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News From The Branch

Welcome to what should have been June's newsletter. Instead we find ourselves in July. Delays across the board, but we still aim to be firing on all cylinders. That's right, as we gear up for another Festival of Pubs.

We also welcome a new Chair, a glamorous new technical department and something we haven't had for a while, a Cider rep. So you could say we've been rather busy of late. And on top of that we may have presented some awards.

Beer Scoring Upgrade

Beer scores and the Good Beer Guide

There are tens of thousands of pubs across the country serving cask beers, and many of those serve really good pints.

For lovers of a decent pint, it's important to be able to find them. CAMRA's Good Beer Guide has been the 'bible' for finding the very best ones since 1974 and continues to be relied upon by tens of thousands of people.

CAMRA's online pub guide camra.org.uk/pubs can also help because beer quality is indicated by the '3 Pints' symbols that CAMRA members can see when logged in.

Pubs and clubs that serve really excellent pints, and serve them consistently well, can be potential candidates for the Good Beer Guide.

To help identify them, CAMRA members score their pints whenever they have the opportunity. Their scores help local branches determine candidates for the Guide, and these can change year on year because the standards are high. Serving live cask beer requires skill in the cellar and attention by bar staff all the time. Competition for a place is stiff because only 4,500 places are available.

Until now, the scoring system has used a numbering system of 0 to 5. But there are problems with this. It requires memorising the criteria for each score and using them consistently, but memories can be variable. Some people genuinely struggle with numbers, so they don't take part. It becomes open to individual interpretation with resulting inconsistency between scorers. There's also the potential for individual bias and a reluctance to 'award' high scores.

We all know when we are drinking a good pint that's been well-kept, and we also know when a pint is very good or excellent – who cannot resist telling everyone else about it! And likewise, a pint that is simply OK or, hopefully not often, undrinkable.

So, to make things easier for everyone, a new intuitive ratings system is being introduced, which is more descriptive of the beer being drunk.

Each of the new ratings has a description and a likely reaction to help you pin down the most appropriate rating.

Ratings can be recorded on CAMRA's online pub guide <https://camra.org.uk/pubs> by all CAMRA members, so start rating your beer now.

New ratings for cask beer scoring

Beer Scoring Advisory Group (BSAG) exists (in brief), to:

- Promote, support and monitor the National Beer Scoring System (NBSS).
- Ensure NBSS is effective, coherent and aligned with the Campaign's aims.
- Encourage and promote beer scoring, including providing tools and training to help branches.

In 2025, BSAG were asked to come up with recommendations to improve the scores and descriptors currently used in NBSS. This naturally led to discussion of more improvements, evolution, and recommendations.

This paper outlines the initial results of the review, which we propose to implement first. There may be a secondary set of recommendations with their own implementation proposals.

Premise

Beer Scoring Advisory Group has been asked to review improving scoring and descriptors for cask beers.

These proposed improvements have been put forward with the aim of:

- Simplifying the beer scoring process.
- Developing a greater, and shared, understanding of the scoring system and when each score should be used.
- Increasing the number of scores being submitted, and the number of members submitting scores.
- Separating 'no cask beer available' from the scoring scale.

New ratings and descriptions

The ratings replace the score scale and remove the use of half points.

The ratings will still have the numerical value (0-5) attached to them for 'back end' purposes to allow for calculation of and analysis of scores for pubs.

Using features from the current descriptions, we have added a set of 'reactions' that should help members choose the rating most aligned to the beer they are drinking.

There will be a new tick box, separate from the ratings, for 'no cask beer available'.

We will also add automated pub update messages where someone submits a rating in a pub with no cask beer, or for a pub marked as serving cask is rated as 'none available'.

| New cask ratings and descriptions - table 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. |

Pubs Officer News



St Helens Festival of Pubs 2026: Help Us Find Sponsors to Make This Year's Event an Outstanding Success!

Following the massive, headline-making success of our debut event last year, the **St Helens Festival of Pubs sponsored by SSO Logistics** is officially returning this August! Building on everything that worked so well in 2025, our community-led celebration is back in August with a grand finale from **26th to 31st August 2026**, and it's going to be bigger, more vibrant, and more wide-reaching than ever.

This year, we are significantly expanding the festival's footprint well beyond the town centre. We are bringing events, promotions, and dedicated "Pub Trails" directly into **Newton-le-Willows, Earlestown, Haydock, Rainhill, Whiston and Rainford**. Our mission remains clear: drive footfall into our fantastic independent high streets, champion our excellent local pubs, and raise vital funds for our official charity partner, **Willowbrook Hospice**.

From family-friendly treasure hunts, live music, and pub quizzes to murder mystery trails, games nights, and cider tastings, our itinerary spans the entire spectrum of pub culture. We're connecting traditional real ale bastions like the Turks Head and the Star Inn with contemporary craft venues like Tank Bar and the Firkin.

We Need Your Help, Members!

To pull off a borough-wide event of this scale and maximise our donation to Willowbrook Hospice, we need to secure local business sponsors. **This is where you come in.**

Do you drink in a pub owned by an entrepreneurial landlord? Do you work for a local firm looking for fantastic regional exposure? Do you know a business owner in St Helens or Newton who wants to connect with thousands of local consumers?

We have designed a range of incredibly affordable, local marketing packages that offer businesses massive exposure throughout July and August. Please look through the opportunities below and pitch them to your employers, local businesses, or favourite traders:

- **Marketing Sponsorship Package (£350):** Perfect for high-visibility branding. Features the business logo prominently on large-format festival banners displayed at major road junctions, town gateways, and flagship participating venues.
- **The High-Impact Beer Mat Sponsor (£350):** An amazing point-of-sale opportunity. We print at least 5,000 premium, double-sided square beer mats with the company's dedicated branding/QR code on one side, distributed directly onto pub tables weeks before the festival.
- **Programme Sponsor (£350):** Features prominent "Sponsor Credit" on the front cover of our official printed guide (distributed free across all venues) plus a half-page inside advert.
- **Official Pub Map Trail Sponsor (£100 per trail / £500 for all 6):** Sponsor one of our popular printed trifold trail leaflets (including St Helens Centre, Newton/Earlestown/Haydock, Rainford, Rainhill, the Rail Trail, or the Bus Trail). Includes a logo and a custom message on 1,000+ printed copies per trail and all digital maps.
- **Festival Programme Adverts (From £60):** Standalone printed adverts inside our official keepsake guide carried by attendees throughout August.

Let's Get to Work!

Post-event surveys from last year showed that 100% of responding businesses felt they benefited from being involved, and 100% of attendees wanted to see the festival return. The appetite is there—now we just need the backing to make it happen.

Artwork for our primary July print runs is being finalised right now, meaning packages are being allocated on a strict, first-come, first-served basis.

If you know a business that would be a perfect fit, please send them to our official festival page at sthelens.camra.org.uk/pubfest or have them contact us directly:

- Contact: Ian Pye (Pubs Officer)
- Email: pubfest@sthelens.camra.org.uk

Let's work together to support our local independent pubs, raise vital funds for Willowbrook Hospice, and keep the St Helens community thriving this August!

Love your local

The Festival of Pubs will this year have a 'Love your local' campaign at its core. Let us know what goes on at your local every week or any special events taking place during August. Ask the manager or owner to get in touch with us at pubfest@sthelens.camra.org.uk so see how we might be able to help support and promote events throughout the Festival of Pubs.



Real Ale: Live beer however it's served

During the Festival of Pubs, we'll be launching a new logo and campaign to support breweries and pubs that sell real ale in containers other than cask, such as bottles, cans, kegs and occasionally tanks. Watch out for the logo appearing on containers near you and support live beer.

For those that want to know what CAMRA's formal definition of real ale and live beer is here you go:

Understanding Real Ale: The Modern CAMRA Definition

Since CAMRA was formed in the early 1970s, the beer world has changed dramatically. To keep up with modern brewing techniques, CAMRA uses the overarching term "**Live Beer**" to define the core of what real ale is, before breaking down the specific characteristics of traditional "**Cask-Conditioned Beer**."

Part 1: What is "Live Beer"?

At its simplest, CAMRA defines a live beer as a beer that is **alive and maturing inside its final container** (whether that container is a cask, bottle, can, keg, or tank).

The Technical Rule:

To be classed as a live beer, when it is first put into its container, it must have:

- At least **100,000 cells of live yeast** per millilitre.
- Enough **fermentable sugar** left over to create a measurable secondary fermentation inside that container.

Pointers to Best Practice:

- **Flavour Development:** Dead or filtered beer is at its best the moment it leaves the brewery and gradually fades. Live beer, however, continues to develop character and depth over time—for months in a bottle, or even a decade for stronger beers.
- **Natural Carbonation:** The bubbles in live beer are completely natural. In a sealed container (like a bottle, can, or key-keg), the trapped carbon dioxide gas (CO_2) builds up, creating higher carbonation. In a vented cask, the gas can escape, resulting in a naturally lower, gentler carbonation.

Part 2: What is "Cask-Conditioned Beer"?

CAMRA defines cask-conditioned beer (traditional Real Ale) as a **live beer that continues to mature in its cask, with any excess carbon dioxide vented out so it can be served at natural atmospheric pressure.**

Pointers to Best Practice:

- **Cellar Maturation:** Cask beer should be left to settle and develop in the cellar for up to 10 days before serving. This venting and resting rounds out the character and creates subtle, appealing flavours.
- **Traditional Ingredients:** Authentic cask beer should be brewed primarily from malted barley. The use of cheap alternative starches or sugars should be minimal or zero.
- **Natural Hops:** Brewers should use whole, compressed, or pelletised hops. Hop extracts or oils should only be used for tiny adjustments. "Dry-hopping" (adding fresh hops straight to the cask) is highly encouraged.
- **Clear vs. Hazy Beer:** Traditionally, a protein called "finings" is added to the cask to make the beer "drop bright" (pour crystal clear). Some modern brewers choose to leave their beers "unfined," resulting in a hazy look. Both methods are equally authentic.
- **The Perfect Carbonation:** Authentic cask beer has a low, natural carbonation of around **2 grams of CO_2 per litre** (1.1 volumes). For comparison, kegged or bottled beers are much gassier, sitting at 4–8 grams of CO_2 per litre.
- **Temperature Control:** Casks must reach a strict cellar temperature of **11–14°C** before being vented. Once vented, the beer needs between 12 hours and 4 days to stabilize perfectly.
- **Serving and Freshness:** When cask beer is pulled via a handpump or gravity tap, air enters the cask to replace the liquid. Because oxygen eventually spoils the flavor, good cellar management is vital. Replacing this air with a sterile, inactive gas at atmospheric pressure to preserve freshness is completely permissible.

In other news...

A Phoenix from the Flames

It has been many things over the years as most people will know. It even managed to host a successful Rock Night for a good number of years. Most people will have known it as either The Sportsmans or The Talbot and variations of. It always threatened to fly, but in the end just fluttered. Now it emerges from the ashes as a Cornerstone (see what I did there), to the lower Duke Street quarter. Maybe now it has the capacity to grow its wings and become the pub we know it can be.

It's early days yet, and the pub has had its issues, primarily with the cellar. We have a meeting there next month, so hopefully there are no more mice in the machinery and there's a clear path for take off. The refurb looks to have gone very well. And while it may look like a lot of work has gone into it, the pub has retained a lot of its uniqueness and style. Go experience it for yourselves and enjoy a pint or two while the weather is nice. Yes, there is still a beer garden. A pub definitely in need of support in its early stages of a new existence.



A Chair, an Officer and an Editor walk into a Tank



Sounds like there's a joke in there somewhere. Well, maybe there is. But only on Comedy Night. Yes, that's right, this place has a Comedy Night. Anyway, after being included in last year's Festival of Pubs the future was kind of looking promising for this quirky little place on Westfield Street. Sadly things didn't quite turn out as planned. But with a change of ownership and an invitation of a chat, we thought it best to pop along to see what could happen.

Despite not having any hadpulls on the bar they are still keen on stocking real ale in cans and possibly bottles. There's also some interest in real cider as well. Tank's future is once again looking bright. We'll keep you updated as to when they are stocking the good stuff.

For all your CAMRA related news outside of our branch, keep an eye out for the latest issue of What's Brewing, which is available online at <https://wb.camra.org.uk/>

Forthcoming Events

Willowbrook Pub Walk – 26th July

Another organised pub walk in support of Willowbrook Hospice. Combining fresh air, great company and visits to some fantastic local pubs.

Details are as follows:-

- Sunday 26th July
- Start Time: 12:00 noon
- Distance: 7 miles
- Start Location: Junction Inn
- Finish Location: Eccleston Arms

Suitable for individuals or families/groups. Even dogs are welcome.

Entry Fees

- £20 per adult
- £5 for under 16s
- £40 per family (2 adults and 2 children)
Includes an official event T-shirt

Visiting Junction Inn, Golden Lion, Bottle & Glass, Seven Stars, Griffin Inn & Eccleston Arms
Visit <https://willowbrook.org.uk/willowbrook-pub-walk-26th-july-2026> for more details.

Articles

Bowland Brewery Trip

Cracking night at Bowland Brewery back in April. Organised by the Turks Head, it's potentially the first ever pub to do a brewery tour around such an interesting venue. A really informative tour and great beer to boot.



Here Comes Mild May

A small group went a walking

Celebrated by all who enjoy this drink throughout the month of May, at whichever venue is serving it at the time. We as a branch decided that one particular Saturday in this month would be a good day for a meander. The 16th I think it was.



Awards at the Turks Vault



The Turks Head was all smiles on Sunday 14th June as staff proudly accepted their Pub of the Year certificate, along with the title of Cider Pub of the Year.

If that wasn't enough, adding to the celebrations was the Cowley Vaults securing a well deserved second place in our Pub of the Year competition. It also received recognition for its commitment to serving quality real cider.

Glorious sunshine set the tone for a lively afternoon in the shared beer garden, complete with a bouncy castle for families and live music from Simon Brady was the perfect backdrop for

a community-spirited celebration. To say Daryl, the owner of both pubs was chuffed, would be a huge understatement.

Being shortlisted alone, for any pub in our branch is a major achievement. It shows these pubs consistently serve excellent real ale and/or real cider, are among the very best in our branch.

We remain committed as always to supporting pubs in our branch area, encouraging people to explore venues they may not have visited before.

The Turks Head will now compete against Liverpool, Southport and Wirral for the title of Merseyside Pub of the Year.

A New Set Of Apples & Pears



That's right, as there's a new set of stairs to climb for one of our newest committee members. Born out of the fires of Mustafar, we welcome her into our branch.

Hello everyone!

My name is Sam and I am your new Cider Officer. Feel free to call me Cider Sam.

I'm relatively new to this role, so you'll have to bear with me while I find my boots.

At branch HQ we base ourselves in a rather large apple tree just outside of base camp, so we can get a good look at what's happening in our branch area.

I say we, because somehow I seem to have found myself an assistant in this fruity escapade. We are on the lookout for cider related activities and to hopefully bring you some of our own in the future.

This undertaking cannot be done by two people alone, so I'm going to need all the assistance I can get from our cider drinking members. You know who you are. I'll need your eyes, ears, taste buds and that guy's leg (bonus points for anyone getting that reference), when you're next out in the field. Let's try and make a big noise about the real stuff.

For me, CAMRA is about more than just a great pint of real ale. It is also about celebrating the wonderful drink made from apples and indeed pears. Of course I'm talking about the wonderful and diverse Cider and Perry. The proper stuff, not the artificially carbonated keg, bottled or canned offering that only has distant memories of apples or pears. Maybe no memory at all. But as we enter July, CAMRA's Cider and Perry Month, I want to make sure our branch is shouting louder than ever about these fantastic drinks. I will aim to be your guide from here and beyond.

Whether you are a lifelong cider drinker or someone who has never tried real cider before, I want to hear from you. Come and grab me for a chat at our next branch meeting, or drop me an email (cider@sthelens.camra.org.uk), if you spot a great real cider, new or otherwise, while out and about. Could be anywhere really. Doesn't necessarily have to be in our branch area. Let's work together to make our branch a fantastic place for real cider and perry drinkers!



Wassail!

If anyone would like to write a short article or news story for the newsletter please send it to us via email newsletter@sthelens.camra.org.uk

Next Committee Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 8th July at Sun Inn (Prescot) at 8pm
The following Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 12th August at Stocks Tavern (NLW) at 8pm

Committee meetings usually take place on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. All CAMRA members are welcome to attend these meetings. Committee meetings are always held at local pubs that serve real ale. All are welcome to attend our Committee meetings, but only Committee members can vote.

Next Branch Meeting

The next Branch meeting will be held on Wednesday 22nd July at Cornerstone Inn at 8pm
The following Branch meeting will be held on Wednesday 26th August at 8pm.

This meeting is likely to be a Branch Social around St Helens due to our Festival of Pubs. Meeting point to be determined.

Branch meetings usually take place on the 4th Wednesday of the month. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss current issues and have a general catch up with local brewery, pub, and beer festival news. These meetings are quite informal and fairly short (on average between an hour and an hour and a half). Our CAMRA Branch meetings are always held at local pubs that serve real ale.



CAMRA is more than just promoting great beer:-

- It's very sociable - you'll meet others who share your interest in all things beer (or cider/perry)
- CAMRA offers a range of training for volunteers - including Emergency First Aid, Food Hygiene, Stewarding and Health & Safety
- You'll gain skills to enhance your CV
- CAMRA volunteers are a wonderful mix of people, of all ages, from all walks of life

If you are interested in joining CAMRA, all the relevant details can be found at <http://www.camra.org.uk>



Real Ale Pubs in the St Helens & Districts Area

Please Note, the list below is currently under construction/review due to some exciting new updates.

We hope to start bringing you a much more updated list in our next edition.

For more information about any of the pubs listed below, check out <https://camra.org.uk/pubs>

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Abbey Hotel | Grapes | Seven Stars Inn |
| Beer EnGin | Griffin Inn (Eccleston) | Ship Inn |
| Bottle & Glass | Hare & Hounds | Simms Road Inn |
| Brasserie Chalon | Haydock Reading Room | Skew Bridge Alehouse |
| Carr Mill Hotel | Junction (Rainford) | Stanley Arms |
| Clock Face - Prescot | Kirkfield Hotel | Star Inn |
| Coach & Horses | Lamb Inn | Stocks Tavern |
| Colliers Arms | Little George | Sun Inn |
| Commercial Hotel | Lymewood Farm | Tipsy Tap |
| Cowley Vaults | Manor Farm | Turks Head |
| Cricketers Arms | Masons Arms | Watch Maker |
| Deane's House | Nelson | Wellington |
| Derby Arms - Knowsley | Nine Arches | West Park RFC |
| Derby Arms - Rainford | Oak Tree Inn | Woodlands |
| Eagle & Child | Pied Bull Hotel | |
| Eccleston Arms | Railway Hotel | |
| Firkin | Rainford Labour Club | |
| George | Rainhill Recreation Club | |
| Gerard Arms | Red Cat | |
| Glass Horse | Red Lion | |
| Glass House | Reform Club | |
| Golden Lion | Sefton | |