

WETHERSPOONNEWS

EQUAL TAX BETWEEN PUBS AND SUPERMARKETS

“ A reduced rate of hospitality VAT across the UK means lower prices and more jobs, leading to the regeneration of our high streets and communities ”

Kate Nicholls OBE, chief executive of UKHospitality

“ Our pubs are unfairly taxed, with £1 in every three spent in a pub paid back to the treasury – we need relief to compete ”

Emma McClarkin OBE, chief executive of the British Beer and Pub Association

“ ..this disparity in treatment of consumption taxes is increasingly acting to the detriment of pubs and hospitality businesses ”

Simon Johnson, former CEO of Business in Sport & Leisure (BISL) [See page 14](#)

MUCH MORE TO CIDER THAN APPLES

Range of ciders behind the bar includes varieties made from passion fruit, blood orange, dark berries, tropical fruit, strawberry and lime

25 YEARS SINCE THE COMPANY'S FIRST HOTEL OPENED

With 57, so far, in Britain and Ireland – it's hard to imagine life without them. Every hotel is also attached to a Wetherspoon pub, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner

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PRIZE CROSSWORD 105

INSIDE

36

New wines



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Tax equality makes economic sense

In the end, the public will decide...

When Wetherspoon first opened in 1979, around 90 per cent of beer was sold in the 'on-trade' – pubs, clubs, restaurants and hotels.

The take-home beer trade was dominated by 'off-licences', typically corner shops, present in most high streets.

In the intervening decades, the market has been transformed.

Today, supermarkets are present in every town and high street – they have cut a swathe through the licensed trade, crushing off-licences and reducing the on-trade market share, prepandemic, to under 50 per cent – and probably much less today.

Supermarkets, even so, have generally brought great benefit to their customers, providing an Aladdin's cave of goods, at competitive prices, under one roof.

Success

And their expansion has brought great financial success, with Tesco, the largest of the chains, making, perhaps, more profits than the entire on-trade.

Competition among businesses, the basis of market economies in the free world, is the engine which improves living standards for the country, providing jobs for people and tax for the treasury.

However, it is an important principle of taxation that it should be fair and equitable, treating similar businesses in a similar fashion.

Unfortunately, there is great tax inequality in the licensed trade in two main areas.

The first is in relation to food. Both pubs and supermarkets sell food.

However – whereas pubs pay 20 per cent VAT (value-added tax) in respect of food sales, supermarkets pay nothing.

The second relates to business rates, where pubs pay about 20 pence a pint, with supermarkets paying a mere fraction of that... perhaps around two pence.

Subsidise

Supermarkets have been able to use their tax advantage to subsidise the price of their beer, wine and spirits – which has opened up a massive disparity between the off- and on-trade.

Price matters, so many people have understandably deserted pubs, especially mid week, resulting in swathes of closures in recent years.

The great British and Irish pub culture, the social melting pot across the land, envied throughout the world, is being challenged as never before.

The simple solution is tax equality among supermarkets, pubs, clubs, hotels and restaurants.

Some people worry that tax equality would result in 'profiteering' in the on-trade – that tax would come down, but prices would stay the same.

In reality, that is never going to happen.

The laws of competition mean that pubs will have to bring their prices down to compete with one another and with other on-trade businesses.

The real consequence of tax equality, when you analyse the issue, is that pubs will be more competitively priced, compared with supermarkets, encouraging people to go out for a pint, rather than staring at their own four walls or at Netflix – what's not to like?

Consequences

Other important consequences of tax equality will surely be an increase in investment in the on-trade in beleaguered high streets, with more pubs, restaurants, cafés and clubs opening up, leading to more employment opportunities and, yes... higher taxes for the treasury.

The question of taxes is often thought to be the preserve of politicians alone.

However, it's really a question for you, the public.

Do you want pubs and restaurants to be treated equally?

Supermarket chains are infinitely more powerful than any pub or restaurant company.

Surely, they don't need a huge tax advantage.

So, Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt, and also Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves, it's time to act.

Pursuing a goal of equality must be the right approach – and, as in so many areas of life, will bring great benefits.

Tim Martin

Chairman

There are two sides to the COVID-19 argument But only one can be right...

At the beginning of the pandemic, MPs (ie parliament) granted No. 10 Downing Street (ie the government) emergency powers which allowed four ministers, including the prime minister, known as 'the Quad', to make decisions without the normal scrutiny of parliament.

The results have been plain to see in the release of former health minister Matt Hancock's WhatsApp messages, sometimes called the 'lockdown papers'.

Unfortunately, decisions were often taken for PR purposes or sometimes for personal aggrandisement, rather than as a result of a careful scrutiny of the evidence and a desire to 'do the right thing'.

Insofar as MPs who weren't in the government commented, it seemed to be a question of urging the government to even greater restrictions. There also appeared to be a competition between Westminster and the devolved governments to see who could impose the most restrictions – thereby seeming the most virtuous.

However, many people believe that the Swedish approach, outlined in a transcript of an Aussie TV interview three years ago (see opposite page), in the early days of the pandemic, with Swedish epidemiologist Johan Giesecke, is the direction which the UK and other countries should have followed all along.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the UK's approach and Sweden's was the Swedish mantra, articulated by Professor Giesecke,

of "...trust the people. People are not stupid. If you tell them what's good for them, they'll do what you say". In contrast, for some reason, the decision-makers in the UK, including many of the academics in SAGE, believed that frightening the people into following the government line was the appropriate response.

On page 54, we publish a Guardian article by Professor Francois Balloux, of University College London Genetics Institute, who analysed a World Health Organization report on the pandemic and concluded: "The strength of mitigation measures does not seem to be a strong predictor of excess deaths."

He also said: "The worst performer, by some margin, is Peru, despite enforcing the longest, harshest lockdown."

The World Health Organization's report emphatically discredits arguments, such as those put forward by Professors Michael Baker and Martin McKee (see page 56), who advocated a 'COVID-19 elimination strategy', based on faulty evidence about its alleged success in China.

Elsewhere, we present articles by Jonathan Sumption, ex-Supreme Court judge and historian, and Fraser Nelson, editor of The Spectator, who also opposed the lockdown.

A flavour of the vicious nature of the attacks on people who oppose lockdowns is illustrated in an article (see page 58) by government supporter and MP Neil O'Brien.

Not everyone will agree with this choice of articles or the views expressed in them. They're only opinions.

You, the reader, need to make up your own mind. Luckily, as we've said before, in a democratic society, that's exactly what you're entitled to do.

Tim says: "Professor Johan Giesecke, a Swedish epidemiologist, was interviewed on Aussie TV in April 2020, in the early days of the pandemic. This is a transcript of the interview, in which Professor Giesecke explains the Swedish philosophy.

The Swedes didn't get everything right, but many people today believe that their general approach, which avoided lockdowns and heavy restrictions, produced superior results. Whether this view about Sweden is believed to be correct will determine UK and world policy for pandemics in the future.

You, the public, will decide..."

Wetherspoon News autumn 2020

Sky News: You've been a strong critic of the idea of lockdowns, Sweden has avoided these sort of lockdowns that we're seeing here in Australia. Tell us your thoughts – are lockdowns the correct way to go?

Johan: You introduced me by saying that I would say that you got it all wrong. I don't think you got it all wrong, but you painted yourself into a corner and I'm watching with interest how you and 100 other countries will climb out of the lockdown, because I don't think any government that I know gave a minute's thought about how they would get out of the different lockdowns that are installed.

Take the school closure for example, if you close the schools, when are you going to open them, what's the criteria?

I don't think anyone thought about that when the closure was decided on. Anyway, so Sweden doesn't have such a strict lockdown, there are a few things that are forbidden – the crowd can't be more than 50 people, at restaurants that are mostly open, there should be 5ft or 1.5 meters between the tables, you have to sit down to eat, there are a few things like that, but rather mild things... there are very few laws and [regulations] passed, you can go out without being stopped by the police and fined or threatened with prison and mostly we talk about trust... we trust the people – people are not stupid.

That's... the basic line [in Sweden]. If you tell people what's good for them and what's good for their neighbours and other people, they do that. You take a restriction that's sensible and understandable, people will follow it.

Sky News: You said that you think the results are going to be similar across most countries regardless of the approach they've taken, can you take us through that?

Johan: There is a tsunami of a rather mild infection spreading around the globe and I think that there's very little chance to stop it by any measure we take.

Most people will become infected by this and most people won't even notice. We have data now from Sweden that shows between 98 and 99 percent of the cases have had a very mild infection or didn't even realise they were infected.

So we have this spread of this mild disease around the globe and most of it is happening where we don't see it.

It's among people that don't get very sick, spread it to someone else that doesn't get very sick and what we're looking at is a thin layer at the top of people who do develop the disease and even thinner layer of people that go into intensive care and then even thinner layer of people who die.

But the real outbreak is happening where we don't see it.

Sky News: So....you're saying that at some point pretty much everybody is going to get this disease to some degree or another.

Here in Australia we've done an incredibly good job suppressing it.

I'm wondering do you think we've done too good a job, is it possible to do too good a job suppressing it in the early stages such that you won't ever be able to take the foot off the break on your restrictions to get the disease just to a manageable flow of cases that the health system, which we were told this was all about preparing for that, be allowed to handle the cases as they come through.

Johan: Yes... one point is to flatten the curve a bit so that the health care isn't overused.

You may succeed, and New Zealand may also succeed, but I've been asking myself when New Zealand or Australia has stamped out every case in the country, what do you do for the next 30 years.

Will you close your borders completely? Quarantine everyone who is going to Australia or New Zealand? Because the disease will be out there. I don't know how you are going to handle that.

That's your problem.

Sky News: You've said you think in most countries regardless of the measures we take, eg. Taiwan has been very successful and other countries like Italy have been disaster cases, but you think at the end of the day they're all pretty much going to end up with the same fatalities, the same results, the same deaths regardless of what measures they took. Explain that.

Johan: Yes. Basically I think it will be the same because, like I said, the real epidemic is invisible and it's going on all the time around us.

The other thing with a lockdown is when you open it, you will have more cases, so the countries who pride themselves in having a few deaths now, will get these deaths when they start lifting the lockdown.

Sky News: Tell us briefly about the Imperial College results that sparked this worldwide panic.

You believe they were flawed, these were the initial results that were coming out and the modelling that was saying millions are gonna die.

You thought that was flawed, tell us why.

Johan: Yes, there are a few procedural things... One is that the paper was never published which is normal scientific behaviour.

The second thing it wasn't peer-reviewed, which means it wasn't looked upon by other people, which is also normal scientific procedure.

So it was more like an internal departmental communication, a memo.

And then the big mistake of the Imperial group was under-estimating the proportion of the very mild cases that would never be detected, that's the main thing with that prediction.

And it's fascinating how it changed the policy of the world.

The UK made a U-turn overnight [upon] the publication of the paper which is fascinating.

So, yes, there were several other mistakes with the paper, but it gets very technical to get into that.

Sky News: You mention that the overwhelming majority of people that get this disease have no symptoms or very minimal symptoms.

Do we even know the real fatality rate of the coronavirus?

Johan: No. Well it's around 0.1%.

Sky News: We were told it was 3% initially, initially 2%, are you saying now that it's 0.1%, that's pretty much the same fatality rate as the regular flu isn't it?

Johan: I think it's a bit higher actually. I said before in Sweden that this is like a severe influenza. I don't think that's completely true – it will be a bit more severe than the influenza, maybe double, but not tenfold.

Sky News: With all of the health care systems focusing on flattening the curve and being prepared for these waves of infection, which aren't

necessarily coming because of the very restrictive measures, overall are we gonna see more people dying, we talked a little bit about this before on the show, of cancers, heart attacks, things like that, simply because they're too scared to go to the hospital because they think they won't get treated.

Is there going to be other deaths that are going to be caused by our overweighting focus just on this one particular disease?

Johan: Could well be.

The emergency rooms here in Stockholm have about 50% of the usual number of patients coming in, and one reason is probably that people are scared of contracting the disease when they go into hospitals, and another is that, I think, they say they can wait a bit until the thing is over.

Sky News: You've said the best policy, the correct policy, would be to simply protect the old and the frail. Is that correct?

Johan: Yes, and that's the Swedish model. It has... two pillars.

One is only use measures that are evidence-based.

And there are two that are evidence-based... one is washing hands... we've known that for 150 years since Semmelweis in Austria a long time ago.

The other is social distancing.

If you don't get too close to other people, they won't infect you.

And the third may be trust the people.

People are not stupid, if you tell them what's good for them they will do what you say.

You don't need soldiers on the street – and police.

It's unnecessary.

● Transcript of interview, Swedish former chief epidemiologist Johan Giesecke

By Sky News Australia
29 April 2020

COMPANY ISSUES DOGGED DEFENCE OF NO-CANINE POLICY

Britain has a long-held and justifiable reputation as an animal-loving nation – and we appreciate that many of our customers are responsible pet owners.

However, Wetherspoon does not permit dogs or other animals in our pubs, hotels or in external areas which belong to, or are managed by, us.

This includes our beer gardens, car parks and outside pavement areas.

We understand that this exclusion is a difficult and sensitive issue for many customers, particularly dog owners wanting to enjoy a visit to the pub along with their furry four-legged family members.

We realise that this Wetherspoon policy may seem quite strict, yet our pubs are busy, often with families and children present – and we serve a lot of food.

Not everyone likes dogs present in dining areas and, with the best will in the world, even well-trained dogs can sometimes behave unpredictably... and accidents can and do happen.

We do, however, welcome assistance dogs.

Since it would be helpful for staff, we do suggest that any assistance dogs, if possible, should wear a recognisable leash/collar or harness and that their owners bring along suitable documentation (although not mandatory requirements).

Wetherspoon's founder and chairman, Tim Martin, said: "Over the years, we have had numerous letters and e-mails asking us to change our no-dog policy.

"Of course, we understand and sympathise with dog owners, yet remain resolute on this highly emotive issue."

The Wetherspoon News 'Your Say' page has published several letters, in recent years, regarding our no-dog policy.

Here, with Tim's replies, are examples from 2014, 2018 and spring 2022.

2022

PAW TREATMENT FOR DOGGED CUSTOMERS?

Dear editor

Having recently retired from work, I became the proud 'parent' of a puppy dog.

She soon became an important part of my life and routine.

As a regular diner at Wetherspoon's pubs, I took puppy along with us, when my wife and I went to our local in Newcastle-under-Lyme, where we sat outside and ordered breakfast.

Imagine my surprise when the manager had to tell us that dogs are not allowed – inside or outside.

It's the first time in my life that I have been kicked out of a pub... and a Wetherspoon at that! LOL

So, this e-mail is not in anger... rules are rules... but I would like to remind Tim et al that the current trend in pubs, restaurants and shops is to go 'dog friendly'.

These venues have seen the growing attraction of such places and the profitability of dog access.

Therefore, I ask please to consider looking at your rule on allowing dogs.

I suggest that outside, at least, is a step forward which would be greatly appreciated by many of your customers. You could even be radical and offer pet membership – a small fee giving the pet access permission.

Having visited quite a few pet-friendly places, I have been assured that dogs messing the floor is not happening.

I hope that my thoughts above strike a chord with you, and I am certain that they will with many others, should a poll be taken.

Yours

Paul Lythgoe (via e-mail)

Tim replies: A tricky area, indeed – and a very emotive one. In our busy pubs, with high food sales, not everyone likes dogs present – and accidents can happen.

This is an area in which, to paraphrase the poet John Lydgate, later made more famous still by Abraham Lincoln: "You can't please all the people all the time."

WETHERSPOON > SPRING 2022

2014

JUSTICE FOR DOGS – THAT'S ALL I WANT

Dear Tim

As a family which always chooses Wetherspoon pubs first and fell walkers, we were delighted to learn about the opening of The Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, in Keswick. (editor's note: the pub opened on 30 September).

Our only concern was that it was not 'open for dogs'. We are now proud owners of Florrie (pictured), a 14-month-old collie, rescued from Ireland and we would like to take her in with us.

You may know that Keswick has been voted the most dog-friendly town in England (Kennel Club).

If you were to take a walk down its main street, you will see that most pubs and hotels encourage well-behaved dogs and their owners.

While I fully understand your general policy about allowing entry to registered assistance dogs only, would you consider having an area in the pub, where Florrie is allowed?

Yours, Jim Murray, Tyne & Wear

Tim replies: Another vexed issue. At my first pub in north London, I was persuaded to buy a Doberman, for security reasons. Before the poor dog died, I had walked the equivalent of from here to Australia, I calculated. He was useless as a guard dog, and I wanted my money back. He used to bark loudly, in panic, if another dog entered the premises – and pandemonium would often ensue. Whereas almost all dogs are well behaved, in reality, in busy pubs like ours, it's very difficult to prevent flare-ups of the nature I describe, which can be upsetting for some customers. In the end, we decided to go for 'guide dogs only'. I'm the first to admit that this policy is unfair, as far as Florrie is concerned.

WETHERSPOON > AUTUMN 2014



2018

WELL, I'LL BE DOG-GONE

Dear Tim

I've been a customer of Wetherspoon for many years. I recently visited your pub in Mold, Flintshire. We sat down to have a meal at lunch time, only to be informed by a staff member that no dogs are allowed in the outside seating area.

On this occasion, Wetherspoon lost three customers – and I'm sure that there will be many more in future. You have lost me for good, with this policy.

I spoke to the manager who informed me that it was Wetherspoon's policy. My reply was: "What 'idiot' made this policy; in this day and age, how can anyone in business turn business away?"

By the way, there was a pub just up the road which allowed dogs on the premises.

Regards

Mr B, North Wales (via e-mail)

Tim replies: Thank you for your letter.

The idiot you refer to was, indeed, my good self. This is an emotional area, but, since our first pub, it has been our policy not to allow dogs, except guide dogs. Whereas most dog owners can control their well-trained dogs, this is not invariably the case.

The original rule, unfair on some dogs, I admit, is even more sensible today, since our pubs sell large amounts of food and admit children.

Also, in my experience, guide dog owners aren't keen on other dogs being admitted.

Most big food retailers and restaurant companies allow only guide dogs.

In this area, you can't please all of the people all of the time.

WETHERSPOON > AUTUMN 2018

DIRECTOR DEBBIE NAMED AS A WOMAN TO WATCH



Wetherspoon's regional manager and employee director, Debbie Whittingham, has been named in the Women to Watch & Role Models for Inclusion in Hospitality, Travel & Leisure (HTL) Index 2022.

The index highlights talented women who have achieved personal and professional success, through leadership, innovation and determination.

It also highlights individuals who strive to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging across their organisation, sector or their community.

Debbie started her career with Wetherspoon in 1992 as a shift manager at one of the company's pubs in north London.

Since then, she has managed Wetherspoon pubs, progressed to area manager and, in 2013, became a regional manager with responsibility for four area managers and 57 pubs across England.

In 2021, Debbie was made an employee director, sitting on the Wetherspoon board.

She said: "I am immensely proud to work for Wetherspoon. I work with incredible people every day.

"Our pubs' staff members are amazing – full of fantastic people.

"I am delighted to be named in the Women to Watch & Role Models for Inclusion in Hospitality, Travel & Leisure (HTL) Index 2022.

"Diversity, equality and inclusion are extremely important to me personally and also make good business sense.

"These result in a happier, more engaged workforce which, in turn, leads to a better customer experience in our pubs.

"The qualities also help to drive creativity and innovation and undoubtedly lead to better decision-making, by utilising a wider range of skills, ideas and experience."

Wetherspoon's chief executive, John Hutson, added: "Debbie is an outstanding leader in Wetherspoon and thoroughly deserves this recognition.

"She is an integral part of the company's success."

Women to Watch & Role Models for Inclusion in Hospitality, Travel & Leisure (HTL) Index 2022 is produced by WiHTL, in partnership with the MBS Group.

AWARDS

CHAIN REACTION AS PUB AFTER PUB WIN IN LOO OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Hundreds of premises, including hotels, praised for their excellent away-from-home washrooms



The Crossed Peels (Stirling)

Hundreds of Wetherspoon pubs have won acclaim for the quality and standard of their toilets – in the Loo of the Year Awards 2022.

In addition, the company won two national awards, with some pubs also winning individual national awards.

The awards are aimed at highlighting and improving standards of away-from-home washrooms across the UK.

Inspectors for Loo of the Year Awards make unannounced visits to thousands of toilets at sites across the UK, in order to judge them.

All of the toilets are graded silver, gold, platinum, platinum plus or diamond, with unacceptable toilets not graded at all.

A diamond rating (the highest-possible rating) is awarded to those venues which offer 'the highest standards of cleaning and the provision of facilities to meet all users' needs'.

The toilets are judged against numerous criteria, including décor and maintenance, cleanliness, accessibility, hand-washing and -drying equipment and overall management.

Wetherspoon's pubs and hotels received 14 diamond awards, 138 platinum plus awards, 582 platinum awards and 98 gold awards.

The company's operations director, Martin Geoghegan, said: "We are delighted that our pubs have won so many awards.

"Staff at our pubs ensure that the toilets are in excellent condition at all times – and it is superb that this has been recognised by inspectors.

"Offering our customers clean and well-maintained toilets is of utmost importance to us."

The Loo of the Year Awards' managing director, Becky Wall, said:

"The toilets at Wetherspoon's pubs have been designed and fitted out to a very high standard and are clean and well maintained.

"The individual pubs deserve their awards, as does Wetherspoon for the company awards."

Wetherspoon won the corporate provider trophy, awarded to the corporate organisation or authority with 10 or more entries, which, in the opinion of the judges, is maintaining a consistently high standard of away-from-home toilets'.

The company also triumphed in the market sector awards, being named as the leading provider of toilets in the pubs and wine bars sector.

In addition, Wetherspoon was named as the best provider of toilets for pubs and hotels in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

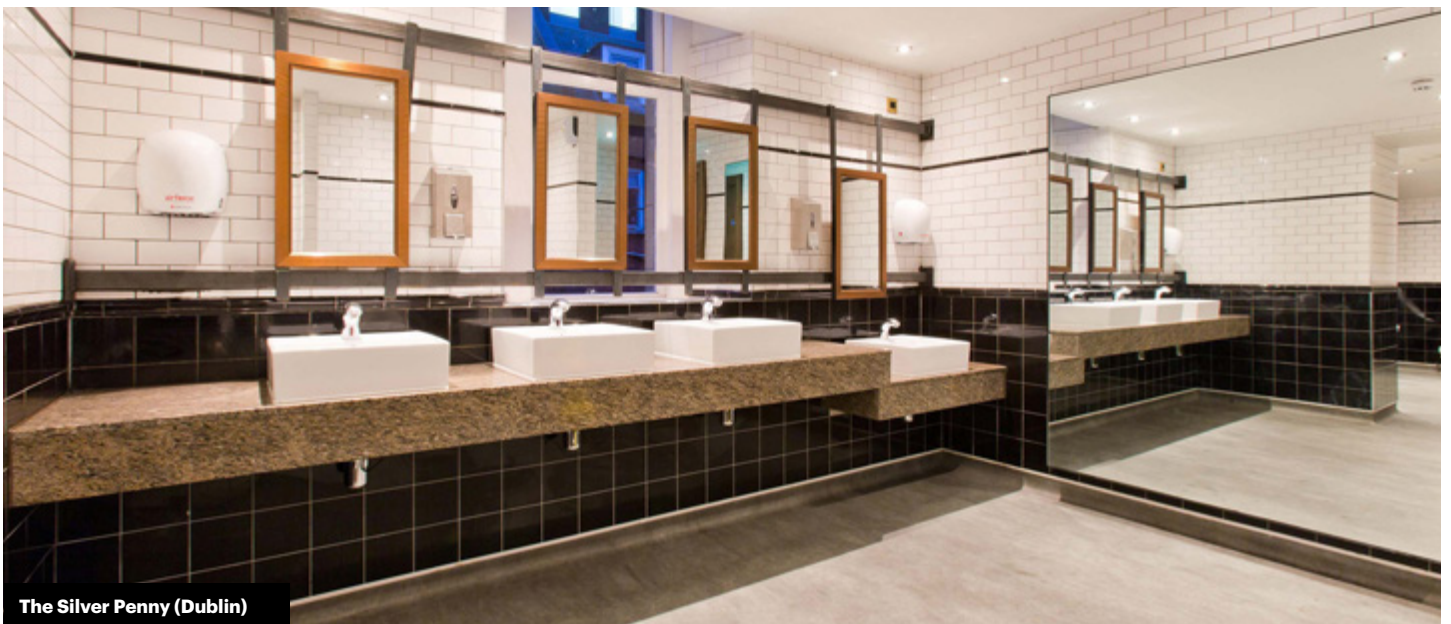
The Scarsdale Hundred (Beighton, Sheffield), Yr Hen Dderwen (Carmarthen), The Crossed Peels (Stirling) and The Silver Penny (Dublin) were named as winners in the pubs and wine bars sector.

In the hotel category, Wetherspoon also had a clean sweep, with George Hotel (Bewdley), The George Hotel (Brecon), The Guildhall & Linen Exchange (Dunfermline) and Keavan's Port Hotel (Dublin) being named as the best providers of toilets.

Wetherspoon's pubs also triumphed in the historic buildings category, with three of its pubs named as winners: The Guildhall & Linen Exchange (Dunfermline), The Palladium (Llandudno) and The Silver Penny (Dublin).

The Forty Foot (Dún Laoghaire, Republic of Ireland) won the individual category award. This is awarded to the top entry from all individual categories – excluding public toilet categories.

And three Wetherspoon pubs were awarded in the accessible toilet entries award: Yr Hen Dderwen (Carmarthen), The Carrick Stone (Cumbernauld) and The Silver Penny (Dublin).



AWARDS

ILFORD

GREAT SPOON JUDGED TO BE GREAT BOON FOR ILFORD



Pub manager Chris Thaxter (left) is pictured with (front, left to right) shift managers Sarah Levy, Kerry Adamberry and Angela Wood, together with bar associate Jack Kilduff (back left) and kitchen manager Gary Faulkner

The Great Spoon of Ilford (Ilford) has been voted as 'Best Hospitality Business' at the Ilford Business Awards 2022.

Organised by the Ilford Business Improvement District (BID), the pub scooped the award at a special awards ceremony attended by pub manager Chris Thaxter.

Chris, who has managed the pub since the summer of 2021, said: "We are thrilled to win, the first time the pub has won it, up against so many other great hospitality venues in a busy local area.

"The pub was nominated by our area manager and voted for by our loyal customers and local people. We thank them all for their support." The Ilford Business Awards 2022, comprising 15 categories and

including businesses across the borough, were a celebration of business and community.

Formed in 2009, Ilford BID's key aims are to promote the almost 400 businesses in the BID boundary, increase footfall and to make Ilford the destination of choice for local people and visitors.

Redbridge Council leader Cllr Jas Athwal told the Ilford Recorder newspaper: "Local businesses are the heart of the community and [we are] celebrating them, especially since they've come through hard times.

"Each of these businesses brings so much character to the place, but it's the opportunity that is really important at the moment."

GRACE, EIGHT, HAS LONG LOCKS LOPPED TO HELP ILL CHILDREN



BEFORE: Grace's long blonde locks are held by (left to right) hairdresser Sharon John, Scotty and Claire Doman, with shift leader Erin Fleming

Big-hearted Grace Doman had never had a haircut, until she was told of the plight of children who, because of cancer treatment, can lose their hair.

Grace, the eight-year-old daughter of Scotty Doman, had her long locks lopped off at the pub which he manages – The Moon Under Water (Colindale, northwest London).

Scotty said: "Grace was very protective of her long hair, yet, when she heard about The Little Princess Trust, which collects hair to make into wigs for children undergoing cancer treatment, she decided that she wanted to help."



AFTER: Grace proudly holds her lopped locks aloft as (left to right) hairdresser Sharon John and mum and dad, Scotty and Claire, look on

As well as donating her locks to The Little Princess Trust, Grace and the pub team raised £1,656 for the trust and Young Lives vs Cancer. A festive cake sale and tombola on the day of Grace's Big Trim contributed £370 to the total.

Grace's hair was cut by local hairdresser Sharon John, the mother of Emily John, a shift manager at the pub.

Grace's mum and shift leader Claire Doman was also on hand to steady any nerves.

RHYME, GENTLEMEN, PLEASE: IAN PENS POEMS IN THE PUB

Staff at The Old Market Hall (Mexborough) have been congratulating poet and pub regular Ian Parks, who has published a book which he wrote during visits to the pub.

His book, *Love Poems*, was put together from handwritten lines from Ian while sitting next to an image of fellow Mexborough poet and former Poet Laureate Ted Hughes.

He and Ted Hughes attended the same school, Mexborough Grammar, albeit in different eras – and were taught by the same teacher John Fisher.

The pub's manager, Matt Fearn, said: "We are all delighted for Ian. "Staff and other customers often notice him scribbling away and he is always up for a chat about poetry."

Indeed, Ian runs poetry group Read to Write, which meets regularly at the pub.

Ian said: "I feel very comfortable writing at the pub.

"The staff are very friendly and welcoming, taking an interest in what I'm doing. Matt is very encouraging of poetry here and in the local community."

Ian has strong connections with not only Mexborough, but also the building, as he was often taken to the market hall, as a child, before it became a pub.

He enjoys a pint of local real ale in the pub which, among others, serves brews from Sheffield's Thornbridge and Rotherham's Chantry breweries.

Of all the dishes on the menu, Ian saves his favourite steak meal as a treat – at the end of a writing session.

● To find out more about the book, *Love Poems*, readers can contact Ian: iparkspoet@hotmail.com



AWARDS

PRESTWICK

PRESTWICK PIONEER COLLECTS CAMRA CROWN FOR THIRD TIME



The Prestwick Pioneer (Prestwick) has been recognised by members of its local Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) branch for the quality of its real ale.

The pub, which opened in May 2012, has, for the third time, been named Ayrshire & Wigtownshire CAMRA South Ayrshire 'pub of the year'.

Pub manager Euan Scott (pictured right) was presented with a certificate by branch socials coordinator Donald Clark (pictured left) at a special presentation evening at the pub.

Euan, who has managed The Prestwick Pioneer since September 2014, having previously been a shift manager at the pub, said: "We are delighted to have been awarded the Ayrshire & Wigtownshire CAMRA South Ayrshire 'pub of the year' title for 2022 by our local CAMRA members.

"We previously won the award in 2012, just after the pub first opened, and again in 2018."

The pub serves six real ales at all times: three permanent beers (Sharp's Doom Bar, Greene King Abbott and Ruddles), as well as three ever-changing guest ales.

Euan reported: "Among the popular beers with our real-ale customers are those from nearby Ayr Brewing Company, especially its pale ale Leezie Lundie (3.8% ABV)."

Donald Clark added: "Congratulations to Euan and The Prestwick Pioneer, awarded the accolade of area branch pub of the year 2022.

"The Prestwick Pioneer was voted the most popular pub in the branch area of South Ayrshire, against 17 other real ale outlets.

"The pub won by a considerable margin over its nearest competitor."

SPOONS SCOOPS AWARD FOR STAFF'S WELL-BEING MEASURES

Wetherspoon has won an award in recognition of the way it cares for its staff's well-being.

The company was named winner of the National Staff Wellbeing Award 2022 (for companies with more than 251 sites), presented by the Licensed Trade Charity (LTC).

The award is given to that operator judged to have been most successful and shown the most ingenuity in making its employees aware of the work of the LTC.

Judges looked specifically at how the charity is promoted, including posters on staff notice boards and internal communications encouraging staff to contact the LTC, if needing support.

Wetherspoon's chief executive, John Hutson, said: "We support the well-being of our employees on a wide range of physical and mental health issues.

"The company is committed, at all times, to supporting positive mental health in the workplace and assisting employees, wherever possible, with mental health problems.

"Our aim is always to encourage positive mental well-being and health in the workplace (and outside of work) – an important part of the company's commitment to being a Top Employer.

"The range of support available to all employees is detailed in the mental health and well-being policy and includes a well-being

checklist, a wellness recovery action plan and confidential external counselling, through the LTC, for all employees."

The LTC was founded in 1793 by people from the trade and is devoted to looking after those from the licensed drinks trade, providing support and practical help for workers in the hospitality industry.

The LTC helps more than 10,000 people each year and is proud to have helped hundreds of thousands in its 200+ years.

Paula Smith, head of marketing at the LTC, said: "Through our annual awards, we recognise the people and companies which mirror our own core values and help us to help more people.

"Working with operators like Wetherspoon gives us a way to reach the large numbers of employees in its head office and throughout its pubs, ultimately helping more people.

"Its support is invaluable to our work to raise awareness."

The Staff Wellbeing Award 2022 was sponsored by hospitality consultants Bums on Seats, which added: "Many thousands of staff in the licensed drinks trade work long and demanding hours, believing passionately in what they do. For many, however, life can be challenging.

"The emotional support provided by the LTC's counsellors is a crucial lifeline – needed now more than ever – and Bums on Seats is proud to sponsor the Staff Wellbeing Award 2022."

EASTBOURNE

VAL GIVEN GONG FOR 10 YEARS OF ALE EXCELLENCE

The London & County (Eastbourne) has been listed in the Campaign for Real Ale's (CAMRA) publication, The Good Beer Guide, for 10 consecutive years.

To mark the achievement, pub manager Val Cheang was presented with a special certificate by members of the local South East Sussex CAMRA branch.

Val, who has managed the pub since 2009, said: "My team works hard to ensure that the real ale served at The London & County is the best quality and choice we can offer.

"The fact we have managed a decade of consecutive listings in The Good Beer Guide is perfect testament to that hard work and consistency."

South East Sussex CAMRA branch's chairman, Peter Adams, added:

"Congratulations on reaching this milestone. Many pubs in the guide do not make it."

Wetherspoon continues to have more pubs listed, as a proportion of its estate, than any other pub company, with 200 included in the 2023 guide (50th edition).

Staff work hard to offer first-class beers at all times – and local CAMRA branch members judge and score pubs for considered inclusion in the guide.



Pictured (front) are pub manager Val Cheang (right) and chairman of South East Sussex Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) branch Peter Adams; (back row, left to right) are duty manager Mark Westcott, shift leader Emilia Krezelok and team leader Daniel Blake

THE LEISURE BUSINESS BLOG: OF PUBS, TAX AND FAIRNESS

Some things never change. Ten years ago, I was lobbying for a reduction in consumption tax rates for pubs and restaurants, on grounds of fairness, compared to supermarkets. After the publication of JD Wetherspoon's Half Year Results, the same issue is back in the news.

Recent headlines like "Tim Martin blasts disparity in tax treatment of pubs and supermarkets" revealed that the Wetherspoon boss is determined to keep the issue of fairness in taxes on pubs in the news spotlight. In this Article, I examine the issue and question why it is still not resolved after over 15 years of lobbying.

Wetherspoon is a leisure business leader

I will admit to being a fan of Wetherspoon as a business. They have doggedly pursued their business model of affordable, quality meals and drinks in well appointed and locally tailored premises. I admire the way that they have invested in their pubs, focussing on high street, locally interesting locations. In fact, there was a period over recent years, when JD Wetherspoon was one of the few national businesses investing substantial resources in town and city centres. In some of the otherwise neglected towns, especially in the North, Wetherspoon pubs were inspiring confidence in their localities.

Chairman Tim Martin's political pronouncements in recent years have not been to everybody's taste. This has tended to detract from the fact that he is one of the most passionate and articulate advocates for the Pub and Hospitality sector of the leisure business. His straight talking approach to complex issues of policy was very helpful to me when I was CEO of Business in Sport & Leisure (BISL) a decade ago.

Supermarkets are the "biggest threat to the UK hospitality sector"

Tim Martin was amongst the first to raise the issue of a lack of fairness on Value Added Tax, arguing that the "vast disparity" in tax treatment between pubs and supermarkets was allowing supermarkets to subsidise beer prices to the detriment of pubs and bars. For some time, this was an industry wide campaign. Now, Martin appears to suggest that he is becoming a lone voice. He returned to the argument in his trading statement. "Supermarkets are the biggest threat to the UK hospitality sector. Unless the industry campaigns strongly for equality, it will inevitably shrink relative to supermarkets, which will not help high streets, tourism, the economy overall, or the ancient institution of the pub". Strong stuff.

For the same meal, a pie and a pint, pubs pay up to 3 times as much consumption tax as supermarkets

At BISL, we were lobbying on this issue over 10 years ago. We were able to adduce evidence that pubs are taxed much more heavily when selling a meal with a drink than is a supermarket or convenience store.

- 20% VAT is charged on meals in pubs, whereas no VAT applies on the same product if purchased (packaged) in a supermarket.
- VAT and Duty contribution from a pint of lager consumed in a pub is significantly higher than in a supermarket for the same product.

We argued that, in addition to this disparity and lack of fairness, consumption of a pint of lager in a pub presents fewer risks, as it takes place on-site, in a highly regulated, community environment. In comparison, consumption of alcohol purchased at a supermarket or convenience store takes place off-site.

It is self-evident that this disparity will have become worse over the pandemic. While pubs and bars were closed, then open, then closed again, supermarkets were able to gain significant market share.



The pubs and bars have not been able to claw back this market share since the pandemic. They have been affected by transport strikes, by enforced closures, and the general cost of living crisis. With consumers increasingly being price conscious in their leisure choices and cutting back on some luxuries, this disparity in treatment of consumption taxes is increasingly acting to the detriment of pubs and hospitality businesses. Tim Martin is absolutely right.

The choices for Government

BISL asked the Government in 2013 to begin a longer term examination of a reduced VAT rate for meals at pubs and restaurants. We argued that the UK VAT rate on leisure services was amongst the highest in Europe. I am sure that is still the case. We argued that an equalisation of tax treatments would create new jobs and generate a net benefit for the economy.

We did not succeed in our arguments and it is clear that policy has not changed since then.

For some reason, the Government was reluctant to be persuaded of the benefits for the economy, and especially to the survival of high streets and city centres, of being seen to preserve a vibrant pub and hospitality sector and stopping the sector from being disadvantaged by the comparison with supermarkets. It is not for me to reason why.

But has the pub sector missed the boat with this argument? There was a period when it is absolutely the case that pubs were amongst the few businesses investing in high streets and town centres. They were a key element of the Government's stated plan to revitalise town and city centres. They were able to argue that pubs and bars were trying to remain competitive in high streets with one arm tied behind its back. This was a good argument to make in comparison to supermarkets which were increasingly expanding out of town and abandoning high streets.

But the pandemic, and corporate developments in the supermarket sector have changed the argument. Now, high streets increasingly feature not just a pub, a chemists, a betting shop, but also now, high street and town centre versions of supermarkets like Tesco Extra and Sainsburys Local and convenience stores that have been subsumed into Supermarket groups. The Pub is no longer always the centre of a high street or town centre, with Working from Home a larger factor in the economy, other leisure businesses are moving in, and the investment by the supermarkets in our town centres is also economically important.

The Government has not been persuaded yet and one line of argument has weakened over the years.

The argument remains correct. The tax disparity is unfair to pubs.

Be that as it may, the argument remains correct. The consumption tax disparity on meals with drinks between pubs and supermarkets works massively to the detriment of pubs. It is an unintended consequence and it should be addressed.

It remains to be seen if Tim Martin's voice continues to be a lone one or if the industry decides that this is an issue worth fighting for.

Simon Johnson is an experienced Chair and NED in the Leisure industry.

A former CEO of Business in Sport & Leisure (BISL), Simon is currently Chair of the Rugby Football League and of Sports Information Services (SIS).

He often writes on topical issues in the leisure industry on his website www.sjrb.co.uk

SAXON CROWN BEJEWELLED WITH PUPILS' MODERN ART

Students from a local school have their artwork on permanent display in the hotel of The Saxon Crown (Corby).

Wetherspoon spent £3.4 million redeveloping the hotel, adding 37 bedrooms to the original 12.

The company asked the head of art at Lodge Park Academy, in Corby, whether the students would wish to contribute art for the bedrooms and hallways of the new hotel.

Lodge Park Academy's head of art, Sarah Blackie, said: "The brief given was for year-10 art students to create A3 artwork on the theme 'Visions of Corby'.

"Students researched about people and places of importance associated with Corby and the immediate surrounding area, then created 2D work in response.

"The art's styles were based on images by leading modern artists whose work the students had been studying as part of the art curriculum.

"They had under two months on this assignment, so we are hugely proud of the work which they have achieved."

The students were given a tour of the hotel, by the pub's manager Nikki Cameron, to see their art on display.

Nikki said: "For many years, Wetherspoon has invited schools' art students to supply art for our hotels.

"We were delighted to be able to do this at The Saxon Crown too.

"The art is of a very high standard and is a great addition to the hotel's bedrooms and hallways."



THE TICHENHAM INN • ICKENHAM

SKYE HIGH: 23-YEAR-OLD GOES FROM CLEANER TO PUB'S LEADER



One of Wetherspoon's youngest pub managers started working for the company more than four years ago – as a cleaner.

Skye Mendoza, 23, runs The Tichenham Inn (Ickenham), having worked her way through the ranks from cleaner, then bar associate to shift manager and now pub manager.

She is responsible for a team of 28 full- and part-time staff.

Skye joined Wetherspoon in late 2018 after a friend told her of a vacancy and that career progression was a realistic possibility with Wetherspoon.

She said: "I left my job as a bar worker with another pub company to come here as a cleaner.

"I was doing just the same things every day – and there just wasn't any chance of advancement or promotion."

After a while, because she had had previous experience, Skye was offered cover shifts as a bar associate.

Her manager at the time, Lily Capillo, was clearly impressed – she asked

Skye to become a shift leader in mid 2019, a little more than six months after she had joined the company.

Skye added: "I have a lot to thank Lily for.

"She really took me under her wing, teaching me about various aspects of the business and helping me with my personal licence."

Skye was offered the chance to become manager at The Tichenham Inn in December 2021, when Lily moved to become manager at J.J. Moon's (Wembley).

She said: "Wetherspoon offers really good career progression, and I am a good example of how you can progress in the pubs.

"I am determined, motivated and want to learn more skills.

"Standing still just isn't for me."

Speaking of her ambitions for the future, Skye added:

"First things first. I want to establish myself here and gain experience as a pub manager.

"Then, who knows, a bigger pub, maybe."

UNIQUE PUB GARDEN HELPS KING'S NORTON STAFF BLOOM

Pub manager Nikki Rumney and her team at The Navigation Inn (Kings Norton) marked the pub's first birthday in December.

Nikki, who has been manager at the pub near Birmingham since opening day, heads a team of 50 full- and part-time staff.

When Wetherspoon spent £2.59 million developing the pub on the site of the former Navigation Inn – a community pub with a long local history – extensive and sympathetic renovation work stripped the building back to its original part-Victorian interior and exterior.

More contemporary elements were also added to the building, including an extension to the stable block outbuilding, with a roof light, and two gardens created to provide a welcoming space for locals and visitors alike.

As well as catering for customers' comfort, the pub's staff are provided for with excellent facilities behind the scenes.

There is a main staff room, with dining area, desk space, heating and air-conditioning, changing rooms and toilet facilities.

In addition, the staff have their own garden.



The pebbled space, at the rear of the building, provides an outside area for relaxing during a break from work.

Wetherspoon's founder and chairman, Tim Martin, said: "This must be the only staff room in the UK, anywhere, in any business, where staff have their own garden."

Pub manager Nikki (pictured left, with floor associate Laura Vaughan) added: "We have a great team at the pub, who have worked well together and helped to establish the pub already within the local community.

"It is essential that team members should be able to relax in comfortable surroundings, during their breaks at work – and the staff facilities, including the garden, are excellent."

DRAPER'S ARMS AND DOODLER'S HANDS CREATE A MONSTER

'Doodler' Graham George was having a quiet pint in The Draper's Arms (Peterborough) when he came up with an artistic idea for Halloween.

Graham, a local artist (@grahamjgeorge), noticed the spooky 'draw your own monster' graphics on the children's menu and decided to create some art based on them.

He said: "There's nothing I enjoy more than having a pint and doodling at the same time. I do a lot of my work on found materials, in the hope of incorporating it into my artwork."

He has since sold some of his work and plans to use the proceeds to help the mental health charity MIND.

"What started out as a drawing for my son in the 'draw your own monster' part of the children's menu quickly became a whole series of monsters," added Graham, who specialises in comic horror illustrations.

"So, your children's menu worked perfectly with my monster drawings (and my son loved them)."



DAUGHTER ZOE REVEALS HER PARENTS' PROGRESS

When Zoe Thorpe read, in Wetherspoon News, about customers visiting numerous pubs, she immediately thought about the exploits of her own parents and got in touch.

Nick and Susan Rayner, like so many, are Wetherspoon enthusiasts and have now visited 118 Wetherspoon pubs on their travels.

Susan, 58, a retired head teacher, and Nick, 59, a self-employed accountant, live in Spalding, Lincolnshire, and are regular customers at their local, The Ivy Wall (Spalding).

Zoe explained: "Mum is a regular on a Monday, when she enjoys a relaxing drink after taking care of my sister Hannah's three youngsters all day.

"Mum and dad also have a meal at The Ivy Wall every Friday night, often taking my nana (Jean Dobson) with them."

Zoe continued: "They also plan trips and city breaks around the country, choosing locations to visit which have several Wetherspoon pubs within easy walking distance. They have been to all of the major cities, including Leeds, London, Manchester and Newcastle.

"They love The Troll Cart (Great Yarmouth), where they also stayed at the hotel, saying it's the value-for-money offered by Wetherspoon which is one of the best things about the pubs."

The family also spends an annual 'Christmas jumper day' together, at The Ivy Wall, which Zoe admits has become increasingly chaotic in line with the family growing in number.



ROMFORD ROMEO USES PUB SIGN TO SHOW HIS LOVE



During 2022, Wetherspoon's head-office staff received an unusual request for an image of the signage at one of the company's pubs.

Customer Aiden Topp e-mailed to ask for the image of the sign hanging outside The Moon and Stars (Romford) to be used as part of his wedding celebrations.

Aiden, who lived in Romford until March 2022, met wife-to-be Elouise in 2016 at a mutual friend's birthday party at the pub.

When the couple were planning their nuptials in June 2022, they wanted to theme their big day with moons and stars.

Aiden explained: "I have always been into anything space related, and Elouise is a big Dr Who fan, so the fact that we met at a pub called The Moon and Stars just added to the wedding theme making perfect sense."

Unfortunately, despite their best efforts, the Wetherspoon team and architects were unable to locate the original image of the signage, no longer held in the archives.

However, Aiden was undeterred and took a photograph of the signage depicting a large moon and, with the help of Photoshop and a little creativity, produced a 'pub sign' which featured on the bar at their wedding venue.

He said: "I took a photo of the sign from outside The Moon and Stars, but it was obviously at an angle.

"However, I managed to edit the photo, to make it look straight, and it ended up looking as good as the real thing.

"Our special day, at Thames Chase Forest Centre, including our own Moon and Stars mini pub, complete with sign, was enjoyed by our 65 guests."

Wetherspoon also sent a wedding gift of £50 vouchers to enjoy at The Moon and Stars or any other pub the couple chooses.

LOONY 'LAUD' HOPE MAKES PUB HIS CHESTER ELECTION HQ



Wetherspoon superfan Alan Hope, aka Howling 'Laud' Hope, was running in the Chester by-election.

Official Monster Raving Loony Party leader Alan, pictured (centre) with Loony members 'Red Rocket' Ron Stephenson (left) and Jackie 'Sheikh Mihand' Davidson, reported: "We came, we saw, but we didn't conquer, although the good news was that we didn't come last either."

"If all the people who'd said they would vote for me had done so, I might have won.

"That's always the case, but never mind. Next time maybe."

Alan continued: "With the kind permission of Tim Martin, I was able to use the Wetherspoon pub and hotel The Bull and Stirrup Hotel, as my party HQ and meeting centre. Chester was great fun – a lovely city.

"Vicci, the pub manager, John and their gang made me very welcome and we had lots of people coming and going, just to say hello and have a chat."

A keen Wetherspoon 'collector', Alan also took the opportunity to visit The Square Bottle, Wetherspoon's other pub in the city.

He said: "I made a lot of friends there too, but can't add either pub to my total of 725 Spoons visited, since The Bull and The Bottle were revisits."

Alan concluded: "The amount of people who say, 'we thought the 'Loony Party' were already in', is quite funny and, yet again, the winning party was those who didn't vote at all."

"Once again, it was all good fun and we keep on keeping happy."

ROOM AT THE TOP AS CAMRA MEMBERS MEET AT THE J. P. JOULE

The J. P. Joule (Sale) hosted the Campaign for Real Ale's Trafford & Hulme branch's first meeting of the year.

Branch chairman George Elmslie chose the pub for not only its range of real ales, but also its sought-after upstairs meeting room.

He said: "The fact that The J. P. Joule has an upstairs meeting room makes it well placed to hold meetings."

The J. P. Joule serves 10 real ales at all times, including guest ales, but has the capacity to serve 14 over its two bars – one upstairs near the meeting room and the downstairs main bar.

Shift manager Eric Fulham (pictured) said: "We are delighted to host the branch meetings of CAMRA, as it gives us a chance to chat with them on a range of subjects, including new beers and forthcoming festivals and events."



TWENTY-ONE MILLION GOOD REASONS TO CELEBRATE CHANCE MEETING

Well done folks!
£21,000,000
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY



Wetherspoon's founder and chairman, Tim Martin, is pictured (centre) with staff and Young Lives vs Cancer representatives, celebrating the £21-million fundraising milestone for the company's chosen charity

Wetherspoon's staff and customers have raised **£21 million for the company's chosen charity Young Lives vs Cancer, the UK's leading cancer charity for children and young people and their families.**

Since the partnership began in 2002, staff and customers have organised and taken part in various fundraising events, such as quizzes, bake sales, sky-diving and mountain-climbing, to raise funds for the charity which provides practical, financial and emotional help to children and young people with cancer and their families.

Wetherspoon's staff have also organised interpub fundraising team events, such as the KICK football competition and annual darts tournament, as well as participated in the London marathon and most recently a London-to-Paris cycle ride.

Both customers and staff have given support to these fundraising events and have donated generously, year after year, to Young Lives vs Cancer.

Young Lives vs Cancer's director of income and engagement, Luke Mallett, said: "When the partnership with Wetherspoon began with a chance meeting in 2002, the initial fundraising target was £500,000, yet, 20 years later, that total has reached an incredible £21 million.

"Wetherspoon's staff and pub communities have amazed and inspired us year after year.

"From the bottom of our heart, we wish to thank each and every Wetherspoon colleague and all customers for their dedication, enthusiasm and support.

"Young Lives vs Cancer supports more than 7,000 children and young people with cancer and their families each year, and Wetherspoon's customers, employees and local communities play a part in helping us to be there for them."

Wetherspoon's people director, Tom Ball, added: "We are extremely proud to have raised so much money for such a wonderful charity."

Young Lives vs Cancer works with children and young people diagnosed with cancer and their families to help them to find the strength to face everything which cancer has to throw at them.

The money raised from this partnership has helped to fund financial grants to assist families with the extra costs which cancer brings, while also helping families to use the charity's Home from Home facilities when their child is undergoing treatment in a nearby hospital.

It has also introduced support groups for service users and their families.

COUNTING SPOONS MAKES 'LIFE A GREAT ADVENTURE' SAYS PETER



Customer Peter McElhatton has combined his love of sport, following his favourite teams, to turn Wetherspoon 'collector', with 923 of the company's pubs now ticked off his list (as at March 2023).

Peter, who lives in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, near Manchester, is a season ticket-holder at Oldham Athletic Football Club and Oldham Rugby League, following the teams all over the country, which was how the Wetherspoon collection first began.

He said: "Wetherspoon was, and still is, the first and major stopping-off point on those travels up and down the country, with great food and drinks at excellent prices, as well as fine décor and history."

Peter, a retired accountant, explained: "When I retired from work in 2016, I started counting the Spoons and visited them all in just under three years (1,088 days), excluding the airport pubs (behind security).

"Since then, I have completed all newer openings, including a great trip to Ireland and, more recently, to The London and North Western (Birmingham New Street station).

"I have now been to 923 pubs in total, my criteria being to have something to eat and/or drink – and I have kept my receipt from most of them.

"It is all a bit of fun and part of the game."

Peter, 68, lists many of the pubs among his favourites, especially those in historic buildings and coastal locations.

Among them are The Picture House (Stafford), Opera House (Tunbridge Wells), Waterend Barn (St Albans), The Forty Foot (Dún Laoghaire) and The Mount Stuart (Cardiff).

He added: "I love the old buildings, the seaside locations and the quirkier venues.

"I also love all of the history and the artwork on display in them."

Peter concluded: "Following Wetherspoon takes you to places which you wouldn't normally visit – and I've met some great people.

"I would like to thank Wetherspoon for helping to make my life into a great adventure.

"Hopefully, there will be some more new ones opening soon, so my adventure can continue."

NOW OPEN

Greenwich

THE STARGAZER

Wetherspoon has opened its newest pub at the famous music, leisure and entertainment venue – The O2, London.

The Stargazer is located in The O2's Entertainment District, adjacent to Mamma Mia! The Party.

The pub, which cost £2.9 million to develop, is managed by Arber Hasani (pictured), who is responsible for a team of 85 staff.

Arber has worked for Wetherspoon since December 2003 and has most recently managed The Great Harry, Wetherspoon's pub in Woolwich, since June 2011.

The Stargazer features a 3,800-square-foot beer garden, offering views across the River Thames and Canary Wharf.

The pub is open seven days a week, 10am – 12.15am, with food served throughout the day, from opening until 11pm every day.

Family dining, with children accompanied by an adult, is available until 9pm throughout the week.

The pub specialises in real ales and traditional ciders, as well as craft and world beers, serving a wide range of draught ales, as well as bottled beers, including those from local and regional brewers.

The pub's name, as well as its design, drew inspiration from its location and the important role which Greenwich plays in the history of astronomy and navigation.

Renowned astronomer Sir Edmund Halley established his reputation studying the stars and was appointed as Greenwich Observatory's Astronomer Royal.

His star catalogue, published in 1678, was the world's first such work and determined hundreds of southern stars' locations.

The stars are reflected in the signage, as you enter the pub, and throughout the interior, in the form of bespoke sculptures and lighting features.

The use of copper material represents the rays from the solar system.

Sculptures and artwork are also displayed behind the bar, symbolising astronomy instruments, views and stargazers, as well as the stargazer's other meanings – a lily and a venomous fish.

The bespoke carpet, fitted throughout the pub, also draws inspiration from orbiting stars and planets, along with the equipment used by astrologers and astronomers.

The pub is wheelchair accessible and has a specially adapted toilet for customers with disabilities.

Arber said: "We are delighted to be able to welcome customers to The Stargazer and are confident that the pub will be a great addition to The O2's Entertainment District, alongside the varied mix of more than 30 bars and restaurants."

The O2 is the world's most popular music, entertainment and leisure venue.

Spanning more than 800,000 square feet, The O2 has been visited by over 100 million people since opening in 2007 and plays host to more than 300 events a year.

**The O2, Peninsula Square, Greenwich
London, SE10 ODX**





SONGSTRESS SINGS PRAISES OF PUBS

Singer Kimberley Cowan and her boyfriend, snooker coach Curtis Daher, have notched up 120 Wetherspoon pub visits while travelling around Britain.

The couple, 26 and 27, respectively, began visiting the pubs when travelling for work – but now do it just because they like the pubs and experiencing new parts of the country.

Their 100th pub was The Lord Rosebery (Scarborough).

Kimberley said: “We’ve spent the last few years travelling up and down the UK to obtain the century milestone and have since visited many more Wetherspoon pubs.”

Kimberley is originally from Keighley, West Yorkshire, yet now lives in Lancashire.

She named her favourite Wetherspoon pub as The Caley Picture House (Edinburgh), while Curtis admires the architectural splendour of The Winter Gardens (Harrogate).

Many of the pubs to which the pair have been are in the northeast of England and along the A1 arterial road.

Next on their hitlist are all pubs in Scotland and Britain’s most northerly, southerly, westerly and easterly pubs.

Kimberley said: “Our first date was in The Bankers Draft (Sheffield), so, for that reason as well, we have a sentimental attachment to Wetherspoon.

“But what we like to do is explore new cities, towns and areas of our country – and going to see new Wetherspoon pubs helps us to do that.”



CORNISH BUOY BAND WET THEIR WHISTLES AT TRY DOWR

Pub manager Natalie Higgs, who runs Try Dour (Truro), had some famous and very welcome customers at her pub.

The Fisherman’s Friends visited the pub – a local Cornish singing group which shot to international fame with a biopic comedy-drama film released in 2019.

Natalie said: “They popped in for a drink at Try Dour after performing at the nearby Hall for Cornwall (formerly Truro City Hall).

“They are a well-known and much-loved group, and it was a delight to have them at the pub.”

Natalie concluded: “There have been two films made about them – and,

now, Fisherman’s Friends The Musical (the true story of the world’s most unlikely buoy band) is touring the UK in 2023.”

Bound together by life-long friendship and more than 25 years’ shared experience, the group hails from Port Isaac, Cornwall, and sings traditional songs of the sea, handed down to the various members by their forefathers.

The group has recorded hit albums, performed for HM The Queen at her diamond jubilee celebrations, won various folk awards and performed on the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury Festival.



Shift manager Layla Evans (front left) and shift leader Matt Sinkins (back left) are pictured with The Fisherman’s Friends

THE HART & SPOOL - A REEL DRAW FOR ELSTREE FILMMAKERS



Hooray for Borehamwood – show destination and film enthusiasts’ must-see location.

Wetherspoon’s pub in the town, The Hart & Spool, often welcomes customers visiting from afar, coming to the Hertfordshire town to attend events, tours and shows.

The pub’s manager, Trevor Davis, said: “We welcome many people from within the area, here for a show or visit, who come in for a drink or bite to eat before moving on to the studios.

“We also have a group of studio employees who visit regularly, during their lunch break or when they have finished for the day.

“It is always good to see them too.”

Elstree and Borehamwood have long been connected with a great history of iconic film and television production.

In fact, at Elstree and Borehamwood station, Elstree Screen Heritage has created a ‘walk of fame’, with the names cast into paving slabs of those stars who have performed in the films made at the nearby film studios, including Jack Nicholson, Harrison Ford, Julie Andrews and many others.

Elstree Studios is London’s number-one film and TV studio, with seven stages (with another two planned), 95 years’ film-making experience and more than 1,000 film and television credits.

Elstree Studios has been synonymous with film-making for almost a century and has been the facility of choice for countless feature films, television shows, commercials, pop promos and tour rehearsals.

More recent television productions include *The Crown*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and *The Voice UK*, while the the ‘George Lucas stages’ (1 and 2), both used famously during *Star Wars* Trilogy filming, are among the tallest in Europe, at 15.2 metres.

In the mid 1920s, young British film producer Herbert Wilcox and Hollywood producer JD Williams were looking for a site to build a new motion picture studio, away from the smog of London and with easy access by rail and road.

They were aware that such a facility already operated in a small village named Borehamwood – Neptune Studios, which had opened in 1914.

Building started in 1925, and Wilcox decided to call the new site Elstree Studios, although in Borehamwood, because Elstree was a more established geographical name.

The nearby BBC Elstree Centre has also been home to the soap opera *Eastenders* and the set of *Albert Square, Walford*, since the show began in 1985. However, there are no public tours available.

Located seven miles northwest is another movie-making megastar – Warner Bros Studio Tour London, at Leavesden, Watford, home of *The Making of Harry Potter*.

Visitors flock to experience the magic of the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter*, exploring the iconic costumes, props and sets, including the Great Hall, Forbidden Forest and Diagon Alley, while discovering what it took to bring the *Harry Potter* books to life in film.

Watford Junction is the nearest railway station (with a regular shuttle bus operated by the studio tours). Wetherspoon’s pub in the town is *The Moon Under Water*.

SHEFFIELD

WAGON & HORSES PULLING CHAPELTOWN IN RIGHT DIRECTION



Pub manager Peter Bryan is pictured (back centre) with representatives from Choose Chapeltown, Chapeltown Litter Pickers and Chapeltown in Bloom, together with (far right) councillor John Housley (chair of Ecclesfield Parish Council) Chapeltown Ward

The Wagon & Horses (Sheffield) has been serving the community of Chapeltown for almost 10 years (in October 2023).

Pub manager Peter Bryan, who took over at the pub towards the end of 2021, is an enthusiastic advocate of 'stay local, shop local'.

Chapeltown is located 11km north of Sheffield city centre, and a local group – Choose Chapeltown – is working hard to support local businesses.

Peter said: "The pub is involved with Choose Chapeltown, helping to co-ordinate events and initiatives, including the Chapeltown Litter Pickers and Chapeltown in Bloom.

"These groups are all part of the community effort – people volunteering their time to keep Chapeltown litter free and colourful.

"Working with local businesses and the community ensures that the pub maintains its important community role and has a greater connection with the people we serve."

Peter added: "I also attend regular meetings with the group to share ideas, with the main aim of improving the local area.

"We are working with the local parish council and other local businesses to help to promote the local area and to encourage new custom in Chapeltown."

Choose Chapeltown encourages local residents to explore the local shops and to browse the market, helping to support local businesses and producers.

The group also promotes eating locally with the family and drinking locally with friends, in support of local hospitality businesses, including The Wagon & Horses.

Choose Chapeltown also organises local initiatives and events, including those for Christmas and Halloween which took place in the village during 2022.

Peter concluded: "Choose Chapeltown is a great example of like-minded local people joining forces to help to improve the place where they live and work together."

OLDBURY

SPECIAL VISIT TO COURT OF REQUESTS FOR SANDWELL'S SPECIAL OLYMPIANS



Pub manager Jodie Harvey and her team at The Court of Requests (Oldbury) welcomed members of Special Olympics Sandwell, after the group was presented with The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

The group of about 40 volunteers and competitors asked to visit the pub following the presentation at Sandwell Council House, just a street away from it.

Several competitors visit the pub regularly for lunch and are known by the pub's staff.

Jodie said: "It was great to see so many of our local Special Olympians here.

"It was smiles all round and they are always very welcome in the pub."

The award was made last year, yet was formally presented to the group only in February 2023.

Pictured is group chair Norma Hyde (holding the glass trophy) and Linford Golding (holding the certificate), with group members around them.

RUTHERGLEN

FOUR TIMES 10 IN RUTHERGLEN

Four team members at An Ruadh-Ghleann (Rutherglen) celebrated 10 years working at the pub as the pub celebrated its 10th birthday.

Pub manager Kathleen Scouler, kitchen manager Steven Fountain and cleaners Alison McKeown and Bernie Foyer have, among them, notched up 40 years' service at the pub.

Kathleen said: "It's been a good 10 years – and we have a good, close-knit team. It's great to have fellow staff members who've been here from the pub's opening – you develop a good understanding with one another."

To celebrate the occasion, customers enjoyed cake and a buffet – and the pub was decked with balloons.

Pictured are shift leader Jamie Parrott and bar associate Lisa Gardner outside the pub with the birthday cake and balloons.



SERIOUS SECURITY STEPS MAKE SOCIALISING SAFER

Pub staff and external experts combine to help to keep any hint of trouble at bay

Wetherspoon always aims to offer its staff and customers the best-possible pub experience.

Whether it is as a work place or a socialising space, a safe environment is of paramount importance to everyone.

Our pub managers and staff work closely with their local police forces and pubwatch groups, making every effort possible to ensure that the safety of staff and customers is placed as a high priority.

Wetherspoon has a dedicated security group which works directly with security company SECOM.

It provides expert guidance, helping the company to make its pubs and hotels safe and secure, as well as giving invaluable and immediate first-hand assistance to our pub teams on the occasions issues do arise.

SECOM provides Wetherspoon with CCTV, security installations and monitoring equipment, as well as working with employees who may have been assaulted, to pursue charges on their behalf.

Behaviour

Wetherspoon's pub & hotel security co-ordinator, Lewis Hinckley-Keens, said: "Poor customer behaviour and antisocial behaviour are not tolerated at any of our pubs or hotels.

"The purpose of the security group is to make our pubs and hotels as safe and welcoming as possible for all of our customers, guests and employees."

Lewis continued: "We are involved in a wide scope of work, including door security, individual pub security measures, police response and prosecutions.

"We also liaise and work with local authorities and external organisations, including local pubwatch schemes and Best Bar None initiatives, to help to make a difference."

The group, in partnership with the SECOM intelligence team, headed by communications and investigations manager Gemma McKinlay, has been able to work with local policing teams and agencies to resolve several issues at various pubs.

Tenacity

Issues have included a repeat offender returning to a pub regularly, assaults on staff members and instances of racial assault or abuse, which have all been fully investigated thanks to the tenacity of the SECOM intelligence team, with successful outcomes achieved.

Police attendance and meetings at the pubs have been arranged, security measures reviewed, intelligence shared, evidence gathered and investigations pursued.

Subsequent arrest and charging of suspects have been achieved in some cases, as well as welfare and victim support offered to those involved.

Lewis reported: "Of the 78 incidents reported and escalated (since January 2022), the team has secured an 81-per-cent success rate, illustrating the great success of the work achieved by Gemma and SECOM.

"Where issues have been resolved, the pubs are now in a much better position, often with closer relationships developed with the local police and better lines of communication now in place.

Key

"These are key to establishing a better and safer environment, in not only the pub, but also the wider local community."

Gemma McKinlay added: "Having worked in collaboration with Wetherspoon since January 2020, SECOM and I have been given the opportunity to support pubs, employees and the wider communities against anti-social and sometimes violent behaviour.

"Our main objective is to reduce risk against customers and staff and to encourage a safe environment.

"We are here to support and help them to empower staff, when dealing with the police or local authority, and to understand processes and legislation – which can be overwhelming.

"Additionally, we are able to assist with internal and external investigations and ensure that all lines of enquiry are fully developed.

"Collaboratively, we have achieved a healthy balance among safety, security and accountability."

Pubwatch

In January 2022, Wetherspoon's pubs were confirmed to be participating, across the UK, in at least 468 pubwatch schemes.

By January 2023, the company's pubs actively participate in at least 535 local pubwatch schemes, a 14-per-cent increase.

Many of these local initiatives are chaired by Wetherspoon's pub managers.

Examples include Wembley pubwatch, where pub manager Lily Capillo (J.J. Moon's, Wembley) has created what we believe to be one of the largest pubwatch schemes in the country.

The pub manager of The Assembly Rooms (Epsom), Sel Devecioglu, and the deputy manager, Kara Nash, also picked up a 'highly commended' award, on behalf of Epsom pubwatch and its members, at the 2022 National Pubwatch Awards, for 'outstanding social responsibility'.



Pictured (left to right) are National Pubwatch chairman Steve Baker OBE, pub manager Selcuk Devecioglu and deputy manager Kara Nash (both of The Assembly Rooms, Epsom), Lord Kennedy, Your Pontypridd BID project officer James Payne, Pontypridd pubwatch chair Sian John, Reading pubwatch honorary secretary Bill Donne, Reading pubwatch chair and Purple Turtle bar general manager Stuart McNaught and Wetherspoon's legal director Nigel Connor



Best Bar None

Wetherspoon's pubs across the UK also have a great working relationship with the Best Bar None initiative.

The Best Bar None award scheme promotes the responsible management and operation of alcohol-licensed premises and rewards best practice. The scheme, piloted in Manchester city centre in 2003 and supported by the Home Office, has grown as more local authorities promote Best Bar None schemes.

The Joseph Bramah (Barnsley) was awarded the 'best pub from a national company' title, as well as the most-prized 'overall winner' title at the Barnsley Best Bar None 2021/22 ceremony.

The company has at least 88 pubs accredited by Best Bar None and is currently working on a scheme to facilitate all pubs being able to apply for accreditation centrally, without the need for a local initiative/assessor who may not be available.

Ask for Angela

Wetherspoon is also supporting Sylvia Oates (founder of Six Till Six) and Hayley Crawford (district commander for Bassetlaw and creator of the 'Ask for Angela' initiative) in promoting 'Ask for Angela' in pubs.

'Ask for Angela' is for people who feel unsafe, vulnerable or threatened. They can seek help discreetly by approaching staff and asking them for Angela.

This coded phrase will indicate to staff that they require help with their situation. A trained staff member will then look to support and assist them – which might be through reuniting them with a friend, seeing them to a taxi or calling the police.



FOOD HYGIENE

– AMONG THE BIG GROUPS, WE ARE THE BEST

Average rating of 4.98 out of 5, scored at 769 pubs, puts Wetherspoon above comparable operators

Wetherspoon has, once again, scored highly in the latest food hygiene rating league table (www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk), as at 20 February 2023.

Among the biggest pub chains, Wetherspoon's pubs consistently top the charts in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS).

The company's pubs in England, Northern Ireland and Wales have an average food hygiene rating of 4.98.

The FHRS – the only independent government scheme assessing the level of hygiene standards in pubs, restaurants, take-aways, clubs and cafés – is run by local authorities.

It scores outlets 0–5, with the highest-possible rating of five meaning 'very good' hygiene practices and safety systems in place, fully complying with the law.

Outlets with a rating of four are deemed to have 'good' hygiene standards, while three is 'generally satisfactory', two needs 'some improvement', a rating of one requires 'major improvement' and 0 requires 'urgent improvement'.

Wetherspoon was ahead of pub companies such as Hungry Horse and Nicholson's and was also rated higher than restaurant and sandwich chains including PizzaExpress, Nando's, McDonald's and Greggs – although all of those companies also scored highly.

Of our pubs, 769 currently have an FHRS rating, with 98.05 per cent of those achieving the highest-possible rating of five.

Scotland operates the Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS). This scheme has a 'pass/fail' rating – with 60 Wetherspoon pubs in Scotland gaining a 'pass' score – a 100-per-cent success rate.

The ratings for both FHRS and FHIS follow an independent assessment of food hygiene at the various premises, determined by local authority environmental health officers visiting outlets to assess hygiene levels.

Environmental health officers assess three areas: food hygiene and safety procedures; structural compliance; confidence in management.

The ratings (as well as the date of inspection) can be found online and on stickers displayed at businesses' premises.

Wetherspoon's personnel and retail audit director, James Ullman, said: "We are proud of our pubs' hygiene ratings.

"However, we also take it extremely seriously when a pub does not achieve the maximum rating in either scheme.

"Where a maximum score is not achieved, we work hard with each pub's team and local authority to ensure, as quickly as possible, that standards are returned to expected levels."

To achieve the highest-possible rating of five, our pubs' management and staff must achieve and maintain the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene, including:

Hygienic food-handling

This is how food is prepared, cooked, cooled, reheated and stored:

- checking fridge temperatures
- hand-washing facilities and practices
- equipment used for raw and cooked foods being kept separately
- staff members' understanding of food hygiene

Physical condition of the premises and facilities

This is the assessment of the standard of cleanliness and upkeep, including whether:

- the condition of general decoration, layout and lighting is of a good standard
- it is clean and cleaning materials meet requirements
- there is suitable ventilation and pest control
- rubbish and waste are disposed of correctly

Food safety management

This ensures that suitable precautions are taken to keep food safe, including:

- staff training records
- logs of relevant checks, such as fridges' temperatures and cleaning
- safety procedure records

Did you know?

As well as the independent assessments by the FHRS across England, Northern Ireland and Wales and the FHIS in Scotland, Wetherspoon monitors its own pub hygiene standards.

Monthly, each pub receives at least five quality-assurance visits from a combination of its area manager, Wetherspoon's own audit department, an external 'mystery shopper' company and other head-office managers.

The only independent government scheme assessing food hygiene standards

FOOD HYGIENE RATING



VERY GOOD

	Total premises scored	Average premises score out of 5
TGI Fridays	70	5.00
ASK	64	5.00
GBK	35	5.00
Prezzo	146	4.99
Slug & Lettuce	75	4.99
Wetherspoon	769	4.98
Aldi	757	4.98
Nando's	417	4.98
Greggs	1831	4.96
McDonald's	1227	4.96
Lidl	649	4.96
Walkabout	20	4.95
O'Neill's	34	4.94
Yates	33	4.94
Starbucks	994	4.93
Hungry Horse	243	4.93
Nicholson's	67	4.93
Giraffe	15	4.93
PizzaExpress	333	4.92
Miller & Carter	113	4.92
Be At One	35	4.91
Costa Coffee	2365	4.90
Sizzling Pub Co	176	4.90
All Bar One	50	4.90
Table Table	43	4.90
Chef & Brewer	131	4.89
Geronimo	35	4.89
Craff Union	409	4.88
Coffee#1	104	4.88
YO! Sushi	51	4.88
Browns	24	4.88
Burger King	433	4.87
Vintage Inns	149	4.87
Pitcher & Piano	15	4.87
KFC	901	4.86
Zizzi	126	4.86
Côte	83	4.86
Carluccio's	35	4.86
Asda	519	4.85
Toby Carvery	141	4.85
Las Iguanas	43	4.84
Bella Italia	76	4.82
Turtle Bay	44	4.82
BrewDog	44	4.82
Bill's	54	4.81
Oakman Inns	36	4.81
Papa Johns	447	4.80
Brewers Fayre	124	4.80
Young's	123	4.80
Beefeater	121	4.80
Harvester	157	4.78
Subway	1385	4.75
Caffè Nero	528	4.71
Loungers/Cosy Club	197	4.70
German Doner Kebab	98	4.69
Café Rouge	33	4.61

Information in this table was sourced on 20 February 2023 from www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk, listing 769 Wetherspoon pubs in England, Northern Ireland and Wales with an average food hygiene rating of 4.98. Please note that, where councils are yet to assess or submit their pub inspection, there may be a slight gap in the number of pubs, compared with that in our records. Businesses are rated from 0 to 5 which is displayed at their premises and online. The top score is 5.

MAXIMUM MARKS – THEY SCORE 'EM AT THE FORUM



Kitchen manager Kate Curry

Across six, seven, eight and even nine successive annual inspections, many of our pubs (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) have achieved the highest-possible rating of five.

To gain a maximum score is difficult enough; however, to then maintain that highly coveted rating of five requires consistently high standards.

Among our pubs achieving a continuous maximum rating of five for the last seven consecutive inspections is The Forum (Hexham).

The pub, housed in a former cinema in Northumberland, has been managed by Cindy Elliott-Purkins since 2009.

Cindy, who has been with the company for 20 years, started as a bar associate at The Quayside (Newcastle) and also had a spell at Wetherspoons (Metrocentre, Gateshead), including a stint as kitchen manager, before taking on her first pub manager role at The Forum.

Kitchen manager Kate Curry has been in charge of her kitchen team of six for the past three and a half years. She started at the pub seven years ago as a 16-year-old floor associate, working her way up to her current position.

Cindy explained: "The kitchen team is small, but several of our staff are cross-trained, meaning that they are able, as and when the situation requires, to work either front of house on the bar or in the kitchen.

"We have eight long-serving members, with up to 10 years' service each, as well as several students working at the pub.

"I have high confidence in my management team and the processes in place, enabling us to achieve consecutively very good hygiene scores.

"It is all about not dropping the ball and keeping focused on every aspect of the pub."

Cindy continued: "We have the Wetherspoon procedures in place, keeping our standards as high as possible, including a monthly unannounced audit inspection.

"We always score more highly on this than the company average.

"The food hygiene inspection is also unannounced, so we can never prepare for it. We just need to keep on top of everything, at all times – even the little things can make all the difference.

"A five-star rating is definitely a big deal, not only for us, but particularly for our customers.

"People are very aware, with social media playing a part in that, and we have also had good coverage in the local newspaper – which helps to promote our good practices."

Cindy concluded: "There are a lot of places in Hexham to eat.

"Although we're very competitive on price, that isn't the only thing which people seek these days.

"Good hygiene is essential – and we must continue to achieve and maintain those high standards."

CASTLE IN THE AIR • THE MARDI GRAS • MANCHESTER

FLOOR ASSOCIATE ROBERT FOLLOWS IN FAMILY'S FOOTSTEPS



Martin and Alison Drury have been looking back on 25 years with Wetherspoon – a period which has latterly seen their son Robert join the company as well.

The couple started as joint pub managers at The Hope Tap (Reading) on 7 September 1997.

Martin had been working in another pub while Alison came from a restaurant background.

Their complementary talents stood them in good stead as pub managers for Wetherspoon.

They worked at several pubs, including The Tim Bobbin (Urmston), for seven years until 2010, when they took a step back to work as shift managers in various Manchester pubs.

Martin worked at Castle in the Air while Alison moved to nearby pub The Mardi Gras, each located in a shopping centre. They are still at their respective pub.

Martin said: "I'm very happy at Castle in the Air. I know the place, the customers and the team here well.

"It is a great joy to be able to teach younger people the skills they need and to nudge them in the right direction.

"I have shoes older than some of the people I work with.

"Wetherspoon is a real family company. We work together really well – and everyone helps everyone else. There is a lot of support.

"The pay and benefits are good – and there is flexibility, when you need it."

Son Robert, 17, works with mum Alison at The Mardi Gras as a floor associate, having joined the company in early 2022.

He said: "Lockdown was a strange time, but it's great to be out now and working. I want to pull my weight and get on, but I haven't exactly worked out a career yet. It's just good to be earning money."

Regional manager Will Fotheringham said: "Martin and Alison are two of the most experienced members of management in the northwest.

"The pubs benefit from their wealth of experience – and they have the same enthusiasm for the job today which they had when they first started."

Pictured (left to right) are regional manager Will Fotheringham, floor associate Robert Drury, shift managers Alison and Martin Drury and area manager Sarah Leather.

AWARDS

BOLTON

SPINNING TO WINNING - MULE LEADS THE PACK UNDER MANAGER SIMON



Pictured (left to right) are CAMRA member Paul Roberts, pub manager Simon Long, shift leader and real-ale champion Chelsea Hulme and Bolton CAMRA branch chairman Graham Walsh

The Spinning Mule (Bolton) has been named as 'pub of the season' by local Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) branch members.

Pub manager Simon Long received the accolade for 'winter 2022/23' from Bolton CAMRA branch's chairman, Graham Walsh, at a presentation evening at the pub.

Simon, who has been at The Spinning Mule, his first pub as manager, since 2020, said: "This is a massive deal for us and just underlines the hard work and dedication of the team."

"We have a good relationship with Bolton CAMRA branch members, with many of them regular customers, and we thank them for their support."

"We are delighted to be voted as their winter pub of the season."

Graham Walsh added: "Bolton CAMRA is really pleased to award our winter pub of the season 2022/23 title to The Spinning Mule."

"Our members chose it as the winner, based on its choice, quality and consistency of real ales and on the availability of seasonal beer styles, during the winter months, such as porters, stouts and old ales."

"The accolade is also recognition of the recent investment in the pub

and the hard work by staff to provide a warm and welcoming space where everyone can enjoy a pint."

The Spinning Mule serves 12 real ales at all times, including Wetherspoon's three regular ales, Sharp's Doom Bar and Abbot Ale and Ruddles from Greene King, and a selection of ever-changing guest ales from local breweries.

Simon, who has worked for the company for 12 years and was previously at The Regal Moon (Rochdale), added: "We have Ossett White Rat (4.0% ABV) as much as possible, having been voted top in the inaugural Spinning Mule CAMRA 'beer of the year' awards."

"Also popular with our regulars is Peerless Full Whack (6.0% ABV). Titanic Plum Porter (4.9% ABV) always goes down really well."

Simon concluded: "We hope that this award is the first of many."

"A lot of our real-ale success is down to the skill and hard work of our real-ale champion Chelsea, who decides which guest beers are on offer at the pub."

"We will also be aiming for inclusion in the next CAMRA Good Beer Guide - fingers crossed."

VALUING STAFF MAKES WETHERSPOON A TOP EMPLOYER



Wetherspoon has been recognised by the Top Employers Institute as a Top Employer United Kingdom 2023.

It is the 18th time Wetherspoon has been certified by the Top Employers Institute – the independent organisation behind

the Top Employers accreditation.

To achieve Top Employer certification, participating organisations are assessed by the Top Employers Institute via a rigorous analysis of their people practices.

The HR Best Practices survey covers six HR domains, comprising 20 topics across the business and employee life cycle, including people strategy, work environment, talent acquisition, learning and well-being, plus diversity and inclusion.

The information is then validated and audited independently by the Top Employers Institute to ensure the integrity of the processes and data.

Wetherspoon’s people director, Tom Ball, said: “We are extremely proud to be considered among the best employers in the United Kingdom, particularly as this recognition comes from an independent organisation which researches numerous companies.

“The company employs more than 41,000 staff across its pubs in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, as well as at its head office.

“Wetherspoon is committed to offering employees the best opportunities to succeed and grow within the company, including studying for qualifications and apprenticeships.

“This is evident in the number of Wetherspoon’s staff progressing to more senior positions.”

GRIMSBY • CAMBERWELL

LISTING FOR TWO IN THE GOOD BEER GUIDE



The numerous Wetherspoon pubs listed, over many years, in the Campaign for Real Ale’s (CAMRA) publication The Good Beer Guide are perfect testament to the quality of the real ale served.

An official ‘certificate of inclusion’ has been presented to many pubs to mark their 2023 guide listing.

At The Yarborough Hotel (Grimsby) (above left), shift leader and real-ale champion Michael Evans (centre) accepted recognition from Grimsby & North East Lincolnshire CAMRA branch chair Kevin Donovan (right) and branch vice chair Mark Long (left).

Michael said: “We are delighted to be included in the CAMRA guide for 2023, the 50-year anniversary edition.

“It is great recognition for the pub and the team, who work hard to ensure that our real ale selection is always varied and excellent quality.”



At The Fox on the Hill (Camberwell) (above), pub manager Ryan Way (left) received recognition from South East London CAMRA beer festival’s organiser Eric Camfield (right) for the pub’s third consecutive year in the guide.

Ryan, who has managed the pub for four years, said: “It is a very competitive part of London, so we are happy to have retained our listing in the guide. It is a badge of honour.

“The Fox on the Hill is a destination pub, rather than passing trade, so the listing lifts our profile and is the gold standard for those seeking good real ale.”

Eric Camfield added: “Pubs in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide (now 50 years old) are selected on the quality of beer served, especially real ale.

“The Fox on the Hill’s inclusion has been achieved by having consistently high scores from CAMRA members who drink at the pub and report their findings to ‘What Pub’ (whatpub.com).”

WINES WITH HISTORY B

Seven new varieties now on sale include the produce of European vineyards first tilled in the 19th century

Pubs are now serving seven NEW wines, as part of the ever-growing range of wines at your local Wetherspoon.

For your enjoyment, two NEW whites, three rosés and two reds have been added to the wine list.

NEW Bolla Pinot Grigio delle Venezie DOC (12% ABV) from Italy and NEW Cune White Rioja (13% ABV) from Spain are both available by the bottle (750ml). Villa Maria Private Bin Sauvignon Blanc (12.5% ABV) from New Zealand is served by the glass (125ml, 175ml and 250ml), as well as the bottle (750ml).

Tradition

Since 1883, expertise and a respect for tradition have been the pillars of Bolla's wine-making philosophy.

This long history has led to the Bolla winery being recognised as an ambassador, the world over, of Italian taste.

The grapes harvested for Bolla Pinot Grigio are sourced from hillside vineyards located in northeast Italy's Delle Venezie area.

Rioja produces not only red wines, but also excellent white wines – as is proven by this superb example of a white Rioja. Cune White Rioja (unoaked) has aromas of apple and pears.

In 1879, two brothers, Eusabio and Raimundo Real de Asua, founded the winery CVNE (pronounced 'coo-nay') in the heart of Haro.

It's still run by one of their direct descendants.

NEW Bolla Pinot Grigio Blush Venezia DOC (11.5% ABV) from Italy and NEW The Pale by Sacha Lichine (12.5% ABV) from Provence, France, each a rosé wine, are also available in a bottle (750ml), while NEW Villa Maria Blush Sauvignon (12.5% ABV) from New Zealand is served by the glass (125ml, 175ml and 250ml), as well as the bottle (750ml).

Floral

Bolla Pinot Grigio Blush Venezia DOC is floral, with lingering notes of summer fruits.

The Pale is crafted with grapes from the Vin de Pays du Var region of Provence. This is a classic Mediterranean rosé... with a twist.

It is deliciously dry and refreshing, with bright red-fruit flavours and a clean, crisp finish.

Villa Maria Blush Sauvignon is a fresh twist on a Kiwi favourite.

A delicate, pale pink wine, this is blushing from a splash of merlot from the Hawkes Bay region and bursting with fresh grapefruit and berry flavours.

Shiraz

NEW Grant Burge Barossa Ink Shiraz (14.5% ABV) from Barossa Valley, South Australia, is served by the glass (125ml, 175ml and 250ml) and bottle (750ml), while NEW Zana Pinot Noir (12.5% ABV), from Romania, and Trivento Reserve Malbec (14% ABV), from Argentina, are available in a bottle (750ml).

Zana Pinot Noir, packed full of raspberry and black cherry fruit character, is produced by Cramele Recas.

It is made with grapes grown on the Dealul Uberland vineyard, an estate located on the far western fringes of the Romanian region of Transylvania/Banat, near Timisoara.

Fifth-generation winemaker Grant Burge is the name behind one of Australia's most respected and innovative producers. Grant Burge Barossa Ink Shiraz, an intensely dark blockbuster, is sourced from grapes grown across the Barossa.

Decadent rich berry flavours pack an immediate punch, balanced by hints of dark chocolate, blackberries, cherries and sweet oak spice.

Fizz

For something with a little fizz, try the ever-popular Italian Teresa Rizzi Prosecco (11% ABV) or the sparkling rosé (11.5% ABV). The rosé is available in a 200ml bottle, the Prosecco as a 200ml and 750ml bottle.

Broadwood's Folly, a fine, dry English sparkling wine (12% ABV) from the award-winning Denbies wine estate in Surrey, is available by the bottle (750ml).

Why not discover Wetherspoon's wine range for yourself?



RING FRUITFUL FUTURE

Concha y Toro

Coldwater Creek wine on draught is available by the glass (125ml, 175ml and 250ml).

Concha y Toro, which produces Wetherspoon's draught wine, began in 1883 with its founder, Don Melchor, dreaming about creating 'the best wines'.

Today, Concha y Toro is one of the most-admired wine producers in the world.

Its various multiaward-winning wines and brands are enjoyed by consumers around the world, in more than 140 countries.

Coldwater Creek wines hail from Chile's Valle Central wine region, where the iconic Andes Mountains provide a natural barrier, protecting vineyards from the elements.

This unique geography, combined with the warm climate and cooling breezes, creates perfect wine-producing conditions.

Tasting notes



Chardonnay (12% ABV): This zesty Chardonnay, light golden in colour, has aromas of peach and citrus and flavours of pineapple and tropical fruit.

Pinot grigio (12% ABV): This fresh, crisp pinot grigio has green apple and pear flavours.



Rosé (11.5% ABV): This delightful fruity rosé is made from the premium grape variety cabernet sauvignon.

The strawberry and cherry aromas are followed by a lovely balance of red fruit flavours and a refreshing crispness.



Merlot (12% ABV): Bright red in the glass, with a lovely aroma of raspberry and cherry, this is smooth and easy drinking, with red plum flavours and a hint of spice.



CHERRY TREE ALE ACE JOHN KEEPS PUB AT TOP OF LEAGUE

Ale champion John Burgess has been celebrating 20 years' service at The Cherry Tree (Huddersfield).

Bar associate John was given responsibility four years ago for promoting real ale in the pub – which has been in The Good Beer Guide, published by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), for the past three – including the current edition.

John, a CAMRA member, has run meet-the-brewer nights at The Cherry Tree and events such as tap takeovers, where a single brewer takes over the ale taps for the evening.

He said: "I enjoy real ale and was only too pleased to take on the role of ale champion at the pub."

John, a keen Huddersfield Town supporter, has worked at the pub since February 2003.

The pub's manager, Catherine Ball, said: "John is one of our secret weapons – and we are very proud of his achievement of getting us in The Good Beer Guide and keeping us there."

"All of the staff are proud of his achievement – and it's great that it has been recognised by the company."

Pictured (left to right) are Catherine Ball, John Burgess, bar associate Karl Wellbelove and duty manager Donna Allen.



SIBLINGS SERVE UP BIRTHDAY BASH AT THE TREMENHEERE



Brother and sister Jamie and Jade Hooper are pictured marking the 20th birthday of The Tremeneheere (Penzance).

Jamie started working at the pub nine years ago, as a bar associate, and has progressed to shift manager, while shift leader Jade has been at the pub (her second spell) for a year and a half.

The Cornish pub has been managed for the past year by Bobby Platt, who was previously at Chapel an Gansblydhen (Bodmin) (now closed).

The Tremeneheere's 20th birthday celebrations included a charity fundraiser which collected £100 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Staff baked cakes for a charity bake sale, as well as donating gifts for a raffle, and there was also a birthday card-colouring competition for the youngsters.

PONTYPRIDDIAN WEAR IT WELSH ON ST DAVID'S DAY

The Tumble Inn (Pontypridd) hosted a St David's Day quiz night to generate funds for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Customers were requested to donate just £2 per person, with a maximum of six players comprising each competing team, and encouraged to wear 'Welsh attire' for the occasion.

The quiz included picture rounds and general knowledge questions, with prizes up for grabs throughout the evening.

In total, 10 teams took part, some wearing Welsh Jerseys and T-shirts, with £42 raised for the charity.

Pictured at the event (left to right) are pub manager Hannah Marl, customer and quiz host James Haddrick, shift leader and quiz co-host Tiarnan Doherty and shift manager Rebecca Ashman (front).



HIGH NOTES HIT AS CINDERELLA SWEEPS IN TO OPERA HOUSE

Opera House (Tunbridge Wells) hosted its annual eagerly anticipated opera performance.

Two performances of Cinderella'23 – a new fairy-tale opera with music from George Frideric Handel to Jerome Kern, by the touring Merry Opera Company – were enjoyed by a sold-out audience at the pub.

Opera House, Wetherspoon's pub in the Kent town, reverts to its original use at least once annually to stage an opera show.

The audience enjoyed either a matinée or Sunday-evening show, in seats from the balcony (no dining) or from boxes or stall seats with preshow dining included in the ticket price.

The production told the story of the timeless heroine Cinderella, who has now finally resolved to transform her forsaken circumstances into happiness ever after, as she threads her way through life's anguish and comedy to find her gallant prince.

Pub manager Ross Markwick said: "We were thrilled to welcome the Merry Opera Company back to Opera House with its production of Cinderella'23.

"Tickets for the annual opera performance, which sold out in record time this year, are always highly sought after, and the show is always enjoyed and much loved by our staff and customers alike."

Past productions at Opera House have included The Mikado, Pirates of Penzance, The Marriage of Figaro, The Magic Flute, La bohème and Kiss Me, Figaro!

The original theatre opened in 1902, built by the firm of John Jarvis, with the architect JP Briggs.

It later became a cinema and then a bingo hall, opening as a Wetherspoon pub in April 1997.





The Saxon Crown (Corby)

NO END IN SIGHT FOR ROOM BOOM WHICH BEGAN IN 1998

It is 25 years since the company's first hotel opened, but now - with 57, so far, in Britain and Ireland - it's hard to imagine life without them

This year marks 25 years since the company opened the doors of its first hotel, in Shrewsbury, Shropshire.

In the quarter of a century since, at The Shrewsbury Hotel and at all of the company's hotels, the motto remains the same: quality accommodation at great prices.

Wetherspoon currently operates 57 hotels in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Each of the hotels, situated above or near a Wetherspoon pub, has its own unique character, with many in restored historic buildings.

Whether it's a convenient one-night stay or a much-needed weekend break, Wetherspoon has a collection of hotels across the UK and the Republic of Ireland, offering the perfect accommodation.

Every hotel is also attached to a Wetherspoon pub, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, including excellent club deals, as well as a range of hot, soft and alcoholic drinks, all conveniently located for hotel guests to enjoy during their stay.

To date, the 57 hotels across England, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales offer a combined 1,285 rooms.

From Cornwall to Cumbria, there are 44 hotels throughout England; in the Republic of Ireland, you can sleep soundly in Swords or at the largest Wetherspoon hotel, Keavan's Port Hotel (Dublin city centre);

from the Highlands to the Scottish Borders, Scotland offers seven places to stay; there is a warm Welsh welcome in our four hotels in Wales.

Whether you are looking to enjoy a city break, a seaside stay or countryside get-away, Wetherspoon has a warm welcome waiting for you at the company's hotels.

Each of our hotel rooms features an en suite bathroom, complimentary tea- and coffee-making facilities, hair dryer, flat-screen television with Freeview TV (Saorview Freesat TV in Ireland) and unlimited free Wi-Fi.

The hotels all offer a 24-hour reception service – and the rooms can accommodate a mixture of double, twin and family occupancy, many being interconnecting. There are also accessible bedrooms, with wet-room facilities, suitable for guests with disabilities.

Selected hotels offer meeting and conference rooms, step-free access and car-parking facilities – for more information, visit the web page of the hotel of your choice.

For all hotel bookings, please visit the Wetherspoon website (jdwetherspoon.com), offering our best rates* for customers.

You can also use the telephone and our app to book a hotel visit.

*Non-refundable advance purchase rates, available to book direct on the telephone, our website and our app. †Price shown is per room, per night, on a Sunday, and is subject to change.

Stay with us on Sunday from **£50***

England

THE SAXON CROWN

100 Elizabeth Street, Corby
Northamptonshire, NN17 1FN

This hotel reopened in November 2022, following a £3.4-million refurbishment project, offering an additional 37 rooms to the original 12-bedroom hotel.

Housed in the former East Midlands Co-Operative building, the 49 bedrooms have been luxuriously fitted, each featuring an en suite bathroom with rainfall shower.

The 37 additional hotel rooms, of which 15 pairs can create linked rooms, are located over the first and second floors of the adjacent building. They comprise eight new double rooms and a further 27 twin rooms, as well as two new accessible rooms, suitable for guests with disabilities, complete with full DDA-compliant bathroom facilities. (In 1995, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) made it mandatory for all of those establishments/service providers open to the public to take reasonable steps to provide access for people with disabilities.)

There is passenger lift access to all levels and a new stairway linking the extension to the original 12 hotel bedrooms, on the first floor, over the pub. The Saxon Crown also has two meeting rooms available for hire, for a range of conferencing styles.

Corby is a fast-growing town in the heart of the east Midlands, located alongside the Welland Valley and Rockingham Forest. The town was the site of the former Stewart and Lloyds Steelworks which created an influx of Scottish migrant workers settling in Corby and earning its nickname – Little Scotland.



Republic of Ireland

KEAVAN'S PORT HOTEL

1 Camden Street Upper, Dublin, D02 TC61

In Dublin, during August 2021, Wetherspoon opened its biggest hotel so far, investing €27.4 million in the pub and 89-bedroom hotel.

Keavan's Port Hotel and its accompanying Wetherspoon pub are housed in the redeveloped series of eight Georgian townhouses (seven of which are protected) in Camden Street Upper/Lower, in Dublin's city centre.

Several historical aspects of the old buildings have been retained and restored, including the circular stained-glass window, crafted

by Earley & Company (church decorators, stained-glass manufacturers and stone carvers) which was based at the site.

Part of the building was also a convent of the Little Sisters of the Assumption – from 1890 until the 1940s. Their former chapel has been preserved and forms part of the pub and hotel.

Located on the rejuvenated Camden Street, with plenty of pubs, bars and restaurants to choose from, 1km from the city centre and Grafton Street, the hotel and pub are within a short distance of many of Dublin's attractions.



Scotland

THE SALTOUN INN

Saltoun Square, Fraserburgh
Aberdeenshire, AB43 9DA

Wetherspoon opened The Saltoun Inn in August 2014 in the northeast Scotland town of Fraserburgh, following a £2.44-million redevelopment.

Housed in a grade B listed property, it was originally built in 1801 as part of the transformation of Saltoun Square, previously named Kirk Green, into a 'classical town centre'.

Originally called The Saltoun Inn, it was funded by the Gardeners' Friendly Society of Fraserburgh, a gentlemen's club formed (10 years earlier) for 'social and benevolent purposes'. The inn provided 'a fashionable place in which the burgh's commercial classes could transact their business'.

The hotel boasts 11 en suite bedrooms (six doubles, two twin, two family and one accessible twin room). The hotel also adjoins the Wetherspoon pub and serves food from 7am onwards.

Fraserburgh is a beautiful seaside town, with a rich history in the fishing industry. The town boasts a stunning, award-winning beach and several other attractions, such as the Lighthouse Museum, Heritage Centre and community swimming pool, making the town an ideal place for the whole family to visit.



Wales

THE WYNDHAM ARMS HOTEL

Dunraven Place, Bridgend, CF31 1JE

This hotel, first opened by Wetherspoon in 1999, offers 26 individual bedrooms – from single to family rooms.

It underwent an extensive £1-million refurbishment in 2014.

Originally The Wyndham Arms of 1792, named after a centuries-old local family connected with the Bridgend area for many years, the building incorporates part of a structure previously on the site.

A section of the building was used formerly as a courthouse and jail.

Ideally located in Bridgend town centre, the hotel is perfect for both leisure and business, with the area famous for the Bridgend Designer Outlet, Glamorgan Heritage Coast and some stunning beaches nearby and just a short drive away.

Also within easy access of both Cardiff and Swansea, The Wyndham Arms Hotel is ideal for those attending events at Cardiff's Principality Stadium (formerly The Millennium Stadium), Cardiff International Arena and Swansea.com Stadium (formerly Liberty Stadium).

WEST MIDLANDS

ROB FLYING HIGH AFTER FOCUSING ON CAREER



Rob Browning, Wetherspoon's area manager for the West Midlands, received a surprise presentation to mark two special occasions.

Rob (left) pictured with (left to right) fellow area manager Colin Lovell, regional manager Debbie Whittingham and area manager Kat Prince, celebrated his 40th birthday and 20 years' service with Wetherspoon.

Rob received his long-service certificate, together with a cake and Champagne, at The Flying Standard (Coventry).

Rob laughed: "Twenty years with Wetherspoon – that is half my life."

He joined the company in the summer of 2002 as a part-time kitchen associate at The Parchment Makers (Havant) near to his home, during his summer break from university.

Rob reported: "When I went back for my second year of film studies at Middlesex University, I transferred to The Picture Palace (Ponders End) (now closed) and moved to the bar.

"When I realised that the university course wasn't for me, I was offered a full-time position at the pub... and have never looked back."

Rob stayed at The Picture Palace until the summer of 2006, progressing to senior shift manager, before he and his partner moved house to Stratford-upon-Avon.

He said: "We had visited the area and loved it, so decided to move there and I was able to transfer again to The Benjamin Satchwell (Royal Leamington Spa).

"I was there for six months before getting my first pub as pub manager, in December 2006, at The City Arms (Coventry).

"It is a big pub and was hard work, especially during the busy Christmas and new year."

Rob returned to The Benjamin Satchwell at Easter 2009, where he spent four and half years as pub manager, before becoming an area manager in December 2013.

He revealed: "I have always been career led and enjoy working for Wetherspoon.

"When I realised that university wasn't for me and transferred to the bar, where I enjoyed the whole nature of the business, I knuckled down to make it my career.

"I was always aiming to progress further and was quite vocal, at the time, about becoming an area manager – and I love what I do... 100 per cent."

Rob concluded: "You don't have to have a university degree to enjoy a successful career with Wetherspoon.

"I often tell staff members, if you are self-motivated and work hard, the opportunities are there. I can use myself and my career path as an example."

Wetherspoon's regional manager, Debbie Whittingham, said: "Congratulations to Rob on achieving an amazing 20 years with the company.

"We thank him for all of his hard work, commitment and loyalty.

"We thank Rob especially for being such a valuable team member and wish him the best for his continued success."



Shift leader Ellie Crowe at The J. P. Joule (Sale)

Note from the editor: The article below outlines Wetherspoon's bonus and free shares scheme. No company is perfect, but Wetherspoon believes that it pays a higher percentage of its profits in this way than most, or possibly any, large companies.

£484 MILLION IN FREE SHARES AND BONUSES PAID TO EMPLOYEES SINCE 2006

83 per cent paid to pub staff

Since the early 1980s, Wetherspoon has awarded bonuses, free shares and 'share options' to pub employees.

The current scheme of paying monthly bonuses to all pub employees, subject to certain criteria, started in 1998, with a government-approved free share scheme introduced in 2003.

Bonuses and share schemes provide an extra incentive for people to stay with the company: there are 13 employees who have worked for the company for over 30 years, 535 for over 20 years, 3,506 for over 10 years and 9,810 for over five years.

Since 2006, the company has paid £484 million to its employees in respect of bonuses and free shares.

BONUSES AND SHARES

Of the recipients, approximately 96 per cent were employees below board level, with around 83 per cent paid to employees working in pubs.

Employees are eligible for bonuses from the commencement of their employment and are eligible for free shares after 18 months.

In the financial year ended July 2022, bonuses and free shares of £30 million were awarded (see table[^] below), with 79 per cent of employees receiving a bonus and/or shares in that period.

At the current time, 13,475 of our 42,910 employees have been awarded free shares in the company.

It's probably true to say that no one earns a vast fortune from these schemes.

However, as far as the company is aware, Wetherspoon consistently pays a bigger percentage of its profits to its employees, by way of bonuses and free shares, than any other large pub/restaurant company or retailer.

Since the share scheme's introduction, Wetherspoon has awarded 23.4 million shares to employees – approximately 18.2 per cent of all shares in existence today.

Wetherspoon's chief executive, John Hutson, said: "People are vital to the success of the business.

"Our bonus and share schemes are a good way to share in the company's success."

Wetherspoon: Bonuses and free shares v profits, 2006–22

Financial year	Bonuses and free shares	Profit after tax (loss/profit after tax)*	Bonus etc as % of profit
	£m	£m	
2022	30	-25	-
2021	23	-147	-
2020	33	-39	-
2019	46	80	58
2018	43	84	51
2017	44	77	57
2016	33	57	58
2015	31	57	53
2014	29	59	50
2013	29	65	44
2012	24	57	42
2011	23	52	43
2010	23	51	44
2009	21	45	45
2008	16	36	45
2007	19	47	41
2006	17	40	41
Total	484	596	49.3**

[^]Source: J D Wetherspoon plc's annual reports and accounts 2006–22

*Profit after tax from 2020 is post-IFRS 16 accounting.

**Shares and bonus as a percentage of profit excludes 2020 onwards.

WETHERSPOON, ITS CUSTOMERS AND EMPLOYEES HAVE PAID £5.8 BILLION OF TAX TO THE GOVERNMENT IN THE LAST 10 YEARS

In Wetherspoon's 2022 financial year (12 months to July 2022), it generated £662.7 million in tax – about £1 in every £1,000 of ALL UK government taxes. The average tax generated per pub in 2022 was £780,000.

The table* below shows the tax generated by the company in its financial years 2013–2022.

During this period, taxes amounted to about 37 per cent of every pound which went 'over the bar', net of VAT – about 20 times the company's profit.

Wetherspoon's finance director, Ben Whitley, said: "Pub companies pay enormous amounts of tax, but that is not always well understood by the companies themselves or by commentators, since most taxes are hidden in a financial fog.

"Wetherspoon has provided a table which illustrates the exact amounts of tax which the company, its customers and employees have generated, highlighting the importance of the hospitality sector to the nation's finances."

Wetherspoon's chairman, Tim Martin, said: "The main long-term challenge to the pub industry is the tax disparity with supermarkets, which pay zero VAT in respect of food sales, whereas pubs pay 20 per cent.

"This disparity enables supermarkets to subsidise the selling price of beer, wine and spirits, to the detriment of pubs.

"Supermarkets also pay lower business rates per pint than pubs.

"A direct consequence is that pubs' share of beer sales, for example, has dropped from 90 per cent to less than 50 per cent, in recent decades.

"In fact, supermarkets are far more profitable than pubs – Tesco is probably more profitable than the entire pub industry.

"Even so, like Monty Python's Dennis Moore, successive governments have robbed the poor (pubs) and given to the rich (supermarkets).

"A core principle of taxation is that it should be fair and equitable.

"Yet most large pub companies in the UK have remained silent on this vital issue, as their most recent trading statements demonstrate.

"However, surveys by Wetherspoon in the past have demonstrated great fervour for tax equality among individual tenants and free traders.

"The lack of vocal support for equality is probably an example of board rooms being out of touch with those on the front line, always a bad sign for any industry.

"Until there is tax equality between different types of business on the High Street, pubs will always be fighting with one hand tied behind their back – and will provide less in the way of jobs or taxes than they otherwise might."

Wetherspoon's tax payments in financial years 2013–2022	2022 £m	2021 £m	2020 £m	2019 £m	2018 £m	2017 £m	2016 £m	2015 £m	2014 £m	2013 £m	2013–2022 £m
VAT	287.7	93.8	244.3	357.9	332.8	323.4	311.7	294.4	275.1	253.0	2,774.1
Alcohol duty	156.6	70.6	124.2	174.4	175.9	167.2	164.4	161.4	157	144.4	1,496.1
PAYE and NIC	141.9	101.5	106.6	121.4	109.2	96.2	95.1	84.8	78.4	70.2	1,005.3
Business rates	50.3	1.5	39.5	57.3	55.6	53.0	50.2	48.7	44.9	46.4	447.4
Corporation tax	1.5	–	21.5	19.9	26.1	20.7	19.9	15.3	18.1	18.4	161.7
Corporation tax credit (historic capital allowances)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	-2.0	–	–	-2
Fruit/slot machine duty	12.8	4.3	9.0	11.6	10.5	10.5	11.0	11.2	11.3	7.2	99.4
Climate change levies	9.7	7.9	6.1	10.4	9.2	9.7	8.7	6.4	6.3	4.3	81.8
Stamp duty	2.7	1.8	4.9	3.7	1.2	5.1	2.6	1.8	2.1	1.0	26.9
Sugar tax	2.9	1.3	2.0	2.9	0.8	–	–	–	–	–	9.9
Fuel duty	1.9	1.1	1.7	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.9	2.1	2.0	20.2
Carbon tax	–	–	–	1.9	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.7	2.7	2.6	20.9
Premise licence and TV licences	0.5	0.5	1.1	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	1.6	0.7	0.7	8.2
Landfill tax	–	–	–	–	1.7	2.5	2.2	2.2	1.5	1.3	11.4
Furlough tax rebate	4.4	-213.0	-124.1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	-341.5
Eat Out to Help Out	–	-23.2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	-23.2
Local government grants	1.4	-11.1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	-12.5
TOTAL TAX	662.7	37.0	436.7	764.4	728.8	694.6	672.3	632.4	600.2	551.5	5,784.1
TAX PER PUB	0.78	43	528	871	825	768	705	673	662	632	6.49
TAX AS % OF NET SALES	38.1%	4.8	34.6	42.0	43.0	41.8	42.1	41.8	42.6	43.1	37.4%
LOSS/PROFIT AFTER TAX	-24.9	-146.5	-38.5	79.6	83.6	76.9	56.9	57.5	58.9	65.2	268.7

*Source: J D Wetherspoon plc's annual reports and accounts 2013–2022

DERBY

TOM AND TEAM BLAZE A TRAIL TO TAKE TROPHY



Pub manager Tom Parfitt and the team at The Standing Order (Derby) are the first recipients of a highly coveted company award.

Tom (right) is pictured receiving the trophy 'J D Wetherspoon real-ale festival – overall company sales winner' from Wetherspoon's area manager (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) Joe Argyle.

Joe said: "It has been a tough couple of years for everyone – and the company wanted to celebrate some good things again.

"This cup recognises the pub which sold the most festival pints during the autumn 2022 real-ale event.

"Congratulations go to Tom and his team at The Standing Order."

Joe added: "It is the first time that the company has awarded this trophy – and it will now be up for grabs during every future real-ale festival.

"It is a bit of fun and also provides healthy competition, as well as recognition for all of our hard-working staff."

Tom said: "We are delighted to win this trophy, the first time that it has been awarded.

"The Standing Order's regular customers are an enthusiastic real-ale fan base, with the twice-yearly real-ale festivals being a highlight in the calendar.

"This recognition completes a great period for the pub, which also saw us reopen in September, following a £1.7-million expansion and refurbishment project."

The Standing Order served a selection of 36 real ales during the 12-day event featuring ales brewed using only British-grown hop varieties. Several of the ales were available in the pub for the first time, including some brewed especially for the event.

THE BRIDGE HOUSE • BELFAST

BRIDGE HOUSE'S MANAGER, PHIL, LOOKS BACK ON A LONG SPAN



Phil Annett, pub manager at The Bridge House (Belfast), celebrated 30 years' service with the company.

Wetherspoon's area manager, Ireland, Darren Niven, is pictured (above left) presenting a cake to Phil to mark the occasion.

Phil's team members are also pictured, all wearing 'Phil' face masks, at the special surprise celebration at his pub.

Belfast-born Phil first joined Wetherspoon in November 1992, having previously been an aircraft electrician, with some part-time experience of working in pubs and clubs in and around Belfast.

Phil recalled: "I attended an open day for Wetherspoon at a hotel in the city and was successful.

"Having taken redundancy from the aircraft factory, I moved to England to work at a Wetherspoon pub in Hampstead, northwest London.

"John Hutson, now the chief executive of the company, was then my area manager."

Phil continued: "The company was small – and there was a real family atmosphere about it, which I liked."

Phil worked at several of our pubs in London, including at Heathrow airport, across southeast England and then Glasgow, before the opportunity arose to return home to Belfast, when The Bridge House first opened in 2000.

He then worked at The Spirit Merchant (Newtownards) for two spells as pub manager, as well as at The Tuesday Bell (Lisburn) (now closed), before his return to Belfast in the summer of 2016.

Phil also held the role of area manager for Northern Ireland for a few years, before resuming as a pub manager.

Phil concluded: "Although the company has grown tremendously since I first joined 30 years ago, that family atmosphere has never been lost.

"You can also talk to anyone, at any level, from founder and chairman Tim Martin to any of the associates working in the pubs – everyone is listened to and treated the same.

"It is a good company."



FLEET

CAMRA DEEMS ARTHUR A PRINCE AMONG PUBS



The Prince Arthur (Fleet) has received recognition from two local organisations for its dedication to, and support for, real ale.

The Hampshire pub was presented with a special framed 'CAMRA 10 consecutive years in The Good Beer Guide' certificate, to mark a decade of successive listings in the Campaign for Real Ale's guide.

CAMRA Surrey and Hants Borders branch pubs officer Kevin Travers is pictured (left) handing over the award to former manager Stuart Merricks and shift manager Jessie Stewart. CAMRA member and Fleet town councillor Alan Hope is also pictured (right).

The local CAMRA branch also selected the pub to launch CAMRA's 2023 Good Beer Guide officially.

The Prince Arthur became the first pub in Fleet, as well as in the local area, to achieve 10 consecutive years (2014–2023, inclusive) in the guide. First opened in 1998, the pub will celebrate its silver anniversary in July 2023.

Of all UK pubs, less than 10 per cent ever appear in the guide and under one per cent have appeared for the last 10 years or more.

Jessie said: "We are all thrilled to receive this recognition from our local CAMRA members, as well as achieve a run of 10 successive years in the guide.

"We thank them for their continued support and look forward to maintaining our close ties with the branch."

At the presentation evening, Fleet Lions also took the opportunity to thank pub manager Stuart Merricks for his support – now at The Queen Hotel (Aldershot).

Fleet Lions members Mark Cooper (president) and Jim Storey, both from the Fleet Lions Beerfest Team, were pleased to present Stuart with a certificate of appreciation.

Jim said: "We are very grateful for all of the support which Stuart has given us, promoting our annual beer festival, which is organised and staffed by volunteers, with all profits going to local charities.

"Stuart has also worked, on his day off, behind the bar at the Fleet Lions Beer Festival."

MUCH MORE TO CIDER

Range of ciders behind the bar includes varieties made from passion

The days are now getting longer and warmer, as summer will soon be upon us, and what more fitting way to spend some glorious British summertime than socialising with friends or family at your local Wetherspoon.

And nothing encapsulates summer better than a cool glass of cider, on a sunny day.

Wetherspoon's range of bottled and draught ciders offer something for everyone, from traditional apple to a whole host of fruit-flavoured cider drinks.

Choices

The 500ml bottle range, with the majority of pubs offering an 'any 2 for' mix-and-match drinks deal, now has nine great cider choices.

Among the selection is Thatchers Blood Orange (4.0% ABV), Bulmers Original (4.5% ABV), Angry Orchard Crisp Apple (5.0% ABV) and Aspell Apple Cyder (5.5% ABV), alongside Kopparberg's range of Light Passionfruit, Strawberry & Lime, Mixed Fruit and Mixed Fruit Tropical (each 4.0% ABV) and Bulmers Crushed Red Berries & Lime (4.0% ABV).

Wetherspoon's draught cider range includes four great choices, as well as a variety of ever-changing guest cider choices (ask at your local Wetherspoon for details).

Draught

On draught at Wetherspoon is Stowford Press Dark Berry cider (4.0% ABV), from Westons Cider, available as a pint and half-pint measure.

A vibrant, dark-berry-coloured cider, this has a rich, blackcurrant and blackberry fragrance.

A delicious and refreshing drink, it is bursting with the flavour of dark berries.

It joins Stowford Press Apple cider (4.5% ABV), Kopparberg Strawberry & Lime (4.0% ABV) and Thatchers Gold (4.8% ABV), along with other guest ciders, in Wetherspoon's draught cider range.



BULMERS

Original
(4.5% ABV)

Crushed Red Berries & Lime
(4.0% ABV)

THATCHERS

Blood Orange
(4.0% ABV)

Mixed Fruit Tropical
(4.0% ABV)

KOPPARBERG

Mixed Fruit
(4.0% ABV)

Light Passionfruit
(4.0% ABV)

Strawberry & Lime
(4.0% ABV)

MORE THAN APPLES

fruit, blood orange, dark berries, tropical fruit, strawberry and lime

WESTONS

Stowford Press Dark Berry and Apple ciders (draught) are supplied by the same traditional cider-making company, Westons Cider, established in 1880.

Based in the Herefordshire village of Much Marcle, five generations of the Weston family have worked with like-minded colleagues in the pursuit of passion – creating authentic ciders.

It began when Henry Weston settled in the village in 1878 and began to produce ciders and perries, using a variety of regional fruit grown in the surrounding orchards.

His great-grandchildren (fourth-generation Westons) Helen Thomas (managing director) and Tim Weston (director) are the current custodians of the family business.

KOPPARBERG

Wetherspoon's range of Kopparberg cider drinks is available in bottles and on draught.

Customers have been enjoying Sweden's Kopparberg ciders in Wetherspoon's pubs since 2005.

Kopparberg Brewery, which stands on the original site where it was first founded and built in 1882 by 36 regional brewers, was re-established in 1994.

The empty brewery caught the eye of Peter Bronsman, owner and managing director of Kopparberg Breweries, who bought it with his brother Dan-Anders.

Kopparberg is now sold in more than 30 countries worldwide.

THATCHERS

Thatchers Blood Orange cider (bottle) and Thatchers Gold (draught) is made at Myrtle Farm, Somerset, home, since 1904, to four generations of the cider-making Thatcher family.

It was William Thatcher who started to make cider to give to his workers as part of their wages – he quickly gained a reputation for making the best-tasting cider around.

His son, Stan, then started to sell his wares to local pubs, before third-generation John took over the reins.

Now, it's Martin at the helm, continuing in his great-grandfather's footsteps, with the fifth generation waiting in the wings.



Strawberry & Lime
(4.0% ABV)

Crisp Apple
(5.0% ABV)

Apple Cyder
(5.5% ABV)

KIRKINTILLOCH

KIRKY PUFFER STAYS IN FRONT, FUELLED BY TOP-QUALITY ALES



The Kirky Puffer (Kirkintilloch) has been recognised, once again, by members of the local Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) branch.

Glasgow and West of Scotland CAMRA branch members named the pub, for the third time, as the 'Dunbartonshire pub of the year', presenting a certificate to pub manager John McKenna (centre). The certificate is now on display in the pub.

The presentation took place at the start of a branch meeting being held at the pub.

Branch deputy chairman Roger Harrison (pictured) handed over the certificate to John (who is Glasgow and West of Scotland CAMRA branch chairman). Cellar champion Chris Brown is also pictured.

Roger Harrison said: "Our congratulations go to Johnnie and his team for consistently providing us with top-quality ales."

John added: "We're delighted that The Kirky Puffer has won CAMRA 'pub of the year' for the third time and thank the members for their support."

The Kirky Puffer serves six real ales at all times, including four ever-changing guest beers, among them local ales from Scottish breweries Stewart Brewing and Harviestoun Brewery.

THE COMPANY ROW • CONSETT

SHELLEY LOSES ACCENT, YET, ON SWAPPING YORKSHIRE FOR DURHAM, FINDS CAREER



Shelley Hobbs made a new year's resolution at the start of 2003 – to apply for a job at Wetherspoon.

Since then, she has worked for several Wetherspoon pubs and, 20 years on, is still with the company today as pub manager at The Company Row (Consett).

Her decision was made on a new year's night out with friends at The Postern Gate (York), the Wetherspoon pub where she saw a recruitment poster.

She said: "At the time, I was with Bass which was making redundancies.

"I saw a recruitment poster in the pub and, aware of the redundancy possibility at my job, I decided to apply."

Shelley, born in North Yorkshire, joined Lloyds No.1 Bar (Harrogate) (now closed) as a shift manager.

Within 12 months, she'd moved to The Quayside (Newcastle), where she was shift manager.

Shelley worked in Newcastle for almost five years, which included a role as shift manager of Union Rooms (now closed) in the city centre.

In 2008, she moved to The Company Row (Consett), where she has been the manager for 15 years.

She said: "I might be from Yorkshire, but I no longer have a Yorkshire accent."

Shelley has had two children since joining Wetherspoon – a daughter and son.

She added: "I haven't taken any time off work, other than maternity leave.

"The company has been brilliant; fabulous with work-life balance; absolutely second to none – and I think that's why I've stayed.

"Plus I think I haven't been too bad at my job which will explain my longevity too.

"The team above me (area managers, general managers and directors), as well as those I manage, have all been involved in a mutually supportive relationship over the years.

"So many staff members stay at Wetherspoon for a long time.

"You get to know them well – and these long-term working relationships benefit everyone."

Tim says: “Professor Francois Balloux, of University College London, in this Guardian article, discusses the World Health Organization’s investigation into government responses to COVID-19 and concludes that ‘Sweden’s death rate is ... about half the UK’s and, whereas it is above those of the Nordic countries, it still looks flattering, relative to the majority of the European Union.’”

Wetherspoon News summer 2022

“ SWEDEN? JAPAN? UK? DEBATES OVER WHO HAD A ‘GOOD’ COVID WON’T END

The WHO has spoken but even its huge new report will not settle arguments about pandemic strategies

National Covid death rates are, inevitably, political. How could they not be when they are viewed as evidence for good or bad government on matters of life or death? How did the UK fare compared with, say, Germany? Should both countries have been more like Sweden? However, when new data arrives, far from settling arguments over which pandemic mitigation strategies worked best, it tends to further inflame disagreements or harden pre-existing positions.

So it is with the much-anticipated report by the World Health Organization (WHO) on Covid-associated deaths, released last week. The WHO estimates that around 15 million additional people died because of the pandemic in 2020-2021, about 2.7 times higher than officially recorded deaths.

While staggering, the estimated excess deaths didn’t really come as a surprise to those who have been closely following the situation. If anything, this estimate is lower than many may have anticipated. Indeed, two previous modelling efforts, by the Economist and the University of Washington, suggested around 18 million excess deaths.

That more people died in the pandemic than have been officially registered as Covid deaths should be largely uncontroversial. Many countries simply did not have the diagnostic infrastructure in place to identify every Covid death. The pandemic – and, to an extent, our response to it – has also been devastating to social and healthcare around the world.

Now the WHO report seems to provide ammunition for essentially any narrative and it is unlikely to check the politicisation of the Covid debate – in the UK or elsewhere.

For example, India’s own official excess death estimate is about 10 times lower than the 4.7 million people reported by the WHO. Indian authorities have vehemently rejected the methodology used by the WHO and its estimate for their country. They even opposed publication of the report and released their own 2020 death figures two to three months ahead of schedule to offer a counter-narrative.

Here, many comparisons have been made with other countries to highlight the UK as either the epitome of failure or a roaring success. In fact, according to the WHO report, the UK has fared fairly unremarkably. An estimated 109 excess deaths per 100,000 people places it at 56th in the global ranking of “best performing” countries, and middle of the table relative to the European Union, coming 15th out of the 27 EU member states. The UK’s estimated excess death toll is below Germany’s and Italy’s, but above France’s. According to the WHO estimates, Germany significantly underestimated Covid deaths, France overestimated them and the UK got it about right, suggesting that the much-criticised “death within 28 days of a positive test” approach was a reasonable proxy for Covid death before the Omicron wave.

Some countries became synonymous in the public imagination with particular pandemic mitigation strategies. Sweden has been criticised by some for the lack of stringency of its measures and hailed by others as a shining example of how to protect the rights of its citizens while navigating a health crisis.

To the possible disappointment of both its supporters and detractors, Sweden’s estimated excess death of 56/100,000 is about half the UK’s and, while it is above those of other Nordic nations, it still looks flattering relative to the majority of EU countries.

An additional reason why the WHO report won’t settle many arguments stems from Covid excess death figures being extremely difficult to measure precisely. Even in the absence of ideological disagreements, they do not offer simple, incontrovertible “follow the science” answers. Pandemic excess deaths represent the difference between the number of people who died, relative to a hypothetical number of people who might have died had the pandemic not happened.

The number of actual deaths is accurately registered in high-income countries but this is not necessarily the case in many parts of the world, where estimates can be crude. Getting an accurate number for the hypothetical number of deaths that might have occurred had the pandemic not happened is even more challenging. (The WHO relied on a fairly complex model and the extent to which some of its estimates may have been coloured by modelling assumptions will be scrutinised and criticised.)

The report paints a complex picture supporting no single straightforward narrative. Which shouldn’t be too surprising. A single number for each country is unlikely to capture the full complexity of vastly different socioeconomic situations and two years of often inconsistent policies. Lower-middle income countries in eastern Europe and South America have been particularly badly affected, probably because of a relatively unfavourable age pyramid, low vaccination coverage and disruption to their economy and healthcare systems. Richer countries tended to do better overall, with the exception of the US, which fared quite poorly with 144/100,000 excess deaths.

A few countries kept excess deaths close to, or even below zero, including Australia, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, Mongolia and New Zealand. Being rich and geographically isolated helps.

The stringency of mitigation measures does not seem to be a particularly strong predictor of excess deaths. While countries that achieved low excess deaths tended to have fairly tight measures in place, the worst performer by some margin is Peru, despite enforcing the harshest, longest lockdown. This proved ineffective at reducing viral transmission and probably contributed negatively to the excess death toll.

The results from the WHO report will undoubtedly be analysed extensively by pandemic planners, though they are unlikely to be of much help to inform actionable “one-fits-all-follow-the-science” strategies. The major message is that richer, more insular countries kept excess deaths low by limiting the spread of Sars-CoV-2 until the arrival of vaccines and then achieved high vaccination coverage in elderly people. Those relative success stories largely built on pre-existing geographic and socioeconomic advantages rather than unique, well-thought-out mitigation plans.

Read that way, the main thrust of the WHO report boils down to reducing inequality, improving health and providing a robust social and healthcare system offering the best pandemic preparedness. That would be money well spent, even if the next one takes a while to hit.

Francois Balloux is Director of the University College London Genetics Institute.

By Francois Balloux

The Guardian / 8 May 2022

Print credit: Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2022

Tim says: "Professor Robert Dingwall, of Nottingham Trent University, like Professor Balloux (page 54), discusses the WHO report on COVID-19 and reaches broadly the same conclusion.

He says that 'unlike the UK, where elites assumed that people should be told what was good for them and then compelled or frightened into doing it, Sweden explained its public health thinking and invited citizens to co-operate'."

Wetherspoon News winter 2022/23

SWEDEN'S WHO FIGURES MUST RADICALLY CHANGE THE TERMS OF THE COVID INQUIRY

Unlike the UK where elites told people what was good for them, Sweden explained its public health thinking and invited people to cooperate

"Judge me in a year" said Anders Tegnell, Sweden's State Epidemiologist, in July 2020, when his country was being attacked for sticking to its pandemic plan rather than adopting the novel intervention of lockdown. The latest World Health Organisation figures add to the evidence that has been accumulating since summer 2021. Sweden managed the pandemic more successfully than most, with much less disruption of everyday life and economic activity.

The WHO has published estimates of excess deaths globally for 2020 and 2021. This approach covers all deaths from Covid, whether formally diagnosed or not, together with collateral damage in deaths from other conditions that went untreated. Looking at Europe, where official data are usually robust, Sweden had half the excess death rate of the UK, Germany or Spain – and a quarter of that of many Eastern European nations.

In turn, the UK tends to be mid-table, in line with other large Western European countries, while Eastern European countries have had much worse experiences. There is a widely-circulated view that the UK has had a uniquely bad pandemic. The data simply do not support this.

Nor do they support the view that the outcomes have much to do with the restrictions adopted by different governments, how soon they began, or the stringency of enforcement. The question, then, is how governments came to adopt highly restrictive policies in the first place. This must be the starting point for any national inquiry. Why was the experience of emergency planners, and two decades of pandemic preparation, abandoned everywhere except Sweden?

Sweden never 'let it rip'. There were restrictions on large gatherings, and on restaurants and some other places of entertainment. Secondary schools and universities switched to remote learning at some points. Masks were never thought to be of benefit but social distancing was encouraged. The approach was based on the minimum intervention necessary to manage the highest risk environments.

Mistakes were made and acknowledged. In the first wave of the pandemic, Sweden had a problem with Covid deaths in care homes, which tend to be larger than in the UK. Once the virus got into a home, it could circulate around a larger number of people than would be possible in UK homes. When additional infection controls were introduced, residents were as

well shielded as anywhere. Unlike the UK where elites assumed that people should be told what was good for them, and then compelled or frightened into doing it, Sweden explained its public health thinking and invited citizens to cooperate.

Many UK problems can be traced to its top-down approach. No-one asked the academics who know about laws and rules whether they would work in this situation. Officials and politicians made those decisions on the basis of their own, often simplistic, beliefs. But rules are inflexible tools, which invite confrontation and dispute. How can anyone comply with a law that cannot differentiate between a party and a work-related gathering? The Swedish approach allowed citizens to think about applying broad public health messages to the circumstances of their own lives.

Sweden shows that there was another path not taken, that could have brought this country through the pandemic in far better shape, socially and economically. The inquiry must not be diverted into the minutiae of arguments about whether we should have locked down a week or two weeks earlier. It must be free to examine the whole strategy - in particular, why robust social science evidence on managing emergencies, and its contribution to pandemic planning since the early 2000s, was abandoned so precipitately.

Robert Dingwall is Professor of Sociology at Nottingham Trent University.

By Robert Dingwall

The Daily Telegraph / 7 May 2022

Print credit: © Robert Dingwall/Telegraph Media Group Limited 2022

Tim says: “Professors Michael Baker and Martin McKee advocated a ‘COVID-19 elimination strategy’ and said that ‘elimination is achievable’ which turned out to be wrong, as Professor Johan Giesecke (page 5) foresaw in his Australian television interview which took place a year earlier.”

Wetherspoon News spring 2021

ALL COUNTRIES SHOULD PURSUE A COVID-19 ELIMINATION STRATEGY: HERE ARE 16 REASONS WHY

Countries trying to eliminate the virus have been far more successful and economically better off than those that have tried to suppress it

The past year of Covid-19 has taught us that it is the behaviour of governments, more than the behaviour of the virus or individuals, that shapes countries' experience of the crisis. Talking about pandemic waves has given the virus far too much agency: until quite recently the apparent waves of infection were driven by government action and inaction. It is only now with the emergence of more infectious variants that it might be appropriate to talk about a true second wave.

As governments draw up their battle plans for year two, we might expect them to base their strategies on the wealth of data about what works best. And the evidence to date suggests that countries pursuing elimination of Covid-19 are performing much better than those trying to suppress the virus. Aiming for zero-Covid is producing more positive results than trying to “live with the virus”.

Here are 16 reasons why we think all countries should at least consider an elimination approach:

1. It saves lives. Not surprisingly, eliminating transmission of the virus minimises Covid-19 deaths. Countries pursuing elimination have Covid-19 mortality rates that are typically below 10 per million, which is 100 times less than many countries “living” with the virus.

2. The elimination of community transmission also spares populations from “long-Covid”, which causes persistent health problems in survivors. These problems are reported by the majority of people hospitalised because of Covid-19 and can also affect those with even mild infection.

3. Elimination is pro-equity. Pandemics almost invariably cause disproportionate harm to the most disadvantage groups based on ethnicity, income and long-term illness. Eliminating Covid-19 can minimise these inequalities particularly if a suitable social “safety-net” is also provided.

4. Countries that have eliminated Covid-19 are experiencing less economic contraction than countries trying to live with the virus. Mainland China and Taiwan are possibly the only places with neutral or net positive economic growth in 2020.

5. Elimination is achievable and works in a variety of settings. Globally, multiple countries and jurisdictions are successfully pursuing elimination approaches, notably mainland China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

They are diverse in geography, population size, resources, and styles of government.

6. The virus can be eliminated even after intense local transmission has occurred. Mainland China demonstrated this in Wuhan. The state of Victoria in Australia was also able to eliminate Covid-19 even after a period of intense local transmission with higher rates than were being reported in the UK at the time.

7. It's easier if more countries adopt this approach. Border controls can be relaxed, creating “green zones” and allowing quarantine-free travel with associated social and economic benefits. This opening-up is already happening among Australian states and between Pacific islands and New Zealand.

8. The rollout of effective vaccines will make Covid-19 elimination easier to achieve. Effective vaccines working in combination with other public health measures have been crucial to the successful elimination of diseases such as polio and measles in many countries.

9. Having an explicit “zero-Covid” goal provides a strong motivating and coordinating focus. Suppression does not offer a clear end point, leaving countries vulnerable to rapid resurgences, as seen recently in countries like Ireland. The resulting uncertainty makes it impossible to plan, with enormous consequences for schools, businesses, family life, and much else.

10. It is sustainable. Countries pursuing elimination have had setbacks in the form of border failures and outbreaks, but have mostly been able to contain them and regain their elimination status.

11. If the virus mutates, elimination still works. The major methods used for Covid-19 elimination (border management, physical distancing, mask wearing, testing and contact tracing) are relatively unaffected by virus mutations (though testing could theoretically be less effective if the virus changed markedly, and outbreak control would become more difficult with more infectious variants).

12. It also still works if vaccines provide only limited long-term protection. For example, if vaccines are poorly effective at preventing onward transmission then elimination methods could supplement that limitation.

13. It may reduce emergence of more dangerous virus variants. Elimination approaches result in far fewer circulating viruses. Consequently, there will

be fewer opportunities for emergence of new variants that are more infectious, and that might escape the protective effects of vaccines, or even be more lethal.

14. The use of lockdowns should be less necessary. A relatively short, intense lockdown to eliminate Covid-19 transmission in an area should allow control measures to be relaxed in the absence of circulating virus. Countries such as New Zealand have had far less time under lockdown than most countries pursuing suppression which have needed to go in and out of lockdown for long periods to avoid their health services becoming overwhelmed.

15. Vigorous control of Covid-19 infection has substantial co-benefits. Elimination approaches have reduced transmission of other respiratory viruses, notably influenza, resulting in fewer hospitalisations and deaths from these respiratory pathogens.

16. It provides a good interim strategy while we identify an optimal long-term approach, which is currently uncertain. One scenario could be regional elimination or even global eradication as we saw with Sars. Another plausible option is endemic infection with the health burden being managed with vaccines, as we see with influenza.

These benefits of pursuing a Covid-19 elimination strategy need to be balanced against the costs and potential negative effects. However, these costs are also experienced by countries trying to suppress the virus, except in their case they come repeatedly, after each resurgence.

On balance, elimination looks like the “least bad choice” for many jurisdictions. We hope that all governments, and the World Health Organization, will consider the elimination strategy as they plan year two of our global response to the pandemic.

Michael Baker is a professor of public health at the University of Otago.

Martin McKee is a professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

By Michael Baker and Martin McKee

The Guardian / 28 January 2021

Print credit: www.theguardian.com

Tim says: “Fraser Nelson, editor of The Spectator, discusses the psychological background to COVID-19, which he attributes to ‘public panic ... that sucked in the government, opposition and most of the media’.

Mr Nelson is perhaps being too kind to politicians and the media.

Many people have presented a good case which says that politicians and the media induced the panic in the first place.”

BRITAIN MAY WELL REPEAT ITS LOCKDOWN BLUNDERS SOONER THAN ANYONE THINKS

From Sweden and the WhatsApp leaks, it's clear what needs to be changed. But will anyone do it?

Almost exactly three years ago, Chris Whitty explained the trouble with lockdowns. Pandemics, he would say, kill people in two ways: directly – and indirectly, via panic and disruption. It's hard to measure the latter but you can count the total number of deaths, from all causes. Such figures are coming in now. The country with the smallest rise isn't Australia or New Zealand, who closed their borders. Nor is it Italy or Canada, who had some of the toughest lockdowns. The winner, with the smallest rise in “excess” deaths since the pandemic began, is Sweden.

For those who had accused the lockdown-rejecting Swedes of pursuing a “let it rip” policy that left people to die, this is all rather baffling. And it raises some interesting questions. Australia had hardly any Covid: just lockdowns. So how did it end up with “excess deaths” – at 7 per cent – more than twice the level of the Swedes? If choosing lockdown was to “choose life” (as Matt Hancock put it) then where, in the world's data, is the correlation between lockdown severity and lives saved?

It may suit the Government to delay the Covid inquiry reckoning until after the general election, but the conversation needs to be had now. There is more than enough evidence to update the pandemic plan, given that a new pathogen could emerge at any moment. And a harder, perhaps even more important question: how to restore trust in public health? What rules need to be in place to ensure that, next time, data is not misrepresented and science is not abused by politicians?

The Lockdown Files give three main insights into what went wrong. First, we have firm examples of “the science” being invoked to impose various measures that turn out to be politically motivated. Then we see the slapdash method in which major decisions were made: how WhatsApp replaces normal government. And finally, the tone. How after taking emergency powers, this group of men go from being thoughtful and open-minded to being flippant and gung-ho. Once again, we see how power corrupts – and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

There is one fascinating exchange where Ben Wallace, who as Defence Secretary has seen his share of emergencies, is roped into one of the WhatsApp decision-making groups. He seems appalled and explains that, if they don't mind, he will leave them to it and keep operating through normal government methods. If others had reacted the same way, things could have been very different.

By showing us the psychology of a group in a crisis, the Lockdown Files explain why previous pandemic planning failed: it didn't factor in human nature. The public panic was so deep that there was huge pressure to impose restrictions, whether they worked or not. This created a gravitational pull that sucked in the government, opposition and much of the media – crushing the normal safeguards (cost-benefit analyses, etc). No one wanted to go against it. Even academics found a huge pressure to be quiet if they had doubts. Oxford's Carl Heneghan calls this the “silence of science”.

Sweden had the unflappable Anders Tegnell as chief epidemiologist, who went all-out to argue against what he saw as populism: lockdowns that were not backed by science and could cause more harm than good. He never stopped arguing, giving television interviews while waiting on train

platforms and publishing study after study. He won people over. Sweden ended up with middling Covid but among Europe's least economic damage and lowest increase in deaths. In an interview last week, Tegnell offered advice for his successor: “Have ice in your stomach.”

Must our next pandemic response be so dependent on personality? Must the fate of nations depend on musical chairs – whether the seat is held by a 63-year-old epidemiologist like Tegnell (whose CV included hands-on experience with Ebola) or a couple of WhatsApping 41-year-olds like Matt Hancock and Simon Case? Safeguards can – and should – be put in place now. There is no need to wait for an inquiry.

The Prime Minister can, at any time, order that from now on modelling needs to follow Treasury standards of transparency and robustness, stating main assumptions and uncertainties. Likely trade-offs (long and short-term) must be clearly acknowledged for every public health response. Complexity must be recognised. Critics should be welcomed, not hounded. Sage, whose very name is now synonymous with spin and bungling, should be disbanded.

It could all be needed sooner than we think. Some 130 million birds now are understood to have died from the latest variant of bird flu, which has already jumped to mammals with a human fatality in Cambodia. We can imagine what could very well happen next: Public Health England starts to do some “scenario” planning for it becoming a human pandemic, with a bias towards the worst case. Sage is exhumed. Professor Neil Ferguson comes up with some doom graphs. The whole merry-go-round could easily start again.

But will politicians be taken seriously next time they say “trust the science”? Polls in the US show that trust in public health bodies has taken a major hit since Covid. While no similar studies have been done here, we do see worrying signs in falling rates of childhood vaccination. Overstating the scientific case during Covid – where the science was genuinely mixed – risks reducing confidence in other areas where the science really is clear.

And the brutal truth? The science on Covid still isn't clear. On masks, on social distancing, even school closures – it's hard to say what difference they make to the spread of a virus. The UK hasn't commissioned a single high-quality study into what works and what doesn't. Even the excess deaths count is complicated – but Sweden is at or near the bottom, whichever way you cut it. But even now, no one seems very interested in the actual science, or learning lessons any time soon.

It's now 20 years since the boring old coronavirus mutated into a killer in the Sars epidemic. Asian countries updated their pandemic emergency plans – but Britain didn't, sticking with its flu-based approach. Are we seeing the same complacency yet again? We have now seen, in the Lockdown Files, much of what went wrong. We have also seen, in Sweden, what can go right. We will now see whether Rishi Sunak can put the two together.

By Fraser Nelson

The Daily Telegraph / 9 March 2023

Print credit: © Fraser Nelson/Telegraph Media Group Limited 2023

Tim says: "Neil O'Brien was used by the government, during the pandemic, to attack and vilify critics of lockdown tactics, such as Professors Sunetra Gupta and Carl Heneghan of the University of Oxford.

In contrast to Professor Balloux's analysis of the WHO report on the subject, O'Brien says erroneously that 'countries taking the toughest measures were getting great results'.

The reality turned out to be the exact opposite. As Professor Balloux said: 'The worst performer, by some margin, is Peru, despite enforcing the longest, harshest lockdown.'

Wetherspoon News spring 2021

I'D LOVE TO IGNORE 'COVID SCEPTICS' AND THEIR TALL TALES. BUT THEY MAKE A SPLASH AND HAVE NO SHAME

The Tory MP on the fantasies of those in the media, and beyond, who oppose lockdown

If you had opened certain newspapers over the past year, you would have read the following. In spring, you'd have been told the virus was fizzling out. You might have been treated to the views of epidemiologist Sunetra Gupta, who claimed: "The epidemic has largely come and is on its way out in this country." This wasn't due to the lockdown, she argued, but "the build-up of immunity", which government advisers were apparently underestimating.

By the summer, you would have read that it was all over. In June, Toby Young, editor of the Lockdown Sceptics website predicted: "There will be no 'second spike' – not now, and not in the autumn either. The virus has melted into thin air. It's time to get back to normal." Telegraph columnist Allison Pearson wrote: "The terrible Coronabeast will be gone from these isles by September."

By July, the sceptical narrative had changed. According to Ross Clark in the Daily Mail, there was nothing to fear. Boris Johnson's warning of a possible "second wave" was an unjustified "emotive" use of language. Rising cases in countries such as Spain were "little more than a statistical illusion" due to increased testing.

Globally, countries taking the toughest measures were getting great results. Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Japan and Taiwan all saw case rates at about a 20th of the EU average. The Covid sceptics trashed their approach as "sheer panic". Instead, libertarian Sweden was all the rage. Never mind that its death rate was 10 times that of its neighbours. They would have no second wave because they had wisely built up "herd immunity". In fact, there was a brutal second wave; Finland and Norway offered emergency medical assistance as Stockholm's hospitals overflowed. Even the king slammed the failed strategy.

As infections built up again in the autumn, the story changed once more. Though it looked like cases were rising, it was a "casedemic" brought on by faulty tests. "At least 91% of 'Covid cases' are FALSE POSITIVES," thundered Talk Radio host Julia Hartley-Brewer in September. "There is no evidence of a second wave."

By autumn, there were more people in hospital with Covid but several papers ran pieces saying our hospitals weren't unusually busy in November. Some continued the pretence for an absurdly long time. On 29 December, Pearson wrote: "ICU occupancy is 78% today. Remarkably low for this time of year" and that "winter 2020 is the lowest hospital bed occupancy for 10 years. Yes, really."

However, as the new variant exploded and television news showed ambulances queuing outside hospitals that were full of people gasping for breath, the story had to change again. Yes, people were now dying but not in unusual numbers. On 4 January, Hartley-Brewer reassured us: "The virus kills. It just isn't causing excess deaths anymore." This was rather difficult to square with the Office for National Statistics saying 2020 saw the largest increase in deaths in England and Wales since 1940. So, others resorted to a different argument. Yes, 89,000 extra people had died but

they would have died anyway. They were old or had "prior conditions", so were already on the way out. They didn't mention that 8,300 of them were of working age or that many "prior conditions" were non-fatal, such as asthma, diabetes, mental health or learning difficulties.

Powerful Covid-sceptics in the media have got it wrong at every stage. They fought to stop or delay every measure necessary to control the virus. They opposed masks, resisted travel restrictions, fought local lockdown tiers as well as national measures, often with conflicting arguments. Clark wrote again in October that local tiers were unfair and the PM wanted to "trash the northern economy", but when national measures proved necessary, he complained "we are going to close down restaurants in Cornwall to try to fight an epidemic in Manchester". In December, he said we should prioritise vaccinations in "the parts of the country which add most to the economy, London especially".

They rubbish those who knew what they were talking about. Professors Chris Whitty and Patrick Vallance were "Messrs Doom and Gloom", "fear-mongering" and "self-serving". That Whitty and Jonathan Van-Tam used their tiny amount of spare time to volunteer in hospitals suggests that's not true. Now, as the death toll still rises, the same people crawl from the woodwork to demand we lift all restrictions as soon as the most vulnerable are vaccinated.

It's great that we are leading Europe in vaccinations and lockdown has meant cases are starting to fall back. But if we drop our guard, we could still risk many lives agonisingly close to the finish line.

Because they are still dangerous, I have pointed out the mistakes of some Covid-sceptics on Twitter. They regard this as outrageous. An MP shouldn't be getting involved in this. I "must not have any constituents who're struggling", says Hartley-Brewer. Young deleted all his tweets from last year and, in a joint podcast with alt-right conspiracy theorist James Delingpole, I was accused of being "a wrong un", a "fascist", and compared to Stalin's secret police chief Lavrenti Beria. (I didn't know you could be a Nazi and a Commie.) I've touched a nerve, it seems. Politicians are used to accountability. The guilty people within the media are not.

The truth is, the Covid-sceptics aren't really sceptics at all. They engage in motivated reasoning; they make stuff up and double down on disproved claims. They are powerful figures, not used to being questioned. But the truth is that they have a hell of a lot to answer for.

Neil O'Brien is Conservative MP for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston, a former director of Policy Exchange and a vice-chair of the Conservative party.

By Neil O'Brien

The Guardian / 17 January 2021

Print credit: Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2022

Tim says: “Jonathan Sumption is a lawyer and historian, ending his legal career as a Supreme Court judge. In this article, he discusses the insights from the release of Matt Hancock’s WhatsApp messages and is surely correct in concluding that they show ‘chaos and incoherence at the heart of government’.

One possible additional factor is what investment guru Warren Buffett calls ‘the institutional imperative’, whereby everyone copies everyone else – in this case: ‘China has locked down and many other countries are doing the same, so best if we do, too.’”

MATT HANCOCK WAS NEVER A POLICY MAKER – HE WAS A FANATIC

The Lockdown Files have shown it was a complete lack of leadership that led to the unprecedented historical step of shutting down the UK

The 19th-century sage William Hazlitt once observed that those who love liberty love their fellow men, while those who love power love only themselves. Matt Hancock says that he has been betrayed by the leaking of his WhatsApp messages. But few people will have any sympathy for him. He gluttoned on power and too obviously loved himself.

Some things can be said in his favour. The Lockdown Files are not a complete record. No doubt there were also phone calls, Zoom meetings, civil service memos and the like, in which the thoughts of ministers and officials may have been more fully laid out. Not all the accusations levelled against him are fair. Care homes, for example, were probably an insoluble problem, given the absence of other places for many elderly patients to go, and the scarcity of testing materials in the early stages of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, Hancock’s WhatsApp messages offer an ugly insight into the workings of government at a time when it aspired to micromanage every aspect of our lives. They reveal the chaos and incoherence at the heart of government, as decisions were made on the hoof. They expose the fallacy that ministers were better able to judge our vulnerabilities than we were ourselves. They throw a harsh light on those involved: their narcissism, their superficiality, their hypocrisies great and small. Above all, they show in embarrassing detail how completely power corrupts those who have it.

The case against lockdowns was only partly a moral one. Like Hazlitt, I believe in liberty. But I have never regarded that as a conclusive argument. Even the most ardent lockdown sceptics accept that in extreme cases drastic measures may be required. But Covid-19 was not an extreme case.

Three major problems

Human beings have lived with epidemic disease from the beginning of time. Covid-19 is a relatively serious epidemic, but historically it is well within the range of health risks which are inseparable from ordinary existence. In Europe, bubonic plague, smallpox, cholera and tuberculosis were all worse in their time. Worldwide, the list of comparable or worse epidemics is much longer, even if they did not happen to strike Europe or North America. In future they are likely to be more frequent and more widespread.

No government, anywhere, had previously sought to deal with epidemic disease by closing down much of society. No society has ever improved public health by making itself poorer.

Spanish flu, between 1918 and 1921, was distinctly worse than Covid-19 – about 200,000 are thought to have died in the UK alone at a time when its population was about two thirds what it is now – but governments did not lock down healthy people or destroy their livelihoods. Asiatic flu in 1957 and Hong Kong flu in 1968 also killed millions; the US and the UK made a deliberate decision not to disrupt the life of the nation. No one criticised them on either occasion. Something has changed, but the change is in ourselves, not in the nature or scale of the risks. We are more easily frightened and have unrealistic expectations of the state.

There always were three major problems about lockdowns as a response to this particular pathogen, all of which are thrown into sharp relief by The Lockdown Files.

The first was the catastrophic social and economic cost. Messrs Whitty and Vallance accepted in their evidence to a Parliamentary committee

that this was a serious issue but added that it was not their job to think about it. It turned out to be no one’s job. There never was a proper cost-benefit analysis. The Government went into the lockdowns blind.

The second problem was that lockdowns were indiscriminate whereas the virus was selective. This is the critical point in the view of many reputable epidemiologists. The groups at significant risk of serious illness or death were the old and those suffering from certain underlying health problems. For the overwhelming majority of the population, including almost all of those who were economically active, the symptoms could be relatively mild. It did not matter much whether healthy under-65s were infected, provided that they did not infect others in the more vulnerable categories.

Protecting the truly vulnerable would have been challenging, but not as challenging as keeping most of the population locked up. Only about 8 per cent of people under 65 live in the same household as someone over that age. Humans have a developed sense of self-preservation. They had already begun to limit their social interaction before the first lockdown was announced. What they needed was balanced and trustworthy advice, not coercion or propaganda.

The scientists always understood this. In March 2020, a fortnight before the first lockdown, SAGE advised that social distancing measures, including confinement, should apply to those over 70 and younger people with known vulnerabilities. They proposed that “citizens should be treated as rational actors, capable of taking decisions for themselves and managing personal risk”. Policies designed to limit human interaction among those at risk are often said to require mass coercion as if this went without saying. But it was not obvious to the scientists at the time. The policies originally proposed by SAGE were actually followed by Sweden with results that were notably better than ours.

The third problem was that even the minimum of human interaction necessary to keep basic services like food distribution and healthcare running was more than enough to keep the virus circulating. All that lockdowns could ever achieve in those circumstances was to defer some infections until after they were lifted, to prevent people from acquiring a measure of personal immunity, and to prolong the crisis.

The adrenalin of power

The fateful moment came when the government chose to go for coercion. This ruled out any distinction between the vulnerable and the invulnerable, because it would have been too difficult to police. It also meant that ministers began to manipulate public opinion, exaggerating the risks in order to justify their decision and scare people into compliance. So we had the theatrical announcement of the latest death toll at daily press conferences from Downing Street. Shocking posters appeared on our streets (“Look him in the eyes”, etc). Matt Hancock announced that “if you go out, people will die”.

The scare campaign created a perfect storm, for it made it more difficult to lift the lockdown. The original idea was “three weeks to squash the sombrero”. The peak of hospital admissions came after slightly less than three weeks on April 11 2020, when Covid cases filled less than half of NHS beds. But the lockdown continued until July and was then reimposed in October.



continued on page 60

The Lockdown Files show this process at work in awful detail. “We frighten the pants off everyone with the new strain,” Hancock proudly declared. He wanted news of the Alpha variant timed to create maximum fear. Simon Case, the Cabinet Secretary, cheered from the sidelines. “The fear/guilt factor vital,” he assured Hancock. When the second lockdown was being plotted, the hapless health minister called for a projection of the “do nothing” death toll. The result was the notorious graph projecting 4,000 deaths a day, a claim that was manifestly false and swiftly exploded.

Hancock was the chief peddler of the idea that everyone was equally at risk from Covid-19. This proposition was patently untrue, but it was useful because it frightened people. “It’s not unhelpful having people think they could be next,” wrote his special adviser, who knew his master’s mind well. Other countries did not behave like this. In Sweden state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell was able to reassure his public that a lockdown was neither necessary nor helpful. Events have proved him right.

Ministers imprisoned by their own rhetoric found themselves forced to follow public opinion rather than lead it. But it was a public opinion of their own creation. Scientific evidence had very little to do with it. The Downing Street media advisers Lee Cain and James Slack, ex-journalists with no scientific background, appear to have been mainly responsible for persuading the prime minister to prolong the first lockdown. Relaxing it would be “too far ahead of public opinion”, they argued. Matt Hancock insisted on schoolchildren wearing masks in class in spite of scientific advice that it made little difference, because it was necessary to keep up with Nicola Sturgeon. When Rishi Sunak had the temerity to suggest that once the vaccine rollout started the lockdown should be relaxed, Hancock resisted. “This is not a SAGE call,” he said, “it’s a political call.”

Once ministers had started on this course, there was no turning back. It is hard to admit that you have inflicted untold damage on a whole society by mistake. Hancock resisted shortening the 14-day quarantine period in spite of scientific advice that five days was enough, because he did not want to admit that the original policy had been wrong. Relevant evidence was simply shut out. His response to the success of Sweden’s policies was not to learn from it but to dismiss it as the “f--ing Swedish argument”. Having no grounds for rejecting the Swedish argument, he had to ask his advisers to find him some. “Supply three or four bullet [points] of why Sweden is wrong,” he barked.

The adrenalin of power is corrosive. It was largely responsible for the sheer nastiness of the Government’s response to criticism. Hancock lashed out at the least signs of resistance or dissent. He wanted internal critics sacked or moved. He suggested the cancellation of a learning disability hub in the constituency of an MP who intended to vote against the tier system. Ministers “got heavy” with the police to make them tougher on the public. The police responded with oppressive gestures like fining people going for a walk with a takeaway coffee. The prime minister thought it “superb” that two travellers had been fined £10,000 for evading the equally pointless quarantine regulations. Hancock gloated over the discomfort of returning travellers, forced by the chopping and changing of the rules to quarantine in basic hotels at their own expense. “Hilarious,” chipped in Simon Case.

There is no sign that Hancock either thought or cared about the wider consequences of his measures. He seems to have believed that there was no limit to the amount of human misery and economic destruction that was worth enduring in order to keep the Covid numbers down. Rishi Sunak is on record as saying that any discussion of the wider problems was ruled out in advance, and this is fully borne out by the WhatsApp messages. Any hint from Sunak or business secretary Alok Sharma that the cure might be worse than the disease provoked an explosion of bile but no actual answers.

Hancock fought tooth and nail to close schools and keep them closed. Deprived of many months of education, cooped up indoors and terrified by government warnings that they would kill their grandparents by hugging them, children suffered a sharp rise in mental illness and self-harm although they were themselves at no risk from Covid-19. Cancer patients were left undiagnosed and untreated. Old people, deprived of stimulation, succumbed to dementia in large numbers. Small businesses were destroyed which had taken a lifetime to build up. A joyless puritanism infected government policy. No travel. No wedding parties or funeral wakes. No hugs. Anyone who spoke up for a measure of decency or moderation in this surreal world was promptly slapped down as a “w--er”.

Real policy-making is never black and white like this. It is always a matter of judgment, of weighing up pros and cons. In that sense, Matt Hancock was never a policy-maker. He was a fanatic.

A classic failure of government

Why did hitherto decent people behave like this? In Hancock’s case, at least part of the answer is vanity. The crisis was good for his profile. He saw himself as the man of action, the Churchill of public health, the saviour of his people, earning the plaudits of a grateful nation. As early as January 2020, he was sharing a message from a sycophantic “wise friend” assuring him that a “well-handled crisis of this scale could propel you into the next league”. He fussed over his tweets. He pushed his way in front of every press camera. He tried to divert the credit for the vaccines from Kate Bingham to himself. “I think I look great” is one of his more memorable messages.

And what of the prime minister who presided indulgently over this shambles? The Lockdown Files show that Boris Johnson always recognised the totalitarian implications of his administration’s measures. Sometimes he recoiled from the unfolding social and economic catastrophe. Occasionally he even saw through the manipulative statistics presented to him. He toyed with the idea of leaving the over-65s to make their own risk assessments. He would clearly have preferred to end the first lockdown sooner.

But Johnson never had the courage of his convictions. He picked up fag-ends of information from newspapers but lacked the application to get to the bottom of the scientific evidence. He was constantly manipulated by those around him whose agenda was based on little more than public relations. In the end he was always pushed back into the shape that they wanted. He remained the “wonky shopping trolley” derided by Dominic Cummings in his explosive evidence to a House of Commons committee. As Simon Case admitted in one of his more indiscreet messages, by 2021 public distrust of Johnson was too strong for his words to carry any weight.

This was a classic failure of government. Britain has faced many crises over the past century: wars, pandemics, strikes, economic failure. All government and most crises involve conflicting priorities. Departmental ministers fight their corner. The role of the prime minister is critical. He is the only person in a position to decide between the rival claims of public health, education, social policy, economic survival and financial solvency. For that he needs a clear idea of what he is trying to achieve and a strategy for achieving it. He needs strength of personality and the public stature to persuade the public rather than just appease them. He must have command of the detail, and the respect of his subordinates. Boris Johnson had none of these things.

Lack of sense of direction at the top is always fatal, however talented the subordinates. Johnson’s subordinates were not talented. The team in Downing Street was dominated by a failed autocrat in Dominic Cummings and an inexperienced Cabinet Secretary in Simon Case. Both of them grew to despise him, usually with good reason. Apart from Sunak and Gove, his Cabinet was probably the most mediocre band of British ministers for nearly a century. Collectively, they proved unable to look at the whole problem in the round. Their eyes were never on the ball. They were not even on the field. These are the lessons of this sorry business.

Lord Sumption was a Supreme Court justice in the United Kingdom between 2012 and 2018.



By Jonathan Sumption

The Daily Telegraph / 10 March 2023

Print credit: © Jonathan Sumption/Telegraph Media Group Limited 2023

JOY IN DUMFRIES AFTER RUINED CHURCH BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

Magnificent former Methodist place of worship is in great shape, once again, since being transformed into our pub, Robert the Bruce



Derelict

‘Prior to the refurbishment works, the remains of the façade had been left derelict for approximately 15 years, without adequate protection, causing sandstone to be saturated by rainwater and the paint to flake, owing to resulting deterioration.

‘The drying-out period for the sandstone has been estimated at approximately eight years and there is no alternative short-term solution. However, eventually, we hope to bring back the original painted façade to the building.’

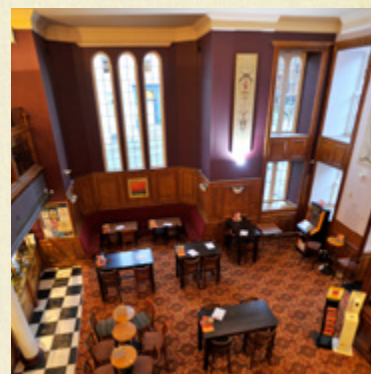
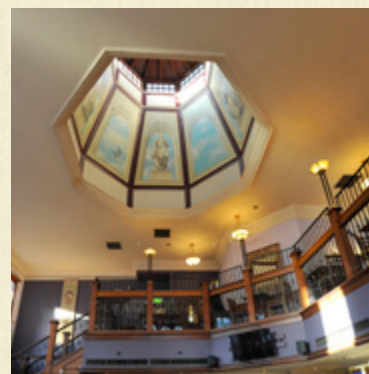
Dumfries is home to many beautiful buildings, several constructed from the characteristic red stone, including Mid Steeple, dating from 1708 and once the town tolbooth and prison, as well as Dumfries Academy, the Municipal Chambers and Dumfries & Galloway Council Offices.

Robert the Bruce, housed in the magnificent old church building, which was previously painted white, now stripped, is among the collection.

Many of the original features of the Methodist church, which closed in 1986 (and was first built as an Episcopal church in 1817 by TF Hunt of London), can still be seen at the pub, including the giant tetrastyle Ionic portico entrance on Buccleuch Street and tall arch windows on the Castle Street side.

There is also an unusual gallery, above the bar area, along with an octagonal, small-paned, decorated, domed ceiling ‘lantern’ feature. Some decorative cast-iron railings also survive.

81–83 Buccleuch Street, Dumfries, Dumfries and Galloway, DGI 1DJ



Our online pub histories series continues to prove a hugely popular source of historical information since its launch at the end of 2016.

Initially showcasing just a handful of our pubs in major UK city centres, including Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield, our website history catalogue has now grown to encompass more than 750 of our premises.

Wetherspoon takes immense pride in the restoration and refurbishment of some wonderful and, in several cases, unique buildings, to create our pubs – and our pub histories series has unearthed some interesting discoveries.

Online

The online historical information, detailing the story of our pubs, includes numerous images of the artwork and old photographs on display, as well as photos of the interior, exterior and features of each building.

In this pub histories spotlight, a regular Wetherspoon News feature, we focus on Robert the Bruce (Dumfries).

This former Methodist church first opened as a Wetherspoon pub in September 2000, in this market town, in Dumfries & Galloway.

The pub is named after one of Scotland’s best-known kings.

It stands near the site of Greyfriars Church, renowned as the scene of the 1306 murder, by Robert the Bruce, of John Comyn III of Badenoch (nicknamed ‘the Red’).

Listed

A plaque documenting the history of Robert the Bruce is on display in the listed premises.

It reads: ‘The building formerly comprised the façades of the former Methodist church (category A listed building) with a gap site adjoining the church (formerly the church hall).

‘The remains of the former Methodist church have been reintegrated along with the construction of a new roof and cupola in the original manner.

‘The exterior of the building has been recently stripped of paint to enable the existing sandstone walls and columns to dry out under natural conditions.



CAPTAIN ALEXANDER MAKING A SPLASH SOON AFTER LAUNCH

Liverpool pub named after pioneering sea captain wins sought-after listing in The Good Beer Guide

Wetherspoon is proud of the quality of the real ale served in its pubs.

Its staff work hard to offer first-class beers at all times.

This is evident in the high number of Wetherspoon pubs listed, over many years, in the Campaign for Real Ale's (CAMRA) publication The Good Beer Guide.

Wetherspoon continues to have more pubs listed, as a proportion of its estate, than any other pub company.

Listed

In 2023's 50th edition, there are 200 Wetherspoon pubs listed.

In this regular feature, we highlight those pubs and staff who serve an excellent range of real ales from brewers across the UK.

The Captain Alexander (Liverpool), which opened as a Wetherspoon pub in June 2019, is featured for the very first time in the 2023 guide (published 2022).

The pub's name remembers Scottish-born sea captain Alexander Allan who, on 23 May 1819, advertised that the 169-ton brig Jean would shortly set sail for Canada. It was the forerunner of the Allan family's large North Atlantic fleet of sailing ships.

By the 1830s, the shipping-line company had offices in Glasgow, Liverpool and Montreal. Its Liverpool office closed in 1917.

Champion

Pub manager Phil Nesbit has been at the helm since the pub opened and, regarding all things real ale, is assisted by bar associate and ale champion Andre Fu.

As well as being responsible for cellar management and cleaning, along with non-kitchen deliveries, Andre selects and orders the range of guest ales served at the pub.

Andre (pictured) said: "Like every Wetherspoon pub, we stock the core real-ale choices of Sharp's Doom Bar, Greene King Abbot Ale and Ruddles, in addition to three guest ales (Monday to Thursday) and five at weekends (Friday, Saturday and Sunday)."

Although originally from London, Andre has lived in and around Liverpool for the past 25 years. He is a former vice-chair of Liverpool Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) and pub liaison, while still a member of the local branch for the past 10 years.

He said: "I know what breweries and beers sell well and also ensure that we have a couple of local beers among the guest ales on offer."

Local

"We order from the national listing, as well as directly from local breweries within a 30-mile radius of the pub.

"We also expand the range with a regular tap-takeover event, showcasing five or six guest ales from one particular brewery, the last one being Manchester-based Brightside Brewing Company."

Other breweries and beers which always prove popular at The Captain Alexander are Wirral-based Peerless Brewing's Knee

Buckler IPA (5.2% ABV) and Langton Spin (4.4% ABV), together with Liverpool-based Strawberry Fields Brewery's Eleanor (4.2% ABV), Lucy (4.5% ABV) and Kaleidoscope (5.2% ABV).

Also among the favourites are Staffordshire-based Titanic Brewery's Iceberg (4.1% ABV), White Star (4.5% ABV) and Captain Smiths (5.2% ABV), as well as beers from North Yorkshire-based Rooster's Brewing Co.

Andre said: "I work at the pub during the week (Monday to Friday); when I am not there, shift manager Greg Hewitt and shift leader Rob Hannah help to make sure that the real-ale side of things runs smoothly at the pub."

He concluded: "We are thrilled to be included in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide (50th edition) for the very first time.

"It is a great achievement to be among the listed pubs, however, the challenge now is to maintain our position in the guide, up against some tough competition across the city."

What The Good Beer Guide 2023 says:

THE CAPTAIN ALEXANDER

One-bar Wetherspoon with an outdoor terrace, close to Pier Head and Albert Dock.

The pub opened in 2019 and is named after Captain Alexander 'Sandy' Allan, founder of the Allan Shipping Line, which had an office next door.

The Allan Line pioneered trading with Canada and became the world's largest privately owned shipping firm in the early 19th century.

● Victoria House, James Street, Liverpool, Merseyside, L2 7NX

What CAMRA says:

Steve Downing, Good Beer Guide Co-ordinator Liverpool CAMRA, said: "Only pubs serving consistently well-kept cask ale appear in The Good Beer Guide (GBG).

"A pub's inclusion in the guide is determined purely by the thousands of beer quality scores entered by local and visiting CAMRA members on whatpub.com.

"Then, a rigorous check is made, with only those pubs at the top of the beer scores league honoured by a listing in GBG.

"Thousands of CAMRA members visit Liverpool, for not only the great pubs, but also the prestigious Liverpool Beer Festival held every February in the Metropolitan Cathedral Crypt.

"This means that we have beer scorers from all over the country.

"No other factor, such as value for money, is taken into consideration.

"For The Captain Alexander to get into GBG has taken a lot of care and attention, in terms of beer cellarmanship and the range of beers on offer."

NEW LOOK

London Gatwick Airport south terminal, landside

THE BEEHIVE

Pub manager Laura Beal is pictured at her new-look pub The Beehive (London Gatwick Airport, south terminal, landside).

Having first opened in August 2011, the pub underwent a £900,000 refurbishment and upgrade project.

The project has included the installation of new signage, new bar-front overbar glass racks, the addition of a digital advertising screen and a new floor finishing has been installed.

Also on the bar, there has been a full upgrade to the drinks-dispensing system, enhancing the quality and speed of service, as well as a new app station installed.

Behind the scenes, the kitchen has been upgraded and a pizza oven installed, allowing the pub to add pizzas to its menu.

Staff facilities have also been upgraded.

Laura said: "The Beehive looks wonderful and is a great asset to the airport."

"We are also pleased that, as a result of the project, 40 new jobs have been created."

The pub's opening hours are 4am-11.30pm during the summer (April-October); winter 5am-11pm.

**Before Security, South Terminal, Gatwick Airport
Crawley, West Sussex, RH6 0NG**



NEW LOOK



City of London

THE CROSSE KEYS

Pub manager Robbie Douglas is pictured with bar associate Kadra Omar at the reopening of The Crosse Keys (City of London).

The pub had been closed since January 2022 for emergency and essential repair work to take place, following a flooding incident from the hotel above.

As well as back-of-house changes, including an upgrade to the kitchen facilities, dispensing equipment and customer accessible toilet facilities, new carpet has been installed, together with some new furniture and redecoration.

The Crosse Keys, in Gracechurch Street, first opened as a Wetherspoon pub in June 1999. It is managed by Robbie and Caroline Douglas.

Robbie said: "The pub is extremely popular and an important part of the social scene here.

"We are delighted to be open once again, after a lengthy closure."

Twenty-five new jobs were created at the pub, taking the number of staff to approximately 90.

Unlike many pubs in City of London, The Crosse Keys is open seven days a week. It is open 8am-11pm (Monday-Thursday), 8am-midnight (Friday), 8.30am-11pm (Saturday) and 9.30am-9pm (Sunday).

**9 Gracechurch Street
London, EC3V 0DR**



NEW LOOK

Falmouth

THE PACKET STATION

Pub manager Aaron Niles is pictured (far left) with Town Mayor and Mayoress of Falmouth Councillor Steve Eva and his wife Victoria, Council officials and pub staff at his new-look pub – The Packet Station (Falmouth).

The pub, which first opened in March 2003, has a new roof terrace (to accommodate up to 136 customers) with treetop views.

The space has a mix of tables and chairs, both free standing outside dining tables and chairs and high-top tables and stools, together with planting and lighting.

The roof terrace is accessible by either stairs or lift, making the space accessible for all and wheelchair friendly.

As part of the £3.4-million development project, the pub has also undergone a full refurbishment and upgrade.

The pub's existing customer areas, on the ground and first floor, have been refurbished, with upgrades to bars and customer toilets.

The interior design of the new-look pub draws on the modernist character of the existing building, with a colour palette reflecting the special Cornish light which continues to inspire great artists.

The 'journey' through the building continues across each floor, where artwork and sculpture explore the colourful facets of Falmouth's history, including the now-famous steam packet ships, transporting letters and parcels across the world.

The ground floor has a customer area around the new main bar, with a series of smaller areas wrapping around the stairs.

A raised area, at the rear of the space, looks out onto the small courtyard.

New bespoke lighting has been installed throughout the pub to enhance the individual areas' character.

Aaron said: "Wetherspoon has made a significant investment in this project, highlighting the company's commitment to the pub and to Falmouth itself.

"We are thrilled with all of our new-look pub and upgraded facilities, particularly the new roof terrace which provides a wonderful outside space for our regular customers and visitors to enjoy."



4 The Moor, Falmouth, Cornwall, TR11 3QA





BARGE CREW RENDERS CASH UNTO CESAR

The Brockley Barge (Brockley) celebrated its 22nd birthday as part of a series of events designed to raise cash for Young Lives vs Cancer. Staff each paid £1 to wear their own clothes for the day, and cakes were sold to contribute to a total of £175 for the charity.

The pub's manager, Cesar Kimbirima, has worked at the pub for nine years. He said: "It was a good day. We have a good team here and great customers, too."

Cesar added: "We always want to do our best for Young Lives vs Cancer. "Our customers also enjoy taking part in a weekly bonus ball draw and especially like a sweep stake for all of the big sporting events, like the Grand National and the World Cup."

Cesar is pictured (left) with kitchen manager Nicolas Bland, toasting the pub's birthday with a glass of Prosecco.

HEROES HONoured AT THE FERRY BOAT



A plaque to honour two Victoria Cross winners has been unveiled at The Ferry Boat (Runcorn).

The unveiling was part of a collaboration among the pub, a local campaign to honour VC winners and Runcorn-based researchers.

The plaque honours British Army Captain Duncan Thomas, who served in World War I and Captain Joseph Terreta who served in the Royal Navy in World War II.

The pub's manager, Jimmy Quinn, said: "We were honoured to be chosen as the site to host this plaque. It is very important that the research into the stories behind these heroes continue, so that people can learn about them and what they did and honour them."

Among those attending the event was customer Paul James, now retired from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. The Tom Wilkinson Victoria Cross Statue Appeal has worked

tirelessly to uncover such stories, along with local researchers such as Linda Wilding, the former group leader of the Runcorn Family History Society.

Pictured (left to right) are pub manager Jimmy Quinn, Paul James, Linda Wilding and secretary and founder of the Tom Wilkinson Victoria Cross Statue Appeal Tony Miller.



THE RED LION INN • MORRISTON • THE BANK STATEMENT • SWANSEA • THE WYNDHAM ARMS HOTEL • BRIDGEND

TIME FLIES BY FOR 20-YEAR VETERANS IN SOUTH WALES



Three Wetherspoon staff members in south Wales have been celebrating 20 years with the company, citing employer flexibility and career progression among the main reasons behind their long service.

They are shift manager Marie Carter at The Red Lion Inn (Morrison), floor associate John Rees at The Bank Statement (Swansea) and hotel manager Lisa Driscoll at The Wyndham Arms Hotel (Bridgend).

Lisa has helped Wetherspoon open 27 pubs in her 20 years as part of the company's pre-opening training team – as well as running The Wyndham Arms Hotel.

She joined the company from a major hotel chain on 21 December 2002.

Lisa said: "Within a month of joining Wetherspoon, I had won 'employee of the month' at the hotel – then, within 10 years, I was running the hotel side of the business.

"I really love my job – I would love to open more Wetherspoon hotels and am always available to support other hotel managers in the company.

"Wetherspoon has given me a lot of security."

Her younger daughter, Yasmin Baker, has been working at the hotel for 17 years and is now a bar team leader at The Wyndham Arms Hotel.

Marie has been able to negotiate her career around family and children. She joined Yr Ieuan Ap Iago (Aberdare) as a bar associate in November 2002 from another pub in the area and, within three years, had risen through the ranks to take charge of The Olympia (Tredegar) and The Sirhowy (Blackwood).

After four years in pub management, Marie took a step back to have two children, both girls, before returning to work at The Red Lion Inn as a shift manager.

She said: "I have had a great career and maybe I will return to pub management, but I'm happy as I am for now.

"Wetherspoon has treated me very well – the flexibility they showed when I had my children and the opportunities they have given me for advancement are two major reasons why I've stayed so long, but also it's the team at the pub. There is a good spirit here – and we are a happy ship."

John Rees has worked as a floor associate at The Bank Statement for 20 years, working two evening shifts each week.

John says he loves working at the pub and chatting to customers.

He said: "I've been working every Friday and Wednesday evening here since 2002. I look forward to it. I am proud to have reached 20 years' service."

Area manager Victoria Walker knows Lisa, Marie and John very well.

She said: "They are lovely people – Lisa is phenomenal – she teaches me about hotels. I am lucky in that respect as an area manager. She has been, and continues to be, a real asset to the company, as have Marie and John.

"Marie is very outgoing, a real 'people person' and an absolute joy to work with. She keeps the team driven and motivated, while bringing energy and passion to the job.

"John is always the first person to greet me, if he is on shift.

"He is fantastic with customers, brings great banter to the pub and has a wonderful enthusiasm for his job."

● **Pictured (left to right) are Marie Carter, John Rees and Lisa Driscoll**

GOOD TIMES WITH GREAT ALE AT THE WATCH MAKER



Real-ale-lovers from the St Helens and District branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) arrived at The Watch Maker (Prescot) to celebrate its first-ever listing in The Good Beer Guide.

The group, led by branch chair Gillian Yates, congratulated pub staff on its inclusion in the guide, an annual listing of the UK's best real-ale pubs as chosen by local CAMRA members.

She also presented the pub with a local 'pub of excellence' accolade, as part of its annual 'pub of the year' awards.

Gillian said: "We are delighted to be here to recognise the work which staff have put in to earn The Watch Maker a fine reputation for the quality of its real ale."

Shift leader Daniel McCourt said: "We were glad to host CAMRA for the evening, as we value the organisation's opinions on our ales."

The pub offers around eight real ales (depending on availability), usually including ales from Wily Fox Brewery, Coach House Brewing Company and Peerless Brewing.

Pictured (left to right) are St Helens and District CAMRA branch chair Gillian Yates, shift leader and real-ale champion Daniel McCourt, pub manager Sheena Pyper-Mann and CAMRA branch pubs officer Ian Pye.

TEAM LEADER RUTH TAKES A 12-MILE WALK TO WORK

Team leader Ruth Payne led a 12-mile charity walk from Rye to The John Logie Baird (Hastings), where she works.

The walk was organised to help two charities – Young Lives vs Cancer and Hastings Athletics Club.

Three walkers set off from Rye at 10am on a mild autumnal day and made it to The John Logie Baird shortly after 2.30pm.

Ruth said: "It was a lot of fun and very exhilarating."

The initial aim was to raise £500, yet, as more donations poured in, this quickly rose, with the final total of £1,075 being split between the two charities.

Ruth had the backing of the pub's manager, Josh Morgan, who arranged with Young Lives vs Cancer to provide T-shirts and banners for the finish line.

Josh said: "It was a great effort. Ruth organised it off her own bat, and the team backed her. We are grateful to all of those who donated so generously.

"Charlie and Dan agreed to complete the full walk in drag, helping to boost donations, while Ruth opted, for the whole trip, to sport a dinosaur costume."



Pictured (left to right) are pub manager and supporter Josh Morgan, shift manager Charlie Adams, bar associate and supporter Lucy Faye Frearson, team leader Ruth Payne and kitchen manager Dan Noble

BARRELS ROLL OUT FROM FOOT OF THE OCHIL HILLS

Harviestoun Brewery has gone from strength to strength since its birth 40 years ago in a shed in Scotland

Brewery's name: Harviestoun Brewery, Alva, Clackmannanshire



In October this year, Harviestoun Brewery will be celebrating 40 years' brewing, having had its life begun in a shed (back in 1983) by fanatical home brewer Ken Brooker.

Now based only five miles from its original home, at the foot of the Ochil Hills, in Alva, Clackmannanshire, the Scottish brewery has seen many changes in its four decades of production.

However, the family-run business, which became part of Caledonian Brewery in 2006, but has been independent since 2008, continues to produce award-winning ales and has been supplying Wetherspoon with regular guest and festival ales since 1999.

Retirement

Master brewer Amy Cockburn (pictured) took over the reins in 2022, following the retirement (after 25 years at Harviestoun) of Stuart Cail, although she is no stranger to the Harviestoun brewhouse, having worked there for 15 years herself.

Amy, who gained her brewing and distilling degree at Edinburgh's Heriot-Watt University, recalled: "When I graduated, Stuart phoned me and offered me a job at the brewery straight from university.

"I have worked my way up in the 15 years since – and, when Stuart retired, it was a natural step up for me.

"We had worked closely together, so I knew the job well, and it has been a matter of keeping things ticking over, while putting my own stamp on the role.

Improvements

"There are a lot of things which haven't and won't change; other aspects will have slight improvements and tweaks, but, now that

we are fully up and running again (post pandemic), we can also focus on more new product development."

Several of Harviestoun's real ales are tried, tested and much loved, with its flagship brew Schiehallion Lager Beer still picking up awards (2022 SIBA overall champion Cask Beer of Britain) almost 30 years since its launch.

Amy said: "The longevity of that beer, still a great favourite, is kudos to the guys at Harviestoun for the consistency and quality of their brewing. It has certainly stood the test of time."

Wetherspoon's customers were also able to enjoy Bitter & Twisted (3.8% ABV), available on the January–March 2023 national listing, another long-standing award-winning offering from the brewery.

Festival

Amy revealed: "We have been working with Wetherspoon for the 15 years I have been at the brewery and have supplied several festival beers.

"In fact, our session IPA Heaven Cent, a recipe with which we had been playing for a little while, was first launched during the 2020 Wetherspoon real-ale festival.

"We now sell it in cans and kegs as part of our core range."

She added: "We have a strong presence in Scotland, yet it is always great when we can reach further and see our beers being enjoyed by Wetherspoon's customers further south."

Amy concluded: "Real ale can be a fickle thing and, if not kept and served correctly, can be ruined within hours.

"We can rely on Wetherspoon – the pubs definitely know how to handle real ale... that is never a worry."

TWIN PEAKS: NATHAN AND HIS SIBLING SCALE HEIGHTS



Ice baths, crawling through mud and 30m scaffolds were among the challenges faced by Wetherspoon's maintenance manager Nathan McGovern as he, his twin and four friends raised £1,600 for Alzheimer's UK.

The group completed Manchester's gruelling 10k Tough Mudder obstacle course, which took place at Heaton Park.

Nathan and his friend Lee Wignall both have relatives who have suffered with different forms of dementia.

Nathan said: "Lee and I have both lost relatives to dementia.

"We had a conversation and decided that we wanted to raise money for the charities which help those with conditions such as Alzheimer's."

Speaking of the challenge, Nathan said: "The ice water was the worst. The day itself wasn't unpleasant, around 18°C, but the ice was a real shock to the system.

"A challenge presented itself every kilometre of the way, and crawling through mud was not easy."



Nathan paid tribute to his friend Jay Curran, who, despite his fear of heights, scaled a 30m climbing wall during the exercise.

He said: "It would be difficult enough for anyone, but it's a lot more difficult if you have that phobia."

The team had to pull together as the course took its toll on the six friends.

One of the group, Paul Copeland, developed a severe cramp towards the end of the challenge, but his five mates picked him up and made sure that they all crossed the line together.

The group is undaunted by the experience and planning another fundraising mission in 2023.

Pictured outside The Art Picture House (Bury) (left to right) are (back row) Lee Wignall, Paul Copeland, Jay Curran and Brian Kelly, with (front row) Wetherspoon's regional maintenance manager Nathan McGovern and twin brother Marc McGovern.

COUNTING HOUSE REGULARS ADD CHEER TO THEIR FAVOURITE CORNER

Two regular customers at The Counting House (Dundee) brought some festive cheer and attention to their favoured corner of their favourite pub.

Peter Burke (pictured) and Jake Montgomery asked pub manager Stevie Reid whether they could decorate the window of the pub, where they sit together most days.

Stevie said: "Peter and Jake are well-known regular customers and both great characters; when they asked to put up some Christmas decorations, I was more than happy to agree."

Peter added: "We did ask nicely and got permission, with Jake bringing in most of the decorations from home.

"It looked good – and lots of people commented, took photos and even gave us Christmas cards."

Jake said: "I have collected quite a lot of decorations over the years, so it was great to be able to cheer up our little corner of the pub.

"It was meant to be a bit of fun just for us really, but certainly brought a lot of attention, especially with people walking past."

Peter laughed: "I've told Stevie that we could do this regularly now, so let's see what happens."

Both Peter and Jake are also keen supporters of the pub's charity fundraising for Young Lives vs Cancer, helping to raise funds with raffles of Christmas selection boxes and Easter eggs.





HUNDREDS OF YEARS' HISTORY MAKE THE KINGS HEAD WHAT IT IS TODAY

Features from the 17th century preserved in careful refit of Monmouth pub and hotel

O riginally a 17th-century coaching inn, **The Kings Head (Monmouth) first opened as a Wetherspoon pub in September 1998, in this historic grade II listed building.**

Then, following a £1.64-million complete hotel refurbishment project, The Kings Head reopened its doors in April 2018 as a pub and new-look hotel.

Specialist restoration work was also carried out during this period, since, during the initial works, original artworks of significant importance were discovered in one of the hotel rooms – and construction had to be put on hold.

Behind studding for a modern en suite bathroom and layers of wallpaper and paint, a patterned wall artwork was uncovered on an existing stone wall, on an original layer of lime render, believed to date from around 1575–1625.

After specialist restoration work, the artwork is now permanently visible in the hotel bedroom, through a protective glass covering.

The pattern shows 'a high degree of vegetation in the borders, surrounding the panels, which was intended to mimic wood panelling ... a faded 'fleur de lys' is also perhaps evidence of royalist leanings in the owners of the time'.

War

The coaching inn is said to have been visited during the Civil War in the 1640s by Charles I. At that time (1675), the inn was owned by Richard Ballard, who acted as both postmaster and mayor.

The inn was an important post house in the later 17th century.

In the 1800s, this was one of Monmouth's most important inns, often used for corporation dinners. One such event was held in 1840 to celebrate Queen Victoria's wedding.

Until 1830, Agincourt Square (which faces the pub and hotel) was called Market Place. Its name was changed in the hope of attracting more of the tourists who visited the area while boating down the River Wye.

Monmouth, in fact, takes its name from the River Monnow, a tributary of the Wye.

Directly below the hotel room containing the ancient art discovery is The King's Room, part of the customer dining area at the rear of the building.

The ceiling is another listed feature and, during the hotel's renovation work in 2018, also underwent repair, restoration and preservation work by specialist contractors.

The King's Room's ornate plaster ceiling, believed to be of late 17th century origin, with a roundel of painted fruit and central Tudor rose decoration, was stabilised and redecorated, with careful colour-matching of specialist mineral paints.

Portrait

Also on display in The King's Room, above the fireplace, is a painted relief plaster panel with what was probably intended to be a portrait of King Charles, said to have been installed as a memorial in 1670.

The crowned figure is full face and flanked by the initials CR and primitive vases of roses.



In 2009, the premises was awarded a Monmouth Heritage blue plaque from the Monmouth Civic Society, recognising it as 'a building of great historical and architectural interest'.

Displayed on the striking black-and-white frontage of the building, it reads: The King's Head Hotel – circa mid-17th century, reputedly visited by Charles I in 1645, became a posting inn in the late 17th century. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, stagecoaches left here for London. It now includes the former Monmouth Bank (c1740) and the County Club (c1877).

Although built in the mid 17th century, in the town ditch, the building was altered in the 18th century, with further alteration and adjustment in the late 19th century, including the addition of gables.

The hotel was expanded into adjoining buildings on the left, the 18th-century old bank house, and the 1875 County Club on the right. The interior was gradually opened out to join the three buildings into the one whole premises it is today.

The steep climb down to the rear garden and rear elevation visible from St John's Street demonstrates that the original hotel was built in the ditch of the castle's outer bailey, as there is considerable additional understorey at the rear.

Castle

Monmouth has its origins in Roman times, when a small Roman garrison was stationed here, with the settlement called Blestium. During the 11th and 12th century, the area was managed by French lords and a castle built.

Henry V, the illustrious soldier king, was born at Monmouth Castle in 1387. The Shire Hall, located opposite The Kings Head, displays a statue of Henry V.

The castle changed hands three times during the Civil War and, following its final capture by the Parliamentarians, most of the fortifications were demolished. Great Castle House, built in 1673 by the third Marquis of Worcester, is now the home of the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers (Militia), the second-oldest regiment of the British Army.

Throughout the pub, there are images and information boards detailing the history of Monmouth, events and characters, among them King Henry V, Geoffrey of Monmouth and William Cobbett.

There is historical detail about Agincourt Square, Monmouth as a market town and Monmouth Viaduct. Illustrations include Charles I during the Civil War, as well as an ancient map of Monmouth and a tapestry.

Alongside the rich history clearly making The Kings Head the much-loved pub which it is today is contemporary artwork, commissioned during the refurbishment of the 24-bedroom hotel.

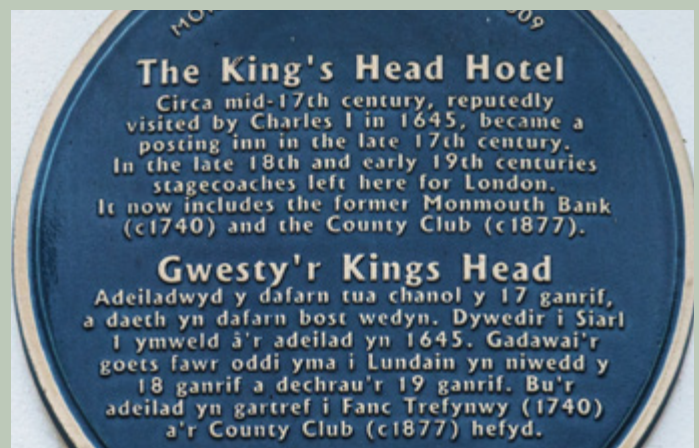
The rooms are individually decorated in natural tones, reflecting the local scenery and nature of the building's location, while new artwork is displayed in each bedroom, depicting landscapes and local sites, produced by the pupils at nearby Overmonnow Primary School.

A series of four limited-edition prints, by renowned Welsh artist David Day and titled Countryside Walk, is also displayed in the hotel's reception area.

Shortlisted for the 'Welsh artist of the year' award in 2009, Ebbw Vale-born Day's paintings have been critically acclaimed.

He uses acrylic paint, Indian ink and oil pastels, creating work verging on the abstract, many contrasting manmade structures against a background of local Welsh landscapes.

● 8 Agincourt Square, Monmouth, Monmouthshire, NP25 3DY



THRILL FOR LEEDS RUGBY FANS AS RHINOS CHARGE IN TO PUB

Rugby league stars Aidan Sezer and Sam Lisone, of Leeds Rhinos, dropped in to meet customers and staff at The Golden Beam (Headingley, Leeds).

Scrum half Aidan and prop forward Sam were accompanied by club mascot Ronnie Rhino as part of an ongoing relationship with the pub, which is an ambassador venue for Leeds Rhinos.

Shift manager Luke Holdsworth said: "We have a lot to do with the Rhinos and can sell matchday tickets, at the pub at half price, as part of our arrangement.

"A lot of the customers are huge fans and come here before and after matches.

"Everyone had a great time – and Aidan and Sam were very generous, chatting and signing autographs and posing for selfies."

Leeds Rhinos players Aidan Sezer and Sam Lisone are pictured in club tracksuit tops with Ronnie Rhino and pub manager Chris Donoghue (third from right).



ROHAN'S RINGCRAFT BRINGS BIG WIN FOR COLLEAGUE'S GRANDSON

Young Max-Henry Harrow was speechless when his friend Rohan Baillie presented the 10-year-old Crohn's disease sufferer with a cheque for £1,073, following a charity boxing match.

Max-Henry is the grandson of shift leader Shirley McKenzie at The Golden Acorn (Glenrothes), and the money raised by fellow shift leader Rohan will go towards transport costs to and from hospital in Edinburgh, where Max-Henry has treatment.

Rohan said: "The lad couldn't believe it – and neither could his parents Kenny and Melissa.

"To be honest, I never expected to raise more than a couple of hundred pounds."

Rohan got into boxing last year – and his first bout took place at the Glen Pavilion in the town.

He put a huge amount of time into training – and also fundraising.

He said: "I asked all of my friends, customers, colleagues to do their best – and they were so generous because they know Max-Henry and Shirley."

Max-Henry is also a keen Manchester City fan and plans to spend some of the money, when his condition allows, following his favourite team.

He is pictured receiving his cheque from Rohan at The Golden Acorn.



QUORN™ NUGGET DISH CURRIES FAVOUR DURING VEGANUARY

Wetherspoon supported Veganuary – the annual challenge encouraging people to follow a vegan lifestyle for the month of January.

Wetherspoon offers several vegan dishes on its menu.

These include vegan breakfast (two Quorn sausages, baked beans, two hash browns, mushrooms, tomato, slice of bread and vegan spread); smashed avocado muffin; fiesta burger (Beyond Meat® plant-based patty, salsa, guacamole, roasted pepper, courgette, onion, with six onion rings).

Wetherspoon's senior food-development manager, Matt Elsdon, said: "Our vegan meals are extremely popular and form an important part of our overall food offering.

"We have added katsu Quorn™ nugget curry to the menu, which has proven a hit with customers.

"We were pleased to be associated with Veganuary and to highlight the range of vegan dishes on our menu."

Veganuary's senior corporate engagement specialist, Zoe West, added: "Wetherspoon was one of the first pub chains to be involved in Veganuary – and its vegan options have increased every year since, helping to make plant-based eating easier and more accessible for everyone.

"We're delighted that Wetherspoon has added a katsu Quorn™ nugget curry to its menu, as well as promoting its entire vegan menu throughout the pubs to mark Veganuary."

POLICE SPREADS DRINK-DRIVE MESSAGE AT SUSSEX PUBS



Wetherspoon's pubs across Sussex supported a police force campaign, during the festive period, to tackle drink driving.

The pubs were visited by Sussex Police licensing officers, with new beer mats, posters and flyers to display, to take the message to customers and to get people talking about the issue.

Shift manager Sam Gray (left) and deputy manager Becca James at The Picture Playhouse (Bexhill-on-Sea) are pictured helping to support the campaign, when Hastings and Rother licensing officer PC Daren Spalding visited.

Other participating Wetherspoon pubs across East Sussex included The London & County (Eastbourne) and The John Logie Baird (Hastings).

The Picture Playhouse's manager, Sonia De Sousa, said: "We were only too happy to support the initiative and to help in raising awareness and spreading the important message about the issues of drink driving.

"Our pub, like all Wetherspoon pubs, offers so many great alternatives to alcoholic drinks, so there is absolutely no excuse for drivers not being able to socialise safely."

PC Spalding added: "Working alongside pubs, restaurants

and venues has been a crucial part of our campaign to tackle drink driving, so we are pleased with the response from staff at Wetherspoon to support our campaign.

"Drink driving destroys lives, and, tragically, despite many warnings, reckless motorists continue to get behind the wheel, putting themselves and others at risk.

"That's why our innovative campaign with the beer mats and posters has seen us working closely with venues to try to prevent drink driving in the first place."

In December 2022, the force launched the national campaign called Drink Driving: Together We Can Stop It – to raise awareness of the easy steps which everyone can take to help to prevent and persuade friends and loved-ones from drink driving.

The campaign coincided with increased patrols by forces across the country, as part of Operation Limit, to catch drink drivers and stop them from causing so much harm on our roads.

During Sussex Police's campaign, 233 drivers were arrested for offences related to drink or drug driving, with more than 80 of those already charged to appear in court.



The Blue Bell (Hemsworth) Bar associate Emily Murkin

POPPY APPEAL – WE NEVER FORGET

Each year, during the November period of remembrance, Wetherspoon supports the Royal British Legion's (RBL) annual poppy appeal.

The red poppy is a symbol of remembrance and hope – hope for people, supported by the RBL, to overcome their difficulties and for a peaceful world.

Wetherspoon's pubs across England, Scotland and Wales display poppies, with each having a collection box on the bar, as well as one being at Wetherspoon's head office.

Many of the pubs also produce their own poppy and remembrance displays to mark the occasion – and November 2022 was no exception.

Wetherspoon's people director, Tom Ball, said: "We are proud to support the Royal British Legion's annual poppy appeal, in the

knowledge that every poppy sold helps the life of many serving and ex-serving personnel and their families.

"Thank you to all of our staff and customers who continue to help us to support the RBL's appeal."

Ben France, head of corporate partners at the Royal British Legion, said: "We're incredibly grateful for the support which we receive from Wetherspoon, its staff and customers.

"Every donation collected will help the RBL to provide life-changing support to members of the armed forces' community and ensure that their unique contribution is never forgotten."

The RBL supports serving members of the armed forces, veterans and their families who may be struggling through hardship, injury and bereavement.

● To find out more, visit: rbl.org.uk



The Admiral Byng (Potters Bar) Customers Jean Margaret Schroder (left) and Leigh McDougall buy poppies from bar associate Louis Morris



The Romany Rye (Dereham) Shift manager Paul Salmon serves a poppy to customer Jean Emery



The Market Cross (Holywell) Bar associate Tom Tate



The Esquire House (Glasgow) Team leader Jade Tierney with regular customer Derek Wilson

HENLEY-ON-THAMES

HEROES WHO SPOKE UP FOR CATHERINE WHEEL HONoured WITH PLAQUE AT PUB



Pub manager Heather McIntyre (right) and deputy manager Samantha Ashby are pictured at their pub, The Catherine Wheel (Henley-on-Thames), following the unveiling of a plaque.

The Henley Society installed the commemorative blue plaque at the Wetherspoon pub and hotel, which opened in December 2000, housed in one of Henley's best-known old buildings.

The plaque reads:

The Catherine Wheel Hotel

The Katheryne Whyll hotel, first mentioned in 1499 in the will of Mr John Lyde, was saved from demolition in 1961 following a campaign by a group of Henley residents, who later became The Henley Society.

The Henley Society (<https://www.thehenleysociety.org/>) website reports: 'The Henley Society was formed in 1961, when a major planning application was approved by Henley Borough Council which would have involved the demolition of the handsome Catherine Wheel Hotel in Hart Street and its replacement with a row of 1960s-style shops.

'Local residents and visitors alike were aghast at the idea not only of losing this splendid old building, but that its own elected council should approve of the shops scheme without due regard for the town's historic street scene.

'Such was the local anger to this decision that it resulted in the formation of the society and the saving of the hotel.

'Hart Street is one of the jewels in Britain's high-street scenes and to imagine it without the Catherine Wheel façade would be unthinkable.'

The new plaque remembers this relatively recent history, as well as the more ancient history of the building itself.

Pub manager Heather McIntyre said: "We were only too pleased to have The Henley Society install the new plaque at The Catherine Wheel to highlight the importance of the group's past and continuing aims.

"We are the current and proud custodians of this wonderful historic building which, thanks to The Henley Society and local residents who were here more than 60 years ago, is still in existence for everyone to enjoy."

Inside the grade II listed entrance hallway of the pub, information panels are on display, with illustrations, photographs and text about the more detailed history of the building, provided by the Henley Archaeological and Historical Group.

A Henley pub of this name was mentioned in a will of 1499, while it is known that 'Le Katharine Whele' paid a rent (in 1564) towards the upkeep of the bridge.

Originally a fraction of its present size, the pub prospered during the 19th century as one of the town's main coaching inns.

MILE END

NO HALF MEASURES FROM HALF MOON CUSTOMERS

Staff and customers at The Half Moon (Mile End) embraced the spirit of the festive season with generous gifts for sick children at a local hospital.

Organised by shift leader Christine Chapman (right) and kitchen shift leader Chelsea Gibson (centre), the donations of presents, as well as cash to buy and wrap more, were gifted to young patients at the Royal London Hospital, in Whitechapel.

Christine and Chelsea are pictured with a 'play team' staff member at the hospital, delivering the donations, which included more than 50 selection boxes, soft toys and games.



SUPERFANS MAKE SUPERFAST SWOOP ON SCRIBBLING MILL



Wetherspoon superfans Malcolm and Hilary Peart were among the first visitors to The Scribbling Mill (Leeds).

The couple had travelled from Durham, 100 miles away, to be at the opening of the pub at White Rose Shopping Centre.

It was the 1,025th Wetherspoon pub which Malcolm had visited and the 817th for his wife.

Malcolm, a former supplier of glassware and crockery to hospitality businesses, has been visiting Wetherspoon's pubs for 15 years, since his retirement (Hilary for 10 years).

They have visited every pub in Scotland and Wales, the great majority in England and all but three in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The pubs which remain on the hitlist are either hotels or airside pubs at airports.

Hilary said: "We have visited 25 of the hotels and are looking at visiting the rest when we can.

"It's a fun hobby – and we both enjoy doing it."

Hilary and Malcolm enjoy a glass of wine when they visit pubs as a couple, yet, when left to his own devices, Malcolm is partial to a pint of lager or a whisky.

"There is usually a good offer on, with curry or steak on different nights – and we really like the breakfast offer," she added.

The couple started chalking off pubs when Wetherspoon began opening them in their local area.

They still visit The Wicket Gate (Chester-le-Street), along with The Bishops' Mill (Durham).

Hilary added: "We like the buildings, and Malcolm takes pictures of the outside, whenever he visits one."

Malcolm particularly enjoyed visiting Royal Victoria Pavilion (Ramsgate) and Hilary The Old Chapel (Darwen). Both liked The Man in the Moon (Newport, Isle of Wight).

The couple are turning their hobby into a family tradition, by taking their grandchildren to the pubs.

Hilary added: "We enjoyed a lovely time in Grimsby with them at The Yarborough Hotel."

NO CLOSE SHAVES FOR WALKDEN'S LIPPY TRIO

A moustachioed trio of young men at The Bull's Head Hotel (Walkden) raised £280 during 'Movember'.

By people growing moustaches each November, the Movember Foundation encourages men to raise funds and awareness of prostate and other male cancers. Shift leader Lewis Akers and bar associates Dan Lawton and Luke Farrow spent the month without shaving their top lip.

Dan and Luke shaved off their moustache after the fundraising effort, but Lewis has kept his.

Lewis said: "It took three weeks to grow mine, so I wasn't shaving it off again."

The trio plans to repeat its efforts next Movember.

Pictured (left to right) are Dan, Luke and Lewis at the pub.





The David Protheroe (Neath) Shift leader Dawn Phillips holds one of the many Welsh poems on display throughout the pub; flying the flag behind the bar are bar associates Sophie Skivington (left) and Caitlin Huxtable; shift leader Gavin Parker is also pictured

WELSH DRAGON JOINED BY MOOSE AND CANARY ON ST DAVID'S DAY

Wetherspoon's pubs across Wales marked **St David's Day (Dydd Gŵyl Dewi)** by serving a selection of Welsh beers and spirits.

The drinks on offer were Brains St David's Ale, Brecon Special Reserve Gin, Penderyn whisky, Au Vodka blue raspberry, Boss Brave (from Boss Brewing Company), Glamorgan Dead Canary and Purple Moose High Hops.

Wetherspoon's general manager, Steve Edge, said: "We were proud to serve a range of beers and spirits produced in Wales, on St David's Day.

"It's always great to showcase these excellent products and offer our customers the opportunity to support Welsh brewers and producers."

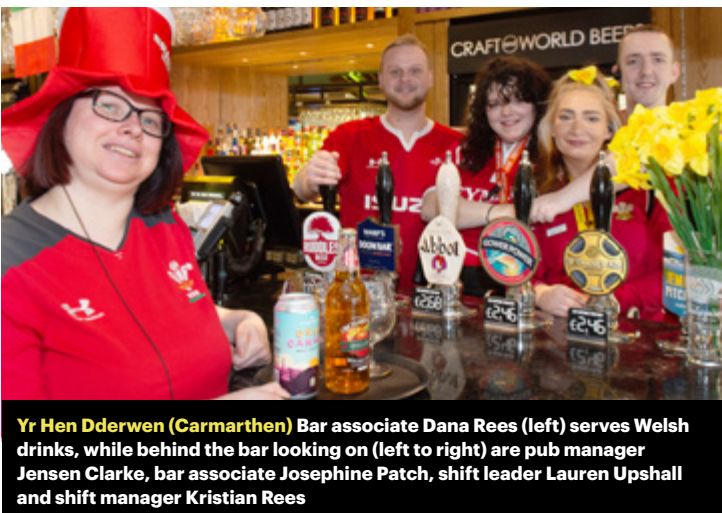
Several pubs hosted their own St David's Day activities, including fundraising events in support of the company's charity Young Lives vs Cancer.



The Sussex (Rhyl) Shift leader Helen Parker



The Palladium (Llandudno) Bar associate Elisa Clifton serves customers David Kane and Carla Lewis



Yr Hen Dderwen (Carmarthen) Bar associate Dana Rees (left) serves Welsh drinks, while behind the bar looking on (left to right) are pub manager Jensen Clarke, bar associate Josephine Patch, shift leader Lauren Upshall and shift manager Kristian Rees



The Picture House (Colwyn Bay) Shift leader Zoe Rogers serves customers Kevin and Jean Burke

BRIDGWATER

THE CARNIVAL INN AND THE CARNIVAL OUT AT BRIDGWATER



Excited crowds gathered outside The Carnival Inn (Bridgwater) to watch the annual event after which the pub is named.

They flocked to the pub to watch the stunning carnival carts, dancing and pyrotechnics which always feature in the town's Bonfire Night parade.

Bridgwater Carnival is one of Europe's biggest illuminated carnivals and has been going since 1881.

It has been supported by the pub since it opened in 2002.

Every year, the pub sponsors the event's programme issued to the crowd, so contributes financially to the event itself.

The pub's manager, Seth Moseley, said: "It is an absolutely astonishing event.

"Our location provides the perfect spot for crowds to gather to watch the stunning spectacle as the carnival carts pass by."

RENFREW

SECRET SANTA GIVEN THE BOOT AS STAFF STEP UP FOR SHOEBOX APPEAL

The Shoebox Appeal for Ukraine received a welcome boost after pub manager Donna Walker linked up with the manager of the commercial centre in which her pub is based.

Donna runs The Lord of the Isles, in the XSite Centre, in Renfrew, Glasgow.

She and the centre's manager Bruce Harley worked together to put together as many shoeboxes as possible for the appeal.

Customers and staff at the pub donated new toys, babies' clothes, dolls and hygiene products to go into more than 20 boxes.

These were then donated to a large group of refugees from Ukraine who are being accommodated in a cruise ship moored in King George V dock on the River Clyde.

Donna said: "I went to a business meeting – and Bruce said he was getting involved with the Shoebox Appeal.

"So, instead of doing a secret Santa for one another, my staff and I decided to each put together a shoebox instead."

She added: "As usual, my customers were very generous in donating as well."



Bruce Harley added: "It was great to have Donna and her tremendous team involved, because they always put so much effort into community and charity events."

● Pictured are Bruce Harley and Donna Walker, with wrapped-up festive shoeboxes with gifts for Ukrainian refugees

FRIENDS OF BUXTON STATION AMONG FRIENDS AT THE WYE BRIDGE HOUSE



The Wye Bridge House (Buxton) provides a safe, welcoming and comfortable meeting place for volunteer members of a local community group.

Friends of Buxton Station (FoBS) are welcomed by pub manager Adam Cunningham (pictured left) and his team, once a month, following their 'gardening parties'.

FoBS is an unfunded voluntary community group, working to make the nearby Buxton station more welcoming, cheery, interesting and comfortable. They take part in regular gardening and clean-up sessions.

Adam said: "We are proud to welcome FoBS to the pub each month.

"Although they are a station group, they also do so much great work around the town and, like our Wetherspoon pub, are at the heart of our community."

In recognition of its work, FoBS has received several awards, including a Queen's Award for Voluntary Services (received June 2021) (pictured), the equivalent of an MBE for volunteers, and several National Community Rail Awards.

Dave Carlisle, chairman of FoBS, said: "Adam and his team never mind that, after our gardening stints, we turn up in grubby clothes.

"There is always a table put aside for us to gather round.

"For some members, the social aspect of chatting with hot chocolate or coffee is most important, making them feel part of something special.

"The Wye Bridge House provides great value and a very comfortable place to meet up."

LIVERPOOL

BECKY PLAYS A BLINDER FOR YOUNGSTERS WITH TOY DRIVE

Shift leader Becky Doherty (pictured) has been supporting youngsters in her local community once again – this time with a Christmas toy collection.

Becky, who works at The Navigator (Liverpool), organised the 'toy drive' during the run-up to the festive season, delivering all of the gifts in time for the big day.

Becky explained: "We liaised with Aid To All, again, to provide toys and gifts for children whose families are struggling at this difficult time.

"The month-long collection brought in a lot of toy donations, as well as £400 in cash donations, which we used to buy more gifts.

"Aid To All was providing Christmas dinners for families who were struggling during this festive period, while we provided toys for each household.

"A huge thankyou to our wonderful customers for their support in helping us to help others."

Aid To All is a non-profit organisation, aiming to help families and individuals who need support in the Liverpool area.



JANUARY SALE
Round-up



The Broken Bridge (Pontefract) Enjoying breakfast together are customers Leanne Charles (left) and Sophie Carrington

LOW AND BEHOLD – THE NEW-YEAR SALE

Wetherspoon's pubs reduced the prices of a range of food and drinks at the start of the year.

The drinks featured in the sale included draught beers and ciders (Carlsberg, Bud Light, Guinness, Stowford Press Dark Berry Cider, Stowford Press Apple Cider, Ruddles Best and Worthington's Creamflow), spirits (Bell's whisky, Gordon's gin, Duppy White rum, AU Vodka (four flavours), a range of soft drinks (Diet Pepsi, Pepsi Max, R White's lemonade, Pepsi Max cherry) and Lavazza coffee (as well as tea and hot chocolate, all with free refills).

The low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks included in the sale were Beck's Blue, Adnams Ghost Ship, BrewDog Punk AF, Heineken 0.0, Kopparberg and Erdinger.

Customers enjoyed savings on food, too, with offers on three breakfast items – MOMA Porridge, breakfast muffin deal (fried egg, sausage bacon, American-style cheese, in an English muffin) and breakfast

wrap deal (fried egg, bacon, sausage, hash brown and Cheddar Cheese, in a wrap).

The sale also included a selection of 3oz burgers (including a soft drink) from a choice of three: American burger, classic beef burger and skinny beef burger (all served with chips).

Wetherspoon's founder and chairman, Tim Martin, said:

"The range of food and drinks on sale in the pubs was aimed at suiting a wide variety of tastes.

"This year, we included our biggest selection of low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks.

"As always, staff at the pubs served customers responsibly."



The Rohan Kanhai (Ashington) Customers Barry and Maureen Owen



The Sir John Moore (Glasgow) Customers Michaela Welsh and Aidan Stewart



The Eilhu Yale (Wrexham) Shift leader Sarah Griffiths serves customers Carla Owen and Phil Pritchard



The Unicorn (Altrincham) Pub manager Heather Bowers is pictured with customers Tom Reddish (left) and Spencer Bell

IAN MAKES HIS THIRST HISTORY AS HE EXPLORES SAXON SHORE



Rambler Ian Dennis has incorporated Wetherspoon's pubs along his favourite country walk – The Saxon Shore Way.

Ian lives in Mepham (Kent) and is a regular at The Robert Pocock (Gravesend) – a stone's throw from the start of the walk.

The Saxon Shore Way runs from Gravesend, around the Kent coast, crossing the border into East Sussex and ending up in Hastings.

Ian said: "I call it the Saxon Spoons route."

He has completed various sections of the journey 15–20 miles at a time, discovering Wetherspoon's pubs along the way, mostly at the end of the walking day.

Among the eight pubs which Ian has visited along the route are The Peter Cushing (Whitstable), The Sir Norman Wisdom (Deal) and Royal Victoria Pavilion (Ramsgate), which he described as "incredible".

He added: "What I really like are the efforts which the company has made to keep parts of the original architecture – and also the framed words and images on the walls with their historical references."

Ian, who has stepped back from work into semi-retirement since the pandemic, said: "I have more time on my hands now, so can go walking more often. I started doing sections of The Saxon Shore Way and kept discovering Wetherspoon's pubs – after that, I started making them my 'target point' for the end of a section."

"All of the pubs are impressive and quirky, in their own way."

Ian likes to vary his choice of meals and enjoys a hard-earned pint of San Miguel at the end of a day's walking.

He added: "Wetherspoon's pubs attract an eclectic mix of customers, which is great – and the staff are a delightful group of people."

SUSAN WELCOMED TO REGAL MOON'S BIRTHDAY BASH

Customer Susan Charlton has been popping to The Regal Moon (Rochdale) since it opened in 1997.

And she was there to celebrate the pub's birthday, with other customers and staff, with a large slice of birthday cake.

Other baked delicacies were available to buy, with all proceeds going to Young Lives vs Cancer.

The pub's manager, Rob Burgess, said: "Susan has been coming here since we

opened, mostly in the mornings for coffee, and we were delighted that she was able to join us for our birthday celebrations."

Balloons, party hats and inflatable picture frames served to augment the party atmosphere.

Pictured (left to right) are shift manager Ashleigh Hodgkinson, Susan Charlton and bar associate Emily Gronan, outside the pub with a cake whose icing reads 'Happy Birthday, The Regal Moon'.



GARFORTH

BRIGGATE KNITTERS STAY WARM IN SNUG



The Briggate (Garforth) provides the ideal venue for a group of local crafters who gather weekly at the pub.

Knit, Stitch & Natter Garforth has made the warm and welcoming Wetherspoon pub, near Leeds, its 'home' for the Wednesday morning (from 10am) get-together.

Shift manager Aysha Reeve said: "Every Wednesday morning, we reserve an area of the pub for the local knitting group, which uses the space to socialise and create beautiful, knitted artwork.

"This creates a great community atmosphere in the pub, and new people join the group week by week. They enjoy our breakfast menu and hot drinks, as well as the company of fellow crafters."

Aysha added: "They've often joked about featuring in Wetherspoon News – and we thought that it would be a great way to thank them for creating such wonderful, colourful artwork, often on display in the pub and sometimes for charity.

"They are also a wonderful example of the great community of Garforth, with The Briggate playing its part."

The group's Facebook page (facebook.com/groups/1428383804086416) says: 'Everyone is invited to come along, even if you can't knit or stitch, you can always natter.'

'We hope to see everyone in 'the snug' at Wetherspoon – in through the main door, round towards the bar, then left and left again, by the rear windows.'

MEXBOROUGH

PUB OR FOOD PACKAGE - MATT CAN MANAGE

Friday means foodbank for Matt Fearn, manager of The Old Market Hall (Mexborough).

Matt volunteers as a delivery driver for Mexborough Foodbank, based in Willows Community Centre.

He was approached by local councillor Sean Gibbons, during the pandemic restrictions, to explore the probability of volunteering.

Matt said: "I went round there – and they asked me what I could do and I said 'well, what needs doing?', so they asked me to be a delivery driver."

He used to do one or two routes each Friday, but, in recent months, he's been doing a minimum of three.

He said: "It has become a lot busier and I am happy to help."

Matt is pictured (centre) with other volunteers at Willow Community Centre, Mexborough.



BLETCHLEY

OFFICERS ASSEMBLE FOR CAPTAIN RIDLEY'S BRASS BAND BREAKFAST

More than 100 serving and retired British Army veterans met for their annual brass band breakfast event at Captain Ridley's Shooting Party (Bletchley).

And the word 'serving' takes on a new meaning at the event – which sees those officers still in the army serving their retired veteran comrades.

Pub manager Jess Spooner said: "It's lovely to see the retired veterans being looked after by army officers.

"We look forward to their visits. They take over the entire dining area for a couple of hours in the morning."

As the soldiers enjoyed their breakfast, a brass band from their own ranks played seasonal and military tunes.

The group is led by army veteran Simon Wilkinson, who said: "Our annual event reunites old friends and comrades and is a great occasion to swap stories and socialise, but it is more than that – as we also offer support to veterans who need it.

"Captain Ridley's Shooting Party is a great place for us to meet, as it can accommodate our numbers and the staff are always very friendly and kind to our members."

Captain Ridley's Shooting Party (Bletchley)



Well done folks!
£625
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

Team leader Tracy Lineker (pictured) raised £625 for Young Lives vs Cancer by raffling two hampers as prizes. Tracy, who leads charity events for Captain Ridley's Shooting Party (Bletchley), asked customers for donations to fill the hampers.

She said: "I divided them, so that I could create a 'pamper hamper' and a 'sweet hamper'."

The pamper hamper contained two bottles of Prosecco and bath/shower accessories, including perfumed soap, while the sweet hamper was full of chocolates and other confectionery.

Tracy added: "The customers were very generous. I had set myself a target of raising £200, so was delighted to raise more than three times that amount."

The Quay (Poole)



Well done folks!
£377
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

A festive fundraiser at The Quay (Poole) collected £377 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Organised by kitchen manager Emma Cox and shift manager Steph Tobin, the event saw local businesses set up stall at the pub to sell goods and gifts to customers.

Regulars and staff also made home-baked goodies for a charity cake sale.

Other fundraising activities included a tombola, face-painting and games for the youngsters, as well as a colouring competition.

Pictured (back row, left to right) are customer and face-painter Marta Kavcior, shift manager Steph Tobin, team leader Honor Davies, kitchen manager Emma Cox, customer and helper Jane Turvey and pub manager Charlee Blanchard; (front row, left to right) bar associate Ellen Painter, team leader Kira Holland and young helpers Grace and Darice Mudge.

The Six Bells (Lymington)



Well done folks!
£100
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

A weekend of events celebrated 'A Decade of The Bells' at The Six Bells (Lymington) as the pub celebrated its 10th birthday.

The two-day event saw a mini beer festival featuring local ales from Ringwood Brewery and Flack Manor Brewery, as well as a special Birthday Ale brewed by Bowman's Brewery, based in Southampton.

There was also a raffle, a kids' colouring competition and a cake sale.

A total of £100 was raised for Young Lives vs Cancer.

The pub's manager, Beckie Graham, said: "It was a wonderful weekend and a great way to mark the pub's significant birthday."

"All of the events proved popular with our customers, who thoroughly enjoyed themselves."

Pictured (left to right) are Beckie Graham, bar associate Meghan Davies, bar team leader Victoria Paton and shift manager James Mann.

The Queen of Iceni (Norwich)



Well done folks!
£1,300
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

A static bike ride with a competitive twist raised £1,300 for Young Lives vs Cancer at The Queen of Iceni (Norwich).

Newly appointed 'charity champion' Michela Chapman (pictured) came up with the idea of pitching one man against an entire team of 17 colleagues to see who could cycle furthest over an 11-hour period.

The ace up Michela's sleeve was cycling fanatic and team leader Nathan Dodds, who eventually chalked up 335km, only very narrowly losing out to the rest of the team, who managed a combined 340.3km.

Shift leader Michela said: "It was Nathan versus everyone else. I knew him to be a fanatical cyclist, and then I came up with the idea of asking him to beat the total of all the other participants."

"Nathan lost by just 5.3km. He was outstanding - he took five breaks, the longest of which was six minutes - and then cycled home afterwards."

"Customers really got into the competition of it and kept donating."

The Lord of the Isles (Renfrew)



Well done folks!
£200
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

A weekly pub quiz now takes place at The Lord of the Isles (Renfrew). For the first quiz, kitchen associate Daniel Green (pictured) was tasked with the job of quizmaster. Team leader Paul Whyte has since taken over the role. Customers each pay a £2 entry fee, with the money raised divided between prize money and the pub's charity – Young Lives vs Cancer. Before the launch event at The Lord of the Isles, Daniel researched other Glasgow pubs' quiz nights and gleaned some tips and tricks. He said: "Rather than using the usual quiz-generating websites, I made up the questions myself, researching topics like sport, television, music and general knowledge." "The quizzes have proven to be a popular fixture at the pub and, to date, we have raised £200 for Young Lives vs Cancer."

The Ferry Boat (Runcorn)



Well done folks!
£150
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

Staff at The Ferry Boat (Runcorn) donned fancy dress to raise £150 for Young Lives vs Cancer through a Dracula quiz at Halloween. Pub manager Jimmy Quinn organised the event and arrived dressed as the infamous vampire, with quiz prizes of a bottle of gin and cakes, which customers tried to win by answering Dracula-themed quiz questions. He said: "It was great fun – and a lot of the customers joined in the fancy dress theme as well." One 79-year-old regular amused fellow customers with a hat which folded open to reveal flashing lights and scary messages. Pictured (left to right) are bar associate Ste Arnold, team leader Erin Jones and bar associate Chris Kennedy.

The Iron Duke (Wellington)



Well done folks!
£1,004
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

Pictured (left to right) are bar associates Kaitlyn Mason and Emma Thomas, running the bake sale

An all-day bake sale at The Iron Duke (Wellington) raised just over £1,000 for Young Lives vs Cancer. Staff, including team leader and event organiser Josie Baker, made sponges, biscuits and flapjacks which were on sale in the pub. The fundraising event also included the opportunity (for a £5 donation) for children to see Santa and receive a gift.



Pictured (left to right) are bar associate Elsie Groves, Santa and team leader Josie Baker

Those donating received a complimentary hot drink. The pub also held a raffle with prizes from local businesses, including vouchers for cider, meat and goods in high-street shops. Pub manager Mat Turner said: "It was a lovely day and a real community effort. We want to thank our customers and local businesses for their contributions." Mat also had a word of thanks for Josie's father, Mark, who took on the role of Santa: "He was brilliant with the kids." The final total raised was £1,004.53.

An Ruadh-Ghleann (Rutherglen)



Well done folks!
£200
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

More than 50 regulars got together at An Ruadh-Ghleann (Rutherglen) for a festive Christmas lunch. For £6.50 each, customers enjoyed a brunch burger, fish and chips or a scampi meal, plus a drink of their choice from a long list on the menu. Afterwards, customers were treated to entertainment in the form of tombola, Play Your Cards Right and bingo. From the ticket sales, £200 was donated to Young Lives vs Cancer. The pub's manager, Kathleen Scouler, said: "Everyone had a lot of fun – people particularly enjoyed the bingo, which is held fortnightly, as it has become a real feature of the pub's calendar." Kathleen, arms aloft, is pictured in a festive red jumper with her customers.

The Glass House (St Helens)



Staff members from The Glass House (St Helens) took part in their annual charity fundraising 'glow walk'.

The team lit up the streets of St Helens and Prescot on its 5.6km walk from the pub to The Watch Maker (Prescot), collecting £550 for Young Lives vs Cancer in the process.

Pictured taking part (back row, left to right) are cleaner Ann Marie McGann, shift leader Becky Carmichael, bar associate Holly Thompson, shift manager Ellie Callaghan and cleaner Karen Taylor; (front, left to right) pub manager Ashleigh Briscoe-Williams, two-year-old Kali-Ann and duty manager Chantelle Briscoe-Williams.

Chantelle said: "It was a great walk, which took us all just two hours, and we were joined by our youngest member – my two-year-old niece Kali-Ann.

"The support from everyone was fantastic – and we thank them for their generosity."

The Woodseats Palace (Woodseats, Sheffield)



Children enjoyed breakfast with Santa at The Woodseats Palace (Woodseats, Sheffield).

Parents paid £8 to purchase a ticket for their child, which included breakfast and a gift from Santa of a selection box or a book.

The children also enjoyed making Christmas cards with Santa and pub staff, along with decorating gingerbread men.

A total of £108 was raised for Young Lives vs Cancer, with another £56 from a supper-with-Santa event, held through popular demand.

Shift manager Sophia Salvati said: "It's the second year we've done this. We are a community pub, with several schools nearby, so we see parents in here having coffee after the school run – and it was wonderful to see them here enjoying themselves with their children."

The breakfast event took place over two days at the weekend.

Bar associate Jake Dunn (pictured with Sam) took on the role of Santa on the Saturday, with his father, John, being Santa on the Sunday.

The Commercial Hotel (Accrington)



A squad of nine walkers from The Commercial Hotel (Accrington) completed a 35.4km walk to raise £2,100 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

The team, led by pub manager John Rogers (now at The Boot Inn (Burnley)), dropped in on four other Wetherspoon pubs – The Grey Friar (Preston), The Twelve Tellers (Preston), The Postal Order (Blackburn) and The Old Chapel (Darwen) – before returning to The Commercial Hotel.

The total raised is a huge dent in the pub's target of raising £5,000 for the charity by the end of the financial year in April 2023.

John (a keen Blackburn Rovers supporter), along with shift leader and fellow Riversiders fan Owen Dootson, was forced to wear the colours of fierce rivals Burnley FC, having lost a bet with friends on which team would win the local derby (Burnley beat Blackburn).

Burnley fans and shift managers Jason Ellison and Adam Duckworth were only too happy to lend them their shirts for the event.

John said: "We may have lost the bet, but the football shirts helped us to create a bit of friendly rivalry around the event and hopefully added to the total raised.

"I'm very proud of the team. It was a huge effort from everyone. All nine completed the walk."

Money was raised online and from collection buckets taken round the five pubs en route.

Pictured (left to right) are shift leader Amber Pye, shift manager Adam Duckworth, shift leader Adam Smith, bar associate Owen Dootson, kitchen team leader Emma Hamilton, pub manager John Rogers, shift manager Jason Ellison, team leader Chloe Brown and (in the red dress and full nail set) bar associate Connor Fitton.

Pictured (inset) are John and Owen, wearing their borrowed Burnley FC shirts.



The Blackwater Stream (Broadstone, Poole)



Staff at The Blackwater Stream (Broadstone, Poole) dressed up for a Halloween bake sale to raise funds for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Shift leader Hollie Gauntlett and team leader Ann Bell baked and sold the cakes to raise £37 for the charity.

Staff were in fancy-dress costumes, including witches, vampires and zombie outfits.

The pub's manager, Natasha Jervis, said:

"It was a good atmosphere, and customers joined in the fun. We are pleased to have contributed again to Young Lives vs Cancer and thank our customers for their generosity."

Pictured (top) are shift leader Hollie Gauntlett (left) and team leader Ann Bell.

The Jolly Sailor (Bristol)



Well done folks!
£450
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

A regular quiz night at The Jolly Sailor (Bristol) raised £450 for Young Lives vs Cancer in 2022.

Quizmaster Andy Bell (pictured) launched the quiz in late 2021 and has attracted a loyal following, through quizzes based on not only the usual music, geography and general knowledge rounds, but also themes such as Harry Potter and science fiction.

Entrants compete for cash prizes which are capped, so that any money left over can be donated to charity.

He said: "We get between 25 and 50 people every Monday night. People like the quiz and also the sense of community which it creates."

Quizmaster Andy (as he is known) was hired specifically to run the weekly quiz and has a history of running quizzes and charity work.

The final quiz of 2022 was a Christmas special, drawing in more than 60 people.

The Woodseats Palace (Woodseats, Sheffield)



Well done folks!
£96
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

A festive bake sale at The Woodseats Palace (Woodseats, Sheffield) raised £96 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

The event was organised by team leader Victoria Forbes, who made a rainbow sprinkle cake, fig rolls, doughnuts and cup cakes, among other goodies.

Pub manager Rick Brown said: "The event was a great success, thanks to Victoria's hard work. She did an amazing job."

Other team members stepped in to tempt customers to sweat treats.

Pictured (left to right) are shift leader Jack Grayson, shift manager Sophia Salvati and bar associate Iona Robertson.

The Lord of the Isles (Renfrew)



Well done folks!
£226
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

A charity bake sale at The Lord of the Isles (Renfrew) raised £226 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

A team of bakers at the pub, including its manager Donna Walker, her seven-year-old daughter Elisa and shift leader Natalie Brady, produced an array of goodies such as macarons, carrot cake cupcakes, millionaire's shortbread, rocky road and various other cakes.

Donna said: "We had great fun baking the goodies – and our customers were very generous with their purchases."

"We were pleased to have raised £226 for our chosen charity."

Pictured is bar team leader Paul Whyte.

The Punch Bowl (York)



Well done folks!
£150
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

Shift manager Rachel Southwell is pictured selling a cornucopia of cupcakes at The Punch Bowl (York).

The cupcakes – many of which were made by team leader Izzy Barrington – came in many flavours, including chocolate, cream and hazelnut.

Sales of the cakes raised £150 for Young Lives vs Cancer at Halloween.

Rachel, who organised the event, said: "It was a team effort, with me on sales and Izzy on production."

"There was a good atmosphere on the day – and people were very generous."

The Malthouse (Willenhall)



Pumpkins were carved, faces painted and apples decorated as The Malthouse (Willenhall) celebrated Halloween.

The day was organised by pub manager Jordan Holmes and kitchen manager Clare Reece.

A total of £87 was raised for Young Lives vs Cancer as cakes were sold and parents paid for their children to have face-painting.

Jordan said: "It was a good day – children were happy decorating apples, with Clare's help."

The children also decorated cupcakes with a variety of toppings and colourful sprinkles.

Jordan is pictured (back) with (left to right) bar associate Hollie Fletcher, shift leader India Pattemore and kitchen manager Clare Reece.

The Poste of Stone (Stone)



A festive wreath-making workshop at The Poste of Stone (Stone) raised £30 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Customers paid to participate in the event and learned how to make beautiful wreaths to adorn their front door at Christmas.

The event was put on by local business Artisan Boutique, which specialises in handmade goods and regularly holds arts and crafts workshops.

Shift manager Andy Best said: "We like to work with the community to put on fundraisers and give customers a new experience. Our thanks to the Artisan Boutique, which was only too happy to help."

Pictured are pub customers and boutique staff at the workshop.

Well done folks!
£308
RAISED FOR OUR
CHOSEN CHARITY

The Silkstone Inn (Barnsley)



A 12-hour Christmas static cycle challenge at The Silkstone Inn (Barnsley) generated £308 in charity cash donations for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Staff members at the pub took it in turn, during their shift, to keep the bike pedals turning in the festive fundraiser.

Pictured (left to right) are shift leader James Clark, bar associates Emilie Wiper and Mackenzie Heppenstall and pub manager Gemma Butler.

The Spirit Merchant (Newtownards)



Santa (regular customer Billy Johnston) lent a helping hand with The Big Christmas Raffle at The Spirit Merchant (Newtownards).

The festive fundraiser, which raised £250 for Young Lives vs Cancer, was organised by pub manager Alice Treasure and bar associate Ben Fullerton (pictured).

Regular customers Chris Beattie (left) and Terry Cunningham (right) were the lucky winners of gift voucher prizes which had been up for grabs.

The first prize was £250 of Tesco vouchers, while Wetherspoon gift cards of £100 and £50 were offered as second and third prizes, respectively.

Alice said: "A huge thankyou to everyone who supported the raffle, helping to raise much-needed funds for our chosen charity – Young Lives vs Cancer."

The Sir Nigel Gresley (Swadlincote)



Well done folks!
£2,100
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

A festive fundraising raffle at The Sir Nigel Gresley (Swadlincote), in the run-up to Christmas, collected an impressive £2,100 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Pub manager Rob Winterton is pictured with bar associate and organiser Rene Harrison, with two of the five hampers up for grabs in the Christmas Eve draw.

Rob said: "Staff members each donated £10 to get the fundraiser started, with Rene also collecting donations from local shops to fill the hampers.

"This was an amazing effort by the team, but especially Rene, who spent most of December organising and selling raffle tickets, even in her own time.

"Thank you to everyone who supported the fundraiser and for helping to raise an incredible amount for a great charity."

The Broken Bridge (Pontefract)



Well done folks!
£2,025
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

Nine daredevil fundraisers at The Broken Bridge (Pontefract) embarked on a skydive challenge, all for the first time, raising £2,025 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

The tandem jumps, from an altitude of 3,500 metres, took place in the skies over Yorkshire's Parachute Club, Skydive GB, Bridlington.

Pictured on the ground are the adventurous (back row, left to right) bar associates Jake Moorhouse and Megan Rowlinson, with Sam Bottomley and Marc Neumann (both no longer with the company).

Also pictured (front row, left to right) are bar associate Charlotte Smith, kitchen team leader Leah Rose, team leader and organiser Lindsay Baines, shift leader Gemma Stanistreet and team leader Adam Duker.

The Lord of the Isles (Renfrew) and The James Watt (Greenock)



Volunteers from two Wetherspoon pubs in Scotland helped to bring some festive cheer to families staying, during the Christmas period, at Young Lives vs Cancer Home from Home accommodation.

Helping out at Marion's House, in Glasgow, were pub manager Donna Walker, shift leader Natalie Brady and bar associate Lauren Fitzgerald, all from The Lord of the Isles (Renfrew), along with shift manager Julie Alexander and bar associates Scott McIntosh and Kane Alexander from The James Watt (Greenock) (all pictured).

The super six volunteers spent their day off at the home, putting up Christmas decorations.

Donna reported: "We wanted to show our support, at such a difficult time, for the young cancer patients and their families.

"Helping to sort out the Christmas decorations at Marion's House was the least we could do."

Home from Home manager Anne Morison said: "The team members were all fantastic, working hard to get the home ready for Christmas.

"The families staying in the home are so grateful for Wetherspoon's continued support."

Marion's House in Glasgow offers free accommodation for families to stay close to their child when having cancer treatment. It is a short walk from there to Glasgow's Royal Hospital for Children.

The York Palace (Llanelli)



Well done folks!
£90
RAISED FOR OUR CHOSEN CHARITY

Santa took time out from his busy schedule, in the run-up to Christmas, to take part in a meet-and-greet with youngsters at The York Palace (Llanelli).

Pictured with Santa at the festive fundraiser are pub manager Nicole Dowell and shift leader Cayo Evans.

The youngsters received a present each from Santa and had their photograph taken with him.

Ticket sales for the event, together with further cash donations on the day, raised £90 for Young Lives vs Cancer.

RALPH AND PUBWATCHERS KEEP NE’ER-DO-WELLS AWAY FROM CASTLE



Pub manager Ralph Banda has been running the company’s oldest pub, **The Rochester Castle (Stoke Newington), for the past six years.**

His first pub as manager, Ralph has been actively involved in the Stoke Newington pubwatch scheme since his arrival at The Rochester Castle.

Covering Stoke Newington High Street, Church Street and Stamford Hill, as well as Hackney, Shoreditch and Dalston, the initiative currently has around 15 venues as members and is chaired by Margaret Ryan from Mascara Bar, Stamford Hill.

Ralph (pictured) reported: “We have monthly meetings and take it in turn to host the get-togethers, where we share information and ideas.

“We are also all in contact via a WhatsApp group chat, together with the CCTV radio system introduced about four years ago.”

He explained: “The CCTV radio is a great way to communicate with one another about issues and any trouble, as and when it occurs.

“It is linked to the police, who can respond quickly, and controlled by the council’s CCTV system.

“If anyone causes trouble in one venue, that person can be followed via CCTV, with all venues alerted to the situation, and then legitimately refused entry to all venues.

“We all sign into the CCTV radio system as part of our opening-up procedure – and sign off again when we close.”

Additional security measures at Wetherspoon’s pubs include body cam-wearing, for all managers on duty, which has been in place for around five years.

Ralph continued: “We have had meetings at Hackney Council and have been shown the CCTV in operation – and it has been a useful tool for us all.

“Having a pubwatch scheme is a great way to stay in touch and forge closer links with other venues in the area.

“It is a case of safety in numbers. Stoke Newington is almost like a village – and we all look out for one another.”

He added: “Wetherspoon has its own safety and security training procedures, but pubwatch does offer free training – which is great for independent venues.”

Ralph has worked for Wetherspoon for 12 years and was previously at The Ledger Building (Docklands), Goldengrove (Stratford) and Baxter’s Court (Hackney), before becoming pub manager at The Rochester Castle in 2017.

He concluded: “If we have any major issues here, I always alert the team at Baxter’s Court (Hackney) – the more people on board the better.”

MANY CANDLES ON THEIR CAKES AS 20TH-CENTURY PUBS AGE GRACEFULLY

From December 2022 to February 2023, numerous Wetherspoon pubs celebrated a significant birthday of 25 years or more.

Ten pubs marked their silver anniversary, clocking up an amazing combined 250 years serving their respective communities since 1997 and 1998.

The 25-year celebrations were held at Penderel's Oak (Holborn), The Bishop Vesey (Sutton Coldfield), The County Hotel (Ashford), The Edmund Tyney (Leatherhead), The Harbord Harbord (Middleton), The Parchment Makers (Havant), The Sir Thomas Gerard (Ashton-in-Makerfield), The Van Dyck Forum (Bristol), The William Morris (Hammersmith) and The William Wygston (Wigston).

Other long-serving pubs during that three-month birthday period included J.J. Moon's (Kingsbury) and The Toll Gate (Harringay), both marking 34 years since first opening, while J.J. Moon's (Wembley) celebrated 32 years.

Marking 31 years since opening were The George (Wanstead) and The New Fairlop Oak (Barkingside).

Also clocking up a combined 150 years serving their local communities were five pubs marking their 30-year anniversary.

They were The Beehive (Brixton), The George (Croydon), The Miller's Well (East Ham), The Village Inn (Rayners Lane) and Wetherspoons (Victoria Station).

J.J. Moon's (Kingsbury)

Pictured marking 34 years since this pub first opened (left to right) are customer of many years Fredrick Harris, shift leader Lia Picariello and regular customers Ermalinda Lynch and Ian Logie.

The pub has been managed for the last four years by Aidan O'Sullivan, who first joined Wetherspoon in March 2006.

Other staff members with long-service records for the company include kitchen manager Libby Hutber (13 years) and shift managers Pearse Culkin (16 years) and Jai-De Dale (seven years).

J.J. Moon's first opened in December 1988 in a parade of shops (at number 553) which had been developed in the mid 1930s, after the underground station opened in 1932.

Numbers 553 and 555 were combined in the mid 1950s and occupied, for many years, by the Circle Furnishing Company.

J.J. Moon's is named after a fictional character, playing on the George Orwell 'Moon Under Water' theme of some of Wetherspoon's earliest pubs.



34 YEARS



32 YEARS

J.J. Moon's (Wembley)

This opened as a Wetherspoon pub on New Year's Day 1991.

The pub is managed by Lily Capillo, who joined the company in May 2011.

Pictured celebrating the birthday (left to right) are bar associate and cleaner Naomi Massey, duty manager Lisa Moran (also 20 years with the company), bar associate George Cole and kitchen manager David Garvey.

Long-serving staff members at the pub include team leaders Jean-Luc Julienne (12 years) and David Kelly (15 years), kitchen team leader Dennis D'Souza (10 years) and bar associate Andre Dominique (five years in July 2023).

The George (Wanstead)

Pub manager Monika Tymosz is pictured (far right) with team members marking the 31st birthday of this pub.

Monika has worked for Wetherspoon since 2005 and took over at The George in February 2022.

Also pictured (left to right) are shift manager Matt Turner (six years at the pub; eight and a half years with the company) and bar associates Phoebe Austin, Jamie Ashley and Ayesha Harper (Ayesha celebrates five years at The George in October 2023).

This pub on High Street, which first opened as a Wetherspoon in January 1992, maintains the name of its fine Edwardian building, completed in 1903.

It replaced an earlier George and Dragon Inn, dating from 1716, which had stood on an adjacent site.



31
YEARS



31
YEARS

The New Fairlop Oak (Barkingside)

This pub first opened as a Wetherspoon in December 1991.

Pub manager Karen Burdett (far right) has been at the helm for the past 15 years, having clocked up 21 years' service with the company.

Also pictured (left to right) are team leader Elaine Grizzle, who has been at the pub more than a decade, Rusne Micheviciute, daughter of shift manager Rozvita Kairyte and kitchen associate Alina Antoniu (both six years at the pub).

The pub is named after the oak tree planted on the green at Fullwell Cross to replace the original Fairlop Oak (lost in 1820) which was one of Britain's largest-ever trees.

It was thought to have been named on a visit in 1704 by Queen Anne.

Fairlop Oak stood alone in a vast clearing and became the setting for the Fairlop Fair, which started in July 1725.

The fair became an annual event, taking place during the first week in July, and ran almost continuously until 1900.

The Beehive (Brixton)

Pictured cheering the 30th birthday of this pub (left to right) are shift leader Valentin Dudu, customer Terence Tait and team leader Javougn Moreland.

The pub, which first opened as a Wetherspoon in February 1993 and takes its name from Beehive Place at the rear of the building, has been run by pub manager Neil Warshow since December 2008. He has worked for the company for 24 years.

Among the long-serving staff members are shift managers Jay-pee Gotgotao (since June 2008) and Phillip Mwondha (since March 2010), along with kitchen shift leader Geoffrey Mwangi Mzumara (since May 2007).

Beehive Place, previously named Cumberland Place, was renumbered and renamed in 1913, because 'Cumberland occurs 18 times' in London street listings.

The premises was formerly a long-standing shoe shop which first opened c1905. It once had a large painted side wall, proclaiming: 'J Sears & Co TrueForm Boot Co Ltd. Branches in London and all large towns. Factory Northampton'.



30
YEARS

MILESTONE BIRTHDAYS

The George (Croydon)

Customers at this pub were able to celebrate its 30th birthday with a special birthday cake and a selection of real ales from Oakham Ales (also marking 30 years), during a four-day event.

Among the Oakham ales being served were Green Devil IPA, Black Magic Chocolate Porter, Would be Kings strong pale ale, Citra session IPA, Inferno Blonde Ale and JHB Jeffrey Hudson Bitter.

Pictured behind the bar (left to right) are bar associate Jay Costoli, duty manager Joe Adamson, pub manager Louie Scott and bar associate Lily Moore. Louie has run the pub since June 2019.

The pub, which first opened (in George Street) as a Wetherspoon pub in February 1993, recalls the name of the centuries-old pub which once stood on the corner of High Street and George Street. The old inn is recorded as early as 1497, when it was called The George and Dragon.



The Miller's Well (East Ham)

Shift manager Louise Stewart and shift leader Bradley Heather are pictured marking the 30th birthday of this pub, which first opened in February 1993.

Pub manager Paul Johnson took over in September 2018, having joined the company in March 2014, and has a team with many long-serving staff members.

Among them are Louise (eight years), shift leaders Danielle Adigun (nine years) and Chloe Mayes (six years), bar associate Zoe Agada (seven years) and kitchen associate Chantel Adigun (eight years).

Bar associate Del Williams has been at the pub for one year, yet has so far enjoyed 19 years' service with Wetherspoon.

The pub is named after a nearby famous medicinal spring, known as the Miller's Well, first recorded in 1818 when the site was open countryside. Covered over when the area was developed in the early 1900s, its water was said to cure a wide variety of ailments.



Wetherspoons (Victoria Station)

This pub has been serving customers travelling in and out of London's Victoria station since December 1992.

It is located on the upper level of Victoria Island – self-contained shops on the station's Brighton side.

Pub manager Dan Wonders, who has worked for Wetherspoon since July 2011, took over in May 2022 and has several long-serving staff members on the team.

Among them are shift manager Zoe Ford, who has worked at the pub since October 2010, and shift manager Andzejs Andrusjaks (since November 2010), as well as kitchen associate Irena Raba (since February 2018).

Kitchen shift leader Artur Prusinowski has worked for Wetherspoon since 2009 and was previously at The Metropolitan Bar (Marylebone Road), though has now been at Victoria for eight years.

Bar associate Brendan Power is pictured marking the pub's birthday.



The Village Inn (Rayners Lane)

First opened as a Wetherspoon pub in February 1993, this pub has been run by pub manager Eric Farrell since July 2017.

Among the long-serving staff on his team are shift manager Alan Davison and bar associate Steve Kandiuk, both with seven years' service with the company.

Pictured marking three decades since the pub opened (back row, left to right) are kitchen/bar associate Gabriel Desouza, kitchen shift leader Dan Grosu and bar associate Joshua Morrison; (middle row, left to right) kitchen associate Matthew Russell, bar associate Steve Kandiuk and customer Mick.

Also pictured (front row, left to right) are team leader Aman Raja Sanghera, bar associate Kajal Zala, shift manager Mollen Keightley, shift manager Alan Davison, bar associates Janhavi Pathak, Barkha Jadhvani and Hamsa Dakshinamoorthy and customers Duke (far right) and Byron (front left).



ORMSKIRK

COURT LEET CREW SENDS A HAMPER TO HOPE STREET



The team at The Court Leet (Ormskirk) helped, in the run-up to Christmas, to support a local mental health and well-being organisation. Pub manager Lisa Newton and shift manager Tom Grice organised a collection of Christmas goodies to present a hamper to Hope Street, located opposite the pub.

The community hub opened on Christmas Day, to provide Christmas dinner for those needing help and support and had asked for donations of mince pies, cakes and non-perishable food items.

The team at The Court Leet, together with numerous generous customers, swung into action with a collection for the cause.

Tom and Lisa are pictured (front, left to right) handing over the hamper to Hope Street's co-founders Dom and Sheila Byrne (also CEO).

Tom said: "Hope Street does amazing work in the community, helping those suffering from poor mental health issues.

"We wanted to show our support at Christmas time and will continue to offer help throughout the year, where we can."

Sheila revealed: "I suffered from a nervous breakdown in 2016, leading Dom and me to open Ormskirk Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Organisation, in May 2018.

"Because of my own experiences with mental health disorders, I am extremely passionate about ensuring that others don't reach the point of despair which I experienced."

She added: "A big thankyou to the staff and customers at The Court Leet for their support. It's very much appreciated."

CAMBUSLANG

FAIRWEATHER FOLK SHOW THEY CARE

Pub manager Michael Easton and his team continue to support local charities, with fundraising events at The John Fairweather (Cambuslang).

The latest recipient of the generosity of the staff and regular customers is Cambuslang Out of School Care Project.

Michael, who has run the pub since early 2022, reported: "We hosted a charity bingo night at the pub, for the local care group, which raised £685 on the night."

Mhairi Henderson, Cambuslang Out of School Care Project's project manager, said: "Thanks so much for the event. Everyone was great, very helpful – and the fundraising total of £685 was fabulous."

The project is a community not-for-profit group, providing childcare in term time and during school holidays. The children take part in a variety of activities, including arts and crafts, imaginative play, construction, ICT and outdoor play.



Pub manager Michael Easton (left) with shift manager Scott Nobes

RUNCORN

PUB STAFF SPARKLE AS BONFIRE NIGHT GOES OFF WITH A BANG



Pub manager Jimmy Quinn praised his team at The Ferry Boat (Runcorn) for their efforts, after the pub held a Bonfire Night spectacular.

Jimmy and his team hosted 350 customers in the pub's car park, there to enjoy the Halton fireworks event, which returned in 2022 after three years' pandemic absence.

The display, organised by Halton Borough Council and supported by local businesses for Halton residents, is staged from the Silver Jubilee Bridge and visible from many surrounding areas, including The Ferry Boat.

Staff donned fancy dress as they served pizzas and burgers in take-away boxes to the customers, among them many parents with their children, who gathered in the car park to await the pyrotechnic show.

The pub's team, against the backdrop of 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the crowd, was also able to enjoy the fireworks spectacle.

Jimmy said: "It was a top top night and the team put in an absolutely mint performance, including setting up and (the next day) clearing away more than 60 benches.

"Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening."

The pub was decorated for the occasion with bonfire-themed bunting and colourful ornaments. A charity cash collection also amassed £100 from customers in donations for Young Lives vs Cancer.

Pictured (left to right) are bar associates Chris Kennedy, Nicola Carter and Megan Davies with pub manager Jimmy Quinn (dressed as Ali G).

STAFFORD

ELLIOT BREAKS PAIN BARRIER IN PARIS TO HELP HOUSE OF BREAD

Kitchen team leader Elliot Wade and his friend Alex Bush set off to Paris from The Picture House (Stafford) to raise cash for a local foodbank.

The friends have completed several gruelling charity challenges, including a climb up Mount Kilimanjaro in June 2022.

The pair took six days to complete the 430-mile cycle ride.

Sponsored by customers and through an online fundraising page, Elliot and Alex raised £1,555 for Stafford-based foodbank House of Bread.

Elliot (pictured left, with Alex) said: "It was Alex who came up with the idea. We are now trying to come up with another challenge we want to do."



ALCOHOL, ALCOHOL EVERYWHERE... BUT NOT A DROP TO DRINK



Pub manager Natasha Jervis has achieved the incredible feat of giving up alcohol for a year.

Natasha (pictured), who runs The Blackwater Stream (Broadstone, Poole), partly credits the explosion in availability of alcohol-free beers for her success in achieving her milestone.

She said: "I've suffered with mild anxiety for more than eight years now – and those anxiety levels increased coming out of lockdown, as they did for many others.

"I decided that I would take a year off from drinking alcohol to concentrate on improving my headspace. Someone then suggested that I set up a fundraising page, which was a brilliant idea, and I thought that Anxiety UK would be a great cause."

Through her efforts, Natasha has attracted donations for the charity, raising £807 so far, thanks to the generosity of customers, colleagues, friends and family.

Natasha added: "A lot of staff have had increased anxieties, especially after the pandemic, so I felt that this was a good charity.

"I also have a customer who has given £100 to the local food bank, as I completed the whole year."

Natasha's favourite non-alcoholic beer is Ghost Ship from Adnams Brewery, but the pub also sells Erdinger Drive, Beck's Blue, Stella Artois 0.0%, Punk AF and Kopparberg Alcohol Free.

She said: "These drinks allow people to 'join in' and feel social, in a drinking environment."

PIZZAS PACK A PUNCH AT THE PUNCH BOWL

The Punch Bowl (York) gave its customers a slice of things to come as it prepared to launch a new range of pizzas.

Shift manager Rachel Southwell (pictured) handed out free slices of Margherita pizza, after colleagues bedecked the pub with balloons for a special launch event.

Shift manager Beinn Myers took vouchers to hand out at the local

railway station – and their efforts created a buzz around the launch.

Beinn said: "Customers really enjoyed it, as they had been asking for some time for pizzas to become available at the pub."

The pub had previously not served pizzas on its menu; however, it now offers a range of seven pizzas, including spicy meat feast and roasted vegetable, as well as a vegan option.



CLECKHEATON

OBEDIAH CASH MAKES SPLASH IN DRAGON POND



Spen Valley Civic Society's volunteers constructing the pond

The Obediah Brooke (Cleckheaton) has helped a local community project, once again, in the West Yorkshire town.

In September 2020, Wetherspoon News reported how the Wetherspoon pub had sponsored a tree, an American red oak in the Jo Cox Community Wood, through kitchen manager Chris Abson and his colleagues at The Obediah Brooke.

Chris, who has since moved to The Barum Top Inn (Halifax), reported: "Local voluntary group Spen Valley Civic Society had started creating the wood, in 2019, and has continued to develop it, to provide a place for people to come together in the open air and as a green home for wildlife in the built-up Spen Valley.

"In 2022 we contributed £100 to Spen Valley Civic Society's crowdfunding effort, raising money to create a large wildlife pond."

Thanks to support from Wetherspoon's staff and customers, as well as other donors, the target was achieved and a pond is now in place, after two months' hard work, mainly by local volunteers.

Paths are being laid, and spring 2023 will see the introduction of new plants, added in and around the pond.

Max Rathmell, Spen Valley Civic Society's chairman, said:

"We've called this a 'dragon pond', because we're creating a home for dragonflies and many other insects, frogs and newts.

"This will increase biodiversity and allow more birds and creatures like water voles, foxes, badgers etc to live here.

"In future, we'll construct a dipping platform, so that local school children can make supervised visits and learn, at first hand, about the environment.

"Thank you to Wetherspoon for its support."

The Jo Cox Community Wood is under a mile from The Obediah Brooke, between Cleckheaton and Heckmondwike.

It is easily accessed via the Spen Valley Greenway, Cleckheaton, and offers access for people with disabilities, picnic tables, an outdoor classroom and information boards.

More than 1,000 trees have also been planted, plus wildflowers and hedging.



The Obediah Brooke's sponsored tree autumn colour 2022

Since MP Jo Cox's death in 2016, her family has supported Spen Valley Civic Society to develop the wood.

Family members visit regularly, with Jo's sister, Kim Leadbeater, now the area's MP, after her predecessor, Tracy Brabin, stood down to become West Yorkshire's mayor.

WHICKHAM

CLASPER COLLECTORS A CLASS ACT, AS PER USUAL



An estimated £2,000 worth of Christmas gifts were donated by staff and customers at The Harry Clasper (Whickham), as well as at other Wetherspoon pubs in the area.

The gifts, including toys, a coffee machine and clothes, were passed on to The Royal Victoria Infirmary Children's Cancer Unit, in nearby Newcastle.

The pub's manager, Tyler Hudson, organises the collection every year and said that this year's event raised significantly more money than in the past two years.

She said: "We were overwhelmed by customers' generosity, as well as donations from businesses in and around Whickham and other Wetherspoon pubs.

"Customers were asking about the collection before we even started it this year. I think that's partly because the collection has generated its own reputation, but also because people, this year, are aware of the cost of living."

The presents were wrapped and given to parents of the children to add labels, so that the presents came from them.

Tyler added: "We are a community-based pub – and this is something we like to do each year."

Pictured with the presents (left to right) are bar associates Victoria Munday and Leon Clarke, pub manager Tyler Hudson and team leader Jason Purchase.

CANTERBURY

KENT PUB HELPS THE HUNGRY THROUGH FOOD BANK INITIATIVE

Staff and customers at The Thomas Ingoldsby (Canterbury) joined forces to help those less fortunate, during the run-up to the festive season.

The pub in the Kent town doubled as a food-collection point for generous local people to donate tins, jars and dried food stuffs, as well as essentials, in support of the Canterbury Food Bank.

Pictured with some of the collected food are bar shift leader Alice Crabb and bar associate Tom Phipps.

Pub manager Ali Stevenson said: "The Thomas Ingoldsby is a wonderful community pub, and this much-needed initiative gave us the opportunity to give something back to our great community.

"With the cost-of-living crisis getting worse, more and more people are having to ask for support – and Canterbury Food Bank is there to offer some help.

"We would like to thank our generous customers for their donations during a tough time for everyone."



MEXBOROUGH

YOUNG ARTISTS MEET SANTA AT THE OLD MARKET HALL



Eight colouring competition winners were treated to tea with Santa at The Old Market Hall (Mexborough) before heading into town to turn on its Christmas lights.

The children, two from each of four local schools, were chosen to turn on the lights, after submitting their entries.

Each was given a present by Santa (aka customer Tommy Joyce) at the tea.

They then joined a Christmas parade into the town centre, where the lights ceremony took place.

The pub's manager, Matt Fearn, said: "It was a really good event, with lots of happy children – and we are grateful to Tommy for standing in as Santa."

Santa is pictured with some of the competition winners.

STRETFORD

BEN AND BISHOP BLAIZE HELP THE HOMELESS IN MANCHESTER

The Bishop Blaize (Stretford) has helped to raise charity funds to aid the homeless people of Manchester.

Pub manager Ben Plunkett and his team collected cash donations at the pub, located near to Manchester United Football Club, which were added to online donations to the Facebook group Sukie's Red Devils.

The Bishop Blaize is the unofficial home of the Manchester United supporters' group, set up by Sukie Sidhu. With more than 5,000 members worldwide, the group supports various charities, including Manchester's Homeless Group (MHG).

Sukie's Red Devils and Northern Ireland Manchester United supporters' club member Darran Fee helped to organise the latest charity fundraising initiative, which collected £3,700 for MHG.

Ben said: "Sukie is a top lad – and Darran has done an amazing job with this latest charity fundraiser."

He explained: "MHG goes out during the night, three times a week, helping people on the streets of Manchester."

"This money will pay for sleeping bags and various essentials to help those vulnerable people."

MHG was set up five years ago and is now one of the longest-running consistent outreach groups in Manchester, providing support for homeless and rough sleepers.

Sukie added: "We do a lot of work for charity – especially for Reds fans who have lost people or met with misfortune."

"Ben and his team, all great people, are part of what we do."

Pictured (left to right) are Sukie Sidhu, pub manager Ben Plunkett, Matthew Buckley from Sukie's Red Devils and Northern Ireland Manchester United supporters' club member and fundraiser Darran Fee.



CHAPELTOWN

CAROLS IN CHAPELTOWN AS BRASS BAND BLOWS IN



Chapelton's Silver Prize Band performing carols at The Wagon & Horses

Customers were treated to a festive brass band performance at The Wagon & Horses (Chapelton).

The Chapelton Silver Prize Band and singers from St John's Church performed carols, as customers took part in a tombola and a raffle held, to raise money for the church and Young Lives vs Cancer.



Pub manager Peter Bryan is pictured with Sweet Treat staff Alison Senior (left) and Kelsey White

At the same time, staff from local confectionery store Sweet Treat gave away free samples and sold sweets to add to the festive atmosphere.

Pub manager Peter Bryan said: "This is something we've been doing for a few years now – and it is a very popular event. This year, we brought in Sweet Treat to show our support for local businesses."

A total of £160 was raised for Young Lives v Cancer.

SPEYSIDE DISTILLERS SET GIN FLOWING IN GLASGOW



Shift manager Ryan Gallacher and business development manager Rachel Hay, from Scottish craft gin producer Caorunn, are pictured at The Society Room (Glasgow) where customers had the opportunity to sample some gins.

Rachel brought three of Caorunn's gins, produced at its Balmenach distillery in Speyside, where the company has been operating since 2009.

These were its Original, a classic gin, and two flavoured products – Blood Orange and Scottish Raspberry (best served with tonic).

The pub event was one of 11 to take place in Wetherspoon's pubs in and around Glasgow, including tastings at The James Watt (Greenock), The Paddle Steamer (Largs) and The Carrick Stone (Cumbernauld).

Ryan said: "We have done a few meet-the-brewer events in the past, yet this had a different twist on it.

"As well as the tastings, Rachel undertook a question-and-answer session, at which customers could quiz her about the gins."

Rachel said: "It was great fun to interact with the pub's customers and introduce some new people to craft gin."

All three of Caorunn's gins featured at the tasting are available in Wetherspoon's pubs in Scotland (not available at all times; ask at the bar for details).

FINE ALES FLOW THROUGH GLASGOW IN FESTIVAL FIRST

Ale champion Nathan McGowan organised a city-wide ale festival at six Wetherspoon pubs in Glasgow.

The 10-day festival featured beers from five Scottish breweries, in addition to those usually available.

It is the first time the city's Wetherspoon pubs have joined together to run a festival.

The participating pubs were The Counting House, The Crystal Palace, The Esquire House, The Hengler's Circus, The Sir John Moore and The Society Room.

Nathan, who works as a shift manager with responsibility for real ale at The Society Room, visited each pub to decide, along with their ale champions, what to order from the brewers.

In supplying beers for the festival, Falkirk brewers Tryst and Hybrid joined Stewart Brewing (Loanhead, near Edinburgh), Broughton Ales (Biggar) and Mòr Brewery (Dundee).

Among the ales on sale were some special festival brews, including Tryst APA and Stewart Brewing Glasgow Gold. Others included Tryst Hop Trail, Hybrid White Out and Mòr Scode!



Nathan said: "The festival was a great success. I had a lot of fun organising it and would do it again next year."

● **Nathan is pictured serving a pint to customer Frank McCrindle at The Society Room**

BURNS' NIGHT

Round-up



The Gold Cape (Mold) Bar associate Branwen Ankers

A HEATED WEEK AS PUBS FEEL THE BURNS

Wetherspoon's pubs celebrated the life and poetry of the Scottish poet Robert Burns by hosting a seven-day celebration.

Customers enjoyed some traditional Scottish food and drinks to mark the occasion, including during Burns' Night itself.

The pubs served two special meals – Scottish haggis, neeps and tatties, as well as Caledonian burger (two 3oz beef patties with haggis and whisky sauce, served with chips and six onion rings).

A small Scottish haggis, neeps and tatties meal was also available for those seeking a lighter meal or smaller portion.

Among the drinks choices for the Burns event was a selection of Scottish drinks.

Belhaven Robert Burns Ale (4.2% ABV) was served especially for the event, as well as Scottish gins, whiskies and beers.

They included two Scottish single malt whiskies, Glenmorangie and Glenfiddich, along with Haig Club Clubman, The Famous Grouse and Bell's whisky.

Scotland's BrewDog Elvis Juice and Hazy Jane craft beers, plus Scottish gins Hendrick's Gin and Edinburgh Gin Rhubarb & Ginger liqueur, were also served.



The Golden Acorn (Glenrothes) Customers Michael Johnston (left) and Rohan Bailli



Thorn's Farm (Yate) Customers Tim and Tina Naismith toast Burns with a dram, together with shift leader Kirsty Francis



The Esquire House (Glasgow) Customers Margaret Semple and Graham Little toast Robert Burns



The Ferry Boat (Runcorn) Pub manager Jimmy Quinn serves customers Kathleen Trillo and her son David Trillo



The Great Glen (Fort William) Customers and friends Kyle Lander, Matt Colbert and Sam MacMillan (left to right) get in the spirit of the occasion and celebrate Robert Burns



The Captain James Lang (Dumbarton) Bar associate Kim McLean serves Burns' week meals to customers Melissa McNee (left) and Claire Hart



The King's Highway (Inverness) Bar associate Findlay Richardson serves customers Heather and Christopher MacRae



The Sawyer's Arms (Maesteg) Pub manager and Scot Joanne Jordan (left), with shift leader Becky Herbert



The Sir William de Wessyngton (Washington) Customers Susan and Thomas Stokell enjoy a Burns' week meal



★ LEATHERHEAD THE EDMUND TYLNEY

25
YEARS

There was plenty of celebration cake and fizz for staff and customers to toast a special occasion at The Edmund Tylney (Leatherhead).

The pub marked its 25th anniversary, having opened on 19 December 1997 on the site of former shops in High Street.

The pub is named after the Master of Revels to Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. Edmund Tylney lived in Leatherhead at The Mansion which once stood on the site of the present library, located nearby.

Pictured enjoying the celebrations (left to right) are shift leader Josh Berry (behind the balloons), pub manager Del Harris (holding his son, Owen), shift manager Demi Dobson (in front), regular customer 'Pickle' and shift manager Vicki Bailey.



★ KIRKINTILLOCH THE KIRKY PUFFER

20
YEARS

A coffee morning was held with regular customers to mark the 20th birthday of The Kirky Puffer (Kirkintilloch).

The event was held on 20 January, coincidentally the same date on which pub manager John McKenna, in 2014, began his Wetherspoon career.

But it wasn't until March 2018 that John took the helm at The Kirky Puffer, following a five-month, £1.8-million refurbishment project which added a two-tier beer garden.

John said: "The ladies we invited to the coffee morning were some of the first regulars who came through our doors. It was a fitting way to thank them for their custom over the years."

John is pictured with shift manager Sara Cairney and (front row, left to right) customers Anne Gilmour, Anne Kennedy and Josephine Gilbey.



★ CONSETT THE COMPANY ROW

20
YEARS

The Company Row (Consett) has been open for 20 years – and one staff member has been there since the start.

As staff celebrated the pub's anniversary, they also recognised the long service notched up by Sarah Rowell, who joined the pub as a bar associate a week before it opened.

Sarah said: "I was working in a pub across the road – and it was closing just as The Company Row was opening, so I applied for a job at the new pub and got it.

"I am still here 20 years later and have thoroughly enjoyed my time working at the pub."

Sarah won promotion to shift leader, yet decided it wasn't for her, so she returned to her position as bar associate.

Pictured celebrating the pub's 20th birthday are (left to right) pub manager Shelley Hobbs, bar associate Sarah Rowell and area manager John Hudson.



★ HOLBORN PENDEREL'S OAK

25
YEARS

Staff at Penderel's Oak (Holborn) are pictured celebrating the pub's 25th birthday.

The pub, now a firm favourite with London pub-goers, first opened its doors on 18 February 1998.

Shift leader Vladimira Binova said: "The staff are very proud to work at the pub and were pleased to celebrate its milestone."

Pictured (left to right) are kitchen team leader Peter Hernandez, shift leader Vladimira Binova, bar associate Dhinesh Murugan, team leader Richard Lewis, kitchen team leader Neme Cardoso and bar associates AJ Buckland and Freddy Hayden.



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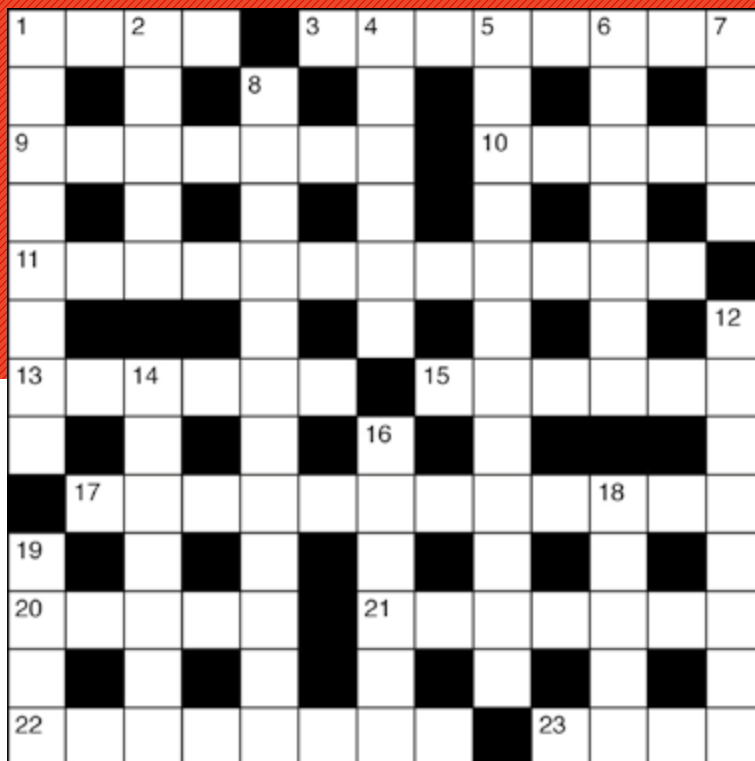
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Across

- 1. River in Western Australia which flows west to the Indian Ocean below Perth (4)
- 3. See 5 Down.
- 9. 1859 battle in Italy after which a purplish-red colour is named (7)
- 10. A young or nestling owl (5)
- 11. 1991 U.S. Open golf champion (5,7)
- 13. Alexander, Czech statesman who died in 1992 following a car accident (6)
- 15. The --- gland is a pea-sized organ in

- the brain that secretes melatonin into the bloodstream (6)
- 17. Erect Eurasian perennial grass, *Festuca pratensis*, with lustrous leaves and stem bases surrounded by dark brown sheaths (6,6)
- 20. 1979 Ridley Scott film with Sigourney Weaver (5)
- 21. Arthur, author of the children's book *Swallows and Amazons* (7)
- 22. 1971 novel by Harold Robbins (3,5)
- 23. Sir Robert, British Prime Minister 1841-46 (4)

Down

- 1. Private eye in Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (3,5)
- 2. "12 --- Men", 1957 Sidney Lumet courtroom film drama (5)
- 4. Queen of ---, character in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (6)
- 5, 3Ac. & 16Dn. 1937 Walt Disney film (4,5,3,3,5,6)
- 6. Miss Harper, actress who played Rhoda in the television comedy (7)
- 7. Brazils, hazels and pecans, for example (4)

- 8. In the US, the Fourth of July is officially called --- Day (12)
- 12. European woodland plant which has a one-sided cluster of blue bell-shaped flowers (8)
- 14. Utah is known as the '--- State' (7)
- 16. See 5.
- 18. Brian, English cricket captain 1966-67 (5)
- 19. James, Scottish engineer whose improvements to the steam engine led to the widespread use of steam power in industry (4)

SOLUTIONS (Winter 2022/23 issue)

Across: 6 Molière; 7 Loach; 9 Nepal; 10 Lemming; 12 Marathon Man; 14 Mike Denness; 18 Verbena; 19 Medea; 21 Avery; 22 Pegasus.

Down: 1 Moses; 2 Tirana; 3 Arc; 4 Norman; 5 Scandal; 8 Methane; 11 Cayenne; 13 Minerva; 15 Edberg; 16 Stefan; 17 Rebus; 20 Tex.

The winter 2022/23 crossword winners were:

★ FH, Broadstairs, ★ MS, Gosport ★ RS, Stretford ★ LJ, Selsey



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Nik Antona is national chairman of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale

Cheers

PUB-GOERS ASSEMBLE – TO HELP THE SECTOR FIGHT BACK

The pub and drinks industry is under attack and needs its customers to join the resistance, says CAMRA's national chairman Nik Antona

We all know that it's been an incredibly difficult period for the nation's pubs and breweries.

From cost-of-goods issues to a spiralling cost-of-living crisis hurting consumers' spending, we have seen numerous reports, over the last few months, of brewers and pubs shutting up shop, reducing opening times and raising prices to try desperately to recuperate costs. Now, the horizon holds a fresh threat to your pint – which could have a widespread impact on the beer and pubs industry throughout the UK.

BAN

The Scottish Government has announced that it is considering a ban on all alcohol advertising and sponsorship in public places.

The proposal covers not only overt alcohol advertising in print, TV, radio and outside public spaces, but also the display of alcohol in shops and could stop pubs and breweries from working with grassroots sports clubs and community events.

We are incredibly concerned that these Draconian proposals would penalise the vast majority of responsible drinkers and have a massive impact on consumer choice.

They would also set a dangerous precedent for adoption in other parts of the UK, while giving valuable ammunition for the anti-alcohol industry to push its own agenda. Imagine a future where Wetherspoon's pubs are not allowed to advertise their deals in their window or where local brewers are prohibited from selling their ales at a farmers' market.

CLOSURE

For the smallest, independent brewers and cider producers looking to enter the market, it could be absolutely devastating and risk their untimely closure.

These small producers are absolutely vital to the beer and cider industry here in the UK, providing a wide range of tasty and distinctive brews for which our country has become known.

A potential ban on alcohol sponsorship (currently written in the proposals) would hinder how the trade presently works with various charitable organisations across its communities.

The reality is that beer and cider festivals or beer-tasting events organised by groups like CAMRA (or grassroots sports teams which work closely with pubs and breweries) could all be affected adversely and diminished severely as a result.



Let's not forget the devastation which we all felt back in 2020



Consumers must be presented with a balanced view on the debate around alcohol harm and responsible drinking – a blanket ban is not the way to achieve this end.

CAMRA will always support any action to help to ensure that alcohol advertising doesn't adversely affect children and young people.

However, we do need to be proportionate in our actions and recognise the significant effect which Draconian laws could have on our local brewing and pub scene.

LIFESTYLE

It has long been my belief that moderate alcohol consumption can be part of a healthy lifestyle and that the supervised community setting of the local pub is the very best place to enjoy a beer or cider.

Furthermore, our local pubs play a vital role in bringing people together, combatting loneliness and creating social cohesion.

Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

The Scottish Government's deliberations seem to be part of a wider trend of decision makers and governments making it increasingly difficult for the beer and pubs sector to stay viable.

From unfair business rates which penalise bricks-and-mortar businesses, such as pubs, to too much of a pint's price going to the taxman, the alcohol industry seems to be becoming the scapegoat for most of the issues which we're facing collectively in the UK.

Let's not forget the devastation which we all felt back in 2020, when politicians told us that every pub was to shut for the foreseeable future.

We're lucky that, at the time, it was a temporary measure for most of our beloved locals.

This won't be the case next time – once a pub closes its doors, it is usually for ever – and the effect will be felt for a long time across its local community.

So, what can you do to help?

First, ensure that you join CAMRA to help us as we lobby the governments across the four nations to deliver sound policies which actually support, rather than hinder, the beer and pub trade.

You can also write to your MP and MSP on this important issue and continue to support your local with your patronage to help it through this incredibly difficult time.

● **To join CAMRA, visit: join.camra.org.uk**

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NR19 1DL
01362 654160

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DN1 1NH
01302 732123

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WR14 4QS
01684 580350

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NR30 2AF
01493 332932

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DN31 1JN
01472 361924

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CO12 3JR
01255 245400

Henley-on-Thames

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01491 848484

Huntingdon

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PE29 3BD
01480 432402

King's Lynn

Globe Hotel
PE30 1EZ
01553 668000

Kingston Upon Hull

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HU1 2NR
01482 324030

Leighton Buzzard

The Swan Hotel
LU7 1EA
01525 380170

March

The Hippodrome
PE15 8AQ
01354 602980

Minehead

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TA24 5NH
01643 701910

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Cabot Court Hotel
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01934 427930

Whitby

The Angel Hotel
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01947 824730

Wigan

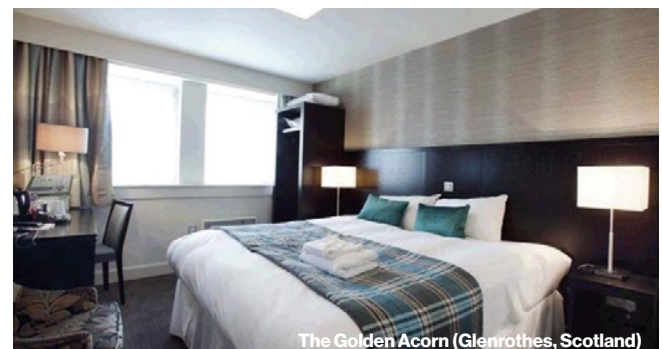
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01942 823800

Worcester

The Crown
WR1 3LL
01905 617578



The Saxon Crown (Corby, England)



The Golden Acorn (Glenrothes, Scotland)



The King's Head Hotel (Monmouth, Wales)



The Old Borough (Swords, Ireland)

Scotland

Broughty Ferry

Jolly's Hotel
DD5 2BJ
01382 734910

Dunfermline

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Linen Exchange
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01383 724060

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01346 519548

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01592 751175

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01463 251800

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01721 723467

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