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CONTENTS



5 Starting Pint
Comment from the Editor.

7 Campaign Column
National campaigning in your local magazine.

8 World-Wise Webb
Tim Webb blames big brewers for “The horrible state of UK beer.”

10 For Pete’s Sake
Pete Brown compares two Cities of Ale.

12 Mission Accomplished
Peter Hill celebrates his 24,460th pub visit with South Herts in the Mermaid, St Albans.

16 Wether Report
JDW HQ is asked to support Peter Hill’s charity fundraising.

18 Brewer’s View
Steve Dunkley asks, “Is the Good Beer Guide trusted?”

20 Herts Pub, Club & Brewery News
The big news is McMullen’s pubs sale to Punch - how will the pubs be affected?

24 Beer Belle
Annabel Smith defines the pub as Britain’s 2nd living room.

26 Hoppy Lotte
Lotte Peplow explains how beer temperature affects the flavour of food.



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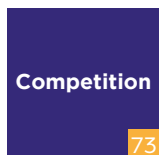
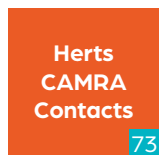
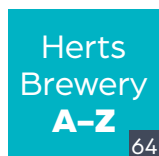
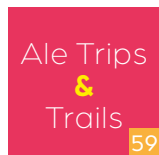
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CONTENTS (cont)

- 28** **Herts CAMRA Awards**
South Herts reveals its Pub of the Year!
- 32** **Beating Herts**
Les Middlewood chats with New River Brewery's John Bourdeaux.
- 34** **Laura in Beerland**
Laura Hadland remembers her publican sister, who died young.
- 36** **Members' Weekend 2026**
Emily Ryans shows off what she and her team have organised to entice members to St Albans City of Ale.
- 44** **Readers Write**
 *Have your say! Email editor@pintsofview.camra.org.uk*
- 50** **Herts CAMRA Obituaries**
Tributes to John Hanscomb and Des de Moor.
- 54** **Regional CAMRA Festivals**
In Hertfordshire and beyond.
- 59** **Ale Trips & Trails**
Or pub crawls, as we used to call them.
- 60** **Herts CAMRA Branch News**
Reports from two AGMs - more interesting than it sounds!
- 64** **Herts Brewery A - Z**
Snippets about most of our 15 breweries.
- 67** **Down Your Way**
Hertfordshire pubs and clubs - what's changed.
- 70** **Herts CAMRA Meetings, Socials & Festivals**
- 73** **Herts CAMRA Contacts**
- 73** **Competition**
Reading pages 50-51 might help your chance of winning.
- 74** **Steve's SHOUT**
Steve Bury shouts about a government that's out of touch.
- 76** **Roger... and out**
Roger Protz wonders whether McMullen's pubs sale to Punch could spell the eventual demise of its Hertford brewery.
- 78** **Advertising & Contributors**





Starting Pint

I've been advised that the front cover of a CAMRA branch magazine should, ideally, pique the interest of *all* pub goers and not just Members of the Campaign. If you're a beer-loving non-member reading this, then I reckon I've done my job!

CAMRA Members' Weekend is an annual country-roaming event, organised and run by CAMRA Members for, in years gone by, CAMRA Members.

This year is different.

The South Herts branch organising committee, headed by branch Deputy Chair Emily Ryans, has put together a Members' Weekend designed to promote local pubs and appeal to all. They've even gone and given the 5-day event a special name and its own website:

stalbanscityofale.org.uk

Do make sure that you click on the link and/or read pages 36-41 to find out about what's on offer — you won't want to discover Beer Festivals, Tap Takeovers, Meet the Brewers and Expert Presentations once they've been and gone. That said, the pubs, the pub trails and the live music will still be there once Members' Weekend has packed up and left.

It would be remiss of me not to remind Members that the AGM and Conference, i.e. the formal 'business' part of the Weekend, takes place centrally in the Alban Arena. I've been to the last three, in Sheffield, Dundee and Torquay, and enjoyed every one. Part of the experience has been frequenting the 'Members' Bar' — which, this year, will be located in a marquee on the Arena Patio — though trying to compete with the 35 to 40 pubs on the trails will be a tough ask.

Strange, that during the 52 years when St Albans was home to National CAMRA, the city never once hosted a Members' Weekend, yet within six months of the Head Office officially relocating to Luton it's got its first.

Anyway, I can't wait!

Although *Starting Pint* is the first article in *Pints of View*, it's the one I write last — once the magazine is almost

complete. I can then pick out something from within that I think warrants special mention.

Big news in Hertfordshire is McMullen's sale of 30 pubs to Punch Pubs (formerly Taverns). Two articles cover this beautifully — both discussing the potential fallout, though from different angles. Whereas Roger Protz focuses on the potential loss of Mac's Hertford brewery (*Roger... and out*, page 76), Les Middlewood writes more about Mac's reduced pub estate and the inevitable reduction in the number of pubs offering Mac's beers (*Herts Pub, Club & Brewery News*, page 20).

It was while doing online research about Punch, that I discovered the White Hart Tap in the Sopwell area of St Albans was an "available pub" on the company's website. A subsequent chat with pub licensee Stephen McConnell confirmed that he will be leaving in May, after being at the helm since before the turn of the millennium. It was only two years ago, in May 2024, that Steve was presented by South Herts CAMRA Chair Ian Boyd with the prestigious Dave Burns Award "in recognition of his 25 years championing excellent cask beer at the outstanding White Hart Tap."

According to Punch's advert, "the White Hart Tap will be the best local pub offering a great range of real ales and good value pub food, where friends & families gather, new friendships are made and experiences shared."

Let's hope so. Steve will be a tough act to follow!

Paul Donatantonio
Editor

The Royston Club

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Campaign Column

At this rate, there will be no pubs left

It is well publicised that hospitality is already in dire financial straits, which will only worsen once the 1 April minimum wage increases kick in, along with escalating energy costs and rocketing rates. To withstand the pressures, prices need to increase, yet the rise in the cost-of-living is leaving customers with less disposable income, not more.

Pubs are a part of hospitality that has another increase to contend with – alcohol duty.

Most of the cost increases I understand

01/04/26 – Minimum wage (adult) +4.1%

01/04/26 – Minimum wage (18-20) +8.5%

01/02/26 – Alcohol duty +3.66% (RPI)

Now – Energy +??%

Note that the Government sneakily uses RPI rather than the lower and now more common CPI.

And, of course, there was last year's hike in Employer National Insurance – an increase from 13.8% to 15% applied on employee earnings above £5,000 rather than the previous £9,100 (the secondary threshold).

However, I struggle with Business Rates. Not only are some of the percentage increases mentioned eye-watering, there is often bewilderment when the rate bills of Pub A, Club B and Shop C, are compared.

Having heard that the revised rating system will result in pubs closing their doors for good, I decided to try and find out for myself what's going on. Where better place to start than the pubs and clubs of Hertfordshire –

specifically those good enough to support this magazine with their adverts.

So, rate increases from 1 April 2026 have been capped at maximums of 5%, 15% or 30%, depending upon which band the rateable value falls into. I won't comment here on the method of assessment/calculation, nor the 'cliff-edge' effect of having such large increments between bands.

AREA	To 31 Mar 2026		From 01 Apr 2026		INCREASE
	RATEABLE VALUE	RATE BILL after 40% RML Relief	RATEABLE VALUE	RATE BILL after Trans Relief	
St Albans	£78,000	£25,974	£132,500	£33,766	£7,792 30%
St Albans	£38,000	£11,377	£46,000	£13,084	£1,707 15%
Other	£40,000	£11,976	£35,500	£13,561	£1,585 13%
St Albans	£28,500	£8,533	£41,000	£9,813	£1,280 15%
St Albans	£28,250	£8,458	£52,000	£9,727	£1,269 15%
St Albans	£20,500	£6,138	£31,500	£7,058	£921 15%
St Albans	£19,250	£5,763	£32,500	£6,628	£865 15%
Other	£19,000	£5,689	£28,000	£6,542	£853 15%
Other	£23,000	£6,886	£20,000	£7,231	£344 5%
Other	£12,000	£3,593	£14,250	£3,772	£180 5%
St Albans	£11,000	£3,293	£17,000	£3,458	£165 5%
St Albans	£10,750	£3,219	£12,750	£3,379	£161 5%
Other	£7,200	£2,156	£8,100	£2,263	£108 5%
Other	£5,000	£1,497	£6,500	£1,572	£75 5%
Other	£3,800	£1,138	£7,500	£1,195	£57 5%
Other	£2,500	£749	£5,650	£786	£37 5%

If that doesn't look great, far worse is in store over the next two years, when transitional relief is significantly reduced and, therefore, rate bills will significantly increase. The table below is taken from <https://www.gov.uk/business-rates-relief/transitional-relief>

If your bill is increasing from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029			
Rateable value	2026 to 2027	2027 to 2028	2028 to 2029
Up to £20,000 (£28,000 in London)	5%	10% plus inflation	25% plus inflation
£20,001 (£28,001 in London) to £100,000	15%	25% plus inflation	40% plus inflation
Over £100,000	30%	25% plus inflation	25% plus inflation

Whilst it's unlikely that any retrospective action will be taken by the government to reduce bills from 1 April 2026, it is essential that CAMRA supports the industry's lobbying to ensure that the draconian increases proposed for coming years are withdrawn.

If you're a publican reading this, do please write in with your comments. I will be happy to withhold both your name and the name of your pub if you prefer.

Paul Donatantonio



unique among the national bodies that make up the Brewers of Europe, for having members belonging to large retail trade groups. And yet nobody mentions the role of UK brewing in the epidemic of pub failures.

Joining the dots

For some while, I have been spelling out in this magazine and elsewhere, how turning beer into a commodity in the late 20th century, selling most of UK brewing off to multinational companies, and keeping beer taxes absurdly high, have led inevitably to a worrying decline in the industry.

The horrible state of UK beer

If recently published figures are correct, 2025 may have seen the smallest volume of beer produced in the UK since modern records began in 1900. Alternatively, they may just mean that our big brewers are particularly bad at doing it.

Speaking out

People from the licensed trade complain, with good reason, that pubs are struggling to survive, blaming the Government of the day, in well-practised fashion. However, take a look at how things have been going since the 1980s and it is clear that pubs have been in steady, unrelenting decline for decades.

Historically, the brewing and pub trades were so interlinked that they were seen as branches of the same industry. The British Beer & Pub Association (BBPA) remains

2025 (Oct 24 - Sep 25)	Brand	Cask Ale	Ow
1	Timothy Taylor's	Landlord	Independ
2	Sharp's	Doom Bar	Molson C
3	Fuller's	London Pride	Asahi
4	Greene King	Abbott	CK Asset
5	Greene King	IPA	CK Asset
6	Wainright	Gold/Amber	CMBC
7	St Austell	Tribute	Independ
8	Marston's	Pedigree	CMBC
9	Morland	Old Speckled Hen	CK Asset
10	Black Sheep	Best Bitter	Keystone
Total			

This should come as no surprise. Four companies — AB-InBev, Heineken, Carlsberg and Molson Coors — produce 70+% of UK beer and, in effect, control its sale. None has a major UK shareholder, nor a link to Britain's brewing heritage, and their efforts to reverse beer's halving of sales since 1980 have been woeful - based on marketing UK-made lagers as 'foreign'; national brands as 'local'; and industrial beers as 'craft'.

In other trades, the market might sort out such hapless incompetence, but beer is different. The four corporations dominate the market, by striking deals with the large PubCos that dominate the on-trade, the 'independent' wholesalers that supply the free trade, and the supermarket groups that now supply half the beer we drink. They

also control draught beer sales by owning companies that service beer lines cheaply and efficiently, provided only certain beers are sold.

The tax problem

Britain has one of the highest levels of beer tax in Europe, topped only by the high-wage economies of Norway, Finland and Iceland. Of Europe's top ten beer-drinking nations (UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Spain), only Ireland and the UK impose huge taxes on beer, with the Irish buffered by earning 20-30% more per head than we do.

The UK Government wants to grow the economy but the big brewers do not. Falling sales mean Duty and VAT have halved, low

In 1900, when modern data-collecting began, the UK's 41.5 million citizens drank, between them, 60.7 million hectolitres of beer, or roughly five pints a week each. Last year was set to see 69.5 million of us drink just 28.5 million hectolitres, or 1½ pints a week.

Astonishingly, given the rules imposed on the market, the independent brewery sector has *still* grown its volumes, because people actually like their beers and will actively seek them out. The dramatic decline affects only the bright and shiny big brands.

AB-InBev and Heineken no longer brew cask ales, Molson Coors intend to stop doing so by the end of the year, and Carlsberg recently crunched its cask range. The reason?

The big brewers cannot even make cask ale

	Top 10 Cask Ales			'Big 4' Multi-National Cask Ales			Other Cask Ales		
	2025	2024	Change	2025	2024	Change	2025	2024	Change
	Volume (HL)			Volume (HL)			Volume (HL)		
ent	102,552	102,654	-0.1%				102,552	102,654	-0.1%
Coors	88,506	109,043	-18.8%	88,506	109,043	-18.8%			
	78,113	76,850	1.6%				78,113	76,850	1.6%
Holdings	63,685	66,169	-3.8%				63,685	66,169	-3.8%
Holdings	43,575	50,001	-12.9%				43,575	50,001	-12.9%
	37,556	40,353	-6.9%	37,556	40,353	-6.9%			
ent	28,713	30,717	-6.5%				28,713	30,717	-6.5%
	24,842	30,284	-18.0%	24,842	30,284	-18.0%			
Holdings	13,730	14,917	-8.0%				13,730	14,917	-8.0%
Brewing	12,906	13,608	-5.2%				12,906	13,608	-5.2%
	494,178	534,596	-7.6%	150,904	179,680	-16.0%	343,274	354,916	-3.3%

profitability (ABI-UK has posted £200 million in losses since 2021) means low Corporation Tax, and exporting is a joke.

Original British and Belgian beer styles are huge in the global beer market, but while Belgian brewers use this to export in vast quantities, British brewery exports are mostly down to big brands going to-and-fro between big brewery subsidiaries in other countries.

Will 2025 be the low point?

The BBPA's latest annual statistics handbook reported that in the first nine months of 2025, UK beer production fell by 19% compared to the same months of 2024. If those numbers are correct and the trend held, 2025 will have seen less beer produced than in COVID Year 2020, making it the lowest on record.

work. Leading the industry is something they do by flexing their financial muscle, not by achieving excellence.

If the big brewers cannot produce winning beers, they need to stop brewing. If the Government wants to grow the industry, it must stop treating it like an ailing cash cow. If supermarkets want to sell more beer, they need to stock tastier ones.

To revive UK beer, we must all back our independent breweries. If these can increase production despite being excluded from much of the market, imagine what they could do if allowed fair access?

Tim Webb
Beer Writer

Co-author, The World Atlas of Beer
Exeter & Devon CAMRA

For Pete's Sake

Ale of Two Cities

As a recently adopted son of Norwich, I was surprised this year to see St Albans proclaim itself the City of Ale — a title Norwich claimed for itself back in 2011. Norwich City of Ale has since grown into an annual month-long event with multiple ale trails, tap takeovers and a busy opening festival. Couldn't you at least have said, "The *other* City of Ale"?

It is, of course, great to have more than one city renowned for excellent beer. I hate the modern reductionist logic that asks, "Are you Team A or Team B?". Aren't we allowed to like more than one thing any more?

But still, it's a bit cheeky to appropriate a title or slogan that one city has been using for fifteen years.

I like St Albans and appreciate that it has a longstanding relationship with cask ale. CAMRA's head office was there for most of its existence — but that's because Graham Lees, one of the founders, just happened to live there, rather than it being specifically chosen for the quality of its ale. Roger Protz also lives there, which strengthens the case.



The main criterion is, of course, the quality of the beer in the pubs, and the pubs themselves. I was particularly impressed by the Goat, the Mermaid and the Beehive on my last visit. All feel like "proper pubs", but move with the times, offering great cask ale, obviously, but also more than that. You also have the most impressive Wetherspoons I've ever seen.

Hmmm, I suppose it's just possible that Graham and Roger chose to live in St Albans because of its pubs and beer...

Is Ye Olde Fighting Cocks the oldest pub in England? I'm with the *Guinness Book of Records* on this, who used to claim it was, but then withdrew it on the grounds that it is impossible to verify. The building looks like it dates back to the 17th century, and the earliest

Norwich



St Albans



known mention of it is from 1622. The earliest reference to the Adam & Eve in Norwich is from 1249. Just sayin'.

The City of Ale claim was made by the local CAMRA branch, which has launched an event that bears a striking similarity to Norwich's, to run over the Members' Weekend from Thu 16 to Mon 20 April, so <https://stalbanscityofale.org.uk/> is quite possibly running at the same time you're reading this. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I guess.

So what are you imitating?

Come to Norwich, and within five minutes of getting off the train, someone will tell you the city used to boast a church for every week of the year and a pub for every day of the year. That hasn't been true for a long time, but it's actually quite bizarre how many wonderful pubs there are here, pretty much all of them selling perfectly kept real ale. I was recently asked to choose my eight favourites for my *Sunday Times* column. My first selection consisted entirely of pubs in the NR3 post code, to the north of the city. The NR2-ers get a bit frosty about things like that, so I tried again. When I got my final eight, as a thought experiment I pretended they didn't exist, and I had to choose another eight. I was well into my third list before I even had to stop and think.

There used to be several great breweries here, and if the city has one curious lack, it's that we only have one real brewery in the city itself — though that's one more than St Albans. *Nah nah na nah nah!* In any case, that's corrected by all the breweries out in the beautiful countryside between the city and the coast. Adnams, about an hour away, is (wrongly) considered by locals too big to be good. Also, it's in Suffolk, not Norfolk. Greene King has a surprisingly muted presence, given it's an hour away to the south-west. Norwich has a reputation for independent businesses across the board. If you only drank here, you'd think the likes of Mr Winters, Moongazer, Grain and Barsham were national names, given their dominance in the city. It's very confusing when they disappear once you're an hour down the A11.

Like St Albans, Norwich is a very intact medieval city — could that have any link to

the preponderance of good pubs? It's also very walkable. The organisers of the original City of Ale have to keep tinkering with the trails because some of them are too easy and quick to complete.

So, enjoy your inaugural City of Ale celebration. It's only five days long, but you have to start somewhere. When it's been and gone, why not come and check out the original? <https://www.cityofale.org.uk/> runs from 21 May to 22 June, giving you plenty of time to complete a few trails. It's not easy to get to from St Albans — don't try to travel by train on a Sunday, like I did — but its remoteness keeps all the idiots away. If Roger Protz can make the journey every year, well into his eighties, so can you. You'll get the same warm welcome he does.

Pete Brown

*Author, Broadcaster, Beer Lover
Beer Writer of the Year 2021, 2016, 2012, 2009
www.petebrown.net/pete-brown-blog
Norwich & District CAMRA*

*Dating in parts from the 15th century and a
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Hertford Club Literary Festival July 3rd & 4th



CAMRA South Herts Branch Club of the Year 2025

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**the Lawn is looking Great for
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01992 421422**

so I set about organising and publicising the event. Mermaid licensees John Cusworth and Mark Powell were, as expected, very much on-board, as was Nick Jones from Oakham Brewery and world-famous beer writer, campaigner, member of South Herts CAMRA, and *Pints of View* columnist, the legendary Roger Protz.

During conversations with Peter, he told me a bit about himself. In 1984 he became a founder member of the Black Country Ale Tairsters, a group set up with his dad and for like-minded individuals with the aim of visiting all 300 pubs listed on a map issued by Wolverhampton brewer Banks's. The group, who call themselves the "BATs", is still in existence today and, nearly 25,000 pubs later, quite likely to outlast the brewery, though Peter is the only original member. Each pub visit is meticulously logged in one

of what are now 26 books that include every real ale available, along with licensee and staff signatures, and a record of the charity donation received. But that's not the half of it. Peter also has 300 lever-arch files, containing 100,000 photos, business cards and menus, which he thought I'd probably find fascinating. He already knew me well! What used to be his spare room, is now akin to a records office!

Peter told me that he had visited St Albans only three times previously; first in 1987 when he drank in the Old King's Head, as it was called back then (now Dylans at The Kings Arms) and also in self-styled oldest pub in Britain, Ye Olde Fighting Cocks. Next visit was in 1996 and the last, after a long wait, in 2018. We discussed the possibility of a pub crawl on the day of the Mermaid visit, which Peter was enthusiastic about, so long

Peter says...

"I always leave a calling card which I have signed by a pub team member to prove I have been in. The wife is OK with it — she just accepts it's my hobby. It's our anniversary next week and she wants to go to Greenwich. So of course, I've checked if there's a few pubs I need to chalk off down there, and there is, so we'll be popping in for a couple of pints. I'm trying to do my bit to keep the pub scene alive. I'll keep going until the beer runs out!"

as it was mainly comprised of pubs that were new to him.

I ended up arranging a crawl that would start and finish at the Mermaid and include seven other St Albans pubs that Peter had not yet drunk



in, rather than the 28 that he previously had.

All went tickety-boo until the night before, when the British weather decided to play foul and dump a load of snow on the country, bringing some areas to a standstill. Consequently, at 7.30 the next morning, I wondered whether Peter and drinking partner Liam would be able to make it down for our midday opening-time rendezvous at the Mermaid. I hastily considered a number of options: plan B (delay for six hours), plan C (train, if doable) and a drastic plan D (postpone until 24 Jan to combine with our branch AGM).

However, 6" of snow in West Bromwich was not going to deter these hardy Boys from the Black Country, and in less than an hour Peter messaged me with a confident "once I'm on the motorway I should be OK, I'm leaving at 9am." meaning plan A was still very much ON.

Back on track, we did indeed meet as scheduled. Walking into the pub at midday, a greeting party of branch members welcomed a smiling Peter, dressed in jeans, t-shirt and a signature waistcoat hand-made from beer towels. The local paper had been notified of the event, but I discovered that the story was of national interest and a news team from the UK's largest press agency, SWNS, was on hand for photos, videos and an interview. I soon found out that SWNS had reported on some of Peter's previous pub milestones and were very much 'in the loop'.

By 12.30pm, and with Peter onto his nth pint of Citra, numbers in the pub had swelled to 20, which became 30 by the time a dozen of us departed just before 2.30pm on Peter's 1.6 miles mini-crawl. This left others to enjoy the award-winning Mermaid's

Peter says...

GBG - "It's the definitive guide for great pubs, I've had great fun and met some amazing people along the way. The CAMRA guide is a bit like the beer drinker's bible - they know a good pub so I thought I'd try them all!"

selection of real ales and ciders. We would return...

...and so we did. Despite a tight pub-hopping schedule, at just after 6pm we stepped back into a now-crowded Mermaid for more Citra, more banter, and numerous excellent speeches. I can't remember the order, but the A-list cast included South Herts CAMRA Chair Ian Boyd, Beer Writer Roger Protz, Mermaid Licensee John Cusworth, Oakham Brewery Marketing Manager



Nick Jones, CAMRA National Executive Director Laura Emson, and cider-sipping, St Albans-loving local MP and Liberal Democrat Deputy Leader, Daisy Cooper.

Each expressed universal admiration for Peter's achievement, praised his love of beer and pubs, and, I assume, felt grateful for his dedication in trying to single-handedly ensure their survival.

All spoke about the tough times facing the industry, the government's failure to grasp that its policies hinder rather than help, and its inability to recognise the importance of these uniquely British institutions — meeting places for friends, refuges for the lonely, major employers and significant taxpayers.

Ian Boyd presented Peter with a certificate to commemorate the day, and Nick Jones gave Peter a Citra T-shirt and

invited him on a forthcoming VIP Oakham Brewery tour.

Peter responded with humility — his lovely, musical, mellifluous Black Country tones lighting up the faces of his attentive 'audience'. After thanking those involved for "the best day of my life", he went on to sing the praises of CAMRA, St Albans,

the Mermaid and Citra. We all raised a glass to Peter, then got on with drinking, chatting and enjoying a great evening, before leaving and pondering: "I wonder what new challenge he'll set himself?"

Paul Donatantonio (words)
Will Lewis (photos)
South Herts CAMRA

Peter says...

Fri 9 Jan 2026 — "It was a cracking day and night — absolutely fantastic, I was treated like a celebrity. Even the local MP turned out, and the chairman of the local CAMRA branch. They all took me on a pub crawl and I was presented with a plaque."

The journey home — "I was even able to cross off four pubs on the way home, which are in the 2026 CAMRA guide. I'm not sure if I'll work my way through all of those yet — I'm keeping that idea under wraps for

now as I don't know what the missus will say."

The Mermaid, St Albans, Herts — "My last pub in the CAMRA 2020 guide. Brilliant licensees, fabulous beer, best Oakham Citra for miles, and a great day, courtesy of the local South Herts CAMRA branch. A must visit."

Queens Head, Allens Green, Herts — "A welcoming country pub. Superb beers and ciders. Every third week there's a beer honesty board where you drink your beer and put the required money in the box."



'Fork all' from Spoons!

As featured elsewhere in this issue, pub tucker Peter Hill and his dad, Joe, founded 'The Black Country Ale Tairsters' in 1984, describing themselves as 'pub travellers'. Their aim was to visit pubs, drink in them, document their details, and request a £1 donation from each publican for charitable causes.

In the early days, most declined. Getting started with no track record was difficult, and a pound was worth a lot more then. However, as time went by, publicans became more generous. Today, 42 years on, Peter still asks for £1, though pays considerably more for the pints he consumes — 50-100p back then versus £3.50-7.00 today. Joe sadly passed away in 2014, but his spirit lives on.

On 27 February 2026, having completed the challenge of visiting all 4,309 open GBG2020 pubs, Peter presented a cheque for £7,150 to Midlands Air Ambulance at his local pub, the Rising Sun, Tipton, West Midlands. The total raised so far from the 24,585 different pubs visited is a staggering £36,411.



Mate 'Bunchy'; Kay Starkey, Midlands Air Ambulance Fundraising Executive; Peter Hill; and the cheque for £7,150

Date	Donation	Charity
06/02/2007	£3,000	John Radcliffe Children's Hospital, Oxford
21/11/2008	£2,360	Meningitis Trust
03/12/2010	£3,000	N Wales Children's Hospitals
14/09/2013	£5,650	S Wales Noah's Ark Children's Hospital
25/11/2015	£3,025	Sandwell Children's Hospital, W Bromwich
25/03/2016	£350	Cornwall Air Ambulance
04/08/2017	£3,250	Nottingham Children's Hospital
28/11/2019	£4,000	Midlands Air Ambulance
10/04/2024	£500	Albion Foundation
27/02/2026	£7,150	Midlands Air Ambulance

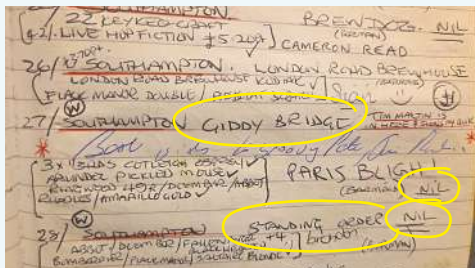
Charities that have benefitted over the last two decades from Peter Hill's fundraising

Top donor is the popular, award-winning **Hope in Carshalton**, Surrey, where £48 was handed over to Peter. At the other end of the scale are those pubs that contribute £0, normally because of restrictions placed upon staff.

During our 8-pub crawl in **St Albans** on 9 January, I witnessed donations from the majority of pubs visited. Whilst three were the 'regulation' £1 asked for, the **Horn** and **Mermaid** gave very generously — £20 and £40, respectively.

I wondered how Peter would go about asking for a donation from a Wetherspoon pub — in the case of St Albans, the impressive timber-framed and Grade II listed Waterend Barn. He didn't even try, because: "A long time ago, the odd one or two did, but then I stopped asking as it wasn't worth the hassle."

It turns out that Peter has visited a total of 598 Wetherspoon pubs; one being the **Giddy Bridge**, Southampton, on Sunday 14 April 2019 where he met none other than the future Sir Tim Martin, Wetherspoon Chairman, who signed Peter's book "Best wishes to groovy Pete", and posed for



a photo. I'm not sure his hand felt his pocket though, as Peter's book records a £0 donation, as it does for the next pub visited, the nearby **Standing Order** – another Wetherspoon.

Whilst it is understandable that PubCo bar staff may not be able to 'dip into the till' to make a charity donation, it seems somewhat unfair that companies 'with the broadest shoulders' have not contributed, in contrast to the beleaguered independents. This is an opportunity for Wetherspoon to right that wrong!

Maybe Sir Tim could present Peter with a large cheque (physical size and monetary value) made out to one of his chosen charities – perhaps at Peter's 600th Wetherspoon pub, which can't be far off!

I'll report back next issue.

Paul Donatantonio

The Mermaid
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St Albans
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16th - 20th April
20 real ales.
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and 15 bottled Belgian beers

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The Mermaid
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The Mermaid
ST ALBANS

CIDER Festival
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Live Music
Sunday 5pm - 7pm

40 CAMRA APPROVED AND
FRUIT INFUSED CIDERS



Brewer's View

Is the Good Beer Guide trusted?

The *Good Beer Guide* (GBG) is a celebrated book, held up to showcase the country's best pubs. But over the years it's become a bit of a contentious subject, even within CAMRA itself.

Despite being a national guide, there is no national selection process, and so branches can have different ways to choose the pubs that they put into it, so long as minimum criteria are met. One branch could, for instance, decide that no matter how great a pub is, if it doesn't open seven days a week, then it won't be included. Yet a pub across the road could have the same opening hours but be included by a neighbouring branch which doesn't have that rule.

And the guide is not infinite. There isn't enough room in the printed book for every pub that could meet new nationalised selection criteria. Each branch has an allocation to fill, and many will do so regardless of the quality of their local pubs,

believing that failure to do so may result in fewer entries the following year. There are ways to address this, but none are perfect and all come with their own problems. Furthermore, anything printed is usually out of date before it hits the shelves.

In short, the GBG isn't the trusted resource it once was.

This is not to say it's no longer useful. In fact, the GBG is still the first point of call for many — those planning a visit outside of their normal area and others content with flicking through the pages to check which old haunts in their local area are still included.

However, for the GBG to regain trust, it needs to be digitised and the basic version needs to be free. There are so many no-cost alternatives available, that people won't be willing to pay for something unless it is far, far better than the rivals.

A digital guide allows for all pubs to be included regardless of quality, as they now are on the CAMRA website, and immediately becomes a well-referenced resource driving traffic to the CAMRA domain and any on-screen promotion.

Updates would not be reliant on having to wait until the next annual release and so a pub found to be contravening CAMRA rules could have its entry quickly updated. Similarly, when contraventions have been addressed, the pub could just as easily be put back in.

It may be an oft-mocked organisation that many think is stuck in the past, but CAMRA is respected and the *Good Beer Guide* is known for being honest. You can't buy your way into it. And bringing that over to a digital version means that its credibility as a resource is far greater than anything else currently available.

The idea of a printed guide shouldn't be discarded though, but rather embraced and enhanced. Pubs in the guide are supposed to be the best in the country, and a way to improve this is to split the GBG into multiple books. Along with a much smaller national guide would be regional guides, which recognise those pubs that reach and maintain a constant high level of quality. Some regions may not have as many as others, and we need to accept that.

The number of entries would be restricted by the number of qualifying pubs, not the space available to print. If an area has a lot of pubs that would qualify, then that region can be split such as North and South London having separate books. CAMRA already produces some local guides, with *Manchester's Best Beer Pubs and Bar* by Matthew Curtis being the most recent, joining *London's Best Beer Pubs & Bars* by the late Des de Moor. The new regional guides could follow in the same vein, becoming collectable items in themselves and more useful reference books than the current *Good Beer Guide*.

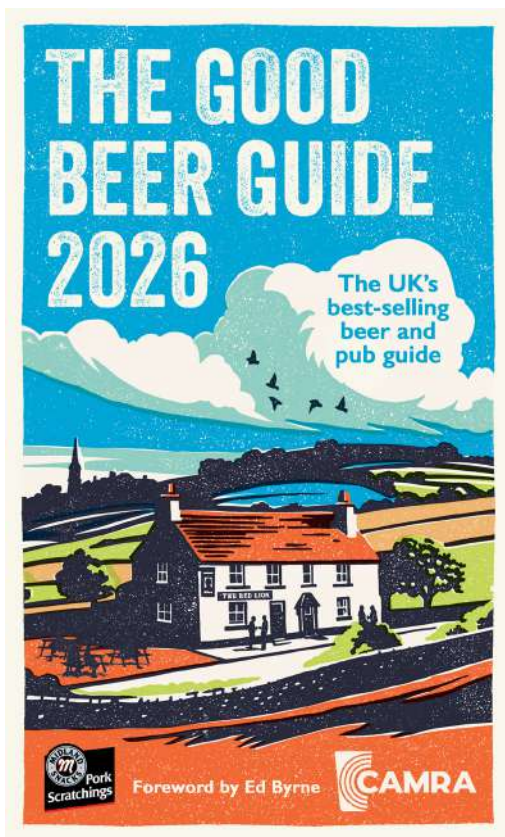
The national guide can then be the best of the best, regardless of where those pubs are – a 'Top 1,000 Pubs in the Country', based on those criteria used in the digital version. Getting into this new style GBG would be a much bigger achievement, as currently pubs only have to be the best in their area. And

as such, the printed guide would hold more value to drinkers and be more celebrated by publicans.

By switching the focus of the GBG to an online, up-to-date and interactive reference, its reputation can be increased, losing the "out-of-date-before-it's-printed" stigma and varying branch selection criteria, whilst increasing the transparency of the selection process. And by becoming the go-to source of information for pubs, the new guide can be used to promote CAMRA and encourage both new membership as well as member activation.

By switching the printed *Good Beer Guide* to regionals, the Campaign will be able to showcase all the good pubs in branches and regions with no limits on entries, nor padding of numbers to meet self-imposed targets.

The new national guide would be more of an awards list that publicans can truly celebrate being included in.



Steve Dunkley
 Beer & Brewing
 Historian & Writer
 Founder, Beer Nouveau Brewery
 Peterborough CAMRA

The full-length original version
 of this article is at
[https://wb.camra.org.uk/2024/05/15/
 is-the-good-beer-guide-trusted](https://wb.camra.org.uk/2024/05/15/is-the-good-beer-guide-trusted)

Tenanted pubs fall to Mac's axe

January 2026 brought the shock news that McMullen were to sell all of their tenancy pub estate plus three



PUNCH
PUBS & CO

and supporting our Publicans and Management Partners to help their businesses

managed houses. It soon became apparent that it was to Punch Taverns and that the transfer would be early February. The move would involve 30 pubs — a sizeable 25% of Mac's 120 pub total, mainly in Mac's traditional heartland of Hertfordshire, West Essex and North London.

Initial reaction from tenants to the news ranged from worry and concern to disappointment and sadness, despite the promise of lease terms and conditions being protected. Some senior staff in the three managed pubs were offered posts elsewhere in Mac's business, whilst some of Mac's headquarters' staff were transferred to Punch to help ease the move.

In their February press release, Mac's Joint Managing Director Tom McMullen said: *"There are some phenomenal independent operators in these businesses, and it was important to us that they transferred to an owner who possesses both the scale and strategic direction necessary to offer improved support, and is willing and able to provide the financial commitment that these pubs deserve. We are also grateful to our tenanted operations team who have continued to grow this part of the business and are supporting through the transition."*

In the Punch press release, Group Strategy and Commercial Director James Croft added: *"We're delighted to have completed the acquisition of these pubs from McMullen's. This is a fantastic collection of pubs with real heritage, strong community roots and proven operators running them day to day, and we look forward to welcoming them into the Punch family. Our focus remains on long-term partnerships, investing in our pubs*

succeed as we work towards being the 5-star pub company."

Mac's frustration and deep concern about the current difficult trading conditions along with high tax burdens, particularly those emanating from last Autumn's Budget, must have been major factors in the company's decision to sell. Tom McMullen's opinions on these matters had been strongly expressed in this article for *The Parliament Politics* magazine back in November 2025:

<https://parliamentnews.co.uk/last-years-cut-to-business-property-relief-will-wreck-many-private-family-businesses-the-chancellor-needs-to-rethink-this-anti-growth-policy>

Dedicated Mac's beer drinkers – from fans of cask AK Original Mild and Country Bitter to those who favour IPA, the seasonal brews, bottled No.1 Light Ale, and kegged SIPA and Elysium – have been left wondering whether their local will continue to serve their favourite beers.

As part of the deal, McMullen's cask ales will be available to the pubs via Punch drays – direct delivery from Mac's being severed. Punch also have their own list of cask ales available to tenants, though the choice is somewhat constrained and likely to be the same for all of the transferred pubs and exclude most beers from other Hertfordshire brewers. Nevertheless, some publicans may grasp the opportunity to stock a wider range.

Fears have been widely expressed that Mac's next move might be to discontinue brewing and operate solely as a pub company – as has happened with other brewery pub sales – Young's and Brakspear come to mind. However, with their 200 year celebrations commencing in January 2027, Mac's have

given assurances on this front, Tom McMullen saying: *“We brew beer for a multitude of reasons and I can’t foresee that changing.... importantly, there are a number of soft, non-financial reasons for brewing, one of which is to have a binding identity across our entire business. To most of our guests and team, the pub brand is their primary loyalty, but after that, it’s to the brewery rather than a retailing concept. The shareholders’ loyalty is primarily to the brewery and it is no coincidence that, with others, the owners’ loyalty to team and guests starts to decline once a brewery is lost. That said, we will have to work on our economies of scale and grow volume and get materially better at product development to improve our market share in our own pubs.”*

Mac’s have expressed some sadness at both losing pubs that helped build their business over generations, and parting with people they have worked with for years, but I suppose that such feelings needed to be put aside when deciding to sell. Mac’s rich tradition of pub ownership in Hertfordshire has certainly taken a hit. The 20 plus Herts pubs include the Greyhound in Bengoe; Mac’s very first pub purchase bought back in 1836; the Good Beer Guide’s Great Eastern Tavern in Hertford, the enterprising Rose & Crown in Ware, and the friendly Sibthorpe Arms in Welham Green. The three managed houses are the Builders Arms in Potters Bar, the Hatfield Tap and the Shark in Harlow.



Sibthorpe Arms, Welham Green and Lord Haig, Hertford

Currently closed but retained by Mac’s are the Lion in Eastwick, the Yew Tree in Walkern and the Baker Arms in Bayford. The latter is the subject of a planning application for housing at the rear, together with a related scheme to transfer the pub to a community group.

Whilst Mac’s will retain a varied portfolio, the company sees its future in big city centre, town and suburban pubs, along with large

food-led destination rural inns. I expect further acquisitions in this vein and let’s not forget that Mac’s are one of the few companies still building pubs.

Moving forward, CAMRA has lingering concerns that Punch, having bought a job lot of pubs, might decide to offload or close some of them – time will tell. Last year, Hertfordshire CAMRA Branches wrote to Town and Parish Councils suggesting that they seek Asset of Community Value status for town and village pubs. Let’s hope they do so.

Les Middlewood
South Herts CAMRA

The listings below are colour-coded North Herts, South Herts, Herts & Essex Borders, Watford & District and Other Branches.

HERTFORDSHIRE	Codicote	Globe
	Hatfield	Hatfield Tap (managed)
	Hertford	Dog & Whistle Great Eastern Tavern Greyhound Lord Haig Millstream
	Heronsgate	Stag
	Potters Bar	Builders Arms (managed)
	Puckeridge	White Hart
	Sawbridgeworth	George IV Orange Tree
	Stevenage	Almond Tree Old Town Bar Royal Oak
	Waltham Cross	Wheatsheaf
	Ware	Rose & Crown Spread Eagle
	Welham Green	Sibthorpe Arms
	Welwyn	Steamer Tavern

ESSEX	Harlow	Shark (managed)
	Lippits Hill	Owl
	Upshire	Horseshoes
	Waltham Abbey	Welsh Harp

LONDON	Barnet	Queens Arms Kings Head Sebright Arms
	Enfield Lock	Greyhound
	Finchley	Windsor Castle

Rose & Crown – still a thorny issue, ten years on

As readers may know, I was editor of *Pints of View* for twenty years before moving to Kent in December 2022. The new editor, Paul Donatantonio, is always trying to increase circulation, and recently approached the Rose & Crown, Essendon, to take copies. I gather they declined, telling Paul they want nothing to do with CAMRA after what was printed in *Pints of View* some years ago. Knowing nothing about the history, Paul asked them to explain, but they refused to elaborate, so Paul asked me.



To be honest, I had only a vague recollection of what had caused the problem and so we looked back through previous issues and found two references to the pub from 2016.

In PoV275, I had written a lengthy article about ACV (Asset of Community Value) listings, in which I stated that *“the landlord of the Rose & Crown in Essendon has barred all local parish councillors from its pub for having put an ACV on the pub.”*

This evidently prompted the licensee to contact me and in PoV276, I wrote: *“In the last edition 275, I stated on page 2 that the landlord of the Rose & Crown had barred*

the Essendon Parish Council from his pub following its ACV listing. I have been assured by landlord Mark Davis that this is not the case and they are still welcome at the pub. There has obviously been a misunderstanding and I was misinformed. I apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused.”

I remember being disappointed that an elected member of Essendon County Council had provided the information...

The ACV must have expired in 2021 and I'm delighted that the pub is still trading. I apologise, again, for what was published a decade ago when *Pints of View* was on my watch.

Steve Bury
Ex-editor
Pints of View

A black and white advertisement for 'The Blockheads Ware Drill Hall'. At the top is a logo consisting of a square with a white border. Inside the square, the letters 'B', 'L', and 'O' are arranged in a grid pattern. Below the square, the word 'CKHEAD' is written in a bold, sans-serif font. Underneath the logo, the text reads 'THE BLOCKHEADS WARE DRILL HALL' in large, bold, sans-serif letters. Below that, in smaller text, is '17 Amwell End, Ware SG12 9HP'. The date 'SATURDAY 2ND MAY' is prominently displayed in large, bold, sans-serif letters, followed by 'DOORS 7PM'. Below this, it says 'UNDER 18s MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT'. Further down, it lists '£33+ booking fee seetickets.com' and 'MORE INFO: 07904 333923'. At the bottom, there are two beer mug icons flanking the text 'serving up to 4 real ales'. The website address 'www.seetickets.com/event/the-blockheads/the-drill-hall/' is at the very bottom.

Dunsley's Dozen Charity Collabs

Tring Brewery is raising funds and awareness for Berkhamsted and District Community First Responders (CFRs) throughout 2026. The scheme was established in 1994, training volunteers to attend emergency calls, offering life-saving care in the vital minutes before an ambulance crew arrives. The training is provided by the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST). It just so happens that the local CFRs are patrons of the brewery!

As well as hosting special fundraising events throughout the year, Tring will brew monthly beers to raise awareness of CFRs, with names and imagery inspired by health services. The roundel design is based on the local CFR branch.

The collaborative monthly ales, starting with *Ambrewlance*, will be available on draught from local pubs and the Dunsley Farm brewery shop. Details of brewery members' nights, ToadFest, and other activities will be

announced via Tring Brewery's social media and newsletter channels.

The full list of monthly beers is:

Ambrewlance (Pale Ale, 4%) – January
Resus Red (Amber Ale, 4.2%) – February
Skeleton Session (Bitter, 4%) – March
Thirst Responder (Pale Ale, 3.9%) – April
On The Scene (Strong Bitter, 4.4%) – May
Priority 1 (Pale Ale, 3.7%) – June
Dr. ABC (Pale Ale, 4%) – July
Stitched Up (Bitter, 4.1%) – August
Citrus N' Sirens (Pale Ale, 3.9%) – September
Shock Horror (Strong Bitter, 4.3%) – October
Brews & Twos (Pale Ale, 3.8%) – November
Holly & The IV (Festive Bitter, 4%) – December

Cheers to a year of beer, in the name of Community First Responders!

Jared Ward-Brickett

Tring Brewery PR Director
 Mid-Chilterns CAMRA

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In 2026 we are raising funds and awareness for Berkhamsted & District Community First Responders



TRING
 BREWERY Co.

Dunsley Farm, London Road, Tring HP23 6HA

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Beer Belle

Britain's 2nd Living Room **The Pub**

Woolworths, British Home Stores, Top Shop and Debenhams — just a few of the high street names we've seen disappear over the past decade. Their decline largely resulted from shifts in consumer behaviour and (alleged) financial mismanagement. It's no surprise that people felt disappointed when these previously successful businesses closed, but Amazon had stepped in and made it easy for us to buy anything we wanted without leaving the house.

If British pubs disappeared tomorrow, the country would lose far more than a place to buy a pint. Something essential would quietly vanish: a shared social space where strangers talk, communities gather, and everyday life is paused in order for us to feel human again. In an age of scrolling, streaming, and working from home, the pub may seem old-school, but that's exactly why it matters so much.

Under the Labour government administration, pubs (like other businesses) have been subjected to a rise in employer National Insurance rates and the minimum wage, combined with a cut in business rates relief. Soaring cost-of-goods prices and rising utility

bills have additionally piled the pressure on an industry which barely had time to recover after a global pandemic.

Let's be clear: pubs are not just businesses. They are social anchors. Unlike coffee chains or exclusive hotels, pubs are designed to be neutral ground. You don't need to dress a certain way, order the right thing, or justify why you're there. You can go alone, meet friends, or strike up a conversation with someone you've never met. You don't need an invitation, a membership, or a subscription — just turning up is enough.

Pubs also do something quietly radical: they bring different people together. In a pub, age, job title, and background matter less. Office workers drink next to builders. Students share tables with retirees. Conversations spill across social lines that rarely cross elsewhere. At a time when British society often feels divided, the pub remains one of the last places where mixing feels normal rather than forced.

Pubs also play a huge role in community life. In villages and neighbourhoods, the local pub often acts as a social hub. It's where quiz nights happen, charities raise money, birthdays are celebrated, and sports teams either drown their sorrows or celebrate their victories.

For people who live alone or work remotely, the pub can be a vital source of human contact — a place where someone notices if you haven't been in for a while. Being noticed, remembered, or asked "The usual, love?" might seem small, but it can mean everything. In January 2026, the campaigner Esther Rantzen called for pubs to be protected from closure "to ensure people have somewhere to experience companionship". When a pub closes, the loss isn't just economic; it leaves a social gap that no app or delivery service can fill.

Conversation is another key part of pub culture. Pubs are built for talking. They encourage relaxed, face-to-face discussion, whether it's about football, politics, or the price of a pint.



Home Alone — in the living room

Disagreements happen, of course, but so does understanding. In a world where many conversations now take place online, the pub remains a space for real, human interaction.

Pubs are also closely tied to everyday British rituals. A pint after work, a Sunday lunch with family, or a post-match drink with friends are small traditions, but they matter. These moments help structure life and strengthen relationships in ways that texts and group chats never can.



Community Zone — in the Boot, St Albans

When pubs struggle, it's not just nostalgia at stake. It's community, conversation, and connection. Britain without pubs wouldn't just be quieter — it would be lonelier. And if that's not a compelling argument to pop out to the pub, enjoy a pint, and support your local pub, I don't know what is.

Annabel Smith

Beer Sommelier & Writer
www.beerbelle.co.uk
 Wakefield CAMRA

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 training, consultancy, events

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Photo: © Nic Crilly-Hargrave

Hoppy Lotte

but beer paired with food is an integral part of the dish, and the temperature should complement that of the other ingredients.

For example, a 1944 Golden Pale Helles Bock Lager (5% ABV) from *The Bold Mariner Brewing Co* was served chilled, at a lower temperature than a plate of salumi, focaccia and ricotta. The crisp, clean, refreshing character of the beer offset the ambient temperature of the food ingredients, creating a complementary interplay on the palate.

Hinterland's Jamaican Haze IPA (6.8% ABV) was served a few degrees above the usual 7°C – ice cold temperatures can mute hop aroma and flavour, so IPAs are best served only slightly chilled. A cold dish of sea bass crudo with a grilled nectarine salad, shiso and hazelnuts was paired with this IPA, where Sabro hops with notes of coconut and lime were showcased perfectly at the slightly warmer temperature.

A pairing is successful when beer in the glass is a natural extension to food on the plate, both in temperature and flavour. Such was the case when campanelle pasta with duck ragu was paired with *Samuel Adams Boston Lager* (5.2% ABV), making its welcome return to the UK after a five-year absence.

A rare-breed pork chop, fresh cherry mustard sauce, roasted potatoes and salad, was up

Hot topic!



Beer Temperature vs Food Flavour

While cask ale is served at cellar temperature, the majority of keg beers are typically enjoyed chilled. However, allowing a beer to warm by just a few degrees can unlock hidden flavours and, when paired with food, enhance the taste of both.

Last summer, this theory was put to the test by the Brewers Association (BA) – the not-for-profit trade association for small and independent American craft brewers – in London's Manteca restaurant, during a five course pairing curated by the BA Executive Chef, Adam Dulye, in collaboration with Manteca Head Chef, Chris Leach.

So, great beer and great food – we were guaranteed a treat!

The message was simple: cold beer can numb the palate, masking the full taste profile. Lagers and lighter styles are typically served very cold to maximise refreshment,



Photo: © Nic Crilly-Hargrave



Photo: © Nic Crilly-Hargrave

contrasts. Allowing the beer to warm slightly enhanced the flavours of both beer and food.

The UK is the third largest market for American craft beer, accounting for 8.2% of exports. Its style-diversity and world-class quality make American craft beer ideal both as a refreshing, flavoursome drink, and an excellent accompaniment to all types of food.

As everyone knows, wine tends to be the default alcoholic drink to accompany fine dining. That being the case, most diners are missing out on the ever-growing number of quality beers that are now available in a diverse range of styles to suit every part of a 5-course feast!

One thing we *can* learn from wine, though, is the importance of serving temperature.

Lotte Peplow

Beer Sommelier & Writer

American Craft Beer Ambassador for Europe

www.brewersassociation.org

Richmond & Hounslow CAMRA

next with *Toppling Goliath's King Sue Double IPA* (8.2% ABV) that burst with juicy tropical hop notes and was served a few degrees above chilled. Equally harmonious was *Coldfire's Cerise Rouge 2024* (6.3% ABV), a foeder-fermented sour blonde base ale, aged in white-wine barrels, then refermented on Montmorency cherries in a process taking three years.

And so to the decadent dessert of chilled profiteroles paired with a room temperature imperial oatmeal vanilla porter *Virginia Beer Co, Pinwheel Porter* (9% ABV) showcasing flavours of chocolate and vanilla, and brewed with flaked oats to give a creamy mouthfeel. The harmony between the cold chocolate and vanilla-cream profiteroles, and the beer's matching flavour profile was striking, and made all the more expressive and nuanced by the beer's warmer serving temperature.

The event clearly demonstrated that American craft beer has limitless food pairing potential, not only with flavour synergies but also through thoughtful temperature



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Harpenden
Hertfordshire
AL5 2SD
Tel: 01582 763989



Warm welcome
Beautiful beer
Green, peaceful garden







Herts CAMRA Awards

South Herts Gold for Old Cross

Congratulations to all those pubs that made it through to the final of our branch competition.

Eight pubs represent only 3% of around 220 serving cask ale across South Hertfordshire.

Branch winner, the Old Cross Tavern, first achieved top spot in 1999 and has now gone on to win seven times. Last year's Silver was the first top three for the Hertford freehouse since James Ashbourne took over the pub in late 2023. This year he's gone one better and goes through to the 'County Round' in May, where competition will include serial winner from North Herts branch, the Orange Tree in Baldock.

May the best pub win!

Paul Donatantonio

South Herts CAMRA Pub of the Year 2026

CASK & STILLAGE, Potters Bar	
CROOKED BILLET, Ware	
GREAT NORTHERN, St Albans	BRONZE
GREEN MAN, Sandridge	
JOHN BUNYAN, Coleman Green	
OLD CROSS TAVERN, Hertford	GOLD
ROBIN HOOD, St Albans	SILVER
WOODMAN, Wildhill	

PS: A presentation will be made to James and his staff at the Old Cross Tavern on Thursday 30 April. All are welcome to join in the celebrations!



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Beating Herts

New River Brewery

flowing into its second decade

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Pindar Road, Hoddesdon, EN11 0FF
www.newriverbrewery.co.uk | 01992 446200

Having just completed their tenth year since opening, it was time to catch up with this special, but unassuming brewery located on an industrial unit in Hoddesdon. I met affable owner and brewer John Bourdeaux on a rain-swept January day to discuss the past and find out how he sees the future...

John's love for beer and pubs was formed in his teens alongside a penchant for mountains and high places — walking trips inevitably included visits to rural pubs. He home-brewed and his job, as an accountant working in the retail and hospitality sector, often touched the world of brewing and pubs. The desire to brew on a larger scale was always on his mind and by 2013, it was time for a career change! Realising the need to train before brewing commercially, John worked with Tim Longman at Black Horse Brewery, Barnet for three months, followed by a spell at Brewlab in Sunderland.

Having discussed his ideas with friend and City trader, Jeremy Alter, the two decided to take

the plunge. With the business plan finalised, they were on the lookout for premises close to their home territory in Enfield.

A lease was taken on a unit close to the famous New River, built in the early 17thC to provide London's growing population with fresh and clean water from springs at Chadwell and Amwell in the Lea Valley. The river's name was adopted for the brewery and brand new stainless steel brewing plant was acquired from Johnson Brewing Design of Bury, Greater Manchester. It was of 12-barrel brew length (maximum 48 casks). Two further Fermenting Vessels have since been added and a typical week comprises brewing on Monday, racking of the previous week's brew on Tuesday, pub deliveries on Wednesday/Thursday and recipe presentation and cask washing on Friday. The brewery has invested in 500 casks and is currently operating at 50% capacity.

After trial brewing, *Riverbed Red 4.2%*, an amber, became the first beer — upscaled from the brewery's pilot brew-kit recipe. It was joined by *London Tap 3.8%*, a pale ale, and *Five-Inch Drop 4.6%*, a triple-hopped IPA. Soon after came *Blind Poet 4.5%*, a lightly smoked porter, and *Twin Spring 4.0%*, a mellow golden ale. These became the core beers, soon winning CAMRA awards — county and national — and trade accolades.

Early outlets for the beers were nearby pubs and clubs with Jeremy driving trade in London and John in the Home Counties.

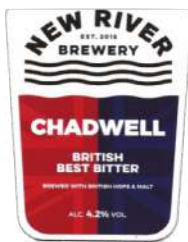
As the company grew, the brewery gave opportunities to young brewers and John is particularly proud to have seen them flourish. Connor Bartlett, now with Adnams, was followed by Vincent Marteau, now brewing in



south-west France, and then Sammy Dennis, now back near his home town of Burton-on-Trent. When Sammy left in 2024, John resumed responsibility for brewing. Prior to that, in 2021, Jeremy had decided to withdraw from the partnership leaving John to run the business, assisted by his wife, Brenda.

Malts are generally from Muntons of Stowmarket and, of late, nearby French & Jups. John is a big fan of English hops such as Goldings and Fuggles, but also uses American and New Zealand hops when their specific characteristics are called for. Yeast is cultivated externally, but cropped and re-pitched from batch to batch. Torrefied wheat is added to help with head retention. Of all the elements in the brewing process, John picks out conditioning as one of the most challenging — crash chilling in particular. I was surprised to hear that the use of isinglass finings (from fish swim bladders) was discontinued two years ago. Although the change to a vegan-friendly alternative was a leap of faith, successful trialling has resulted in beer dropping bright just as quickly despite using only 40ml per cask, rather than 500ml of traditional finings.

2023 saw the release of *Chadwell 4.2%*, a traditional best bitter crammed with Fuggles hops, which became the brewery's first beer brewed solely from British ingredients. The beer was originally called *'Happy and Glorious'* to celebrate the King's coronation but proved so popular that it became permanent. Next came *Great Amwell 4.6%*, an American Pale Ale and another successful addition. And last year, to celebrate their 10 year anniversary, John brewed *Ten of Herts 4.8%*, a West Coast IPA, dry-hopped at most stages of the brewing process with Mosaic, Simcoe, Citra, Chinook and Centennial. However, John also hopes to see a comeback for traditional bitters where balance



allows drinkers to discover their subtlety.

The brewery deals directly with Free Houses and Social or Sports Clubs — mainly in Herts and Essex, less so in London, but also in Kent, West Sussex and Northamptonshire, where the many micro-pubs are keen to stock New River beers. There is no kegging or canning, but a range of beers are bottled and available to order online for delivery or collection from Pindar Road... where John has resisted thoughts of opening a tap room.

The brewery promotes its name and beers through sponsorship of Enfield Town FC, along with other local organisations, and, of course, by supplying beer to CAMRA festivals and events — over 70 so far. John is keen to recognise CAMRA's support.

Let's raise a glass to John, Brenda and a great local, independent brewery. We wish them all well in continuing to bring excellent beers to drinkers in Hertfordshire and beyond, for many years to come!

Les Middlewood
South Herts CAMRA



Laura in Beerland

Time called early

Only now that she's gone do I realise that my sister Vicki was, for me, the archetypal publican — It's amazing how we sometimes don't notice the things that are right under our noses.

Vicki's untimely death, shortly before her 50th birthday, has sent me into a spiral of reflection on her life. I've realised that she shaped my worldview much more significantly than I had ever credited when she was alive.

Whenever I write about pubs, I have noticed that I display a fondness for those landlords whose brusque exterior barely cloaks a genuine dedication to, and love for, their beer, their community and their regulars. It's our Vic that makes me think they are the best landlords.

Her no-nonsense personality suited her perfectly to the trade. I think that this biker and heavy-metal fan could reasonably be described as formidable – and she could easily handle even the rowdiest customer. Yet her many years of dedicated charity and community work through her pubs show a softer side, one that won her a place in the hearts of all she came into contact with.

She had an incredible mind. Exceptional. Her natural gifts meant that she displayed an aptitude for everything she turned her hand to. She could achieve anything, with remarkably little effort. At least that's how it felt to those of us growing up in her shadow, who had to work steadfastly and diligently for our own meagre accomplishments.

The possibilities for her life were endless. Would she be an engineer? A classical



musician? A politician? The only limit was her imagination, it seemed, when she finished her GCSEs.

But with such boundless potential comes a shrewd understanding of one's own self-determination. My sister, frankly, dismayed all observers by not doing what was expected, but doing what she wanted.

Leaving the family home at 16, she went from a Saturday job on a market jewellery stall into bar work to support her new life in a bedsit. Before long, or so it seems in my memory, she was managing her own pub. She spent almost all of her working life behind one bar or another.

Of course, a woman of such limitless prospects "throwing her future away" in pubs was a bitter pill for many in the family to swallow. It's probably at least part of the reason that she chose not to have very much to do with her relatives for much of her life. And, looking back, those careless attitudes towards hospitality make me particularly sad.

I have the privilege of also living a professional life that gravitates around the pub. What I see is a skilled trade. Publicans have so many roles to play that go far beyond pulling pints and cashing up. They are (usually) skilled in cellar management, they are called upon as mediators and

confidants. Quite often, they are keepers of our precious built heritage and all of them are custodians of our unique and valuable pub culture. That's not even beginning to unpick the complex everyday grind of running a business against a complex socio-economic background.

I don't see that choosing to manage pubs for a living is a waste of potential. I understand that it can offer an enjoyable and fulfilling career that brings with it a commendable amount of social good. I also recognise that it is not an easy way out. It's a stressful job with a huge amount of uncertainty, unsociable hours (ironically) and little respite. We are not necessarily defined as people by our work, but it often feels like being an exemplary publican is more of a calling than a job.

I'm proud of what my sister achieved in the pubs she called home. Her job and her life had value and she was certainly dedicated to doing things properly. I still laugh that she once ratted me out to our parents for visiting

her pub on the sly when an under-16s disco I was intending to attend was unexpectedly cancelled. I was pretty livid at the time, but what I didn't know then was that I was putting her licence at risk and she was "doing the right thing". Although I also suspect that she didn't like the idea of her youngest sibling having far more freedom than she had enjoyed at the same age, so there was a touch of petulance in her actions.

I raise my glass to everyone in the hospitality industry. I believe your work has real, tangible value and I thank you for taking it on, even the really messy bits that demand a significant application of blue roll. I hope, in turn, you'll raise a glass to my big sister, Vicki. One of your own, gone too soon.

Laura Hadland

Food & Drink Writer

Author, 50 years of CAMRA

<https://linktr.ee/laurahadland>

Telford & East Shropshire CAMRA



camra.org.uk/saveyourlocal

Is your
local pub
under
threat?

CAMRA
Pubs, Pints, People

Photo: © Lily Waite



CAMRA
MEMBERS' WEEKEND
ST ALBANS 2026



Thu 16 - Mon 20 April

St Albans City of Ale Hosts 2026 Event

Spring is just around the corner, which can only mean one thing — CAMRA's National Members' Weekend is nearly upon us! After recent years in destinations as diverse as Sheffield, Dundee and Torquay, this year it arrives on home turf in St Albans. Taking place from 17-19 April 2026, this year's Weekend will bring together 1,000 beer, cider and pub lovers from across the UK for a long weekend of discussion, celebration and exploration.

At the heart of the Weekend itself are the AGM and Conference sessions, held on Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th at the Alban Arena in the city centre. These sessions are where CAMRA members can take part in debating motions, hear from National Executive members, and celebrate achievements from across the Campaign. Alongside this formal programme are opportunities to socialise at the bar, meet fellow members and learn more about today's key issues facing beer, cider, pubs and breweries.

But St Albans offers far more than the conference. Rather than keeping everyone

in one place, we want visitors to explore our beautiful, historic city, discover new favourite pubs and experience the warm welcome the city is renowned for. We've arranged a dedicated programme of off-site activity called *St Albans City of Ale*. This city-wide collection of events brings the Weekend into our local pubs, clubs and museum. From pub beer and cider festivals, tastings and guided pub trails, to live music and special guest presentations, *City of Ale* gives you every reason to explore the city and its exceptional pubs — whether you are participating in conference business or not.

Whilst many of our pubs will be showcasing the best local ales for our visitors to explore, a variety of tap takeovers will give locals a chance to sample beers rarely seen in St Albans.

Visit the *City of Ale* website:

stalbanscityofale.org.uk

to plan your weekend. You'll find event filters, pub trails, maps and practical info on travel and accommodation, so you can build your perfect itinerary.

Whether you're a member planning to join us at the Arena, or simply want to enjoy a long weekend of good pubs and great company, there's plenty to look forward to. All events are free to enter with no booking required unless stated otherwise on the website.

Roll on April — see you in St Albans!

Emily Ryans
City of Ale Organiser
South Herts CAMRA

6 x St Albans City Pub Trails



Charter Market Quarter

- 📍 6 pubs/clubs
- 🚶 Walking: 0.6 miles



St Peter's Quarter

- 📍 6 pubs/clubs
- 🚶 Walking: 1.2 miles



Medieval St Albans East

- 📍 6 pubs/clubs
- 🚶 Walking: 0.4 miles



Medieval St Albans West

- 📍 6 pubs/clubs
- 🚶 Walking: 1.6 miles



Victorian St Albans

- 📍 6 pubs/clubs
- 🚶 Walking: 0.6 miles



Fleetville & Camp

- 📍 5 pubs/clubs
- 🚶 Walking: 3.5 miles

6 x Beer Festivals



Great Northern Beer Festival

- 📅 Thu 16 – Sun 19 April 2026
- 🕒 All day
- 📍 Great Northern



Portland 'Best of British' Beer & Food Festival

- 📅 Thu 16 – Sun 19 April 2026
- 🕒 All day
- 📍 Portland Arms



Mermaid Beer Festival

- 📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026
- 🕒 All day
- 📍 Mermaid



Waterend Barn Cask Ale Showcase

- 📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026
- 🕒 All day
- 📍 Waterend Barn



Lower Red Beer Festival

- 📅 Fri 17 – Mon 20 April 2026
- 🕒 All day
- 📍 Lower Red Lion



The Boot-iful Beer Fest

- 📅 Fri 17 – Mon 20 April 2026
- 🕒 All day
- 📍 Boot

12 x Tap Takeovers



International Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Mad Squirrel Tap



Deya Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Sun 19 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Dylans @ The Kings Arms



Verdant Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Sun 19 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Craft & Cleaver



3 Brewers Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Lower Red Lion



Beak Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Beer Shop



Harvey's Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Robin Hood



Tring Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 White Hart Tap



Two Flints Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Farmer's Boy



XT Tap Takeover

📅 Thu 16 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Beehive



Brains Tap Takeover

📅 Fri 17 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Hare & Hounds



Vale Tap Takeover

📅 Fri 17 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Six Bells



Oakham Tap Takeover

📅 Sat 18 – Mon 20 April 2026

🕒 All day

📍 Harpsfield Hall

4 x Presentations (including)



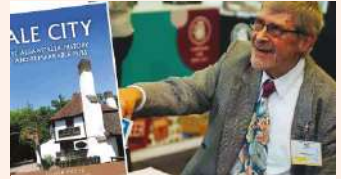
Curator Talk: Inns and Alehouses

📅 Thu 16 April 2026, 7pm – 8pm
📍 St Albans Museum + Gallery



Heritage Plaque Unveiling Celebration

📅 Thu 16 April 2026, 6pm – 7pm
📍 The Farriers Arms



Roger Protz Presents: Ale City

📅 Fri 17 April 2026, 6pm – 7pm
📍 The Royston Social Club

12 x Live Music Events (including)



Bob Dylan Tribute

📅 Fri 17 April 2026
🕒 8pm – 10pm
📍 Mad Squirrel Tap



The Maida Vales

📅 Fri 17 April 2026
🕒 7pm – 9pm
📍 Beehive



The Imitation Zone

📅 Fri 17 April 2026
🕒 9pm – 11pm
📍 Farmer's Boy



Uptown Funk

📅 Fri 17 April 2026
🕒 10.30pm – 2am
📍 Horn



The Bear Pit Band

📅 Sat 18 April 2026
🕒 2pm – 4.30pm
📍 Farmer's Boy



Kevin Clynes

📅 Sat 18 April 2026
🕒 9pm – 11.30pm
📍 Garibaldi



Special Kinda Madness

📅 Sat 18 April 2026
🕒 9pm – 12am
📍 Horn



Dirty Dog Band

📅 Sat 18 April 2026
🕒 9.30pm – 12am
📍 Cock

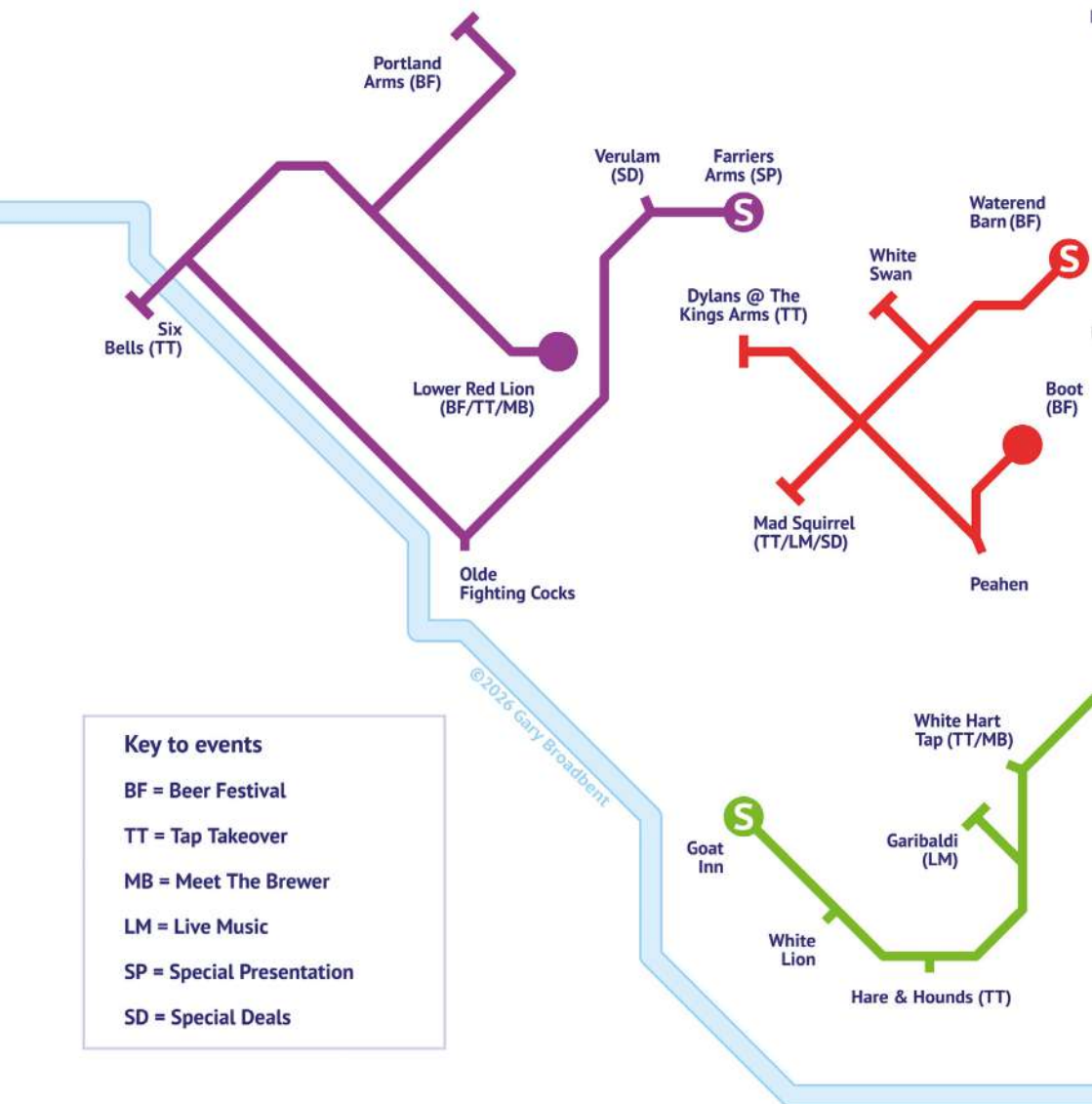


The Mighty Quinn

📅 Sun 19 April 2026
🕒 5pm – 7pm
📍 Mermaid

Pub Trails

Craft & Cleaver
(TT/MB)



Key to events

BF = Beer Festival

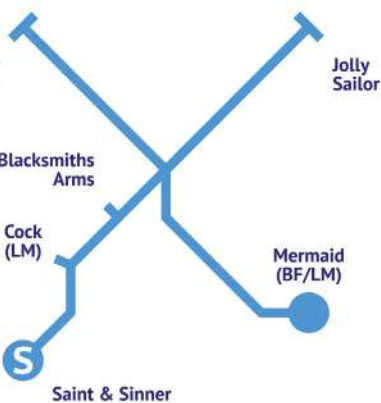
TT = Tap Takeover


MB = Meet The Brewer

LM = Live Music

SP = Special Presentation

SD = Special Deals

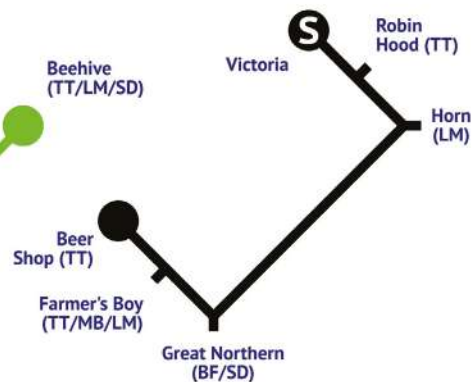
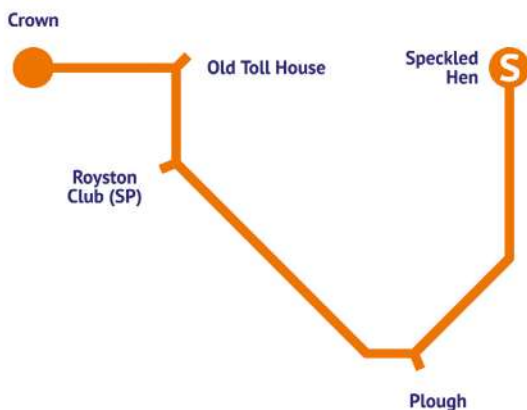




St Albans City of Ale

stalbanacityofale.org.uk

CAMRA
MEMBERS' WEEKEND
St ALBANS 2026



Key to trails S = Start ● = Finish

- Medieval St Albans West - 1.6 miles
- Charter Market Quarter - 0.6 miles
- Medieval St Albans East - 0.4 miles
- St Peter's Quarter - 1.2 miles
- Victorian St Albans - 0.6 miles
- Fleetville & Camp - 3.5 miles



THE BOOT

*One of St Albans oldest pubs:
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Listed in the Guinness Harp Guide.

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*25p off a pint of real ale for
CAMRA members*

*Find us in Market Place, St Albans
bootcantina.com*



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holding two AA rosettes.*

*Boasting a beer wall with eight
Craft Beers and two Real Ales.*

*25p off a pint of real ale or craft beer wall
for CAMRA members.*

*Find us on George Street, St Albans
dylanskingsarms.com*





THE PLOUGH

KINGS WALDEN

The Plough, Plough Lane, Kings Walden,
Nr Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 8LA

Real Ales | Adnams | Abbot | 2 rolling guest hand pulls
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Summer May to September

Classic Cars Nights



Last Thursday of the Month

Outside Bar & Street Food

Cars start arriving from 5.00pm





GBG: No judges? The jury's out

Hi Paul,

Having read Les Middlewood's piece in Issue 315, *The Great Divide*, I remember those days well.

In 1974, I was living, literally, a golf shot into Enfield, with 8 of my nearest 10 pubs being in Waltham Cross. Some of my drinking was done in Enfield, as it had a large number of pubs at that time, but my locals were the Queens Head in Waltham Cross and The New Inn in Waltham Abbey.

There was considerable discussion about the decision to have an Enfield and Barnet branch [of CAMRA]. Those drinkers living in eastern Enfield (Freezywater) or western Barnet (Edgware) had a 2-hour bus journey (each way) to get to meetings held on the opposite side of the branch as most of the transport routes went north / south.

Barnet drinkers were more likely to drink in North or Central London than in Enfield, as bus, tube and train lines ran that way. In the Enfield half, drinkers in Southgate and Palmers Green used the tube to go into London, or local buses to get to Barnet — few ventured east into Enfield Town. Those who lived in Enfield Town rarely drank outside the immediate area, whilst those on the eastern side used buses to get into the Town or to Waltham Cross and Cheshunt.

Drinkers in Broxbourne Borough and Epping Forest areas faced (possibly) worse problems. Bus services from the Cross went through Broxbourne to Hertford, or through the Abbey to Upshire, and were poor at night, whilst the train went to Hertford, Harlow or Bishops Stortford. The latter two stations were well outside the 'normal' drinking areas for those used to being on the edge of London. In fact, it was quicker by train to get from eastern Enfield to Central London than to Bishops Stortford. Waltham Abbey was served even worse, being detached from the rest of Essex by Epping Forest, with no railway link, and bus routes that went only to the Cross or Chingford.

Most people felt that, whilst having a local branch was a good idea as it put gentle pressure on landlords to have real ale kept in good condition, the lack of decent transport links meant that smaller sub-branches would have been a good idea. There were many discussions about how pubs for the GBG would be selected. Enfield was alone in the Borough in not having a London postcode, which meant that Enfield pubs would be listed separately from the Southgate, Palmers Green and Edmonton pubs with their 'N' prefix. Meanwhile, pubs in Broxbourne Borough would be selected by Herts & Essex branch members, who were poor travellers and rarely ventured far off the old A11 corridor.

In 1983, I moved to Hoddesdon, and a few months later went to a Herts & Essex

branch meeting in Harlow. This journey would have taken roughly 50-60 minutes by public transport OR 18 minutes by car, so I drove. I was astonished that most of the other members at the meeting were unaware that the Borough of Broxbourne was part of their branch. I didn't bother going again for many years.

The train line in Broxbourne runs along the eastern side of the borough and there is no direct service from Hoddesdon to Essex. The bus services don't cover the majority of the rural area after 7pm. Consequently, Broxbourne area pubs still receive few visits from Herts & Essex Borders members and so the split of entries in GBG between SW Essex, Broxbourne and rural East Herts is skewed.

I can't remember the last Broxbourne area GBG entry — there hasn't been one this millennium — so, unsurprisingly, the list on page 27 of 20 pubs with 5 or more GBG entries does not include any pubs from Broxbourne.

Keith Harrington
Hoddesdon

***Ed says:** A lengthy letter, but I'm sure those familiar with the area will have found it an informative and enjoyable read. I decided to consult GBG archives (actually, a spreadsheet provided by South Herts CAMRA Member and Hertfordshire GBG guru Bob Norrish) to find out when Broxbourne and Hoddesdon pubs last appeared in the Guide.*

Broxbourne	Years in GBG (last year)
White Bear	3 (1990)
Crown	1 (1984)
*Turford Masseys	1 (1986)
**Pubs open today	2

*Closed 2010

**Serving cask

Hoddesdon	Years in GBG (last year)
No pubs ever in GBG	
**Pubs open today	7

I think you might be onto something, Keith.

Of course, whilst the reason for avoiding GBG might be, as you suggest, because the pubs are not visited by Herts & Essex Borders Members who are the CAMRA judges when it comes to assessing pubs in the area, might it instead be because there are either too few pubs, or they're simply not good enough? That's a genuine question, not a rhetorical one.

By the way, I'm personally in favour of sub-branches, so long as local enthusiasm can survive the additional layer of admin.



Have your say! Email editor@pintsofview.camra.org.uk

GBG > BBB?

Hi Paul

Regarding your "Starting Pint" column in PoV315, as a St Albans resident, I too find it frustrating that a number of our pubs are excluded from the *Good Beer Guide (GBG)* due to limited space. As someone who also travels the country navigating with both GPS and GBG, my frustration is compounded by occasional disappointments in the form of GBG pubs whose inclusion, in my opinion, is questionable — possibly because CAMRA locally have scraped the bottom of the cask in order to fill their quota, for fear of the "use it or lose it" principle.

A pub remaining open and serving cask is difficult to remove from the GBG without a (hopefully rare!) serious deterioration in beer quality. Combined with space limitations, this seems inconsistent with CAMRA's core purpose, as it reduces the Campaign's ability to publicly recognise and promote a pub that has introduced cask where previously there either was none or the quality has significantly improved. A digital GBG will address this.

With search and filtering functions and the availability of information that the physical version can't accommodate, a digital GBG will provide a more powerful tool to assist real ale drinkers in finding pubs that meet their specific needs, as well as enabling the real-time updates you refer to. Regarding the latter, you rightly make the point that some factual detail won't survive the 12 months between editions, but based on personal experience, I'd go further and

say some won't even survive the lead time of several months between branches' selections of their entries and the GBG's publication. A digital GBG could also enable the submission of reviews, supporting the availability of up-to-date information and informing decisions on a pub's future GBG entry.

Despite my thoughts above, I remain a genuine fan of the printed page and believe that a publication in book form, alongside a digital GBG, definitely still has a place. What this would look like is open to debate, but at its core it would present the best pubs included in the GBG. It could be the coffee table book you describe, although I'm inclined to believe something more portable still has its uses. I would still like the initial selection of pubs included to be beer led, but with other factors applied in making the final determination. Fuller descriptions provided in the book would allow explanation of the pubs' inclusion. Clearly any such book needs to add value beyond the digital GBG to be commercially viable and a rebrand will be required — "The Best of British Beer" perhaps?

Whatever its outcome, this debate is definitely one the Campaign needs to have, as the assertion that it is "time for the guide to evolve" is becoming increasingly difficult to resist. You presented this as a question on the cover of PoV315. You were right to do so!

David Watts
St Albans

Ed says: *Welcome to the debate! I'm pleased you're "a genuine fan of the printed page" — I most certainly am, unless the digital alternative offers markedly more for a lot less. Based upon your suggestion of presenting the best pubs in the Good Beer Guide, how about calling it "The Best Beer Guide"?*

LWB landlord and a tale of pipe ale

Hi,

A couple of interesting items.

My mate, Mark, lives in rural Wiltshire. His local pub can only be enjoyed by clients who are prepared for a long hike, unless they cycle, or travel by car.

The landlord bought an old LWB Landover, seating 8 passengers. Upon closing time, any clients who have over imbibed are then transported, without any dangers to local road users, directly to their beds and without any charge. A thank you for their custom from the landlord, who also enjoys the obvious camaraderie.

Perhaps other rural publicans may like to ensure continuing custom in these dark times for our country pubs and replicate this visionary's cunning plan?

On another note, I start work at 5.30am and am lucky to be able to finish around 4pm, thus usually being the first in the pub. It surprises me the number of publicans that will pour my first cask ale straight into the glass. The resultant 'pipe' ale is not a pleasure, yet even landlords who should know better will do this to save pennies.

In the case of what used to be my local, they ended up losing the £4K p.a. that I used to spend there, so shot themselves in the pump, so to speak.

Carry on your good work.

Neil Fletcher

English Garden Company
North Mymms



Ed says: I wonder what happens when the Wiltshire landlord has 9 drinkers requiring a lift home? "Squash up inside, please"? Or 10, or 11? And is the regular ferrying of customers within the terms of his insurance?

I'm not trying to be a kill-joy. Maybe he does not allow more than 8 passengers and will make a second trip. And maybe his insurance is not compromised. Just something to be considered. If my not-local-enough local offered the service, I'd gratefully accept and use the pub more frequently.

As for 'pipe' ale, ex-editor Steve Bury covered this three years ago (PoV306 p5) using the term 'pipey beer'. There are a number of ways a landlord can reduce wastage at the start of a shift and serving customers shite ale should not be one of them.



Have your say! Email editor@pintsofview.camra.org.uk

In search of a quiet pint

I write as a lapsed member of CAMRA, having left when you ceased to produce a printed *What's Brewing*. I always try and pick up a current copy of *Pints of View*, when I see it, usually at Hertford Rugby Club.

In issue 315, you encourage us to visit pubs more as we all appreciate that they are having a difficult time. I would gladly do so, but many insist on playing piped music — often at a level which discourages any conversation. It would not be so bad if the music played was jazz, classical, folk, country, blues or rock, but it's generally either lift music or awful pop.

The same disease is also spreading to cafes, restaurants and shops. I also hate televisions — although I will accept them if they show a particular sporting event and are then turned off.

As I understand, pubs have to pay for both

music and television; surely it would save money to do without either? It would be interesting to see the results of a survey asking how many people would stop going to the pub if there was no music - I certainly wouldn't and cannot be the only one.

My wife and I had lunch in a local community café today, somewhere we had not visited before. The cafe was very busy and had no music. We will return, though I would prefer to be in a pub with a pint and a meal, but quiet venues win every time.

Please continue to produce *Pints of View* as it is an interesting publication, especially the updates on local pubs.

Regards

Stephen Ruff
Hertford

Ed says: *I hope you don't believe that South Herts CAMRA, Pints of View, or I are responsible for the demise of printed What's Brewing! Out of interest, would you be prepared to pay a higher annual subscription to cover printing and postage costs, and, if so, how much?*

With regard to noisy pubs, presumably, those that have TVs and/or piped music do so because there are customers attracted to one or the other. However, in cities and towns such as St Albans and Hertford, the wide choice of pubs should allow everyone to choose a pub that, broadly speaking, gives them what they want.

I asked Hertford local Les Middlewood to suggest suitable venues, and his response was: Old Cross Tavern — no TV or piped music (see ad page 29). Occasional live acoustic Sunday pm. White Horse — almost always no TV on or piped music, though is showing the current 6 Nations rugby on TV. Six Templars (Wetherspoon) — has TVs but no sound and, of course, serves food. Some others are reasonably quiet during the day, but change in the evenings and particularly at weekends.

But if you're from Hertford you must be aware of these.

I'm not a local but would add the Hertford Club (see ad page 11), though membership is required unless signed in by a current member. In conclusion, there are some quiet alternatives to the café, though maybe very few if you intend to eat.

Do write in again with comments on our suggestions.



Have your say! Email editor@pintsofview.camra.org.uk

ABV reduction = Act of Bloody Vandalism

Hello Paul,

Firstly, thanks for a great magazine. I always read and enjoy it.

Over the years, I have often thought that CAMRA was a bit too sniffy about the big brewers irrespective of the quality of their product.

Between 1962 and 1968, I was an employee of Joshua Tetley and Son in Leeds. These were probably the best years of my life, which may have been to do with the free beer, a benign dictatorship to work for, and the fact that I was only 21 when I left!

Even in those days, bigger brewers were swallowing up smaller ones — and as we know, the practice has accelerated over the years.

When Carlsberg entrusted the brewing of Tetley's Cask Bitter to Marston's, I kept an open mind. The truth is, the product was

acceptable and drinkable, and on my frequent visits back to my home city to watch Leeds United, I enjoyed a pint or two.

Last year, something went wrong, as even to my untutored palate the beer didn't taste right. I had witnessed the dumbing down of Lagers and Nitro Kegs, but the penny took a while to drop. Yes, they had weakened my favourite beer. My favourite tippie was now 3.4 ABV and no longer provided me with a trip down memory lane. Quite simply an act of vandalism.

Timothy Taylor's or Kirkstall 3 Swords for me in future.

I wonder, can any readers supply other examples of cask ales that have been weakened?

Best wishes

Michael Gill
St Albans

Ed says: *Glad you enjoy the magazine! According to the CAMRA website, Tetley's Bitter is 3.7% ABV. I've advised the Brewery Liaison Officer (BLO) and asked him to investigate.*

As for other beers 'dumbed down' to 3.4% ABV (to hit a lower rate of excise duty), these are the ones I know, though readers can probably name a few others (please, no keg or examples above 3.4%).

Brand	Beer	Brewer	Old ABV	New ABV
Greene King	IPA	Greene King	3.60%	3.40%
Banks's	Amber	Carlsberg	3.80%	3.40%
Fuller's	Hophead	Asahi	3.80%	3.40%
Ruddles	Best	Greene King	3.70%	3.40%

Some say that it's impossible for the ABV of a beer to be reduced without quality being affected. Maybe that's true, but what if a beer is 'designed' to be 3.4% from the outset?

I well remember being mightily impressed with an ale at St Albans Beer & Cider Festival back in 2023 — Ossett Easy Does It 3.4% ABV. Aroma, mouthfeel, flavour and finish all punched above their weight. When discussing with the brewery, I was told that the duty saving was offset by the enormous quantities of expensive Harlequin and Citra hops. Well, they would say that, wouldn't they, but as it turned out to be a one-off 25th anniversary ale, maybe Ossett couldn't afford to brew it again?

Herts CAMRA Obituaries

John Hanscomb R.I.P. (1937 – 2025)

CAMRA pioneers are mourning the loss of John Hanscomb, the first editor of the Good Beer Guide in the 1970s, who died on New Year's Eve at the age of 88.

John, who lived in Croxley Green, Hertfordshire, was a great campaigner and influential voice in the Campaign's early years. He worked as a page planner in the print and newspaper industry, a demanding job in the days of hot metal printing.

An active member of CAMRA, he took up the challenge of producing a guide to pubs that sold what he called "proper beer" at a time when such keg beers as Watney's Red Barrel, Worthington E and Double Diamond were being heavily promoted by national brewers.

"The problem", he said, "was that we didn't know where all the good pubs were. We knew all Young's pubs in the London area sold proper beer, but other brewers wouldn't tell us which of their pubs sold the real thing."

John told Ray Bailey and Jessica Boak, who blog as BoakandBailey: *"One lawyer told us 'If you have a list of real ale pubs, you'll be sued by the brewers.' But I wanted the bastards to take us to court!"*

John recalled that there weren't many CAMRA branches back then, and he spent a lot of time on the road, often with his wife Rose. *"I remember spending a whole evening in Henley-on-Thames visiting 10*

or 12 Brakspear pubs. There wasn't the breathalyser in those days and there was much less traffic on the roads."

The first guide in 1972 listed 300 pubs and ran to 18 pages. It was typewritten and

photocopied, and put together like wall paper on the kitchen table in the flat of CAMRA co-founder Michael Hardman, who acted as production editor.

The first commercial printed guide appeared in 1974. It was backed financially by Waddington's, a major printer, who took the financial pressure off the fledgling Campaign. Major controversy occurred when, in

the breweries section, John coined the celebrated warning:

"Watneys - avoid like the plague."

John said: *"I was upset by what Watneys was doing, in Norfolk especially",* where the giant London brewer had bought all three breweries in Norwich, closed two of them and shuttered hundreds of pubs in the county.

When the guide appeared, Waddingtons got cold feet and said it would have to pulp the entire print run and reprint it with a different description of Watneys. Christopher Hutt, national chairman at the time and author of the seminal *Death of the English Pub*, says the issue was discussed at a meeting of the National Executive. He



The brewers

This list names all the breweries in England, Wales and the Isle of Man, plus three in Scotland whose products are available south of the border. The comments are intended as a guide to the traveller who comes across a pub not listed in the Good Beer Guide.

Generally, breweries are listed under the name of the companies which run them—though in some cases the signs outside pubs have other names on them. For instance, Brakspear houses have a sign saying Henley Brewery. The actual title of the companies has been followed where possible. Thus the difference in the style used for Boddington's and that for Gale or Young.

Breweries which are still known by individual names, despite having been taken over by one of the big six combines, are listed under the old title. The groups they belong to can be identified by referring to the code in parentheses after their names: (A)—Allied Breweries; (B)—Bass Charrington; (C)—Courage; (S)—Scottish & Newcastle; (W)—Watney. Whitbread are removing the old name-boards and all the group's breweries are listed here under the name of the parent company. Bass Charrington call their regional subsidiaries by a variety of names but here they are all listed under the title of the parent company, except the ones in London (Charrington), Burton-on-Trent (Bass-Worthington) and Birmingham (Mitchells & Butlers) which retain the old name, and Cardiff (Welsh), which is a new title for the group's Welsh interests.

A much more comprehensive study of the breweries of Britain is made in *The Beer Drinker's Companion*, by CAMRA member Frank Baillie (David & Charles, £2.95).

Adnams: Southwold, Suffolk.
Nearly always real draught beer.
Ansells (A): Birmingham.
Brews: many pubs on pressure.
Arkel: Swindon.
Very little unpressurised beer.
Banks: Wolverhampton.
Generally recommended.
Barnsley (C):
A shadow of its former self; due to close.
Bass Charrington: Blackpool (for-

Courage: Bristol; Southwark, London; Plymouth; Reading.
Several different brews—often dispensed traditionally.
Darley: Thorne, Yorks.
An unusual brew.
Devenport: Birmingham.
A fair chance of real ale over a wide area.
Devenish: Redruth; Weymouth.
Real draught beer is hard to find.
Dennington: Stow-on-the-Wold.

Home: Arnold, Notts.
Excellent—if it's not pressurised.
Hook Norton: Banbury, Oxon.
Mainly very good.
Hopkins: Leicester.
Only one pub (see Market Bosworth)—but excellent ale.
Hull:
Disjunctive—but recommended.
Hydes: Manchester.
Good ale, often ruined by pressure.
Ind Coopie (A): Burton-on-Trent; Ironford, Essex.
Few number of pubs selling real ale of mediocre quality.
Jennings: Cockenmouth.
Real beer is the rule.
King & Barnes: Horsham, Sussex.
Excellent ale when it's not pressurised.
Lees: Middleton Junction, Lancs.
Generally reliable.
Lion: Blackburn; Cleator Moor, Cumberland.
Distinctive beer being spoilt by gas.
Lorimer & Clark: Edinburgh.
Very few draught outlets in England.
McEwan (S): Edinburgh.
A few draught outlets in England.
McMullen: Hottel.
Too often pressurised.
Mansfield:
Nal always real draught.
Marston: Burton-on-Trent.
Good ales, very widely distributed, but often ruined by pressure.
Melbourn: Stamford, Lincs.
Usually reliable.
Mitchells: Lancaster.
A good bet.
Mitchells & Butlers (B): Birmingham.
A bad bet.
Morland: Abingdon, Berks.
A reasonable chance of real ale.
Morrall's: Oxford.
Sometimes hard to find real draught.
Newcastle (S):
No pubs recommended.
Northern Clubs: Newcastle-upon-

Selby:
Not a chance of pressure.
Shepherd Neame: Faversham, Kent.
Good when it's not gassed up.
Shipstone: New Basford, Notts.
Good local brew.
Simpkins (or JPS): Brierley Hill, Staffs.
Excellent regional brew—but beware of pressure in some houses.
John Smith (C): Tadcaster.
Deteriorating.
Samuel Smith: Tadcaster.
Distinctive brew—but too much pressure.
South Wales Clubs: Pontyclun.
Club trade only.
Taylor, Timothy: Keighley, Yorks.
A very reliable brew.
Tetley (A): Leeds; Warrington.
Once among the best—but pressurised beers are spoiling the Tetley image.
Theakston: Masham, Yorks.
Highly recommended.
Thwaites: Blackburn.
One of the few ultra-modern breweries turning out excellent ale; some tank, however.
Tolly Cobbold: Ipswich.
Difficult to find real ale.
Truman (Wa): London.
Beer well clear.
Ushers (Wa): Trobridge, Wilts.
A little real ale still available.
Vaux: Sundeland.
Rapidly going over to pressure.
Wadworth: Davies, Wilts.
One of the best.
Ward: Sheffield.
Is a heavy routine.
Watney: Mortlake, London; Norwich; Whitechapel, London.
Avoid at all costs.
Webster (Very): Wrexham.
Sell a lot of real ale.
Wells, Charles: Bedford.
A one-in-three chance of real ale.
Welsh (B): Cardiff.
A shadow of the beers it has replaced.

Watney: Mortlake, London; Norwich; Whitechapel, London.
Avoid at all costs.

recalled it was a heated debate and he was drained at the end of it, but the majority feeling was CAMRA had no option but to agree with Waddingtons for fear of legal reprisals that could lead to the Campaign being wound up.

Fortunately, Waddingtons agreed to pay the costs of the reprint, which appeared with the description changed to:

“Watneys – avoid at all costs”

Michael Hardman says the horse had already bolted. *“Many newspapers had published the ‘avoid like the plague’ description and it achieved widespread publicity. As a result, the guide quickly sold out.”*

John Hanscomb stood down as editor following that edition and handed over to Michael Hardman. John, who worked at the enormous Sun Printers in Watford, said it was a difficult time for him as he had to work shifts, often late at night, and

found it hard to continue to check out large numbers of pubs.

But he remained an active member of the Campaign.

Les Middlewood, of our South Herts branch, says John would often attend socials at the West Herts Sports & Social Club in Watford, which had been a flagship entry in the Good Beer Guide from its inception.

His enduring contribution to the Campaign is summed up by founder-member Graham Lees: *“John brought colour, character and campaigning instinct to the early days of CAMRA.”*

Roger Protz
Guild of Beer Writers
South Herts CAMRA

Des de Moor R.I.P. (1961 – 2026)

Des de Moor, who died last month, was a phenomenon. He was a prolific writer about beer and took part in beer-judging events in many countries.

He dived deep into the history of beer and its myriad styles. At the same time, he organised tours of breweries, pubs and taprooms, and played a leading role in promoting the burgeoning London beer scene in the 21st century.

Des was born in Ipswich and moved to London, where he lived in Deptford with his partner Ian Harris. A great believer in walking for health, he was secretary of the Ramblers' Association until 2015 and edited its magazine.

His passion for beer was matched by his love of music. He was a singer who performed in a number of London clubs, specialising in cabaret and presenting a collection of songs by David Bowie called *Darkness and Disgrace* with pianist Russell Churney.

As described by leading beer writer Pete Brown, Des was "a man of many layers". He translated songs by the Belgian performer Jacques Brel into English, founded music nights at the Vortex Club in Stoke Newington, and took part in poetry festivals at the Camden People's Theatre.

Des became an accredited beer sommelier, enabling him to take part in judging not only in Britain but in competitions abroad, including the World Beer Cup and the Great American Beer Festival in the United States, the annual Brussels Beer Challenge, and competitions in the Netherlands.

He made a major impact with his popular *Guide to London's Best Beers, Pubs and Bars*, first published by CAMRA in 2011, followed by new editions in 2015 and 2022. Des said: "I like to think my book made at least a small contribution to the explosion of London brewing." From the guide's influential reach, I think we can be certain that it did.

Champion Beer of Britain (CBoB) competition organiser Christine Cryne said: "Des regularly judged at CBoB and Cask Beer in London and he was willing to share his knowledge and experience. He was of enormous help to CAMRA in London, using his knowledge of London breweries to keep our data up to date."



He combined his love of walking with guided tours of London pubs, breweries and

taprooms. The tours highlighted the Bermondsey Beer Mile with its collection of craft breweries that includes Anspach and Hobday and Kernel.

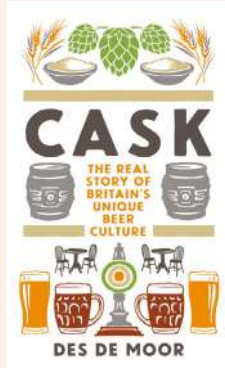
Des said of his writing and judging: "What really interests me is how beer is appreciated and received, the culture that surrounds it and how that relates to the wider features of the societies that produce it, consume it and the places where it is made. Beer is an artefact of human society, not a simple intoxicant but capable of being enjoyed and appreciated in the same way as all the other finer things in life and it should be celebrated as such."

He wrote a regular bottled beer column for *BEER Magazine* and contributed to other CAMRA publications. The impact of his work saw him win the Best Beer and

Travel Writing Award from the British Guild of Beer Writers in 2011 and 2015.

In 2023, he published his major work with CAMRA, *Cask, the real story of Britain's unique beer culture*, a history of cask beer and our country's stand-out contribution to the world of beer. The book traced cask-beer brewing over the centuries, detailed how it survived the keg revolution in the 1950s and 60s, and the rise of CAMRA in the 1970s. He recorded the hammering of sales cask beer took during the COVID pandemic and the subsequent lockdown of pubs, but he was upbeat about its resilience, saying it had overcome many other challenges over the centuries. In my review of the book, I described it as "superbly written and deeply researched".

In 2025, enthralled by the book, *Pints of View* editor Paul Donatantonio invited Des to write a guest column for this magazine. Thrilled when Des accepted, *The Local, Reinvented* appeared last summer in *PoV314* and observed how the railway arch, shopfront and taproom have provided welcome alternatives to brewery- and PubCo-tied houses. Sadly, that was to be the one and only 'Moor beer'



column. Paul recalls that "it took only a few emails to realise what a lovely humble man Des was."

St Albans Beer Festival Sponsorship Manager Emily Ryans says of Des: "We were lucky enough to have him come and deliver a number of talks and tastings, notably matching beers and cheeses which he did with aplomb. Des was such a pleasure to work with! One example that sticks out is when, last year, he arrived **5 hours early** for his event so that he could go round, test the beers, meet the breweries and volunteers helping him, and leave himself time to set up. In contrast, his co-host turned up 20 minutes after their event started! Des held the fort like a master and never showed any impatience. Our festival and the beer world, won't be the same without him."

Des's untimely death has led to an outpouring of comments on social media, all stressing his warmth, humanity and generosity. His enormous contribution to the appreciation of beer will not be forgotten.

Roger Protz
Guild of Beer Writers
South Herts CAMRA

Dear Readers

It can be difficult to choose who of the recently deceased CAMRA members to include within these pages since, as time goes by, an increasing number will 'down their last pint' between issues — especially as *Pints of View* is now published only thrice a year.

However, I had no hesitation in making space for John Hanscomb and Des de Moor, who both contributed hugely to the Campaign. In fact, John was one of the main instigators of the Hertfordshire Branch and subsequently became a South Herts member when other branches seceded.

Both obituaries can be found at <https://wb.camra.org.uk/tag/obituaries>, along with others.

Paul Donatantonio



Regional CAMRA Festivals

19 CAMRA-run beer festivals, from May to October, in and around Herts.

Many festivals have **100s OF COOLED DRAUGHT BEERS, CIDERS & PERRIES** to choose from, along with a variety of street food.

For 2026, there's **FREE ENTRY** for CAMRA members and some may incentivise non-members to sign up with **FREE ENTRY & TWO FREE PINTS**.



MAY 2026

1 Biggleswade Beer & Cider Festival – TBC
Thu 7 – Sat 9 MayBiggleswade and District Conservative Club,
St Andrews Street, Biggleswade**2 Cambridge Beer Festival**
Mon 18 – Sat 23 May

Jesus Green, Cambridge

3 Colchester Beer & Cider Festival
Wed 27 – Sun 30 MayColchester Arts Centre, Church Street,
Colchester**4 Northampton County Beer Festival**
Fri 29 – Sat 30 May

Beckets Park, Bedford Road, Northampton

JUNE 2026

5 Thurrock Beer & Cider Festival
Thu 2 – Sat 6 June

Civic Hall, Blackshots Lane, Thurrock

6 Hitchin Beer Festival
Thu 4 – Sat 6 June

Hitchin Rugby Club. Old Hale Way, Hitchin

7 Braintree Real Ale Festival
Thu 11 – Sat 13 June

Braintree Institute, Bocking End, Essex

8 Gibberd Gardens Beer & Cider Festival
Sat 20 – Sun 21 June

Gibberd Gardens, Marsh Lane, Harlow

JULY 2026

9 Festival of Beer & Brewing
Thu 2 – Sun 5 July

Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket

10 Chelmsford Summer Beer & Cider Festival

Thu 14 – Sat 18 July

Admirals Park, Chelmsford.

11 Hemel Old Town Beer Festival
Fri 17 – Sun 19 JulySt Mary's Church, High Street, Hemel
Hempstead**12 Epping & Ongar Railway Real Ale Festival**

Fri 24 – Sun 26 July

North Weald Railway Station, Essex

AUGUST 2026

Note: There will be no **Great British Beer Festival** in 2026**13 Peterborough Beer Festival**
Tue 25 – Sat 29 AugustThe Embankment, Embankment Road,
Peterborough**14 Clacton Real Ale & Cider Festival**
Wed 26 – Sat 29 August

St James Hall, Clacton-On-Sea

15 East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival
Wed 26 – Mon 31 August

St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds

SEPTEMBER 2026

16 Chappel Summer Beer Festival – TBC

Tue 8 – Sat 12 September

East Anglian Railway Museum, Colchester

17 St Albans Beer & Cider Festival
Wed 23 – Sat 26 September

Alban Arena, St Peter's Street, St Albans

OCTOBER 2026

18 Bedford Beer & Cider Festival
Wed 7 – Sat 10 October

Bedford Corn Exchange, Bedford

19 Norwich Beer Festival
Mon 26 – Sat 31 October

The Halls, St Andrew's Plain, Norwich

HITCHIN

BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL 2026



HITCHIN RUGBY CLUB

King George V Playing Fields

Old Hale Way, SG5 1XL

4th - 6th JUNE

Thu - 5PM to 11PM * Fri - Noon to 11PM * Sat - Noon to 10PM

Packages in advance online * Scan QR code
Free entry for CAMRA members



HitchinBeerCiderFestival



**HITCHIN
RUGBY CLUB**



hitchinbeerciderfestival.org.uk

AROUND 200 BEERS, CIDERS, PERRIES & MEADS

Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival 2026



North Herts CAMRA are pleased to announce that the annual festival will be held from **4 - 6 June**. Our venue, once again, will be **Hitchin Rugby Club**, Old Hale Way, Hitchin SG5 1XL. The opening times are 5 - 11pm Thursday, noon - 11pm Friday, and noon - 10pm Saturday. The Rugby Club is within walking distance of the railway station (approximately 20 minutes), and there are bus stops close to the site on Bedford Road and Old Hale Way with connections to Bedford, Biggleswade, Stevenage and Hitchin town centre.

The festival is held in a large marquee with plenty of outdoor space to enjoy the sunshine, and will feature an extensive range of drinks. We will have 100 Cask Ales and a range of exciting craft beers on the key keg bar. Over 40 Real Ciders & Perries will be available at the cider bar, and we will have some sparkling cider available again this year. The Mead bar has proved very popular at recent festivals. The international bar will have several quality beers on draught, as well as an extensive range of bottled beers from around the world covering every style from pilsner to lambics. A range of food will be available to satisfy all tastes.

The festival is jointly run by North Herts CAMRA and Hitchin Rugby Club, and would not be possible without the volunteers from these organisations. Can you spare a few hours to help? Volunteers are required for setting up the festival, during the festival itself and for take down on the morning of Sunday 7 June. Volunteers will be rewarded for their time with beer tokens. To find out more, why not come along to our volunteers event at the rugby club on Friday 17 April from 8pm, or get in touch at nhcamra.staffing@gmail.com.

Ticket packages, consisting of an entrance ticket, drink tokens and a festival glass, can be purchased on the door or in advance online. There is a discount on tickets purchased in advance, which go on sale 2 April. New for 2026, CAMRA members get Free Entrance to the festival, on both advance ticket packages and on the door. To join CAMRA go to camra.org.uk

For the latest information and to purchase advance tickets please visit the CAMRA North Herts' website <https://northherts.camra.org.uk/> or Facebook @NHCAMRA

Jeremy Kitson
Co-organiser
Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival





Ale Trips & Trails

Another Herts Ale Trail – the 331 bus is on its way!

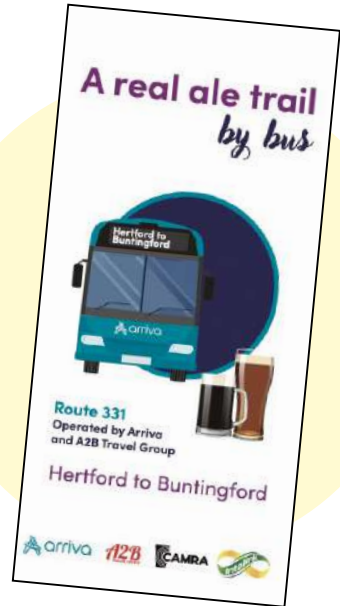
Look out for the second of our free Real Ale Trail by Bus guides supporting pubs, cask ale and public transport in Hertfordshire. The new leaflet centres on the 331 bus route which runs from Hertford, through Ware and north to Buntingford. As well as featuring pubs close to the route in these towns, the guide will include pubs in Wadesmill, Standon, Puckeridge, Braughing, Ware Street, Westmill and Aspenden.

The 331 route travels through some classic east Hertfordshire countryside and the leaflet is a collaboration between Arriva, Intalink and three CAMRA Branches – South Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire and Herts Essex Borders.

As we go to press, the leaflet is being formulated ready for printing. It should be available in the associated pubs, local libraries and at Hertford Tourist Office by mid-April, and will also feature on the South Herts Branch website at <https://southherts.camra.org.uk/campaigning/local-pub-guides/> where it will join:

314/315 – Ale trail by bus (from Welwyn Garden City to Hitchin taking in the villages of Welwyn, Codicote, Kimpton, Whitwell, St. Paul's Walden and Chapelfoot).

Hertford Loop Line – Ale trail by train (from Alexandra Palace to Watton-at-Stone, taking



in stations including Cuffley, Bayford and Hertford North).

New River Line – Ale trail by train (from Broxbourne to Hertford East, taking in Rye House, St Margarets and Ware).

So, what are you waiting for? While Spring is in the air, Hertfordshire's trains and buses are on the ground ready to ferry drinkers on trails around the pubs of rural Hertfordshire!

Les Middlewood
South Herts CAMRA



Abbey Line Real Ale Trail – the 331 leaflet will be closely followed by yet another Hertfordshire Ale Trail guide. South Herts CAMRA Transport Officer Andrew Wallace is leading the CAMRA team and aims to have the guide out in time for Members' Weekend (16 – 20 April) despite the fact that it's still at draft stage. It is expected that the format used in the recent bus guides will be carried over with a map including the stations and nearby pubs.

Paul Donatantonio



South Herts 2026 AGM & Branch Meeting

Saturday 24 January 2026 saw 46 members gather at the GBG2026-listed Royston Club in St Albans, to attend the first South Herts Branch Meeting of the year in tandem with the ever-popular AGM. The club, as always, was very welcoming, offering 4 cask beers and, for the occasion, 3 traditional ciders along with a wonderful buffet, courtesy of club secretary Barrie Lloyd and his friendly staff.

I reported the much-publicised struggle facing pubs and breweries nationally, and noted that our branch has not been immune from the economic difficulties. There is massive support from Daisy Cooper, our local MP (Pub Parliamentarian of the Year in 2024, and Vice Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Beer), regarding the newly devised and draconian ratings structure, with local pubs facing horrendous increases that threaten their viability. Nevertheless, in 2025 only a few in the branch closed for good, although around 20 remain in need of tenants. Ten pubs currently benefit from some protection against change of use or closure, following pressure from the local community and South Herts CAMRA to designate them as Assets of Community Value. The meeting also heard that McMullen was to restructure its estate and sell around 30 of its pubs (27 tenanted and 3 managed) to Punch, enabling the Hertford brewer to concentrate on growing its remaining managed house and hotel division.

Meanwhile, CAMRA membership continues to decrease from its 2019/20 pre-COVID peak of 192,000. Due to the consequent fall in membership-fee income, losses from national festivals, and ever-rising increases in operational costs, a major comprehensive

financial and strategic restructuring is now underway at HQ. The physical move of HQ from St Albans to Luton is now over, though the sale of 230 Hatfield Road awaits completion.

Our branch membership has fared rather better, with numbers falling by just six (0.3%) in the year to January 2026. In contrast, national membership for the same period declined by 2.5%, though this is massively improved compared with the years immediately after COVID. No fewer than 111 new members were recruited to CAMRA (of which 52 were to our branch) at St Albans Beer & Cider Festival (SABCF) thanks to



the efforts of a local team headed by the enthusiastic and enigmatic Laura Coles, National Events Recruitment Officer. This compares with 65 new members in 2024 from a similar overall attendance.

The festival continues to be a success on numerous levels, including financial – enabling Festival Treasurer Russell Homfray to transfer a surplus to HQ, once again – and was officially opened by Daisy Cooper MP, with additional speeches from Roger Protz and CAMRA National Chair Ash Corbett-Collins. A big vote of thanks went to John Tubridy for his ever-inspiring leadership, together with Emily Ryans, Ben Wilkinson, Tom Blakemore, Geoff Govier, Russell Homfray, Dave Wright, bar managers and countless volunteers.

The Branch accounts were presented and approved. Our Auditors, Andrew Howat and Andrew Stovell, were thanked for their overall budgetary oversight of the branch and their continued support for the upcoming year. Branch Treasurer Matt Handford advised the meeting that funds remain sufficiently positive to cover operational costs.

In line with CAMRA recommendations, we now hold elections at our AGM for the key branch officer posts deemed necessary by HQ for any branch to function, and these were duly filled, as were a host of other essential posts that enable our branch to run effectively.

The meeting was an ideal opportunity to show-off a new plaque, funded by member donations, commemorating the now-famous meeting on 30 November 1972 at the

on drinking culture, and specialises in the cultural history of pubs, beer, and cider. He is a columnist for the *Sunday Times*, a regular contributor to BBC Radio's Food Programme, and has been voted Beer Writer of the Year by the British Guild of Beer Writers, four times. Of the 14 books he has written, Pete, unsurprisingly, chose "*Clubland: How the Working Men's Club Shaped Britain*", to frame the subject of his presentation.

Afterwards, a group of us took our guest on a tour around some of St Albans' finest hostelries — where, I am ashamed to admit, I encouraged Pete to end his annual 'Dry January' a few days early...

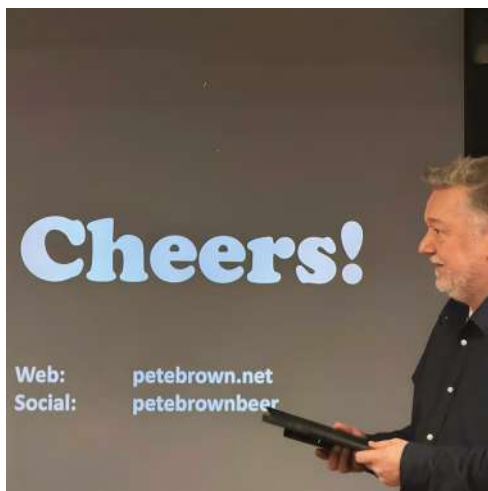
Ian Boyd
Chair

South Herts CAMRA



legendary Farriers Arms pub. The meeting was the first of a CAMRA branch anywhere in the UK, and the pub was the only one in St Albans then serving cask-conditioned ale. The plaque, once fixed to an external wall of the pub, will be officially unveiled at a special celebration on Thursday 16 April at the launch of Annual CAMRA Members' Weekend, being held in St Albans for the first time.

The meeting was followed by a delicious food spread and refreshments. The attendees then took on the role of audience and were treated to a most entertaining and informative presentation by the multi-award-winning author, journalist and broadcaster, Pete Brown. Pete is widely considered to be one of the UK's leading authorities



HEB 2026 AGM & Branch Meeting

Monday 9 February found members of the Herts & Essex Borders branch congregating at the Nag's Head in Bishops Stortford for our AGM and branch meeting. This turned out to be an interesting choice of location as this is a McMullen pub that they have retained, following the very recent sale of thirty pubs to Punch.

The Nag's Head was built in 1934 for Benskins Brewery and is grade II listed. Corner round turret wings with wraparound metal framed windows and most of the interior art deco features remain, such as alcove seating and central bar. This evening, there were three real ales on tap, *McMullen Country Bitter 4.3%* and *IPA 4.8%*, plus *Rivertown Rival 4.0%* — a stout that proved very popular.

Thankfully, the threat of branch closure is now finally behind us and, after a difficult year that saw committee member changes and the 2025 Winter Beer Festival cancelled due to branch insecurity, it turns out we are now doing well. The branch created sufficient surplus to be able to send over £7,000 to CAMRA HQ.

Nationally, CAMRA membership has fallen somewhat, while HEB has dropped officially from 815 in 2024 to 792 for this year. Losses due to members moving out of the branch area, leaving CAMRA and, of course, moving to that great beer lounge in the sky, are partially offset by members moving into the area and new members joining the Campaign. Of our total branch membership, 75% falls within the 61 - 80 age range.

The main task of the evening was to choose GBG entries, which, being a cross-county boundary branch, resulted in two lists of pubs to work through. But luckily no recounts were required.

Advance notice was given that the branch's 50th birthday will be celebrated at Gibbard Gardens on 22 August, following our



Photoshoot: Norman, centre-stage, with those members not at the bar or in the loo

participation in their beer festival over the weekend of 19 - 21 June. All are welcome.

At the following branch meeting, the changes due to the aforementioned sale of Mac's pubs to Punch came to the front as this affects seven of our pubs, three in Herts and four in Essex. Of particular interest is the George IV at Sawbridgeworth — for many years one of our GBG entries. For the present, it will continue to sell McMullen beers, but for how long? Hopefully, the new ownership will end the open and closed swinging door at the Wheatsheaf in Waltham Cross and will fully open the refurbished Welsh Harp in Waltham Cross. Like other branches affected, it will be a case of wait and see, so get scoring those new beers.

Following two beer breaks and the raffle, it was time to disperse by mini-bus, trains — which were affected by signalling problems at Tottenham Hale — car and Shanks's pony.

Norman Samuels & Kathryn Flagner
Herts & Essex Borders CAMRA

Tips to spot Carlsberg 'Fresh Ale'



Carbonation

Lower carbonation than keg and may be slightly fizzier than cask

Brands

Wainwright Amber, Wainwright Gold, Hobgoblin IPA



Dispense

Cask handpull, might look 'jerky' during pouring

Mouthfeel

Smooth with a slight fizziness

On the bar

'Brewery-conditioned' on the pump clip

Taste

Slight 'tinniness'

Think you've spotted one?

- 1) Take a photo
- 2) Report it here



Herts Brewery A-Z

3 Brewers of St Albans

Symondshyde Farm, nr Hatfield AL10 9BB
www.3brewers.co.uk



Two recent milestones. Matt Sutton has notched up 10 years at the brewery and the brewery has notched up its 1,000th brew, celebrated with 'Grand' Stout 4.3%. Planned for May is *Mild* 3.6%, once again.

According to Matt, 3 Brewers is more solid than at any time in its 13-year history: *"We run a very tight ship — everything the business makes is reinvested to make us as lean & efficient as possible. We have no investors, no shareholders, no crowdfunding, no financing. Our relatively modest ambitions, conservative financial approach, and phenomenal team put us in really good shape for the future."*

Stephen Thompson, BLO

Baron Brewing

Great Hormead, Buntingford SG9 OPB
www.baronbrewing.co.uk



It has been a strong start to the year for Jack Baron's brewery.

New beers continue to be released including *Running with Scissors* 6.2% (New England IPA), *Helly* 5% (Lager) and *Bring That Beat Back* 4.7% (Stout).

The Handsome Prince, the brewery's taproom in Cambridge, also goes from strength to strength with food now served courtesy of Harry's Restaurant next door and the first Meet the Brewer with Jack himself coming up.

There are also plans for the brewery to launch their first Non-Alcoholic beer in the coming weeks.

Simon Dewhurst, BLO

Buntingford Brewery



Therfield Rd, Royston SG8 9NW
www.buntingfordbrewery.com

Buntingford will once again be at the Cambridge Beer Festival with

a new beer, a British IPA.

John Hamblin, BLO

Creative Juices Brewing

Woodoaks Farm, Rickmansworth WD3 9XG
www.creativejuicesbrewingcompany.com



The tap room closed for renovations early in the year and reopened from Friday 6 March.

Andrew Vaughan, BLO

Garden City Brewery

22 The Wynd, Letchworth Garden City SG6 3EN
www.gardencitybrewery.co.uk



Garden City Brewery is celebrating its 10th Anniversary in June. See their social media for upcoming events to celebrate.

John Hamblin, BLO

Mad Squirrel Brewery

Berkhamsted Rd, Hemel Hempstead HP1 2SG
www.madsquirrelbrew.co.uk



Hertford 'Shop' opened before Christmas and is going well.

A new collaborative brew with Hertford Brew Club — a home brewing group — has produced a one-off keg red IPA, *Crimson Hart* 5%, which will be available in their beer shops.

The two new 250HL tanks are now installed and in operation. To put that in perspective, each holds 850 x 30L kegs. Prior to these, all tanks were 120HL. The new ones are currently holding lager, but the plan is to store 'Sumo' in them [made necessary by the recent Wetherspoon listing].

Supplying both Craft Local pubs — the Grand Junction, Bulbourne and Red Lion, Chenies.

Richard Abraham, BLO

McMullen Brewing & Pubs

26 Old Cross, Hertford, SG14 1RD
www.mcmullens.co.uk



In January, Mac's announced their shock decision to sell off their entire tenanted pub estate and three managed houses. This amounts to over 30 pubs mainly from the traditional heart of the company's presence in Herts, West Essex and North London. However, the managed estate of 90 pubs remains intact. For more, see articles on pages 20-21 and 76-77.

There will be four seasonal cask beers this year — initially *Rivertown Riva* 4.0%, a welcome stout with hints of chocolate.

Les Middlewood, BLO

New River Brewery

Pindar Rd, Hoddesdon EN11 0FF
www.newriverbrewery.co.uk



A new batch of *Kaimata* 3.6% pale ale has been brewed for cask using three New Zealand hops. John Bourdeaux, owner and brewer, describes it as “a lovely light beer, perfect for the spring...”.

Tim Vaughan, BLO

Pope's Yard Brewery

Paramount Ind. Est. Watford WD24 7ACX
www.popesyard.co.uk



With so many pubs closing and breweries struggling, Pope's Yard say they're lucky to get extra income from companies using the brewery as a film set, which seems more reliable than beer sales nowadays.

They'll keep on doing both, but the current focus is more on the filming.

Charles Teuma, BLO

Six Hills Brewing



29b High St, Stevenage SG1 3BG
www.sixhillsbrewing.co.uk

Paul Clinton sold the company in December, but is still on the

scene for the handover and the brewery is continuing to produce its core line-up. New owners are Steve Braden and Adam Cooper, mates of 35 years, who fulfilled a lifelong dream by taking ownership of the brewery. They celebrated by brewing a hazy pale *Would You Adam & Steve It!* 4.5%, initially available in the Broken Seal taproom straight from the tank, before keggling.

Adam Walsh, BLO

Tring Brewery

Dunsley Farm, London Rd, Tring HP23 6HA
www.tringbrewery.co.uk Tel: 01442 890721



The brewery is launching twelve new beers in collaboration with Community First Responders, as a drive to raise funds for the emergency volunteer charity throughout 2026. See page 23 for further details including the beer list.

Jared Ward-Brickett, Brewery PR Director

Other Hertfordshire breweries



The Belgian Brewer

Raynham Road, Bishop's Stortford CM23 5NZ
www.thebelgianbrewer.co.uk



Crossover Blendery

Lannock Manor Farm, Weston SG4 7EE
www.crossoverblendery.co.uk



Farr Brew

Great Level End Farm, Redbourn AL3 7A
www.farrbrew.com



Two Bob Brewing

www.facebook.com/p/The-Two-Bob-Brewing-Company-100031566857163/
twobobbrewco@gmail.com

Down Your Way

Hertfordshire Pubs & Clubs

Changes since
the last edition

This section contains information from a large number of sources and occasionally errors may occur or the information may be out-of-date upon publication. Comments or additional information should be sent to the editor (see page 3 for contact details).

AMWELL The **Elephant & Castle** closed in January when Farr Brew handed the pub back to Greene King who are now seeking new leaseholders.

BAYFORD We still await the result of a planning application for the **Baker Arms** (McMullen) which would see part of the existing building retained as a pub and the rest converted for residential use. A new house would also be built in part of the garden. If approved, an opportunity might then arise for the community to acquire the pub, funded through a community share offer.

BENINGTON In November, the planning application to turn the **Bell** into housing was refused. We wait to see if the owners submit an appeal. In the meantime **"The Friends of the Bell"** are holding fundraising 'Pop-Up Pub' events in the village hall - all with the aim of seeing the **Bell** reopened.

BUSHEY **Horse & Chains** has reopened under new management after a short period of closure.

CHORLEYWOOD Wells and Co are advertising the lease for the **Black Horse** in Dog Kennel Lane.

CODICOTE The **Globe** has reopened and is being run by the operators who also have the **Rose & Crown** in Tewin. However, McMullen has sold it to Punch.

COLNEY HEATH A planning application has been lodged for the construction of 9 houses and associated works on land at the **Crooked Billet**. The pub would remain open and in place. A decision is awaited.

CROXLEY GREEN The **"Save Our Sportsman"** campaign group continues to monitor developments at the Scots Hill pub, still closed and on the market but now at a further reduced price - £875,000.

ELSTREE Refurbishment work continues to bring the **Plough** back as a pub, with work programmed to complete sometime in 2026.

GRAVELEY The **George & Dragon** closed in June 2025 with Greene King still seeking new leaseholders.

HARPENDEN The **Inn on the Green** in Leyton Road closed in September for refurbishment work - reopening at the end of October with Greene King IPA and Abbot Ale and two guest cask beers.

HERONSGATE The **Stag** has been sold to Punch by McMullen.

HERTFORD **Mad Squirrel** brewery have opened their 10th **Mad Squirrel Tap & Bar** in the former **Snug/Vintage** building in Railway Street. Two to three cask ales are featured alongside their extensive selection of craft keg beers. For the brewery, this marks a return to where it all started - Red Squirrel began brewing in Hertford in 2004, later moving to Potten End near Hemel Hempstead and changing their name to Mad Squirrel. There are pizzas, cocktails and live music at weekends to attract a wide audience and an outside decked area has been created at the rear. On Bengeo Street, McMullen's **Greyhound** has reopened, now managed by a team from the **Dog & Whistle** in Hertford. However, Mac's have sold both to Punch,

QUEENS HEAD

Award Winning Free House

Herts & Essex Borders CAMRA
Pub of the Year 2024 - 2025
Cider Pub of the Year 2022 - 2025

Hertfordshire County CAMRA
Cider Pub of the Year 2023 - 2024

East Anglia Region CAMRA
Cider Pub of the Year 2022

UK National CAMRA
Cider Pub of the Year 2022
(Top 4 finalist)



Bar - Mon-Fri: 5-11pm | Sat: 12-11pm | Sun: 12-10.30pm
Meals - Wed-Fri: Flexible | Sat: 12-11pm | Sun: 12-10.30pm

Allens Green, Sawbridgeworth, Herts. CM21 OLS
01279 723393 email info@qhpub.co.uk

along with the **Great Eastern Tavern**, the **Millstream** and the **Lord Haig**. As we went to press, the **Other Side** in Parliament Square was closed for refurbishment - due to reopen in the spring.

HITCHIN The **Bricklayers** in Queens Street closed in late 2025 - reopening expected soon.

HODDESDON Sadly another pub loss. Planning permission has been granted for the conversion of the **King William IV** into residential use - the Lord Street pub (with no cask ale) had been closed for many months. Also, the **Bell Hotel**, most recently trading as a Hotel and Tea Room, is now in administration. We wait to see if there is any chance

of it reopening as a pub.

KIMPTON The march goes on to find a way for the **White Horse** to be reopened with further fundraising pop-up events taking place in the nearby Dacre Rooms.

LETCHWORTH The **Wilbury** in Wilbury Hills Road is now a Stonehouse pizza and carvery restaurant with no cask ale.

LITTLE WYMONDLEY The **Bucks Head** closed in November - new tenants are being sought.

NEWGATE STREET Following a fire in December caused by an electrical fault, the **Coach & Horses**, which last year relaunched primarily as a Turkish restaurant with no

cask ale, has remained closed. The bar had welcomed drink-only customers but we await further information about reopening.

NORTON Stonegate group are looking for new operators for the **Three Horseshoes** - the Norton Road pub remains open.

PERRY GREEN Work is continuing to bring the **Hoops** back to life. Closed for three years, building and refurbishment work aims to extend and improve the pub which sits on the Henry Moore estate. Reopening is expected soon, in 2026.

PETER'S GREEN The **Bright Star** remains open but is up for sale at £800,000.

POTTERS CROUCH The **Holly Bush**, closed for approaching a year, reopened under new management with a party on 12 February. South Herts CAMRA members attended the welcome relaunch and enjoyed the London Pride and ESB that the Fuller's pub was offering on the night. However, there was a report of no real ale a month later. One to watch...

PUCKERIDGE The **White Hart** has been sold to Punch by McMullen.

REED The former **Cabinet** is now operating as an Italian restaurant.

RUSHDEN Still no news on the **Moon & Stars**, which has remained closed for many, many months. Will it ever see the light of day?

ST ALBANS The **Beech House** in St Peter's Street has re-introduced cask ale, trialling Tring Side Pocket for a Toad. Building works and refurbishment at the **Farriers Arms** in Lower Dagnall Street has included bringing access to the Ladies WC from inside. The **Slug & Lettuce** closed in February for a refurbishment, due to re-open as **The London Stone** - no cask ale expected. **White Hart Tap** licensee Stephen McConnell will be leaving the Punch-owned pub in early May after 27 years. The PubCo is advertising for someone to enter into a "Management Partnership" agreement.

SANDRIDGE Sad to report that due to the pressures

of the current financial climate, the **Rose & Crown** is currently closed during the week - just open from 4pm on Fridays and from noon on Saturdays and Sundays. Lunches available 12 - 2.30pm Saturday, and Sunday roasts from 12 - 5pm.

SAWBRIDGEWORTH The reopened **Gate** has been offering up to three cask ales. McMullen have sold the **George IV** and the **Orange Tree** to Punch.

STEVENAGE There has been a refurbishment at the **Old Red Lion** in Shephall - handpumped beers are from Greene King. McMullen have sold the **Almond Tree**, **Old Town Bar** and **Royal Oak** to Punch.

TONWELL Still no news on the **Robin Hood & Little John** free house which has remained closed since March 2025.

WALTHAM CROSS The **Wheatsheaf** is closed but has been sold by McMullen to Punch.

WARE The **Maltings** in Watton Road is still being advertised for new leaseholders but remains open. Welcome news that the **Old Bulls Head** in Baldock Street has reopened, in the hands of John and Kelly - currently their third pub in the town. Early beers have been the retained Theakstons Old Peculier and from Tring brewery. We expect a settled beer range. McMullen have sold the **Rose & Crown** and **Spread Eagle** to Punch, who

are advertising the lease at the **Angel** in Star Street.

WATFORD The **Southern Cross** in Langley Road has closed - we hear that Greene King are to sell the pub but await further information. The **Horns** in Hempstead Road closed yet again in February - as we went to press, we were waiting for any indication of when it might reopen. In the town centre, **Walkabout** has become **Dunnings Bar II**, an Irish themed bar, nightclub **Popworld** has become **Zoo Watford**, and the **Slug and Lettuce** is now **O Watford**. No cask ale in any of them.

WELHAM GREEN McMullen have sold the **Sibthorpe Arms** to Punch.

WELWYN McMullen have sold the **Steamer** and the **Tavern** to Punch.

WHEATHAMPSTEAD The food-led **Wicked Lady** on Nomansland Common has undergone a refurbishment.

WHITWELL The **Bull** is currently closed. We await news of what comes next.

At any one time, about fifty pubs in Hertfordshire are up for grabs - a few for sale, but many where pub companies are seeking new leaseholders or tenants.

If you're interested in becoming a publican, view the pub company websites.

Herts CAMRA

Meetings, Socials & Festivals

The listings below are colour-coded **North Herts**, **South Herts**, **Herts & Essex Borders**, **Watford & District** and **All Hertfordshire Branches**. CAMRA members are very welcome to attend all CAMRA Branch Meetings and Social Events.

Attention! To keep up to date with local Branch activities, please consult the social media posts or websites of the four Branches – details on page 73.

APRIL

All Branches

Fri 17 – Sun 19: NATIONAL MEMBERS' WEEKEND AND AGM – St Albans

Alban Arena, St Peter's Street, St Albans.

See pages 36-41 for full details.

Sat 25: Herts Cask Beer of the Year Award Presentation – Tring

1pm. **Tring Brewery**, Dunsley Farm, London Road, Tring.

South Herts

Wed 22: Branch Meeting – London Colney

8pm. **Bull**, Barnet Road, London Colney.

North Herts

Wed 15: Branch Social – Baldock

8pm. **Old White Horse**, Station Road then, **White Lion**, High Street, **Cock** High Street and **Orange Tree**, Norton Road, Baldock.

Fri 24: Branch AGM – Baldock

8pm. **Orange Tree**, Norton Road, Baldock.

Herts & Essex Borders

Mon 13: Branch Meeting – Cheshunt

8.30pm. **Maltsters**, Windmill Lane, Cheshunt.

Watford and District

Fri 10: Branch Social – Bushey

8.15pm. **Three Crowns**, 1 High Road, WD23 1EA; 9.15pm. **King Stag**, 15 Bournehall Road,

WD23 3EH; 10pm. **Swan**, 25 Park Road, WD23 3EE.

Mon 27: W&D Branch Meeting

8pm. **Essex Arms**, Langley Way, Watford, WD17 3EG.

MAY

South Herts

Wed 13: Branch Meeting – Harpenden

8pm. **Harpenden Arms**, High Street, Harpenden.

Sat 16 – Sun 17: St Albans Mild Weekend

Two organised crawls to 18 pubs - see branch website & Facebook for details nearer the time.

Tue 19: 20th Hertford Mild Trail

7.45pm. **Black Horse**, West Street, Hertford; 8.30pm. **White Horse**, Castle Street; 9.15pm. **Old Barge**, The Folly; 10pm. **Old Cross Tavern**, St Andrew Street. See ad on page 72.

North Herts

Wed 13: Branch Social – Letchworth

8pm. **Arena Tavern**, Arena Parade then **Crafty's**, Leys Avenue, **Garden City Brewery**, The Wynd and **Three Magnets**, Leys Avenue.

Herts & Essex Borders

Wed 13: Branch Meeting – Tawny Common

8.30pm. **The Dog House**, Tawny Common.

Sat 16: Essex Pub of the Year Judging Trip

Details TBC.

Watford and District

Fri 1: Branch Social - Watford

8.30pm. **Red Lion**, 105, Vicarage Road, WD18 0EY; 9.15pm. **Two Trees Micro**, 18 Vicarage Road, WD18 0EH; 10.30pm. **Moon Under Water**, 44 High Street, WD17 2BS.

Mon 18: Branch Meeting - Watford

8pm. **Wellington Arms**, 2 Woodford Road, WD17 1PA.

Fri 22: Branch Social - Chorleywood and Heronsgate

8.30pm. **Rose & Crown**, Old Common Road, WD3 5LW; 9.15pm. **Old Shepherd**, Chorleywood Bottom, WD3 5JH; 10pm. **Land of Liberty, Peace & Plenty**, Long Lane, WD3 5BS.

JUNE

South Herts

Wed 10: Branch Meeting - St Albans

8pm. **Great Northern**, London Road, St Albans.

North Herts

Thu 4 (5pm) - Sat 6 (10pm): Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival 2026

Hitchin Rugby Club, Old Hale Way, Hitchin SG5 1XL.

Herts & Essex Borders

Tue 9: Branch Meeting - Bishop's Stortford

8.30pm. **Star**, Bridge Street, Bishop's Stortford.

Watford and District

Fri 5: Branch Social - King's Langley

7pm. **Old Palace**, 83 Langley Hill, WD4 9HQ; 7.45pm. **Saracen's Head**, 47 High Street, WD4 9HU; 8.30pm. **Rose & Crown**, 60 High Street, WD4 9HT.

JULY

South Herts

Sat 25: Branch Meeting - Hertford

1pm. **The Hertford Club**, Bull Plain, Hertford.

North Herts

Sat 4: Buntingford Brewery Social and Tour - All Branches Welcome!

12:30pm - 4:30pm. Buntingford Brewery, Greys Brewhouse, Therfield Rd, Royston SG8 9NW. To reserve your spot email chairman@northherts.camra.org.uk subject 'BB Event'. Details and travel recommendations nearer the date at <https://northherts.camra.org.uk/local-events/>

Herts & Essex Borders

To be advised

Watford and District

Sat 18: Branch Social - Sarratt

1pm. **Cock**, Church Lane, WD3 6HH; 2pm. **Cricketers**, The Green, WD3 6AS; 3pm. **Boot**, The Green, Sarratt.

Mon 27: Branch Meeting - Watford

8pm. **West Herts Sports Club**, 8 Park Avenue, Watford, WD18 7HP.

THE LORDSHIP ARMS

Repeat CAMRA Pub of the Year Winner
The Inn in the Sticks, Benington, Nr Stevenage



**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY
CAMRA PUB OF THE YEAR 2023**

Crouch Vale Brewer's Gold
Black Sheep Best
Timothy Taylor's Landlord

Plus 5 changing guest beers from Independent & Micro-Breweries including a Mild, Stout or Porter
Also Traditional Cider

See our selection of current & coming beers online
Lunchtime Snacks

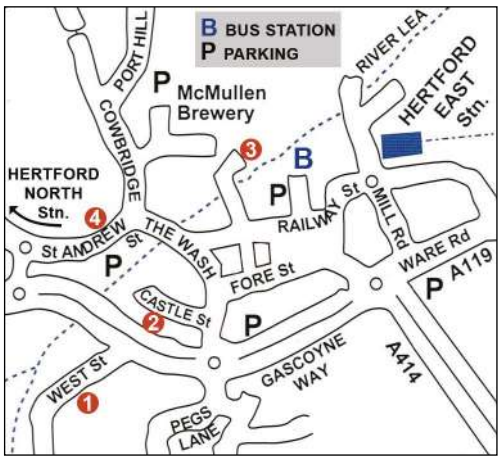
Classic Car meetings 3rd Tue of mth Apr to Sep

Tel 01438 869665 www.lordshiparms.co.uk



Hertford's Spiled for Mild Night

Tuesday 19th May



-
- | | | |
|----|---------|------------------|
| 1. | 7.45pm | Black Horse |
| 2. | 8.30pm | White Horse |
| 3. | 9.15pm | Old Barge |
| 4. | 10.00pm | Old Cross Tavern |
-

Four great pubs - four or more great milds

Celebrating 20 Years of The Hertford Mild Night Everyone Welcome

Herts CAMRA Contacts

South Herts CAMRA

🌐 southherts.camra.org.uk

Chair: Ian Boyd
chair@southherts.camra.org.uk

Branch contact: Ben Wilkinson
contact@southherts.camra.org.uk

📘 facebook.com/camrasouthherts
📷 instagram.com/southhertscamra
✂ x.com/SouthHertsCAMRA

North Herts CAMRA

🌐 northherts.camra.org.uk

Chair: Dean Barrett
chairman@northherts.camra.org.uk

Branch contact: Jeremy Kitson
secretary@northherts.camra.org.uk

📘 facebook.com/CAMRANorthHerts
📷 instagram.com/camranorthherts

Herts & Essex Borders CAMRA

🌐 heb.camra.org.uk

Chair: Graham Darby
chair@heb.camra.org.uk

Branch contact: Graham Darby
secretary@heb.camra.org.uk

📘 facebook.com/
hertsessexbordercamra

Watford & District CAMRA

🌐 watford.camra.org.uk

Chair: Andrew Vaughan
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✂ x.com/watfordcamra

Pints of View 316 GBG1972 Herts Pubs Competition

**TWO winners each receive:
2026 CAMRA Good Beer Guide**

**1) Which current CAMRA
branch has the most GBG1972
Hertfordshire pubs still open?**

.....

Tie-breaker:

**2) How many GBG1972
pubs were listed as being in
Hertfordshire?**

.....

Entries by Fri 29 May 2026 to:
PoV Competition, 5 Manor Way,
Potters Bar, Herts. EN6 1EL

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Postcode.....Tel no.....

Pints of View 315 St Albans Historic Pubs Competition

Correct answers:
London Road - **Woolpack**
George Street - **Sugar Loaf**
Verulam Road - **Plough**

Congratulations to our winner:
Anthony Toole, Welwyn Garden City



Steve's SHOUT

Is the Government out of touch? (rhet.)

I wonder how many readers will have heard of Dan Tomlinson, Labour MP for Chipping Barnet (which is partly in Hertfordshire) and Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury? He made a strange report to the Morning Advertiser (the licensed trade daily digital 'paper') saying that the problems arising with business rates following the last budget had been something the hospitality trade had brought upon themselves. According to Tomlinson, it should have been obvious that the subsidies were only to help the trade through COVID, and forward planning would have eased the burden when the business rates were returned to the normal level.

At present, rateable levels set by the government are advised by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and raise £34bn for the exchequer. Tomlinson said that objections should have been raised before the budget – and they would have, had it been known that the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) multiplier was to be set at only 5p lower than the standard rate rather than the expected 20p needed to offset the loss of discounts

introduced in the pandemic. Following the budget, all the trade bodies who had been working with the government on the review withdrew, which included the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA), UK Hospitality, British Institute of Innkeepers (BII), and the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA). Is it surprising that many pubs were refusing to serve MPs?

Dan Tomlinson needs a history lesson. Publicans have been complaining at the highest level about business rates since the last review in 2016. St Albans was hit particularly hard with the Blacksmiths' up 82%, the Boot's 87% and the Fighting Cocks an unbelievable 280%. In response, Sean Hughes of the Boot and Christo Tofelli of the Fighting Cocks started the "Save St Albans Pubs" campaign, but, seeing that exorbitant rates increases were being reported the length and breadth of the country, changed it to "Save UK Pubs". Visits to parliament followed, and in 2017, Sean and Christo jointly received the CAMRA "Campaigner of the Year Award", all some two years before COVID had been discovered.



There has been a lot of pub-related information in the press of late about brewery closures. In Hertfordshire, there's a petition to wind up Farr Brew, and in Cornwall, the rather larger Sharp's brewery is to be closed by Molson Coors at the end of this year with the potential loss of 200 jobs. Sharp's beers include the ubiquitous Doom Bar, which was the UK's best-selling cask beer until finally being usurped by Timothy Taylor's Landlord in 2025 (see table pages 8-9). It has been reported for several years that the bottled pasteurised version of Doom Bar is being brewed in Burton-on-Trent, though it has yet to be confirmed that brewing of the Sharp's cask beers will move there - perhaps some already have? Coors have invested £20m since purchasing Sharp's brewery in 2011, but maybe they just don't need/want capacity in a part of the country that will, inevitably, result in high nationwide distribution costs. Retain the brand and produce beer wherever it's cheapest to do so, is the mantra of today's global brewers.

SIBA have reported that 137 micro brewers closed during 2025, i.e. nearly three a week.

Eighty per cent of small/micro brewers' production is sold in pubs of which 366 shut between Dec 2024 and Dec 2025. That's a slight slowdown compared with the 2,000 pubs that have shut in the last five years, but still one every day.

Pubs are our heritage, pubs are community centres and pubs are employers — both directly, and indirectly. I know that, you know that, but it seems chancellor Rachel Reeves does not.

However, a small glimmer of light may have shone from Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy, who told millions of BBC Question Time viewers, *"We are listening, and we are not afraid to go away and rethink, and try and do things differently"*, when chef and publican Tom Kerridge called for a significant reduction in VAT paid by pubs.

Let's hope for another government U-turn.

Steve Bury

Chair

Swale CAMRA

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Roger... and out

Mac's future: Bye, bye brewery?

The question hangs heavy over Hertfordshire: will Independent Family Brewer McMullen continue to brew beer?

The sale of the Hertford brewery's 30 tenanted pubs — reported in this issue — has sent shock waves through the county. Mac's is Herts' major brewer and it will still own 90 managed pubs.

Its cask beers include AK Mild, a beer of historic importance that we can ill afford to lose.

The company has said it plans to continue to brew, and it will certainly do so for the immediate future as it will celebrate 200 years of brewing in 2027. It would be a rather muted celebration if no beer was being produced. But even its best friends, of whom I am one as a dedicated drinker of AK, must doubt Mac's long-term commitment to brewing.

I am struck by the awesome similarities with Young's. The South London brewery enjoyed iconic status with beer lovers. It



had remained true to cask ale through the dog days of the keg revolution of the 1960s and 70s and enjoyed great success on the back of the rise of CAMRA. John Young, the chairman, was a brewer to his fingertips but when he died, the younger members of the family were reluctant to remain in brewing and closed the Wandsworth plant in 2006. Young's became a pub company with its beers brewed in quick succession by Charles Wells at their Eagle Brewery in Bedford, and then Marston's when it bought the brewery.

But Marston's sold the plant to a Spanish lager brewer and the Young's beers moved to Banks's Brewery in Wolverhampton. The game of pass-the-brewery-parcel continued. The formation, in 2024, of CMBC (Carlsberg Marston's Brewing Company), with the Danish lager brewer in the chair, saw the closure of all the former Marston's breweries save for its original site in Burton-on-Trent. Burton will be the final resting place for beers from south London with different traditions and taste.



McMullen's family brewery, Hertford

Carlsberg's global brewery, Wolves

My most recent sampling of Young's beers in Wyllyotts Manor in Potters Bar made me fume with rage. These were beers I had rated highly when I worked in London and had regular access to Young's pubs. But the sublime balance of biscuit malt and peppery and spicy hops had gone. Original Bitter was drinkable but unmemorable while Special was too sweet, too fruity and seriously under-hopped.

I didn't have the opportunity to sample them again when I went to the Red Lion in Radlett. Despite it being a Young's pub, there were no Young's beers on the bar and I had to settle for a pint of Landlord. Not exactly a hardship, but an odd situation.

History doesn't repeat itself precisely. The McMullen family are cut from a different stripe to the Youngs. The Punch deal includes a clause that will enable McMullen to continue to supply the former tenanted pubs with their beers. But, ominously, they will be

delivered by Punch, not Mac's. Punch will no doubt point out to their new publicans that the pub company has a list of other beers it can supply, no doubt at a generous discount.

If demand for Mac's beers declines, the family may consider leaving brewing and having their beers brewed under licence. There's plenty of spare capacity available in the industry.

I hope and pray that AK and Country will remain brewed in Hertford. AK, CAMRA's Hertfordshire Beer of the Year in 2024, is one of the few remaining examples of a 19th century light mild. It's a beer for the desert island and it must be saved for future generations to enjoy and revere.

My heartfelt message to McMullen is a simple one: Carry on brewing.

Roger Protz

*Guild of Beer Writers
South Herts CAMRA*

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22 Blockheads at Ware Drill Hall	29 Old Cross Tavern
42 Boot + Dylans at the Kings Arms	28 Orange Tree
2 Cask & Stillage	43 Plough
66 CKN Print	25 Podge's Belgian Beer Tours
27 Cross Keys	79 Pubs in Town
31 Great Northern	68 Queen's Head
11 Hertford Club	32 Robin Hood
56 Hitchin Beer Festival	6 Royston Club
71 Lordship Arms	80 St Albans Beer & Cider Festival
17 Mermaid	58 Timothy Taylor's
33 New River Brewery	23 Tring Brewery

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