

leicestershire drinker

magazine of the leicestershire branches of the campaign for real ale

Issue 8 - Spring 2024

SPRING

Leicester Beer Festival - Serving Beer Trips to Chester, Sheffield, Ashby and Peterborough



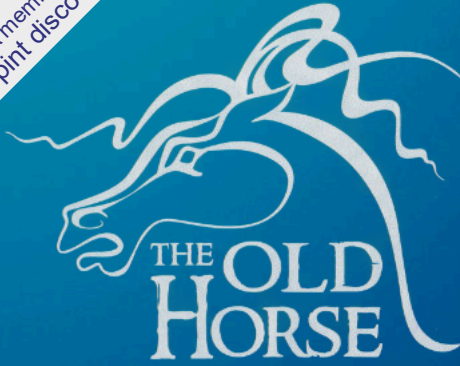
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Editor's Welcome



I hope you all enjoyed the festivities and helped licensees keep their bank managers happy.

Unfortunately, quite a few pubs took advantage of the revenues enjoyed and then called it a day. These included the award-winning Mash & Press in Anstey along with Monstex Brewery.

The last edition talked of hundreds of lost pubs and a new book delves further into those in Loughborough (more details in pub news).

In addition to the over 300 pubs we deliver our magazine to, they also end up at many festivals and I periodically get notes from remote places who have somehow received them or have read it online. The most recent has triggered a manhunt:

STAND UP THE DON WITH A BEARD

"I often read with interest the Leicestershire Drinker although I live miles away in rural Lincolnshire. I've been a member of Fenland CAMRA since the 1970s and one of your members, a bearded gentleman by the name of Don, travels by buses and trains each week to my local, 8 Sail Brewery Bar in Heckington and delivers a few copies of the mag. Although Fenland Branch does not have its own newsletter now, we often swap copies of others such as Nottingham and Derby. I see from your Issue 7 that a visit was made to the home of Tynt Meadow beer. Don was kind enough to present me with a bottle of said beer recently, which I really enjoyed. I read of forays to different parts of the country to sample pubs and beers, using public transport. Unfortunately, rural Lincs has poor bus services but I'm fortunate to live near my local train station (which is adjacent to 8 Sail) on the Nottingham / Skegness line. However, the monthly Poacher Line trips to Batemans Brewery, Wainfleet, ceased around Covid and their visitor centre has not reopened for the public use. I look forward to further issues of the Leicestershire Drinker."
David Mellor

Perhaps a trip taking in Heckington is called for.

CAMRA Hinckley have lost two stalwarts in Dianne Bates and Colin Scott.

Dianne Bates had been an active member almost since the creation of the branch in 2005. An ever-present at the Hinckley Beer Festivals and the Market Bosworth Rail Ale Festivals, taking on many roles for the duration of these events.

In the past, Dianne has acted as one of the accounts auditors as well as providing support to her husband David, in producing the Branch magazine.

Dianne has been the face of the branch in welcoming new members at their first meeting, and relieving us all of money for monthly raffle tickets! A constant at all of the social events, Dianne will be sadly missed.

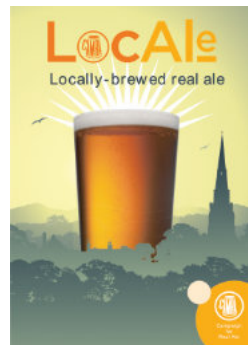
Colin Scott has also been a long-standing active member and was the Membership Secretary up to this year's AGM. Notably, stepping in to help the previous Branch Chair during the Covid pandemic, taking on the role of Deputy Chair providing welcome assistance at a very difficult time.

Colin has also been a great supporter of the Branch beer festivals, not just as Membership Secretary (signing up the local MP and one of the Borough Councillors, amongst others), but assisting in all areas.

As part of the Three Brewers celebration within the branch, Colin typically volunteered to act out the role of William Butler, dressed accordingly for the occasion.

This edition is slimmer than those of late as we have less advertisements than we have been getting. Licensees are struggling and cutting costs but if they want to encourage punters, they need to advertise what they have to offer. If you don't want to lose your magazine and possibly your pub do encourage your pub to consider advertising if only their special events. If you get any hint of interest, just let us have the licensee's name and contact details and we will speak to them to see what we can do for them.

Roy Denney



Leicestershire CAMRA Branches

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Email chair@meltonmowbray.camra.org.uk

Vale of Belvoir (VB) valeofbelvoir.camra.org.uk

HELP WANTED

The local branches are run entirely by voluntary teams and more help is always welcome. Staffing festivals is a great opportunity to get involved but another is dropping off copies of this publication at pubs you would probably enjoy visiting anyway. Each branch receives an allocation to distribute so if you think you can help please contact your local branch.

Open Meetings and Events Diary

Pub 'festivals' are organised and publicised at fairly short notice so keep an eye on the branches' websites.

February

23rd-25th East Flanders trip (Geraardsbergen) (MM)

28th Melton Branch Meeting, 7.30pm Charlie's Bar (MM)

29th Debate- What Makes a Good Pub, Sir Robert Peel (LEI)

March

6th Hinckley Branch Meeting, Hinckley Rugby Club (HB)

7th - 9th Loughborough Beer Festival, Polish Club, Loughborough (LOU)

April

3rd Survey Trip, details tbc (MM)

8th Hinckley Branch Meeting, Clarence Bar (HB)

24th - 26th Visit to Norwich (MM)

May

1st Hinckley Branch Meeting, Belper Arms (HB)

1st Melton Branch Meeting, venue tbc (MM)

July

3rd - 6th Leicester Beer Festival, Abbey Pumping Station

September

20th - 21st Melton Beer & Cider Festival, The Stockyard, Melton Market



Leicestershire Drinker

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If you wish to comment on any article or wish to contribute something for consideration, please use the website or send them to the editor Roy Denney editor@leicsdrinker.camra.org.uk
We are happy to tidy up raw material but will not publish anything received which is offensive or contrary to the legal framework within which we live. We reserve the right to edit, hold over, or discard material.

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Full details at leicsdrinker.camra.org.uk or from advert@leicsdrinker.camra.org.uk

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HELPLINES

Hygiene / Food Standards - food.gov.uk

Trading Standards - For problems such as consistent short measures, no price lists, pass it to Leicestershire trading standards if considered appropriate - 0116 232 3232 or 0808 223 1133

Citizen's Advice - 0800 144 8848 citizensadvice.org.uk

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Stagecoach stagecoachbus.com/about/midlands Centrebus centrebus.info

Arriva arrivabus.co.uk/midlands

Kinchbus/Skylink kinchbus.co.uk

Firstbus firstbus.co.uk/leicester

Traveline - traveline.info

Pub Discoveries / Gossip / Comings and Goings

The **Olde Red Lion** at Market Bosworth has both new landlords and a new kitchen. Similarly, the former Steamin' Billy pub, the **Railway**, in Hinckley, has been taken over by the Birmingham based pub company, Valiant, and has a complete refurbishment, inside and outside.

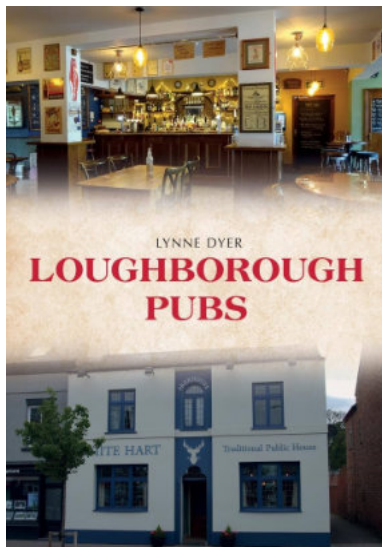
Loughborough CAMRA have their festival in early March, back in the Polish Club (see advert) and Leicester Branch are planning for a festival the first week in July.

Loughborough Pubs, a book by Lynne Dyer, has been reviewed by Philip Thorpe of Loughborough CAMRA and tells us that this soft-back book from Amberley Publishing is well presented with excellent colour photographs on most pages, and compares well with other Amberley books. Author Lynne Dyer has obviously done extensive research on the history of the older pubs in the town, giving details of landlords, sporting events and presentations, as well as inquests and auctions that took place in the pubs. It features a photo of the **White Hart** on the front.

The introduction gives a brief overview of the many Loughborough pubs that have disappeared

over the years, and the pub buildings that now have alternative uses. Publications such as Bill Wells' *Book of Loughborough Boozers*, CAMRA Guides, and Eric Swift's *Inns of Leicestershire* are

mentioned as sources of information. Not all lost pubs are mentioned, but this was not the intention. Before the introduction there is a colour map showing the location of all the pubs in the book, which will be helpful for readers not familiar with the town.



The main body of the book is split into two sections, the first is Town Centre Pubs, followed by Pubs Beyond The Town Centre. Included are the most modern pubs such as **The Amber Rooms**, micro pubs **Cask Bah** and **Needle and Pin**, plus **Moonface Brewery Tap** and **Charnwood Brewery**. There are photographs of all the pub exteriors, plus some interior shots. Where there are three shots of the exterior,

perhaps one could have been sacrificed for an interior one. For example, there are three of the rather nondescript Moonface exterior, but not one taken of the quirky inside. Inevitably this book will be a 'snapshot' in time, closure of the **Moon and Bell**, and the sale of the **Windmill** for other uses has happened since going to press.

If you know the history of pubs closed in your area and can help compile a register of them please contact the editor either with what you know or your contact details if you are happy to try and assist Charlie Corcoran in putting together this list.

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Overall, he found it an interesting well-presented book, which should appeal to those interested in the current pub scene, local history, and possibly some family history researchers. It complements other publications about local pubs.

Leicester has seen the opening of a third **Real Ale Classroom**. This one in the city centre complements the original in Stonegate and one in Lutterworth. The original was opened in 2015 by two secondary school teachers, Ian and Steve, who had done their time in education and were very much ready to do something different, so swapped life in one classroom for a new start in another significantly different Classroom.

Since our last edition the Campaign for Real Ale has announced the four regional finalists in its national Pub of the Year 2023. The pubs are:

- Nelson Arms, Tonbridge, Kent
- Tamworth Tap, Tamworth, West Midlands
- Trafalgar Hotel, Ramsey, Isle of Man
- Beer Engine, Skipton, Yorkshire

The first requisite is the quality of their beer but beyond that, they were selected by CAMRA volunteers judged on their atmosphere, décor, welcome, service, value for money and customer mix. By the time this edition comes out, the winner should be known and the process of selection for 2024 underway.

One pub that ticks all these boxes, the **Dog & Hedgehog** at Dadlington, is to close. As best we know it is to be developed outside the licenced trade. A great loss.

Parish Brewery are now producing Proper Charlie and PSB in 5L and 10L mini kegs. Three or six cases of 500ml Bonce Blower are also now available. Fruits of the Parish (4.2% ABV), a refreshingly fruity amber ale which had success at a number of beer festivals in the summer, has now been added to the core beer portfolio.

Further to our recent article, Bye Bye Buswells, Gary is to finally leave the **Lime Kiln** after 21 years. Gary is looking at new brewery/tap premises in Melton Mowbray.

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Chris Greenwood has been cruising around another side of Sheffield

"Sheffield is one of England's largest cities. It's built on seven hills, like Rome and Lisbon, not as pretty as the other two, but it has its attractions. A major attraction of the Steel City is the number of very good real ale pubs. One Saturday, I decided to explore an area new to me, Crookes.

It's a bit of a walkout to Crookes, but there are plenty of pubs on the way. My first port of call was the **Roebuck Tavern**. I wasn't planning to go there, but it was open before midday. It's a pleasant pub/eatery, with some attractive fireplaces, light wood and comfortable leather sofas. There was a good choice on the six wickets. I drank the Ossett Idaho 7. It was one of my beers of the day, generously hopped, with intense grapefruit notes and mouthfeel and a long bitter and citrusy finish.

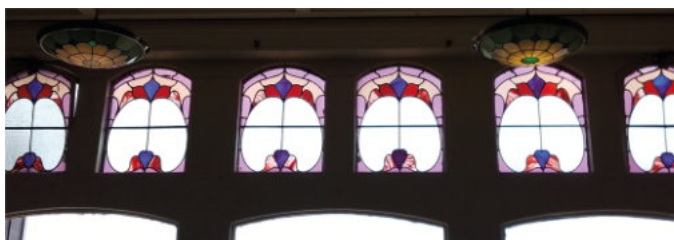


The Roebuck Tavern

The next pub was **Vocation & Co**, on Devonshire Street. This is a modern, light and airy place with five Vocation beers on handpump and a lot of keg. I tried the Vocation Milk Race, served to me by a chatty and friendly guy behind the bar. The beer looked good, black with a light brown head and had a good balance of lactose sweetness and coffee bitterness.

Next up was **Doctor's Orders** on Glossop Road. The pub has an impressive frontage, stained glass and pretty wooden fireplaces. I sipped the Black Sheep Best Bitter, which had an initial malty sweetness with some bitterness in the finish.

At the top of Glossop Road is the **Itchy Pig**. It's a basic, friendly micro, very green. I had an enjoyable chat with the knowledgeable bar manager. There were six



Stained glass at the Doctor's Orders

beers on offer. The Nightjar Gap Year Elephant Pants was an enjoyable IPA, with a generous amount of hops, some citrus notes and a bitter ending.

It was soon time to venture into Crookes. Up a small hill, not surprisingly. The Crookes Road is the main road in this area, and there are plenty of pubs on it. The first one I visited was the **Old Grindstone**. This is a True North pub, refurbished to a high standard, with five hand pulls. The friendly young woman behind the bar served me a True North Tempo, a slightly hazy pale, with a fruity mouth feel and a slightly bitter finish.

Next up was **The Ball**, a modern, rambling, comfortable Greene King pub. Seven of the eight beers were not Greene King. A helpful lad behind the bar gave me a few tasters, before I plumped for the Thornbridge Jaipur. It was in decent condition, with sharp bitterness and dry, hoppy ending. The pub gives a generous CAMRA discount.

A few minutes up the road is the **Two Sheds**, a small, basic micropub, with an impressive collection of pump clips on the ceiling. There were four real ales on offer. I drank the Durham Libelle, a well-hopped, easy-drinking pale, with plenty of bitterness on the tongue and finish. The Artesian Elderflower and Gooseberry Pale, was a refreshing, fruity beer, with a nice mix of the two fruits in its name.

Opposite, is the **Punchbowl**, another well-furnished True North establishment, with an impressive facade. It was quite food-oriented, with four True North

beers. The True North Blonde was a little thin, with a tiny hop tingle on the tongue and a slightly bitter ending.

Around a few corners from Crookes Road, you come to Cobden View Road and the **Cobden View** pub, an unspoiled backstreet locals' pub, with some attractive features and a nice garden. I was pleasantly surprised to see an Amarillo Session Pale by Brew Social Brewery from Sheffield. The beer was hoppy and refreshing, with a long bitter finish and some pineapple notes right at the end.

A slight backtrack gets you to Slinn Street and the **Princess Royal**. This is another attractive back street local, with an impressive frontage, lots of original features and a full-sized snooker table. The landlord and bar manager were very welcoming. There were four beers. I had the Welbeck Abbey Seven Sisters, which had a really puckering, grapefruit mouth feel and a citrusy finish.

A short walk downhill gets you to Common Side and **Hallamshire House**. This pub has an attractive facade, some impressive stained glass and a full-size snooker table. I think they are in a league with Princess Royal and some other pubs. It's a Thornbridge pub, with seven of their beers and CAMRA discount. I started with a half of Wild Swan, a classic, low gravity, well hopped pale ale, full of English hops, tangy, hoppy, with a long, bitter finish. The Ravenna had the signature pineapple notes of mosaic hops, with a citrusy, bitter finish.

Downhill on Brook Hill, is the **University Arms**. It has a pretty main room, upstairs stuff and a

pleasant garden. There was a good choice on the five wickets, friendly staff and CAMRA discount. The Triple Point Citrus Cryo had a spiky hop

mouthfeel, pear notes and a bitter ending. The Neepsend Galeru was a good mix of Vic Secret and Talus. It had a sweet start, with a sudden burst of hops and a bitter finish.

It's an enjoyable walk past the impressive university buildings and an old church to Trippet Lane and the **Dog and Partridge**. It's another attractive alehouse, with plenty of interesting features. The three beers weren't as interesting as

past visits. I drank the Little Critters Spot On, which had fruity notes, with a short pear drop tingle on the tongue at the end.

My automatic pilot got me to the **Rutland Arms** on Brown Street. This place has a very eye-catching, tiled Gilmour Brewery frontage, lots of pump clips adorning the walls and a relaxed atmosphere. There was a very good choice of beer, as usual. The Blue Bee Sabro Columbus had a woody start, with an emerging fruitiness, citrus notes and a long dry finish. The Siren Suspended in Eclipse had an appealing, fruity nose, plenty of hops in the mouth and a lasting bitter ending. The

Meanwood Love You Took was a lovely juicy, hazy pale with a tasty mix of Amarillo and Chinook, with citrus notes and a fruity finish. The Arbor Midnight Blue was a classic stout, with lots of roasted barley and coffee flavours and a dry, bitter finish, a great end to another exciting adventure in Sheffield. The Rutland Arms is very near the train station and I caught the 9pm (the last train) to go home. Cheers.



Stained glass at the Hallamshire House



Rutland Arms

Chris Greenwood

Leicester Beer Festival

Festivals are an opportunity to try a wider range of beers than we can normally get locally, although more guest beers pop up these days than when festivals started in this country. There became a tradition of breweries producing a festival special beer but to my mind that defeated the object as I wanted to find brews I liked which I could look out for to enjoy again.

Festivals increased in popularity and in Leicester's case outgrew any venues available and we could not satisfy the demand even using a venue with shortcomings, so we had to look elsewhere for better facilities. We then used the Haymarket Theatre which could take the numbers and had the facilities but it was expensive and the layout was poor and, in any event, the venue closed down during Covid and has not as yet reopened.

After a few years with no festival, we have explored several options, none very big, all expensive and not really suitable.

We did find one excellent venue where we could have worked in conjunction with a commercial operation, each party using their expertise in different elements of a joint venture. It did not however conform to the normal structure that our parent organisation liked and we got nowhere with it. CAMRA being an organisation of considerable size and being membership led with a committee structure, is slow to change and cumbersome in decision making. It does not always sit within the way the commercial world operates.

To my mind, it has gone from being an innovative organisation leading the charge for changes in the drinks industry to being one slow to follow trends.

Leicester CAMRA have now found yet another venue – small but very suitable and they have authority from on high.

I personally, like festivals with at most 100 ales and find enormous events too crowded and uncomfortable, so I am happy with a smaller venue, but it will mean disappointing those who cannot get tickets. There is a lot we cannot include with a small venue but it does make organising it a lot easier.

Food provision is one thing and we have usually had some hot food available but we cannot afford



Festival venue

the space in the potential venue for any catering. I find most people just want a cheese cob, pork pie or a slice of pizza that they can wander around with and this could be provided by mobile concessions outside our venue. Entertainment can also not be accommodated. It is a mixed blessing, something like Marmite. A lot enjoy it and a lot hate it and a few put up with it. Personally, I want to discuss the beers, impossible with some band belting out music.

With a smaller festival the choice of beers must have the right balance of styles and given everyone has different tastes, extremes with low take up should be avoided whilst giving real choices. People out socially with friends drink a whole range of alcoholic and soft drinks but with a small festival we must concentrate on our central purpose of showcasing beers and ciders. We will not have space for a range of alternatives.

The festival is to be at the fascinating Abbey Pumping Station alongside the National Space Centre, so people could take those in as well. Details are still being worked out.

The festival is the first week in July so do watch the branch website leicester.camra.org.uk for details as it will need to be by ticket.

Roy Denney

Everards' Beer Hall

The front cover is the impressive **Everards' Beer Hall** and brewery at Everards Meadows, near Fosse Park in Leicester LE19 2AN.

Everards Tiger along with a wide selection of their limited-edition and small batch beers are brewed in their state-of-the-art brewery and small batch brewery which you can see behind the windows in this modern and stylish Beer Hall.

As well as food and drink, there is a brewery gift shop selling Everards beers, other drinks and local produce. For opening times and more information or to book a table or brewery tour go to everardsmeadows.co.uk/explore/everards-brewery



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Why and What If?

Almost all discoveries and inventions evolved from people with curious minds asking these questions. Scientists do it all the time but most of us in our quiet moments ponder on 'what if'.

I used to publish a good pub guide by circulation list via emails and on the internet. It is still there floating about but massively out of date. Since Covid, pubs close or change hands so frequently, it is impossible to keep it up to date. It had 1500 pubs mostly in the rural and coastal areas but some in major towns and cities.

My 'what if' thoughts often wander to what if I published a good pub guide now. What do most people think constitutes a good pub and does that depend on which generation?

The late teens prefer clubs it seems and the 20s & 30s want smart bars where fancy drinks are available. The great majority of people who like pubs as we know them are when children have flown the nest etc. At that age, people rediscover the pleasure of meeting other people and chatting, not swapping social media messages.

So, what do I consider a good pub? A place where conversation is king; serving a choice of real ales in a clean and comfortable setting. Not a lot to ask for really.

Pubs in my old guide are rated 2 to 9. Scoring 1 did not make the guide and 2 was less than average but in a good location. They then went up to 8 or 9 where they were really good pubs offering exceptional beers and food at reasonable prices, well worth going out of your way for.

Using those criteria these days would not work as it would exclude the new wave of micros which offer at best very limited food often in fairly cramped premises but are still very enjoyable places to visit. We are in effect comparing chalk with cheese so to my mind the best way for me to select the best 10 pubs in the area would be by just noting the ten I use most. However, that depends on where I find myself with my other activities, so not a balanced approach. I could go around all the

supposed best and judge them against some criteria, but I suffer from a beer problem. I cannot be in more than one pub at the same time. Spread over many days I might have just caught one on a bad day or I could be off-colour.

All this just goes to show that any rating system will be inherently inadequate and will lead to challenges.

There was a time when some CAMRA areas did publish local good pub guides until print costs put paid to most, but several now have online pub guides. Few, if any, rate the pubs but the commentary gives you a bit of a steer as to how good they are considered.

Pub of the Year (POTY) is as near as ideally, once we have a short list a judging panel should go around them all together. Leicester CAMRA have decided to have an Urban POTY and a Rural one and possibly a suburban one as they are all serving different markets. Some areas have a Micro POTY and others a Summer Pub of the Season.

So why do we choose pubs the way we do? What if we tried something different?

The Good Beer Guide (GBG) and Pub of the Year are quite different. For the POTY, members must be able to nominate pubs but I don't think they should vote between them as most members will not know many of them. The branch committee should have a broad knowledge and can allow for numerous circumstances to get down to the shortlist. Alternatively, members can vote to get down to a shortlist but at the end of the day, a coach trip around all the shortlisted pubs is needed for the same people, having seen all the pubs, to then decide.

The Good Beer Guide is incorrectly used as a pub guide and beers are often scored on preferences not condition. We have explored its issues previously but it does not really work. If five new pubs selling truly excellent beers were to open, we would have to drop five pubs which are no



worse than the year before and might even have improved. This makes it something of a nonsense but if all went in deemed to be good, nobody would carry the guide around as it would be far too heavy.

There is an argument that online we could include all good pubs but with no known cap, pubs not included would scream even louder so we would end up putting them all in which is what WhatPub does already. CAMRA needs to publish a guide in any event to fund its campaign.

Please let the Editor know if you have any suggestions as to how to better do things. Letters or emails are always welcome.

One idea which came up during debate following an earlier edition of the Drinker might be worth further consideration.

That was that there should be a GBG for each region. The suggestion was that branches could have double their allocations and CAMRA would sell more as some people would buy guides to more than one region. We could have national guides for Scotland, Wales and Ulster plus South East England and London, Home Counties and South West England, The Borders and West Midlands, The East Midlands including Lincolnshire, Northants and Cambridge, Liverpool, Cheshire and Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cumberland & Westmorland, West and South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and the North East.

“The Good Beer Guide and Pub of the Year are quite different”

This would give us 11 focused, more easily carried guides with more entries per branch. CAMRA would sell more printed guides and the online guide could merge all these.

Roy Denney

Join the CAMRA story

Real ale is just the start...



Campaign
for
Real Ale

Join the CAMRA story
camra.org.uk/join

Real stories, real people, **real ale**

Chester by Coach

Gary Aikens has worked tirelessly over many years, organising trips to a wide variety of reachable destinations. We touch on them in reports of activities and the recent trip to Chester was like many a great success. Chris Greenwood went on this trip and gives us a more fulsome report.

"I went on this trip to Chester just before Christmas, setting off from Leicester at 9.30am and arriving in the centre of Chester just after midday. Armed with a good map Gary had printed from the Chester CAMRA branch, I headed off to visit some pubs and do some sightseeing.

My first port of call was the **Cornerhouse** on City Road. This is in a row of beautiful black and white, half-timbered buildings. It's a long wooden floored place, with attractive ceiling beams, exposed brickwork and a working fireplace. I chose a Three Tuns Stout from the four wickets, it had treacle and molasses notes, with a sweet finish.

Also on City Road is the **Cellar**, a basic ground floor bar and a spacious downstairs room. The owner was friendly and knowledgeable. There were six beers on offer. I drank a Northern Monk Fresh From, containing a decent amount of Luminosia, some bitterness and a gentle hop tingle on the tongue.

Just up the road and right, down the steps to the canal brings you to the **Old Harkers Arms**, an imposing brick-built, converted warehouse. The large l-shaped establishment has a lot of prints, pictures and books on the walls. There were six ales on; I ordered a White Rat and was told it wasn't on, so I asked for a Phoenix Boss Man. The young woman started pouring my beer, took my money, then disappeared. I went around the bar, to see White Rat was on, the lady had forgotten me, then short-measured me, someone else topped me up! The Boss Man had a balance of

malt and hops, with a developing fruitiness and a bitter finish.

Up next was the **Deva Tap**, on Brook Street, an interesting frontage led to a long, wood beamed pub, with three beers. The cheerful woman behind the bar served me an Ossett White Rat. It was a refreshing pale, with a pronounced bitter bite and a long hoppy finish.

Also on Brook Street is **Ye Olde Cottage** Inn, however, it didn't open until 2pm. I decided to walk up to the cathedral and Northgate, which was filled with attractive black and white, half-timbered buildings. The cathedral is made of

sandstone, so it looks very pretty in the sunlight. I took some photos and had a wander for a while, before going into **Ye Olde Boot Inn**, a lovely old building, with many black wooden ceiling beams, a couple of tapestries and an impressive fireplace in the small back bar. Everything here is Sam Smiths. I had the Old Brewery Bitter, a sweet, malty, mid brown ale, with some bitterness at the end.

I went back to the Olde Cottage, yet another pretty black and white building, with some stained glass and pictures and brewery mirrors on the walls. This was a down-to-earth, locals' pub, with four handpumps. I tried the Weetwood Harlequin, which had a generous

amount of English hops, a bitter mouthfeel, with some malt content.

A pleasant walk down the canal, alongside the city walls, brought me to the canal basin at Tower Wharf and **Telford's Warehouse**. Another impressive, brick, converted warehouse, with lots of massive wooden beams and winding gear as the centrepiece. There were four beers on. The friendly landlady gave me a Salopian Oracle, which was a pleasant pale ale, with plenty of hops in the mouth and a dry, bitter, slightly fruity ending.



Cornerhouse

I walked along the walls to Northgate and the **Pied Bull**. The pub had an attractive brick facade and lots of black, wooden beams on the ceiling. This is a brewpub, there was a good variety of styles in their five beers. I drank the Pied Bull Doubull Troubull, which was a good mix of Citra and Amarillo, with a pleasing, hoppy mouthfeel and a dry, bitter finish. The Pied Eyed had an appealing nose and lots of Nelson Sauvin, with a long hoppy ending.

Just down on the road, on Lower Bridge Street, is the impressive **Spitting Feathers Brewery Tap**, an impressive conversion from a Jacobean banqueting hall, with high ceilings and a tapestry. I chose the Shiny Swag from the eight beers on the bar, it had a good mix of Citra and Wakatu, grapefruit notes and a citrusy finish.

An enjoyable walk over the Old Dee Bridge took me to the **Ship Inn**, a food-oriented place, with three handpulls and welcoming service. The Westwood Turncoat claimed to be a hazy NEIPA, it wasn't! However, it was quite tasty, fruity, with a



Deva Tap

bitter edge, pear drop notes and an astringent ending.

I went back up to Bridge Street and eventually found the **Cavern of the Curious Gnome**, a massive two-floored establishment, with four real ales in the upstairs bar. The Chapter Greatcoat was a West Coast pale ale, with a fruity mouthfeel, orange peel notes and some bitterness in the finish.

The coach was picking us up on Foregate Street, so I went to the **Square Bottle**, a modern, very long, very busy Wetherspoon pub. I had the Peerless Full Whack, a strong 6% thing, with lots of malt, caramel overtones and a hint of chocolate, slight bitterness and butterscotch notes.

Well, it was soon time to go back to Leicester, so I got on the coach and Paul, the driver, got us all home quickly and safely. Thanks once again to Gary for organising another very enjoyable trip and to Paul the driver."

The trip was also to take in the Christmas Market but we know where Chris's interests lie.

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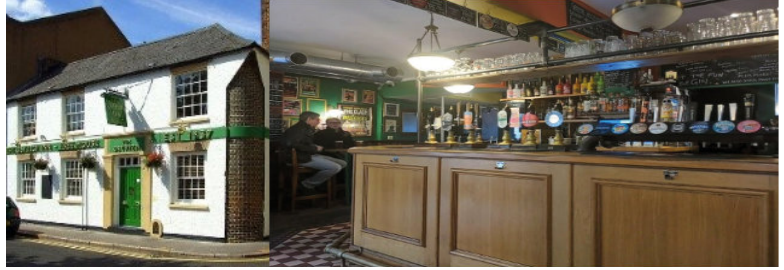
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Peterborough Perambulations

On a bright dry Saturday in December, 15 Melton Branch members plus one dog and two guests set off from Melton Mowbray for a Christmas Bash in Peterborough. On arrival, they were met by their secretary's daughter and her partner who live in Peterborough and would be their guides.



Ostrich - outside and inside

Their first port of call was the **Charters Bar** which is a Dutch Barge built in 1907. It is moored on the River Nene by Town Bridge. Serving mainly Oakham Ales plus guests usually Nene Valley ales.



Bottle & Board

They set off from there to try a new micropub called **Bottle & Board** which opened in 2020 and has British and Continental bottles in fridges. It also has Belgian beer taps and, on the day, Thornbridge beer was a guest ale. David Whitehead, Melton Branch Secretary, tried the Cherry Choffe which he thought was excellent.



Stoneworks

Their next venue was The **Stoneworks**, another micropub which on the day had two tap takeovers. David tried the Untitled #2 Chocolate Smoked Salt Stout. Another had the Billions of Cherries Sour, which she reported was excellent.

They then moved on to the **Ostrich**, a traditional pub which had four Christmas-themed beers on. Most of the group after the visit enjoyed their short stay here, some preferring traditional beers.

They moved on to the **Bumble Inn** which opened in 2016 and was a former chemist's shop. It has five hand pumps serving various ales, plus two craft key kegs and two ciders. David sampled the Franc & Stein which was very tasty.

Their last port of call was the **Blind Tiger** micropub which had a tap takeover from Stones Brewery. The Blind Tiger serves quality craft keg beers, wines and spirits. There are swings and table games to keep customers happy and drinking.

They then made their way back to the station for the homeward trip.



Blind Tiger - outside and inside



Christmas Away Days



On a cold December day, the Loughborough CAMRA Christmas trip ended up visiting Ashby de la Zouch and Melbourne (Derbyshire). Eight members set off from Loughborough on the 129 Diamond bus (Midland Classic) to Ashby. On arrival there was a large Christmas Market in the town centre and it was very busy. We wondered if we had made the right choice, however, we needn't have worried as we started with a breakfast in the **Shoulder of Mutton**, a



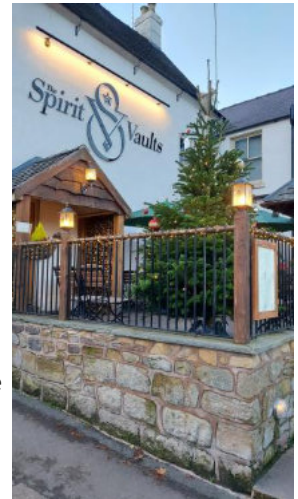
Wetherspoon pub with multiple drinking areas before visiting the **Tap at Number 76** at the other end of the town centre. The pub is one of the oldest buildings in Ashby and was a medieval farm house; in recent years it was a café before becoming a micropub for Tollgate Brewery with an excellent selection of beers. Some members even managed to survey the **Plough** before we got the number 9 Diamond bus to Melbourne.

The town centre was quiet compared to Ashby and we started our visit in the **Bank of Beers** micropub (formerly The Chip and Pin which was



Derbyshire's first micropub converted from a bank). The pub has been refurbished and is now more spacious and under new ownership of Leatherbritches. Four real ales were on offer; two from Leatherbritches and two guest beers. Craft beers and ciders were also available.

Next was a short walk to the **Spirit Vaults** opposite Melbourne Hall and St Michael and St Mary's Church entrance. The church is a grade 1 listed building and dates back to 1133 and is one of the finest Norman churches. Just a short walk from here you can visit the picturesque lake.



The **Sprite Vaults** is a smartly decorated, two room microbrewery, located in the pub now run by Morgan Brewmaster Brewery (set up by owners of the former Shardlow Brewery). Three real ales were on offer from Morgan Brewmaster: Vaults Gold 4.2%, Vaults Dark, a rich roasted malty ale and Reverend, an amber ale. Three guest beers were also available. There is a separate restaurant at the pub and rooms are available.

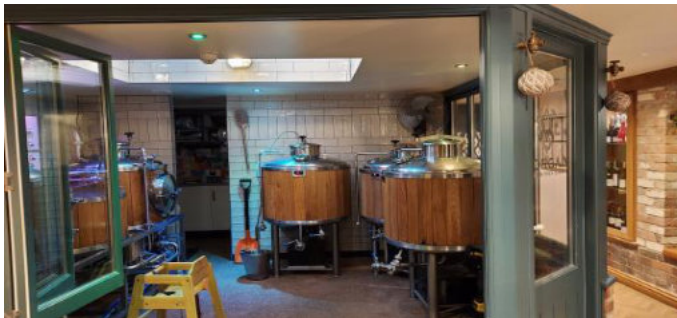
The next pub on our list was **Harper's** in the centre of Melbourne. Unfortunately, we hit the pub at the wrong time on a late Saturday afternoon which was very busy. They sell beers from the Little Brewing Company (which is a microbrewery at the Boot pub, Repton, Derbyshire). We have an excuse for a return visit to sample the beers here.

We then visited the **White Swan**, one of the oldest pubs in Melbourne, dating back to 1684. The pub

Ashby de la Zouch and Melbourne

has a small lounge on the right and a larger bar area on the left. The beers on offer were draught Bass and Timothy Taylor Landlord which were both excellent.

It was then time for the number 9 Diamond bus for the short journey to East Midlands Airport where we changed for the Skylink bus (towards Leicester) for the short journey to Kegworth. We



visited the **Red Lion**, a multi roomed pub and, as always, there was a nice choice of real ales, four regular and four guest beers. After an hour there it was time for our return journey to Loughborough on the Skylink bus.

Andy Leates



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Historic Burton Union Sets To Go

It's the end of the barrel for the world-famous union sets (pictured) used to ferment Pedigree at the Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Co (CMBC), in Burton-upon-Trent.

The company says the process is no longer viable because of a drop in cask volumes. Two of the sets will remain at the brewery as a piece of brewing heritage.

CAMRA is urging CBMC to preserve these historic brewing vessels.

Burton unions, or Burton union sets, is an unusual method of brewing using a system of wooden barrels and pipes which recirculates beer and yeast during the fermentation period.

CAMRA national chairman Nik Antona said: "It's obviously hugely disappointing that CMBC has taken the decision to retire its iconic Burton unions. It is arguably the last brewery in the world, and certainly in the UK, using this method and this decision will see a unique and historic part of Britain's brewing heritage declared completely extinct.

"We'd urge CMBC to find some way to preserve these historic pieces of brewing equipment rather than simply scrap them, or make the union sets available to another brewery which might be interested in preserving this tradition.

"We do understand the need for breweries to remain efficient and ensure quality at a time when we are sadly seeing many closures.

"CAMRA is reassured that this news is tempered by the fact CMBC has invested a significant sum, worth several millions, in the site, which hopefully will secure continued brewing and support the cask ales which have long been brewed in Burton-upon-Trent."

Marston's director of brewing Emma Gilleland said: "We take great pride in the quality of our brews, and by moving cask Pedigree to stainless steel fermenters we will be able to deliver consistent strong quality for our customers and consumers going forward."

"We are committed to protecting the legacy of the union sets, both for the brewery and for Burton. We will invest in preserving two union sets which will remain at the brewery so they can continue to be part of its future as enduring, iconic symbols of British brewing."



In its heyday Marston's Pedigree was regarded as the most sublime and complex of British ales. Brewed with the uncompromising hard waters from Burton-upon-Trent, the beer has a nutty delicateness, which can be masked by the sulphurous "snatch" from the sulphates in the area's legendary "just perfect" liquor.

Housed in high-ceilinged maturation rooms, described by beer writer Roger Protz as a "cathedral of brewing". The system was introduced in the 1830s and was once widely used for the production of "better" ales.

Other breweries have long since torn down their Burton union systems as needlessly elaborate, expensive relics. The former Bass union stands in the car park of the National Brewery Centre in Burton,

After fermentation begins the beer is transferred into 264 linked oak barrels, the production of carbon dioxide, as a by-product of fermentation, helps expel the yeast off the beer through swan-necked pipes into yeast collection troughs.

The practical purpose of the system was to allow excess yeast foam (barm) to be expelled from the casks without leaving excessive amounts of head space within. The system was quickly refined to separate any expelled beer from the wasted yeast, allowing it to flow back into the casks to continue fermentation.

Brewing scientists regarded the system as unparalleled for the production of bright, clean, strong-tasting pale ales.

However, the system with its flurry of pipes and casks and the necessity to keep the cavernous fermenting rooms at a cool temperature – even through long, hot summers – is expensive.

Timothy Hampson

Why Pub Campaigners Are Needed

The story of the Crooked House rightly dominated the headlines last year. The pub, in Himley, near Dudley in the West Midlands, was sold to a developer by Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Company in July 2023, ending its 260-year tenure as a public house.

The following month, a fire broke out causing massive damage to the building, which was famous for being "Britain's wonkiest pub" due to its sloping nature, caused by subsidence. After the fire, the building was demolished by its new owner – later revealed to be ATE Farms Ltd – and reporting from several national outlets provided evidence that the demolition equipment was hired at least one week before the fire took place.

My colleague at (CAMRA magazine) *What's Brewing* Laura Hadland has kept an in-depth timeline on the incident on her website, which is now being treated as suspected arson by the West Midlands Police. The loss of such a historic pub is a tragedy; the unchecked destruction of not just something physical, but culturally and emotionally significant, now reduced to nothing more than ash, dust and memory.

I have thought about the ongoing case of the Crooked House often since it became headline news. Pubs are essential touchstones within communities and the loss of this one will have no doubt been felt keenly by those who frequented it. That it resonated so much with the general public is significant, but what I felt the national press failed to highlight as a result is how often incidents like this happen, and how many traditional, community focussed pubs like this are closing down, or at severe risk of doing so.

In researching my most recent book, *Manchester's Best Beer Pubs and Bars*, I developed a close relationship with the pubs in this corner of the North West. But I also knew that in producing a physical guide, the amount of time it would

remain accurate would be finite. A couple of venues in the book, the Epicurean in Ancoats and Hatch along Oxford Road, didn't even survive the amount of time it took for the final draft to come back from the printers. Pi Bar in Altrincham also changed hands, but has thankfully been reborn as the Beacon, and I'm glad to say is still an excellent beer destination.



The closure of one pub since the book's publication has given me particular pause for thought. I included Oldham's Royal Oak with intention: so much of the book is dedicated to venues that are houses of great beer first, and proper pubs second, and within Oldham venues like the Cob and Coal, and Fox and Pine are representative of

this. But I wanted to include a pub that was of Oldham – a true, working-class town, built on the back of proper local pubs. For me, the Royal Oak was the best of them.

The three-storey, Grade II-listed building on Oldham's Union Street had reportedly served as a public house since 1825. It was previously owned by Robinson's brewery of Stockport, which sold the site to pub company Inglenook Inns in 2017. Despite the change in ownership, the Royal Oak still carried the family brewer's beers, including its strong winter warmer, Old Tom, during the colder months.

David Sweeney, the pub's licensee for the past 16 years was given just two weeks' notice of the sale and was forced to close the pub in early December, ahead of the busy Christmas trading period. The sale was private and reportedly done without Sweeney's prior knowledge. While the new owner has not been disclosed, technically there is very little it can do to modify the existing building owing to its Grade II-listed status. Although one X (formerly Twitter) user posted on 7 December that people were inside the pub "ripping stuff out". Add the case of the Crooked

Continued on page 21

Bear Festival

No, not a spelling mistake. Leicester CAMRA ran a coach trip to see the Whittlesey annual Straw Bear Festival dating with a few gaps to the middle of the 19th Century. It involves someone getting covered in straw and dancing through the streets, accompanied by more than 250 Molly and Morris dancers and musicians.

An effigy of a straw bear is burned to mark the ending of the festival which signifies the old year going out and the new year coming in. Thankfully not the chap running through the town.

The festival drew thousands to this market town including the Leicester CAMRA Treasurer, Charlie

Corcoran and his Red Leicester Morris troop and a coachload of supporters, possibly only here for the beer as somebody once said.

They were certainly blessed with a nice sunny winter's day and the pubs were busy with locals and visitors. It was good to see several of the pubs that perhaps don't usually sell much real ale had taken the opportunity to get a good range of beers in especially for the event. The range of Adnams beer on a stillage in the **Med Cocktail Bar** was well received and it was definitely easier to get served there than in Wetherspoons next door.



Continued from page 20

House to the mix, and we can see that developers have little regard for the sanctity of such venues, and one can only hope that the law is used effectively to make an example of the people who destroyed this particular pub.

While on a personal level it's frustrating to see my guide gradually go out of date, more significantly, the closure of the Royal Oak and the nature in which it happened demonstrates the threats facing so many of the UK's pubs. This is especially so considering how many licensees are likely struggling to turn a profit due to spiralling inflation and costs, and wholesale changes to the alcohol duty system that the industry is still trying to get its head around.

How many more Crooked Houses and Royal Oaks are just around the corner, waiting to happen? How many more licensees will lose their entire

livelihoods with just a couple of weeks' notice? And perhaps most importantly, how many local pubs, cherished by the members of the community who use them, are under serious threat of disappearing completely and creating lasting damage to the social structure of said communities?

It's a new year, and a good time to remind ourselves that events such as the above are not happening in isolation. Campaigners need to be consistent in ensuring that their voices are heard, and that the general public are constantly reminded of both how important pubs are to their communities, and how at risk so many are disappearing completely. By ensuring our voices are heard, we might just give them the window for survival they so desperately need.

Matthew Curtis

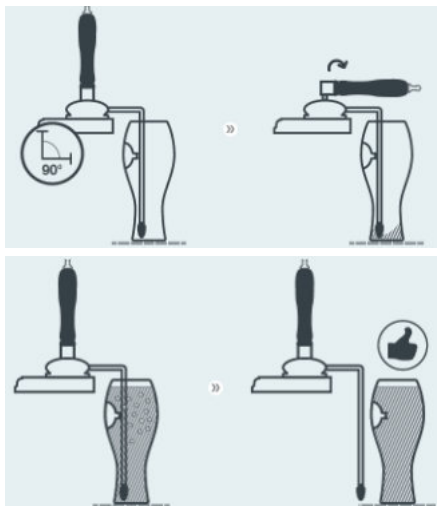
How Well Can You Pull?

No amount of skill can dispense a bad pint and improve it, but even the best of drinks can be disappointing if pulled badly.

Dispensing beer has always been an issue in pubs. The industry tends to employ inexperienced younger staff and you get what you pay for, unless you are the customer. If you work behind a bar and don't feel you know all the techniques needed, do ask your employer as it is in everybody's interest to have it done right.

Customers' varying tastes do not help though.

As a northerner I want a head on my beer, but a friend I drink with enjoys the same beer as I do but wants the sparkler removed before his pint is pulled. Modern cask beer is usually designed to be served through a handpull with a sparkler.



Images: beerconsultancy.co.uk/CellarCraft

The average drinker will not understand but pulling a pint involves a whole range of skills. Using a handpull requires one set of skills and using one with a sparkler attachment requires a different technique.

Beers direct from the cask just using gravity are different of course, but most keg beer comes through a faucet and they vary widely; all this needs teaching to bar staff. It is in all landlord's interests to provide this if they want satisfied customers.

It always surprises me how little people know about the beer they drink. Perhaps they don't need to. If they don't like a beer, it may just not be to their taste and a knowledge of the ingredients, hop varieties in particular, helps. If they understand how pints should be served it helps as well and if they know what to expect from a beer, they will know whether it is actually off and should be sent back.

Roy Denney

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Call for Government to Help Struggling Pubs

The British Institute of Innkeeping (BII), which represents more than 13,000 independent licensees, has written to the chancellor calling for more financial support for pubs.

A recent survey of BII members found 62 per cent to be reporting of pub revenues being flat or down. In addition, most pubs were facing exceptional costs rises for energy, wages and raw materials.

The difficult trading conditions saw three out of four pubs operate unprofitably in 2023.

BII chief executive Steve Alton said: "Our members' pubs continue to face a cost of business crisis, driven by exceptional cost increases in energy, staffing, food and drink supply. "Pubs are essential businesses at the heart of every community, providing accessible spaces for all. They are vital in supporting local suppliers including brewers, providing essential skilled jobs, and have the capacity to generate real growth in the economy.

Ahead of the Budget, CAMRA is calling for a reduction in draught beer and cider duty. This will help level the playing field between community venues like pubs and social clubs and the off-trade.

The Campaign is also urging for the scrappage of unnecessary rules that ban take-home draught beer and cider for most pubs and festivals, plus the reform of business rate relief schemes that are due to end in England next year, with money for devolved governments to do the same in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Sales of Low Alcohol Beer Rise

Are low alcohol beers changing the character of pubs as we know them, and what does it mean for the future of cask ale?

A YouGov survey shows a rise in popularity of low and no alcohol products, with young adults now the biggest consumers.

The Portman Group's sixth annual survey in partnership with YouGov shows that young people are the biggest consumers of low and no alcohol alternatives, with nearly half (44 per cent) of 18-24 year olds surveyed considering themselves either an occasional or regular drinker

of alcohol alternatives, compared to 31 per cent in 2022.

Trends also show that the younger generation are now the most sober age group overall, with 39 per cent of 18-24 year olds not drinking alcohol at all.

The research continues to tell a positive story of how low and no alcohol products have become an important and normal part of how the UK public moderate their drinking and tackle potential harm – with three quarters (75 per cent) of UK drinkers having at least tried a low or no alcohol alternative, compared to a third (33 per cent) of non-drinkers.

MBE for Micropub Pioneer

Martyn Hillier, founder of the Micropub Association, was made an MBE for services to business and hospitality in the New Year Honours list.



Hillier opened the first micropub in Herne, Kent – the **Butchers Arms** – in 2005, and has since been leading the micropub movement. He was invited to speak and introduce the concept of micropubs at the 2009 CAMRA's Members Weekend in Eastbourne by former national director Brett Laniosh and was awarded CAMRA Campaigner of the Year 2015 by then national chairman Colin Valentine.

He has formed a small but like-minded group, the Micropub Association, where people can ask questions and get free advice on opening their own micropub.

Spoon's Boss Knighted

The founder of the JD Wetherspoon pub chain and its chairman Tim Martin has been knighted in the New Year Honours list.

Now with more than 800 pubs, 'Spoons is probably the country's largest retailer of cask ale from more small brewers than any other.

In 1979, his first venue was in Muswell Hill, north London in a former bookies, and was originally called Martin's Free House, before being renamed JD Wetherspoon the following year. The chain, which became known for its affordable prices, floated on the London Stock Exchange in 1992.

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