

Durham Drinker

FREE

Issue 155 – Summer 2026

With Darlington

In this issue...

- CAMRA Durham Pub and Club of the Year awards (pg 8)
- Foxcubbrewing: New kid on the block (pg 28)
- More Micropub Adventures (pg 18)



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Branch Diary

June

10th: Branch Meeting – The Queen's Head, Framwellgate Moor (7pm)

July

9th: Social – The Half Moon Inn, Durham (7pm)

August

6th: Social – Meet at The Butchers Arms, Chester-le-Street (7pm)

12–16th: Consett Beer Festival – The Grey Horse, Consett

15th: Social – Consett Beer Festival (1pm)

September

3rd–5th: Durham Beer Festival – Durham City Rugby Club

16th: Branch Meeting – The Victoria Inn, Durham (7pm)

October

7th: Social – Venue TBC

November

12th: Branch Meeting – Venue TBC

Check out our socials, website, and the next issue for venues!

From the editor



Hello and welcome to Issue 155 of Durham Drinker. Apparently, summer is just around the corner and the weather should have been of the type to tempt you into the various beer gardens around County Durham—but it's been of the type to have you nursing your pint while huddled around a blazing fire. Never mind, the beer is the same quality indoors or out.

May has been Mild Month, and while that isn't a beer style you'd normally associate with the North East, the latest addition to our list of breweries, Foxcubbrewing of Spennymoor, have offered us Rust and Ruby. Milds from further afield have featured in some of our pubs, giving us the chance to sample this style. I hope you enjoyed them.

Of course, the current global and national economic situation has resulted in your pint costing more almost every time you go to the bar. Raw material costs, transport costs, utilities costs... the list goes on, and could be shortened by some serious thought being put into the issue of business rates, National Insurance contributions, and beer taxation. Something CAMRA has been banging on about (sorry... campaigning for) for years. Who knows, one day something really positive might happen.

In the meantime, have a look at our Pub News section (The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly) to see what's happening on the pub closure front—another situation that changes on a virtually daily basis. Hopefully your local isn't on the negative side of things. If you have any news, good (hopefully) or bad about beer, pubs, or breweries in our area, please let us know—contact details can be found on page 2.

We've got planning for the Durham Beer Festival underway, with the 2026 calendar meaning that it runs at the Durham City Rugby Club in very early September. We intend to bring you the usual mix of local beers (especially those you might not see in that many places) and interesting ones from further afield. If you fancy joining in the fun by serving drinks, or if you feel you have a particular skill that might be used at the festival, or have any ideas for what you'd like to see there, please drop us a line.

We're also making an effort to have a fuller social diary, so have a look at that to see where we'll be and when—and again, if you have any ideas about what sort of events CAMRA Durham should be offering, drop us a line. Better still, join us at one of our meetings or socials and have a chat.

Most importantly, please support your local pubs and breweries by getting out there and drinking the real stuff—it's the reason CAMRA exists.

Cheers, **Paul Dobson**

Durham Drinker

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Published by: CAMRA Durham

Design/Typesetting: Morgan Davies

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Branch Committee

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Chair: Neil Shaw

Treasurer: John Baxter

Secretary: Tony Dent

Membership Secretary: Garry Halliday

Public Affairs Officer: Neil Shaw

Publications & Campaigns Officer: Paul Dobson

Apple Representative (Cider): Chris Mansfield

Pub Data Coordinator: Dave Thornton

Website & Social Media Officer: Neil Shaw

Social Secretary: Dan Kolb

Pub Preservation Officer: Peter Jones

Pub Promotions & Awards Coordinator: Ronnie McDonnell

Pub Protection Officer: Peter Lawson

Good Beer Guide Submissions: Peter Jones

Environment Officer: Garry Halliday

Festival Coordinator: Dan Kolb

Brewery Liason Officers

Caps Off: Paul Dobson

Castle Eden Brewery: Arthur Corner

Consett Ale Works: Sandra Wilkinson

Durham Brewery: Stephanie Salter

Fox Cub Brewing: Paul Dobson

George Samuel Brewing Company: Paul Dobson

Hill Island Microbrewery: Tony Dent

Hopper House Brew Farm: Peter Jones

Weard'ALE Brewery: Paul Dobson

The Yard of Ale Brewing Company: Arthur Corner

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YE OLD ELM TREE



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**2 Guest craft beer lines and one hand pull
guest cider**

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garden**

**Weekly folk music sessions and pub quiz,
as well as a monthly acoustic night**



BRITISH BEER STYLES: BROWN ALE

Dr. P R M Jones takes us back with the history of Brown Ale...

Brown Ale was first produced in London in late C17 but was eclipsed

by pale ales from Burton in mid C19, before being revived when Mann's of Whitechapel produced their version in 1902. Initially brewed at 4% ABV it is now a mere 2.8% and brewed by Marston's but I am unsure of its availability.

However, we are a North-Eastern CAMRA branch so that's where we are going. The famous 'Newcastle Brown Ale' was developed by Colonel Jim Porter DSO in 1927 after three years of testing. Brewed in Newcastle city centre, it won gold at the International Brewery Exhibition in London in 1928, as Best Bottled Beer. When Newcastle Breweries merged with a series of Scottish breweries to form Scottish & Newcastle breweries (S&N) in 1960, Newcastle Brown Ale was its main product, with an ABV of 4.7% and described as full-bodied, smooth, with caramel, banana, and dried fruit flavours.

The beer became a cult product in Tyneside working-class culture and amongst university students. In my Freshers Week at Newcastle University in 1973, we had a 'first night on the Brown' where we were given free bottles of it. In 1996 it was awarded Protective Geographical Indicator (PGI) status, meaning it could only be brewed in Newcastle.

By 2000 S&N, through a series of acquisitions, became part of one of the largest brewing concerns in the world. But not all was well, so to cut costs in 2007, Tyne Brewery moved into Federation Brewery in Dunston, south of the Tyne and thus Broon lost its PGI status. In 2008 bottling of it moved to John Smith's in Tadcaster, but worse was yet to come—S&N was bought up by Carlsberg and Heineken in the same year, what was left of the business became Heineken UK. Brown (or 'Dog', as it was once known) is still brewed in Tadcaster, as well as Belgium and California, but its popularity is in decline.

Not to be outdone by its regional rival, Vaux of Sunderland, had their own Brown Ale, 'Double Maxim', first brewed in 1901 as 'Maxim Ale'. Technically older than its Northern rival, it is so named because Ernest Vaux, grandson of the brewery's founder, commanded a company of Maxim machine guns in the Boer War. It was doubled in strength to a serious 8% in 1937 and renamed 'Double Maxim'. Now at a more sensible 4.7%, it is described as having a good



balance of ripe grain, and spicy hops, with a long bittersweet finish—but unlike its Northern rival is still available on draught as well as bottles.

Vaux employed 600 people and had about 500 pubs but after a controversial boardroom fracas, the brewery closed in 1999. The pubs were renamed Swallow Inns, and were subsequently taken over by Whitbread.

However, like the proverbial phoenix, the beer was rescued by the Double Maxim company which had it contract brewed by Robinson of Stockport, before they built their own Maxim Brewery at Rainton Bridge in 2008.

This year they were acquired by Powder Monkey, and as we write are moving to the Castle Eden Brewery in Seaham—another part of the Powder Monkey set-up.

More recently, a 'Sunderland Brown Ale' (4.6%) has been produced by the new Vaux brewery—a small operation who acquired the Vaux name but not the recipes.

Dr. P R M Jones

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PICTURE QUIZ

Can you name these local hostelries? Answers inside back cover.





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PUB AND CLUB OF THE YEAR

As mentioned in Issue 154, here are the awards to our pubs and clubs of the year

City Pub Of The Year – Winner



The Victoria Inn, Durham – Landlord Michael Webster receives the certificate from CAMRA's Neil Cleall

City Pub Of The Year – Runners-up



The Station House, Durham – Simon with the City Pub Runner-up and the Cider Pub Winner certificates



Ye Olde Elm Tree, Durham – Kizzy with the certificate

Club Of The Year – Winner

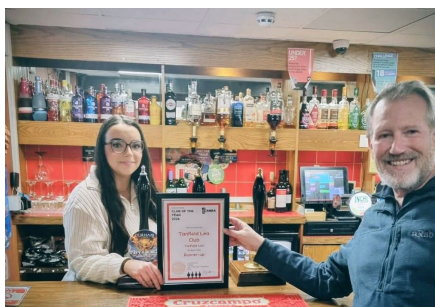


The Masonic Centre, Chester-le-Street – Barry Clark with the certificate

Club Of The Year – Runners-up



The Railway Institute, Shildon – Hazel with CAMRA's Paul Dobson



Tanfield Lea Club, Tanfield Lea – Kayleigh with CAMRA's Garry Halliday



Ceddesfeld Hall, Sedgefield – left to right: Tony Guest, CAMRA's Peter Jones, and Judith King

Country Pub Of The Year – Winner



The Surtees Arms, Ferryhill Station – Alan Hogg, also Cider Pub Runner-up

Country Pub Of The Year – Runners-up



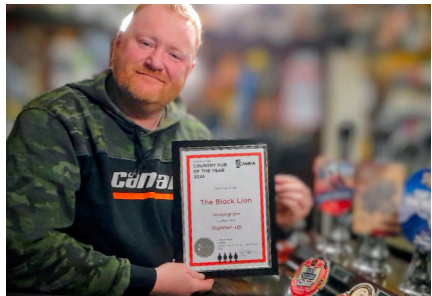
The Hare & Hounds, Westgate – Colin Stubbs



The Three Horse Shoes, Leamside – James



The Victoria, Witton-le-Wear – Landlord George Hall (left) with CAMRA's Tony Dent



The Black Lion, Wolsingham – Josh Wilks

Town Pub Of The Year – Winner



The Grey Horse, Consett – Dave and Sandra with CAMRA's Stephanie Salter (centre)

Town Pub Of The Year – Runners-up



The Little Tap, Spennymoor – Dave



The Frog and Ferret, Spennymoor – Trevor

Cider Pub Of The Year – Runner-up

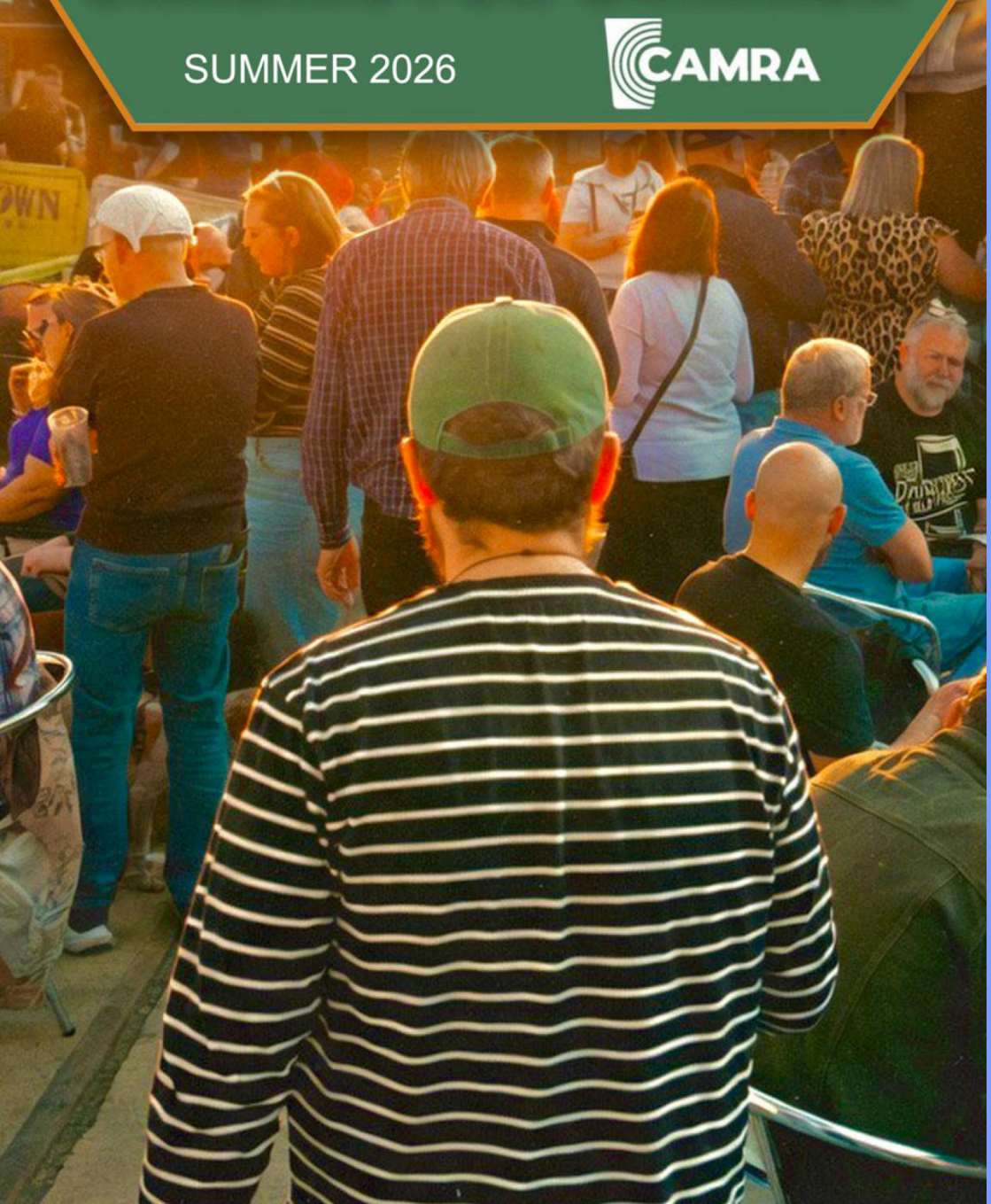


Fram Ferment, Framwellgate Moor – Andy

NEWSLETTER OF DARLINGTON CAMRA

DARLINGTON DRINKER

SUMMER 2026



DARLINGTON UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR

The busiest time in the branch calendar is now behind us and we start to look forward to summer. The first months of the new year have seen us vote for, and choose, our Pubs and Club Of The Year; finalise our Good Beer Guide entries for the 2027 edition; run our Beer Festival, and culminate with our early May AGM.

As my first year as branch chair concludes, I can honestly say we have a positive story to tell. Membership numbers are at their highest level in two years, which has come as the result of some hard work. We have made a concerted effort to get the branch more visible, in both town and country pubs. We have brought back surveying trips, to allow branch members to get out to some locations that are difficult to achieve via public transport. We have continued to put on social events, including meetups with other branches. And probably the biggest factor is our beer festival which, once again, in its second year of rebirth has been a huge success.

On the pub front, we have seen two more pubs opening in Darlington since March this year, that serve multiple real ales. Given how many already established real ale pubs the town already has, it shows to me that there is real appetite for real ale amongst the Darlington drinkers. Hopefully, its a trend that we will continue to see nationally.

Finally, as chair, I need to say some big thank yous to the rest of the committee for their continued work and commitment. Also, to the Beer Festival committee who spend many, many, hours of their spare time across most of the year to deliver a well put together, well appreciated, successful Beer Festival back to the town. And also, to all of the volunteers that helped out at the beer festival, without whom we have no festival. Your hard work and positive attitude did not go unnoticed.

Ian Taylor - Branch Chair

ALL EVENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CHECK SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UPDATES.

**Tuesday 16th June
Darlington Quoit Club
7PM**

**Branch Meeting and
Annual Quoits Competition.**

**Everyone welcome,
always a fun night.**

No Quoits experience needed

**Saturday 20th June
Survey Bus Trip**

**around some of the North Yorks
pubs in our branch to the south
of Darlington.**

Saturday 1st August - Social Saturday

**outing to Huddersfield. We'll be jumping on the train and taking in
Huddersfield's finest establishments.**

**Saturday August 15th 1:00pm,
The Olde Well Inn, Barnard Castle**

**Members of the committee will be coming to Barnard Castle
for a chance to meet up with Barney-based branch members
and have a casual chat around all things CAMRA
followed by a town walk.**

EVENTS



FACEBOOK.COM/DARLOCAMRA

INSTAGRAM.COM/CAMRA_DARLINGTON

DARLINGTON PUB/CLUB OF THE YEAR 2026

**In a slightly altered format for the competition
this year, members could vote for a
country Pub Of The Year as well
as a Town Pub of the Year.**

**The winner of each of those categories
was then surveyed and the overall winner
put forward for the Regional POTY.**



**TOWN PUB OF THE YEAR
THE QUAKERHOUSE
DARLINGTON**

**COUNTRY PUB OF THE YEAR
THE RED LION
COTHERSTONE**

**The Quakerhouse coming out on top overall.
Congratulations to Shelley and her staff and
good luck in the North East Regional competition.**

**CLUB OF THE YEAR
DARLINGTON SNOOKER
CLUB**

**CIDER PUB OF THE YEAR
THE BLACKSMITHS ARMS
MICKLETON**

**N YORKSHIRE COUNTRY
PUB OF THE NEAR
CROSSKEYS INN
EPPLEBY**

PUB NEWS

The Other Side (Houndgate, Darlington)

has opened with 3 Handpulls serving guest ales sourced predominantly locally (3 Brothers, Mithril...) but also nationally.



The Cornerhouse (Skinnergate, Darlington)

has re-opened as a tap room for Marske-by-the-Sea based brewery Talking Tides Brew Co. Almost all beers on offer are their own including two permanent handpulls,



The Half Moon (North Road, Darlington)

has been bought outright by current licensee Martin Landers. This is great news as it confirms the oldest remaining pub in the town will remain as a pub and will continue to serve 4 guest Real Ales with a focus on local breweries.



MORE NEWS AT DARLO.CAMRA.ORG.UK

GRAND SUMMER QUIZ

1. Berwick-upon-Tweed has changed hands between Scotland and England several times, but when was the last time?
2. Which range of hills straddle the Northumberland/Scotland border?
3. When did the Tyne Bridge open?
4. When was the Angel of The North unveiled?
5. Which drink was invented by chemist William Owen in Newcastle in 1927?
6. What type of bridge connects Middlesbrough and Stockton?
7. Which US politician's family takes their name from the village of Roddam in Northumberland?
8. In what year was the Jarrow March?
9. In 2014, another march from Jarrow took place, protesting about what?
10. When Roger Whittaker sang 'Durham Town', on the banks of which river was he sitting?
11. Which cheesy village was once home to the NCB locomotive works?
12. Which film theme song is often sung by repeating the word 'Durham'?
13. Shaw's Academy in Bowes was the inspiration for which classic novel?
14. St. Mary's and St. Cuthbert's Church in Chester-le-Street was once home to an anchorite, but what is an anchorite?
15. Which US president visited Washington in 1977?
16. Which condiment was invented in Durham in 1720?
17. What is the area of County Durham in square miles?
18. How long is the River Wear in miles?
19. What is the highest point in County Durham? (Bonus point for exact height!!)
20. Which is the most westerly pub in County Durham?

Let us know how you got on!

MICROPUB ADVENTURES

Over the last couple of years, Durham Drinker has featured some of the adventures of Scott as he wends his way around different parts of the UK seeking out ales from our independent breweries. Teesside comes to mind, for one, so when he announced a trip to Durham City, we felt obliged to report on it. These trips are meticulously planned around public transport, in order to make the most of the time, and the suitable pubs, available. It's a difficult job but someone has to do it...

Naturally, when arriving by train from the South, Scott's first port of call was The Waiting Room, which is a clever renovation of a long-disused building and, as Scott found, is a comfortable place to start a visit, with Wylam Gold on offer on this occasion. From here he passed the Station House (more of that later) to have a Yankee (from Rooster's) at the Kingslodge Inn, which he found to be a quiet spot close enough to the town to be convenient, but secluded in its own way. From here it was up the hill to Ye Olde Elm Tree for a Brentwood Gold and a chat with the ever-accommodating Laura before nipping across the road to the Holy GrAle. They offered their usual Pennine Pale plus Two by Two Pale, and impressed him with the well-stocked fridges of exotic bottles and cans.



A walk across town took Scott to the Shakespeare, where he went for Landlord rather than Old Peculier—perhaps a sensible choice given the distance he was covering, especially with a river to cross. On the other side, of course, is the Victoria Inn (our current City Pub Of The Year)—and where the toastie complemented the Hadrian Border Northern Pale perfectly. Even micropub adventurers

have to eat sometimes. The tour continued at the Dun Cow, where Castle Eden Blonde was sampled and the history of the pub delved into.

A canny walk up Claypath and onto Gilesgate is enough to generate a thirst in anybody, so a stop-off at the Woodman would be a logical option, and Scott was lucky enough to find Consett Ale Works' Ironsand on offer.

Finally, CAMRA Durham caught up at the next stop, Gilesgate's Hop Knocker, where Pubs Officer (officially Pub Data Coordinator) Dave Thornton,

and Chair Neil Shaw joined in the fun with some Wylam Rant on handpull. Public transport was then the only option to get to Fram Ferment way out on Framwellgate Moor Front Street, but all that travelling whipped up a thirst for some of George Samuel's Leaves On The Line before heading back to the station.

Via the Station House to meet up with one of his blog followers, Andy, and a last beer before the train back down South.

I suspect that there are a few local readers who've not visited all of the pubs mentioned, and hopefully this has given them a thirst to visit what's on our doorstep. You can find much more detail on this trip, and his many others, at micropubadventures.co.uk



— ★ —
Books inspired by
*Horner's
Toffee Factory*
& Dainty Dinah
toffee of Chester-le-Street

— ★ —

SCAN ME!



— ★ —



— ★ —

★ Bestselling local author **Glenda Young** ★ —

The image features a promotional banner for Glenda Young's books. It includes the text 'Books inspired by Horner's Toffee Factory & Dainty Dinah toffee of Chester-le-Street', a QR code with a 'SCAN ME!' arrow, and three book covers: 'Celebrations at the Toffee Factory', 'Secrets the Toffee Factory Girls', and 'The Toffee Factory Girls'. Each book cover has a quote: 'We're over and three friends hope for better days', 'Can three friends keep their secrets safe?', and 'Amidst war, three girls find friendship, love and hope'. The author's name 'GLENDA YOUNG' is at the bottom of each cover.

DISCOUNTS FOR CAMRA MEMBERS

All discounts on production of valid CAMRA membership card, unless otherwise stated

- The Green Tree, Bishop Auckland – 10p off a pint of cask ale
- The Bay Horse, Bishop Auckland – 10% off real ale
- The Ship, Middlestone Village – 10p off a pint
- The Half Moon, Durham – 20p off a pint
- The Red Lion, North Bitchburn – 20p off a pint of cask ale
- The Pack Horse, Burnopfield – 10% off real ale
- The Church Mouse, Chester Moor – 20p off a pint of real ale
- The Grey Horse, Consett – 20p off a pint
- The Duke of Wellington, Durham – 20p off a pint of cask ale
- The Head of Steam, Durham – 20p off a pint of cask ale
- The Market Tavern, Durham – 10% off real ale
- The Waiting Room, Durham – 5% off cask ale (not keg)
- The Sportsman, Belmont – 10% off cask ale
- Chester-le-Street Masonic Centre – accepts vouchers (card not required)
- The Hare and Hounds, Westgate – First two pints of Weard'ALE beer half price with an evening meal or Sunday carvery. Table must be booked in advance
- The Sportsman, Belmont – 10% off cask ale
- Dancing Betty, Dalton Park – 10% off real ale

In addition, all CAMRA members currently receive £30 of CAMRA vouchers each year, redeemable in the form of 50p off a pint of cask ale nationally in many pubs. Full details of the scheme can be found on CAMRA's website. In the Durham branch area, these are all pubs operated by JD Wetherspoon, and some by Stonegate Group.

If you are aware of any offers that aren't listed, or have any problems with those which are, please let us know. You can find out more about these venues by viewing their entries in CAMRA's national database at:

www.camra.org.uk

MASONIC CENTRE

ANNUAL BEER FESTIVAL

Date for your Diary

**Camra
Durham
Club of the
Year 2026**

Bar open 7
nights a week -
we accept
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vouchers



9th to 12th
July 2026

2026

16 Local
Cask Ales
plus
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HELP KEEP US UP TO DATE!

On the opposite page there are details on changes to beer scoring, which is submitted via the pub record on the national CAMRA database at www.camra.org.uk/pubs. These scores are very important when assessing the quality of beer served and go a long way to deciding which pubs feature in the Good Beer Guide.

The database is a really valuable source of information for pub-goers wherever you happen to be in the country. Of course, the database is only as good as the data held. It is the responsibility of each CAMRA branch to keep information on each pub and club in its area as up to date as possible. This is a challenging task due to the number of pubs and the fluidity of information, and in reality the branch can coordinate it—but collecting the information needs the help of as many people as possible.

We have a small band of active volunteers, mostly those who deliver this magazine, who provide updates but they

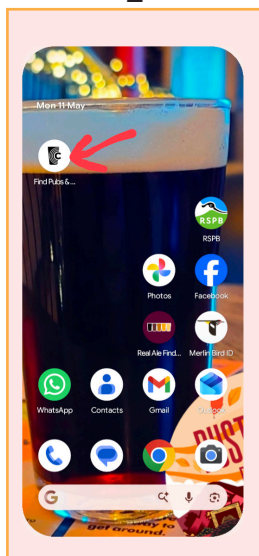
can't visit everywhere and collect full information at every hostelry. The Pub Data Coordinator also scours the digital world to find information provided by the pubs themselves on their websites and social media accounts for clues as to what is going on.

This is where you, dear reader, come in—because ANYONE can submit information and updates about a pub. You don't even need to be a CAMRA member.

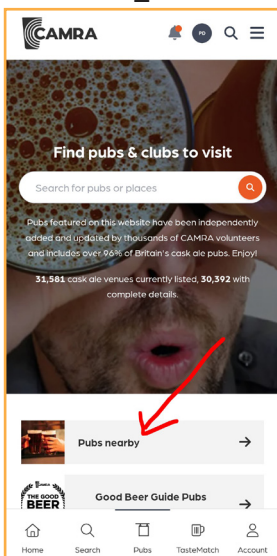
The best way to submit information is on the pub's record in the CAMRA pubs database—find the CAMRA app and install it on your mobile (1). Open it and click on the 'Pubs Nearby' button (2). Then click on the photo of the relevant pub (3), scroll down and you will see 'Help keep our information accurate', click on the 'Suggest an edit' button (4) and you'll see options (5).

Try it out in the pub you're in right now! Simple! Over to you, folks.

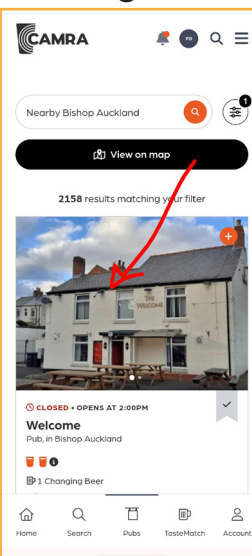
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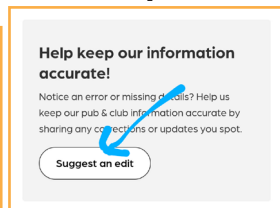
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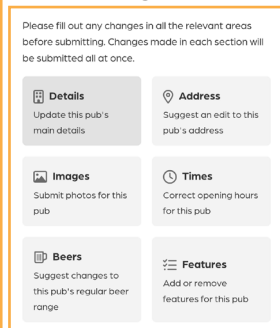
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UPDATE TO BEER SCORING

Cask beer lovers across the country are set to benefit from a major overhaul of how they rate their pints as new scoring guidelines are introduced from June 2026.

The changes come following a comprehensive review by CAMRA's Beer Scoring Advisory Group (BSAG), which was tasked with improving the National Beer Scoring System (NBSS). The goal is simple: make scoring clearer, more intuitive, and hopefully encourage more members to score their beers.

At the heart of the update is a shift away from the traditional numerical scale toward a more accessible set of descriptive ratings. Instead of scoring on a scale of 0 to 5, drinkers will now choose from 6 very straightforward ratings: 'Excellent', 'Very Good', 'Good', 'Acceptable', 'Poor', and 'Undrinkable'. Half points have been scrapped entirely in a bid to simplify decision-making.

To make the system even more

user-friendly, each rating is paired with a relatable 'reaction'. For example, an 'Excellent' pint is one you'd eagerly recommend to friends, while a 'Very Good' beer might tempt you to stay for another instead of moving on. At the other end of the scale, an 'Undrinkable' beer is one you'd return to the bar without hesitation.

Importantly, the update also separates the absence of cask beer from the scoring system itself. A new tick-box option will allow users to highlight when no cask beer is available helping to improve data accuracy and highlight gaps in availability.

CAMRA hopes the refreshed approach will encourage more members to submit scores, leading to a richer and more reliable picture of beer quality nationwide. With clearer guidance and a more engaging format, the changes aim to strengthen the role of beer scoring in championing well-kept cask ale.

Rating	Description	Your reaction
Excellent	Exceptional and clear (if intended to be) with fantastic aromas, flavours and ideal carbonation.	Superb! You tell your friends and compliment the cellar manager.
Very good	Satisfying and well-kept with a great appearance, good carbonation and enticing aromas and flavours.	You consider having another and my cancel plans to move to another pub.
Good	Nice appearance, good carbonation, aromas and flavour.	Pleasant but not memorable. You're happy to have another but might consider something else.
Acceptable	Unremarkable and ordinary, with no noteworthy characteristics.	You're unlikely to have another unless it is all there and there isn't another pub to go to.
Poor	Noticably imperfect.	Drinkable with resentment, but you politely ask for a replacement.
Undrinkable	Unpleasant to drink, likely with a disgusting taste, incorrect appearance and off/foul aroma.	You politely ask for it to be replaced and consider asking the publican to take it off.

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WIGAN'S CHOSEN FEW

After last year's excursion to Ripon and beyond, **Ronnie Chambers** fancied something a bit further afield...



A pub crawl in Wigan had been on my radar for many a year, so after a Station Master full English breakfast at Hartlepool Railway Station (no Rat Race now), I was off and into Wigan, arriving at 11:30am. My intention was to visit every pub in this year's CAMRA Good Beer Guide (GBG), apart from the Crooke Hall Inn, which was too far out of town.

Wigan is a big, boisterous place, easily thought of as small, certainly up until Wigan Athletic's rise through the leagues from 1978 to gaining Premier League status in 2005. As a town, it is more like a Sunderland than a Hartlepool, with much more going on, more vibrant, with an atmosphere that, well, let's say, keeps you on your toes.

First on the list was Wigan Central, a sort of micro/craft beer establishment in a railway arch, very close to both Wallgate and North Western stations. It was full of railway ephemera, and on the tables were wooden railway signals, used to signify whether you wanted table service or not—upward position requesting service... Straight away, you could see this would be heaven for lovers of foreign bottled beers or craft beers in cans, but my first pint of the day was an Oatmeal Stout by Brewsmith priced at £4.10. I gave it 6/10.

Next up was the Swan & Railway Hotel, if not the best pub in the Wigan then certainly the most iconic. What I would call a 10 out of 10 pub, a multi-roomed, no-frills gem, offering good quality accommodation, as well as an extensive choice of wine and whisky. I got talking to a couple of blokes who were football fanatics like myself, off later to watch Wigan vs Orient. On a Thursday night? Sky TV. This was the sort of pub I could have stayed in all day, especially drinking draught Bass (7/10) at £4 a pint. Apparently, the company that owns this pub also own the Railway Hotel in Birtley.

A short walk away is the Anvil, very much a locals' pub, many of the type (rough and ready, but friendly, that served real ale) that sadly seemed to have fared worse in the epidemic of pub closures over recent years. Researching Wigan before my visit, it appeared the Anvil is not the pub it used to be, and it gave me that impression on my visit. A pub charging £3.45 for a pint of Wainwright, which I gave 7/10, probably deserves its entry in the GBG, though.

Next up, only a couple of minutes' walk away, was the Tap & Barrel micropub with a decent-sized patio outdoor space. Situated in an alleyway/small arcade setting, it is probably more of an early evening, night-time sort of pub, as on my visit, apart from a couple, I was the only one in there. The lad behind the bar wasn't overly attentive or friendly, which I find can be often the case in micropubs. Still, they had one of my favourite beers, Arizona by Phoenix. Again, this came in at under a fiver, £4.80 to be exact, and a 7/10.

Four pints in, and I decided it was probably be a good time to get the pub furthest away from the railway station ticked off. A good twenty minute walk from the town centre was Sherrington's, a pub situated in what appeared to have been, in the past anyway, a more affluent part of Wigan. A clean, bright, airy, modern sort of place, which you would generally expect to find in the centre rather than on the periphery, but it was very popular on my visit, at only two in the afternoon. A pint of Wily Fox by Crafty Fox (or maybe it was the other way round...?) at £4 proved yet again good value. So far, I was loving these Wigan pub prices. I gave it a 7/10 despite having to ask the barman to top it up.

Walking back into town, the next port of call was Real Crafty. Despite having a micropub sort of name, this looked like a traditional pub. It was a cracking place with a friendly atmosphere, and an 8/10 pint of Triple Hop from Ossett, at £3.90. Next up, was the John Bull Chop House, said to be a hidden gem of Wigan pubs, and it's true, it is well hidden. It was around 5pm now, and things were beginning to liven up as people began their Easter weekend drinking early. The place was rammed, and I could see why. There was a rip-roaring atmosphere, and though not obvious on my visit, apparently it identifies as a rock/bikers pub, but was not in the least way threatening. A borderline 10/10 pub, with Amber bitter by Thwaites at £4.30 rated at 9/10.

Last, but not least, I thought I'd throw in a bonus pub, one not in the GBG, but one that looked like it had something about it. I like to give these random pubs a try, as I believe we should all sometimes go out of our comfort zone. It's a risk; sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. This was the Raven, an old skool, rough and ready, multi-roomed town centre pub. It was actually quite pleasant, as was the Flat Cap bitter by Bank Top that came in at £4.25, and I rated it 7/10. Personally, I think the Raven should've been in the GBG instead of the Tap & Barrel, but that's just my opinion.

Wigan is a good place to visit, with decent pubs, decent beer, and all for under a fiver a pint. These 'low' prices continued the following day of my trip—in Southport and Burscough. Is West Lancashire the cheapest place for beer in England? Or even the UK? It appears more affluent than parts of County Durham, where beer prices have been steadily rising towards and going over the £5 mark.

Why? I'll just have to try some other parts of the country to evaluate prices there.



THE GOOD

- The Manor House, Ferryhill is due to reopen 6th June after long closure with cask ales promised.
- The Ship Inn, Middlestone has reopened after a short closure for a refresh, and is now back under previous management with two ales on—Double Maxim, and Swedish Blonde.
- Plans for new signage, illumination, and external redecoration approved for The Shakespeare, Durham City.
- The Black Rabbit duly opened in what was Hollathans in Chester-le-Street.
- Home & Botanic opened on 22nd May in what was Revolution, Durham City.
- Planning application to convert the former Coach & Horses, Crook into an HMO, refused
- Change of use granted for former Carphone Warehouse, Durham City for a high-end cocktail bar.
- The Queens Head, Framwellgate Moor is now offering CAMRA discount (10p off) on already very competitively priced pints.
- New plans have been announced for the reopening of the Court Inn, Durham City—now as a high-end bar/restaurant collaboration involving The Drunken Duck, and Ye Olde Elm Tree (among others).
- The Dancing Betty, Dalton Park Shopping Centre is now offering a 10% CAMRA discount on cask beers.
- The Big Jug (Claypath), Durham City has reopened, with an Irish theme and is now known as Mr Flynn's. Cask beer is available with Osset White Rat first up.
- The Canteen Bar & Kitchen, Shildon is now offering a 10% CAMRA discount.
- Durham Brewery Tap is now open at 5pm on Friday evenings during the summer months.
- New management at Bellamy's, Consett will be offering real ale, with Consett White Heat to feature regularly.
- There's a possibility of real ale appearing at Crossgate Club, Durham City. Watch this space!!

-
- Reports in the press indicate that Whitbread intends to close its remaining Beefeater and Brewers Fayre outlets which, if true, would include the Beefeater, Broomside Park, and Tindale Crossing, Bishop Auckland.

THE BAD

Continued on next page



THE BAD

- The Eden Arms, West Auckland reopened under new management on 20th March, but with no real ale.
- The Langley Park Hotel has withdrawn cask ale.
- The Cumberland Arms, Bishop Auckland reopened under new management. No cask ale.
- The Imperial Hotel, Stanley (aka The Clock) held its reopening on 28th February after its refurbishment. Unfortunately, no cask ale on offer as was hoped.
- The Red Alligator, South Church is using its handpump again but for Wainwright 'fresh ale' (keg).
- The Avenue, High Shincliffe is also dispensing 'fresh ale' now, but cask continues to be offered on the second pump.

- There seems to be little progress on reopening the former Brewers Fayre outlet Dunelm Ridge, near the Arnison Centre, which was reported to be changing to a Wetherspoon franchise.
- The Blue Bell, Kip Hill, Stanley is closed and the lease is being advertised by Star Pubs.
- Planning application submitted to demolish the closed Victory Club, Tudhoe and build seven "two-bedroom eco bungalows".
- Press reports that The Curious Mr. Fox, Durham City is up for sale.
- The Royal Oak, Butterknowle closed on 15th March after being up for sale for two years. An offer was accepted before Christmas but the sale fell through.
- The Barley Mow, Birtley closed again at the end of February. Future uncertain.
- The closed Mill, Crook has had planning permission granted to convert it to residential use.
- The King's Head, Bishop Auckland has announced its imminent closure, and is being offered by Punch as a 'management partnership opportunity'.
- The Old Mill, Knitsley is up for sale.
- The Cross Keys, Sherburn has closed.



THE UGLY

All information correct at time of publishing. We strive for accuracy but mistakes do sometimes happen. If you notice an issue or problem, please contact us via email at publications@camradurham.org.

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

A chance encounter at a beer festival in Witton-Le-Wear led to the discovery of an exciting new addition to the local brewing scene.



While attending an event at The Victoria, we were introduced to Rust & Ruby, a 3.5% ABV dark mild that immediately stood out. This beer, rooted in a century-old Welsh recipe and enhanced with modern hops (Fuggle and Harlequin) along with the distinctive addition of black treacle (Oh yes!), offered a compelling blend of tradition and innovation.

The beer is the creation of Foxcubbrewing LTD, a nano-brewery based in Spennymoor, founded in March 2025 by Jamie Fox. Intrigued, we arranged to meet Jamie at The Little Tap in Spennymoor—coincidentally, another venue serving Rust & Ruby. During our visit, it became clear that what began as a passion project in a domestic garage has evolved into a thoughtfully run operation defined by creativity, quality, and a strong sense of community.

As Director and Head Brewer, Jamie maintains a hands-on role across all aspects of production. This small-batch approach allows for meticulous quality control, ensuring consistency and flavour across every release. The brewery embraces experimentation, regularly producing bold, innovative beers—from fruit-infused ales to limited-edition small-batch creations—while maintaining a respect for traditional brewing methods.

Foxcubbrewing is equally committed to sustainability and local engagement. By sourcing ingredients locally where possible, minimising waste, and reducing its environmental footprint, the brewery aims to produce high-quality beer responsibly. Collaboration with local businesses and fostering a sense of community are also central to its ethos, reflecting pride in the region's rich brewing heritage.

Currently operating on a Brewtools B150 system with two 150-litre fermenters, Foxcubbrewing produces approximately 300–450 litres per month.

Its core range includes:

Name	ABV	Type
Rust & Ruby	3.5%	Dark Mild
Tropic Haze	4.6%	Session IPA

Core range continued:

Name	ABV	Type
Prankster	6.0%	Speciality Red IPA
Fudge Comb	6.3%	Stout
Windfall	4.6%	British Brown Ale
Solaris	5.5%	New England IPA
Deified	5.0%	Vienna Lager

With the exception of Fudge Comb, these beers are produced year-round, though availability rotates from batch to batch due to the brewery's current scale. As demand for cask beer grows, most of the range (excluding Solaris) is being made available in cask format. A cask version of Fudge Comb has not yet been pursued, given concerns about shelf life for this dessert-style stout.

While bottled products have been phased out in favour of cans, the brewery is actively expanding its cask-conditioned range to meet rising demand.

The beers are fermented under controlled pressure, naturally carbonated, and canned unpasteurised at low temperatures to preserve flavour. Minimal filtration ensures clarity while retaining some natural character, and no additional CO₂ or sugars are introduced during packaging.

At present, the brewery does not produce gluten-free beers due to the absence of certified testing equipment. However, all offerings are vegan-friendly, with the exception of Fudge Comb, which contains lactose.

Foxcubbrewing's rapid rise has already been recognised, with the brewery securing both gold and silver medals at the London Brewing Competition. Reflecting this growing success, plans are underway to relocate to larger premises in July, increasing production capacity to between 3.5 and 5.0 barrels.

Foxcubbrewing is a promising new player well worth watching. Supporting local breweries is always worthwhile—especially when the quality of the beer speaks so convincingly for itself.

Contact foxcubbrewing@gmail.com or visit foxcubbrewing.com for more information.

NOTE: Despite the similarity in both name and location, Foxcubbrewing LTD has no affiliation with the Marston's pub The Fox Cub at Thinford.



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ANSWERS

Picture Quiz

1. Castle Eden Inn, Castle Eden, **2.** Farmers Arms, Shadforth, **3.** Fram Ferment, Framwellgate Moor, **4.** Green Tree, Bishop Auckland, **5.** Jovial Monk, Newton Hall, **6.** Three Horseshoes, Leamside, **7.** Half Moon, Easington, **8.** Newton Grange, Newton Hall, **9.** Queens Head, Framwellgate Moor, **10.** Travellers Rest, Consett

Grand Summer Quiz

1. 1482, **2.** The Cheviots, **3.** 1928, **4.** 1998, **5.** Lucozade, **6.** Transporter, **7.** Hillary Clinton, **8.** 1936, **9.** Privatisation of the NHS, **10.** Tyne... the dafty!, **11.** Philadelphia, **12.** The Pink Panther, **13.** Nicholas Nickleby, **14.** Religious hermit, **15.** Jimmy Carter, **16.** English mustard, **17.** 1,033 sq mi, **18.** 60 mi, **19.** Mickle Fell (2,585 ft.), **20.** The Blue Bell, St John's Chapel

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