

WirrAle Drinker



Magazine of the Wirral branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA)

August - November 2026

Pub and Brewery news and more from across
the Wirral for the discerning beer and cider drinker



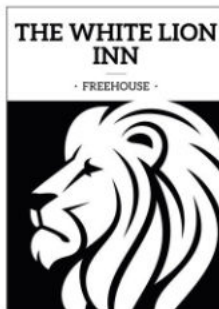
In this issue...

- Thoughts on Cellarmanship
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 - Cider Pub of the Year 2026
- ...and lots more

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Editor's Column

A warm welcome to this issue of *WirrAle Drinker*, a magazine produced by the Wirral Branch of CAMRA. It's all about real ale, real cider and the pubs that serve it on Wirral. From Barnston to Bebington and from West Kirby to Willaston, everything in between and occasionally beyond.

Rising prices, increased staff costs and changes to business rates are hitting pubs hard but they have another problem. Research is showing that a significant portion of young people don't drink alcohol with 39% of 18- to 24-year-olds not drinking alcohol at all. Reasons cited for this include: Young people generally being more health conscious and preferring the gym to the pub; Addiction to phone screens and social media; and social changes brought about by the Covid pandemic, such as being wary of socialising in large groups or busy places.

I read one quote from a 27 year old "I'm constantly in communication with my friends (on social media), I know what they're doing." The young lady went on to say she would go to the pub if there was an event like a quiz. However, the implication was that just meeting up for a drink in a pub with her friends wasn't something she wanted to do as she could just talk to them online or look at their social media feeds to see what they were doing. Personally, I find this completely terrifying and totally bewildering. Now I am not always the most social of people. In fact sometimes people in general drive me round the

twist! However, I have grown up with the pub being the focal point of my social life. As a "Millennial" (though I never signed up to be known as one!) I've grown up with technology and I do keep in touch with friends via e-mail, text and social media, but in my view this is a poor substitute for meeting up face to face. I know a micropub that has a sign by the front door that reads "Welcome to the original social media." From the age I could get served I was meeting up with friends on Friday night in a pub. A couple of months ago I met up with my best friend, we are no longer able to see each other every week but the pub was still our chosen meeting place. In fact I have met most of my friends in pubs, it's a part of the social fabric of my life as it has been for so many people for generations in this country. If that is changing amongst young people it has really worrying implications for the future of our pubs. Pubs are facing enough threats to their existence, if they lose their future customer base then they are doomed.

Although the trend of preferring a phone screen and the gym to a pint in the pub is completely alien to me I am not going to bash the younger generation or tar them all with the same brush as that doesn't get us anywhere. A great deal of young people I know do go to the pub and drink alcohol on a regular basis. I should say though that most of them I know because they work in pubs I frequent. At a beer festival I attended recently, there were lots of young people drinking

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real ale and a barman / cellar keeper friend of mine commented to me about the number of younger people coming to his bar and asking to try cask beer. So maybe there is some hope, perhaps this might be a social blip rather than a permanent trend. Let's hope those young people who already go to the pub can drag their peers away from their phone screens and show them the joys of going to the pub.

In this issue...Dave Goodwin explains why we haven't made an award for Cellarmanship this year. Gareth Owen introduces the winner of our Cider Pub of the Year Award. Wirral CAMRA chairman Lee Reynolds takes us through his first, last and best pint of real ale. Dave Pearson contrasts the Black Horse in Lower Heswall as it was almost fifty years ago and as it is today. I'm introducing the winner of our Pub of the Season for Summer award, getting annoyed by Black IPAs and extolling the joys of a walk with a pub at the end of it. If that wasn't enough there is also a summary of CAMRA's recent report on beer in the

UK, Hop It, What's in a Pub Name, Pub and Brewery News and a massive mash tun of other stuff. Hope you enjoy.

Cheers!
Rob Carter

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Nobody who writes for WirrAle Drinker is paid, we are all volunteers. We produce this magazine because we believe passionately in promoting pubs, breweries, real ale and local business. Advertising revenue goes towards printing costs and any excess goes towards funding future issues.

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Wirral CAMRA Branch Diary

Details are correct at the time of going to press. Please visit our website, wirral.camra.org.uk for up to date information. All welcome at any meeting.



Saturday 8 August Coach Trip to Stourbridge. Leaving the Brass Balance, Birkenhead at 9.30am and Ship and Mitre, Liverpool at 9.40am. To book please contact Dave Hutchinson davehutchinson@wirral.camra.org.uk

Tuesday 11 August Branch Meeting and Social at the Rose & Crown, Bebington Village, meet at 8.30pm

Tuesday 8 September Branch Meeting and Social at Gallaghers Traditional Pub, Birkenhead at 8.30pm

Tuesday 13 October Branch Meeting and Social at the Rose & Crown, Bebington at 8.30pm

Saturday 24 October Coach Trip to Huddersfield leaving the Brass Balance, Birkenhead at 10:30am and the Ship and Mitre, Liverpool at 10:40am. To book please contact Dave Hutchinson davehutchinson@wirral.camra.org.uk

Tuesday 10 November Branch Meeting and Social at Gallaghers Traditional Pub, Birkenhead at 8.30pm

Tuesday 8 December Branch Meeting and Social at the Rose & Crown, Bebington 8.30pm

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Pub and Brewery News

Full details of all our pubs can be found at camra.org.uk/pubs We strive to keep the entries for Wirral pubs up to date. If you notice that something has changed at a pub on Wirral and the entry is not current, please contact us using the link for the pub on the site, and we'll update it.

The **Barrel Inn** micropub, Eastham opened on 23 May 2026 in a former dog grooming salon at the



end of a row of shops on Plymyard Avenue. It is a short walk from Eastham Rake station and accessible via the 38 bus route. The pub is a single room, comfortably and simply furnished, the décor features a lot of wooden panelling with a large table made from a cable drum, a barrel table and two half barrels used as features on the wall. The two cask beers are normally from local Brimstage Brewery with keg beer also available.

Taylor Street Tavern, opened in April in a disused warehouse in Birkenhead, serving one cask ale from Weetwood brewery. There is a quiz on Monday night and live Food in the shape of pie



and mash is available. There is regular live music over the weekend and a decked beer garden.

Phoenix Bar & Grill has reopened on Rake Lane, New Brighton, one real ale is available, usually White Rat from Ossett Brewery. There is a strong



focus on sports TV and food is also available. There is also a separate members club upstairs with pool tables and dart board.

A second incarnation of the **Hoptimist** micropub opened in April on the corner of Seabank Road and Birch Grove in New Brighton serving a range of three rotating cask ales. Bottled, canned and





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Pub and Brewery News

keg beer is also available. No food is served but you can order pizzas from Nickel City on the opposite side of the road and get them delivered to the pub. The pub is dog friendly.

The **Collaboration**, Bebington is selling pints of cask beer for £4 on a Tuesday

Hop, Bromborough is now offering CAMRA discount Monday to Thursday, £3.30 a pint.

Brimstage Brewery had a pop up bar at the Brimstage Artisan Market on Father's Day at Brimstage Courtyard. They will be there again for the Artisan markets in September. They are also preparing for their 20th anniversary celebration later in the year including a brand new beer.



Brimstage Brewery are having a pop up bar at the Artisan Markets in Brimstage courtyard in September

A fresh application has been made by Whitbread to demolish the **Glegg Arms**, Heswall. The pub closed as part of plans to integrate the Beefeater chain of pubs into Premier Inn. An application last year to demolish the pub that dates back to the 1840s was rejected by the council on design grounds. The latest plans involve building 24 extra rooms for the hotel on the site with the building “designed to mirror the former Glegg Arms and replicate its visual identity.”

The **Boat House**, Parkgate reopened on 22 June after closing in March for an extensive refurbishment costing £1.5million.

A rooftop terrace has been added as well as a function room. The pub also has a new manager Dale Tozer, originally from New Zealand who has worked for over twenty two years in the hospitality industry and a new head chef who has moved from their sister pub in Heswall, the **Harry Beswick**. The pub will continue to serve a range of Hydes cask ales as well as good food.



The new bar at the Boat House

Wirral CAMRA Cider Pub of the Year 2026

Unless you've been living in a cave you might have noticed that summer is upon us. As such, the mind of many an English man (or woman) turns to cider (or perry). So, what better place to indulge your fruity fantasies (careful now!) than Wirral CAMRA's Cider Pub of the Year 2026 - namely the **Lazy Landlord** in Mill Lane, Liscard.



Our judging panel tried various ciders from all the appropriate pubs serving real cider in our branch area. A full list of real cider producers complying with the definition can be found at camra.org.uk/promotional-campaigns/promoting-real-cider-and-perry/map.

As well as the quality of the real cider on offer we judged pubs on their welcome, customer service,



cleanliness, décor, hygiene, community focus and value for money, with the Lazy Landlord coming top.

No stranger to awards, this is the Lazy's second consecutive citation for Cider Pub of the Year. So please drop by, get yourself some great cider, or a pint of their excellent real ale if cider isn't your thing, and kick back in one of the most chilled-out establishments Wirral has to offer.

Our congratulations go o boss, Joe Bryan, and his marvellous staff.

Wassail!

Gareth Owen



Wirral CAMRA Pub of the Season Summer 2026

The Irby Mill

Originally a miller's house and later a cafe, the **Irby Mill** dates from the early 19th century, becoming a Higsons pub in 1980 and is now an independent free house. The building is a lovely lump of red sandstone with bags of character with low wooden beams and a real fire. The lineup of up to 6 real ales always includes a beer from a local brewery (usually Peerless or Brimstage). Draught Bass has recently become a permanent fixture on the hand pulls, and they serve a good range of beer styles. On my last visit it was serving a mild (Timothy Taylor - Golden Best), two dark bitters (Draught Bass and Brain's Rev James), two pale beers (Peerless Little Eye and Spitting Feathers Thirst Quencher) and a stout (Theakston's Old Peculiar). The Irby Mill is a consistent entry for CAMRA's Good Beer Guide. Alongside the beer the pub serves good food. It is

dog friendly and there is a beer garden to the side and car park to the rear. There is a monthly quiz and occasional live music. There is a bus stop right outside the pub served by the 22 bus from Heswall, and several footpaths run close by. The pub accepts CAMRA 50p-off vouchers, and cask ale is also £3.50 a pint on Wednesdays.

Its friendly welcome, good beer range, charming character and good quality cask beer have earned it Wirral CAMRA Pub of the Season for Summer 2026. Congratulations to manager Raph and his team.

Rob Carter





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Cellarmanship

It is with some disappointment that after careful consideration, Wirral CAMRA will not be awarding its Cellarmanship Award for 2026.

We are all very aware of the economic difficulties faced by many pubs these days. Pub businesses face many hard decisions and the job is made more difficult for those serving cask-conditioned beers (real ales). It is not just a question of connecting a keg to the gas and a beer line and serving it almost immediately after it arrives in the pub. Cask beer must be allowed to settle and allow secondary fermentation in the cask before it is served and this process can take several days. We do have some wonderful pubs in Wirral serving cask beer in great condition most of the time and certainly well enough to justify their entries in the Good Beer Guide.

There are however several ways that economic pressures cause problems with beer quality.

Firstly, there is the habit of filtering back overspill from the bar or even worse, emptying the undrinkable sediment at the bottom of a cask into the next cask. Far from providing extra profit, this totally inexcusable habit contaminates the next cask, causes beer to be rejected by drinkers and gives the pub a bad reputation. Luckily our best pubs do not practice this appalling habit.

The growing acceptance by some drinkers of cloudy beer has led to bad practices in the industry. Brewers who used to let beer settle so that dead yeast was discarded before filling casks, are now letting the dead yeast into casks either through laziness or to increase their own profits. This causes problems in the pub cellar with difficulty in clearing the beer and leaving too much unsaleable undrinkable sediment in the cask. The excessive amounts of dead yeast in a cask can affect the clarity of the beer and cause unpleasant off-flavours. If the beer is in such a state, the pub should return it to the brewery and not continue selling it to customers.

An acceptable haze in beer might be caused by other factors such as high wheat content and sometimes dry hopping using hop pellets rather than whole hops. Beer may also have a haze if it is too cold but this is temporary and as the beer warms up slightly after serving, the haze disappears.

Beers that are said to be vegan-friendly are often an excuse for cloudy beer. They do not use isinglass finings so the beer is unlikely to be crystal clear but is it the brewery allowing too much dead yeast into the cask or the licensee not letting the beer settle and serving cloudy beer full of dead yeast because the customer will accept it? Other finings to clear beer which are vegan-friendly are available but even without finings, most properly brewed beers will settle, leaving only a slight haze.

Casks do not need shaking; the live yeast which causes secondary fermentation is already in suspension in the beer and disturbing the dead yeast sediment gives the finings in the beer extra work to do and after a while they will stop working or work very slowly, necessitating extra time in the pub cellar for the beer to clear.

Some pubs have the admirable policy of keeping different styles of cask beer available at all times offering great choice for their customers. The business choice of offering a full range of beers at all times can sometimes come at the expense of quality and this is where many of our best pubs have fallen short in the last few months. There is a temptation to put a beer on too early as it is the next beer of a particular style and bar staff don't want a gap in the line-up. The problem is not only cloudy beer but the secondary fermentation has not finished resulting in poorly conditioned beer that has little mouthfeel and is rather flat.

Limited cellar space, particularly in our micro pubs, means that some beers which need more time to condition and settle are served too soon.

One recent comment from a barman serving a cloudy pint was that the beer must be ok because “I’ve only just put it on”. Perhaps it would be better to leave the handpump without beer until the beer was ready.

When the beer reaches the end of the cask there can be numerous off-flavours. A customer taking the beer back should result in a replacement pint but there can still occasionally be a refusal with comments, usually from inexperienced staff, like “No one else has complained.”

When a cask is emptied, the pressure to replace it with another beer often results in another shortcut. Instead of cleaning the lines thoroughly, there is a temptation for a quick flush through

with water or worse still, just pulling the next beer through and risking contamination of that beer.

Luckily most of our best cask pubs rarely suffer from these faults and we have no hesitation of putting them forward for inclusion in the Good Beer Guide as pubs where there is an excellent chance of finding a great pint. The Wirral Branch Cellarmanship award is there to recognise the very best of excellent cellar work and it is with great regret that even our best pubs have been found to fail over the last year and in the majority of cases it was because beer had been put on sale before it was ready. It is a difficult business decision but perhaps it may be a better option to prioritise quality over offering a full range of beer.
Dave Goodwin



Locale is CAMRA's scheme to encourage pubs to serve locally brewed beer.

For more information on Locale, go to camra.org.uk/what-we-do/locale

Fresh Ale isn't Real Ale

Don't Get Duped!

Fresh Ale isn't real ale. It doesn't have the same secondary fermentation in the cask or the same mouthfeel and taste.

Carlsberg are producing “Fresh Ale” currently in three brands although cask versions of these are also available:

- **Wainwright Amber**
- **Wainwright Gold**
- **Hobgoblin IPA**

They are served on hand pumps which may fool customers. Look out for labels that say “Brewery conditioned” as that will tell you it's “Fresh Ale” not real ale. If in doubt ask at the bar.

If you think you have found fresh ale in a pub please report it to CAMRA. Scan the QR code to do so.



Beer In the UK Report

You're being lied to about British beer

On Monday 29 June, CAMRA released a report into the state of the British brewing and pub industry authored by Tim Webb. You can read the full report at camra.org.uk/beer-report below is a summary of some of the key points.

In the UK, the four multinational subsidiary companies produce nearly 70% of UK-brewed beer

Their brands dominate our pubs and bars, as well as supermarkets and other off-trade outlets. They achieve market dominance not by the excellence of their beers but by a network of practices that shape the industry's structure, strategies and policies. These leave independent and regional producers excluded. These four large brewing corporations have concentrated on producing beers that suit their business model more than the beer consumer. Several other important brewers are also foreign-owned. Greene King is part of a Chinese property firm; Tennent's belongs to an Irish brand brokerage; and Fullers, with others, is owned by the Japanese brewer, Asahi. Barcelona-based Damm brews in Bedford. The largest British-owned brewer is Guinness, now owned by London-based Diageo, though still seen as Irish. The biggest independent was BrewDog, UK brewing's most significant 21st century success story, until it was bought in March by an American firm, for a knockdown price.

A majority of pubs are owned by property companies, known collectively as 'pubcos' (pub companies). Some have only a handful of outlets, while the largest has accumulated over 4,000. Most have contractual agreements with one or more of the four corporations, which lead them frequently to limit the beers they supply to their

pubs. If one of the company's licensees wishes to stock a beer from an independent brewer, they will often find they are either not allowed to do so, or they must pay a significant premium. There are around 1,600 small independent breweries in the UK. Between them they hold just 7% of the market.

If the British brewing industry is to reach its potential for growth, the UK beer market must be freed up for smaller independent producers to have fair access to it, and incentives must be found to develop distinctive British beers for export. This requires a market investigation from the Competition and Markets Authority. CAMRA is requesting that they investigate and rectify any distortions within the UK beer market, to include but not be limited to the various practices that limit access to market for independent, small and medium-sized brewers.



Your 'continental' lager was probably made just off the M1

Most of the big-name 'foreign' lagers sold in UK pubs and supermarkets aren't imported at all. They're brewed here, often to UK-only recipes with added water, then dressed in the flag of somewhere more glamorous. Research suggests that the following lager brands are all produced in the UK, with many but not all, simplified to meet UK specifications, usually meaning lower strength:

Amstel, Asahi, Becks, Brooklyn, Bud Light, Budweiser, Carling, Carlsberg, Cobra, Coors, Corona, Cruzcampo, Estrella, Damm, Fosters, Heineken, Holsten, Kingfisher, Kirin, Kronenbourg, Madri, Mahou, Miller, Molson, Moretti, Poretti, Pravha, Red Stripe, San Miguel, Singha, Skol, Sol,

Staropramen, Stella Artois, Tiger, Tuborg, Via Roma.

The traditional 'ale' brands produced by the four corporations read like a roll call of famous British brewing names, though their breweries of origin are wholly owned subsidiaries or defunct, with the beers now brewed elsewhere:

Banks's, Bass, Beavertown, Boddingtons, Brakspear, Courage, Doom Bar, Eagle, Hancock's, Hobgoblin, John Smith's, Manns, Mansfield, Marston's, McEwan's, Newcastle Brown, Ringwood, Sharp's, Stone's, Tetley's, Wainwright, Worthington, Wychwood, Young's.

Seven of the UK's ten best-selling 'craft beers' are made by the big four. In most countries 'craft' has a legal definition: the brewery must be independent of the big corporations. That isn't the case in the UK.

Beavertown (Heineken), Blue Moon (Molson Coors), Brixton (Carlsberg), Brooklyn (Carlsberg), Camden Town (AB InBev), Gamma Ray (Heineken), Goose Island (AB InBev), Lagunitas (Heineken), Neck Oil (Heineken), Shipyard IPA (Carlsberg).

The routine deception of consumers must stop. Beers sold in the UK should clearly name the company that owns the brand, and the place where it is brewed, through an industry code of conduct or, failing that, new labelling legislation.

The UK's absurdly high beer taxes

The direct taxes on beer production are excise duty and sales tax (VAT). Each of these raises £3.5 to 4 billion of revenue per year.⁽¹⁷⁾ VAT is not only applied to the cost of the beer but also to its excise, making it a tax on a tax.

UK beer lovers must pay far more for beer than those in most other European countries, due to

beer taxes that are the highest of any major beer producing nation in Europe. This is a fiscal disincentive to developing beers of character to impress the UK market and boost production for export, which further threatens the viability of many independent breweries.

The UK's abnormally high level of beer taxation, compared to the rest of Europe, needs to be challenged to justify its purpose. The upcoming review of the 2022 changes to the alcohol duty system is an opportunity to make the UK industry competitive with other major brewing nations.

Tim Webb



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GREATER MANCHESTER BEER

Hop It! - Amarillo



*Hops are the flowers (also called seed cones) of the hop plant, *Humulus lupulus*. Hops are a vital ingredient in the brewing process, used for bittering, to impart floral, fruity, or citrus flavours and aromas and as a stability agent. There are many different varieties of hop and this is part of a series of short articles, each about a hop variety and its characteristics.*

The Amarillo hop variety was accidentally discovered by Virgil Gamache Farms, Washington in 1990 when they found it growing alongside their Liberty hop field. They began cultivating it in 1991, then patented it as a new variety in 2003. It was originally patented under the identifier of VGXP01. That catchy name didn't stick and it was renamed Amarillo

Amarillo hops impart a distinct flowery, spicy, tropical, citrus-like flavour and aroma in beer. The

citrus has qualities of lemon and orange, like the Cascade hop variety, but much stronger. It also has one of the highest myrcene oil contents (60-70% of total oils) of any hop which is responsible for its citrusy character. It's a favourite for dry hopping amongst brewers.

Beers brewed with Amarillo Hops:

The Kernel – Pale Ale, Burton Bridge – Fox and Goose, First and Last – Amarillo Pale, Crouch Vale – Amarillo

Coach Trips for 2026

It's that time of year again when we look forward to our planned trips for next year. All trips are on a luxury coach with a toilet. Booking in advance is essential. For all trips, we aim to be back on Merseyside between 8.30 and 9pm and the return price is £25 per person with payment on the day. For more details please contact Dave Hutchinson davehutchinson@wirral.camra.org.uk

Please note that due to increasing costs we have had to raise the price to £25. This is the first price increase for over five years and unfortunately was needed to make the trips viable.

Stourbridge – Saturday 8 August

Stourbridge in the West Midlands is a market town of medieval origin famous for glass making. It lies 10 miles west of Birmingham in the Black Country. We will have lots of excellent pubs for you to visit. Our first pickup will be from the Brass Balance, Argyle Street Birkenhead at 9.30am, and then from the bus stop facing the Ship & Mitre, Dale Street Liverpool at 9.40am.



Huddersfield - Saturday 24 October

And on, to round off the year, we are returning to one of our favourite towns, Huddersfield in West Yorkshire. A famous mill town, it has much neoclassical Victorian architecture, including the railway station. Birthplace of Harold Wilson, the town's excellent pubs offer a selection of ales to rival any beer festival. Our first pickup will be from the Brass Balance, Argyle Street Birkenhead at 10.30am, and then from the bus stop facing the Ship & Mitre, Dale Street Liverpool at 10.40am.



What's in a Pub Name?

The Cleveland Arms

Dating back to at least 1878, **The Cleveland Arms** was a West Cheshire Brewery pub. Acquired by Thwaites in the 1970s and described in 1980 as a pleasant small friendly local with a thriving jug and bottle trade selling Thwaites Best Mild and Bitter by handpump. The pub later became an independently owned free house which it still is to this day. Of the nine pubs in New Ferry in the 1970s, only the Cleveland survives but where does its name originate?

Pubs in the Wirral commonly adopted the "Arms" suffix followed by the name of the local land-owning family, such as the Shrewsbury Arms. The Cleveland is no different and is named after John Cleveland (1661–1717) descended from a Leicestershire Royalist family. He established himself as a wealthy merchant and town house owner in Liverpool. He was the Mayor of Liverpool in 1703, and a Member of Parliament for Liverpool from 1710 until his death in 1717.

In 1713, John Cleveland purchased the Birkenhead Priory estate and the surrounding manor, effectively becoming the "Lord of the Manor" for the area. After he died, the estate passed to his daughter Alice, who married Francis Price. The Price family held the manor for the next 150 years, and they were instrumental in the early development of Birkenhead and New Ferry. His



name is also preserved in Cleveland Street in Birkenhead, reflecting the family's significant influence on the region's infrastructure and land ownership.

On Saturday 25 March 2017, there was a massive explosion that levelled a building and damaged many other nearby properties including houses and shops in New Ferry. The damage caused to many homes and businesses and lives was severe. At the time of the explosion resident band "Shedbrothers" were playing. The pub was devastated and forced to close its doors. The task was immense, but landlady Ann Grimes was determined that this wasn't to be the end of the Cleveland.

Almost six months later the pub re-opened having undergone structural repairs and refurbishment. This has given the pub a clean, modern appearance while retaining a very traditional layout and friendly atmosphere. A sign displayed on the rear of the pub depicts the crest of the Duke of Cleveland. The ribbons underneath display the family's traditional Anglo-Norman motto, split into two scrolls: AYMES, meaning "Love" and LOYALTE meaning "Loyalty". That seems fitting given Ann's love and loyalty to her customers shown by her incredible determination to keep the pub open against the odds. Look out for Fabio, the much-loved occasional pub cat along with up to four real ales with many from Brimstake Brewery.



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The Black Horse Then and Now

The entry for the Black Horse in Lower Heswall in my 1979 Good Beer Guide describes it as a “justly popular village pub”, an epithet that still applies today.

Chris Webber worked behind the bar in 1979, when the cask ales on offer were Draught Bass, Charrington mild and Brew X bitter. He remembers the interior in all its mock-Tudor grandeur, with oak beams and huge fireplaces, but the gents still had to go outside to use the loo. Chris had his 18th birthday party in the function room upstairs and became a regular before being taken on as a barman at a time when it was often three deep at the bar at weekends.

Opening times at the Black in 1979 were 11.30am-3pm and 5.30-10.30pm, as they were for every Merseyside pub in the Guide. Pubs closed in the afternoon and if you wanted to carry on drinking after 3pm you had to find a member's club. Chris recalls that “Cheshire pubs were allowed to close at 11pm on Fridays and Saturdays and my mates and I would often have frantic motorbike rides to the Old Quay in Parkgate to grab a last pint.” Then, as now, the bar had a loyal band of regulars, including cocklers who used to sell the shellfish they had just caught in the River Dee.



The Black Horse pictured in 1980



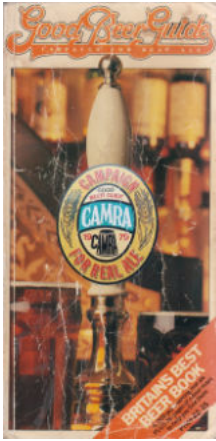
The current landlord of the Black Horse, Rob Aland

The pub has undergone plenty of changes since those days, with the function room now unused due to health and safety laws. The gent's loo is now indoors and there is a conservatory which houses the darts board and pool table. This room can be reserved as a function room; the pool table can be covered over for a buffet, and it has proved popular for birthday parties and wakes.

Landlord Rob Aland has been at the helm since April 2024 and is currently negotiating a 5-year tenancy with the owners, Heineken Star pub co. The deal is that Rob has to pay rent and buy all his beer off them. After working in the mobile phone industry for many years, before ill health forced retirement, he started doing maintenance work at the pub for the

previous landlord, Wayne.

Wayne decided he couldn't make a go of the place, and at the same time Rob was looking to downsize his home as his five children had grown up. The pub comes with living quarters, so after the initial negotiations with Heineken were finalised, Rob sold the family home and moved into the pub. His son works behind the bar part-time when not studying.



1979 Good Beer Guide

"I wanted to make it a community-focused, dog-friendly pub, an ale house rather than an eatery. As well as sport on TV, we have jazz on Tuesdays, a quiz on Wednesdays, jam night on Thursdays and a live band on Fridays. People like it that I'm very hands-on and that my son works here too. It has paid off and takings are up by more than a third compared to when I took over. I must thank Tony from the Plasterers Arms in Hoylake who mentored me to get me started."

London Pride and Timothy Taylor Golden Best are the regular cask ales, with Otter Bitter the current guest ale, all at £5 a pint. Heineken policy is only to source from national brands or from full

members of the Society of Independent Brewers and Associates, which sadly rules out most local breweries.

Just like most pubs in 1979, pies are always available from the bar, also pizzas from 5-9pm.

Rob is looking forward to running the Black Horse for the next five years and hopes to get an option to renew when the current deal is up. Those 1970s days of being three deep at the bar may be over but the Black Horse is still a friendly and popular pub.

Dave Pearson





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Fancy a Dee Black Vic Dee Vic?

Heswall nowadays has a pretty vibrant real ale scene with eight pubs serving cask beer. Two independent micropubs; the **Beer Lab** and the **Bow-Legged Beagle**, two gastropubs; the **Harry Beswick** and the **Jug and Bottle**, a Wetherspoons – the **Prese Well**, and three traditional pubs the **Dee View Inn**, the **Johnny Pye** and the **Black Horse**. With such a wide choice of pubs and real ale it offers a lot of potential for a great pub crawl. This, however, hasn't always been the case as Gareth Owen explains.

Fancy a Dee Black Vic Dee Vic? A what? You might well ask! But back when my beard was brown and Mrs Thatcher was starting to make waves, the DBVDV represented a night out for me and my hippy mates. Unimpressed with Thatch, poorly paid and bored we scraped a few quid together to enact our dull ritual.

To set the scene...Heswall in 1979 and before real ale became de rigueur, we would meet early evening at the Dee. This was the **Dee View Inn** by the big mirror and the war memorial. No real ale, just gassy, weak lager (Heineken) and a selection of woeful Whitbread beers. Then it was down School Hill and into the **Black Horse**. This Bass

house with its bar, lounge and snug was ably run by Paul Coventry and had three cask beers. It was one of my first introductions to real ale. So popular was "the Black" back then that it had to issue tickets to its regulars so that they could gain entry at Christmas time!

So, where next? Ah, the Vic! No longer a thing now having been demolished in the noughties to make way for a gated community for the rich and nervous. The **Hotel Victoria** had two bars and a function suite as well as some accommodation. My family referred to the place as "Hatches, Matches & Dispatches" to reflect the fact that our clan (and many others no doubt) used its facilities for celebrations and commiserations as regards births, marriages and deaths. Beer-wise it had nothing to recommend it.

Then it was back to the Dee. We must have been considerably fitter back then to go the wrong way up School "cardiac" Hill. The sanity of this to return to the Dee View for Whitbread keg has to be questioned! The last port of call was the Vic again. Lord knows why! We were just young and stupid I suppose...

Gareth Owen



Pubs, Pints, People.

Death or Glory?
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A Breath of Fresh Air

Does Fresh Air Get You Drunk?

You are having a few drinks with friends or even strangers at the bar. All is good, you are solving all of the world's woes: global warming, poverty, war, pandemics, overpopulation, fake news... you name it, you're fixing it! You are having the best time, and everything is all fine... But then you take a step outside, and the next thing you know it is morning. How did that happen? Have you been abducted by aliens? You must have been, because they seem to have wiped much of your memory. You can barely remember how you were going to fix the world and you have absolutely no memory of the journey home. Who knows what else they did to you... No, hang on, it can't be the aliens, why would they take you, especially if you were drunk?! There must be another explanation... It was the fresh air; everyone knows it is always the fresh air that gets you drunk!

There must be a reason for this. I am a scientist; I should be able to figure this out! Alcohol plus oxygen gives you vinegar... vinegar doesn't get you drunk. It just makes you crave chips! So, let's think about this. The effect that we describe as "drunk" is because alcohol has a sedative effect, additionally it can reduce oxygen uptake by haemoglobin, so it makes absolutely no sense that going into the "fresh air" should accelerate that effect. Going into a cooler environment... no that will wake you up! Maybe it's exercise, but then no-one says dancing gets them drunk... do

they? It could be that everyone else is ready to go and you neck your drink. Doing this will definitely get you drunk quicker! However, it wouldn't increase the level of your inebriation. It would still be the same amount of drunk; you would just get there faster!

You know, maybe the theory of fresh air getting you drunk is just rubbish. But before we consign it to the junk heap, I said I am a scientist, so it is obviously my duty to perform an experiment. I wouldn't put anyone else in danger so I will experiment on myself.

Some time later...

Recently, having visited a number of drinking establishments, I felt perhaps I had drunk sufficient beer to attempt this experiment. So, I decided to make an account on my phone of everything I did on my journey home and compare it the following morning with my memories of what happened, if indeed I had any. These notes included: walking to Chester railway station via the diabolical fresh air, the subsequent even warmer air of the train, listening to various tunes, getting home safe, missing my stop on the train, having the munchies, listening to more tunes, and a massive sneezing fit.

A review of financial transactions the following morning did indeed demonstrate my suitability as a candidate for this study. I recall the sneezing fit and the munchies (mmmm chips...possible

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Score your beer and help decide which pubs get into the next edition of the *Good Beer Guide*

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evidence of vinegar?) and the warm atmosphere and the motion of the train. However, I noticed that some of the things I noted about my journey were out of chronological order. Oddly, I seem to have got home safe and then still been on the train. Perhaps time-travel happened... Fresh air makes you time travel? Maybe it was the aliens after all?

My theory is this... I was engaged in making notes for this piece. Maybe this is true in the pub. We have better recollection of the pub when we are engaged, in conversation and enjoying the beer and the atmosphere. Upon leaving to go home, there is less engagement and we slip into autopilot and are less likely to remember details. It is like that daily drive to work that you only have any recollection of if someone cuts you up! Or perhaps if your journey is particularly diabolical you would only remember someone being polite! That's one theory. That is my "Theory of Disengagement Gets You Drunk". This is a very poor scientific study with a sample size of just me

based on just one inebriated journey home though fresh air.

Another theory is my "Theory of Alcohol Gets You Drunk". It can take between thirty and sixty minutes for blood alcohol concentration to reach its peak. So, when you finish drinking and leave the boozer and step outside into the fresh air, or for that matter any air, the alcohol you have already consumed hasn't kicked in yet. It does so over the course of your journey and feels like you have had another pint while you were travelling. Actually, let's call this the "Delayed Alcohol Effect Theory".

In conclusion – Fresh Air Gets You Drunk! - balderdash! I propose the Delayed Alcohol Effect Theory in combination with Disengagement Theory as a far more plausible explanation... Or alien abduction, which is surely the only possible explanation (I am not a quantum physicist) for the "time-travel" that happened during my experiment.

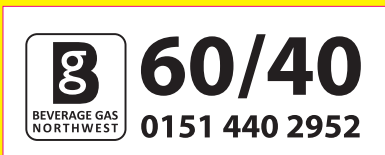
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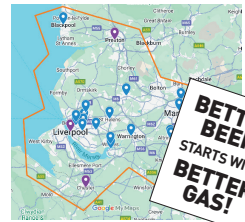
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Beer Scoring Update

From June 2026 CAMRA has changed the system for beer scoring, moving from a numeric scale of 0 to 5 to more definition-based scores, which I'll explain shortly. Wirral CAMRA branch will still use beer scores to determine which pubs go in the Good Beer Guide and also in judging various awards such as Pub of the Year and Cellarmanship. The more scores we get the better and we would encourage you to submit your scores.

Entering your scores is quick and simple

- Using your phone on the pub's Wi-Fi or your phone's network, open camra.org.uk/pubs.
- Find the entry for the pub – there is a button labelled 'Nearby' or 'Nearby pubs' to save you doing a full search.
- Click on 'Submit Beer Scores'.
- Press the Member Login bar (if you have forgotten your password, you can request a link to reset it from an email).
- You may be able to set your phone to save your password for later pub visits.
- You can then follow the screen, first setting the beer score (see guidance below) followed by details of the beer.
- Please always give the brewery and beer name (ignore the note that says optional).
- Press the button which says 'Submit Beer Score'.
- If you make a mistake, you can correct it later (it's easiest to do this on a laptop/desktop).
- If you do not have a smart phone to enter scores while in the pub, you can use a laptop/desktop computer at home.
- You can review and amend your own scores at a later date.

How's your beer?

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 may 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 is and there isn't another pub to go to.
Poor	Noticeably 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.

A few things to note

- Only CAMRA members can submit beer scores.
- Submit scores only for real ales. We do not accept scores for cider or keg beers.
- We do not accept scores where there may be a potential conflict of interest, such as from pub licensees, managers, bar staff or anyone else closely associated with any Wirral pub.
- Any unrealistic scores will be disregarded – for instance where an individual always scores a very high mark for every beer on every visit to their favourite local.

WHY SHOULD I SCORE MY BEER?

- ✓ Guide fellow beer lovers
- ✓ Play a part in the Good Beer Guide selection process
- ✓ Help power CAMRA's beer and pub data
- ✓ A quick and easy way to get involved

Excellent
Very good
Good
Acceptable
Poor
Undrinkable

camra.org.uk/beer-scoring

First, Last and Best

Lee Reynolds talks us through his first, last and best pints of real ale.

I had my first pint of real ale when I was invited on a steam train trip to York with my friend's family when I was seventeen. When we arrived, we walked up a hill making for the nearest pub for my first foray into cask beer. That beer was Theakston's Old Peculiar. For those who don't



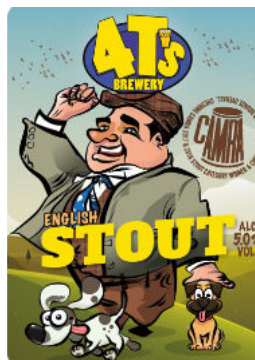
know it, you haven't lived! It's a strong, dark ruby ale at 5.6% ABV, but it used to be even stronger. The name "Peculiar" comes from the ecclesiastical status of Masham as a "Court of the Peculiar." Historically, the beer was so strong that locals affectionately nicknamed it "Yorkshire's Lunatic's Broth." It was the

first and only time I knew I'd had enough.

My last beer was a 4TS English Stout in the recently opened **Hoptimist** in New Brighton. We went there on a pub crawl after the recent CAMRA area meeting. It's 5% ABV, quite sweet and full of roast and chocolate flavours. Lovely!

Finally, my best beer. I am a huge fan of Black Pearl Stout brewed by Milestone in Cromwell, Nottinghamshire. I first had it at their brewery tap room, originally brewed by the Dwan Craft Brewery in Tipperary, Ireland. Milestone bought the recipe from them when they were closing in 2003. It's a 4.3% ABV full-

bodied authentic stout brewed with American Nugget and Galena hops, with a creamy mouth feel and a bitter finish. I don't believe that stout is just a winter thing, I'd happily drink this all year



round. In fact, Black Pearl is that good, I'm pretty sure Jack Sparrow would cross the Caribbean Sea just to get a taste of it!



A Walk to the Pub

I recently visited a friend of mine in London and he asked me what I wanted to do. I suggested that we visit a local pub called the Blythe Hill Tavern. “The Blythe Hill” he exclaimed loudly “that’s miles away”.

“It’s half a mile if that” I responded.

“I’ll check the buses” he said.

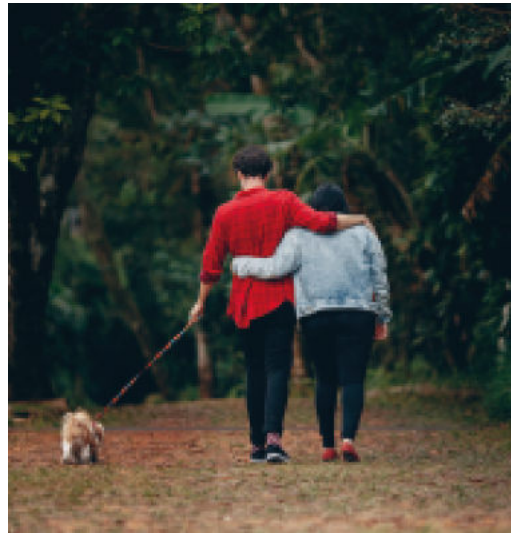
“Come on we’ll walk”

“WALK?!”

“Yup come on” and we set off through the streets of Catford with him protesting loudly about being forced to walk 10 miles and with me inwardly thinking “Bloody lazy Londoners”. Despite the 10 mile distance we managed to cover it in less than 10 minutes (people tell me I walk quickly but that’s ridiculous!). Upon arrival I put a pint in front of him and he soon shut up.

Those who know me will be aware I love a good walk just as much as I enjoy a good pint. Combining the two makes perfect sense to me. For me that can be a route I do regularly like the mile from my house into Bebington village to visit the **Rose and Crown** or the **Collaboration**, or a much longer walk taking all day with several pubs along the way. As I have just demonstrated with the story above not everyone thinks the same way. This is my case for a good walk with a pub or two along the way, or even better at the end!

There are plenty of benefits. First of all, it’s good exercise. Beer is pretty calorific and if you walk to the pub you have at least burnt off a few calories before having a pint. Obviously, you have to be sensible about this, walking 50 feet to a pub and having 8 pints is not going to put you in a calorie deficit! Walking is easy and it’s safe. How many people do you know who have suffered an injury playing sports or running? A lot more than those who walk a mile to the pub I’ll wager! Also, no expensive gym membership required, just some sensible footwear, an idea of where you are going and the motivation to put one foot in front of the



other – the promise of a pint should do that surely?

I’d argue strongly that there are mental health benefits too. For me a walk is the perfect adrenaline burn combined with being out in the fresh air. It’s a world away from my work, sitting behind a desk in front of a computer screen with a constantly ringing phone and overflowing inbox. It’s a chance to unwind and get away from the stress of the day, finishing up at a bar with a good pint and having a pleasant chat is the perfect ending.

Pick something that suits you. Not everyone is going to be capable of doing an 18-mile walking pub crawl. So do something you can manage, if you enjoy it make it a regular thing and start doing longer distances and adding another pub or two into your routes.

One piece of advice, if doing a walk taking in several pubs, stick to lower strength beers. Having a 6% IPA or stout early into your walk can have unintended consequences. Map reading and navigation becomes a good deal more tricky if you are a bit squiffy and crossing flat bridges over

ditches and climbing stiles can become perilous! It's also a good idea to aim to finish your walk either close enough for you to walk home or somewhere with good public transport links to get you home. Keeping hydrated is also important, no I don't mean just drink more beer! Carrying a bottle of water with you is a good idea, particularly on warm days. If you ask nicely, the bar staff will refill it – with water!

There's plenty of options for both routes and good pubs along the way on Wirral. For example, the Wirral Way provides a good route between West Kirby, Heswall and Parkgate and a great selection of pubs along the way. The recently opened stretch of coastal path between Parkgate and the **Harp Inn** is a pleasant route with views over to North Wales and decent pubs at both ends. We have already published a few "WirrAle Walks" in previous issues of this magazine and I'm sure we'll come up with more in the future. You can find all the previous editions of the magazine here wirrale.camra.org.uk/download

In the last few months, I did my regular route over the fields into Thornton Hough to go to the **Red Fox**. Shortly after passing Clatterbridge Hospital I saw a Red Kite being mobbed by a pair of Buzzards. To put that in context for those of you who aren't bird enthusiasts, when I was a kid Buzzards were pretty rare and Red Kites were extinct in the UK. This was the first time I had ever seen a Red Kite on Wirral and it was an amazing view. Upon arrival at the pub I spent the evening talking about it with another pub regular. Now you're not going to have that sort of experience sitting on the sofa at home watching Netflix and drinking out of a can! So, get out there and walk to the pub. Your legs may ache a little, you might feel tired and a bit warm or cold depending on the weather but place yourself on a bar stool or in a comfy chair. That first pint will taste all the better for having walked, trust me.

Rob Carter

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Black Isn't the New Black

There is the odd exception, but generally speaking I'm not a fan of pale, strongly hopped beers, or "Pale hoppy nonsense" as I call them. I love dark beers: porters, stouts and dark bitters. There is one exception however, the aberration that is a black IPA.

So, what is a black IPA? Simply a dark beer brewed with hop varieties and quantities that you would normally find in an IPA. It's a relatively new brewing style. There is some debate over exactly when and who created it, but it's generally thought to be around the early 1990's. I just really wish they hadn't!

Let's deal with the obvious one first – IPA – it stands for India PALE Ale. Although the original IPAs were darker than modern ones, they were never black. Black and pale are opposite. A black pale ale cannot exist and that's just the start of the problems with this style.

Dark beers can taste of all sorts of lovely things: coffee, toffee, roasted malt, dark fruits (this list could go on for a long time, but I will stop there). They should not taste like tropical fruit punch or be so bitter that drinking one feels like your taste buds are being hit by a meat tenderiser! Hops in dark beers should be there for balance of flavour. Adding the varieties of hop that belong in an IPA into a dark beer, and in enormous quantities, creates a completely unbalanced beer in my opinion.

The vast majority of pubs only serve one dark beer, if any. If that dark beer hand pull is a black IPA it can give me a real problem finding something on the bar I want to drink. Worse still is when I think I have ordered a lovely stout or porter, then take a sip, and find my unsuspecting taste buds under violent assault. The horror of realising the dark beer I have been served is an interloping IPA in disguise, lulling me into a sense of false security before pouncing and unleashing hoppy hell!



The landlord of a micropub that I sometimes visit once said to me that he tried putting a Black IPA on his bar. His dark beer drinking regulars wouldn't drink it as it didn't taste like a dark beer, whereas his pale hoppy beer drinking regulars wouldn't drink it as it was dark. Most of it went down the drain.

I have also witnessed a customer in a pub have a taster of a Black IPA. He loudly proclaimed, "That tastes like a perfectly decent stout that a rat has urinated in" (he actually used a different expression for urinated – you get the picture). He then grimaced and ordered a pint of something else to "take that horrible taste away".

So why do brewers continue to make them? I don't know, maybe just to annoy me! Some sadists must like it. Black (IPA) isn't the new black (beer); it's an IPA in stout's clothing and a beer style, in my opinion, that should never have been conceived.

Rob Carter

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x4



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Wed-Thu 1-10pm
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x4



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x4



x3



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CAMRA Cellarmanship Award



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