

Danny Bevvv

Tyneside & Northumberland CAMRA

FREE

Issue 267 • Spring 2026



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Excitement is building for the Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival, with plans coming together for another celebration of real ale, cider and community. It remains a highlight of our year and a showcase for the region's brewing talent.

In this issue, we tour the North East, speaking with our former Regional Director about how the beer landscape continues to evolve. We ramble through Durham in search of welcoming pubs and well-kept pints, and head north to Berwick for a characterful day exploring its varied hostelries.

Wherever you are reading this, I hope these pages encourage you to get out, support local pubs and raise a glass to the best our region has to offer

Cheers,

Anthony McMullen
Editor, *Canny Bevy*

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Chairman's Comments

On January 27th, following months of campaigning, the government announced that in 2026-27, all pubs and live music venues will receive a 15% business rates relief on top of the support previously announced in Budget 2025. While this is a step in the right direction, the reaction has been mixed at best.

Ash Corbett-Collins, CAMRA Chairman, stated, "This short-term announcement is not the 'permanently lower business rates' that pubs were promised. While it is positive that the Chancellor has listened and announced extra discounts for pubs facing the threat of closure, it is short-sighted to believe that today's statement will provide publicans with the certainty they need. The plan to review the unfair way pubs are assessed for business rates is welcome, but this leaves pubs in the same situation they have faced for years—still awaiting promised and fundamental reforms to create a fairer system. CAMRA will continue to campaign for government support for great pubs and independent breweries so they can compete against online businesses and cheap supermarket alcohol."

Pub campaigner Dale Harvey expressed his concerns, saying, "To be honest, the business rates 'relief' offered by the government is an insult to the hard-working publicans and hospitality staff of this country. It amounts to a temporary sticking plaster designed to give the impression that the government is interested in helping the industry. Regardless of the temporary 15% discount or the meagre savings it may provide to a small percentage of pubs in the first year, the rateable values of thousands of businesses have soared—some by as much as 125%. For instance, Sky TV calculates its charges based on a venue's rateable value, considering nothing else.

Consequently, any business facing a rates increase will see the monthly cost of showing live sport skyrocket, forcing them to either cancel a service that generates vital revenue or pay substantially higher costs. The repercussions of this business rates betrayal reflect the decline I have witnessed in the industry over my 30 years in it. We need urgent reform of the entire business rates system, or we will continue to lose hospitality businesses at an alarming rate, leading to increased unemployment and the loss of vital social hubs in our communities."

The rate relief applies solely to pubs and sporting venues, leaving other businesses in the hospitality sector without support, while local councils determine which venues qualify. For instance, in our recent Tyneside club of the year voting, Heaton Stannington would likely receive support as a sports venue, Tyne Amateur Rowing Club might be a difficult case, whereas Tynemouth Social Club would not qualify for any assistance. CAMRA is urging MPs to amend the wording on this issue and extend support to social clubs and a broader range of community-focused venues in the short term, while also advocating for more long-term support for pubs.

The rate of pub closures exceeded one pub per day in England and Wales in 2025, and as our news page indicates, this trend is not slowing down. Thank you for reading, and please continue to support your local establishments.

Paul Hillhouse
Branch Chair
chairman@cannybevy.co.uk

The branch held its inaugural **Newcastle Dark Beer Week** in the final week of February, with 12 fantastic pubs across Newcastle offering a selection of exceptional dark beers. This initiative aimed to encourage pub visits and celebrate a range of beer styles. We look forward to bringing this event back next year and hope to see it grow like the **Gateshead Pub Month**, which will return for its third year this October.

According to the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA), 137 breweries closed in the UK last year. In light of this, the branch has invited local MPs to the **Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival** to sample the outstanding beers produced by our local breweries and discuss strategies to reduce this number and reverse the decline.

Head of Steam Newcastle Not for Sale

Cameron's Brewery has confirmed that the Head of Steam on Neville Street is not being sold and will continue trading as normal.

While three freehold sites elsewhere in the estate have been placed on the market following a strategic review, the Newcastle venue is only seeking a sale and leaseback partner. With around 70 years remaining on the head lease, this move is intended to release capital to support further investment in the Hartlepool brewery and expansion of the Head of Steam brand.

The company recently opened its sixteenth Head of Steam, on Newton Street in Manchester, and is actively seeking further sites, with ambitions for additional Manchester locations as well as York and Bristol.

The **Pickled Toad** in Shieldfield and **Tiny Toad** in Heaton have both closed as the owners focus on the original **Tipsy Toad** in Heaton. The owners stated, "We have

had to make the really hard decision to consolidate our venues. We want to get back to our roots as an independent family-owned business. We so deeply appreciate the support you all gave us for each of these Toad-y adventures, but it's time to come back home to Heaton and focus on getting Tippy Toad back to its glory days."

The Mosaic Tap is relocating, as the railway arch in the Forth Goods Yard is set to be part of the area's redevelopment. The tap will move to Pink Lane, taking over the former **Prohibition Bar**, and promises to be bigger, warmer, and cosier than its previous location. Customers can anticipate a greater selection of beers, more taps, an expanded natural wine offering, and eventually events upstairs.

The Three Tuns recently held an open meeting to discuss future plans for the pub, attracting over 50 attendees. This follows the pub's availability for rent, as reported in the last issue. A recent social media post noted, "*Lots of good news on the horizon and some new energy and enthusiasm coming through the door any day now.*"

The Gold Medal in Gateshead has closed and will reopen as a smokehouse and American BBQ restaurant.

On February 14th, the **Tynemouth Priory** has changed hands as **Star Pubs** (Heineken) takes the pub back from the tenants who have managed it for over 16 years. In a heartfelt social media post, they expressed gratitude to "*the customers, staff, beloved pooches, and the musicians who graced the stage,*" stating, "*We didn't want this to happen; all of our hard work has been snatched from under us.*"

Crown Inn, Humshaugh Closes

The Crown Inn in Humshaugh closed from 6 January 2026, following an announcement by owner David Harding at the start of the year.

The award-winning village pub, known for its distinctive vehicle-themed interior and popular car meets, had been run by the Harding family for 15 years. It had twice been named Best Pub in Northumberland and was well regarded for both its beer and food offer.

In a statement to customers, Mr Harding described the closure as financially driven, citing sustained increases in operating costs alongside a gradual reduction in trade over the past two years. While loyal regulars continued to visit, many were doing so less frequently as household budgets tightened.

Rising energy prices and supplier costs were among the pressures highlighted. The decision also led to redundancies among long-serving staff, something Mr Harding described as the most difficult aspect of closing.

As Humshaugh's only hospitality venue, the loss leaves a significant gap in the local community. Branch members will hope that a viable future can be found for the premises in due course.

Local Breweries Shine at Indie Beer Awards

Society of Independent Brewers and Associates hosted the North East round of the Indie Beer Awards in January, with a particularly strong showing from our local breweries.

Leading the celebrations was Twice Brewed, which was named a four-time champion at the regional awards. The brewery continues to build a formidable reputation for quality and consistency, adding further accolades to its growing list of achievements.

Other North East breweries also enjoyed success:

- Firebrick Brewery
- Hadrian Border Brewery
- Allendale Brewery
- Alnwick Brewery

The awards highlight the depth of brewing talent across Tyneside and Northumberland, with traditional styles and modern interpretations both recognised by judges.

It is encouraging to see independent producers from our area competing strongly at regional level, reinforcing the North East's reputation as a centre of brewing excellence. And we look forward to seeing what creations they and other local brewers make for the upcoming Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival

If you have any pub or brewery news to share with the branch then please contact chairman@cannybevvy.co.uk





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Bridge End Inn



I ventured out on the No 684 bus to Ovingham to visit a pub that has risen from the flood. The Bridge End is a 300-year-old stone-built pub that had been owned by the Outterside family for many years.

In 2015, Storm Desmond struck, causing the Whittle Dene to burst its banks. The pub was submerged by 4ft of water, resulting in severe damage that rendered the building unusable. The family placed the pub on the market, but no buyers came forward. The local community attempted to purchase the pub but was unsuccessful. In 2016, a mystery buyer acquired the building, which stood in ruins for almost 10 years.

Amir Bayat was the buyer. Originally from Persia, Amir came to the United Kingdom in 1979 to study at university, and work brought him to the North East in 1988. He now resides in Durham. After owning the building for some time, Amir had plans to revive the pub; however, the onset of Covid put everything on hold. Following the pandemic, the plan was revived, and work commenced. The interior needed to be demolished and completely renovated. A new roof, new floors, a kitchen, an upstairs sitting area, and an expanded main bar area were added.

The transformation is remarkable. Amir, who has been in the restaurant trade for some time, saw great potential for a food-led pub. March 2025 saw the opening of the revived establishment, and trade has been growing ever since. Amir currently runs the pub with his business partner, Jav, who is expected to take over operations soon.

The main bar features a real fire, while an open-fronted kitchen produces an extensive selection of meals. There is a dining area to the rear, an outdoor drinking area, and a new lounge area upstairs. At the time of my visit, two real ales were on offer from Firebrick, and they are always local ales. A good selection of keg beers and other drinks is also available.

On what was a very cold winter morning, we enjoyed coffees. The local area offers many options for a pre-drink countryside walk. Go North East service 684 leaves Eldon Square every hour and takes approximately 30 minutes. It is a short walk from Prudhoe Railway Station, which is well served by the Tyne Valley Line. The bus stops in Wylam and runs through to Corbridge, both of which have pubs that are also well worth a visit.


By Dave Russell

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Social Events

At CAMRA Tyneside, we actively support the campaign by championing pubs and breweries, advocating for pub preservation, lobbying MPs, and promoting local beer festivals, among other initiatives.

A significant aspect of being a member involves enjoying ourselves. We organise a monthly branch meeting, typically held in an interesting pub, where we discuss important topics while savouring a couple of pints.

Our group is diverse, welcoming individuals of all ages and from various backgrounds. This gathering provides an opportunity to talk about beers, pubs, and the latest happenings in the world of cask ales.

Twice a month, we host an evening wander, a pleasant stroll around several pubs to assess beer quality for consideration in the Good Beer Guide. These outings usually commence around 6.30 or 7.00 and conclude in time for the last buses home.

Occasionally, we venture further afield on daytime socials using public transport, such as buses or trains, to explore areas we cannot reach in the evenings. We have visited places like Haltwhistle, Berwick, and Alnwick. Our small, friendly group maintains a relaxed pace, enjoying a few beers while prioritising a good day out.

Additionally, we organise four coach trips each year—two trips to remote Northumberland and two to further destinations, with one trip exclusively for volunteers at our beer festival. Destinations have included Yorkshire, Cumbria, and other locations, providing a full day out at a reasonable cost.

For more details about our events, please visit our Facebook page, our branch website, or contact us via email at socialsecretary@cannybevvy.co.uk

Dave Russell, Social Secretary

Branch Diary

Regional Meeting

Saturday 28 February | 1.00pm to 4.00pm
Quakerhouse, Darlington

The Regional Meeting will include the election of the new Regional Director. All members are encouraged to attend and take part in shaping the future direction of the region.

Beer Tasting at the Five Swans, Newcastle
Thursday 5 March | 7.00pm to 9.30pm

Join us at the Five Swans for an evening tasting and guided exploration of some of the beers that will feature at the upcoming festival. £10 per person. Pay on the night.

Branch Meeting

Monday 9 March | 7.00pm to 9.30pm
The Strawberry, Newcastle

Northumberland Survey Trip

Saturday 14 March | 11.00am to 8.00pm

A full day exploring the Northumberland coast, including a Pub of the Year presentation at the Ship Inn, Low Newton, during the afternoon. Cost £20 per person. To book a place, contact: socialsecretary@cannybevvy.co.uk

Festivals 2026

20 March – Darlington *

3 April – Morpeth Conservative Club

15 April – Newcastle Beer and Cider *

24 April – Ovington Social Club

1 May – Morpeth RFC

2 May – Gateshead Beer and Music Festival

2 & 3 May – Rigg and Furrow From the Land Festival

3 May – Earsdon and Wellfield

18 June – Tynedale RFC

18 July – Ryton RFC

** Festivals organised by CAMRA with free entry for CAMRA members.*

A Micropub Adv



Berwick-upon-Tweed has a surprisingly lively backstory for such a calm corner of Northumberland. Sitting right on the England and Scotland border, it changed hands more times than most towns care to remember, largely thanks to its importance as a medieval port. The legacy of that tug of war remains in the impressive Elizabethan walls, still perfect for a stroll before the first pint of the day. Once peace prevailed, Berwick settled into life as a market and garrison town through the 18th and 19th centuries. Today it offers a blend of historic streets, coastal views and a pub scene well worth the train journey north.

I travelled up from Newcastle with Zac for my first visit in four years. Before heading into town, we crossed the bridge on the B1 to Spittal for a stop at **Bear Claw Brewery**. Brewing since 2012, Bear Claw began on a modest two-barrel plant producing cask and bottle-conditioned ales. Its distinctive approach centres on fermenting in old oak wine barrels, allowing pale ales, stouts and saisons to mature with depth and character.



The taproom at the **Meantime Workshops** is relaxed and welcoming, with wooden tables, stacked barrels and

outdoor seating for sunnier days. Three cask ales were on alongside a saison on keg. I worked my way through *Daylight*,

Curmudgeon, *The Fool* and *Dark Hollow*, each one in fine form and showing the range the brewery now delivers.



Back in Berwick, our first call was **The Curfew**, tucked down a lane off Bridge Street. Opened in 2014 by Gemma and

David Cook, it captures the micropub spirit beautifully. One cosy room, conversation at the heart of it, and no distractions from televisions or music. Named Northumberland Pub of the Year by CAMRA in 2017, it remains a favourite with locals and visitors alike. With four cask ales, keg options and an inviting selection of ciders, it offers a choice without fuss. My pint was *Marble's Pint*, a refreshing session bitter that suited the afternoon perfectly.



A few steps away sits **Atelier**, housed within the restored Cowe Buildings. Exposed brick, polished wood and soft lighting give it an easy charm. Two cask ales were on, and I chose *As You Were* from Hadrian Border Brewery, a well balanced best bitter that complemented the lively atmosphere and tempting plates emerging from the kitchen.

Further along Bridge Street, **Barrels Ale House** delivers classic alehouse character. An 18th-century building with low ceilings and wooden beams, it is rooted in Berwick's trading past.

Adventure to Berwick



Five cask ales lined the bar. Oakham's *Citra*, bright with citrus character, proved a fine choice and demonstrated why this pub continues to collect CAMRA recognition.



On Hide Hill, **Foxtons Wine Bar & Restaurant** occupies a Grade II listed Georgian building. High

ceilings and sash windows create a lighter feel, blending heritage with contemporary comfort. *Stella Spark* from Firebrick Brewery offered an easy drinking blonde ale with plenty of refreshment.

Across the road, **The Brown Bear** carries centuries of history, with records dating back to 1806 and references to a bear and tree symbol from far earlier. Revived by community effort in 2016, it retains wooden floors and exposed brick while providing a warm welcome. *Twin Coast* from Sharp's Brewery made for a pleasant pause before the final stretch.



Up on Castlegate, **The Free Trade Inn** has been serving since 1847. Its early 20th-century wood panelling and stained glass create a rare preserved interior. One cask ale was on, drawn from a handpull in place since 1957. *Tyneside Blonde* from Hadrian Border Brewery was bright, crisp and a fitting tribute to regional brewing.



Our final stop, **The Pilot Inn** on Low Greens, brought nautical character and cosy rooms to close the day. *Abbots Best* from Firebrick Brewery, a balanced dark ale, rounded things off nicely.

From barrel-aged experimentation to heritage interiors, Berwick offers a compact yet varied pub trail. With everything within easy walking distance and the sea air never far away, it makes for a rewarding day out. Many thanks to Zac for the company on a thoroughly enjoyable micropub adventure. Check out more adventures at micropubadventures.co.uk

By *Micropub Adventures*





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Reflections of an (ex) Regional Director

If you read this after February 2026, these will be the reflections of an ex-regional director (RD). CAMRA is organised into 16 regions. For four years, the five branches in the North East region (Tyne and Wear, Sunderland, South Tyneside, Durham, Darlington, and Cleveland) entrusted me with their leadership when no one else stood. I am immensely grateful for that support.

I apparently took an unconventional route. Unlike other RDs, I was first a member of the National Executive from 2019 to 2021, but I failed to secure re-election in 2021. I joined CAMRA at the 1994 Great British Beer Festival and was a passive member, aside from attending social events, while living in Cardiff and North London. When my job brought me to sunny Newcastle in 2010, I quickly became a public affairs officer and, remarkably, even a branch chair from 2017 to 2019.

Much like my experience with my trade union (PCS), I found myself at odds with some of CAMRA's national decisions. Being an RD is a unique position; you represent your region to the national body while simultaneously guiding, advising, and monitoring the branches.

Of the five branches, three faced vacancies for branch chairs, which we collectively resolved. Had we not done so, the RD would have needed to take on the acting chair role and organise another election. I believe the potential consequences were a strong motivator. Without a chair, a branch risks becoming a sub-branch or ultimately being dissolved by the national executive. Have I made an impact? Perhaps only marginally. We modified the Regional Pub of the Year (POTY) and Club of the Year competitions so that each branch had only one contender. Previously, larger branches could enter two. Not everyone agreed with these changes, but the rationale

was to facilitate easier visits to the other contenders. As an RD, I always maintained neutrality by abstaining from votes. I want to express my gratitude to my regional officers, many of whom continued in their roles after I took over. Special thanks go to Michael Wynne, our efficient regional secretary; Ian Monteith-Preston, our IT guru and regional webmaster; Neil Shaw from Durham for his role as regional finance officer; cider representative Steve Clough; and regional clubs officer Steve Drummond. I also appreciate the numerous branch officers who chaired regional meetings in their local areas. A very special thanks to Dr Ian Lee, my deputy, until Ian Monteith-Preston took over.

We improved communication within the region by establishing a North East mailing list, allowing any member to join and receive information directly. Additionally, we successfully held a regional meeting in Stockton-on-Tees, hosted by the Cleveland branch.

Congratulations to the Cleveland branch, which won the CAMRA National Club of the Year award for 2025 for the Catholic Club in Billingham. Unfortunately, Pope Leo XIV could not attend the presentation on 31 January 2026, despite his connection to the beer-brewing Augustinian order. The club's name pays tribute to the former Catholic Primary School.

One of the RD's responsibilities includes judging the super-regional POTY and COTY competitions. The 16 regional winners are grouped into four super-regions to determine the final four contenders. We are permitted to delegate this task, which I managed to do most years for the club judging.

Continued on page 17 >>>

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Reflections of an (ex) Regional Director

In 2022, due to personal reasons, I could not participate in the Super-Regionals. Feeling guilty, I volunteered for the national round. Consequently, I served as a judge for the national Club of the Year competition in 2022, 2023, and 2024, and in 2025, I was selected to judge the national Pub of the Year competition. While arranging travel can be challenging due to public transport and rail maintenance, it has been a privilege to journey between Aberdeenshire and Kent. RDs have representatives on various national committees and working groups. I gained valuable insights while serving on the Events Committee and three working groups: the Tasting Panel Advisory Group (TPAG), Champion Beer of Britain (CBoB), and the Brewery Liaison Advisory Group (BLAG).

I have also been a CAMRA delegate to the European Beer Consumer Union (EBCU).

I disagree with CAMRA's decision to reduce membership to associate status by 30 June 2026. EBCU supports local brewers against multinational corporations that threaten their existence.

Let me conclude on both a positive and a negative note. The positive aspect is the potential opportunity to eliminate the Late Night Levy in Newcastle, a topic I opposed at the 2015 national AGM in Nottingham. On the other hand, I regret my inability to deliver the promised regional shirts, although I have someone in mind who can accomplish this task.

What does the future hold for me? I will have more time to visit pubs and enjoy cask ales, real ciders, and perries.

By Hubert Gieschen



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Newcastle Beer & Cider Festival returns this Easter

Step into a warm, volunteer-run welcome and discover one of the North East's most anticipated celebrations of independent drink. This Easter, we take over Northumbria Students' Union during the university break, transforming the venue into a festival open to all. No membership required and no student card needed, only a shared appreciation of great beer, cider and community spirit.

Across four days, more than 100 different drinks will be pouring. Expect festival-exclusive beers brewed especially for the event, limited-edition specials and a wide-ranging cider selection, alongside a hand-picked showcase of local spirits. Every drink has been chosen to celebrate independent producers and the craft behind each pint.

Our knowledgeable volunteers are on hand throughout, ready with tasting notes and recommendations. Whether you favour classic British bitters, hop-forward modern styles, rich dark ales or crisp farmhouse ciders, there is plenty to explore.

To keep you fuelled, there will be hot food from **Habita**, serving up freshly prepared dishes across the festival. Snacks come courtesy of **Front Row Biltong** and **The Yolker**, offering the perfect savoury accompaniments to your chosen drink.

Wednesday 15 April, 6pm to 11pm

Opening night sets the tone as we reveal the results of **Battle of the Beers**. Find out who takes the honours for Best New World IPA and Best of British Hops, two fiercely contested categories that highlight both innovation and tradition.

Thursday 16 April, 12pm to 11pm

It is **Hat Day** in support of St Oswald's Hospice. Show your flair and don your finest headwear for charity. No hat? Their volunteers have combed their stores to help you find the perfect one.

In the evening, enjoy live music from **Flat Cap Kev**, a well-known name on the local pub circuit. Kev brings quirky acoustic covers to the festival for the first time, from classic '70s favourites to modern hits.

Friday 17 April, 12pm to 11pm

Live evening acoustic music comes from **Brad Thompson**, a familiar face at the festival and across the region. Expect rock and pop classics alongside 2000s dance hits, all powered by guitar and pedals.

Saturday 18 April, 12pm to 7pm

An afternoon of entertainment features **Leslie Roley**, whose performances have taken her from the Royal Albert Hall to Nashville. Her heart-warming vocals blend folk, pop and blues in beautifully melodic style.

Joining her is **Rich Gilroy**, poet, painter, finale enthusiast and singer of the biggest hits. Expect energetic, feel-good covers to round off the festival in style.

Each day also features charity-run pub games and a cloakroom supporting good causes, adding to the sociable atmosphere while raising valuable funds.

The Newcastle Beer & Cider Festival is more than a drinks event. It is a celebration of independent producers, local talent and the community that keeps our beer culture thriving. Gather your friends, plan your visit and come ready to discover a new favourite.

Anthony McMullen



The first branch CAMRA ramble (CAMRAMble) of 2026 took place in the city of Durham, marking the first event of this kind held outside our branch area. Initially concerned about low attendance, we were pleasantly surprised to have over 20 walkers join us for a 6-mile trek on an overcast day in early February, with rain threatening.

We gathered at the spacious and comfortable **Bridge Hotel**, built in the 1850s as lodgings for railway workers constructing the viaduct beneath it. Only one cask ale was available, Lightfoot (4.1% ABV), a refreshing golden pale ale from Theakston brewery in Masham.

The ramble commenced at noon, and after passing under the enormous stone railway viaduct that carries the East Coast Main Line, we headed towards Durham city centre. Built between 1854 and 1857 for the North Eastern Railway, the viaduct features eleven arches supported on tapering piers. It stretches 277 yards (253 metres) long and stands 76 feet (23 metres) tall, making it an impressive feature of the city's landscape.

At Milburngate Bridge, we descended steps to the riverside, where the River Wear was particularly full due to recent heavy rainfall. The sound of water cascading over the weir was almost deafening.

As we headed north, we crossed the Penny Ferry pedestrian footbridge into the Walkergate area, known for its stylish bars and restaurants. Our next stop was the **Bishops' Mill**, a Wetherspoon outlet in Millennium Square. Named after the historic mill that stood for centuries at this site, the pub was bustling for a Saturday lunchtime, but our group managed to find seating. I enjoyed a delicious spicy chicken pizza alongside a pint of one of my favourite pale ales, Three Swords (4.5%) from Kirkstall Brewery in Leeds.

After an hour, our group was eager to continue, and we set off for a 2-mile leg to the next pub. We crossed into the city centre, passed the bustling marketplace, and headed towards New Elvet Bridge, where we again descended to the riverside. With the river on our right, we walked upstream, first on tarmacked paths and then onto muddy footpaths as we ventured away from the city. The magnificent Durham Cathedral gradually faded from view behind us.

We passed under the rail arch of a former bridge, part of the North Eastern Railway, which operated from 1893 to 1931 for passengers and continued until 1954 for goods. The bridge once crossed the River Wear to Durham Elvet Station, which was demolished in 1964. Today, remnants of the bridge abutments are still visible on the riverside.

The Rose Tree at Shincliffe is a family-run roadside pub located on the banks of the River Wear. With two separate rooms, walkers and well-behaved dogs are made very welcome in the bar. Our canine companions, Kirby and Oswald, settled down as we enjoyed cask ales from Yorkshire's Timothy Taylor's brewery: Boltmaker (4.0%) and Landlord (4.3%). I sampled the former, which was in very good condition.

le – Durham

After a kind member of staff took a group photograph in front of the pub, we crossed the river and headed north along the west bank towards Maiden Castle. Following part of the Northern Saints Trails, we encountered a muddy and slippery climb to pass below Whinney Hill. Taking care on a precarious footpath with a steep drop overlooking Maiden Castle Wood, we eventually found ourselves outside HMP Durham. After navigating a couple of back streets, we soon arrived at a historic multi-room pub.

The Victoria Inn boasts one of the best pub interiors in the North East. Built in 1898-9, the bar features a wooden floor, fixed seating, and a cast-iron fireplace. The snug has original bench seating with baffles, bell-pushes, and a cast-iron and marble fireplace. We sat in the front sitting room, which has a bare wooden floor, small counter, and traces of bell-pushes. This pub is listed in the *CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2026*, and from a choice of quality real ales, I selected Ossett White Rat (4.0%) and settled down to enjoy it in very traditional surroundings.

After using an alleyway beside the pub, we crossed Church Street and descended to cross the River Wear again using Kingsgate Bridge. Very soon, we found ourselves in front of the magnificent Durham Cathedral. With the encroaching sunset, it was illuminated, looking magical in the misty light. The cathedral serves as the seat of the bishop of Durham and is the mother church of the diocese of Durham, containing the shrines of the Anglo-Saxon saints Cuthbert and Bede.

A short cobbled alleyway led us left onto a path descending towards Prebends Bridge. After crossing this historic bridge, we turned right past "Reveal" by Richard Cole, a tall pyramidal sculpture made from repurposed stone from Durham Cathedral.

On South Street, we used an almost hidden footpath to navigate a very muddy alleyway and back streets to reach our next destination: the *CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2026* listed **Old Elm Tree**. The pub was packed with patrons enjoying the live Six Nations Rugby match between England and Wales. Fortunately, there was ample space under the covered patio area at the rear of the pub. Service at the bar was swift, and I soon enjoyed a hazy brew with a slight orange peel taste called Serenity - Cascade & Galaxy (3.8%) from Abbeydale Brewery in Sheffield.

As darkness fell, we made our way back to the starting point of our walk, concluding at the multi CAMRA award-winning *Good Beer Guide* listed **Station House**. This former furniture shop, which opened as a pub in 2015, offers an ever-changing range of beer and cider served from a cool room hatch.

I was treated to a pint of a super hoppy pale ale called Different Station (5.6%) from Pentrich Brewing Co. in Derbyshire. I congratulated my wife Eleanor on leading another well-attended CAMRamble and expressed gratitude that the weather had remained dry throughout the day.

Please look out for our next CAMRamble, where we will again enjoy great walking, cosy pubs, and delightful ales and ciders.

Tara-a-bit!
@MorpethWolf

By Dave Haddon

Spoonsful of Tears by Stu



Stu Brew Team (In Yellow) : William Tyson, Chris O'Malley and Kypros Iakovou

Between Wednesday 4 March and Sunday 15 March, a beer brewed by students in Newcastle will be available in Wetherspoon pubs across the country. For Stu Brew, the student-led brewery based at Newcastle University Students' Union, this marks a significant milestone: a campus project reaching a national audience.

The beer selected for the Spring Festival is Exam Room Tears, a maple and pecan stout first masterminded for the Battle of the Beers at the 2019 Newcastle Beer & Cider Festival. That competition sees local brewers go head to head to create the standout beer of the festival, judged alongside their peers. Exam Room Tears secured runner up position in the Flavoured Porter or Stout category, placing it among the very best in its class. It also went on to be voted the Canniest Bevy by festivalgoers, earning the coveted guests' choice title. Its national release this March therefore carries with it a proud local pedigree.

A year's production in a fortnight

Stu Brew typically produces around 400 casks in a year. When Wetherspoon first approached the brewery about participating in the national festival, the proposed volume was similarly ambitious. For a small teaching brewery that brews every couple of weeks, supplying that amount from its own facility was unrealistic.

The solution came through collaboration

Wetherspoon often pairs international or smaller breweries with established UK producers for festival releases, allowing the beer to be produced at scale while retaining the original recipe and character. In this instance, Stu Brew partnered with St Austell Brewery in Cornwall. The connection was personal as well as professional, stemming from industry ties developed through judging at the British Guild of Beer Writers awards.

The recipe was sent south, scaled up, and brewed on St Austell's larger equipment. Two 75 hectolitre brews were completed to create the required volume, using St Austell's house yeast and production processes. The result is a faithful representation of the Newcastle original, although not vegan-friendly due to the finings used in large-scale cask production.

For the students who travelled to Cornwall, it was an education in scale. Mash tuns measured in tens of hectolitres, automated grain feeds, five-head cask fillers, and a 24-hour brewing operation provided a stark contrast to the more modest, hands-on facility in Newcastle. Observing the same process executed on an industrial scale highlighted how brewing principles translate from microbrewery to regional producer.

More than a collaboration brew

Alongside the main festival batch, the team was invited to design and brew a small-scale prototype on St Austell's pilot plant. The result was a brown ale developed on the spot, combining Cornish malt with a nod to Newcastle's brewing heritage. That smaller brew underscored the spirit of the visit: knowledge sharing rather than contract production.

Student-led in practice, not merely in name

It is easy to describe Stu Brew as Europe's first student-run brewery. The reality behind that phrase encompasses a decade of students learning through experience.

Founded in 2013 through a National Union of Students sustainability grant, the brewery was part of a broader set of environmentally focused initiatives. The first commercial batch was brewed in 2014, and the project has continued to evolve since then.

Students do not merely observe. They mash in, clean down, design recipes, manage stock, and interact with customers. They have also travelled to collaborate with regional brewers, judged competitions, and, in some cases, moved into professional brewing careers. One of the original committee members Hugh O'Neill now works at AleSmith in San Diego as a production manager, a trajectory that speaks volumes about the value of early hands-on experience.

The Wetherspoon festival appearance is therefore not a one-off headline. It is a visible milestone in a longer journey. For current students, seeing a beer they helped produce listed nationally reinforces that the standards they work to in Newcastle are comparable with any commercial brewery in the country.

From campus bar to national stage Stu Brew already enjoys a permanent line at the Students' Union Wetherspoon, negotiated as part of the franchise agreement. Supplying that single venue accounts for a significant portion of its output. Expanding across the country required careful consideration to avoid overstressing capacity or compromising relationships with local customers.

By brewing at scale in Cornwall, the team has managed to take Exam Room Tears nationwide without disrupting production at home. When festival-goers order a pint in March, they are enjoying a beer rooted in Tyneside, shaped by students, and realised through collaboration.

For a project that began with a sustainability grant and a repurposed campus space, that represents steady progress. Not overnight success, but gradual growth, built on partnership and practical education.

Between 4 and 15 March, pubs across the UK will be pouring a stout born in Newcastle lecture theatres and brewhouses. For those of us in the North East, it serves as a reminder that our local brewing talent is well-equipped to hold its own on a national stage.



BOOK REVIEWS by Martin Ellis



**Beer
Knowledge Box
Jane Peyton
Hardback
£10.99**

Jane has been writing about drinks for many years; wine, gin, cocktails, beer and cider. She was Britain's first beer-sommelier of the Year and the UK's first accredited Pommelier (cider sommelier). Jane instigated the UK's national beer day - Beer Day Britain on the 15th June, so she is certainly qualified to write about beer. The first time I opened the book, it fell open at chapter 7 - Health and Benefits. It was great to read that *'In moderation, beer has more health, nutritional and social benefits than any other alcoholic drink'*, she goes on to write *'...independent medical experiments concluded ...beer drinkers were happier and healthier than those who did not drink beer or who drank too much.'*

The book has answers to many beer related questions, some well known to beer enthusiasts others more obscure. However, it addresses one of the beer scene's difficult questions, 'what is a craft beer?' - the answer given looks at the current market situation *'...a marketing term for those bland beers brewed by large corporations that motivated the craft beer revolution in the first place'*.

Chapters cover beer styles, beer history, beer tasting and how to taste beer amongst other topics. It's not an extensive tome covering beer in huge depth. Also available on Kindle, the book is great to dip in and out of.



**Pints and
Pathways:
50 Scenic
Walks to
the Pubs
of Rural
England
Jacob Little
Paperback
£18.99**

A collection of 50 walks in England's countryside ending (or starting) in a pub. The routes include rolling hills, tranquil valleys, cliff tops and historic villages. There is a good spread of locations from across England; old villages in Cornwall, Yorkshire hilltops, ancient towns in Kent and little known Somerset gems. There are 10 walks in the north-east section, seven are within the Tyneside and Northumberland CAMRA branch area.

The walks range in distance from about 2.5 to 10 miles, most are between 4 and 8 miles. So, most can be taken in a morning before a lunchtime pint, or in an afternoon before teatime (beer-time). There are OS maps for every walk, supporting photographs and well researched text to not only navigate the walk, but also learn about the locality and its heritage.

A great selection of pubs and easily manageable walks. Recommended for countryside lovers who also love discovering traditional pubs.



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Late-night Levy - an open letter

In February, Newcastle Council announced they were holding a review of the Late-night levy. This is the open letter we sent to council leader Karen Kilgour.

Dear Karen,

Late-night Levy – Review/Consultation

I am writing to you on behalf of the Tyneside & Northumberland branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) concerning your decision to place the Late-night levy under review.

This is a welcome development, and we would like to register our interest in participating in any public consultation on the issue.

By way of background, CAMRA nationally remain opposed to the levy, specifically due to its detrimental impact on pubs. While the organisation recognises the importance of regulation of, and safety in, the night-time economy, CAMRA believes that this is best achieved through partnership working between local authorities and hospitality businesses, and not through punitive and blunt-force measures such as a Levy.

Newcastle remains in a odd position as one of only two councils outside of London that has chosen to implement a Levy on late night trade. We have always felt that making venues that run safely, without incident, pay to police the few that are causing issues is grossly unfair and has clearly led to a lot of closures and reduced trading hours.

As far as we can see, most of the money raised by the levy has been spent in one small area where most of the nightclubs are located, yet any pub anywhere in Newcastle that opens late is equally forced to endure the costs with no hope of deriving any benefit at a time when we are seeing over 400 pubs a year close in England and Wales.

If a meeting to discuss our views further would help, please let me know and I can look to set something up.

I look forward to hearing further from you.

Mike Allaway
Public Affairs Officer
Tyneside & Northumberland CAMRA

We have since received a reply confirming the branch will be invited to take part in public consultations, and thank Newcastle council for the invitation and timely reply.



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National Club of the Year

Billingham Catholic Club has been named CAMRA's National Club of the Year.

This prestigious competition saw the club compete against more than 100 entries selected by CAMRA branches across the United Kingdom, including our own selection, Heaton Stannington F.C, which was narrowly defeated by Bingham in the regional round. The former Roman Catholic school in Bingham, County Durham, has been featured in the Good Beer Guide for nearly two decades. Its dedicated volunteers ensure the club's reputation remains outstanding.

The club offers an extensive selection, serving over 150 different beers each year, with at least three well-kept real ales available at any time, expanding to eight during the club's regular bank holiday beer and music festivals.

CAMRA Club of the Year coordinator Phil Gregg remarked, "*Billingham's commitment to community and quality cask beer, as well as real cider and perry, makes the team a very worthy winner. Be sure to visit this fantastic club and raise a pint to the team's success! Social clubs are exceptional venues, and I encourage everyone to visit their local to experience these welcoming spaces for themselves.*"

Judges from the Tyneside and Northumberland branch were impressed not only with the quality of the beer on offer but also with the knowledge of the team behind the bar and the warm welcome they received.

Billingham Catholic Club triumphed over Appleton Thorn Village Hall in Cheshire, Cheltenham Motor Club in Gloucestershire, and Orpington Liberal Club in London.



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Quiz!

- Answers:
1. Thursday
 2. County (Gosforth)
 3. Ship (Low Newton)
 4. 1.3%
 5. Sandhill Arms
 6. No - but it does contain lactose milk sugar
 7. No - its free entry for CAMRA members
 8. Hadrian Border
 9. Firebrick
 10. Hexhamshire

Canny Bevy Quiz

by Martin Ellis

- 1 Which day is Hat Day at the Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival?
- 2 Which pub is the CAMRA Tyneside Pub of the Year?
- 3 Which pub is the CAMRA Northumberland Pub of the Year?
- 4 What is the ABV (alcohol by volume) of 'small beer'?
- 5 What's the name of the pub recently opened on Newcastle's Quayside?
- 6 Is there milk in milk stout?
- 7 Do CAMRA members have to pay to attend Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival?
- 8 Who brews Secret Kingdom?
- 9 Who brews Blaydon Brick?
- 10 Who brews Shire Bitter?

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