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Ale



GUZZLER

SPRING 2016
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BRODGAR BERE 4.8% ABV - Rich - Complex - Fruity



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CHAIRPERSON'S COLUMN

[Ed. - The Chairperson's column for this quarter is brought to you by David Cassidy, chairman of the Renfrewshire branch!]

Welcome to issue three of **The Guzzler**. Hopefully you have all been getting out and about in the last couple of months despite the weather and enjoying a lot of the decent ales out there.



The main focus of the Renfrewshire branch for the last few months (and also the next couple!!) is the organisation of our renowned Beer Tent at **Paisley Food and Drink Festival**, which is to be held this year on Friday 24th and Saturday 25th of April in Abbey Close, Paisley.

If you have never worked at a beer festival before you may not realise how much work needs to be done beforehand make it run smoothly on the day. From beer ordering, finance, logistics and a multitude of paperwork – all of these things need to be in place long before we ever get on site. Big thanks to all of our volunteers for the time and effort they give up to make it the best experience possible.

As with every beer event, whether a full festival or a smaller event, we would never be able to run it without volunteers so if you are able to spare any time from the Thursday to the Sunday to help either with the set-up and take down or serving when we are open please fill out the volunteer form which can be found on the **Renfrewshire CAMRA Facebook page**.

The size and logistics of the Beer Tent mean that it will once again be located in the car park at the South end of the site just over the River Cart and directly opposite Il Pescatore restaurant. Make sure you don't miss it – I promise it will be worth it.

The branch have also recently thoroughly enjoyed a great afternoon out for a 'Souper' Saturday at our new Pub of The Year, **The Brown Bull** in Lochwinnoch. 6 different soups and a number of different ales made for a for a fantastic day.

David Cassidy, Renfrewshire Branch Chair.

CONTENTS

- **5-6: Nathan's Pub Tours**
New regular feature. Branch member Nathan Pearce curates self-directed pub tours around our branch area.
- **7-10: Introducing Februa: A New Winter Beer Festival for Glasgow**
Talking with Dookit and STF brewers Harry and Phil about their new winter beer festival, Februa.
- **12-13: Februa Social Report**
By branch member Derek Middlemiss.
- **14-16: Keeping the Pub Relevant: Community, Conversation, and CAMRA's Next Chapter**
By James Kirkham, co-owner of the Big Six Inn, Halifax, West Yorkshire.
- **17: Ales from the Dark Side!**
Our mystery columnist Dark Side returns.
- **20-22: Changing of the Guard: Interview with Scotland's Outgoing Regional Director**
2022-26 RD Stuart McMahon talks to us about his time in the role.

- **23-24: How Do We Get More Women Interested in Real Ale?**
Branch member Teri Beveridge addresses the challenges of the ale scene's gender divide.
- **26-28: Real Ale Finders**
An interview with the founders of the revolutionary real ale app.
- **29-30: A Chat with Wetherspoon Watch**
Branch members Paul Murray and Martin Dryden tell us about their Facebook page, Wetherspoon Watch.
- **32-34: Real Ale at Home: DIY House Handpull Edition**
I made my own handpull from caravan parts. By me, your editor, Westley McCallum.
- **35: Beer Scoring for CAMRA: A Guide**



JOIN CAMRA

CAMRA (the **Campaign for Real Ale**) is an independent, voluntary, consumer organisation whose vision is to have quality real ale, cider & perry and thriving pubs in every community.

Membership is open to all, and we currently represent around 146,000 members across the UK. We are governed by a voluntary unpaid national executive, elected by the membership. There is a local branch structure through which members can join a CAMRA branch and campaign and socialise locally. The Glasgow & West of Scotland branch currently has over 810 members.

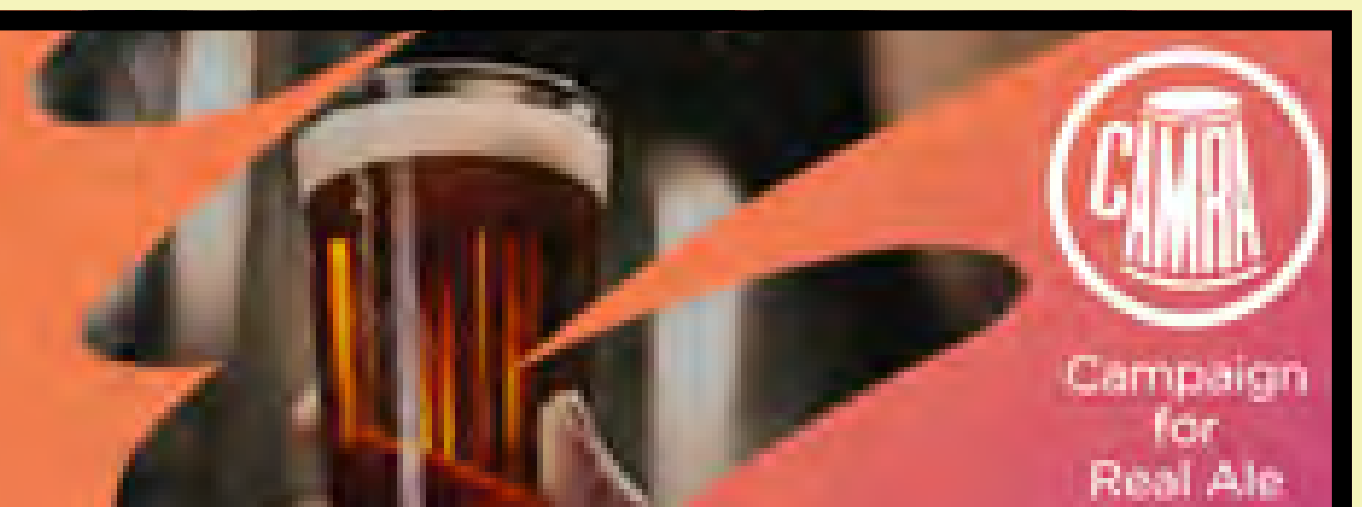
Membership gives you access to; our award-winning quarterly **BEER** magazine; discounts on CAMRA books including our best-selling **Good Beer Guide**; free or reduced entry to over 180 beer festivals; £30 (single)/£40 (joint) of CAMRA real ale, cider and perry vouchers; access to **The Real Ale Discount Scheme** where you receive discounts on pints at over 3,500 participating pubs with your membership card - and much more!

Join CAMRA today at <https://join.camra.org.uk/>

Be part of the CAMRA story

Real ale is just the start...

Join today



NATHAN'S PUB TOURS

Fancy a scoring trip but can't make it to one of our socials? Branch member Nathan Pearce has a few suggestions for self-directed pub tours around our branch area.

Isle of Bute (Longer trip - full day required)



The Isle of Bute is a fantastic year-round destination, offering stunning views and easy accessibility from the mainland. To get here, you can purchase a Rail & Sail ticket through ScotRail or buy tickets separately: a train from Glasgow to Wemyss Bay and a ferry via CalMac. Wemyss Bay station itself is a highlight, featuring a magnificent Victorian glass canopy.

Currently, an Anytime Day Return train ticket is £10.40 (without a Railcard or Club 50 discount), while a summer ferry return is £8.70 (with slight discounts during the winter timetable). On the island, a 24-hour bus ticket for exploring Bute costs £5.50. If you decide to stay accommodation is generally well-priced, with many hotels offering great sunset views over the Firth of Clyde.

1. Kingarth Hotel

Approximately hourly bus to and from Rothesay until 6pm, some late services. Added first so you don't think about travel after having a few!
1 Regular beer, 1 Changing (**Fyne Ales - Jarl** spotted regularly)

2. Anchor Tavern

With regular services from Rothesay to Port Bannatyne this can be easily ticked off the list, possibly en route to the optional extra.
1 Regular beer, 1 Changing (**Fyne Ales - Jarl** spotted regularly)

3. Rabbie's Tavern

1 Changing beer (various Greene King ales spotted)

4. Macs Bar

2 Changing beers (**Orkney - Corncrake** spotted regularly)

5. Black Bull Inn

2 Changing beers (**Caldeonian - Deuchars IPA** spotted regularly)

[Optional Extra]

Catching the 490 bus to Rhubodach, you can get the ferry to Colintrave. Colintrave Hotel is a short walk from the terminal. The ferry runs every 30 minutes. The summer ferry is £3.40 return from Rhubodach to Colintrave, with a slight discount during the winter timetable.

Balloch - Renton - Dumbarton (Shorter trip)

This trip up to Balloch on a clear day offers amazing views looking north from the south shores of Loch Lomond.

A day return ticket from Glasgow is £7.70, without a railcard or Club 50. Depending on the time you decide to do this trip, Loch Lomond Brewery Tap (Pub 3) can be done on the outward or return leg.



Cont...

1. Balloch House Hotel

3 min walk from Balloch train station.
1 Regular beer (**Sharp's - Doom Bar** spotted regularly)
Accepts CAMRA card discount.

2. Tullie Inn

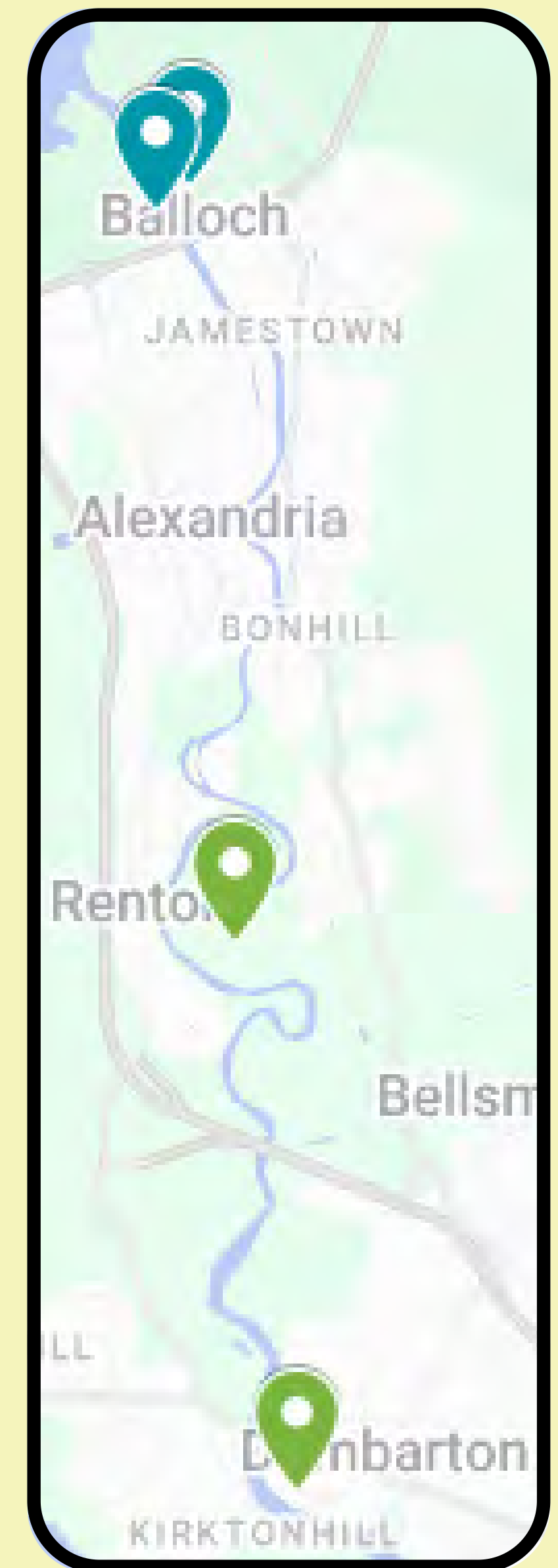
1 min walk from Balloch House Hotel.
2 Changing beers (**Loch Lomond - Southern Summit** spotted regularly)
Accepts CAMRA vouchers.

3. Loch Lomond Brewery Tap

11 min walk from Renton train station.
Open hours:
12pm - 4pm Tues to Thur
2pm - 10pm Fri to Sat
Closed Sun-Mon.

4. Captain James Lang Wetherspoon

10 minute walk from Dumbarton Central train station.
Accepts CAMRA vouchers.



Glasgow Historic Pub Interior Tour (shorter trip)

1. The Old Toll Bar

Two handpulls but only serves real ale on special occasions - check before traveling.
One of the last remaining Victorian 'palace pubs' in Glasgow. Category B listed status.

2. The Laurieston

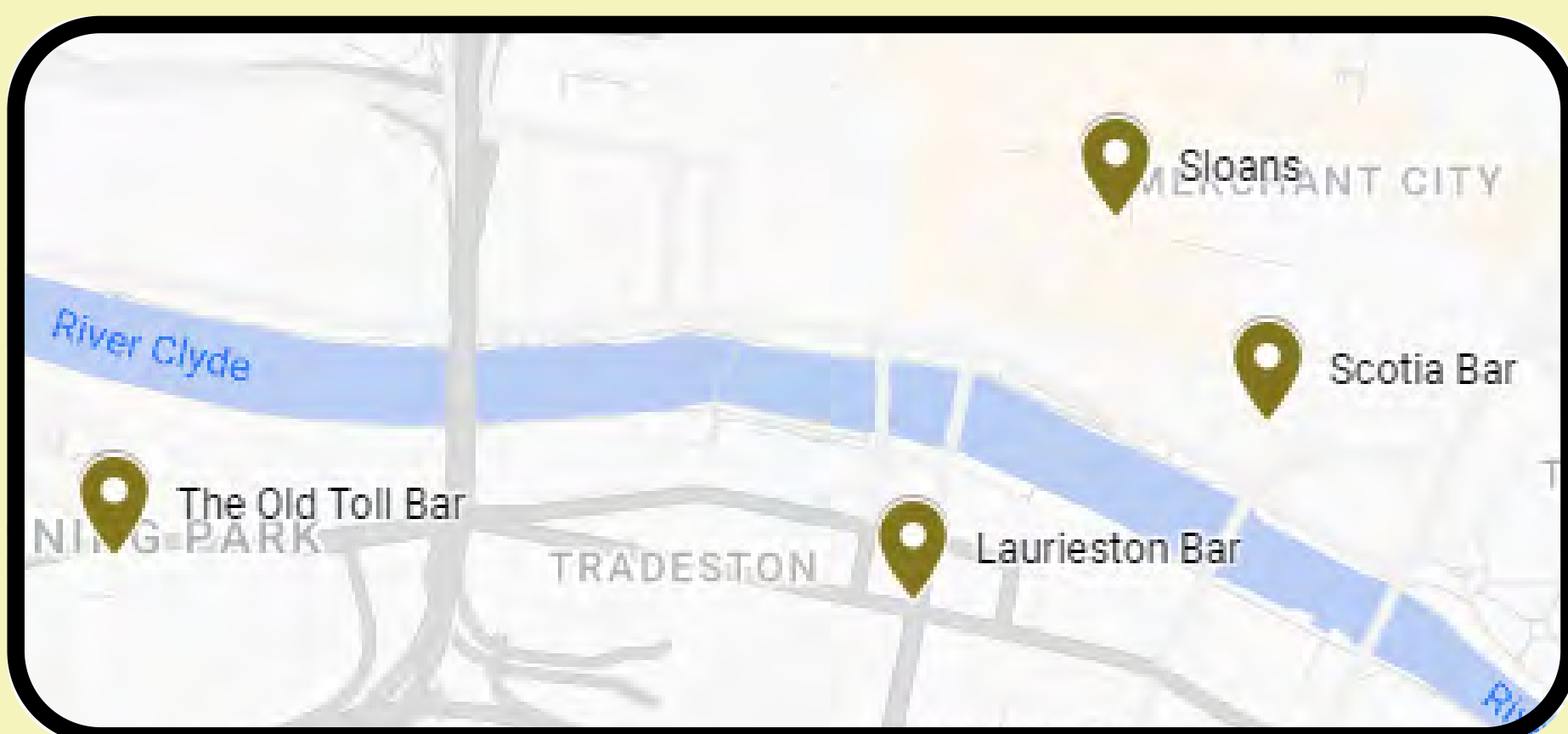
Time capsule of traditional 1960s Glasgow pub. Category C listed status.
2 Changing beers, 1 Regular (**Fyne Ales - Jarl** spotted regularly)

3. Scotia Bar

Mock-Tudor frontage and low, beamed interiors.
One of the oldest pubs in Glasgow.
4 Changing beers (**Loch Lomond - West Highland Way** spotted regularly)
Accepts CAMRA card discount

4. Sloans


Ornate three floor Victorian building with ornate Edwardian remodel. Category A listed status
2 Changing beers (**Caledonian - Deuchars IPA** spotted regularly)



Fancy a couple more? There's always the **Horseshoe Bar** with its marvelous 19th century features (and the longest bar in Scotland), or the **Pot Still's** elaborate traditional bar back! Have fun, but remember: it is your responsibility to plan your trip thoroughly before heading out. Double check all travel details prior to departure.

(By Nathan Pearce.)

Pints don't just drink themselves

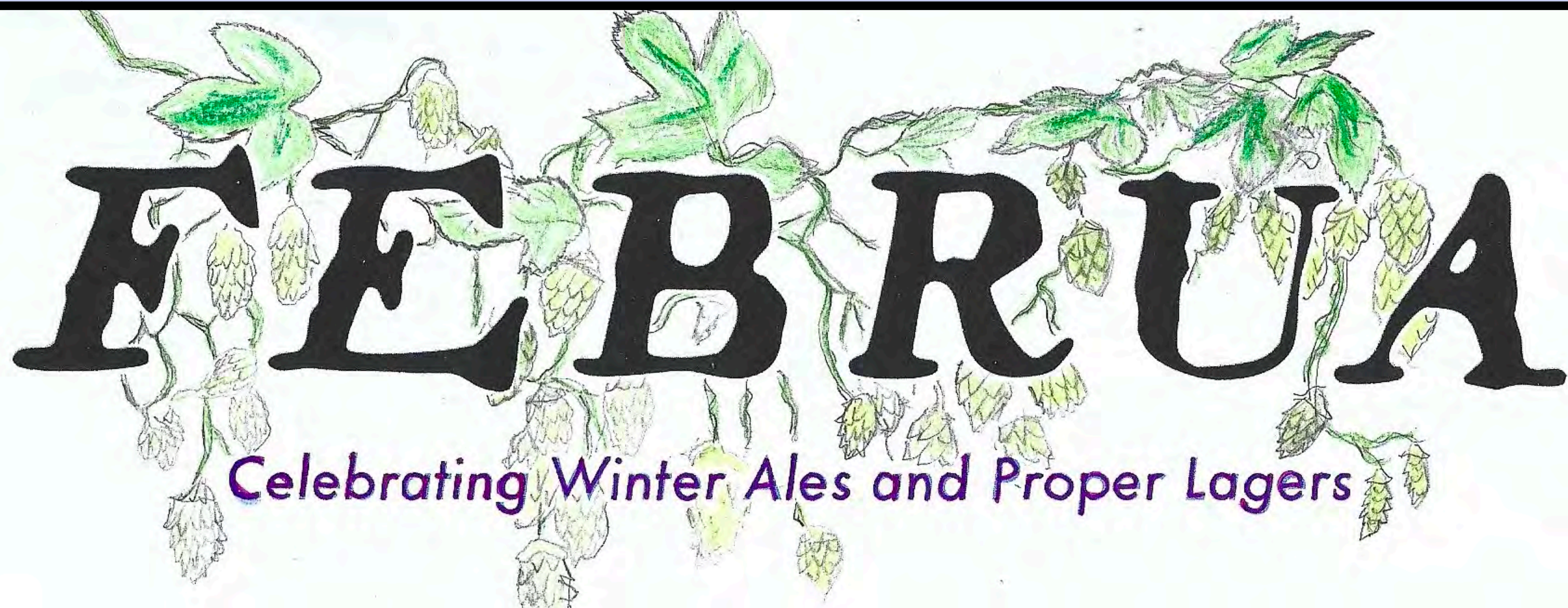
Had to be there button ----->  1,467



Get free entry to over 100 beer festivals across the UK as a CAMRA member.



INTRODUCING FEBRUA: A NEW WINTER BEER FESTIVAL FOR GLASGOW



A brand-new indie beer festival called **Februa** was launched over the weekend of the 7th of February, and celebrated at a small number of hand-picked venues across Glasgow.

Curated by **Simple Things Fermentations** and **Dookit Brewing**, Februa is all about giving winter beers their moment - darker, malt-forward ales alongside clean, well-made lagers - and creating something that can grow into a regular fixture in the Scottish beer calendar.

In this exclusive interview, **The Guzzler** caught up with head brewers **Phil Sisson** and **Harry Weskin** to learn more about the festival and the unique beers brewed especially for the event.

Tell us about the ethos behind Februa, and what gap in Glasgow's beer calendar you were trying to fill with the festival?

(Harry): "The idea sprung from noticing all this delicious lager beer and Winter ale being released from many UK breweries around the end of January and start of February. Both our breweries took full advantage of the quieter and colder months, allowing for excellent cellaring conditions! We were also being treated to some seriously good releases from further afield. It's a fact worth celebrating, we thought. There is a natural lull around February in the Glasgow beer calendar too. So we thought why not come together, enjoy some special beers and see our Winter in style and frivolity!"

How did Dookit and STF come up with the idea to collaborate?

(Phil): "The collab beer is something we've been talking about doing for a while; as fellow small Glasgow based breweries we're in contact a lot anyway so it's one of many ideas we've discussed and kept coming back to. To be honest I can't remember exactly what took us down the Mild route now... but it's worked out well as a collab because there's definitely a bit of both breweries in the beer."

Talk us through the recipe decisions for your collaboration brew: the 6.2% Double Dark Mild - what's the malt bill, hops, yeast, and adjuncts used? Feel free to get technical!

(Harry): "Milds and 60/- ales are championed here at Dookit Brewing: I've brewed several, love doing so and find it a fascinating style. I've never dabbled commercially with brewing a strong mild. It's a special sub-category I also hold dear: ever since discovering **Sarah Hughes' Dark Ruby (6% Ruby Mild)** many years ago, I always wanted to experiment. **Boxcar's** more recent iteration (**6.3% Dark Mild**) also proves how satisfying a beer it can be: rich, velvety-smooth, with an array of warming characteristics from dried caramelised fruit to toffee, chocolate and coffee. Suffice it to say I was thrilled STF was on board with the idea.

Cont...

A well considered malt bill is the firm and vital backbone to any decent mild. I find Maris Otter to be a more than suitable base malt with its natural and well rounded sweetness. A large portion of oats, both flaked and lightly toasted, enhance mouthfeel and sweetness. Cara, Brown, Special B and Midnight Wheat add a dynamic flavour profile of dried dark fruits, subtle biscuit notes and toffee. Chocolate malt, added in the last 15 minutes of the mash brings about the very little amount of roasted character needed, while making it darker and richer.

We wanted to complement the smooth, sweet and non-roasted malt bill with a locally sourced specialty: cacao husks from Bare Bones Chocolate. We were able to discern the cacao husks were from Madagascar because of the prominent cherry note. By adding them to the mash and the kettle (post boil at 75°C) their chocolate aroma and cherry notes were imparted into the beer, which paired beautifully with the already chocolatey malt bill.

Although hops are of secondary importance in a mild style, the decision for which variety to play with was of utmost importance. STF have successfully used Monroe before: their bright red berry character complement the smooth and subtle Bramling Cross bittering addition, alongside the Madagascan cacao husks. This complex fruitiness pairs beautifully with the chocolate notes gained from both husk and grain!"

'Proper Lager' is an interesting term – it reminds us of 'real ale'. How do you define a proper lager in 2026?

(Phil): "There's probably a little bit of cheekiness in the term 'Proper Lager', the word 'lager' is derived from the German verb 'to store' and it implies an extended period of conditioning, which isn't part of the process for the macro lagers found on supermarket shelves. So to us, a 'proper lager' is one that has actually been lagered - left to cold condition in the tank for a decent period."



For the Bohemian Pilsner, how long was the lagering period and how did you achieve clarity and balance?

(Phil): "We brew Bohemian Pilsner every year now and brew day will be late November/early December. We'll shift it into a conditioning tank before Christmas and package it 4-6 weeks later, allowing at least another two weeks to re-ferment and condition again in the can. We don't worry too much about the clarity of the beer but that amount of time at a cold temperature with the yeast strain we use does mean the beer drops nice and bright. We do think about balance a lot - and that's down to getting the right amount of bitterness, residual sugars etc."

Cont...





What can we expect from the Best Bitter?

(Harry): "The **Huffman's Best Bitter**, due to be released in can, cask and keg soon, is my first commercial release of such a style. It sits astride certain modern bitters and late 19th century recipes. It's inspired by some favourite ales of mine: **Kernel's 1880 Simond's Bitter (5.9% ESB)**, **Landlord (4.3% English Pale Ale)** and various modern takes on the best bitter style - **Barney's (4.2% Best Bitter)** springs to mind prominently."

It's great that you're choosing cask as the launchpad for these brews. In your opinion(s), why is cask ale important to you personally and to Glasgow's beer culture?

(Phil): "I'm a huge fan of cask ale and it's been a big part of my beery life for many years now. Ewan and I both worked at **Harviestoun** previously where we brewed and packaged a lot of cask beer, and now at STF everything we do is essentially using the cask approach - every can, bottle and keg is naturally carbonated. We prefer the softer, smaller bubbles, doing it this way allows more of the flavour to come through."

(Harry): "Cask ale has always been important to me, both when going out to pubs and enjoying a well kept pint of ale, and filling firkins at the brewery. Glasgow's rich beer culture and history of real ale is definitely worthy of note and it feels like it is on the up again, which is great to see. I notice new drinkers going to cask and it is our job as brewers to keep flying the flag: the more interesting and well made real ale the better! I don't package into many casks but 2026 will see Dookit Brewing increase its real ale production with a cask washer now in place and new firkins on their way. I feel positive and passionate about what the future holds for Glasgow's real ale scene and I'm proud to be a part of it."

I noticed that the three styles of the festival's flagship brews are all traditional British and European styles. Do you think that our British/European heritage beers are having a bit of a renaissance at the moment?

(Harry): "I certainly hope so! Dookit Brewing specialises in British styles and UK sourced ingredients, so the more interest in these kinds of beers the better for business. In all honesty I feel like traditional styles have never fallen out of fashion as such, but sometimes overshadowed by New World trends. Enough new and older breweries alike are championing styles like milds, shilling ales and bitters to keep quality and interest up."

(Phil): "Yes - which is fantastic. There are so many great styles to explore and to bring into the spotlight, and people really love them. Scottish Export/80 Shilling is a great example - it goes down really well whenever we brew it and if we had a bigger brewery I'd make it part of our core range..."



Cont...

Another example would be Sahti - a Finnish farmhouse ale that's one of our most recent releases. It's a great tasting beer that's hardly ever seen, but people are keen to try it. I love a hoppy, hazy Pale Ale as much as anyone else but it's not always what my palate craves, and obviously plenty of other people feel the same way."

As small brewers, what would you like to see from CAMRA with regards to supporting local breweries, pubs, and community-focused beer culture in Glasgow?

(Phil): "What you're doing here is great - helping people find out about what we're up to and keeping the small independent breweries in the spotlight is really appreciated. Keep highlighting the benefits of supporting small, local businesses doing things the right way - taking the time, using the best ingredients and putting product quality ahead of everything else. Doing the festivals, singing the praises, making connections, all of that is really important."

What's one myth about cask ale you wish would die, and conversely one beer tradition that you hope never changes?

(Harry): "That it is a cheap and non-premium product. Far too many cask ale breweries have closed their doors due to a 'race to the bottom' mentality when it comes to cask ale pricing. So many great pubs understand the premium quality of good real ale, and they promote this fact by keeping and serving it well, and charging a fair price. The drinker respects this and 9 times out of 10 they will be happy to pay the extra £1 or £2 a pint, especially for something rare and of superior quality. We need committed and bold pub landlords to do this. We are so lucky to have a great handful of pubs doing so in Glasgow, but there's always room for more, especially as I am planning to grow cask production at Dookit Brewing this year."

(Phil): "I hope people never stop buying beer in rounds - it's a big part of the pub experience. It shows a level of trust and there's an idea of friendship being more important than money; you might end up paying a bit more than your fair share, but the experience of being together is more important, and it'll likely come back around next time any way."

A myth that I'd like to see disappear is that cask is cheap to produce! We have to accept that we make a fair bit less money if we put beer in a cask than a keg or a can. There are reasons for this, and I get it. But there are good reasons why it should be more expensive too. Perhaps there should be more of a price range - expecting a 3.5% Best Bitter to be roughly the same price as 6.0% NEIPA is not realistic and there should be room for both."

And finally, tell us a little bit about your future plans to scale up the festival/turn it in to a regular thing.

(Phil): "We're hoping that in February 2027 we'll hold an event in Glasgow where some of the best Proper Lagers and Winter Ales from all over the UK will be pouring, and yes every year from then on - why not?!"

(Harry): "Next year we will host the festival at an appropriate venue in Glasgow and invite a decent amount of other breweries from Glasgow and further afield to participate. They will be asked to bring a Winter ale and/ or proper lager, which they have been making over the Winter months. It'll be a great excuse to explore fascinating lager beer and dark seasonal ales- not to mention coming together to celebrate the end of Winter and a sometimes tricky time for the trade."



STF and DOOKIT BREWING
will launch their new beer

Double Dark Mild
and introduce a new annual beer event

FEBRUARIA
Celebrating Winter Ales & Proper Lagers

on Saturday 7th February at
Koelschip Yard, Clockwork and
The Old Toll Bar

Order a pint of Double Dark Mild in all three pubs
and we'll send you a Februa T-shirt

SPRING TAPROOMS COMMUNITY | BEER | DOING GOOD

MARCH 2026

Thurs 5th - 6-10pm
Foodbank Poker Night

Fri 6th - 5-11pm
Community Taproom
IPA Extravaganza

Sat 7th - 2-11pm
6 Nations Mega Charity Day

APRIL 2026

Thurs 2nd - 6-10pm
Foodbank Boardgame Night!

Fri 3rd - 5-11pm
Community Taproom
Easter Brews

Sat 4th - 5-11pm
Easter Vinyl Night!



MAY 2026

Thurs 7th - 6-10pm
Foodbank Poker Night

Fri 8th - 5-11pm
Community Taproom
Spring Brews

Sat 9th - 5-11pm
Andy's Big Cookout!

**SAVE
THE DATES!**

JUNE 2026

Thurs 4nd - 6-10pm
Foodbank Boardgame Night!

Fri 5rd - 5-10pm &
Sat 6th - 5-10pm
Dumbarton Beer Festival
celebrating local
breweries

FEBRUA SOCIAL

About twelve or more visited all three venues with others joining at their preferred pub. It was a quiet relaxing start at the **Old Toll Bar (1 Paisley Rd W, Glasgow G51 1LF)**, a beautifully restored Victorian bar in the south side of Glasgow, before taking a bus towards Strathbungo and the **Koelschip Yard (686-688 Pollokshaws Rd, Glasgow G41 2QB)**; another cosy beer lovers' bar in the south side of the city. Here we settled down to watch the rugby and finished up drowned our sorrows as we watched Scotland splash about in Rome and sink to the Italians. It was then off to **Clockwork (1153-1155 Cathcart Rd, Glasgow G42 9HB)** where most of us got a welcome bite to eat and settled to watch the second match England/Wales and enjoy the beers.

Clockwork was bought by the local Murphy family in December 2024, who are working tirelessly to help get it back to being one of it not the best pub in the Southside. Clockwork once brewed their own beer in-house. Rumours (or is it wishful thinking?) that they might start producing their own once again (in house or off site?), and maybe I could get a refill of my mini keg... Beer fans taking part in the festival trail to enjoy these Februa beers could also collect stamps, and send off a completed card to receive a limited-edition Februa t-shirt celebrating year one of the festival.

(By Derek Middlemiss.)

[Ed. - Derek mailed to say that if anyone wants to have that wee Clockwork keg as a collectible item of Glasgow breweriana, just to let him know!]



Cont...





KEEPING THE PUB RELEVANT: COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CAMRA'S NEXT CHAPTER

By **James Kirkham**, co-owner of **Big Six Inn**, Halifax; an independently owned, award-winning, terraced house pub (featured in the Good Beer Guide 2026 and host to five cask ale lines).

Pubs, Pints & Places on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@wandojames>

<https://www.facebook.com/bigsixinnhalifax>



I didn't set out to criticise CAMRA. I started a YouTube channel because I love pubs. I co-own the Big Six Inn in Halifax - a traditional real ale pub with history, regulars, stories in the walls, and the steady rhythm that only a lived-in local can have. Running a pub in 2026 is not theoretical. It's practical, daily, and sometimes precarious. Margins are tight. Staffing is complex. Energy costs fluctuate. Consumer habits shift. But what keeps me optimistic isn't economics. It's people.

That's where I believe CAMRA's future strength lies too.

The Campaign That Changed Everything

It's impossible to talk about pubs without acknowledging what CAMRA achieved. The preservation of cask ale wasn't inevitable. The fight against homogenised beer in the 1970s mattered enormously. Without that campaigning energy, thousands more pubs would likely have disappeared, and Britain's brewing landscape would be far poorer.

CAMRA's legacy is real and significant. But movements built to solve one era's crisis inevitably face a different challenge in the next. In the 1970s, the problem was declining beer quality and corporate standardisation. In the 2020s, the problem is disengagement. Younger drinkers are not walking away because they dislike beer. They're walking away from anything that feels closed, procedural, or unwelcoming. That distinction matters.

The Real Challenge: Relevance

The pub industry isn't in quiet terminal decline. It is changing. Drinking habits are different. People drink less frequently, but often better. Choice has exploded. Social media shapes perception. Cost of living pressures

influence how and where people go out. But the appetite for shared spaces - real-world, analogue, human spaces - has not disappeared. If anything, after years of lockdowns and digital saturation, it has strengthened.

The question for CAMRA isn't "How do we defend tradition?" It's "How do we stay relevant to people who didn't grow up with it?" Relevance doesn't require abandoning principle. It requires expanding invitation.



Cont...

Small-Scale Connection Works

From my own experience - both running a pub and speaking to drinkers across the country - smaller, social, low-pressure gatherings are often far more effective than formal structures. Not large festivals. Not committee-heavy meetings. Not rulebook debates.

But: Informal pub meet-ups. Evenings focused on conversation rather than campaigning. Brewery visits where the story matters as much as the beer. Collaborations with modern venues rather than quiet suspicion of them. When people feel socially welcome, intellectual engagement follows. It rarely works the other way around.

In my pub, what keeps people coming back isn't simply the beer list. It's the atmosphere. The familiarity. The sense that someone will notice if you're missing. CAMRA's branches that lean into this social warmth - especially for new members - are likely to thrive.

Stories Over Scoring

Modern drinkers connect with narrative. They want to know: Who runs this pub? Why does this beer exist? What makes this place different? What happens if it closes? They are less motivated by scoring systems or internal policy discussions. That doesn't mean those tools are irrelevant. But they are not the gateway. The gateway is experience.

If CAMRA positions itself not just as the guardian of a beer format, but as the champion of pubs as living social spaces, it broadens its appeal instantly.



Bridging an Imagined Divide

There is sometimes a perception of tension between traditional real ale culture and modern craft beer venues - cask versus keg, heritage versus innovation. Most drinkers do not experience this divide. Many younger drinkers I speak to will happily move between a well-kept pint of bitter and a modern hazy pale. What they value is quality, authenticity, and atmosphere. They are far less concerned with factional identity.

CAMRA doesn't need to dilute its focus on cask ale to recognise that pub culture itself is wider than one dispense method. If branches collaborate with a broader range of venues - without losing their core identity - they position themselves as connectors rather than gatekeepers. And connectors are always more attractive than gatekeepers.

Understanding the Modern Pub Economy

Running a pub in 2025 involves navigating complexities that aren't always visible from the bar. Business rates, supplier relationships, staffing pressures, rising costs - all of these shape decisions. When occasional drinkers visit once or twice a year and express surprise at pricing or policies, it highlights something important: there is often a gap in understanding about how modern pubs actually function.

Cont...

This is an area where CAMRA could play a powerful role - not as a critic, but as an interpreter. Explaining why certain pricing structures exist. Helping members understand margin realities. Championing good practice in a way that supports operators rather than alienates them. When pub owners feel understood rather than scrutinised, collaboration becomes easier.

Welcoming the Next Generation

Membership demographics are a sensitive topic, but avoiding the conversation doesn't solve it. If younger drinkers perceive CAMRA as inward-looking or resistant to change, they simply won't engage. But if they see it as open, curious, and socially welcoming, many would likely find it aligns with their values. Young people care deeply about: Independent business. Local identity. Craft and quality. Sustainability. Community. These are not alien to CAMRA's mission. In many ways, they are perfectly aligned. The task is one of tone and accessibility, not ideology. An open invite is more powerful than a closed circle.

The Pub as Social Infrastructure

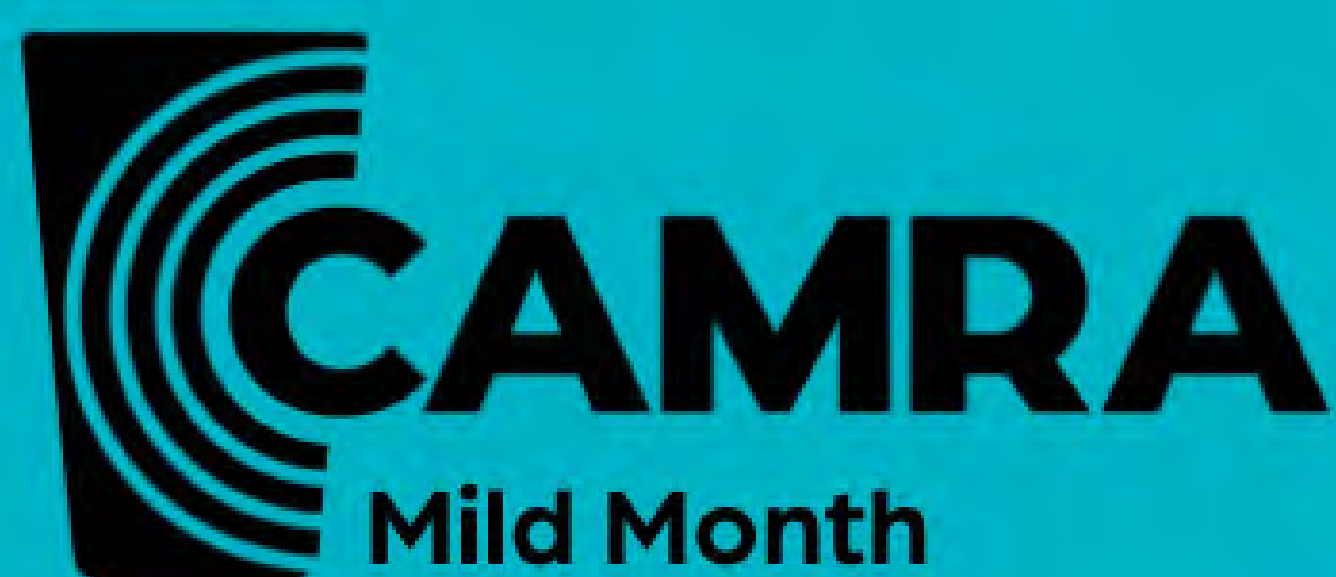
Pubs are more than retail spaces. They are informal community hubs. They host birthday gatherings, wake receptions, charity nights, quiet midweek conversations. They provide continuity in towns and cities that are constantly changing. When a pub closes, something social disappears that cannot easily be replaced. CAMRA has long understood this at a campaigning level. But there is an opportunity now to communicate it in human terms rather than technical ones. Tell more stories. Highlight publicans. Celebrate volunteers. Show the lived reality of a thriving local. Stories build empathy. Empathy builds support.

A Constructive Future

None of this requires dramatic reinvention. It requires small shifts: Prioritising social welcome. Communicating with warmth rather than formality. Engaging modern venues without suspicion. Explaining economic realities clearly. Inviting younger drinkers into conversation. Branches experimenting in these areas are likely to find new energy. Branches that remain solely inward-facing risk stagnation. The pub is not finished. It is evolving. The organisations that evolve with it - while staying rooted in their core values - will continue to matter. CAMRA has the credibility, the history, and the national reach to act as a bridge between generations of drinkers.

The opportunity is there. And from the perspective of someone running a traditional real ale pub in 2026, I genuinely hope it seizes it.

[Ed. - I'm a longtime viewer of James' channel; his videos provide a relaxing glimpse in to the running a real ale pub in the modern age. Last month, he uploaded a series of videos in which he discussed the future of CAMRA. After watching, I contacted him to propose condensing his points in to an article for The Guzzler. I agree wholeheartedly with what he has to say here, and I strongly believe that ongoing relevancy via social connection and authenticity is key to the success of our branch.]



Make yours a mild this May
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ALES FROM THE DARK SIDE!

CAMRA is as significant (if not synonymous) to beer and pubs as the IAM is to driving and road safety. The struggle to ensure real cask ale is still produced and available nationally having been achieved, the focus switched to having real ale recognised with a UNESCO heritage status classification. More recently, the temporary easing of tax burdens on pubs during, and post, COVID is due to be lifted and pub landlords need our support in having that extended or reduced in order to survive and continue trading.



Meanwhile, a potentially worrying trend is taking place and threatening to supplant cask ale once again. I refer of course to the nitrofication of erstwhile real ales. Whilst CAMRA fought off and reversed the trend of the brewing behemoths trying to supplant real ale in the 70's with carbonated Double Diamond style 'keg' beer, the wheel seems to have turned full circle with nitro infused ales and stouts threatening the traditional 'cask' ale once again.



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Nothing beats a pint of Titanic Plum Porter, hand pulled fresh from the cask. Well, almost nothing. As the pictured promotional advert states: "Over the next few weeks, Plum Porter Nitro will be pouring in Castle Pubs, bringing a smooth new twist to one of Britain's most loved porters. Brewed to showcase deep, warming flavours. The rich, roasty flavours of a porter lend themselves perfectly to a silky-smooth mouthfeel, crowned with a sweet, creamy head. So how do we achieve that smoothness? The secret lies in something incredibly small - nitrogen. At Titanic, our keg stouts and porters are infused with nitrogen to create finer bubbles, resulting in a perfectly balanced pint with a luxuriously smooth texture from first sip to last."

So, Titanic Brewery that they plan to make their nationally acclaimed Plum Porter a nitro keg option at their brewery owned pubs. They already produce Plum Porter in nitro cans through their online shop. Should I find both cask and keg versions of this fine porter at any pub in the future (and I may be visiting Stoke on Trent this April), I shall have a pint of both and report back with my findings!

This nitro 'threat' full circle has been fully played out with Boddingtons and it's recent re-emergence as a much loved cask ale. Produced in cask for many years, the 'cream' of Manchester disappeared as their parent brewery transitioned solely to supplying nitro 'keg'. That was soon discontinued, perhaps due to the canned version from supermarkets largely replicating the pub product?

A visit to Manchester in January this year had me seeking out cask 'Boddies' at JW Lee's flagship pub in central Manchester (Founders Hall). It was being heavily promoted at that pub and hopefully will be shipped country wide - in due course. How does it compare to the original? I'm not sure it's as moreish as the original but it's a good start from JW Lee's who'll hopefully improve this brew and perhaps even bring out a reserve version!

(By Dark Side, our mystery contributor.)

[Ed. - Dark Side makes a salient point; the 'stout wars' of the last few years have resulted in a marked increase of nitro dark beers in our pubs. What do you think this means for the future of real ale? Will expanded appreciation of creamier, less carbonated products lead more consumers to try cask ale? Or is this another step in the widespread commodification of live beer?]



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CHANGING OF THE GUARD: INTERVIEW WITH SCOTLAND'S OUTGOING REGIONAL DIRECTOR

The **Guzzler** caught up with Stuart McMahon, the outgoing Regional Director of CAMRA Scotland, to have a chat about his experience in the role over the past four years.

So what first attracted you to CAMRA? And eventually to taking on the role of Regional Director?

"Back in the 80s, the chair and treasurer of my local RSPB group were CAMRA members, and they usually provided a polypin of Marston's Pedigree at the group's Xmas parties. I enjoyed it, and so when I was at the University of Stirling in the late 80s I always hunted out real ales in some local pubs – predominantly Maclays 70/-, 80/-, and even 90/- occasionally.

Roll on to 2010 and Facebook was just getting popular, and the Ayrshire & Wigtownshire CAMRA branch had started a page, and after commenting on a post with Bob Wallace, he said to come and say "hello" at the festival, which I did. One of the first questions he asked was what I did as a day job (graphic design) and would I be interested in producing the 2011 festival logo. The rest, they say, is history. I took over editing **Full Pints** magazine in Autumn 2013 from Graeme Watt, and I'm still the editor today, having won numerous awards for it.



As for taking on the Regional Director role in 2022, I'd been attending a few SNIB meetings beforehand to get a feel for the 'bigger picture' of CAMRA in Scotland and to help with finding news and items for Full Pints. I was made redundant in the Autumn of 2021, and whilst hoping to look for new employment early in 2022, the RD role became vacant and a few folk suggested that I should take it on... which I did in February 2022, taking over from Joe Crawford who'd been the RD during the whole of our COVID lockdowns – his first physical meeting was actually his last one and where I was elected to take over!"

What do you see short term and long term for real ale in Scotland? Will cask always have a place, and is a full revival possible?

"I think cask will always have a place, but in Scotland the attitude and support for it is far more limited than you can find further south - it's never been the dominant drink up here. We've plenty of brewers, but they need outlets to sell their products, and there's not a lot of encouragement from publicans for them to produce cask ales as well as beers in kegged and small pack formats. Short term, with the current lack of support by governments for the industry, I think we'll find a bit of consolidation in the market with several brewers and pubs sadly closing down due to unaffordable costs. Long term, who knows? We need a complete overhaul of the business rates and taxation system for hospitality and brewers to make a big difference, because without it, customers will be priced out of socialising."

Do you think CAMRA should start taking a more pragmatic approach to the wider 'craft beer' trend? How can the organisation adapt and evolve to include the wider craft beer community (and indeed, should it?). If so, how would you approach this?

Cont...

"CAMRA already supports a wide range of 'craft beers' – such as live beer in membrane kegs, or can-conditioned ales. BUT, there's a lot of education needed as to identifying such beers as being 'real' – both from improved labelling and advertising by brewers for the public at the point of sale, and in showing CAMRA members why certain beer styles are more suited to, say, membrane keg. CAMRA's Learn & Discover Bars at larger festivals are one small way of being able to compare different formats, often with surprising results. The rebranding in 2025 was hoped to be the start of a move away from purely 'real ale' by dropping the full organisation name that was in the old logo, to being just "CAMRA", an organisation that supports all consumers, pubs, clubs and beers, whilst still being primarily cask-led behind the name."

What project(s)/development(s) from your time as RD are you most proud of?

"It was great to be involved in the 50th anniversary of CAMRA in Scotland in 2024 and to present a number of special awards to members across the country for their service to CAMRA over the 50 years. The anniversary event in the Bon Accord, Glasgow was a great day which was attended by a couple of the founders. The other event that was memorable was the return of the successful Members' Weekend to Dundee in April 2024 (having also been involved with it in 2019)."



What practical lessons would you pass on to your successor about managing volunteers and sustaining momentum?

"Be visible to branches, and be a good and prompt communicator with them. As one of my friends often says, "How do you know so many folk?" – just by being visible and chatty with everyone. The key to branch successes and momentum in my mind is by holding regular socials and using social media regularly – i.e. making yourself visible to the public. The branches that have adopted this approach during my term as RD have seen a big difference in the number of members attending socials and becoming active."

[Pictured: Stuart back in 2022, accepting the RD role from incumbent Joe Crawford.]

How have Scottish pubs and breweries changed during your tenure, and what trends worry or excite you most?

"We've lost a few bigger breweries during my tenure – e.g. Kelburn, Windswept and Ayr, but others seem to be holding on for now. There's certainly more experimentation happening now with regular 'one off' beers, rather than sticking with a small core range of ales. My own preference is for 'normal' ales – yes, I know, "what is a 'normal' ale?" I hear you say!!! It's hard to beat Timothy Taylor's Landlord or Swannay's Scapa Special when they're in really good condition. I'm not a fan of the current trend of thick, muddy, brightly coloured, often sour, ales with wacky ingredients. But like all beer styles, things go round in circles and there's more interest now in traditional styles like Milds, Bitters and even Stouts these days, that give the mass-produced products a good run for their money."

Which local campaigns (e.g., pub preservation, real ale promotion, licensing issues) do you think need urgent attention now?

"We've got to keep reminding our elected members to try and get changes to business rates and taxation systems for breweries from the governments. At a local level, the best thing folk can do is to visit their local pubs – use them or lose them – and by doing so that can help with real ale promotion. Chat with the other regulars about the ales (if available), and score your beers every time you're in a pub."

Cont...



How effective do you think has CAMRA been at engaging younger drinkers and new audiences in Scotland?

"There has been limited success at engaging younger drinkers so far – we need some young folk in a role who can interact and understand what young people are looking for, rather than the older generation who think they know, but really don't. Plenty of young folk attend our festivals, along with the many independent and trendy 'craft beer' festivals, but very few want to get involved in campaigning within the branches. This isn't just an issue within CAMRA and Scotland, but across the UK, and other organisations have similar challenges in attracting younger folk.

Spare time and work/life balance is often at a premium these days for younger folk who can't commit to a regular involvement. CAMRA needs to have a visible presence at some of the newer independent festivals just to keep getting our name across to the attendees."

RD is an intensive role! How do you find the time? And what do you do to take your mind off CAMRA stuff?

"Outwith CAMRA, I play the pipe organ every week in my local church and am the 'IT guy' for setting up the weekly livestreams and powerpoints for the services. I've also got a portable organ keyboard beside my computer at home for practising on as well. Out and about I do a lot of bird-watching and photography – if it moves I like to know what it is, whether that be a bird, boat, plane or train!"



[Pictured: Stuart presenting CBOS 2025.]

And finally, tell us some of your favourite real ale pubs from around Scotland's different branch areas.

"There's so many – I was in 218 unique pubs across the UK in 2025! Our current Scottish Pub of the Year, Staggs Bar in Musselburgh is fantastic, as was last year's winner the Hillend Tavern in Fife. The Black Isle Bar in Inverness is a great pub, especially for their pizzas! In Glasgow, the Pot Still is fab, as is the Koelschip Yard, and Tennents out in the West End. In my own area, I've got to say the Twa Dugs in West Kilbride and Number 47 in Troon are always good, as is the wonderful Steam Packet Inn, Isle of Whithorn – taproom for the Five Kingdoms brewery and some fantastic food."

The Glasgow & West of Scotland branch thanks Stuart for taking taking the time to do this interview, and for his tireless work over the past four years as Scotland's Regional Director!



Ask MSPs to
support pubs in the
Scottish Budget





HOW DO WE GET MORE WOMEN INTERESTED IN REAL ALE?

How do we get more women interested in real ale?

This is something I've heard a number of times since joining the Campaign for Real Ale in 2025. There is a real push to improve diversity among CAMRA members, at least in the local branch. This is partly in response to the stereotype which paints beer-drinking as the sport of the older white man – a category that more than 75% of CAMRA members fall into (CAMRA IDE Report, 2023). But mostly, in my opinion, this push is a result of a genuine interest in improving gender representation in the group.



[Pictured: Three women chatting and drinking in Track Brewing Taproom, Manchester. Reproduced with permission from CAMRA archival images.]

So, as one of a few women to attend local branch meetings and social events, I've found this question floated my way on more than one occasion.

Truthfully, this is a difficult question to answer. I

certainly cannot speak for every woman in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. However, I would suggest that to begin to answer that question, there are other questions that we must ask first. Like, how does gender impact experiences of the pub environment?

There are many things that make up our experience when we go to the pub. This might be where we go, who we go with, or the feeling it brings us. Our experiences are also made up of who we are on an individual level, what social groups we identify with, and which parts of us become important to the specific set of circumstances we find ourselves in. Gender is one part of our social identity that can become important in the context of the pub, although men, women, transgender and non-binary people might find this to varying degrees.

When we think about who we are as a group, we might think about being a group of people who enjoy real ale. At times, however, situations may occur on a night out that cause people to shift between one identity and another: from belonging to a group of real ale drinkers to belonging to a specific gender group. For a person who identifies as non-binary or transgender, this may be visiting the bathroom. For a person who identifies as female, this might be triggered by concerns about personal safety.

In CAMRA's 2023 IDE Report, when participants were asked about their feelings of safety and inclusion at CAMRA events, most participants said that this wasn't something they had considered. This may reflect the main pool of participants who took part in the survey, of which over 80% were men.

On the other hand, female participants raised concerns about sexist imagery in pubs, feeling patronised when being offered wine or halves instead of pints, and worrying about whether venues were in safe travel locations. Considering the social pressure that is often placed on women to take responsibility for their own safety, and the blame that is at times attributed to women who experience assault, women may find their attention on a night out split between enjoying a drink and managing risk (Nicholls, 2019).

Additionally, for some age groups, there can be gender differences relating to feelings of belonging in the space. A recent study on pub culture in the UK found that older people often drew comparisons between their present day and early adulthood pub experiences (Thurnell-Read, 2024). For some, this was associated with feelings of nostalgia and social connection. However, older women recalled being excluded from pub environments.

Cont...



This was partly due to the social stigma surrounding female pub-goers, who risked raising questions about their respectability or attracting unwanted male attention, and partly due to the presence of male-exclusive spaces until around 50 years ago.

A famous example is that of The Grill pub in Aberdeen. Established in 1870 when gentleman's clubs were rife, the pub donned a "no ladies please" sign in the window until the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. Two years prior, in 1973, a group of women entered the pub despite the sign in the window. They were refused service, and after refusing to leave, the police were called to break up the protest. Although the 1975 legislation made it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sex in the provision of goods and services, the same pub only installed a women's toilet in 1998.



[Pictured: The women who stormed The Grill bar, Aberdeen, in 1973. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Aberdeen Trades Union Council.]

Experiences like this historically shaped women's behaviour by creating a difference in opportunity and exposure to pub environments. This in turn has shaped the behaviour of younger generations of women, who have learned what is appropriate and expected of women by watching their mothers and grandmothers. Although legislation has changed, the expectations placed on women and passed down through generations continue to impact how women relate to historically male-dominated spaces.

So, how do we improve gender diversity in the group? Safety, inclusion, and belonging are a few themes that appear when looking at gender differences in the pub experience. A good starting point might be to seek female

opinions, to explore specific concerns and experiences, and to understand what safety, inclusion and belonging might look like for women, including transwomen and non-binary people.

This is a social change in progress, and it's likely to take some time. In the meantime, it's important to remember that gender is only one part of our social identity and is only one of many different factors that can influence our experiences of the pub environment. The reality is, no two people will experience the environment in the exact same way.

I can say that I've only ever had positive experiences at CAMRA events, and that it's refreshing to hear people asking about ways to make change - even if I don't have all the answers.

(By Teri Beveridge.)



[Pictured: Members of the trade union in 2023 unveiling a plaque commemorating 50 years since the end of the 'men only' policy. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Aberdeen Trades Union Council.]



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REAL ALE FINDER: CHATTING WITH THE FOUNDERS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY REAL ALE APP

Real Ale Finder is a free app for pubs and people who love cask ale and cider. It features inventory management for the pub, and real time notifications for the customer. **The Guzzler** spoke to founders Kenny and Jenny Brunton to learn more about the history of the app, and their plans for its future.

There's no other app like RAF on the market right now. Give us a brief overview of its history. How did you come up with the idea?

"...This isn't a brief overview!

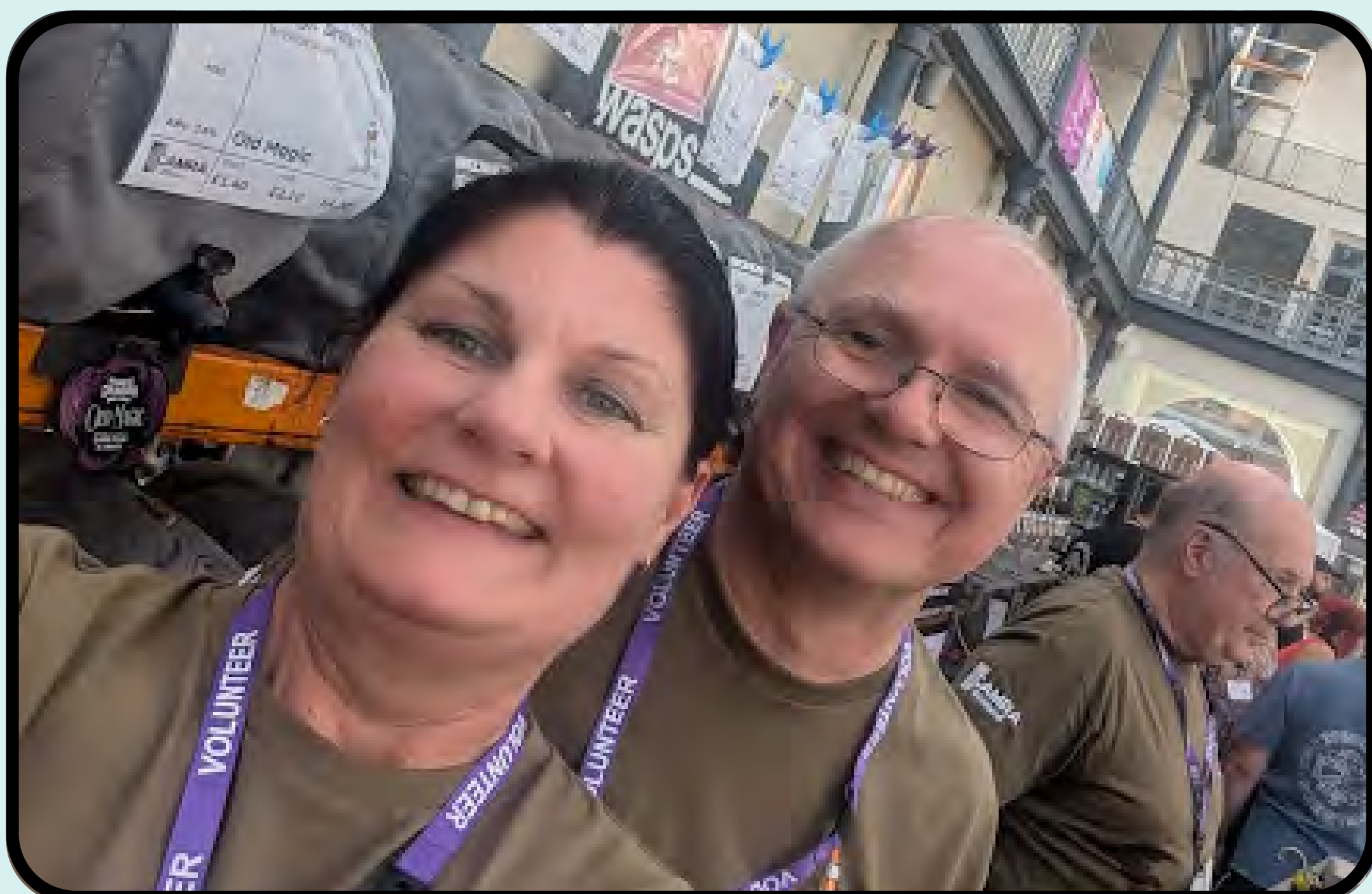
The original idea goes as far back as 2001 when I built a mobile site called ukpubs.org that ran on the basic internet connectivity phones had at the time. However, the technology wasn't ready and life got in the way! Skip forward to around ten years ago and Jenny and I were in Nuneaton one Sunday calling pubs in the towns nearby to find out what beers they had on. We could catch a train somewhere for the day but had to choose. If only there was an app, but how could we persuade pubs to keep a beer list up to date? Make it easy and fast.

I started building an app (web based) that could be trained to recognise pump clips. No artificial intelligence involved, but it worked pretty good and it was not long after we started hanging out at Lord Hop in Nuneaton and got talking to the landlord at the time (Baz) who was very enthusiastic. Over the months it progressed (still web based) and I added a TV/digital menu running on a Raspberry Pi for the pub. Basic chalkboard but updates instantly via the app.

There's no customer app at this point and it's in use in one pub. At this point I moved it over to an Android native platform (app dev was basically my day job at the time). It grew up, got a logo and a name: "Real Ale Finder". Life again gets in the way and we're moving up to Scotland and the pub app gets released the following August. The Black Horse in Preston is the first pub to download the publicly available app. There's still no customer app and there won't be until the following January and shortly after a web based beer board for pubs. The Android customer app came next and by this time we were receiving pressure to get an iOS version of both apps out. I was previously a cross platform developer so that's exactly what happened and not long after we went into lockdown!

It took a while to recover from the effects of the pandemic and to be honest we weren't sure that we would. A lot has happened since then, we continue to grow and have met some amazing people and visited fantastic pubs along the way. Pubs and customers have very much been a part of guiding how the apps develop - their feedback directly shapes the direction we take."

Tell us about the new version you're working on. In what ways does it improve on the older version?



"The new version is the customer apps (Android/iOS) and I'm developing them both in parallel. They'll be more modern with bottom navigation, dark theme and better search and filter options across the app. Additionally, missing attributes such as short style description (e.g. Session IPA) and allergen info. The iOS version has always be a little behind and didn't have a logbook so that will be rectified. There are numerous smaller enhancements and possibly some new areas of the app."

Cont...



Followers Leaderboard	
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The Tamworth Tap ★★★★ Tamworth B79 7LR	325
The Cricketers Arms St Helens WA10 2EB	204
Holly Bush Inn Belper DE56 0RX	162
The Black Country Arms Walsall WS1 1QW	152
Market Tavern Tap Atherstone CV9 1ET	149
Guild Ale House Preston PR1 1DD	146
The Griffin Inn Shustoke B46 2LB	140
The Vine Inn Wednesfield WV11 1TN	139
The Hop Inn Hornchurch RM11 1SU	135

How do you market to pubs and motivate them to sign up?

"This is mostly word of mouth, social media, pub to pub or through the help of some very enthusiastic individuals to which we're truly in debt. We don't have a marketing team so we have to visit pubs and tell them about the app."

Have you encountered resistance from publicans, and what are the most common objections?

"Not resistance as such, but we have encountered some who think it's too much work and that they're too busy. I remember a Derby pub that resisted for this reason, eventually joined due to customer pressure and are now one of the most prolific users on the app. It really works for them."

What advice would you give a publican who's skeptical that an app can drive meaningful revenue?

"Try it. Although I would add that it needs to be given a proper chance. If they update regularly and make sure the customers are aware it does work. We provide tools to print a QR poster, templates for social media etc to help."

Can you share an example where a pub used the app in a creative way to attract customers?

"One recent example is The Cricketers Arms in St Helens who have gone to the effort of having a large Real Ale Finder banner made up and draped across the wall. They also have posters and blackboards around the pub telling customers to get on the app and regularly mention RAF in their social media posts. It's clearly working for them because they have a huge number of followers."

How do you keep things relevant to both long-time CAMRA members and younger drinkers?

"We keep it relevant by making it practical and useful for everyone - it tells you what's on right now and where. CAMRA members get the detail and accuracy; younger drinkers get quick discovery with clear cues like visuals and filters. And as we modernise the customer app UI, it stays familiar for regulars but feels current for new users. We've also tried to make it easy for CAMRA members to submit their beer scores by having a link to the CAMRA page for each pub."

Have you seen the app influence beer culture or pub habits?

"I do think some people use apps to decide where to go for a beer more these days and our intention is to provide reliable real time information. We have a traffic light system on the app which is why we encourage pubs to stay in the green and up to date."

How do you fund all the development and maintenance?

"The app development and running is partly funded through advertising and subscriptions. In terms of ads we use Google's ad network on the web beer boards, customer and pub apps. It's tried and tested as I used to run a website with AdSense many years ago. It has it's issues and doesn't perform as well as it used to, but..."



Cont...



...it makes a significant contribution. The customer apps have a subscription option to remove the ads for a whole year for the price of a pint. We also offer pubs the option to subscribe to our premium service which includes a TV / digital menu feed and website integration options as well as no ads. This subscription costs just £50 a year and is far cheaper than our competitors."



What's the proudest moment you've had since launching?

"CAMRA Pub of the year 2024 - three out of the four pubs were on Real Ale Finder. Tamworth Tap won this year for the third time, having been with us a long time. Extremely high beer turnover and still kept up to date. Actually... we were invited to Titanic's 40th and that was pretty cool. Our favourite beer is Plum Porter and having a few beers in Burslem the night before with the boss was the icing on the cake."

What are your future plans for the app?

"We'll be spending more time keeping the customer apps up to date. But will revisit the pub apps too. There are a lot of features that are being asked for such as multi-site and I'd like to do some work on the sharing templates. Our back end tools are evolving as we automate processes to help us add new beers faster. We intend to continue growing though and to maintain the high standards that our users have come to expect."

How do you plan to handle competition from other platforms, such as Untappd?

"I think we can coexist as we offer different things. Whilst we don't have badges and check ins for customers we do provide near real time beer information and we are hoping our new app will be seen as a very useful tool. In terms of pubs, we think that we provide a low cost alternative. Pubs have had a rough few years and are continuing to face challenges and we think our premium options are very competitive. However, pubs that don't want or need these options can still benefit from using our service."

And finally, what do you want the Glasgow CAMRA community to know that they might not already?

"Give the app a try, it's free and you've got nothing to lose. Chat to pubs that are already using the app. If you are using the customer app, give your local pub a follow!"

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A CHAT WITH WETHERSPOON WATCH

Wetherspoon Watch is a Facebook page created and maintained by Glasgow & West of Scotland branch members Paul Murray and Martin Dryden.

The Guzzler spoke to Paul and Martin about their page; we explored its history, highlights, future plans, and talked about the impact and role of Wetherspools in Scotland's pub culture today.

www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=10005766251260 (or search Wetherspoon Watch on FB)



Tell us a bit about Wetherspoon Watch; what is its purpose, and what made you decide to start the page?

"Unsurprisingly, it has always been about the beer. Namely, the taste and quality of the ales on that day. There was no such medium, Wetherspoon-wide, where consumers could rate the ales at each pub. I had hoped that contributors from around the UK could also add posts of their own as indeed some other sites allow, but there seemed no option to incorporate that function as I set up the page."

"Sadly, it's just Martin and myself who can only post new articles with our followers limited to commenting on our input. I should point out that we concentrate on newer ales that we've not seen or reviewed before, hence the somewhat sporadic frequency of posts."

Do you have a favourite 'Spoons from our branch area? What branches in particular do you think are doing a good job of keeping ale at the forefront of their priorities?

"The **Sir John Moore (260 Argyle St, Glasgow G2 8QW)** pub in Glasgow, although not the company's flagship pub in Glasgow, does seem to regularly stock the beers we want and present it in a consistently good condition. **The Hengler's Circus (351 Sauchiehall St, Glasgow G2 3HU)** does seem to have improved their cellar management of late and we are slowly returning there on a regular basis."

What are some of your favourite beers that have been on at 'Spoons over the winter period? What ones have had the best response from your community?



"The Christmas beers this year have been somewhat uninspiring. That could be due to there being no JW Lees' Plum pudding ale this year! It would seem their brewing schedule fell outside Wetherspools' procurement window. JW Lees' own strict brewing timeline make this fine ale only available for some 6 weeks during the Christmas period."

It sometimes seems trendy for people to hold a "Neverspoons" attitude, but the fact is - 'Spoons are affordable, safe, clean, widespread, and keep good ale. What is your opinion of the role of Wetherspools in Scotland's pub industry?

"The Neverspoons phenomenon took hold during COVID. Media scare stories painted Sir Tim Martin in a particularly bad light just before the furlough scheme rescued the economy..."

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Wetherspoons is not as respected by CAMRA as it should be. Apparently, they do not reclaim the value of our 50p vouchers from CAMRA and absorb the cost of that promotion themselves. But the Neverspooners simply allow us ardent 'Spooners' a clear and free run at the bar! Long may their blinkered approach make my life easier."

To what extent do you think that 'Spoons helps to promote independent Scottish breweries and local cask culture in Scotland? Is there anything they could be doing better, in your opinion?

"As with all 'Spoons in other regions, they do source ales from local brewers which are not generally available throughout the UK. Ditto for craft ale in a can. They do support and stock many Scottish beers."

Wetherspoons has campaigned on VAT and highlighted tax disparities between pubs and supermarkets. How do those tax structures play out on the ground in Scotland?

"This is Sir Tim's main bugbear. Tax disparities with supermarkets aside, UK pubs are hammered with taxes on hospitality in comparison to other mainland Euro countries. The Scottish Parliament's legislation on minimum unit pricing has put Scottish Wetherspoons out of kilter with the rest of the UK, as well as making CAMRA's 50p vouchers redundant in some of the rural branches. My own local Spoons can no longer accept them due to their prices being so low in comparison to the dearer city pubs."

Recent governmental policy changes have prompted substantial increases in Spoons pricing. What do you think is going to be the longer term effects of this? If you could ask the government for one concrete policy change to help pubs and ale drinkers, what would it be and why?

"Increases towards staff NI contributions will result in higher prices, thats just commercial reality. Wetherspoons will weather out this particular storm and still be competing with their real ale pricing. I'm convinced the real ale prices are subsidised by the lager drinkers, and possibly even the J20 soft drinkers. The alcohol taxes and local business rates by councils needs reducing. Pubs are essential community hubs and an integral part of our society and need special protection."

What are your opinions on CAMRA's real ale vouchers? Do you think they are widely utilised by our members? What could we do to raise more awareness of them, and to get our members using them more? Personally, I feel that they're a great conversational tool to increase membership - I frequently get people asking me what they are, and saying they're going to sign up to take advantage of the great deal they provide.

"For me personally, they are an essential incentive to continue on with my CAMRA membership. Of course, I know fellow CAMRA members who are boastful (even disdainful) that they do not redeem the vouchers on principle or are simply lackadaisical in using them."

What's with the Lerwick ale on your cover photo?

"Vaelensi (6% Spiced Ale) is the only ale I've awarded 10/10 to. Honey, ginger and chilli? Heaven in a glass! Sadly, shortly after discovering this ale on cask at the Sir John Moore, this Shetland brewery stopped distributing casks to the mainland. More worryingly, they don't even seem to have bottled it for their recent annual Viking festival. The search for a replacement 10/10 ale will continue as long and as hard as that task may take!"



Have you any future plans for Wetherspoon Watch?

"I'm hoping everybody who reads this article will sign up and follow the 'Watch'! That should double our number of followers overnight! Perhaps I should branch out onto TikTok to influence the next generation of real ale drinkers? I've certainly no inclination to monetize the page. It's a labour of love for me."



LARBERT REAL ALE AND CIDER FESTIVAL

Fri 3 / Sat 4 April

Dobbie Hall, Main Street, Larbert

5 mins walk from Larbert Rail Station

OPENING TIMES:

Fri 3rd: 1pm - 10.30pm. Sat 4th: Noon - 10.30pm.

50-60 Real Ales plus 15+ Ciders

Also Gin, Prosecco and Wine Bar

Free Admission for CAMRA Members (£2 glass/programme)

Non-members: £8



REAL ALE AT HOME: DIY HOUSE HANDPULL EDITION

Now more than ever, it is important that we get out to our local pubs and drink real ale. That's a given. So don't think that by writing this article I am encouraging you to stay at home. Because I'm not. But sometimes (due to transport, scheduling, cost, ale availability, and a variety of other factors) it is simply unfeasible to get oneself to the pub.

I know the problem all too well. I live in Shotts, which is the eastern extremity of our branch area. The nearest pub that serves real ale is The Wishaw Malt Wetherspoons. It's a fine wee pub, and I've rarely been served a bad beer in there. However, it's eight miles away as the crow flies. That means 40 minutes on a bus that stops in all the wee villages where people get on and off and on and off ad infinitum. And said bus only runs until 7pm at night. And it doesn't run at all on a Sunday.

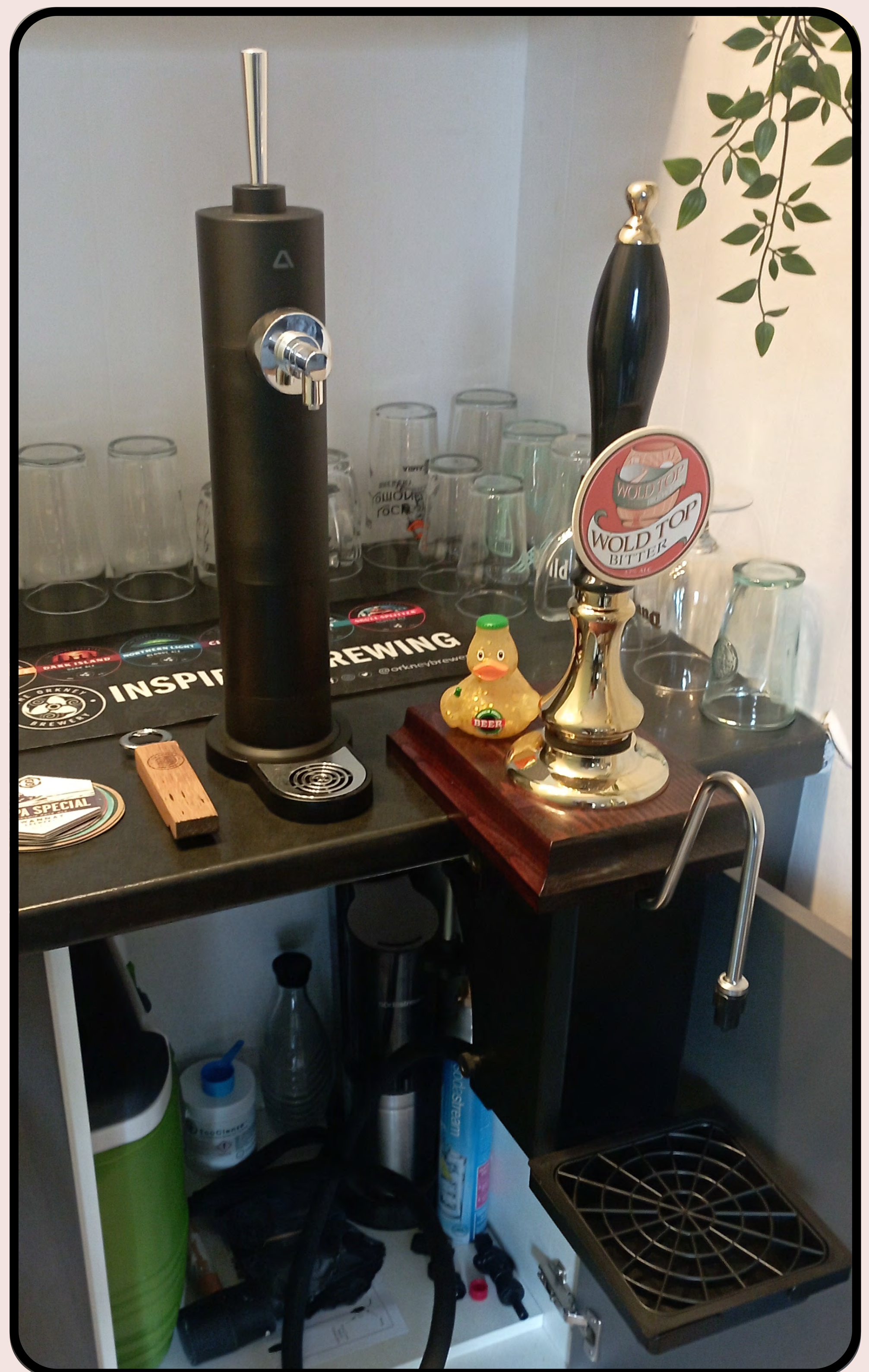
The long and short of it is: during the day on a Saturday is the only time that is feasible for me to visit my 'local'. Ergo on any other day, a beer in the house has to suffice. But the problem here is the lack of bottle conditioned ales in the shops. Harsh carbonation and fizz giving false life to a dead product just doesn't cut it for me, I'm afraid. Moreover, I like my beer to be poured through an engine. I am of the opinion that the cascade you can only really get from an engine-pulled pour imparts something indefinable to the ale.

Therefore, last summer I embarked upon a project that most seem to have undertaken in the early days of COVID - I built myself a home pub. It's nothing fancy (certainly, Iain Mason doesn't have worry about me coming for Stoaters' crown - see **Autumn Issue**, pp. 12-14), but it's functional. There is a small kitchenette in the rear of my house which I reckon was once an outdoor cludgie - it's cramped, but there is enough room for a beer fridge and some counter space. It was connected to the main house at some point in the 1960s, and (thanks to the substandard insulation materials of the time period) maintains an unheated temperature of around 18°C in the summer, and 12°C in the winter. Pretty good conditions for real ale.

It took me a while to find a handpull. Pint365 is the premier option, but at a cost of £204.75 per unit at time of writing, it is one hell of an expensive outlay. So I kept push notifications for eBay enabled on my phone, and waded through unwanted Christmas presents and lockdown impulse buys until I nailed a "used once" badboy for half the price. I bought some line cleaner, ran it through, and was ready to go.

The big problem was, of course, getting beer. Once cracked, real ale lasts for four-ish days - and I had no intent of consuming a 10L polypin in such a short space of time. 5L mini-casks it was, then. Roughly nine pints. Now, bear in mind that mini-casks are a lot harder to acquire than mini-kegs. Considering that the live product only stays at its best for roughly four to six weeks post-shipping, it is understandable that scant few breweries proffer 'fun size' real ale offerings.

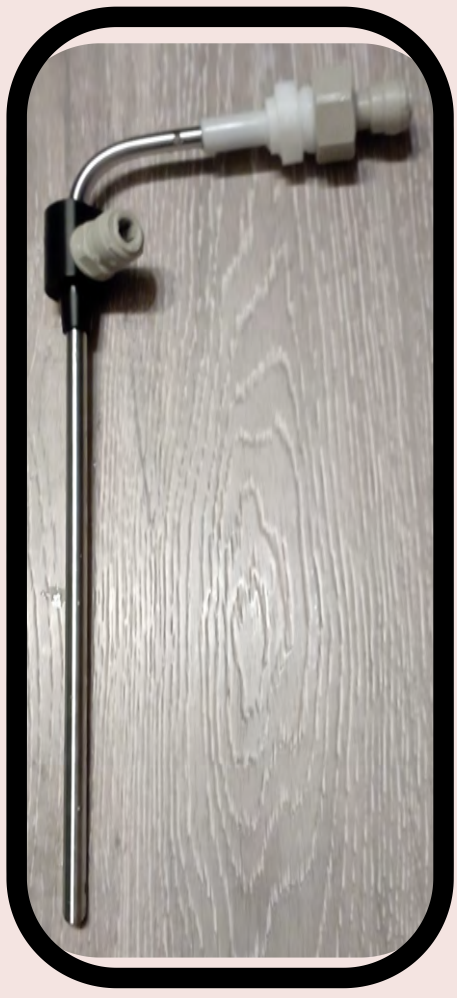
There are enough of them though. In Scotland, **Orkney Brewery** and **Fyne Ales** both stock regular and...



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seasonal mini-casks. And some of my favourites from down south who do the same include **Shipstone's Brewery**, **Long Man Brewery**, and **Wold Top Brewery**. They're all reasonably priced, at around £25 (which works out to roughly £2.78 per pint - on par with supermarket and 'Spoons prices).



But connecting a mini-cask to the Pint365 engine isn't as simple a process as it is with a polypin. In fact, I needed custom equipment. Thankfully, I wasn't caught off guard here; I had done my research prior to purchasing, and contacted RLBS Ltd to acquire one of their 5L Mini-Cask Real Ale Extractors for a reasonable price of £24. This device (pictured) is a 3/4BSP line connector set with a 3/8" push-fit cartridge for use with 3/8" OD push-fit tubes (those used on the Pint365 system), and has a built-in aspirator for natural venting.

Installation is simple: you pry the mini-cask vent off with a screwdriver, use a mallet to pop the airtight plastic bung in to the beer, then insert the extractor device. The connector is tapered to fit in the cavity exactly, and is held in place tightly (therefore creating a mostly anaerobic seal to keep the beer fresh) by the handle of the mini-cask itself. Here's a photo of a pint of **Wold Top's Marmalade Porter (5% English Porter)** pulled through the system - check out that cascade:



Keeping the beer at cellar temperature isn't as big a challenge as one might assume either. As mentioned, the room in which the handpull is situated stays at around 12°C during the winter - an ideal cellar temperature. But during the warmer months, I make use of an insulated cool box. The 57L capacity Vango Pinnacle (lime green, for my sins) is well suited to the task, as this model features a drainage outlet which accomodates 3/8" tubing perfectly. This allows the cool box to maintain its closed seal, and thus makes it easier to achieve a steady temperature in the interior. I have found that cheap freezer ice packs are the best way to go here; with four fully frozen packs bringing the temperature down to roughly 10-13°C for around twelve hours before needing to be replaced. The process can also be aided by draping a wet tea towel over the cask (induction cooling).



Overall, I'm very satisfied with the setup, but at a net cost of around £150 per handpull (or £250 if you splurge for a brand new one) it's not the most affordable project in the world, is it? So I decided to make a challenge for myself: add a second line consisting of a DIY homemade handpull of my own devising, and keep the total cost under £75.

Whilst brainstorming solutions, my mind went back to childhood holidays in Butlin's. The kitchen and bathroom sinks often found in the static caravans were similar in function to the iconic real ale handpull - a lever used suction to draw liquid from a container housed below the sink, which then filled the engine and was forced out by the action of the piston. In fact, it's not just a similar concept; it's the exact same thing.

The most popular and accessible model of caravan handpump, apparently, is the Whale Flipper Pantry 59396 Mark IV, which can be purchased on Amazon at the time of writing for £72.95. It's certainly a lot cheaper than the...

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Pint365 engine, but at that price would still wipe out the majority of my budget and render the whole project moot. So instead, I went to a local vehicle salvage yard and dug through various bits and pieces until I found an intact, fully operational, and clean(ish) Flipper for just £19.

All I needed to do then was find a way to attach it to my 'bar'. I wasn't keen on drilling a hole through the counter top, so purchased a small clamp from a local hardware store (£3.99) and a miniature wooden chopping board from Amazon (£8.99 - in retrospect a bit of a rip-off for what it is, but by this time I was eager to get the project started in earnest, so just took the hit). I widened the hanging hole of the chopping board with my multi-tool, and sanded the inside down to a perfect circle through which I could install the Flipper. I then clamped the entire thing to the counter. A few more lengths of food grade tubing (£8.99 for 1.5m from Amazon - once again paying a little over the odds, but my eagerness to complete the project was getting the better of me by this point).



Granted, to extract ale from a mini-cask you do still need the aforementioned extractor device from RLBS. That's an unavoidable expense of (as previously stated) £24. I just used the one I already had. Nevertheless, the extractor brings the net cost of the DIY unit up to a total of £64.97. I think that's an entirely reasonable outlay, considering that the end product is a fully functional beer engine. I also added a makeshift 'sparkler', sourced from the valve of an old bathroom tap I had replaced years ago. I set it to

the half open/half closed position, thereby achieving creamier head by forcing the expelled beer through a tighter gap. However, I won't add this to the cost - sparklers are entirely optional, after all.

Yes, it is much smaller than a handpull. The engine does not have the same capacity as the Pint365 or commercial units you find in pubs. This means it takes a few more pulls to get a full pint. I did a handpull versus DIY handpull test by timing myself furiously pumping 5L of water from one bucket to another on each unit, but I'm not going to bore you with the statistics here. In the simplest terms: my Pint365 can pull a full pint in four draws, while the DIY unit takes 10. I have no problem with that. Here's some photos of **Wold Top Best Bitter (3.7% Session Bitter)** and **Brewster's Marquis (3.8% Session Bitter)** pulled through the homemade unit. As you can see, it's cascading nicely, and functions just as well as the Pint365 machine. However, we're currently leaking in to a bucket on the floor because I forgot to make a drip tray. I'll need to get on to that next.



(By Westley McCallum.)



BEER SCORING FOR CAMRA: A GUIDE

CAMRA encourages all members to score any real ales drank in pubs around the country on the website at <https://camra.org.uk/>.

Whether you're on your smartphone or computer, this can be done in three simple steps:

1) Sign in to <https://camra.org.uk/> with your membership number and password.

2) Select the pub you wish to score.

3) Select the relevant brewery and beer, and score your drink using the criteria below.

HOW TO SCORE A BEER	
0	Should only be used if no cask ale is available at all.
0.5 - 1 POOR	Beer is anything from barely drinkable to drinkable with considerable resentment. Add a comment why it's poor.
2 AVERAGE	Competently kept, drinkable pint but doesn't inspire in any way.
3 GOOD	Good beer in good form. You want to stay for another pint and may have the beer again.
4 VERY GOOD	Excellent beer in excellent condition. You stay put!
5 PERFECT	Probably the best you are ever likely to find. A seasoned drinker will award this score very rarely.

We have received a grand total of **3811** beer scores this year so far.

Our branch's top rated pubs over the last three months are:

Glasgow

Clockwork
The Lismore
The Raven
Scotia Bar
Sir John Moore
The State Bar

Lanarkshire

The Hay Stook
Hudsons

Argyll

The Oban Inn

Dunbartonshire

The Ashton

And the top scoring beers from our branch area over the last three months are:

Fyne Ales - Argyle Porter (Porter)

Loch Lomond - Southern Summit (American Pale Ale)

Oakham - Citra (Session IPA)

Orkney - Corncrake (Golden Ale)

Titanic - Plum Porter (Speciality Porter)

Fyne Ales - Jarl (American Session Blonde)

Marston's - Bass (Session Bitter)

Orkney - Dark Island (Dark Mild)

Titanic - Plum Porter Grand Reserve (Speciality Porter)

THE LISMORE BAR

206 Dumbarton Road

Whiskies
Gins
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2 Minute Walk from Kelvinhall
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