Winter 2026/27

Pint Taken

FREE

Award Winning Worcestershire County CAMRA Magazine



In this issue

- Pub and Brewery News
- Celebrating Cider and Perry
- Views from Behind the Bar
- CAMRA's Budget Reaction

...and lots more

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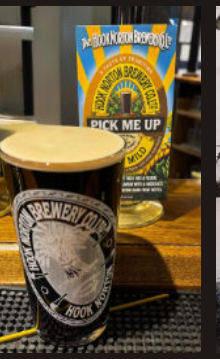
CAMRA

Gareth & Hayley offer a warm welcome at

The HOP POLE













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Branch Pub of the Year 2026
CAMRA
BROMSGROVE, REDDITCH & DROITWICH

Editor's Introduction

This is the time of year when we normally look back at what impacts the recent budget will have on our pubs and the type of beers we like to drink. However, this year's budget was a little muted with an announcement that the duty on alcohol will rise by 4.55%. This was accompanied by an increase of the Small Producer Relief which should help small brewers and cider makers, see page 25 for a report on the budget measures.

However, if you trawl through the fine detail you might also notice something called Guest Beer Provision which gives all pub tenants that are tied to a Pubco for their beers, the ability to add a guest beer of their choice to their bar. As well as providing drinkers with an extra choice, it should also be a boost to local brewers by giving better access into a lot more pubs.

Back in October there was a parliamentary debate on Cask Ale and "the potential merits of recognising the production and serving of cask ale as intangible cultural heritage"; see page 8 for a full report. This coincided with the announcement by Carlsberg Britvic that they were closing the Marston's brewery in Burton. The debate also discussed having Cask Ale recognised by UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage scheme in much the same way that Cornish pasties and Stilton cheese are protected.

It's sad that we have to go to such lengths to protect something that is part of our everyday life, but it appears there are dark forces amassing and we have to do everything in our power to fight back.

If you'd like to comment on anything within this magazine, or any other beer or CAMRA related issues, please email **editor@pinttaken.org.uk** Please include your name, even if you don't want it included as we can't publish anonymous comment.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our readers and all our volunteers who help to keep this magazine going, we couldn't do it without you.

Gez Quinn **editor@pinttaken.org.uk**

The copy deadline for the Spring edition of *Pint Taken* is 26th January.

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Cover photo: Old Oak, Drakes Broughton by Neil Berry

Pub and Brewery News

The **Hop Pole** in Bewdley has new landlords who have introduced changing beers and a Cask Ale Club on Mondays at 5pm. Monday is also Pie Night and a Pint. A great combination!

The **Court Leet** in Bromsgrove has announced that it is closing. This Greene King house under their Hungry Horse brand opened around 10 years ago in what was once Bromsgrove Labour Club. Plans for the venue are not yet known.

The **Golden Lion** in Charford, Bromsgrove have announced that the pub is up for sale. Currently owned by Marstons, the pub will remain open until a new owner can be found.

Black Country Ales have announced that their latest acquisition, the Droitwich Working Men's Club on Friar Street, will be called the **Salters Arms**, when it opens, as a nod to the town's salt brine heritage. Work is currently underway to remodel the whole building and appoint new licensees to run the new pub in time for opening in early December.

The **Old Oak** in Drakes Broughton has been reopened after refurbishment see page 14.

The **Defford Arms** in Defford unfortunately closed on 3rd October.

To submit pub news go to
pinttaken.org.uk/send-news

Hop Shed Brewery are delighted that The Tap Room is included in The Good Beer Guide for the first time – a great way to celebrate their 10th Anniversary!
Tommy, the brewery's apprentice, (pictured below) was chosen as one of the Super Six finalists in HIT Training's Untapped Beer Competition in October. His creation was a 4.1% British Golden Ale, combining heritage Chevallier malt and classic Goldings and Fuggles hops with modern Harlequin and Olicana varieties. The result is a great beer called 'Back to the Future' that celebrates traditional British brewing while showcasing how the style continues to evolve and will feature in the 2027 specials beer line up in pubs in January. Three Kings, the popular Seasonal Stout brewed with Mystic hops for a festive fruitiness will be available on draught again towards the end of November. Finally, a reminder that the Tap Room is open all year around with food every Friday (4-9pm) and Saturday (1-6pm).





Night Owl Brewery has won the top prize in Brewery of the Year for the West Midlands in 'My Local Awards'. The votes come from people who actually use the businesses in various categories, this being Food and Drink production. It is so pleasing to see one of our local breweries right up there at the top. Congratulations to Emily and Miles.

Watch out for Bah Humbug, **Bewdley Brewery**'s 4.6% smooth, ruby coloured Christmas ale that carries a well-balanced, malty flavour, with a hint of liquorice in the aftertaste and as the months get colder the cosy taproom is a great place to drink it.
The brewery is hosting Quiz Nights on the second Thursday of every month for the foreseeable future, aside from January, as they have grown to be widely liked within the local community as many pubs have found to their benefit. Topsy Turvy, which originally debuted at the Bewdley Beer Festival, has proved to be so popular it has been brewed again. It is a 5.9% golden beer with a noticeable sweetness which bounces beautifully off the smooth bitterness from the Fuggles and Celeia hops.
As Christmas approaches, a range of draught beers, gift packs, Christmas crackers, and other merchandise will be available in store and online



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Pub and Brewery News

to order for collection. A Limited Edition liqueur, Jambrewie, a 22% liqueur which has notes of rich vanilla and raisin throughout, finishing with a nutmeg and cinnamon taste, will also be released for the festive season.

Huge congratulations to Perry on his promotion to lead brewer at **Copper Beech Brewery** in the heart of the city of Worcester and welcome to Billy, the new apprentice brewer.

Grinnbull Brewing continues to expand the range of cask ales, one of which is a colab with Copper Beech Brewery for a strong Christmas ale. You might have been lucky enough to have a pint of their Wild Green Hop ale while it was available in local Worcester pubs and the excellent Green Hop Festival at the Talbot, Knightwick which I attended in October.

Global conglomerate Carlsberg Britvic announced in October that it would be closing the **Marston's Brewery** in Burton in 2027. Not one of our local breweries, but its closure threatens several of the beers that we normally see in our pubs such as Marston's Pedigree, Bass, Wainwright, Hobgoblin, Old Empire IPA, 61 Deep, King Goblin, Lancaster Bomber, Pearl Jet and EPA. Not the most exciting list of beers, but losing these beers could well encourage Carlsberg to take cask beer out completely - disturbing times.

Brewery news is compiled by Neil Berry

To submit brewery news go to **pinttaken.org.uk/send-news**

Celebrating Cider and Perry

The West Central CAMRA Region has enjoyed considerable success in the 2026 cider and perry awards.

National Pub of the Year

The 2026 **National Cider Pub of the Year** is the **Hoptician** run by Kevin and Kirsty Farmer in Dursley, Gloucestershire. It's a fabulous micropub with a wonderfully welcoming atmosphere that has only been open for two and a half years. There's a wide range of real ciders and perries, including local varieties, alongside a good selection of real ales and craft beers. The well-attended award was made in October.



The Pomona Award



Albert Johnson of Ross-on-Wye Cider and Perry Company has won CAMRA's 2026 **Pomona Award**, recognising his outstanding contribution to promoting real cider and perry in the UK.

Albert follows in his father's footsteps, Mike Johnson, who received the same award in 2009. His own remarkable work includes cultivating an impressive collection of around 120 apple varieties and 30 pear varieties. This has enabled him to introduce what is believed to be the largest range of single-variety ciders and perries in the UK, if not the world.

Through new plantings and the care of established orchards, Albert is helping to safeguard the future of traditional cider and perry.

His work celebrates the quality, authenticity and provenance of these distinctive drinks, while preserving rare and heritage varieties for future generations.

A highly respected figure in the industry, Albert also shares his knowledge widely, inspiring and supporting the next generation of orchardists, cidermakers and perrymakers. His award recognises not only his achievements, but also his commitment to ensuring that the rich heritage of cider and perry continues to thrive.

Get Involved

Branch Nominations are now open for the prestigious CAMRA **Cider Pub of the Year** competition for 2027, and we need your help to find the UK's finest cider-serving establishments. You need to be a member of CAMRA to nominate, so if you're not already a member, head on over to **camra.org.uk** and join now or use the QR code.

Real cider and perry deserve to be celebrated. Unlike mass-produced alternatives, authentic cider is a labour of love, crafted from 100% pure apple or pear juice using traditional methods. The pubs, clubs, and taprooms that champion these drinks are vital to preserving our heritage and supporting independent producers. This competition shines a spotlight on those venues that go above and beyond to showcase exceptional quality, variety, and knowledge.

Whether it's a rustic rural inn with a dedicated cellar or a vibrant urban micropub with a rotating selection of bag-in-box ciders, we want to hear about it. Winning this award isn't just about bragging rights; it provides a massive boost to local businesses and raises the profile of real cider nationwide.

How to nominate your favourite venue

- **Check the criteria:** Venues should offer a fantastic range of real cider or perry, kept in optimum condition.
- **Consider the atmosphere:** A great cider pub offers a welcoming environment, knowledgeable staff, and a true passion for the craft.
- **Submit your entry:** Contact your local branch to make your nomination or head over to the official CAMRA website to join now.

You'll find more info on what qualifies as real cider on the CAMRA website.

Don't let your favourite local go unnoticed. Your nomination could set them on the path to branch, county or regional glory or even a spot in the national finals. Take a few minutes today to give your favourite cider pub the recognition it truly deserves. Put them on the map and help us celebrate the very best of British cider culture!

If you want more information on the competition or have any questions about real cider and perry, then please get in touch.

Andrea Bennett, Regional Cider Coordinator, West Central Region ***cider@westcentral.camra.org.uk***

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MPs Back Recognition of Cask Beer

MPs have debated "the potential merits of recognising the production and serving of cask ale as intangible cultural heritage" and saw MPs from five political parties and across the UK give their backing for official recognition of cask, for better access to market for independent brewers and the need to protect the UK's brewing heritage.

The debate came about because of Derby CAMRA's local campaigning against misleading Fresh Ale kegged beer served through traditional cask handpulls, which convinced Derby South MP Baggy Shanker to apply for a debate about protecting and promoting cask.

The debate also came on the back of the campaign by Craft Beer Channel to get cask recognised under UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage scheme which has already seen recognition for Belgian beer and the French baguette. The first step to getting cask the same recognition is a listing under the UK government's Living Heritage scheme, which would then open up the possibility for its nomination for the UNESCO listing.

The good news is that responding to the debate, government minister for tourism Stephanie Peacock said the government recognised the strong campaign for living heritage status for cask put forward by Craft Beer Channel and CAMRA, and said the bid is currently being assessed by an independent panel. She said the government recognises that the production and serving of cask is a vital living tradition.

Many MPs spoke about the damaging decisions by multinational brewers to close cask breweries and move production of brands away from the places in which they have traditionally been brewed.

Wolverhampton West MP Warinder Juss spoke about the impact on his city's brewing heritage of the decision to close Banks's brewery and the importance of this heritage being protected.

Burton and Uttoxeter's MP Jacob Collier raised Carlsberg Britvic's announcement about closing Marston's brewery in Burton-upon-Trent putting 300 jobs and the future of brands like Pedigree and Bass at risk.

Staffordshire MP Sir Gavin Williamson said that the Marston's decision was the latest in a pattern of behaviour following the decision to close Banks's and said many global brewers seem determined to close all their cask breweries. Fellow Staffordshire MP Mike Wood agreed saying that losing Marston's, Banks's and Sharp's breweries should set alarm bells ringing in government.

Carlisle MP Julie Minns has long campaigned for better access to all pubs for independent breweries and said getting a pint of independently brewed cask in a pub can be a challenge due to the practices of large brewing companies. She called for a guest beer right to be introduced for tied tenants in England and Wales to improve access into pubs for small breweries – an argument repeated by the Green Party's Hannah Spencer.

Conservative shadow minister James Wild MP highlighted the fact that smaller, independent breweries are finding success in the cask beer market and spoke about the importance of supporting community pubs, taprooms and festivals which are vital to securing the future of cask beer.

Sir Gavin Williamson MP said big brewing businesses are misleading customers into thinking they are getting real ale by serving non-cask beers through traditional handpulls. He called on government to drag in the chief executive of Carlsberg for a dressing down over the damage being done to Britain's cask brewing heritage.

Mike Wood MP said that cask beer served through a handpull at the bar defines British pubs and should be given protection, while Baggy Shanker MP called out the threat posed by 'Fresh Ale' masquerading as cask which misleads consumers.

Now it is a case of waiting for that independent panel to review applications to the Living Heritage scheme. The government's Department for Business needs to take action to prevent misleading products being sold through cask handpulls at the bar. CAMRA will keep speaking to MPs and lobbying government about our Beer in the UK report and the need for wholesale reform of the market to guarantee full access to market.

Paul Edgeworth





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Views from Behind the Bar: Part One

One of our members, Nick Yarwood, has been chatting with a group of landlords across Worcestershire, revealing a shared passion for pubs and several common themes.

Part One features Ian Mercer who runs **Orilla** in Bewdley

Orilla, on the river front in Bewdley, is an independent free house. It was initially a cocktail bar for a year and was then transformed into a very successful ale bar in November 2025, by manager Ian Mercer, for its owner who runs The Courtyard restaurant next door.

Ian first encountered real ales with friends when visiting the **Bell** at Pensax many years ago. He quickly got involved with the pub's annual beer festival and went on to work there for 18 years in the kitchen and on the bar, with real ale becoming his passion. He progressed to become its very successful manager. When it closed and was sold, he managed the bar at Bewdley Brewery for seven years then moved to Orilla to transform and run the pub. It has become very popular with loyal regulars and many visitors, attracted by the five cask ales and interesting craft beers on the bar, many local, some interesting beers from across the country, and always different to anything else in the town.

He said the pub has a clear identity, attracting the local community. For Ian, first impressions are very important, and so the staff are also very important. They are always welcoming and talk with customers. Everyone is acknowledged as soon as they enter and approach the bar.

He said the pub has to be clean, tidy, and warm in winter. Its location by the river bridge helps, and people come in, stay, and return. The beers, wines and spirits are all chosen for good quality and are competitively priced, providing excellent value for customers, who come back time and again.

He's noticed that customers tend not to go out so much these days, and they go out earlier. Young



people are not going out as much, as he and his friends did when they were younger.

VAT is a real burden, especially for smaller businesses, so help should be targeted. Staff costs, business rates, compliance costs and cellar gas have all increased and customers don't see that. To be successful, pubs have to be competitively priced whilst also fair to the business. Being free of tie enables best price sourcing directly with brewers.

Friendship groups are important to the success of the pub, and Ian doesn't need to use social media to increase trade. Every pub is different with different client bases, in his case it's cask ales and craft beers. In Orilla, all cask ales are a single, competitive price, which helps with offering a greater range.

In the cellar, every beer is different, needing its own care and attention. Cask ales condition for at least three days before being vented, some for longer, maybe five or seven days, depending on the beer. He says it's important that beers are turned off or hard pegged after every session. Experience helps with knowing which beers are lively, and only he looks after the cask beers. He does not use vertical dispense, preferring to allow beers to condition horizontally and without being disturbed.

Customers think that running a pub is easy. It's a life-style, with very long hours. Comparisons get made with supermarket prices without appreciating the costs that come with running a pub.

Ian says that CAMRA has done a fantastic job with preserving cask ale and is very helpful with



individual pubs under threat. Campaigning on reducing the tax burden is something that it can help with. Also, reinforcing messages to customers to enjoy and use pubs. For its members, some from outside the area sometimes ask for a discount, but with the pub's competitive prices they are soon happy.

He gets involved with local business promotions such as Heritage on Tap and Visit Worcestershire. He also stated, without being prompted in any way, that advertising in *Pint Taken* is very effective because it targets the right audience and is very good value. Thanks, Ian!

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or scan the QR code to
get started

CAMRA

Resurrecting the Family Name

Darbys

Back in 1864 Charles Darby took on the Dog & Duck in Braybrook St. West Bromwich as a beer retailer. This was the first of many to bear the Darbys name. At around the same time his son George established brewing operations at the Bush Inn to supply beer to the chain of pubs, which led to the building of the Dunkirk brewery in Greets Green in 1902.



The Darbys name continued to grow, eventually to around 150 pubs and off-licences across the Black Country and Birmingham, until the business was bought by M&B in the 1950's, like many other similar sized breweries, and that was that….. until now.

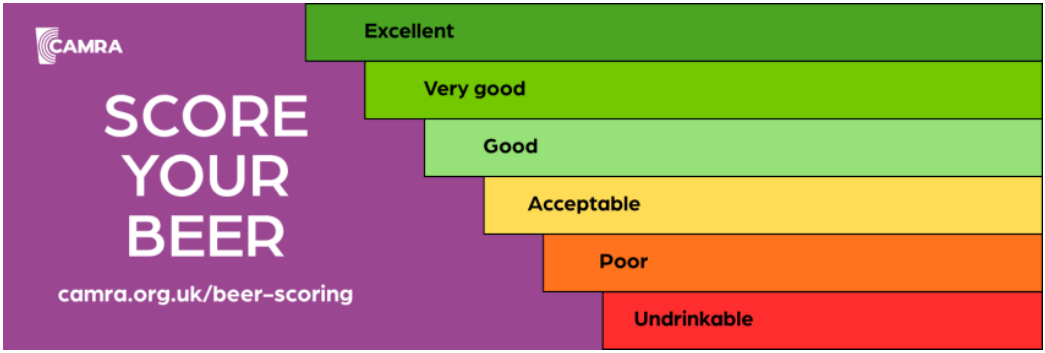
Whilst studying for a career in Mechanical Engineering, George Darby's great grandson Tom Darby decided he'd like to revive the Darby's brewing name. With no small help from his father, Tom has acquired the Brew 61 brewing operation in Upton Warren and alongside his brewer, has developed a 3.4% ABV Session bitter and a 5% ABV Lager which he is now actively marketing under the Darbys name.

He has also decided to continue producing beers under the Brew 61 name, so you should still be seeing them on the bar.

It was great to see Tom (pictured) and his father when they turned up at one of our socials at the **Old Cock** in Droitwich in September, and we wish Tom all the best for the future in reviving his family's brewing heritage.









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Old Oak Reopens

Some marvellous news for Drakes Broughton, which sits between Pershore and Worcester, as the **Old Oak** Inn (as featured on the cover) has reopened under new ownership of SSG Inns.

And not just any ordinary reopening either, but a complete revamp of the pub and the installation of eight real ale and two cider handpulls!

The pub has, within a few weeks, become the heart of the community with numerous events from cheese nights to quizzes, live music, charity and food events. Speaking of food, every day





there are filled baps, scotch eggs and pork pies to be had. With winter now upon us, the pub boasts two fires and when it's warmer there is a super large garden.

The pub is open every day from noon until 11pm and access by public transport is easy by the frequent X50 service from Evesham, Pershore and Worcester. It is highly recommended by the CAMRA branch in Worcester.

Neil Berry

All Aboard for Swindon

On 24th October several members of the Worcester branch attended CAMRA's Swindon Beer Festival held in one of the enormous workshops that used to build Great Western steam locomotives.

The Swindon and North Wiltshire CAMRA branch put on a superb range of cask beers and ciders.

With a railcard or group discount the two-hour journey each way only cost £12 and was well worth it. The entrance fee for CAMRA members was £10 which included a glass and £10 of beer tokens.





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CAMRA Branch Visits Stroud

Bromsgrove, Redditch and Droitwich CAMRA visited Stroud and wider Gloucestershire in September 2026

Our minibus made its way to Stroud and after negotiating a number of road closures, arrived at the majestic **Old Lodge** at Minchinhampton, sitting proudly on Minchinhampton Common with magnificent views over Stroud.



The common is one of the largest grassland commons in the Cotswold area and has been owned and managed by the National Trust since 1913. Cows graze with what seems gay abandon with no fences to stop them wandering onto nearby lanes and paths and similarly not impeded from walking onto greens and fairways of the Old Golf course, formed in 1889. We speculated what the local rules might be for balls rebounding off the cows as natural hazards! Some magnificent panelled rooms with great views and some very sturdy bar stools with original cast iron tractor seats manufactured by Wm. Doyle & Co. Ltd the prominent 19th and early 20th century British agricultural engineers. I was assured that these were comfortable. A great Miami Peach pale ale from Hop Union Brewery, Bristol was on offer alongside Proper Job and an Amber ale from Stroud Brewery.

Second stop was to the legendary **Carpenters Arms** at Westrip, famed for its cider and National Final Four CAMRA Cider Pub of the Year 2025. Stroud Cider CAMRA '23-'26 and Gloucestershire CAMRA Cider Pub of the Year '23-'25. It was little wonder that a massive 12 ciders were available including Hen's Turds, a dry and Slack Ma Girdle, a medium both from Days Cottage Cider alongside other interesting names. The Ales are typically also in good condition to support their entry in the 2026 CAMRA Good Beer Guide. There had been an unexpected demand for their beers from Uley and Brains so only the organic Budding, a pale ale from Stroud was available, but with no complaints.

Our next stop was at the very atmospheric **Woolpack**, Slad. A very popular, 17th century pub (pictured below) clinging to the side of the Slad valley with superb views. Achieved fame through the late 'Cider with Rosie' author Laurie Lee, who was a regular and instrumental in saving the pub from closure. He is pictured in the pub alongside his literary titles and is said to be buried in the Holy Trinity church opposite. The pub does a great job in combining gastro dining in the dining room with end rooms, a long-fixed table to the front and a raised decked patio area for just drinks or with bar snacks. Four excellent and all local ales were available; Woolpack Ale from Cotswold Lion, a bitter and the strong Pigs ear from Uley and Budding from Stroud.



It is unusual for us to include a club as part of our trips but the **Cheltenham Motor Club**, Cheltenham is no ordinary club. Located just outside the town centre in the former Crown Inn. The bar is decorated with various motoring paraphernalia. Gloucestershire/Cheltenham CAMRA's Club of the Year 2006-2018 and South West regional finalist on five occasions, Three times winner of National CAMRA Club of the Year, 2013, 2017 and 2020, and 2014/5/16 finalist. No less than five real ales were available including Tiley's Citra Pale Ale, Jaipur and a limited-edition Amarillo Porter from Redwillow Brewery, Macclesfield. It was an opportunity for our branch Clubs secretary Graham Clements (pictured on the left) to meet club steward Neil Way and have an informed discussion as to the role and importance of clubs in our society.

The **Butchers Arms**, Sheepscombe provided the backdrop for our customary group photo. Dating from around 1670, the Butchers Arms stands within the former Royal Deer Park of Sheepscombe Valley. Local tradition associates the inn's name with the butchering of deer taken during royal hunts, although the present building post-dates the Tudor period. We were still very much in Laurie Lee territory who had associations with the village and its cricket club. The pubs three-dimensional inn sign, depicting a butcher drinking ale while tethered to a pig, is one of the most distinctive and frequently photographed pub signs in England. Ales from each of Prescott, Butcombe and Otter Breweries were available.



Our final stop was at the **Village Inn**, Twyning, dating from around 1457, it has a rambling bar area and is popular with the locals. The pub has low ceilings and the enclosed attractive gardens enhance the beautiful village setting. Timothy Taylor Landlord and Wye Valley Butty Bach are their regular offerings.

Tim Craig, Bromsgrove, Redditch & Droitwich CAMRA Branch Social Secretary
social@brd.camra.org.uk



Views from Behind the Bar: Part Two

*In part two, Nick Yarwood talks to Ursula Downes who runs the **Hollybush** in Stourport.*



The **Hollybush**, Stourport, is run by Ursula Downes and her daughter, Lisa. The pub is owned by Black County Inns and was renovated and extended a few years ago. It's a popular pub with locals and visitors, and stocks the core range of Black County Ales beers and six changing beers, plus some ciders.

Ursula started in the pub trade in Cleobury Mortimer, in The Talbot, over 25 years ago and progressed to running various pubs there before taking on the Hollybush six years ago under a retail agreement.

They both said the refurbishment made a huge difference, creating more room for a regular jam session and charity events. They offer a stew on Tuesdays and cheese on Wednesdays which brings people in.

The pub is like a family, with staff and customers helping and looking out for each other. Staff are encouraged to start conversations with customers to make them feel welcome and at ease. They said that pubs fulfil a very important social function and help to combat loneliness, whilst also respecting that some folks just come in for quiet time.

The success of the pub is its friendly staff who always greet customers and visitors, and the pub is always open, even if quiet, because customers go elsewhere if they find it shut. This also supports the staff, who are very loyal. Crib, darts, music and fresh cobs all help to make people feel at home. Groups of friends come in to play chess and games, such as Munchkin! The upstairs room is a regular meeting place for the Buffalos, and with groups of rugby lads, and it's also popular with youngsters who can chat and socialise in their own space, sometimes bringing pizzas with them. They never cause any disturbance and have a good time whilst also spending at the bar. Any sign of trouble from any customers or any hint of drug abuse leads to immediate ejection. The pub attracts nice people, and they want it to stay that way. The flower garden attracts customers in summer, although as with all pubs in Stourport, parking is a problem. Fortunately, there are buses until mid-evening. The pub is always warm with a welcoming fire in winter, and it makes a big difference to how many folks go in. They quoted the driving force behind BCA, Angus McMeeking, "Never sit in a pub with a coat on!"

Feature on Our Next Cover!

Want your photo or local pub to star on the cover of *Pint Taken*? We'd love to see your shots!

Send your high-quality, portrait-oriented photos to **photo@pinttaken.org.uk**.
Be sure to include your name, the pub's name, and its town/village.
Selected photos will receive a full photographer credit (unpaid submission).

Help us showcase the best of Worcestershire's pub scene
Get snapping today!



They said they are competitive on bar prices because customers are feeling the pinch. Some other pubs' high prices benefit them.

Pubs suffer from disparity on duty with cheap discounted beer in supermarkets, high alcohol duty, VAT, and increasing energy costs. They described how customers sometimes assume the price they pay goes to the landlord without appreciating that all costs are met out of bar takings. Running a pub is not easy – early starts and late finishes, plus time to unwind, leave little time for rest.

For them, a great pub always has decent beer, clean toilets and the pub is presentable and tidy. A few kids are OK, so long as they are quiet and not running around.

To offer very good beer, they ensure the cellar is clean and at the right temperature. Cask beers are given a few days to settle and condition before venting, varying by the type of beer, which comes with experience. Stronger ones are given more time. The regular beer lines, taps and nozzles are always cleaned at least weekly and the changing beer lines are cleaned with every change of beer. Beer is never recycled from nearly empty casks or the drip trays, as was once common. They related that beer order substitutions can be a problem when they don't fit with their customer's tastes, leading to wastage. Their area manager has been very helpful resolving equipment problems quickly and supportive of their plans for the pub.

Socal media helps a lot. People respond to advertised events, the free function room and seeing which ales are currently on the bar. Lisa uses AI to help with graphics because it saves her a lot of time.

They said that CAMRA can help to encourage people to see pubs as a social place to meet others, friends and family, and that cask ale is great value compared to other beers. Ale Trails help as they take people to places they've not been before. Younger people need encouragement to see pubs as social places to go. Smaller breweries need support by promoting their variety of beers.

Interestingly, they get asked by customers about Gluten Free beers and, whilst there are some available, they are not much promoted by breweries. They would like to have a permanent GF line with changing beers on it.

Low/No Alcohol Beers (2026 Refresh)

In the Winter 2023 edition of *Pint Taken*, I published a review of my top picks for low and zero-alcohol beers. Three years later, I wanted to revisit and update that list. Sales of low- and no-alcohol beers continue to rise, and it's good to note that the quality of the products has improved, too. It's interesting to see that some breweries are specialising in this sector of the market and exclusively brewing beers with tiny amounts of alcohol - or none at all.

Some of the beers I reviewed previously are no longer available or have become difficult to find. As many pub-goers will know, these beers are still not typically available behind the bar, which feels like a missed opportunity.

Of the ones I've tried over the past year, here are my current favourites:

Bronze Medal

Adnams (Southwold, Suffolk) – Ghost Ship 0.5% is easy to find and has a great citrus flavour.

Guinness (Dublin, ROI) - 0.0 Stout If you are looking for an easily accessible dark beer, this fits the bill. Some drinkers even prefer it to the regular version.

Silver Medal

Brulo (Edinburgh) – **Lust for Life** is an excellent Double Dry Hopped IPA. Their entire range is worth trying, including the 7 Hop 7 Grain IPA and Highway to Helles Lager. I've yet to try the Cascadian Tides Stout, but I look forward to tasting it.

Brooklyn – Special Effects (brewed in Sweden by Carlsberg Britvic) is a great hoppy lager, though it is darker than you would normally expect. Beer writer Pete Brown rates it highly, and thankfully it's easy to find.

Northern Monk (Leeds) – Holy Faith appeared in my earlier list and remains one of my favourites. It's a great, hazy, American-style IPA for hop lovers everywhere.

St Austell (Cornwall) - Proper Job 0.5% - The low-alcohol version of the justifiably famous beer delivers a bold burst of citrus grapefruit, orange, and tropical pineapple aroma and finishes with a crisp, dry, pine bitterness.

Attic (Birmingham) - Lucid AF Pale A very clean-tasting pale ale with lime and juicy flavours.

Gold Medal

Big Drop – Galactic Milk Stout (brewed by Hepworth in Sussex) is still high in the charts. A magnificent dark beer with chocolate notes and a lactose finish, it is sadly not as widely available as it should be, but it's definitely worth seeking out.

Impossibrew – Triple Hopped IPA (brewed by Allendale in Northumberland) is the best in their range. Although listed as a limited edition, it is worthy of becoming a core beer. Impossibrew famously appeared on Dragons' Den, and this particular brew is a modern, fruity, and bitter IPA.

Tap Social (Botley, Oxfordshire) produces a great range of modern beers, including two magnificent alcohol-free options. **Day Release** is a fruity pale ale packed with flavour, while **Fresh Start** is their new lager featuring a delicious, crisp finish. Tap Social is a social enterprise that helps turn lives around for prisoners and prison leavers through direct employment and advocacy. They have created more than 112,000 hours of paid employment for prisoners on day release from prison, helping to build self-confidence and resilience while equipping people to lead productive, happy lives, which in turn reduces reoffending and prevents victimisation.

Brett Laniosh



Visited All Eight of Our Worcestershire Pubs?



THE CROSS INN
Finstall



THE HANBURY TURN
Bromsgrove



THE MARKET TAVERN
Tenbury Wells



THE IMPERIAL TAVERN
Worcester



THE SARACEN'S HEAD
Worcester



THE HOLLYBUSH
Stourport



THE REAL ALE TAVERN
Bewdley



THE OLD ROYAL LIBRARY
Malvern

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The Black Country.

Views from Behind the Bar: Part Three

*In the final part of this series Nick Yarwood talks to Rob Massey from **Ye Olde Seven Stars**, a town centre pub in Kidderminster.*

Ye Olde Seven Stars, in Kidderminster, is the oldest pub in town. It's owned by Admiral Taverns and is run as a tenancy by Rob Massey, with his very capable assistant, known to everybody as Pinky. Their two dogs are popular with customers, even though one has some quirky behaviours, such as chewing firewood. Well-behaved dogs are always welcome, and dogs soon learn there's a jar of doggy treats behind the bar.

Rob started with Marston's on its Pathfinder scheme, and then ran managed houses for 12 years. He came out of the trade for 8 years and, when the Stars came up after a series of temporary managers had lost it trade, he felt it needed a fresh lift to revive it and took it on three years ago.

It's a community pub as well as attracting visitors. He says that to be successful, a pub must have high standards, clean loos (the first thing that ladies check before deciding whether to stay!), be comfortable, warm and friendly. It has to have kerb-side appeal and life within, an attractive appearance, and be comfortable as soon as someone goes through the door for the first time and, hopefully, they come back. Regular music helps to bring people in and some will come back, helping to build a pub following.

With long experience in the pub trade, Rob has noticed that when pub use declined some years ago, Pubcos were slow to react and adapt, expecting the same financial returns through high rents that had been the case for a long time and not adapting their business models. Many experienced pub licensees left the trade and this killed a lot of tenancies. He found there was no support for licensees at that time.

However, it is much better now. In his case, Admiral Taverns offered financial help with improvements and these have paid off, and with training and advice. Having a strong and honest relationship with the Business Development Manager is key. At the Seven Stars, opening up the garden and making it attractive with new furniture and warm, bright lighting has made a huge difference to trade. He says the most successful



improvement was replacing the old front room fire with an efficient log-burner. It keeps the room warm, is attractive, entices people inside and the room is now the most used in the pub. It suits the age of the pub.

Customers appreciate being with others and friends, and participating in activities such as dominoes. They help and look out for each other. Some come in and sit at the bar, indicating they are up for talking, others like to sit quietly. Staff are good at discerning what they want. Staff are also attentive to keeping the pub clean and tidy, which is important.

The biggest challenges are ever-increasing costs – electricity, rent, rates and volatility of costs which make it difficult to plan ahead. Often, the Government is responsible for lack of business confidence with increases in taxation. Pubcos don't seem interested in energy saving investments such as insulation, batteries and solar panels. With imagination, there could be partnerships with publicans to help make it happen.

Kidderminster doesn't have much of a pub touring scene, so regulars are important. The opening of The Church restaurant and Venue last year has helped to bring more people into town, and all pubs have seen some benefit. Having some more pubs would help to build a circuit. In Kidderminster, there are no old pubs left that could be reopened, so help is needed from other organisations such as the BID (Business Improvement District) to attract interest and from the local authority. High and unrealistic property rents from absentee landlords are a real problem.

There is noticeable disparity and inequity in ratable values, with some smaller pubs, such as the Stars, having higher rates than much larger ones. Rob's view is very strongly that the system is broken and needs changing. Even with recent rate reliefs, the most unreasonable aspect, which he has experienced, is that an appeal takes two years during which time the existing rates have to be paid. That is the last thing a new business needs and is responsible for pub business failures. It took a full two years for him to get a substantial reduction and a refund. The problem is firmly with the Government to sort out.

Cask ale, he says, requires a clean cellar kept at the right temperature, clean glassware and attention to matching volumes to demand. He has a strict cellar regime to manage stock involving temperature control when ales arrive and by cellaring them immediately. They need two to three days to condition. Rob uses vertical stillage because it's easier for the staff to change them. Lines are cleaned after every change with one spare clean line ready to be used. He has a free-of-tie line to increase the interest to ale drinkers but the cost of it and the one cask a week restriction makes it marginal to maintain. He can get a relatively limited range of cask beers on Admiral's list and the SIBA list, but these are expensive. The EEBRIA list has more choice and is less costly. He uses a pricing policy based on % ABV, and some beers are so costly as to not be viable.

Customers think running a pub is easy without appreciating the time involved and the costs. Supermarket minimum pricing on volume beers would make a big difference, as applied in Scotland. Some major pub chains offer beers at prices that other pubs cannot even buy them at, and this is not helping.

Pubs offer mental health benefits and counter loneliness. But they are not on young people's radar very much. And he says that pubs are part of British culture and must be nurtured and protected.

CAMRA can help by lobbying the Government on major reform of VAT and rates. Small changes, such as 1p reductions, don't get passed down to pubs and thus customers. It can also help with messages to the public on the social benefits of pubs and to its members to use every pub.



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	Friday, Saturday	12pm - 9pm
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Opening Times

MONDAY 18.00 – 21.00
No food available

TUESDAY - FRIDAY 09.30 – 23.00
Breakfast 9.30 – 11.30 Lunch 12.00 – 14.00
Dinner 17.30 – 20.30

SATURDAY 9.30 – 23.00
Breakfast 09.30 – 11.30 Lunch 12.00 – 15.00
Dinner 17.30 – 20.30

SUNDAY 9.30 – 20.00
Breakfast 9.30 – 11.30 Lunch 12.00 – 16.00

Our CAFÉ is also open from 09.30 to 17.00 from Tuesday to Sunday, serving a wide selection of Teas, Coffees, Scones, and Cakes

Elizabeth

GOOD FOOD GUIDE 2024/25

GOOD BEER GUIDE 2024 WE'RE IN IT

Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Awards 2024

VISIT WORCESTERSHIRE Tourism Awards 2022/23 Winner

No New Pub Licences in NI Since 1902

I came across a curiosity of UK licensing laws the other day and thought I'd share it with you.

In Northern Ireland, if you want to open a pub, a micropub or a brewery taproom, you have to wait for an existing licence to be given up, buy it, and have it transferred to your premises. It's known as the surrender principle, and because supply is capped, and you are competing with supermarkets for a licence, they often change hands for £100,000 or more.

In England, Scotland and Wales, you can apply for a licence for your premises. In Northern Ireland, opening a new pub means finding a licence from somewhere else.

Of course, the fixed number of licences hasn't kept pub numbers steady. Between 1981 and 2021, Northern Ireland lost around 680 pubs while around 415 off-licences opened. A pub licence can be sold to a shop, but the reverse almost never happens.

This year Lidl opened a pub, the "Middle Ale", beside its store in Dundonald, East Belfast, after the store was refused an off-licence. Securing the licence and premises cost £410,000, before court cases and legal objections.

CAMRA Northern Ireland welcomed the pub's opening, but Regional Director Ruth Sloan called it "a brutal reminder" of the system's effects. A large retailer can find that money; a local brewer or someone hoping to open a micropub often can't. And every new pub requires an existing licence to be surrendered, potentially at the expense of another community pub.

Obviously CAMRA is campaigning to have the whole system reformed as it protects existing licence holders (and probably has something to do with domination of Guinness in that part of the world), but does little to support growth, with most surrendered licences going to grocers protects big business.

Gez Quinn

CAMRA's Budget Reaction

Following the Chancellor's Budget, CAMRA chairman Ash Corbett-Collins welcomed targeted support for small pubs, independent brewers and cider makers, although he warned that wider measures on beer duty, VAT and energy costs would disappoint the industry and drinkers.

Particularly welcome was the announcement that tied pub tenants in England and Wales will be allowed to serve a guest beer of their choice. This could give independent brewers greater access to pub bars and increase consumer choice. CAMRA will work with the Government to ensure the measure is properly implemented, while calling for further action to challenge the dominance of multinational brewers. It also wants the full findings of the long-awaited Access to Market Review published.

However, CAMRA criticised the increase in general and draught alcohol duties, warning that higher beer taxes would be passed on to pubgoers. It argued that the government should instead have reduced duty on beer and cider sold in pubs, while increasing taxes on cheap supermarket alcohol to create a fairer market.

The £10 million Alcohol Duty Relief scheme for smaller brewers and cider makers was also welcomed as valuable support for local and independent producers, whose innovative, high-quality beers are often squeezed out by global drinks companies.

CAMRA expressed disappointment at the lack of action on VAT, energy bills and increased Employer National Insurance contributions. With pubs, brewers and customers already facing financial pressures, it warned that these additional costs could force more otherwise viable pubs to close permanently.

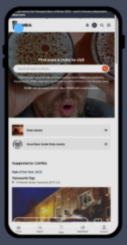
SCORE YOUR BEER

camra.org.uk/beer-scoring

HOW'S YOUR BEER?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Acceptable
- Poor
- Undrinkable

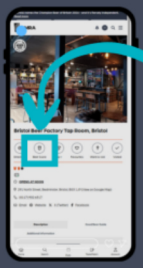
STEP 1: FIND THE PUB



Go to **camra.org.uk/pubs** and find the pub or club page

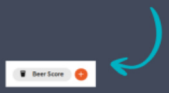
You can score from the pub, or later if that's more convenient for you

STEP 2: CLICK TO SCORE



Click 'Beer Score'

(on a desktop, it looks like this!)



STEP 3: PICK YOUR RATING



Decide which rating best fits the **quality** of your beer

(There's descriptions and reactions to help you choose)

You can also add the price of your drink

STEP 4: SUBMIT

You're all done!

You just helped:

- Select pubs for the Good Beer Guide
- Update our beer and pub data
- Other beer lovers find pubs and brewers

WHY SHOULD I SCORE MY BEER?

- Guide fellow beer lovers
- Play a part in the Good Beer Guide selection process
- Help power CAMRA's beer and pub data
- A quick and easy way to get involved

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Acceptable
- Poor
- Undrinkable

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CAMRA

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What began as a charity pub crawl in November 1984 has become a remarkable 42-year adventure. On Friday 16 October, Peter Hill and his fellow Black Country Ale Tairsters celebrated their 25,000th different pub visit at the Old Royal Library in Great Malvern, a Black Country Ales pub.

The original challenge was much more modest: visit 250 Banks's pubs using a map supplied by a Wolverhampton brewer. Four decades later, the group's travels have taken them across the length and breadth of Britain, including every county in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, every pub in Wales, and every island with a bar off the British and Irish coasts.

Peter, an active member of CAMRA's Dudley South Staffordshire branch since 1990, has clocked up an estimated 410,000 miles and consumed 58,730 pints along the way. His travels have included a 2,000-mile round trip in 2025 to enjoy a pint on North Uist in the Outer Hebrides, where accommodation for the night was a tractor shed!

Earlier this year, Peter completed a visit to every pub listed in CAMRA's 2020 Good Beer Guide, raising an impressive £7,150 for Midland Air Ambulance. He is now fundraising for Great Western Hospital in Swindon and Salisbury Hospital.





Every visit is documented, with signatures from licensees or bar staff, in more than 300 lever-arch files containing over 100,000 photographs, cards, menus and other memorabilia.

From a simple charity challenge to an extraordinary record of Britain's pubs, Peter's journey shows that a pub crawl can be about much more than the beer. And with fundraising continuing, the next milestone is already beckoning!



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Saturday & Sunday
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Briar Hill, Kidderminster
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THE SWAN
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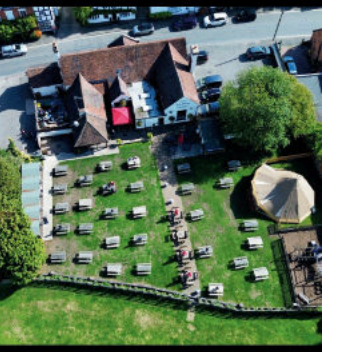




FOOD SERVING TIMES

ALL DAY EVERY DAY
COBS | PORK PIES | PASTIES | SCOTCH EGGS | BAR SNACKS

THURSDAY - SATURDAY 5-9PM
SUNDAY - 1-6PM
BURGERS | WINGS | STEAKS | LOADED FRIES

SATURDAY & SUNDAY 9-12PM
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The Swan - Chaddesley Corbett

CAMRA Events and Contacts

Events below are open to all CAMRA members, and non-members are welcome to join us.

December

Sat 5th Worcester Pub Tour survey (WO) - Details from Worcester branch below

Mon 7th Lunchtime Social (BRD) 12pm at the Red Lion, Droitwich WR9 8AT

Tue 8th Christmas Social Pub Trail (BRD) start at 7pm at the Freemasons Arms, Droitwich WR9 8LR

Thu 19th Worcester Christmas Tour (WO) - Details from Worcester branch below

January

Tue 5th Lunchtime Social (BRD) - 12pm Queens Head Bromsgrove B61 8AB

Thu 7th Members social & curry with new members (WF) - 7pm, George Hotel, Bewdley DY12 2AW

Sat 9th West survey trip (WO) - Details from Worcester branch below

Thu 28th Monthly Social Meeting (BRD) - Hanbury Turn, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4LU

Sat 30th Malvern Pub Tour survey trip (WO) - Details from Worcester branch below

February

Tue 2nd AGM and Members' meeting (WF) - 7pm, King & Castle, Kidderminster DY10 1QX

Tue 2nd Lunchtime Social (BRD) - 12pm Royal Enfield Redditch B97 4QR

Sat 6th East survey trip (WO) - Details from Worcester branch below

Tue 23rd Monthly Meeting (BRD) including final selection for 2028 Good Beer Guide - Blackwell Club, Linthurst Newtown, Blackwell, B60 1BS

March

Tue 2nd Social stroll, Bewdley (WF) - Start at Bewdley Brewery DY12 2DZ

Tue 2nd Lunchtime Social (BRD) - 12pm The Salters Arms, Droitwich WR9 8EQ

Branch Contacts

Bromsgrove, Redditch & Droitwich (BRD)
Email **chair@brd.camra.org.uk** or call Paul 07974 889553. Website **brd.camra.org.uk** Meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month and start at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

Worcester Branch (WO)
Email **contact@worcestercamra.org.uk** or call Mark 07968 337487. Website **worcester.camra.org.uk** Members' meetings are on the second Wednesday of every month 6.45 for 7pm to 9pm.

Wyre Forest Branch (WF)
Email **socials@wyreforest.camra.org.uk** Website **wyreforest.camra.org.uk** Members' meetings and socials are held on the first Tuesday of the month, start at 7pm.

Shakespeare Branch
Email **contact@shakespeare.camra.org.uk** or visit **shakespeare.camra.org.uk** Covering Evesham area.

Worcestershire Tasting Panel
CAMRA members interested in becoming a tasting panel chair are invited to contact **worcstastings@wyreforest.camra.org.uk**

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Redditch and Bromsgrove CAMRA Pub of the Year 2025