# MINE'S PAPINT

THE MAGAZINE FOR READING AND MID BERKSHIRE BRANCH OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

**IN THIS ISSUE...** 

PUB OF THE YEAR 2024

**BREWERY NEWS** 

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**PUB NEWS** 

& MORE...



**ISSUE SIXTY TWO** 

**SPRING 2024** 

Campaign for Real Ale



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## **Branch Diary**



All meetings and social events are relaxed and friendly. Non-members are welcome to all events except business meetings. Check the website before setting out in case of any last-minute changes. www.readingcamra.org.uk

Please confirm times with buses & trains website before setting out. If you are planning to arrive at a social more than 30 mins after the start time, please email to confirm we are not moving on elsewhere.

Social Secretary: Zoe Andrews (Temporary) editor@readingcamra.org.uk

This is a guide only and the Reading & Mid Berks Branch cannot be held responsible for any loss due to the alteration or cancellation of any of these events.

#### **MARCH**

Wednesday 6th: (14:00) Branch Meeting

The Fox & Hounds, 51 Gosbrook Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 8BN.

Good Friday 29th March: (14:00) Easter Branch Social

Reading Town Centre Pub Crawl meeting at The Three Guineas, Reading Station before moving onto The Oakford Social Club, The Alehouse and The Allied Arms.

#### **APRIL**

Thursday 11th: (20:00) Branch Meeting

The Castle Tap, 120 Castle Street, Reading, RG1 7RJ.

Wednesday 24th: (19:00) Branch Social

East Reading 17 Bus Crawl. Meeting at The Three Tuns, 191 Wokingham Road, Reading, RG6 1LT. We will then look to move on to The Roebuck, The Palmer Tavern and The Hope & Bear.

Contents	
From the Editor:	5
Pub News:	6 - 8
Pub of the Year 2024:	10
Ale Trail 2024:	12
Brewery News:	13 - 16
Industry News :	17 - 19
Tutts Clump Cider:	21
International Women's Day:	22 & 23
Dry January:	24 - 27
The Inn Sign Society:	29
Join CAMRA:	30



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## WHAT'S**BREWING**

Our dynamic online news platform is updated daily with stories from the pub & brewing industries, Campaign news & opinion pieces



wb.camra.org.uk





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camra.org.uk/podcast



Our colourful quarterly magazine is full of interesting features from the biggest voices in the trade



Available in print and online

## From the Editor



Welcome to the first Mine's A Pint of 2024. In this edition you find all the regular features including a comprehensive Pub News pulled together by Evelyn Harrison-Bullock where she finds change is afoot across the area. There are some high profile closures and potential changes of hands that were announced as we worked through January.

Phill Gill has shared a detailed Brewery News and as this goes to press, we discovered that something we had long suspected was no longer a rumour. Siren Craft Brew will be opening a taproom along Friar Street, sitting on the corner of a new development that will join onto Station Hill. This will bring something different to the town centre, and is a definite departure from most of the bars along Friar Street. I suspect that those of us who miss the sadly departed Grumpy Goat will be welcoming Siren's new space with open arms.



Image taken from Reading on Thames Blog Instagram page

We also share a piece on Dry January and walk through the challenges that this can pose to pubs at the quietest time of year. What can pubs do differently in future years as this event gains momentum? I share some of my favourite alcohol-free beers where I have seen the quality improve all the time.

The Ale Trail is back and will launch on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March at the Castle Tap. We love seeing you "trailers" working your way through the booklet of pubs on the trail and we are always amazed at how the trail gains more and more popularity every year. In branch meetings, we carefully consider which pubs to place on the trail and we really value your feedback. Our Facebook group is a great place to see how everybody is getting on. Find us by searching Reading Ale Trail.

On March 8th there is likely to be lots of local brewery activity to recognise International Women's Day. Please keep an eye on the social media of our local breweries to see what they're up to in order to mark the occasion. Over the past few years the 8th March has proven to be a wonderful day that brings women in beer together from across the branch.

Enjoy the evenings getting lighter, and we will see you on the other side of Spring.

> Zoë, Editor, Mine's a Pint editor@readingcamra.org.uk

Would you like to contribute to the next edition of Mine's A Pint? If so, drop me a line at minesapingrdg@icloud. com - I'm always open to ideas! Copy deadline for edition 63 will be April 14th. Advertising deadline date is end of April - please contact Paper Red Media for more information about this. Map 63 is estimated to be in your local pub in early May.

#### **Contact Us**

Useful contact details for this magazine, CAMRA and other Social Secretary: Zoë Andrews (Temporary) important things...

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#### **Local Trading Standards**

From time to time, drinkers receiving poor standards of service or poor quality products may wish to raise the matter with Trading Standards. You now need to do this through Citizens Advice, an organisation which provides free, confidential and impartial advice on consumer issues.

To contact Citizens Advice Consumer Service call 03454 04 05 06 or visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk and click on Consumer.

The opinions expressed in Mine's a Pint are not necessarily those of the editor or the Campaign for Real Ale. © Campaign for Real Ale 2024.

### **Pub News**



#### Caversham

The Crown on Bridge Street has applied to change its trading to include alcohol sales from 9am – midnight on Fridays and Saturdays as well as food until midnight. They currently serve food, including pizza, tacos and burgers, daily from midday – 9pm. The pub belongs

Stonegate's Crafted Social model which explained as having "...a deep-rooted passion for all things craft, from beers and bubbly to pizzas and pies...". They boast "... the perfect pint of beer, artisan hand-stretched



The Crown, Caversham Image by Zoë Andrews

pizzas, and wall-to-wall live sport."

#### **Playhatch**

The Flowing Spring on Henley Road has been reminding customers that they are still very much open despite the worst flooding the current landlords have seen in their fourteen years, in their garden and car park. On Facebook they have provided a step by step guide with pictures on how to get in to the pub as the usual back entrance is inaccessible. They have suffered a lack of business but have not had to close. There are lots of events planned for the coming months including a Valentine's Day Sing-along-Nick special on 17th February and the monthly unplugged open mic night. Blues band Blue Moose play on 23rd March and 14th April sees the return of the classic cars and bikes meet as well as a summer of 'Gigs in the Garden'.

#### Reading

The Sun Inn on Castle Street is due to reopen in March after being brought by The Heartwood Collection. It will revert to its original name, The Rising Sun. There will be room for 150 covers inside and 100 outside in a new walled garden. The Heartwood Collection describes itself as an "...award winning collection of cosy pubs and atmospheric brasseries at the heart of their local communities serving great fresh, seasonal food." The menu was devised by celebrity chef Raymond Blanc. There are currently 20 Heartwood Inns pubs and 14 Brasserie Blanc restaurants but The Sun is the beginning of a planned expansion.

The Lyndhurst on Queens Road is up for a fixed term tenancy on the Stonegate website for £923 per week. It has recently been refurbished. On February 7<sup>th</sup> the current tenants confirmed on social media that sadly they will be moving on over the coming months.



The Lyndhurst, Reading Image by Zoë Andrews

Revolutions chain bar on Station Road is one of their eight sites to close. They reported that their younger clientele has been affected by the cost of living crisis which is in turn affecting them. The group reported the best festive trading figures in four years but made



the decision to close some of the less profitable sites. Part of the same business, Revolución de Cuba, still remains in Friar Street.

The Jolly Anglers on Kennet Side closed in November following repossession. It was put on the market in June. A notice on the



Revolutions, Reading Image by Zoë Andrews

door stated that CG & Co had taken possession and changed the locks. It is listed for sale on sidneyphillips.co.uk where it suggests the property could be converted into student housing. The property is on the market for £620,000. Although it underwent an 100K renovation which included a swimming pool and hot tub, the advert states that the four bedroom accommodation is in a shell condition

The Palmer Tavern on Wokingham Road is set for a face lift; the outside changing from blue to grey as well as the installation of new fencing, paving and a shelter. The pub, previously called The College Arms, was renamed in 2016 and owners Greene King will change signage to give a nod to its new namesake. George Palmer was a local businessman in the 1800s.



The Corn Stores, Reading Image by Zoë Andrews

The Royal Albion on Oxford Road is for sale for £650,000 after it was taken over by new management and renovated after a drugs raid in 2022.

The Corn Stores on Forbury Road has closed. They wrote on their website; "With a heavy heart, we have decided to close The Corn Stores. It has been an honour and privilege to restore The Corn Stores to its former glory and act as custodians for the last few years but sadly, we have made the difficult decision to shut its doors. The move comes as we grow the business and continue to define Rarebreed as a collection of restaurants."

It looks likely that **The Cooper Arms** in Market Place will be reopening as a pub at some stage alongside two adjacent retail units. The upper floors will be eight flats.

The Moderation on Caversham Road was closed for a week in January to do work on their floor and cellar. Offers during January and February include burger and chips for £10 on Mondays, £10 curries on Tuesdays, 20% off noodle soups on Wednesdays, two courses for £18 on Thursdays and three courses for £25 on Sundays. They are also offering 20% off their lunch menu from 12 -3pm Monday to Friday. The first Monday of the month is poker night and Sundays are quiz night. For Mothers Day on 10th March they are offering three courses for £30. They provide a mix of South East Asian and traditional pub food.



The Moderation, Reading Image by Zoë Andrews

#### **Tilehurst**

The Restoration on Oxford Road has been closed since 2015. A planning application to knock down the pub and build flats has now been withdrawn. New building regulations mean the owner will need to submit new plans in accordance.



The Fox and Hounds on City Road was taken over in September last year and is in *The Good Beer Guide* 2024 and Cask Marque accredited. In January they held a pickled onion competition. They also offered a free bowl of chilli on Monday evenings when you brought a pint of lager, ale or a glass of wine. They hold quiz nights on the last Thursday of the month and karaoke nights. They are now serving a menu of sandwiches and simple hot meals on Friday, Saturday and Sunday between 12-2pm and 5-8pm.

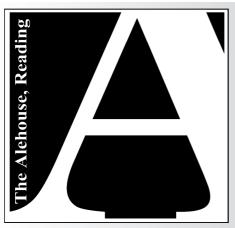
#### Wargrave

Wokingham Borough council have approved plans for The Greyhound to be converted into a a wine bar, shop and guest house. The pub has been closed since December 2021. The plan was submitted by the H'artisan Speciality Coffee Company in July 2023 but nothing has happened as yet.

#### Woolhampton

The Rowbarge on Station Road have lots of events planned this Summer. A new music night "Covers Under the Cover" will take place on the first Saturday of each month beginning on 3rd February with local singer song writer Steve Morano followed by Nicole Allan on 2nd March. Music is free and starts from 7pm. After the success of the Christmas and New year quiz nights, they will be more regular, the next in March with a St Patrick's Day theme. The petting zoo will return on Easter weekend. The annual beer festival will take place 5 - 7th July and is going to be bigger than before. They are also hoping to run a family fun day during the Summer as well as live bands on Bank holiday weekends. They are hoping to expand the BBQ menu to include salads and pizza. The Rowbarge is extremely dog friendly and as well as a monthly dog walk on the last Saturday of each month they have a full dog menu, complete with dog beer.

**Evelyn Harrison-Bullock** 



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#### Pub of the Year 2024



The voting for our Pub, Cider Pub and Club of the Year is open and we'd really appreciate your help in deciding the 2024 winners!

POTY is incredibly important to CAMRA and our local pubs and as a branch we would be failing in one of our key commitments if we did not run this part of our campaign to celebrate pubs and encourage visits every year. As we know, things are forever evolving in the current economy and pubs continue to be under threat of closure. CAMRA want to prevent this as much of this as possible and protect this heritage and culture for future generations to come.

Every year, the Reading & Mid-Berkshire CAMRA branch awards its Pub of the Year (POTY) title to the pub most voted for by branch members. It's the most prestigious prize we can bestow and we want to encourage as many local CAMRA members to vote as possible.



The Alehouse, 2023 Pub of the Year Image taken by Zoë Andrews

Our winner plays off against the other Berkshire branches in order to decide who is Berkshire POTY. It can then proceed through a number of larger inter-regional rounds and, if it's judged best in class all the way through, the pub can end up as the National Pub of the Year.

Here are this years nominees:

#### Pub of the Year 2024

Alehouse, Reading Allied Arms, Reading Bell, Waltham St Lawrence Fox & Hounds, Caversham Nags Head, Reading Retreat, Reading

#### Cider Pub of the Year 2024

Alehouse, Reading Bell, Waltham St Lawrence Castle Tap, Reading Nags Head, Reading

#### Club of the Year

Sonning Golf Club Wargrave & District Snooker Club

If you are a CAMRA member and would like to vote, please head to our website to download a voting form:

https://reading.camra.org.uk/poty

Or, click the link in the email we sent out to all our members in late January.

To vote you'll need to visit the nominated venues and tell us what you think!

Completed forms must be returned by March 3rd to: whatpub@readingcamra.org.uk

Happy voting!



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#### Ale Trail 2024



#### Time to Join In

Watch out for the launch of the 2024 Ale Trail, brought to you by Reading and Mid-Berkshire CAMRA. Launched on Saturday 2 March, this popular annual event is a great chance to get out and about and enjoy some of the excellent pubs that this area has to offer.

What's the deal? Well, first you need to get your hands on an Ale Trail booklet. The best time is at the launch event at the Castle Tap in Reading, where you can pick one up from local CAMRA members for just £2.50 (cash preferred) between 12.30pm and 3pm. After that they'll be available from the bar at the Nags Head and Alehouse in Reading and from the Fox and Hounds in Caversham until the trail ends on Sunday 12 May.



Ale Trail Launch at Nags Head, Reading 2023

Next, have a look through the 24 pubs featured and pick which one you're going to visit first.

Decided? Good, now enjoy a real ale or real cider (where available) and ask the bar tender for an Ale Trail sticker. Stickers are also available for soft drinks for designated drivers. Put the sticker in your booklet, visit another pub and repeat – and your booklet will transform from black and white to colour as you visit more and more pubs!

After a while you should have enjoyed 24 of the best pubs in the local area, so what next? Complete your details and return your booklet to the address shown inside (this is somebody's house so please be respectful and don't make lots of noise if you're returning it in person late at night). Everybody who completes all 24 pubs on the trail will receive an exclusive, limited edition T shirt. If you complete 16 or more pubs, you'll also win entry to a prize draw where there are great prizes donated by local brewers and cider makers – many thanks to Mysterious Brewery, Phantom Brewery, Loddon Brewery, Siren Craft, Tutts Clump Cider and Hogs Back Brewery for donating the draw prizes.

The 24 participating venues are chosen to give a good range of town centre, suburban and rural pubs, and enough variety from one year to the next to keep the trail fresh. There'll almost certainly be somewhere on the list that you haven't visited before. Some offer great food, some have a lovely garden, some are a good place to watch sport. What unites them all is a commitment to good beer and cider. We use the Ale Trail as a way to showcase some of the best pubs in our CAMRA branch area and, in the spirit of guest beers, we also include a guest pub. This year we welcome the Rifle Volunteer on Reading Road in Wokingham (Berkshire South East branch).

Our current branch Pub of the Year and Cider Pub of the Year always feature, so start planning your visits to the old favourites the Bell at Waltham St Lawrence and the Alehouse in Reading town centre.

To find out the full list of pubs participating this year, keep an eye on our Facebook feed or our Branch website, or just pick up a booklet.

Happy trailing - cheers!

Phil Gill

## Brewery News

#### **Delphic**

We don't often hear from this independent brewing company from Newbury, but they've just been given the go ahead to open a brewery and taproom in Newbury so the timing is good to take a closer look.

Founded in 2019 by Tom Broadbank, the brewery currently operates from a 30 sqm garage in Thatcham but now has permission for a new premises within the vacant Motorists Discount Centre on Mayors Lane, Newbury. On a visit in January the place was pretty much a shell but thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign the contractors are in place to start work in February and it's hoped that the brewery and tap room will be up and running by April. The new site is aimed to be able to brew 75,000 and 125,000 litres of beer a year. Besides the brewkit, storage and office space, the plans also contain a taproom that will be open on Fridays and Saturdays.

#### Double-Barrelled

The first new release for 2024 was 'Lessons', a a sessionable, smooth and juicy hazy pale at 4.4% ABV. Simcoe and Simcoe Cryo hops feature, giving forest and citrus fruit aromas. Tart gooseberries and ripened passionfruits with freshly squeezed oranges also feature.

Regular events at the tap room continue, including bingo, quizzes and the Run Ding running club. Coming up on 28 March is the DB Creative Showcase, a modern take on an open mic night with free entry. A variety of performers could present anything from comedy, music and dance to poetry, juggling and magic. If you'd like to get involved, contact details are on their website.

#### **Elusive**

Elusive Brewing has been successful in the 2023 Champion Beer of Britain (CBoB) regional rounds. Their 'Level Up' was a gold winner in the Red Ales, Brown Ales, Old Ales, and Strong Milds category of the London & South East Competition. The final blind taste judging took place at the Ascot Beer Festival by a panel of trained tasters. This award doubled up as the Ascot Beer of the Festival for which owner Andy Parker was presented with his certificate by Mike Smith, the festival organiser.

Their Oregon Trail was also a winner, gaining the silver award in the IPAs (New World & British) category. The final blind taste judging took place at the Worthing Beer Festival by a panel of trained tasters.

The CBoB certificates were presented to Elusive Brewing on 20 January in a ceremony at the official launch of their new expanded taproom, just metres away from the old. The room was packed with well-wishers from CAMRA and the beer world, who all had an excellent time.



Elusive Bar Image by Phil Gill



The new taproom first opened in December and offers more seating and video game screens, plus the drinks range has been extended a little to offer 8 keg beers. Wines from Stanlake Park Vineyard and spirits from The Essex Spirits Company are also available, plus a well-stocked beer fridge and bar snacks.

Not quite a brewery tour, but 'Talk and Tasting' sessions are now on sale. You get a welcome pint or soft drink, then head to the brewery for a sit-down talk and tutored tasting session with one of the Elusive team. Get tasters of at least six other Elusive beers and maybe one straight from the tank, plus a chance to learn more about the beers and the brewery.

You pur and day tick Fel The IPA

Elusive Checkpoint Image by Elusive Brewing

You also get a 10% discount on purchases made at the Taproom and shop for the rest of the day. Head to the website for tickets – the first session is on 24 February.

The first beer of 2024 was a new IPA 'Checkpoint'. This modern West Coast IPA at 6% ABV uses lager malt to provide a pale base while Simcoe, Talus and Nelson Sauvin hops bring notes of pine, grapefruit and gooseberry.

Elusive's annual International Women's Day Collaboration Home Brew Project is back for 2024. They've teamed up with The Malt Miller and Burnt Mill, and will be brewing a West Coast Pale Ale which will be on sale at the beginning of March ready for International Women's Day.

#### **Hogs Back**

For designated drivers or those wanting to take a break from drinking, Hogs Back's Little Swine at 0.5% ABV is a full-bodied, flavourful pale ale. Brewed with speciality malts and three hop varieties including Cascade from Hogs Back's hop garden, Little Swine offers

all the taste of a full-strength beer without the alcohol. It's available in 330ml bottles from the taproom or brewery shop at their site in Tongham.

The first Thursday of every month is a charity quiz night at the taproom, while you can also watch the Six Nations rugby live on the big screen throughout February and March. Check out which matches are available on their website (some prior bookings mean that not all can be shown), and look out for the traditional rugby ale 'England's Glory' which makes a great accompaniment to the sporting action and wood fired pizzas.

#### Loddon

Proper Kitchen continue to provide the regular food offer on Tuesday to Saturday at the tap yard. On Sundays, from 4 February onwards, they are offering roast dinners.

Brewery tours take place every other month from 6.30-10pm. Enjoy an evening at the brewery and discover how the award-winning beers are made. Tours are led by head brewer Tara, with tickets costing £17.50 per person and including two free pints or four half pints.

#### **Mysterious**

A collaboration with Disruption is Brewing just before Christmas led to an 8.5% ABV West Coast 8.5% DIPA that was launched at the Narrowboat at Blake's Lock (what used to be Bel and the Dragon).

Mysterious beers are now available in Vegivores – the plant-based restaurant in St Martin's Precinct in Caversham.

Watch out for the brewery's 1st birthday celebrations in April!



#### **Phantom**

After their regular post-new year shutdown, both Phantom's sites reopened in January. Echoes in Henley was first on 10<sup>th</sup>, with the

Reading taproom following on 19th. They celebrated with the return of 'Feeling This', the popular 5.0% ABV pale ale, and Echoes hosted two well-attended guided tasting and talk sessions to let people find out more about the beer and the brewery.



Phantom Treading Image by Phil Gill

A new collaboration with South Street Arts Centre has produced 'Treading The Boards', a 5.3% ABV pale that will be available from the bar at South Street as well as Phantom's own sites.

The Reading site is currently open Friday to Sunday every week, with Thursday opening planned to return in late February. Echoes is now open later on Wednesdays and Thursdays for post-work drinks, with the new hours of:

> Wednesday 5-10pm Thursday 5-10pm Friday 3-10pm Saturday 12-10pm Sunday 12-6pm

#### Rebellion

A roundup of stats from 2023, the 30th year of brewing at Rebellion:

Number of brews: 481 Pints produced: 4,985,000 Pints sold in the tap yard: 120,070 Deliveries made: 33,673

For 2024 the brewery staff have created the list of monthly specials by voting for their favourite beers from the last 30 years. The idea here is to offer a taste of nostalgia for long-time patrons and also introduce newer customers to the heritage and flavours that have contributed to the brewery's legacy. It began with 'Overdraft Ale' in January, a 4.3% ABV amber and citrus offering. To be followed over the next few months by:

FEBRUARY 'Mutiny', Red & Malty, 4.5% ABV

MARCH 'Evolution', Tawny & Fruity, 4.2% ABV

APRIL 'Gold', Golden & Hoppy, 4.4% ABV

#### Siren Craft

The first ever low alcohol beers from Siren were released in January. In their words, "We've had requests to brew a low alcohol beer for a very long time now, and your comments have not fallen on deaf ears. We could have done this a long time ago, but we always knew that we wanted to do it right. That's why we've teamed up with low and no alcohol giants Mash Gang to bring you not one, but two incredible 0.5% beers."

The first, 'Call of the Void', is a rich and moreish stout with specialty malts. A selection of rich dark grains combine with tonka bean, liquorice root, cacao nibs, coffee and vanilla for a complex amalgamation of flavours, and nitrogen makes for a classic creamy head.

The other, 'Out of Nowhere', is a West Coast Pilsner. With a traditional German lager base, Citra, Idaho7 and Nelson Sauvin are used in the dry hop for fruit cocktail aromas of pineapple, peach and white grape.



At the other end of the scale, 'Shattered Dream Nitro' at 9.6% ABV is an imperial take on the popular 'Broken Dream', loaded with coffee and chocolate flavours. In addition to the imperial strength and generous espresso hit, cacao nibs and vanilla are also added to make this beer even more luxurious than the original.



Siren Shattered Dream Image by Siren Craft Brew

Watch out for 'Guess The Hop', a trilogy of hazy beers which each focus on one single hop. Prizes are on offer for those who correctly guess the hop used in each beer.

#### **Two Flints**



Two Flints cans Image by Two Flints Brewing

Is it really over a year since Two Flints began in an arch under Windsor & Eton Central station? They celebrated their 1st birthday weekend in December with guest beers, cocktails, pizza, DJs and live music. Special new brews Ribbons, Light Years and Cosmic Dance offered something hazy and delicious, with Sonic Muse giving a flavour of the west coast. Their new next door neighbours Indie Rabble make for a mini crawl, with the longerestablished Windsor & Eton just a short walk away.

#### Windsor and Eton

'Last Drop', a 4% ABV rose red bitter, celebrated the Six Nations rugby. Rye and crystal & double roasted malt are used, and this year the hops are Mosaic and Simcoe to give a fruity and floral aroma.

Phil Gill







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## **Industry News**



## Campaign calls for urgent government support as top brewers fight for survival

CAMRA says government support is vital following the news that Elland brewery is facing liquidation and Adnams is looking for financial support.

CAMRA national chairman Nik Antona said: "To hear that Elland brewery is facing liquidation just six months after its 1872 Porter was crowned CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain 2023 [pictured] is a major cause for concern. This, coupled with the reports that Adnams has been working with a management consultancy to explore options to shore up its finances – including the possibility of an injection of private capital – is a one-two punch at the heart of the UK brewing industry.

"The news raises the issue of fair competition, access to market and consumer choice. CAMRA does not want any brewery or cider producer to close their doors for good, be it a contemporary small independent brewer or larger family-owned establishments with decades of history.

"The worrying news that two prestigious, award-winning breweries are both facing pressure to remain trading and survive is indicative of the wider problems the brewing and pub trade are experiencing. CAMRA, along with the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) and the Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB), is calling on the government to increase draught relief to 20 per cent from its current figure of 9.2 per cent in the chancellor's upcoming Budget.

"Cutting tax specifically on draught beer and cider in pubs would encourage people to support their community local and help secure jobs and businesses in the pub and beer sector – particularly small and independent breweries that sell more of their products into pubs and taprooms.

"CAMRA is encouraging everyone to email their MPs, asking them to support the Make it 20 per cent campaign and call on the government to show its support for pubs, social clubs, breweries and cider producers."

CAMRA's online E-lobby can be found here: https://action.camra.org.uk/page/142898/action/I

#### Brewery numbers fall in 2023

New figures released by the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) show there are now fewer breweries in the UK compared to a year ago.

SIBA's UK Brewery Tracker shows the total number of active brewers is now 1,815, down from 1,828 in January last year – an overall net closure of 13 breweries.

SIBA chief executive Andy Slee said: "There is still so much that needs to be done to protect independent breweries across the UK, with help from government on a range of issues now more important than ever if we want to turn the tide and see a growing beer industry in 2024.

"Trading has been incredibly tough for independent breweries, and while the government's welcome introduction of draught relief for beer sold in pubs and taprooms last year was welcome, we would like to see it extended in 2024 to a significant 20 per cent discount."

"What is perhaps most worrying about the figures are the level of closures being experienced in the North of England – with



the North West seeing a net closure rate that is higher than the national figure at a huge -14, and the North East didn't fare much better, with the second highest in the UK and nine net closure rate for 2023.

"It is in these areas where the combined effect of rising production costs hurting margins and the cost-of-living crisis lowering sales appear to be hitting brewery businesses the hardest, with worrying independent brewery closure rates across the North."

The North West had by far the toughest 12 months, with a significant -14 net closure rate across 2023, with -13 in Q4 alone – the highest of any region for any quarter of 2023. The North East also had a very tough year, with five net closures coming in Q4.

The Welsh brewing industry also struggled, with a net six closure rate for last year. A net seven came in the fourth quarter, swinging the dial into the red for the country which began Q4 up one overall. It was a similar story for the Midlands, which ended the year with a minus five net closure rate, losing seven in Q4.

The West of England finished 2023 down two, and Northern Ireland ended up even, despite losing one in Q4.

Moving into positive growth during 2023 was the South West, which was up a net four having finished the year with an increase of 12 in Q4. The South East also saw a rise up nine overall following a Q4 net growth rate which equalled the South West at 12. But it was the East of England that led the pack with the highest rate, finishing last year with an impressive plus 14 with eight in Q4.

Timothy Hampson published in What's Brewing

#### **Calling time on Pedigree**

I placed my order at the bar of the Malt Shovel and publican Brad invited me to take a seat.

"I'll bring your drinks over in a second," he said. "I've just got to see Ray to his taxi."

It's Thursday lunchtime and the Telford pub has only been open for 30 minutes, but already 96-year-old Ray has enjoyed his pint and is heading back home. Brad walks him out to the car park and makes sure he is comfortably seated in his ride home.

Ray has made a point of coming in today. Word has got around that the Malt Shovel's final cask of Pedigree is on the bar. It's hard to overstate what an important part of the pub's identity this beer is.

"This place was built on Pedigree," Brad sighs. Local CAMRA branch member Stew agrees.

"Back in the day, if you didn't drink Pedigree in the Shovel, you got funny looks."



Laura Hadland What's brewing magazine

Every week, on a Thursday, a fresh cask of Pedigree is put on the bar. When it's gone, it's gone, and you have to wait for next Thursday if you want it. I've lived in the area for nearly 18 months now, and the weekly ale ritual has

always given me a strange feeling of comfort. It feels quaint and homely, and knowing it's Pedigree Day gives me a small sense of belonging.

But now the Carlsberg Marston Brewing Company (CMBC) has retired the union sets that Pedigree was brewed through, or at least, partially went through. It is reported that as they have brewed less of the beer, fewer of



the sets were in use and some went through standard stainless steel fermenting vessels and was blended back.

Still, this was a system of venerable heritage, introduced in the 1830s. The Marston's logo depicts the cast iron frames on the union barrels, showing just how important a part the technology has played in Marston's positioning as a Burton brewer of historic pedigree (I know, I couldn't resist). Now the abandonment of the union sets by CMBC marks its extinction in the UK. Until recently, the Marston's website told us earnestly that the system "gives Pedigree its one-of-a-kind taste. No Burton union. No Pedigree. End of".

A Pedigree drinker himself, down-to-earth Brad, a tied tenant, cares deeply about his pub and the quality of the beer. It looks like the decision to abandon Pedigree has pained him. I asked how he felt about the loss of the Burton union system. He is a man of few words.

"You can tell how I feel by the fact we aren't going to buy Pedigree again."

I wondered if the move was a bit premature, perhaps he might wait and see how the flavour might change in future casks. He sets his jaw and gives me a simple but firm "no". No Burton union. No Pedigree. End of.

Brad is gently starting to tempt the Shovel's most ardent Pedigree fans over to alternative brews. Frank, now 86, has been a regular fixture at the pub since he was 16. He's been drinking Pedigree since it was legal for him to do so (probably) – essentially the entire time the beer has been available. Thanks to some recent changes in policy at Marston's pub company (a separate entity to CBMC), the Malt Shovel can now stock guest ales from a limited pool of local breweries. Frank is being wooed with Wye Valley bitter. It costs a bit more per pint since Marston's middleman is taking his cut along the way.

Time will tell how the changes at the Malt Shovel are received. Will Frank and Ray stop by as often? But the retirement of the Burton union sets feels like a purposeful withdrawal from cask ale and brewing heritage.

Since Carlsberg UK and Marston's completed their merger in November 2020, we have seen the sale of London Fields and the Eagle breweries. Marston's Visitor Centre in Burton plus Jennings, Wychwood and Ringwood breweries have all been closed. It has the stench of the Whitbread Tour of Destruction, denounced by CAMRA in 1990.

In its press release, CMBC justified the decision to retire the Burton union system by saying declining volumes in the UK cask market had made the process unviable. Certainly, Pedigree has seen decline. In 2019, the Morning Advertiser reported it was the seventh biggest cask ale brand in the UK, with nearly 41,000hl produced, generating £22.9m. At the end of last year, it had dropped to eighth place, with just under 33,500hl, generating £21.3m.

That's nearly a 20 per cent decrease in production and a drop of £1.6m in revenue. Perhaps I'm a cynic, but there is a sense of the self-fulfilling prophecy about all this. If you choose to make a smaller volume of beer, you'll probably sell less and make less money, I would have thought. Then I suppose you can get rid of inconveniences like the union sets guilt-free. But that's just rampant, uninformed speculation.

Funnily enough, despite the "decline in the UK cask market" cited by CBMC, its other top-selling cask brand, Thwaites Wainwright, has seen a growth in value over the same period. Production has remained relatively steady since 2019, and the brand generated £30.9m last year compared to £27.5m in 2019. But I'm sure that doesn't mean anything.

Laura Hadland published in What's Brewing







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## **Tutts Clump Cider**



Tutts Clump surprised and shocked many people when they shared an update at the beginning of February saying that they needed financial support. A combination of bounce back loans from Covid, the closure of some of their customers and rising costs has created a difficult situation for the local cider business. We spoke with owner Tim Wale last summer he said Covid had hit the business significantly. "It was like having a tap just turn off overnight. I'll never forget it. Overnight, we had nothing coming in. The bills were still there, but you had no pubs, no restaurants, no festivals, no steam rallies, no anything."

#### Save our business Tutts Clump Cider Ltd



Tutts Clump Go Fund Me Image taken from Go Fund Me

The challenges presented by Covid meant that Tim invested his whole private pension into Tutts Clump to keep the business going and cover the business overheads. Tim has also drawn attention to the sad departure of other local cider producers over the last couple of years including Pang Valley, Upton, Red Dog and Crazy Dave.

Tutts Clump have set up a Go Fund Me page to try and keep their business alive It can be found at: https://www.gofundme.com/f/wf8bav-save-our-business

The aim of the fund is to help resolve the business' pressing, immediate cash flow challenges. In his statement on the donation page Tim puts it like this: "if you want to see a successful award winning cider business not to

be another statistic and see three people out of work - please support us."

Tim set up Tutts Clump back in 2008, making



Tutts Clump cider selection Image copyright Tutts Clump

it a full time business two years after taking up the hobby of making cider at home. In that time Tutts Clump has won multiple Great Taste awards for their cider, take pride in their status as an organic producer that use as many local apples as possible, collecting from all across Berkshire and beyond. They've got into pubs, restaurants and even supermarkets. It's a business which has grown exponentially over the past 16 years.

Tim Wale is also a bus driver for Reading Buses and has been working the weekends driving the number 17 across Reading, working in excess of 95 hours a week to try and support his business. It's a business that was not just viable but profitable before Covid, but a combination of bounce back loans, rising utility bills and a lack of government support for food and drink have left Tim fighting to keep his business going.

Tutts Clump really need local support right now more than ever. Share their campaign if you can, encourage your local pub to stock them if you can, pick up their cider when you see it in Waitrose or the Co-op. We really hope the challenges Tutts Clump are facing are resolved soon.

Zoë Andrews

### **International Women's Day 2024**



On March 8th it will be International Women's Day. Each year the momentum grows for IWD and in beer this has been spearheaded by Unite Brew (www.unitebrew.org) who encourage breweries to host an International Women's Collaboration Brew Day. This was founded in 2014 by Sophie de Ronde, the Head Brewer at Burnt Mill Brewery in Ipswich. The aim of Unite Brew is to encourage events "open to all women working in or interested in beer to learn, network and make friends."



Sophie de Ronde of Burnt Mill Brewery Image taken from Unitebrew.org

In recent years in our branch this has prompted women in beer to come together and take part in events organised by local breweries such as Double-Barrelled and Elusive Brew, and we've covered those events in Mine's A Pint. As we go to press, there are events in the pipeline at Double-Barrelled and they will be announcing these on their socials and to their email subscribers soon. I'm sure we're likely to see more announced across the branch.

Having been lucky enough to take part in a collaborative brew previously for IWD with Elusive, Siren Craft and the Malt Miller, I know how important these days can be in building

those connections and friendships and in breaking down any remaining barriers that beer is a man's world.



IWD 2023 at Double-Barrelled Brewery Double-Barrelled Brewery

This said, Laura Hadland, the author of 50 Years of CAMRA has said that work still needs to be done to make women feel more welcome within beer culture. "It may come as a surprise that in the modern organisation [of CAMRA] women are still quite poorly represented. Only 20% of CAMRA members are women and an even smaller fraction are Regional Directors – just two in sixteen. However at the highest level representation is slightly better, with women making up a third of the current National Executive."

This is a really interesting point, and something we have discussed in our branch meetings. It is often just me and a couple of other women who make up the female representation at branch meetings. We really want this to change, but how do we make it happen? In order for things to change, being purposeful won't be enough. We also need to reflect on why it hasn't happened so far, and it's not a simple problem. What is stopping women getting involved with CAMRA right now? Has the lack of a local beer festival impacted membership?

I believe there is some local research to be done and we need to make contact with other



branches where involvement from women is much greater, to find out what they've done differently It's certainly not a case of women not being interested in beer styles, pub culture or a decent pint and a social. But I suspect it has a lot to do with women feeling safe and welcome in pubs, and about how we welcome new members into our branch activities.

I'm grateful to be part of the Berkshire Craft Beer Birds - a group set up by Kirsty Moulsley, the Sales Operations Manager at Double-Barrelled. At these meetings and socials, women from across the branch meet to talk beer, socialise and have fun. There are those who work for breweries like Kirsty or Ruth Mitchell of Elusive Brew and Naomi Hayward from Windsor's Indie Rabble but there are others like myself that dabble in a little writing about my favourite beverage, and women such as Tori Powell, the co-host of A Women's Brew, a popular beer podcast.

Women have always played vital roles in the early production of beer. Laura Harland had this to say about that: "In the medieval period, brewsters sold home brewed ale to supplement their household income. They were gradually forced to give way to a more aggressive commercialisation of the product by male-led ale houses."

Fast forward to 2024 and acknowledging just how many women are currently working in beer, it is on us within CAMRA to make more women feel welcome. I hope that in the years ahead we will rebalance our membership and encourage much more participation at branch meetings from our female members who no doubt, will be full of ideas of how we could do things differently. And if you read this and want to be part of that change - either by joining CAMRA, coming to our socials, writing for Mine's A Pint or joining Berkshire Craft Beer Birds, please get in touch!

Zoë Andrews



## What does Dry January tell us about our relationship with alcohol?



I did Dry January once in 2015 and, in honesty, I found it utterly miserable. I faltered at the last hurdle, which was pay day weekend. I felt surrounded by signature January weather and an impromptu evening down the pub with a couple of friends found me losing my resolve. At that moment in time it was just what I needed and I felt better for having a beer, not in any way worse. I suppose this means that actually, I never completed Dry January.

That said, I did manage several dry Lents in the years that followed which - perhaps owing to the time of year - never felt quite as difficult, and I always felt proud that I'd managed it by the end. Something that would have made it easier is the plethora of alcohol free alternatives that are available today. I can't remember anything but Becks Blue being available back in 2015 and, frankly, you can do better now.

I always feel a bit conflicted by Dry January. The beginning of the year can be deathly quiet for pubs and clubs across the country, with the public establishing more virtuous routines for the new year that don't involve drinking.

There can be an assumption that the run up to Christmas is a bustling time for pubs and hospitality businesses but sadly, this hasn't been the case for several years now. In Reading, over the past few weeks alone, we've seen the closure of several venues as well as pub leases going up for advertisement. Times have been tough in the drinks industry for a long time and I have no doubt that publicans and brewery owners across the country must wonder how many more fires they can put out before the hose runs dry.

Started officially in 2013, Dry January was founded by the charity Alcohol Change - a charity that focuses on reducing the harm alcohol causes in society and does some incredible work. The roots of Dry January go

back even further in history, though: in 1942 a sober January occurred when the Finnish government decided to cut down on alcohol intake in order to support the war effort against the Soviet Union.

Dry January has gained prominence over the past ten years and many charities jump on board to encourage people to take sponsorship for completing it: a quick Google brings up a plethora of Dry January events hosted across the country. It goes without saying, that to support a charity is no bad thing, and all of us could benefit from watching our drinking but it leaves me reflecting on the pubs who are trying to make ends meet and who serve as a social hub for so many.



CAMRA Local Image taken from CAMRA Instagram page

This is a point that CAMRA has recently shared in the weekly newsletter to members, saying that "Whether you went for a pint, a meal, a soft drink, or an alcohol free beer, thank you to everyone who supported their local this January. It is always a difficult time



for the trade, and given the current financial situation it is particularly important that we visit pubs and clubs. Please keep enjoying time at your local all year round!"

A couple of years ago I popped for a solo trip to the Nag's Head because they hosting an excellent tap takeover. As I worked through a list of beers I really wanted to try I was struck by the reality that in the pandemic, a few years before, that simple act of an afternoon pint in a pub wasn't allowed. It was the early afternoon and as I sat there I noticed something. I was the only woman in the room except for one of the bar staff, and that the place was bustling with men of all ages, all talking and drinking. Some were playing board games, others were watching the sport on the telly. Pubs play a crucial role in the well-being of a lot of men in society, and serve as spaces to talk things out and relax.

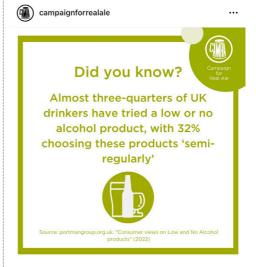
I say this fully aware that therein lies a contradiction for some, because alcohol itself is a depressant and there is no getting away from that. When it's consumed by somebody who isn't in the best place mentally, that person may not feel better on the other side of their pint. No doubt one of the aims of Alcohol Change is to shine a light on our own personal relationship with alcohol.

The fact that it can be so difficult for some folk to do a month without booze isn't a good thing and perhaps should be a big wake up call. Are you drinking too much? Would you be classified as a heavy drinker? Do you know how many units of alcohol are in a pint? Do you care?

I've tracked units through an app on my phone for several years now, after a ticking off by the doctor who said I needed to cut down: no surprises there! But it did make me think - we can be quick to criticise doctors who tell us we're too heavy, too unfit, drinking too much, but I doubt any of them take pleasure in those

conversations. And I reflected on that chat again when somebody I know was diagnosed with cirrhosis.

Research has shown that younger people are much more aware of the dangers of drinking too much and as they become more health conscious, the risk is that unless we do something they'll simply stop going to pubs. And in my opinion that all starts with giving people options. I really admire the Nags Head in Reading who have openly shared the alcohol free beers they have on tap in January to be inclusive to those doing Dry January. They have been on the AF bus for a long time and stock several options all year round, often on draft too. That's not just an inclusive move, but a financially sensible one too.



CAMRA AF Image taken from CAMRA Instagram page

Some people don't like how alcohol makes them feel, but would absolutely relish the opportunity to try AF beers. There are designated drivers who find themselves stuck with lime and soda or endless caffeine hits from Coke. If AF beers had been more readily available over the years, I'd have bought them



many times, normalising the act of doing so not just for myself but for those around me. And I really think this is a critical point.

To normalise not always consuming alcohol in a pub doesn't mean that the role of the public house is redundant. Pubs remain a valuable source of human contact, local culture and friendship. I would encourage every brewery out there to develop lower alcohol or alcoholfree alternatives, and I would urge every pub to stock them. It will bring more people in, not isolate them, and it will protect the pub as a centre of community for many years to come.

Make no mistake, the AF industry is booming in the United Kingdom and any pub or club not carrying a few options for customers are doing themselves a disservice. I've seen AF beer normalised on the continent where it's simply offered on draft like any other drink in most restaurants and bars because it is seen as the right thing to do and the right drink to offer. The UK has some work to do to align in this space.

Now, a bit around the science of alcohol free beer and some suggestions from me on where to start. Years ago, the most common method for alcohol free beer production, and alcohol free spirits for that matter, was to brew the drink as normal and then extract the alcohol afterwards. In fact many drinks in this sector, like alcohol free gin, are still made this way.

The downside, for beer, is an almost inevitable metallic taste in the mouth. Some breweries have got better at disguising this, but it's not easy. Macro beer companies, with their huge research and development budgets have also struggled to make alcohol free beers taste much better. Radlers have proven handy, low alcohol fruit flavoured to disguise the taste and a big can can clock in at just one alcohol unit.

Lemon and grapefruit tend to be the flavours and they do a decent job.

Then, great news came to the alcohol free world in the form of Denmark's Goliath that is Mikkeller. Their R&D developed - and patented - an alcohol free yeast strain that allowed the beers to be brewed as normal without that tricky extraction work afterwards. This proved to be a game changer in terms of the quality of the alcohol free beers available from this point onwards. Mikkeller make some superb ones, which will surprise nobody.

Many alcohol free breweries, have taken up a licence to use that Mikkeller yeast strain and most of these beers are now developed at a contract brewery in Belgium called De Proef. And many of them are truly excellent. Running in parallel has been a huge upswing in UK based alcohol free breweries who have continued to push boundaries - many of them choosing not to use that magic yeast at all, but instead experimenting with their techniques, their choices of hops, their flavours and increasingly developing incredible beers.

So where to start? In terms of what you're most likely to see in your local pubs and especially those that are tied, expect Heineken's 0.0 which its actually pretty good and if you like it, then you'll be happy in Spain where the popular Amstel 0.0 is also by them. Adnam's Ghostship 0.5% is solid and they also brew the M&S Southwold alcohol free beer. Guinness 0.0 is superb and should just be available everywhere in my opinion.

Other old favourites are the classic Erdinger Blue, and the alcohol free Paulaner and Maisel's Weisse. In my experience, most German alcohol free beer tends to be decent: A Hoppy Place in Maidenhead and Windsor tend to stock a good variety of German options.

In the locals that have a wider variety of brews in general, you'll see the very good Lucky Saint



lager, and you'll spot colourfully branded beers by Big Drop Brew Co who do styles varying from lagers, to pale ales and dark stouts.

They're all worth a try. You may also come across the excellent Clear Head by Bristol Beer Factory which supports their project with Talk Club, a charity that focuses on a talking and listening movement to get people mentally fitter. It's both a great cause, and a great beer.



Selection of excellent AF beers that are available.
All photos by Zoë Andrews

Mash Gang are also fantastic, an independent alcohol free brewery based in London who have led the way for several years now. Stoop, their lager, is great but so is Chug, the pale ale. Mash Gang experiment a lot, collaborate frequently and have mastered the art of beautifully designed cans and merchandise which has appealed to their younger audience.

Going local for a moment, Renegade in West Berkshire have two alcohol free beers, Solo, and the Brewski Peach. I've had both and can recommend them. Siren Craft have recently made an alcohol free pils and an alcohol free stout, and while Double-Barrelled haven't got a full alcohol free option just yet, they have regularly put out some brilliant beers hovering around the 3% mark and they always have an alcohol free offering in their taproom.

I'm saving my last breath here for Brulo. Originally named Coast before being forced to change their name, they hail from Scotland and they use that Mikkeller super yeast in their beers. They are the alcohol free beers I drink the most, and I recommend them to anybody who asks me what to try first. Brulo manage to strike the balance between refreshing, not at all tinny and not too sweet. I've tried everything they have done and I've loved it. And if you buy through their website they often have offers, or money off if you refer a friend.

There are some very talented breweries out there making alcohol free beers and I have named a mere handful here. Believe it or not, I've tried nearly 300 varieties so far and I can only see that increasing. If you're on the beer app Untappd, find me @zoeonpop to see my AF Beer list. You'll find many magical brews there. Perhaps they'll change your perspective on alcohol free beer or maybe, just maybe, you'll find yourself tempted to give one a try.

Zoë Andrews



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## The Inn Sign Society



Founded in 1990, the Inn Sign Society raises awareness of the nation's pub signs and compiles a record for the benefit of future generations. Many pub names have links with events from the past or personalities of national and local importance, and the Society provides a forum for members to research the history of inns and pub names.



Inn Sign Society Logo Images provided by Iain Perks, Inn Sign Society

blood to help continue the good work done over the last 34 years.

For more information, including on how to join, see the website at innsignsociety.

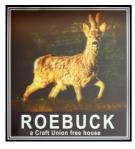
If the Inn Sign Society doesn't research, capture and save our pub sign heritage, perhaps no-one else will.

> Iain Perks Membership Secretary Inn Sign Society

The Inn Sign Society has an active web site and a quarterly full-colour journal to which

full-colour journal to which members are encouraged to submit articles, pictures of pub signs and news from their areas.

As inns and pubs close at an alarming rate, much local heritage is in danger of being lost forever. Pubs are not just a place to enjoy a drink, they are often at the heart of the community and can reflect its history.





Roebuck, Market Place Wokingham and The Jolly Farmer, Davis Street, Hurst Images provided by Iain Perks, Inn Sign Society

Many members take a general interest in all signs, with some specialising in particular breweries, counties, aircraft or railways, to name but a few. The Inn Sign Society is seeking to recruit more members and bring in new

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**LOCALE ACCREDITATION 2013** 

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