover wonderful things that we sometimes take for granted. I just love it. I want people to get that joy and excitement across to other people."

The main aim of this independent beer-focused event is to bring additional footfall. The first three years coincided with Sheffield hosting the annual SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers and Associates) conference, providing a ready source of beer-interested visitors. When the SIBA conference relocated, Jules was both humbled, and reassured, by the local demand to continue. It was something people thought was really valuable.

She said: "At the time it felt like the local council wasn't valuing the culture, community and historic value of the brewing-and-beer sector – the businesses that were driving visitor footfall. This has definitely changed and momentum has grown. That momentum has led the council-led Sheffield Inspires campaign to include the Craft of Brewing as one of the five main strands."

In 2020, SBW was the last large beer event in the UK before lockdown. I recall leading a pub heritage walk on 13 March. This was my last big go-out for a considerable period. A few days later came official advice to avoid all non-essential contact, and lockdown followed soon after. The next year we held a virtual SBW. I led my first SBW



Above: 1930s industrial space meets modern-day celebration of independent brewing at the Trafalgar Warehouse bar



pub heritage walk from Fagan's in 2017. This year, in collaboration with historian John Stocks, a talk, and a walk, focussed on Little Chicago.

This year saw the usual week-long festival (6–15 March). Collaboration was key with Sheffield bars, pubs and restaurants joining forces with local organisations and local, national and international breweries to host more than 50 events across 30 venues.

SBW commences with Indie Beer

Feast (IBF), a two-day celebration of independent craft beer: brewery bars, street food, low-intervention wines and fine cider. Until 2020, this took place at the Grade II-listed Abbeydale Picture House. After the Covid break in 2022 it moved to the 1930s industrial space of Trafalgar Warehouse. This year there were several pop-up tastings hosted by beer writers and breweries, including Rachel Auty (Women on Tap), Adrian

Tierney-Jones, and Attic and Liquid Light breweries.

There were also several inputs from writer Pete Brown. These included pop-up tastings at IBF and a Hop Hideout event, when he was interviewed by culture writer Daniel Dylan Wray about matching beer and music.

As usual, this year there were several collaborative brews, all

'There were inputs from writer Pete Brown, including being interviewed about matching beer and music'

focused on the theme of Sheffield Synth City. A tribute to its pioneering electronic music – synth-pop and bleep-and-bass, including Cabaret Voltaire, Clock DVA, Heaven 17, The Human League, Warp Records, and more. Local breweries involved included Abbeydale, Bradfield, Duality, Emmanuales, Kelham Island, Little Critters, Little Mesters, Saint Mars of the Desert, Tapped, Ticking Clock and Triple Point. Beers





"Synth City allows us to blend the creativity of our independent breweries with the groundbreaking spirit of our music pioneers"

included Abbeydale Synth City pale ale (4.8 per cent ABV) and IBF Beer of the Festival, 5 Years Later On, a 6.5 per cent New England India Pale Ale from Duality/Ticking Clock.

Designed by Lewis Ryan, the visual map for SBW took inspiration from the 1981 Human League album *Dare*. The botanical inspired artwork for IBF was designed by local illustrator Helen Sanpo.

Jules said: "Sheffield Synth City allows us to blend the creativity of our independent breweries with the groundbreaking spirit of our electronic music pioneers. It's powerful to showcase how innovation thrives across all creative industries in the Steel City."

Reflecting on SBW, Jules said:

"It's an umbrella event. It's something customers love; it really chimes with them, it creates a good buzz and excitement. There are lots of positives, learning and knowledge transfer. From both a trade and



Clockwise from main: Guided walk on a pitstop in the Crow; guided walks are popular; Pete Brown being interviewed by Inspire Sheffield; Trafalgar Warehouse, just one of 30 venues

customer perspective, customers love it. Sheffield has so many things: the home of football, electronic music legacy, beer and brewing.

"I think people don't mention Sheffield, city of stainless steel and what drives the brewing industry. We don't mention the impact we've had in the sector. To me, that's a massive light-bulb revelation."

The invention of stainless steel is credited to Sheffield native Harry Brearley, who in 1913, discovered that



Dave Pickersgill is pub heritage officer for Sheffield and District CAMRA. He was a CAMRA Campaigner of the Year 2025 runner-up.

adding chromium to molten iron created a rust-resistant alloy. Stainless steel is extensively used worldwide as a key part of the brewing process, from coppers to fermenting vessels to casks. It is a crucial part of the contribution of Sheffield to the worldwide beer industry. Sheffield should be seen as the home of modern beer.

Beer tourism is a crucial cog in

Sheffield; the footfall and financial benefit is a win-win for the local hospitality and brewing industries. Sheffield Beer Week is a key part of this jigsaw. Visit for the next edition – 5–14 March 2027.

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WHERE'S THE FRUIT?

CAMRA'S CALL TO BACK AUTHENTIC UK-GROWN AND MADE CIDER AND PERRY

CAMRA has urged the government to put an end to industrial drinks made by global companies from as little as 35 per cent juice, which can be taxed and sold as cider and perry.

The Campaign is pushing for the legal minimum juice content to be raised to at least 50 per cent in cider and perry and has set up an e-lobby so that people can contact their MP.

Consumers should be guaranteed that they are buying good quality, authentic real ciders and perries that contain more juice than sweetened water. Many independent producers make drinks with 100 per cent juice, using cider apples and perry pears grown in UK orchards, and they're becoming increasingly popular with, and valued by, consumers.

A YouGov poll commissioned by CAMRA found 87 per cent of consumers favoured raising the minimum juice content of cider to help halt the decline of orchards.

While CAMRA would prefer a minimum content of 85 per cent, a 50 per cent minimum in cider and perry products would be a reasonable requirement for the secretary of state for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to consider, as it ensures that no one ingredient would be greater than natural fruit juice.

In the USA, juice content for cider must be at least 50 per cent. A similar requirement is due

to come into force in Germany, and the European Union is considering similar regulation. Spain also bans the use of all concentrates in cider products of all categories.

CAMRA vice chair Gillian

Hough said: "In the UK, cider and perry can legally consist of 65 per cent alcoholic sugar water. This cheap, sugary mess is added for profit, not quality, and undermines the delicious real cider and perry made by our independent producers.

"Government raising the minimum juice content to 50 per cent is desperately needed to stop the flood of 'cider industrial', watered-down products made by global giants, which confuse consumers into thinking they are enjoying a fruit-led product when it's water and sugar led. This is nothing short of lying to drinkers.

"This campaign to combat commercial, industrial drinks is really important. Get angry about how we are being fooled. A 50 per cent minimum juice content for UK cider and perry needs to be legislated as soon as possible. I urge everyone – beer drinkers, cider and perry lovers and orchard fans across the UK – to contact their MP."



Family values

Historic family breweries have been keeping traditional beer styles alive

The remarkable survival of Britain's family brewers, some of them centuries old, is a cause for celebration as they maintain beer styles that would have disappeared long ago but for their commitment and pride. These styles pre-date the likes of bitter and pale ale and make a historic contribution to Britain's unique family of beer.

Theakston in Masham, North Yorkshire, is home to perhaps the best known of all the family brewers' beers. The brewery will celebrate 200 years of beer making in 2027 and many convivial pints of Old Peculier (5.6 per cent ABV) will mark the event.

Old Peculier is a strong beer that's part of a northern tradition that includes Yorkshire Stingo. It takes its name from the fact that Masham was allowed in medieval times to run its own ecclesiastical court – known in Norman French as a 'peculier' – as it was too dangerous for the Bishop of York to visit the town.

Theakston employs a cooper who builds and repairs oak casks, as many publicans prefer to serve the beer from the wood to give it authenticity.

Samuel Smith in Tadcaster is Yorkshire's oldest brewery, dating from 1758. Its Stingo is a robust 8 per cent and is aged in oak casks, some of which are more than 100 years old. It's bottled conditioned and will improve with age.

The name of the beer is thought to derive from the fact that, due to its strength, it had a sting on the palate. At one time stingo was so popular that the style spread beyond Yorkshire. Between the 18th and 20th centuries a pub in West London was called the Yorkshire Stingo and it brewed on the premises.

At the weekend as many as 20,000 people – Yorkshire expats as well as



'In the 1980s McMullen rebranded AK as Bitter but, following talks with CAMRA, pumps on the bar now proudly proclaim AK is Original Mild'

locals – would gather at the pub to drink stingo in the large garden.

The pub and brewery were

demolished in 1964 to make way for the Marylebone Flyover. Watneys picked up the brand and produced stingo until it closed in 1979.

The style has been revived back in its homeland by Rooster's of Harrogate. The 9 per cent beer is held in tank to mature and is then transferred to pinot noir and bourbon

whiskey casks for nine months before being bottled.

Stingo reached as far south as Dorset. Hall & Woodhouse in Blandford Forum, founded in 1777, brews versions of the style called Team Work. The 7 per cent bottle-conditioned beers celebrate the contribution to the company made by key members of the family, such as former chairman Frank Woodhouse.

Mild is a dray horse of a different colour and modest in strength. Until the 1950s it was Britain's most popular beer style but today it accounts for a tiny proportion of total sales. Mild once came in several formats but most modern interpretations are dark.

All praise then to McMullen for

championing a version known as light mild. The Hertford brewery dates from 1827 and for most of its life it has brewed a fine-drinking light mild called AK. It's 3.7 per cent and is brewed with pale, crystal and chocolate malts and one hop, Whitbread Goldings Variety.

In the 1980s McMullen rebranded AK as Bitter but, following talks with CAMRA, pumps on the bar now proudly proclaim AK is Original Mild.

The name has been a source of interest for years. There have been fanciful suggestions as AK being a misspelling of all clear. It's more likely to be simple branding. Centuries ago, K was used by brewers to indicate mild and when more than one was made, the A stood for the lightest version.

AK flourishes today. In 2024 it was named Hertfordshire Beer of the Year at the St Albans Beer Festival and production director Fergus McMullen said it was the proudest moment in his 40 years with the company.

Let's hope there are many more.



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

London's treasures revisited

Neil Pettigrew reveals more of the historic gems that appear in CAMRA's *London's Real Heritage Pubs*

Produced by CAMRA's Pub Heritage Group, *London's Real Heritage Pubs* focuses on pubs with intact historic interiors or those that have retained important interior features. The book describes 249 of these pubs in Greater London, backed by an extensive selection of 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.

Following on from the article in the last issue of *BEER*, here are a few more pubs from the book that are well worth taking the trouble to visit.

The Grade II listed **Black Lion** (274 Kilburn High Road, NW6 2BY), built in 1898, is a fine example of the type of pub which is often referred to (incorrectly) as a gin palace. Inside, two walls boast golden tableaux in relief of 18th-century figures eating, drinking, painting and making merry. These are topped by dramatic two-foot-deep cornices full of decorative patterning. The fabulous



ceiling is packed with ornate detail. There are fine-etched windows on the side elevation, although sadly, those at the front have been replaced with plain glass. There are usually two or three cask beers available.

In 1933, the **Windsor Castle** (114 Campden Hill Road, Kensington W8 7AR) – built circa 1826 – received a tasteful multi-room refurbishment which survives intact. It's a delicious warren of rooms, all with dark oak panelling and separated by wood partitions that contain intriguingly low doorways. The reason they are so low is that they were never intended to be used by customers, only by pot boys and cleaners. The mahogany barback in the Campden Bar is the sole

'Inside, two walls boast golden tableaux in relief of 18th-century figures eating, drinking, painting and making merry'



survivor from the Victorian era. A pint here makes you feel as if you have stepped through a time warp.

For many years I overlooked the **Argyll Arms** (18 Argyll St, W1F 7TP). It was so near Oxford Circus that I assumed it would be a ghastly tourist trap of little historic interest. In fact, it's one of the capital's best-preserved Victorian pubs, with surviving screens dividing it into four rooms, three of



Clachan



George and Vulture

'I vividly recall having to pass through what seemed like an endless series of doors and screens in order to reach the gents'

them being cosy little snugs. There are glittering displays of mirrors in several places, a highly decorated ceiling and an immensely deep, patterned cornice. All this is part of an 1895 refit, the pub having originally been built in 1868. It's one of the Nicholson's pubs owned by Mitchells & Butlers, so there is usually a good selection of cask beers.

CAMRA's Pub Heritage Group assigns pubs a One, Two or Three Star rating according to the intactness of a pub's interior. Most of the pubs in this article warrant three stars. The **Clachan**, however, gets 'only' one star on account of the removal of all the partitions that once created a multitude of small rooms

radiating round the island bar. I include it here chiefly for nostalgic reasons, as back in 1979, I was a regular and vividly recall having to pass through what seemed like an endless series of doors and screens, all with attractive etched glass, in order to reach the gents. Even without the partitions, the pub (built in 1898) still exudes a wonderful atmosphere of Victorian grandeur on account of its mahogany fittings, mosaic floor tiling and ornate ceiling.

The **George** (75–77 Borough High Street, SE1 1NH) is the capital's only purpose-built pub that is listed as Grade I by Historic England. It is London's only surviving galleried coaching inn, and is owned by the National Trust (nationally it owns 39 pubs). It is a warren of rooms on three floors. The Parliament Bar (the first room on the right as you enter the courtyard along a passageway) has some remarkable old woodwork



Argyll Arms

which may well date from the 17th century, including horizontal boarding on the walls, simple fixed seating and a venerable old fireplace. The first- and second-floor galleries, with their dramatically warped woodwork, look out onto the large courtyard. The pub is leased to Greene King and there is usually a better-than-average selection of its cask beers available.

The **George and Vulture** (3 Castle Court, EC3V 9DL), in the heart of the City, contains a glorious mixture of 18th- and 19th-century fittings. For many years the pub fell off CAMRA's radar as it sold no draught beer and customers were required to have a meal. Now it serves Samuel Smith's keg beers and non-diners are permitted so long as seating is available. Built in the 18th century and Grade II listed, the pub occupies one of those deliciously hidden locations in the City's alleyways. If you visit, make sure to take a look at the rooms on the first, second and third floors.

The book has been compiled by 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.

PROTECTING CASK IS NO EASY TASK

"The biggest threat to cask comes from the failure of UK brewing, and its leaders' cluelessness about how to stop it," says Tim Webb, author of *The Business of Beer* on page six. Is he right? What would you do to grow the sale of cask beer?

I think the biggest threat to cask ale has for a long time, and continues to be, the poor way in which it is looked after and served in many establishments, leading to many people trying it once and then never touching it again.

Ben Wilkinson

I think we need to think about the pull factors surrounding non-cask beer. We can all think of reasons why cask isn't consumed in quantity – consistency, failure of pubs to stock it ("we don't sell much cask" – said to me in a pub a couple of days ago, and a self-fulfilling prophecy if ever there was one), changing tastes in society generally with people having moved to lighter and colder drinks over several decades. But there is also the fact that being weaned on pubs to drink traditional bitters and milds, to mix with their elders, and to converse and play traditional pub games is something which no longer happens to young drinkers. They go to a pub, not to chat and socialise, but probably to listen to music or watch sport on TV (think the recent World Cup). When doing so, they consume drinks that are probably sponsors of the match they're watching, or heavily advertised during breaks in play.

The drinks are sold by brand/lifestyle rather than for their flavour and quality. The punters then go home and watch sport on their own

TVs, and drink the same beers (which they have bought cheap in supermarkets). This, to be blunt, is the environment of today's young drinker, and it's difficult to see how cask can flourish in this kind of entertainment-led milieu. I think we have to face the fact that cask is now a niche market, valued by the discerning drinker, but probably never regaining the kind of mass appeal it enjoyed in the middle of the last century. So perhaps our campaigning should recognise that fact a little more, promoting quality and exceptionalism rather than pretending we can recapture the glory days when cask was king.

James Williams

To me the biggest threat to cask ale is the lack of places to find it. Pubs are being knocked down or converted to housing at a rate of knots. The few remaining pubs are run by people who don't drink beer and think that Carling is a perfect substitute for real ale.

Elvis Evans

It's not an easy one to answer but it probably comes down to making it more consistent without tipping over into homogeneity or monotony.

Too often, the cask beer we get is not the best version of cask beer, or even the best version of that specific cask beer. That's part of why I stopped drinking it.

Regardless of what people think of other types of beer, part of why they're popular is because they're the same wherever you buy them. It's what cask beers aspire to but, for any from several reasons, sadly fall short on.

Ed Quoththeraven

Some cask beer pubs have too much choice. Sometimes this can lead to some of the beers not selling as quickly as others, and they get stale or worse.

Drinkers who are used to drinking fake foreign lagers are baffled when they see genuine foreign lagers on the bar. And it's even worse if they see loads of handpumps selling beers they've never heard of. Some people are a bit nervous about asking, especially if they're with mates who are drinking lager, so they stick with what they know.

My first pint of real ale, more than 50 years ago, was served to me by mistake – the barmaid mistook me for someone else. I drank it anyway and I've been drinking cask ever since. Perhaps some of us old timers should "accidentally" buy a pint of cask for a lager drinker and see what happens.

Will Larter



I think we have to accept that big-brand, highly marketed, multinational brewed beers are the big-volume products for the foreseeable as they appear to satisfy a large percentage of the population and we are unlikely to change the minds of many that drink them.

The important thing now is to ensure that cask beer gets recognised heritage status and that pubs get the right to stock guest beers, thus breaking the monopolisation of what's available on the bar by the multinational breweries so that those who love cask beer will be able to continue to drink the best versions of it for the foreseeable future.

Dudley Pritchard

The enemy of cask is boring, bland macro beers of all formats, not interesting beers produced by passionate brewers. Unfortunately, in the 1990s and noughties we seemed to forget that and wasted too many years accommodating the zealots who would rather live in a world of macro cask than accept good beer comes in all formats.

Ash Corbett-Collins

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

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?
Send your
thoughts to
[wb.editor
@camra.org.uk](mailto:wb.editor@camra.org.uk)

All shipshape

Adrian Tierney-Jones delves into the beers of Bristol

Bristol is brash and entrepreneurial, a city fizzing with ideas, radical and independent, sometimes loud and noisy but never dull. You could say the same thing about its beer scene, which contains some of the most accomplished breweries in the UK. It is even home to the current Champion Beer of Britain, which just happens to be **Independence** (4.6 per cent ABV) from Bristol Beer Factory. All these beers are in can, unfiltered and unpasteurised.

Independence is a buoyant American-style pale ale, the kind of beer whose hop character leaps out of the glass with the audacity of an acrobat. Dark gold in colour, it has



aromatics of freshly cut mango with a daub of lime marmalade in the background. Each swig reveals more ripe mango, plus mandarin orange, a light pepperiness, plus a juicy mouthfeel with an assertively bitter finish. It can be bought online at

bristolbeerfactory.co.uk/collections/all

Left Handed Giant is an example of Bristol's playful nature with its colourful can labels. Gluten-free

Dream House (6.2 per cent) is what the brewery calls its house IPA. It is orange-gold in colour with citrus, berries and stone fruit slinking about on the nose. It has a light creamy mouthfeel and there is orange pith, ripe peach skin and pineapple on the palate alongside a mouthwatering juiciness.



It's a spirited beer that finishes with a light dryness. Go to lefthandedgiant.com/collections/beer to buy.

Various styles of lager emerge from Lost and Grounded's ultra-modern brewery, but the team also looks to Belgium for its inspiration as **Saison D'Avon** (6.5 per cent) demonstrates. This is its own take on the classic Wallonian beer style. In the glass it is golden-amber in colour and the nose pulsates with suggestions of ripe peach, juicy lemon and tart grapefruit, while there is a light peppery spiciness in the background thanks to the addition of grains of paradise. There is more of this angular and jazzy fruitiness and spiciness on the palate, before the beer finishes with a joyful bow of elegant dryness. You can either go to the taproom or check out

lostandgrounded.co.uk/beers

As the nights get darker, here are a couple of equally dark beers to keep you company. First up is Moor Beer's St Philips, a 5 per cent soothing stout, which has hints of vanilla and mocha coffee on the nose.



There is bitterness and roastiness on the palate, reminiscent of an espresso sipped in a Milanese café, alongside more luxurious chocolate and vanilla, before it finishes with a dryness that wouldn't be out of place in the Kalahari. The taproom near Temple Meads station is where you can pick this up or order at moorbeer.co.uk/collections/all

Wiper and True has a stunning taproom and it is where you can find this luscious **Salted Caramel Shake** (5.6 per cent), a version of its popular milk stout. Dark mahogany in colour, there are hints of honeycomb and caramel on the nose, almost as if a Crunchie and Daim bar started a family. On the palate there is more caramel, plus mocha and chocolate, a light roastiness and a suggestion of sarsaparilla before it finishes with a bracing dryness that controls any oversweetness. Buy at wiperandtrue.com/collections/all-beer



Adrian Tierney-Jones is an award-winning journalist specialising in beer, pubs and travel. His latest book is ***A Pub For All Seasons*** (Headline).

YOUR SHOUT



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

You might be interested that in my small branch in Ely, Cambs I started out as rural officer visiting all the pubs and clubs in its area. I built up records of who owned the pubs, managers' names, how many beers – the usual stuff.

I also created a branch newsletter which highlighted the best of these visits. The articles were just Word documents and produced monthly. Lots of photos etc. I added pubs changing hands, and facilities and put the newsletter online. They are still there on the East Anglia CAMRA website.

This led to a December rural trip around seven of the finest and voting on the best beers on the coach for Pub of the Year and *Good Beer Guide* followed up with a final visit of four pubs to nail a winner in January or February.

I added the rural clubs some three years ago. There are seven rural (and one city which I don't cover) selling cask. There are 30 pubs of which 25 sell cask ale. That is 32 pubs and clubs. I started recommending beers that they might be interested in and writing on the Monday with tips.

I took it further and would mention to the brewer in private messages if a beer was off or affected by yeast, which is generally appreciated, especially the times they weren't at their own pub. Beer agents was another.

After three years I stood down from my jobs on the committee and this allowed me to continue and create a six-monthly review, which I mail out to everyone but isn't endorsed by my branch.

We haven't lost a branch pub since before the Covid pandemic and if the one we did lose comes back soon, it is 15 years since we lost a country pub and even that was a "beside a main road" type pub.

David Lloyd via email

I initially joined CAMRA when there was little in the way of decent beer available anywhere – the only real ale available in the immediate area was Bishop's Finger (which was strong).

I joined the protest group in Bristol. Following that, my RAF career sort of got in the way but I eventually came back to CAMRA in time to join the voice for the retention of the pint measure.

Since then, things have got more political with the high cost of running a pub causing many closures but, we are not finished yet – I recently instigated an Asset of Community Value application on a local pub that the owner was trying to convert to flats. This resulted in a sale to a Nepalese group, which now operates it as a going concern, serving decent beers and good food (Dragoon, Brampton). I have also been on t'committee for quite a few years and am currently the memb sec. for the Huntingdonshire branch.

Alan Mellor via email



When did you last see an advert for a cask beer? Ask a youngster, anyone, to name a beer and I bet it will be a lager or Guinness. If you don't tell them, how will they know there is something else.

Ian Middleton via email

Let's shout about cask

US-based beer writer **Ruvani de Silva** longed to escape her home town of Swindon yet, on Sundays, she often enjoys the familiar delights of a pint of cask ale

I grew up in Swindon, 70 miles west of London, and I dreamed big. When you grow up in a small town, you think everything beyond it must be very exciting, so my main ambition was to get out, which I did when I was pretty young. I bopped around the South West for a bit, and then moved to London when I was 21.

Like most teens in the 1990s, I drank a lot of cider and Stella Artois. But growing up in Swindon, we also had local cask beers, such as Wadworth 6X and Arkell's 3B, that I drank in the pub, and still do when visiting.

After moving to London, I took a master's in international politics, then worked in PR and comms with book publishers and charities. That's when I really got into beer. I got involved with CAMRA and was part of a London group called Boozers that used to run beer tours, raising money for good causes. I was also very much into American craft beer as I used to travel to the US with work. At that time, I'd been thinking about working in wine, but I got so excited about beer that it took over.

The beer writing started after I moved to the US with my dual-citizen partner. I didn't have a green card at that point, so I couldn't work. That was a really fun time, discovering so many great beers here in Austin, Texas. And when I got my green card, I knew I'd prefer to write about beer.

The US beer industry has recently taken several steps back in terms of diversity. It's taken a nod from culture at large and there's been a backlash against diversity, equity, inclusion and intersectionality. It's irrational because greater diversity in the workforce means a greater range of ideas and expertise and a bigger market for drinkers. But, thankfully, there are still a lot of women and marginalised groups pushing boundaries in beer.



The British pub is such a special place. When you go to a good pub for the first time, you immediately feel at home and know your way around – there is a wonderful sense of belonging. The Harp in London's Covent Garden and Wild Swan in Leather Lane are great examples of pubs that get everything right. However much the world changes, you walk in there and it's always the same, in a good way.

"Sunday here is cask day. We have a great brewery here called Acopon – it makes amazing cask"

The place where you drink and the people you drink with are such big influences. I saw Pete Brown at the Green Man festival and he pointed out that, if you're on a sunny beach with your loved ones and you crack open a cheap Spanish lager, it can taste like the best beer you've ever had. However, I do have some

favourite styles. I love pilsners, doppelbocks, smoked beer and mixed-culture sours – I just had a really nice box of Dundee-based Holy Goat sour beers when I was back in the UK.

Sunday here is cask day. We have a great brewery here called Acopon – it makes amazing cask. That's where you'll find me on many a Sunday, pretending I'm in the pub. We should be proud of British pubs and beer. Much as I love American craft beers, we should lean more into what we do best instead of just jumping on trends from across the Atlantic. Cask is a good example of that – Britain is so good at it and we need to make so much more of that.

WHAT'S BREWING

AUTUMN 2026

CAMPAIGNS, NEWS AND VIEWS

TV ad first for Campaign

● East of England launch for Sky TV marketing push

PUBS, pints and people were the stars of the show in CAMRA's first TV advert (*right*), shown to Sky TV viewers across the East of England.

Filmed by Lamplight Media, the commercial *Discover great beers with CAMRA* shows people enjoying pints in a pub and at a CAMRA festival.

The advert was shown during hit shows *Euphoria*, *The Miniature Wife*, *Prisoner*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Downton Abbey: The Finale*.

The promotion was shown across the East of

England, including major towns and cities such as Cambridge, Peterborough, Norwich, Ipswich and Northampton.

It was shown until mid-June and can be watched on CAMRA's YouTube channel.

CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins said: "I am excited for us to be branching out into TV marketing and promotion. CAMRA is a great way to discover new beer, brewers and pubs and this advert will help us reach new audiences. There are lots of people who go to the pub and enjoy cask beer, real cider and perry, but may not know how much



vital campaigning takes place across the UK. It really shows what CAMRA is all about: pubs, pints and people.

"The East of England was the perfect location. It is a hotspot for great pubs,

independent breweries, fantastic festivals along with a lot of local CAMRA branches, all working towards our campaigning goals and enjoying socialising with like-minded people."

'Brilliant' start for new pro-pub prime minister

FOLLOWING new prime minister Andy Burnham's decision to cut business rates for pubs in England, CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins said: "This is a brilliant start to the new prime minister's tenure, living up to the statements that he's made before about pubs, pints and people.

"Our business rates

system is grossly unfair to pubs and social clubs, bricks-and-mortar businesses that are also vital social institutions for their communities and desperately needs reform.

"As always, we need to see the details at the Budget, but another year of rate relief will provide vital breathing space to publicans in England, while

the work to review the rating system for hospitality businesses presumably continues."

CAMRA has called for the business rates cut in England to be matched in Northern Ireland (NI), Wales and Scotland.

CAMRA chief executive Tom Stainer said: "It is refreshing to see a prime minister who gets how

important pubs are to local communities and who wants to support them.

"But while pubs in England will get a 20 per cent discount NI businesses feel left behind and are crying out for similar help."

He also called on the Scottish and Welsh governments to match the new prime minister's pro-pub stance.

Welsh pubs' right to buy gamechanger

● Campaign welcomes promised legislation

CAMRA has welcomed the announcement that the new Welsh government's first phase of legislation will include "the development of a community right-to-buy scheme".

First minister Rhun Iirwerth said the new Community Right to Buy will enable eligible community groups to nominate and register valuable community assets and be given the right of

first refusal when the owner decides to sell to make sure these places remain in the hands of communities.

A similar right in England has recently been passed by the UK parliament and will allow community groups to have first refusal on buying a pub registered as an Asset of Community Value if it is put up for sale.

Director of CAMRA Wales Chris Charters said: "The announcement could be a gamechanger for

people who want to save and take over the running of their local.

"Pubs are more than just businesses – they play a crucial role in building and maintaining cohesive communities. Where they are under threat of closure, conversion or demolition, it is right that people are given first refusal to buy it.

"It is really difficult for communities in Wales to save their pub and take it on as a community business because pub protection laws are the weakest in the UK."



All change at Harvey's

SUSSEX brewer Harvey's has announced a series of appointments within its brewing team, marking the next chapter in the brewery's succession plan.

After 40 years as head brewer, Miles Jenner (pictured on right with Peter Yarlett) will now lead the brewery as production director, while continuing as joint MD.

Jenner will initially head production supporting the next generation of brewers as they step into senior roles and ensuring the continuity of the brewery's distinctive tradition.

As part of these changes, Peter Yarlett has been appointed head brewer.

Yarlett first joined Harvey's in 1995 in what began as a holiday job. Following employment as a brewer at Meantime and Hogs Back, he returned to Harvey's as third brewer. He was promoted to second brewer in 2010.

Jenner said: "Our aim was to ensure continuity, while encouraging innovation and it is exciting to see this come to fruition. I could not wish for a more capable or enthusiastic brewing team."

Councillors get behind their locals

PUBS IN Ashfield, Nottinghamshire are set to receive more support after councillors unanimously backed a cross-party motion aimed at helping the trade.

The Protecting Ashfield's Pubs motion was proposed by Hucknall North councillor Gordon Mann and seconded by Hucknall Central's Lee Waters.

The council will now look at creating an Ashfield Pub Protection Plan. This would make it easier for landlords to find grants, get help with licensing and access other assistance available through the council.

Pubs could also be promoted through local events, tourism, and council communications, helping



Gordon Mann, left, and Lee Waters put forward pub motion

them reach more customers.

Mann said: "A good pub brings the community together through live music, celebrations, weddings and other events.

"When a pub closes, it is not just the bar staff who lose their jobs. There are delivery drivers, food suppliers, entertainers, tradespeople and many

other local businesses that depend on the pub trade."

He also highlighted the many small breweries and suppliers supported by pubs across the area.

The council will also write to government and local MPs calling for changes to VAT, beer duty, business rates and other taxes affecting pubs.

Pub campaigner search returns

● Pub Saving Award puts campaigns in spotlight

NOMINATIONS are now open for CAMRA's Pub Saving Award, which celebrates groups that have fought to protect their pub, saving it from demolition or conversion.

The competition thrusts pub-saving campaigns into the national spotlight, inspiring others to investigate community ownership for their local. CAMRA supports community pubs and is keen to assist groups going down this road.

Pub Saving Award coordinator Paul Ainsworth



said: "The return of the Pub Saving Award coincides with the grim third-year anniversary of the fire and complete demolition of the Crooked House, which

shocked the nation. It is bitterly disappointing we are still waiting for justice.

"The Crooked House saga unveiled a wider scandal of potentially unlawful pub

conversions and demolitions across the UK, and we continue to demand stronger planning policies."

Last year's winner was the New Clarence (left) in Hull, which was the first city-centre pub to win the award. The high land value of high streets makes pubs an enticing target for greedy developers.

The award can be made to any group which has carried out campaigning activity to save a pub from closure over the last 12 months. Nominations close on 12 November 2026. The nomination form and eligibility criteria is on CAMRA's website.

Watchdog investigates Stonegate

THE Stonegate pub and bar chain is to be investigated over "unfair" treatment of its tenants.

The Pubs Code adjudicator (PCA) Fiona Dickie said she had reasonable grounds to suspect the pub giant has failed to meet rules

requiring fair treatment of its pub operators.

Stonegate may have failed to comply with legal obligations to "provide accurate and transparent information to both its existing and prospective tied pub tenants," the PCA said.

Dickie said research into the satisfaction level of pub tenants revealed "concerns and issues" among Stonegate's pub operators.

The firm's satisfaction rating has been the lowest of the six regulated pub companies for three years running, she said.

"Upholding the core principles of the Pubs Code, ensuring fair and lawful dealing and that tied tenants are no worse off than free of tie operators, is our priority," Dickie said.

Stonegate's business development managers are also being investigated.

'Extraordinary' growth of annual women's brew day

INTERNATIONAL Women's Collaboration Brew Day (IWCBD) had its biggest year yet with 88 brew days, 1,153 participants, producing 93 new beers and raising £33,889 for women's causes – up 25 per cent on 2025.

Now in its second year under Women On Tap CIC – the UK-based social enterprise championing gender equality in beer – IWCBD has grown into a global movement. From taprooms in Yorkshire to collectives in Switzerland,

South Africa, Canada and the USA, the annual event has become one of the most meaningful campaigns in the independent beer calendar.

Women On Tap CIC founder Rachel Auty said: "The growth is genuinely

extraordinary, but what moves me most are the stories. Women coming together in breweries, supporting each other, and turning their passion for beer into lasting impact for the causes that need us."

AWARDS

Grand designs in the spotlight

A FORMER church and a restored historic pub are among the winners in the 2026 CAMRA Pub Design Awards.

The awards celebrate not only the UK's best-looking pubs, but those which have been lovingly refurbished, converted or have made a major difference to their community.

Run in collaboration with Historic England, the competition is judged by a panel of design and conservation experts. Panel chair Andrew Davison said: "Despite the increasing pressure

on the hospitality industry, people are still prepared to invest time, money and energy into pubs and bars.

"The Pub Design Awards recognise the extraordinary amount of effort, the imagination and design, plus high-quality craftsmanship which have gone into all of these projects."

CAMRA awards committee chair Shelly Bentley added: "From striking Art-Deco wonders to inviting street-corner locals, there are some beautiful pubs across the UK. In these difficult

times for the industry, it is always heartening to see just how much people care about pubs."

Historic England co-chief executive officers Claudia Kenyatta and Emma Squire said: "This year's Historic England Conservation Award winner, the Woodman in Birmingham, is an outstanding example of how thoughtful conservation can allow historic buildings to live on, securing them for future generations to enjoy."

REFURBISHMENT

Winner:

Leyton Engineer, London

Originally Leyton Town Hall, it was converted to a pub some years ago and has undergone an extensive refurbishment by Remarkable Pubs. The restoration of historic features such as glazed screens and the mosaic and terrazzo floors, plus the installation of a new bar back and brass chandeliers have helped to create one of the most impressive pub interiors in East London.

Highly commended:

European, London

Remarkable Pubs aimed to bring back the feel of a welcoming traditional pub to a building which had been stripped of most of its original features. The introduction of a traditional bar back, bespoke upholstered pew seating and the careful choice of the paint scheme both inside and outside have helped restore the aesthetic of a traditional Victorian pub, while the creation of an open kitchen on the ground floor has introduced a new focal point.

Highly commended:

Green Man, Leighton Bromswold

Owners Andy and Lizzie Langridge took over a run-down building and have transformed it into a focal point



Leyton Engineer



European



Green Man

for the village. The pub was in such poor condition, with many fixtures covered in mould, almost all the fittings had to be replaced, including flooring, installing new lighting, seating and bar shelving. An entirely self-funded renovation project, the owners did as much of the work as possible independently, even painstakingly building the new oak panelling from scratch.

Commended:

Duke of York, London

Hertford brewer McMullen's stripped the building back to its bare bones and fully refurbished it, including repairs to fix the pavement from falling into the cellar! The outstanding feature of the pub's refurbishment is the highly impressive ceramic tiled bar counter, which acts as the main focus in the ground-floor bar.



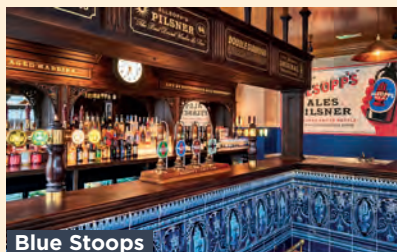
Duke of York

CONVERSION TO PUB USE

Joint winner:

Blue Stoops, London

A conversion of the former Kensington Wine Rooms by Relic Interiors and Box Construction, commissioned by owner Jamie Allsopp, has transformed the building. The interior has been reimagined with half-height partitions and glazed screening, plus new fixed seating, along with a revamp of the exterior with new signage and lighting. The striking new ceramic bar front featuring the historic Allsopp's trademark is a major highlight to this latest addition of West London's pub scene.



Blue Stoops



St Peter's Tavern



Grand Assembly

opening up the spectacular galleried interior and restoring historic features and façade, along with the introduction of an impressive 20-metre bar counter formed from recycled courthouse furniture. New pew seating, glazing and bespoke mirrors have been added along with the creation of a courtyard garden.

Commended:

Grand Assembly, Marlow

A conversion of a former retail unit into a pub by architects kdpa commissioned by JD Wetherspoon. Inspired by pubs and grand assembly halls of the Victorian era, but with a modern-industrial twist, the interior has been broken up into discrete areas with Victorian-styled screening, featuring bespoke, embellished tiling and huge empire chandeliers. The lighting, choice of colours and carpets have all been inspired by Marlow's links to the Thames and rowing heritage.

Joint winner:

St Peter's Tavern, Liverpool

Formerly a Roman Catholic church built in 1788, owner 1936 Pubco described the impressive conversion as its greatest challenge. It involved

HISTORIC ENGLAND CONSERVATION



Woodman

Winner: Woodman, Birmingham

Dating back to 1897 and falling into disrepair, owner Union Inns set out to restore and protect the pub's heritage features and multi-roomed layout. A new wooden floor has been laid, the historic Minton tiling walls have been carefully conserved, and the beautiful, ornate woodwork has been restored. Standing next to the Old Curzon Street station, set to be reopened as part of HS2, the pub will be an impressive first port of call for passengers.

COMMUNITY LOCAL



Lord Southampton

Winner: Lord Southampton, London

After being closed for a long time and in near-derelict condition, owners Aimee Brown and Phil Harrington took on the lease of the pub and undertook extensive repairs. The original floorboards and damaged wall-panelling were restored, the bar area was upgraded and a new hand-painted sign was commissioned. It now offers spaces for groups to meet and is at the heart of its local community.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Branch's award triple whammy

● IT'S three cheers for the pubs and clubs in the Vale of Clwyd branch area as three of its cask beer establishments have won CAMRA's North Wales region pub awards.

The Mold Alehouse was named North Wales Region Pub of the Year, Beer Lab, Mold won the North Wales Cider Pub of the Year, and the Esplanade Club, Rhyl took home the North Wales Club of the Year title.

This is the first time in the Vale of Clwyd CAMRA's 35-year history its branch selections have swept the board by winning all three of the North Wales awards.

Wind in sails of fight for the Ship

● CAMPAIGNERS fighting to reopen their Lincolnshire village pub are celebrating a significant step forward.

The Ship Inn in Surfleet Seas End, which closed more than a year ago, has now been registered as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) following an application to South Holland District Council by the Shipmates group.

The Shipmates now want more people with an interest in seeing the pub reopen get on board. There has been a pub on the site since 1642.

Classic beer goes from hero to Zero

● THERE'S a new beer at Hook Norton brewery and it's turning tradition on its head. The historic

Oxfordshire brewery, established in 1849, is launching Old Hooky Zero, a no-alcohol beer crafted for those who love a timeless pub classic but prefer a lighter touch.

Based on Hooky's award-winning hero beer Old Hooky – first brewed in 1977 – the brewery said Zero captures the original's heritage and is brewed using its recipe and methods in the Victorian tower brewery. The beer uses Challenger, Fuggles and Goldings hops.

Brewer scoops top cider crown

● WELSH brewer Black Cloak is, naturally, best known for its beers, but its taproom in Colwyn Bay also showcases cider which has earned it Abercolwyn branch's Cider Pub of the Year crown.

Black Cloak proprietors Max Harris, Andrew Randles and Kelly Roberts were thrilled to win the award, which rewards the pub making the greatest contribution to promoting cider and promised to continue showcasing the best they can find.

For the presentation in the taproom five ciders were on offer, including those from Newton Court, Gravity Theory, Ascension and Barbourne with its Oak Cask Cider.

Council cuts business rates for local pubs

● THERE'S good news on tap for South Oxfordshire's pubs after the district council approved a one-off, top-up rates cut.



Shipmates are looking for more to join fight for their pub

The discretionary scheme will give around 120 eligible pubs an additional 15 per cent off their business rates helping them tackle rising costs and remain at the heart of communities across the district.

Pop-up micropub sets up in shop

● POP-UP micropub, the Two Tails Taproom in Heathfield, East Sussex is awaiting final approvals for its move to a permanent home in a former womenswear boutique.

Two Tails is the brainchild of Colin and Deena Gilham who made Heathfield their home in 2022. Since 2024, Two Tails has hosted pop-up events at the Union Church in Heathfield, and Deena and Colin feel the time is right for a permanent presence in the town centre.

Three B's land in town centre

● THE award-winning Three B's Micropub in Bridlington has moved to

the town centre (*below*). The new location has more space with the two rooms all on one floor. There's also a large sun-trap beer garden which can accommodate more than 50 people.

Owners Mark and Cheryl Bates have invested around £200,000 in the refurbishment of the former accounts office in Wellington Road, including converting the upper floors into a residential and holiday lets.

The pub also offers an extended range of drinks with more than 10 beers on tap plus 12 ciders, lagers and wines as well as more spirits.

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A Black Country tragedy

THE destruction of the Crooked House pub, a much-loved Black Country tavern that was a victim of arson on 5 August 2023 and then bulldozed, is now told in a new film which records no legal action has been taken three years after the events.

The documentary, directed by Luke Reader, can be viewed on YouTube: *The Crooked House, a Black Country Tragedy*.

The pub in Himley near Dudley, famous for its wonky appearance, dates from the 18th century. It was sold by brewer Marston's in July 2023 to ATE Farms which owned a landfill next door. The firm said the premises would no longer operate as a pub.

Less than two weeks after the sale the pub was consumed by fire. Two days later workers acting for ATE used an excavator to demolish the remains, machinery delivered prior to the blaze.

The documentary charts the destruction of the pub and the campaign to have it rebuilt.

The Crooked House was built in 1756 as a farmhouse. It became a pub, the Glynne Arms, in the 1830s to serve miners working on the estates of Sir Stephen Glynne and the Earl of Dudley. The mines caused the pub to tilt by 15 degrees and the name was changed to the Crooked House to reflect its appearance.

In 1952 the pub was declared structurally unsafe. To save it, Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries bought it for £3,250 and spent a further £10,000 to strengthen the



buttresses that held the building in place. Banks's, the Wolverhampton arm of W&D, was placed on the façade.

As a result of a merger and takeover, W&D became part of Marston's. In July 2023 Marston's took the fateful decision to sell the pub.

On the night of the fire locals said piles of earth had been placed on the path that led to the pub. Six fire crews attended the scene but had difficulty getting to the site. Two days later the building was bulldozed.

A campaign group of local people sprang up, with a simple aim: prosecute those responsible for the destruction of the pub and to have it rebuilt without delay.

Following the demolition, a woman and two men were arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to commit arson. Three other men were held on suspicion of aiding arson. All were released on bail.

The world-famous Crooked House before its destruction by fire and bulldozer which was reported in the *Washington Post* that noted the building predated American Independence

South Staffordshire Council took enforcement proceedings ordering ATE Farms to rebuild the pub "brick by brick". ATE lodged an appeal that was due to be heard in March 2025 but it was postponed by a Crown Prosecution Service ruling that nothing could be heard until criminal proceedings were finished.

ATE was run by George Adam Taylor and his wife and fellow director Carly Taylor. She stood down as a director in December 2023. The company went into liquidation in April 2025 with debts of £1.2m.

As the film shows, the Crooked House remains a pile of rubble. Reader makes the point that the Carlton Tavern in North-West London was also bulldozed illegally and Westminster City Council successfully ruled it should be rebuilt "brick by brick".

The campaign believes the same rules should apply in the Black Country.

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