

# IRON BREW

MAGAZINE OF SCUNTHORPE & DISTRICT CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

FEBRUARY – APRIL 2026



**IN THIS ISSUE:** Craft Beer Connoisseur: Abstinence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder; Christmas Pub Crawl of Sheffield; Branch Christmas Party; Pub & Brewery News; Doncaster Brewery & Tap Imperial Stout Festival; Golden Pints 2025; Independents Challenge Guinness Dominance ... and much more!

## CHAIRMAN'S CHAT



Welcome to this Winter edition of our branch magazine Iron Brew. We trust you had a jolly Christmas and New Year.

We start the year with the news that the hospitality industry was up in arms about the tax changes in the last budget, particularly business rates which could see pubs paying much more of these in years to come. Some pubs had banned Labour MPs from their establishments in protest.

To the layman pub tax issues are of brain numbing complexity, but in essence the Government was persuaded to do a u-turn, hopefully saving many pubs from closure in the coming year due to escalating costs.

Now the Government has seen sense we trust it will offer the industry tax rates that it can afford, otherwise you and I may find that we have fewer pubs to visit and higher prices for food and drinks when we get there as the increased

costs for pubs are inevitably passed on to the consumer .

## CRAFT BEER CONNOISSEUR ABSTINENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER



News has reached me (I'd like to claim it was the jungle telegraph, but in reality it was the internet), that brewing behemoth AB InBev has opened a "de-alcoholisation facility" at its brewery in Magor, South Wales. The plant produces more than 1bn pints of Budweiser, Corona and Stella Artois each year and you might think "Well there's not much alcohol in them anyway", but the new unit will reduce the alcohol even further to produce no-alcohol versions of their brands. The process extracts alcohol from beer using vacuum distillation and

involves reducing the atmospheric pressure inside stainless steel columns, lowering alcohol's boiling point and allowing the beer to be heated to a warm temperature to retain taste while evaporating the alcohol. By avoiding prolonged exposure to high temperatures, the original character of the beer is maintained as much as possible while ensuring it's alcohol-free. AB InBev now has 29 no-alcohol beer brands in its portfolio.

So what's going on? AB InBev say de-alcoholisation has become a central element of its brewing strategy as moderation trends reshape beer consumption patterns in the UK and elsewhere. According to the company's last quarterly update the brewer said its zero-alcohol beers produced a 27% increase in global revenue, so it's not small beer – well it is in one stylistic sense, but not when it comes to global sales! I think this movement towards low and no-alcohol beers can be traced back to the last Conservative Government who revised alcohol duty rates and brought in a significantly lower rate of duty for low strength beers brewed up to 3.4% ABV. Although brewers such as Heineken, who recently reduced the

strength of Fosters Lager from 3.7% to 3.4%, say that this is due to the drinking public demanding lower strength beers, in reality the underlying reason is the enormous saving in beer duty.

Some might say The Government of the time were unduly influenced by the alcohol reduction lobby, but it seems that this has ushered in a demand for lower consumption of alcohol.



The average weekly intake of alcohol consumed by UK adults is now down to 10.2 drinks per week (figures from 2024), a reduction of more than a quarter from the peak of 14 alcoholic drinks per week recorded 20 years ago. Lower consumption is particularly prevalent among younger drinkers where the phenomenon of "zebra-striping" has

been widely reported, which comprises alternating between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks on a night out. And this is despite many studies indicating health and social benefits from moderate alcohol consumption, particularly in the controlled environment of the pub. If you then throw into the mix all the “Dry January” initiatives that appear like clockwork at this time of year, it’s a wonder that the average drinker like me just doesn’t go teetotal altogether! I consider Dry January and all the other New Year initiatives to reduce alcohol consumption part of an insidious, ongoing campaign to stop people drinking alcoholic beverages altogether (or am I just being paranoid)?

The popularity of low alcohol beers has fundamentally reshaped the market. At one time the British beer market was dominated by session beers in the 3.6 – 4.0% strength range. Since the duty cut was introduced this sector has almost been wiped out, at least on the keg side, where Carlsberg, Fosters, John Smiths, Worthington, Boddingtons and Tetley have all had their alcoholic strength reduced. It’s (fortunately) less pronounced on

the cask beer side of things, with most leading brands in the 4% plus segment, although many brewers are now producing additional 3.4% “session beers” to meet demand. While it’s perfectly possible to produce lower strength beers which still have taste, it has to be remembered that the alcohol content is a vital element in the flavour make-up of beer, adding body, warmth, richness and sweetness. Making wholesale downward changes to the alcohol content of an existing beer is likely to change the beer’s character in a negative way and you will probably end up with a forgettable, lacklustre beer that generates zero enthusiasm with the drinker.

And how does this leave the craft beer sector? Well, they too are adopting some 3.4% beers because the duty saving is so significant it can’t be ignored if you want to stay in business. However many have already tried their hand at Table Beers, a long forgotten trend to brew weaker beers to accompany lunch (when the consumption of alcohol in the middle of the day was not regarded as taboo). Kernel Brewery of London for example, produce a very acceptable

Table Beer of around 3% ABV and other craft brewers have done the same, so developing a flavoursome beer of 3.4% is not that much of a stretch for them.

Fortunately there still seems to be a big demand for the stronger outpourings of the craft movement, so IPA’s, DIPA’s and Imperial Stouts don’t look as though they’ll disappear any time soon.

I’ve tried a few low and no-alcohol beers myself (usually when it’s my turn to be the designated driver) and have had mixed experiences with them. It pains me a little to say that despite the best efforts of the craft beer fraternity, most of those I’ve tried have been poor imitations of the real thing and the one that gets closest to its alcoholic sibling is Guinness Zero, where you’d be hard pressed to know you weren’t drinking real Guinness. Having said that most low alcohol beers are better than Kaliber, an early example of an alcohol free lager, a fairly dislikeable chemical brew from



the 80’s, which you drank extremely reluctantly and only if you absolutely had to!

It looks like, given society’s current obsession with health issues, low and no-alcohol beers will be with us for some time. In my view they’ll always be inferior products compared to normal alcoholic beers and I personally won’t be introducing them into my drinking regime any time soon. I do acknowledge though that for some people low and no-alcohol beers are an important part of their lifestyle. Brewers are savvy enough to realise that there is a big demand for these kinds of beers and for that reason it makes economic sense to supply low or no-alcohol beers that satisfy that demand.

Until next time, enjoy your beers!

A BEERGEEK

This article used information from the following, with thanks:

<https://theguardian.com>  
<https://pubcurmudgeon.blogspot.com>

POSTSCRIPT

More on this topic can be had for the price of a pint in my local pub *The Hanging Bat*, where I reside most lunchtimes while enjoying their excellent beers. That’s me in the

corner grappling with that day's newspaper crossword or in simple contemplation of the universe. Late last year I managed to wangle my way on to the local CAMRA groups Christmas pub crawl of Kelham Island pubs and what a splendid day out it was. Big Sid wanted to go but was duty bound to accompany his wife on a Christmas shopping trip to Meadowhall (or *Meadow-hell* as it's fondly known at Christmastime). He had a noticeable hangdog expression when he realised he'd be in Sheffield at the same time as us, but not in the pubs, which was quite touching. Ah well Sid, get your Christmas shopping excuses in early next year so you can go on the festive CAMRA pub crawl! There's a good reason why Sheffield is regarded as the cask beer capital of England (beer drinking residents of Manchester, Bristol, Newcastle and Norwich etc, start writing your letters of complaint now) and every pub we visited in the Kelham Island area of the city seemed to have at least eight or nine handpumps. Some great beers were sampled such as the Neepsend Thanatos Export Stout (5.8% ABV) at the Wellington, the Five Towns Dance Like John Travolta (7%), a peach

flavoured Belgian style Tripel at Shakespeare's (which triggered some very brief, but inadvisable Bee Gees falsetto singing and faux Saturday Night Fever dance moves – it was quite late in the day at this juncture!) and most surprising of all, Thomas Hardy's Ale (11.2%), on handpump in the Harlequin and the Crow Inn.

I sensibly (I thought), tried just a third of the latter, which came in its own branded balloon glass and was as syrupy, sweet and delicious as you might expect.



Allegedly a regular punter in the Harlequin thought it was a good idea to drink pints of Thomas Hardy's Ale one night and had to be bundled into a taxi to get him home following last orders. Surely he must have realised at some point that drinking lots of an 11.2% draught beer will

almost certainly addle your brain and turn your legs to pipe cleaners? Anyway, a great day out as I said and many thanks to the local branch for allowing me to accompany them. Maybe there'll be more trips like this in the months ahead? I hope so!

## **CHRISTMAS PUB CRAWL OF SHEFFIELD**

### **BRANCH FESTIVE DAY OUT**

For this year's branch Christmas pub crawl we decided to go for a banker in the guise of a tour of the pubs in the Kelham Island area of Sheffield. We planned a route taking in seven of these (including the Tap at Sheffield Station), and on a fine, chilly December morning, ten of us, clad in our most garish Christmas jumpers, set off by diesel locomotive for the fair city of Sheffield. Could we do it or would time or insobriety be our undoing? Once at Sheffield Station we headed for the Station Tap, which was busy with commuters but had on some choice beers. After a couple of halves the majority of the group caught the Supertram to Shalesmoor, while others opted to walk to Kelham Island via the city centre.



Once there we met up in the nearby Wellington, a fine, traditional pub featuring local Neepsend beers.

A great range of their cask and keg beers was on offer, supplemented by some good value rolls which we eagerly purchased to accompany our drinks. One of my favourite pubs of the day!

Next we made the short walk to the Fat Cat on Alma Street, no longer selling Pale Rider since the Kelham Island brewery closed a few years ago, but offering a good range of unusual cask beers just the same. Again quite busy in and around the small bar, but we managed to find seating in another room to enjoy a swift couple of halves.

On then to the Harlequin a five minute walk away across the River Don. This is a much improved pub since being taken over by the people running the Rutland Arms (and the Crow Inn) in Sheffield.



We were able to get everyone seated at a long table near the bar and partook of an excellent range of cask beers. These included ales from Abbeydale, Red Willow and others. We were also joined here by Chris, Graham and Ian who had travelled to Sheffield on a later train. Next we retraced our steps and headed back towards the Kelham Island Tavern, a cracking pub which has twice been voted CAMRA's National Pub of the Year. Another great line up of rare and unusual cask beers were on the bar, coupled with some very tasty pork pies to ward off hunger pangs. After a lengthy stop here, we had a short walk to our next pub, Shakespeare's. This is a famous Sheffield alehouse, now under new management, but still having a decent range of cask and keg beers and a great atmosphere. A small group of us also became unduly fascinated by an impressive wall-mounted blackboard listing all the

many single malt whiskies they had available!



All too soon it was time to move on to the last pub on our crawl, the Crow Inn, a short uphill walk from Shakespeare's. By now it was early evening and the Crow was very busy with people leaving work. In the ensuing melee we struggled to get everyone seated around the last remaining table and ended up squashed in like sardines. We did at least manage to sample an excellent porter from North Riding Brewery to finish. Extricating ourselves from the crowd, we made it back to the station on foot for a last half at the Station Tap before returning to Scunthorpe. So we *did* manage all seven pubs on what was a very enjoyable day out. It will be hard to top this in 2026, but we'll do our best! Thanks to all who came along on the crawl and to Steve for the organisation on the day.

**MARK ELSOME**

## BRANCH CHRISTMAS PARTY THE HOP INN, BRIGG

A few days after the Christmas Pub Crawl, we gathered one midweek evening at the Hop Inn in Brigg for the Branch Christmas Party. The pub generously allowed us to use two of their rooms at the back and we managed to get everyone seated in one room or the other.

We reverted to our well known (at least to us) "Christmas Party Plan" where we assembled a DIY cold buffet, had a Christmas quiz and a raffle, plus some delicious Hop Inn craft beers. And once again Christmas jumpers and hats were to the fore!

The buffet consisted of food brought by those attending and its main components were bread, sausage rolls, pork pies, pate, dips, mince pies and savoury snacks - a veritable feast! Many thanks to all those who brought along food items.

The Christmas quiz set by the Branch Chairman was considered to be "challenging" this year by some and resulted in a few furrowed brows while trying to arrive at the answers, but was eventually won by Paul & Beverley who gained a pack of



Christmas craft beers for their efforts. The Christmas raffle was less

contentious and the prizes were shared around as it should be. These consisted of two beer gift packs, a mystery box (containing Belgian bottled beers) and a 2025 bottle of Fullers Vintage Ale. The Hop Inn also kindly donated a bottle of Don Valley



Atomic Blonde for a raffle prize. Beers on for the night included brews from

Northern Monk, Brass Castle, Tartarus and Vault City, which were all very tasty. By the time people started to leave to catch the last bus back to Scunthorpe it was time for last orders, which took us by surprise as we'd completely forgotten that the

pub shut at 9 pm on the night we were there!

Fortunately we'd begun the party when the pub opened at 5 pm, so had just about had our fill by the time last orders came around.

So, a very good night in the end, enjoyed by all. Thanks to everyone who came along to this Christmas celebration and for your good company. Thanks also to Andrew at the Hop Inn for allowing us to use part of his premises for the party.

**MARK ELSOME**

## PUB & BREWERY NEWS

**Moor Brewery** of Bristol has been bought by Callum Bickers and Bruce Gray of another Bristol Brewery **Left Handed Giant**.

This was to save Moor going into administration following owner Justin Hawke stepping away from the brewery after posting some inadvisable comments online about the situation in Gaza. This triggered a boycott of Moor products in Bristol and beyond. Moor Brewery also has a taproom and shop in Bermondsey, London.

**BOAK & BAILEY/BEER TODAY**

<https://boakandbailey.com>



The **Powder Monkey Group** has acquired **Maxim Brewery** in Sunderland. Following its purchase of Castle Eden Brewery earlier this year, Powder Monkey Group has reinforced its capacity in the North East with this acquisition.



This takes the Powder Monkey Group to five key brands across the UK, with a physical presence in the South, Midlands, and North East. The group also owns four breweries in Australia, and is pouring in Hong Kong and Gibraltar. Maxim Brewery was formed following the closure of **Vaux Breweries** in 1999. Its major brands

include Double Maxim, Samson, Lambtons, Swedish Blonde, and other seasonals from the Houghton Le Spring brewery.

**BEER TODAY**

<https://beertoday.co.uk>

The **White Swan** in Barton-upon-Humber had this impressive line-up of cask beers available over the Christmas period:



On the bar were beers from Batemans, Docks Beers, Horncastle and Pennine. Well worth a visit!



Scoundrel, a 4.2% ABV stout, is the latest addition to **Rooster's** core range. A blend of brown and chocolate malts and roasted barley combines with English Admiral hops to create roasted malt and chocolate

flavours, leading to a balanced hop bitterness.

The Indie Beer Symbol, developed by the **Society of Independent Brewers and Associates (SIBA)**, is to be displayed across the **CAMRA** website.



It will highlight which breweries are independent and which pubs serve independent beer.

Research commissioned by SIBA found that three-quarters of people feel the marketing of previously independent brands that are now in the ownership of global brewers is misleading. To address this, the campaign offers a simple brewery checker tool and an 'assured' mark that independent brewers can display.

Faith Unwind is a 0.3% ABV hazy pale ale from **Northern Monk**. It maintains a soft hoppiness to sit alongside the floral, citrusy, tea-like



notes of lemon balm, passionflower, chamomile, and Valerian root.



**Brew York** has produced an unusual 3.5% ABV table porter.

**Teleporter** offers rich, roasty flavours, with layers of coffee and dark chocolate, all wrapped up in a smooth, lingering finish. “It’s a beer that’s light in strength, but boldly goes on flavour,” says the Brew York brewer of the sci-fi-inspired beer.

#### BEER TODAY

**Molson Coors** is set to go head-to-head with Diaego and **Guinness** with the launch of **Caffrey’s Black Stout**. This “new stout crafted to meet growing consumer demand” offers a “distinct and balanced flavour profile” at what is claimed will be an accessible price. The launch followed the news that Diaego is increasing the price of Guinness to the on-trade by at least



5.2%. The new beer is set to tap into the growing demand that Guinness has generated in this category.

*Looks like Molson Coors missed a trick here by brewing this new stout at a duty busting 3.4% ABV rather than competing with Guinness on an equal footing at its normal strength of 4.1% - Ed.*

#### MORNING ADVERTISER

<https://morningadvertiser.co.uk>

#### THE PUB CURMUDGEON PASSING OF WELL KNOWN BLOGGER



Sad news has reached us that Peter Edwardson, AKA the Pub Curmudgeon, has died. I didn’t know him

personally, but liked and admired his Pub Curmudgeon blog, even when I didn’t always agree with his sentiments (he was on the right

politically).

He blogged incisively on the beer scene in his native north-west and on national and global issues. His writing was often a springboard for subjects in Iron Brew and he had many acknowledgements in our magazine e.g. the current Craft Beer Connoisseur’s feature was partially inspired by his last blog (November 2025) entitled “Watering the Workers’ Beer”.

Bloggers Boak & Bailey thought that with almost 20 years of posts in his blog it was a valuable resource and hoped that it could be preserved in some way.

#### MARK ELSOME

#### GOLDEN PINTS

#### THE BRANCH COMMITTEE (AND ONE OTHER) SELECT THEIR BEST BEERS AND PUBS FROM 2025



proper beer writers often pick their

If you trawl the beery depths of the internet like I do, you might be aware that early in the New Year

favourite beers, pubs and other beery ephemera from the previous year – often under the moniker of *Golden Pints* or alternatively *The Year in Beer* if they think that title has become too twee.

I thought it would be interesting if the Branch Committee selected their own Golden Pints from 2025 and so here they are (note that we’ve restricted these to four selections each so that the lists don’t get excessively long or become too trivial to care about):

#### MARK ELSOME, BRANCH CHAIRMAN

#### BEST CASK BEER:

**Three Acre, Skylark Stout 4.6% ABV**

A surprise appearance of this Sussex beer at the Malt Shovel meant that I got to try this smooth, dark stout with a subtle coffee-cocoa backbone. A great cask beer and never bettered during 2025.

#### BEST CRAFT KEG:

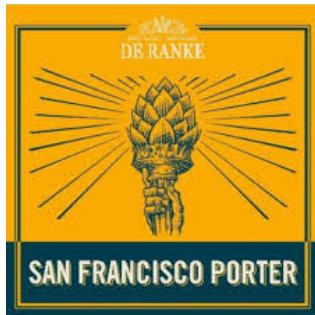
**Verdant Lightbulb 4.5%**

I was able to sample Verdant Lightbulb extra pale ale on a family holiday to Falmouth and at the 5<sup>th</sup> St Peter’s Beer Festival. On each occasion it was as fresh, crisp and hoppy as could be expected and a real treat to drink.

## **BEST BOTTLED OR CANNED BEER:**

### **De Ranke, San Francisco Porter**

**5.5%**



I bought this superb bottled beer at the Pig's Ear Beer Festival

in London in December. Belgian brewing expertise was responsible for this delicious beer with chocolate and liquorice notes allied to assertive American hops – a brilliant combination!

## **BEST PUB:**

### **The Wellington, Sheffield**

I loved this traditionally styled pub located next to the Shalesmoor tram stop in Sheffield when we visited on the branch Christmas crawl. A great range of locally brewed Neepsend beers on the bar, a friendly welcome and the best value meat and cheese rolls known to man! What's not to like?

## **NEIL PATCHETT, BRANCH**

### **TREASURER**

## **BEST CASK BEER**

### **Thornbridge Kipling 5.2%**

This pale ale sampled at the Malt

Shovel is not brewed regularly and is now more of a seasonal offering. Still tastes like the first time I tried it which is unusual nowadays when breweries like to brew something and then either never brew it again or add flavours into it! Nelson Sauvin hops with a Maris Otter malt base; a timeless classic!

## **BEST CRAFT KEG:**

### **Verdant Putty (2025) 8%**

This year's offering of Putty Double IPA (DIPA) at the Hop Inn, Brigg, was the usual high standard release hype juice from Verdant. Fruity and fluffy with the distinctive New England vibe. Not perfect - had a little hop burn and tasted a bit "green" but that's what you get buying the first batch on release day!

## **BEST BOTTLED OR CANNED BEER:**

### **Goose Island Bourbon County Brand Stout (2015) 14.3%**

This bottled imperial stout smelt of burnt oak, chocolates and vanilla and was thick and smooth. Not quite a glass killer but it needed rinsing multiple times to get rid of the remnants! Taste of toffee, caramel, more vanilla and smoke. Absolute treat!

## **BEST PUB:**

### **The Fargate, Sheffield**

Thornbridge Brewery's latest

opening is well worth a visit. Mostly Thornbridge beers, unsurprisingly, but they have about four guest kegs and about half a dozen guest cask. It does get very, very busy with it being in the city centre and new, so expect peak times to be standing room only!



Nice selection of cans and bottles, but be warned; they are very expensive! If you are after train beers better to plan ahead and visit the Hop Hideout in nearby Leah's Yard!

## **STEVE MARTIN, SOCIAL SECRETARY**

## **BEST CASK BEER:**

### **Timothy Taylor's Landlord 4.3%**

I have a clear recollection of how wonderful a pint of Landlord tasted at the Roscoe Head in Liverpool (Liverpool Pub of the Year 2024), which was one of several pubs

visited during a beer crawl of the city.

## **BEST PUB:**

### **The St. Peter's Tavern, Liverpool**

The weekend in Liverpool included my favourite pub of the year – the St. Peter's Tavern – a fantastic converted church which was voted the Best Newcomer Pub of the Year 2025 by Liverpool CAMRA. On the day we arrived it had twelve real ales available. Could easily have stayed there for hours.

## **BEST BOTTLED OR CANNED BEER:**

### **Adnams Ghost Ship 0.5**

On Christmas Day I was the designated driver, so it was an alcohol free day. As a result I had several zero/low alcohol drinks. My favourite was a very tasty bottle of Adnams Ghost Ship (0.5).

## **CRAFT BEER CONNOISSEUR, IRON BREW FEATURE WRITER**

Hello there – your favourite craft beer geek here! The Branch Chairman has allowed me to select my Golden Pints for 2025, even though I'm not a member of his esteemed branch committee, so many thanks for that. Here are my choices:

## **BEST CASK BEER:**

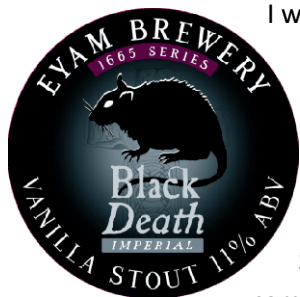
### **Kernel Brown Ale 5.4%**

Kernel Brewery of London is one of the UK's leading breweries in my opinion. They're best known for craft keg beers, but at the recent Pig's Ear Beer Festival in Hackney, they had this beauty available in cask.

A hoppy brown ale in the modern style, it uses a small amount of smoked malt to give it a touch of bonfire in the taste, allied to toasty, caramel notes and a lingering light citrus flavour from American hops. A superb beer!

#### **BEST CRAFT KEG:**

**Eyam Black Death 7.0%**



I was as surprised as anyone when the good people at St Peter's came up with

this imperial stout at their beer festival last year. This was a delicious, strong stout with loads of chocolate flavour and a hint of sweetness from added vanilla. And as a keykeg beer it was classed as a real ale. Win, win!

#### **BEST BOTTLED OR CANNED BEER:**

**Buxton Wyoming Sheep Ranch 8.4%**

I picked up this West Coast DIPA in my local Tescos of all places and what a great beer it was, even though it sounds like the title of a big screen western!

I'll let Buxton sum up its many qualities: "There's nothing sheepish about this big, bold double IPA.

Fresh and piney, with a bitterness that'll butt you into the next valley!" I couldn't have said it better myself (in fact I didn't).

#### **BEST PUB:**

**Tamworth Tap, Tamworth**

I'm fortunate that in my travels last year I was able to visit this fine pub on more than one occasion. A holder of CAMRA's National Pub of the Year award, this town centre hostelry is inevitably busy, but always welcoming.

It has a fine array of cask and keg beers including the great Batham's Bitter on handpump and a wide range of savoury snacks to keep hunger at bay. If that wasn't enough it has its own on-site brewery with at least one of its own beers on the bar at most times. Definitely worth another visit in 2026!

Well that's it for Golden Pints from us for this year. Why not compile your own Golden Pints list for 2025?

A good way to spend half an hour thinking about beer!

## **CHRISTMAS BEER SEARCH 2025**

### **ONE MAN'S SEARCH FOR FESTIVE BREWS**

The search for my 2025 Christmas beers got off to an early start this year, with a trip into North Yorkshire in early October. Knowing from previous visits to Ripon, a small Aladdin's Cave of whisky, wine and local beers was situated just off their market place, so a visit was well worthwhile.

First up was **Pennine Brewery**, based in Bedale, with a bottle of **Palinka Plumb and Brandy Porter** at 4.4% ABV. Several other local ales were also picked up, then I spotted several boxes marked Sam Smiths limited edition! Talking to the shop



owner he informed me it was a new delivery of the famous **Sam Smith's Winter Ale**

for 2025. At 6% and not often seen I

finished shopping with this gem. The Ripon trip then extended up to the **Black Sheep Brewery** in Masham where they had bottles of their Christmas ales on sale! Their old favourite, **Blitzen**, described as a 4% festive ruby ale, was joined with a 3.7% winter pale ale under the name of **Snowflake**. A good start to my Christmas beer shopping!

Later in the month a few days were spent at Alnwick in Northumberland. A visit to the Alnwick Brewery produced no Christmas ales but a nice selection of their regular ales. The following day was Alnwick market day, where another local brewery had a fine section of local ales. Starting with a **Muckle Brewery** winter ale called **Muckle Berry** at 4.5%. Next was another offering from a small brewery called **Hexhamshire**. This was described as a strong Christmas ale at 5.5% called **Old Humbug**. As with the Ripon visit, several other interesting bottles were added to my shopping list.

As Christmas got closer, several other Christmas ales began to appear in supermarkets and smaller outlets around our local

area. Regular Christmas beers, **Santa's Reinbeer**, a 4.3% bitter from **Robinsons Brewery**, **Greene King's Rocking Rudolph**, a 4.2% malty ale and **Bateman's Rosey Nosey**, another ruby ale at 4.7%, were all added to the collection. Sainsbury's offer regular seasonal ales, this time brewed by **Hall and Woodhouse (Badger Brewery)**. The Christmas one appeared as a **Winter Porter** at 5% described as a dark fruit winter spice ale. A second one called **Winter Warmer**, also 5%, stating it was fruity and malty. A regular seasonal beer from Marks and Spencer, brewed by **Adnams** of Southwold, is a fruity winter ale at 4.2%. A trip over to Lincoln also provided some interesting local beers. An 8% Belgium style Christmas ale from **Heckington's 8 Sail Brewery** in a 330ml bottle is a new offering. **Beer Humbug** a 4.2% dark Christmas ale from the **Pheasantry Brewery** has appeared in previous years. Another new addition from the **Hogs Back Brewery** at 4.2% is a deep amber Christmas ale called **Mistletoe and Swine** while the old favourite Christmas ale from **Saltaire Brewery** called **White Christmas**, a citrus and spice festive pale at 4.8%,

were both added to the ever increasing collection. Finishing off this year's Christmas selection were four festive ales in cans. Now a regular Christmas beer from **Brewdog** is their 6% **Hoppy Christmas**. A new festive ale came from Marks and Spencers, brewed by **Adnams Brewery**, named **Spruce Tip Pale Ale** at 4.8% and described as having hints of spruce and lemon. Sounds interesting!



The **Love Lane Brewery** in Liverpool offered **Santa's Big Red IPA**, a 5% red, hoppy ale and finally for the sour beer lovers, **Vault City** of Edinburgh produced a 6% cloudy **Winter Berry Crumble** sour. In my opinion an excellent cross section of all beer types this year, something to suit everyone!

**KEITH DIXON**



## BRANCH TRIP TO DONCASTER BREWERY & TAP

### ANNUAL IMPERIAL STOUT FESTIVAL

For the third year running we had a branch trip on a chilly Saturday in January to Doncaster Brewery & Tap's Imperial Stout Festival. The Tap was featuring five imperial stouts throughout the month, as well as other types of craft keg beers.

On arrival at Doncaster Station our initial plan for a swift half in the Draughtsman's Alehouse was scuppered when we were told they weren't opening until the following Monday. We then had little choice but to head to the Tap straight away. We duly pitched up there just as the doors were opening at noon and quickly made our way upstairs to the Dystopia Room where the stouts were located.

Once seated we started our sampling of the stouts, albeit in third of a pint measures due to the strengths of 10% ABV or more (and cost) of the beers.

All of the stouts were excellent – there were also a couple of IPA's and a Belgian Lambic-style beer to choose from. Among my favourites



were Sureshot's Beware Oblivion is at Hand (11% ABV), Silent First Birthday Imperial Stout (11%) and Bang the Elephant's Mr Ambassador (12.3%). All of the beers were excellent and enjoyed by everyone in our group.

The upstairs Dystopia space was quick to fill up after we got there as there was a Doncaster Rovers FA Cup tie that afternoon, but come kick off time the room almost emptied.

One slight gripe was that as the beers went off (about three while we were there), they weren't replaced and so we had a diminishing choice as the afternoon progressed. We did think about moving downstairs to the ground floor bar where there was an interesting selection of Doncaster Brewery beers, but by this time an acoustic music event was in full swing and there was no room to sit.



We decided to move on and walked the short distance to the Queen Craffhouse & Kitchen in the Doncaster market area. Here they had a good selection of real ales and craft beers. Some opted for a raspberry profiterole sour beer from Vault City and others went for the Polly's Walnut Whip Cream Stout, both excellent.

After another half we walked the short distance to the Little Plough, a traditional pub which is one of our favourites when in Doncaster. They had four handpulled beers on the bar including ales from Wensleydale and Acorn. After a couple more halves and pausing only for a group photo at one of the Snowmen figures that were dotted around the town centre, it was time to make our way back to the station and the journey home.

A very enjoyable day out, with

thanks to those who came along on the trip for their good company. Thanks also to Ian, Alison and Robin at the Tap for organising another excellent stout event.



#### MARK ELSOME

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

#### Chesterfield CAMRA Winter Beer Festival

Friday 6 – Saturday 7 February  
The Winding Wheel, 13 Holywell Street, Chesterfield S41 7SA  
12 – 5pm, 6-11pm Fri & Sat  
Free Advance Tickets (small glass charge) from:

<https://chesterfield.camra.org.uk/>

#### Bradford Beer & Cider Festival

Thursday 26 – Saturday 28 February  
Victoria Hall, Victoria Road, Shipley BD18 3JS  
Doors open 1130am each day

Advance tickets at:

<https://www.bradford.camra.org.uk>

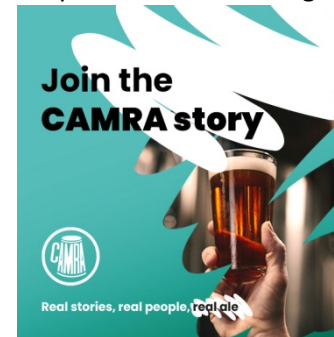
Tickets have to be purchased but beer tokens worth £5 or £7 are issued on entry. Some tickets may be available on the door, but entry is not guaranteed.

#### Crowle Beer & Cider Festival

Thursday 2 – Sat 4 April  
Victory Hall, Ealand  
Times TBC

### JOIN CAMRA

CAMRA membership is an annual subscription at the following rates:



**Single Membership** £34 annually

**Joint Membership** (two persons) £42 annually

**Gift Membership** (Treat a beer lover) £36 for an entire year

- Benefits include: £30 worth of CAMRA real ale vouchers for single membership; £40 for joint members

- Beer Discounts: Discounts on selected real ale, cider and perry in participating pubs
- Beer Festival Entry: Free entry to over 130 UK CAMRA festivals
- CAMRA Books & Merchandise Discounts: Offers on books, clothes & more  
More details at: <https://camra.org.uk>

### INDEPENDENTS CHALLENGE GUINNESS'S DOMINANCE SMALL BREWERS STEP UP STOUT INNOVATION

Following up on the news that Molson Coors has launched Caffrey's Black Stout in direct competition to Guinness, independent breweries are ramping up investment in nitro stouts as demand for dark beer continues to surge.

Guinness remains the dominant force in the stout category, supported by Diageo's multibillion pound marketing and a renewed following among younger drinkers. The rising popularity of stouts has opened the door to challenger brands and a wave of independents

are now producing nitrogenated and other beers to meet demand for creamier, smoother, dark styles. Among these is Anspach & Hobday's London Black nitro porter, which now accounts for around 70% of the brewery's production.



The brewery claim they are not trying to replicate Guinness. Rather their focus is on London heritage and a more complex flavour profile. Larger brewers are also investing in the style with Shepherd Neame's Iron Wharf, Ossett's Barghest and the return of Murphy's from Heineken returning to UK bars. While Guinness's sales remain unmatched, smaller brewers see an opportunity to broaden the stout category. Keith Bott of Titanic Brewery said the challenge is convincing drinkers to try an alternative saying, "It's an opportunity to try something that pours like Guinness but has a completely different flavour profile".

As one of the UK's most enduring beer styles continues its resurgence, stout's momentum appears far from seasonal and both large and small brewers are benefitting from the sustained trend in the on-trade.

#### MORNING ADVERTISER



Well that's about it for this first Iron Brew of the New Year. Thanks for reading. It just remains for me to say ... oh hang on, the Craft Beer Connoisseur has just popped his head round the door and seems to want to impart some late beer knowledge to me (annoyingly he always seems to do that just as I'm wrapping up the latest Iron Brew)! OK, what is it CBC? Did I know that Brewdog were participating in a "social fitness" scheme in their pubs to promote wellness? This is a programme of social gaming-led experiences, which includes a darts quiz, shuffleboard and beer pong (showcasing Mello, a new non-alcoholic beer), which launched at BrewDog Waterloo in London in January and will be rolled out across selected BrewDog venues\*. No, I must say I didn't, but any

initiative to promote socialising as part of a healthy lifestyle gets the thumbs up from me. Some good news from Brewdog for a change and a much better idea than wrapping bottles of their beer in dead squirrels!

Oh and did I tell you that I'm planning a beer trip to Brussels in the spring and Brewdog have one of their pubs in the city. I might just pop in for a glass of Elvis Juice while I'm there. They have 40 taps! What's that CBC – you wouldn't venture into a Brewdog bar at any price? A bit harsh, but that's your prerogative! I like to support UK breweries abroad whenever I can and I shall be looking out for Spanish Guinness on my summer hols. Thanks for bringing that bit of social news to my attention; it was both interesting and worthwhile. Have you got time for a pint at the *Hanging Bat*? Thought so, but it's your round! Until next time - Ed.

**\* BEER TODAY**

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