

Promoting the Pub

1. Promoting the Pub - Why do we need to do it?

- 1.1 The British pub is a unique institution; although most other countries have alcohol outlets of some kind, none of them offer the combination of social drinking, tolerance, conviviality and atmosphere you find in the traditional pubs of this nation. Nor, of course, are you very likely to find hand pumped real ale outside these islands. Drinking proper beer at a beer festival or at home is all fine and dandy but few would disagree that the best place to savour a pint is in a good pub.
- 1.2 The bad news is that there are increasingly fewer pubs to enjoy for those of us who love them. CAMRA's own surveys suggest we are losing them at the rate of 16 a month and the suspicion is that this may be an under-estimate. The total number of licensed premises has remained fairly steady but only because of the increase in town and city centre café-bars, restaurants and other non-traditional (and largely real ale free) outlets.
- 1.3 Pubs are, of course, businesses; the reason they close is that the owners are either not making enough money or feel they can make more money if the building was used for another purpose. It's therefore in the interests of pub-lovers for pubs to be well-used and profitable – which is why CAMRA sees the promotion of pub-going as so vitally important. We need to convince more people to visit more pubs more often; to do that, we need to persuade those who rarely or never visit pubs that they are missing out on one of the great pleasures of life.

2. Community Pubs Month

- 2.1 CAMRA first launched National Pubs Week in 2003 but it has now been refocused as Community Pubs Month.

The campaign aims to:

- raise the profile and importance of pubs in the community
- encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to use community pubs and visit pubs more regularly

encourage pubs to organise events during the week to attract more trade.

- 2.2 The first Monday of the month is designated Community Pubs Day and sees the launch of the campaign. The national Press Office issues a number of stories to the media to raise awareness of the campaign and highlight the major issues facing pubs.
- 2.3 To help pubs promote their participation in Community Pubs Month, promotional packs are available from CAMRA HQ, comprising:
 - Introductory letter
 - Beer mats
 - Pump clip crowners
 - “Empty Belly” A4 posters to promote events

- Polo shirts/T-shirts
 - Leaflets and campaign posters
- 2.4 There is masses of material on the CAMRA website, including:
- ideas for campaigns which you could run during the month
 - how to encourage “non-active” members to take part
 - how to order promotional material
 - working with the media
 - encouraging pubs to participate and what they could do.
- 2.5 CAMRA HQ will assist Branches to achieve the campaign's objectives by:
- automatically sending packs to GBG pubs
 - compiling an on-line database showing which other pubs have ordered packs
 - offering Branches distribution support
 - encouraging large pub companies to participate and letting Branches have feedback
- 2.6 For more information, contact Tony Jerome on tony.jerome@camra.org.uk

3. Local Campaigning

- 3.1 As well as getting involved with Community Pubs Month, there are many other ways in which Branches can promote their local pubs and pub-going generally.
- 3.2 Branch Newsletters Most Branches publish a regular newsletter; these are great campaigning tools as they're often picked up and read by the casual pub-goer as well as the committed real-ale drinker. Articles which enthuse about pubs and highlight their attractions should encourage people to visit them. You can also draw attention to the amazing variety of pubs which exist in every area and demonstrate that there's “a pub for you” whatever your likes and dislikes. Newsletter articles shouldn't just concentrate on those relatively few pubs which are specifically targeted at the real ale drinker but should celebrate all good pubs. It's always worth remembering that the people you most want to reach are the general drinking public rather than fellow CAMRA members – so tailor your material accordingly.
- 3.3 Having produced your excellent newsletter, stuffed with positive pub stories, you want it to reach an audience beyond regular pub goers so look for outlets additional to pubs – libraries and Tourist Information Centres are particularly good if you want the “casual” reader to pick up your publication.
- 3.4 Pub of the Year/Season/Month Awards Giving awards to pubs serves a variety of purposes. Firstly, it rewards excellence and demonstrates a Branch's appreciation of a licensee's efforts in a very tangible way. Secondly, it should help raise standards; the hope will be that other licensees will aspire to reach those high standards. Thirdly, it's great for publicity. The media loves awards and you should have little problem getting your local newspapers and radio stations to feature stories on the winners, which again raises the profile of pubs

in the public eye. Fourthly, the award presentation offers an excellent opportunity for Branch members to have a good time!

- 3.5 How you choose the winners is less important than having the awards in the first place. Some Branches like to place special emphasis on pubs which have shown particular improvement over a period – but it's also important to ensure that pubs which are consistently excellent aren't overlooked for awards.
- 3.6 Following a workshop at the 2005 Members' Weeked, some guidance for Branches on selection methods for Pubs of the Year was produced and this is at Appendix 1; the advice is equally applicable to Pub of the Season and Pub of the Month awards.
- 3.7 You might feel that very regular awards, like Pub of the Month, could devalue your scheme and reduce the impact of what you're trying to do. However, it's a matter of degree. The Pub of the Month, for instance, might just merit an article in your newsletter and a quick press release whereas the Pub of the Year gets the full-blown high-profile presentation treatment. You'll soon find out what works.
- 3.8 You can also vary your awards from straight pub of the year/season/month. One Branch has instituted an annual Most Improved Pub award which has been very successful in acknowledging the efforts of licensees who have worked hard to turn tip into top.
- 3.9 CAMRA aren't the only folk who run pub award schemes. Local newspapers, Councils and bodies like ACRE (Action for Communities in Rural England) have been known to make awards. Often they'll invite local CAMRA Branches to take part but if not, offer your services – you're the experts after all! It's in our interest to help pubs which espouse our values to do well in such competitions. The All Party Parliamentary Beer Group also has awards which can be made by MPs who are members of the Group. If your local MP is a member, you could encourage them to do this – and it also offers a good opportunity to engage with them on pub and industry issues generally.
- 3.10 Local Pub Guides Pub Guides are a great way to promote your local pubs as they are likely to bring to the attention of drinkers pubs they haven't visited before and make them want to go there. A comprehensive pub guide is obviously a major undertaking for any Branch, requiring careful planning and a lot of commitment. However, there are alternatives to the traditional pub guide covering every outlet in an area. You could go for a guide which details only your best pubs with the rest just listed or described only briefly. You could have a guide which concentrates on a particular part of your Branch area. Several Branches have produced leaflets or booklets which guide people towards pubs on or close to train, bus or tram routes. Guidelines for the production of printed guides are located at www.camra.org.uk/localguides.html
- 3.11 Online Pub Guides Of course there is an alternative to producing printed local pub guides. Printed local pub guides have many disadvantages: they are costly to produce, and may not break even if the print run is too small; they are out of date before they are published and so they have a very limited "shelf life". Online pub guides have none of these disadvantages. There are typically zero costs to the branch, if either the online pub guide is published on an existing branch web site, or if one of the nationally supported branch pub databases is

used (PUBZILLA or SPILE). The online pub guide can be continually updated. Details of PUBZILLA and SPILE are located at <http://whatpub.com/download/camra-branch-pub-databases-and-online-pubguides>, and all three provide support for online pub guides.

- 3.12 If all or part of your area is popular with tourists, leaflets targeted especially at the visitor can be effective in tempting them to pop into one or more of your local pubs during their stay. You'll need to cover more than just the real ale aspect of course – food and, particularly, stories and historic elements attached to pubs will have a good impact. One Branch has a town much visited by Japanese tourists and so had their leaflet translated into Japanese – they even went so far as handing them out to these visitors on the street!
- 3.13 PubTrails/Passport Schemes An advantage which CAMRA branches have over the general drinking public is a much wider knowledge of the pubs in particular areas. We're in an excellent position therefore to recommend pubs especially worthy of a visit and can put those recommendations together in the form of trails or crawls. This proved to be a popular aspect of National Pubs Week (now Community Pubs Week) with many Branches lodging suggested crawls on the CAMRA website. Trails can also be publicised within Branch newsletters and websites. You might also want to compile themed trails e.g. pubs with interiors of historic or architectural interest or pubs selling micro-brewery beers.
- 3.14 Pub passport schemes take the trail idea a stage further by offering a reward (typically a T-shirt or tankard) to people who visit each pub within a given period. They work well in conjunction with specific campaigns, notably Mild Week in May, when several Branches organise very successful trails of pubs in the area offering such dark delights. It needs a bit more organisation (producing passports and stamps) and, obviously, liaison with the pubs concerned. You might be able to get sponsorship from local breweries and other businesses.
- 3.15 Beer Festivals Our own Beer Festivals often represent a lost opportunity when it comes to campaigning. Here we have a captive audience, interested in real ale, often with a bit of time on their hands. Providing them with interesting displays to look at can both enhance the festival-going experience for them and help us get our messages across. Displays centred on pub campaigning should be relatively easy to put together given the wealth of material produced centrally.
- 3.16 The Pub Heritage Group has a set of display stands packed with beautifully illustrated information on Britain's Real Heritage Pubs which can be loaned to Festivals.
- 3.17 The Beer Festival Programme could have features on local pubs – where to go during the afternoon when the Festival is closed, for instance.
- 3.18 Websites Branch websites are an obvious place to present lots of information about the pubs in your area. If you find compiling or updating a local Pub Guide a forbidding prospect then you can use the website to convey what information you do have on local pubs and recommended outlets. You can also feature pub trails, highlight any pubs of historic or architectural interest within your area, and list the branch's LocAle pubs.

3.19 Other Methods

- *Pub Beer Festivals.* Not only can these be a nice little earner for hard-pressed licensees, they are also an excellent way to raise the pub's profile in the area and attract people along who might never have been there before. Some licensees may be hesitant about a new venture like this so the local CAMRA Branch, invariably replete with Beer Festival expertise, can hold their hands. We should also sow the seeds of the Festival idea in the minds of licensees.
- *Press Releases.* Today's media is increasingly dependent on being "fed" by external sources; the chances of a pub-related press release being picked up by newspapers and radio is pretty good.
- *Newspapers.* Journalists and beer have a long history of companionship and it's unusual for a local paper not to have at least one writer who is favourably inclined to what CAMRA is about. Identifying and cultivating that person can be very valuable – a letter to the Editor is one way to start, on the assumption that it will be passed on to the "simpatico". Once a relationship is established you can suggest they run regular pub features, awards, whatever.
- *And Others.* Similarly, if you can find contacts at local radio stations and local Councils (especially the Tourist and Community Development people) then mutual back-scratching should follow.
- *Welcome Pack for Licensees.* We want to help licensees to help themselves albeit avoiding at all costs any hint of "we know how to run your business better than you do". We need to let publicans know how we can assist them to promote what they're doing, publicise new developments and so on. Some Branches present new licensees with a pack which sets all this out, along with other information about CAMRA. Can be the start of a beautiful friendship.
- *LocAle.* The LocAle movement is gathering force and capturing the public imagination as it taps into the green zeitgeist. Here's another angle we can use to promote our pubs by highlighting those which offer locally brewed beers (and the publicity might encourage others to do likewise).
- *Meet the Brewer.* Micro-brewers are by their very nature enthusiasts and generally more than happy to rabbit on about their ales and share their delights with others. Encourage your pubs to get them along for a "Meet the Brewer" evening. As well as promoting local beers, the event should also attract non-regulars who might become regulars.
- *Other Events.* Many pubs are very good at putting on special evenings in order to tempt people away from the couch. We can offer our help, with campaigning spin-offs too. For instance, one branch arranged beer-tasting evenings in several pubs, with a trained taster taking the assembled multitude through a variety of real ales – a win/win in a whole heap of ways.
- *Feedback.* Finally it has to be said that some licensees are their own worst enemy, often without realising it. Why do people go to the pub down the road and not my place? You can be cruel to be kind if asked that question, as you probably know better than they do what the problems

could be e.g. boring selection of beers, toilets which don't sparkle (especially the Ladies), intrusive background music. A good licensee will welcome constructive feedback; one who doesn't probably shouldn't be in the trade anyway.

4. Pub Contacts and Pub Data

- 4.1 When it comes to effective **direct** pub campaigning, "knowledge is power". The more detailed your knowledge of a given pub, the more you will be able to promote that pub and provide direct support via the branch newsletter and branch web site to communicate all that is special and different about pubs, such as guest beers, themed food nights, live music, quizzes, pub games teams, charity events etc.
- 4.2 The same knowledge will give you an edge if a pub becomes threatened with closure, allowing a "save the pub" campaign to be launched quickly.
- 4.3 Detailed knowledge of a pub comes from direct contact, and the most effective direct contact is a local CAMRA member who visits that pub on a regular basis. Pub contacts are the key to pub campaigning, and the more members involved in this role the better. A branch member acting as a pub contact should not be the contact for more than six pubs, because the role of being a pub contact should be fun, and not work, and as soon as the number of pubs rises above six the role will increasingly become a burden, and the frequency and duration of visits to each pub will decline and the quality of the liaison with the licensee will diminish.
- 4.4 The role of pub contact should not be restricted to existing active members of the branch. The creation of an extended pub contact network is an excellent mechanism for achieving member activation. Becoming the pub contact for your own local pub is a very easy way for a member to become active.
- 4.5 Pub contacts become the centre of an endless cycle of pub promotion: pub contacts visit their pubs and gather news; the pub news is published in the branch newsletter and on the web site; the pub contact distributes the newsletter to the pub and talks to the licensee ... and so the cycle repeats.
- 4.6 Pub contacts are also the most effective way of keeping a branch pub database accurate and complete. Pub databases are a real campaigning tool, and are not just to be used for preparing Good Beer Guide submissions. Pub databases support every aspect of pub campaigning. Local online guides are important to help promote pubs, but to fully promote and protect pubs we need more knowledge. To promote and protect a pub you need to know about how a pub is operated. Who owns the pub? How long have they owned the pub? What type of pub operator (tenant/lease/manager)? How long has the operator been there? Is the operator tied? What kinds of community events does the pub run? That is a lot to find out, so make sure you have the basic data for an online pub guide entry first, and then add additional details over time.
- 4.7 The most effective type of pub database is one that is online, that is any authorised branch member with access to the internet can update entries in an online pub database via a standard web browser. Maintaining pub data offline in a spreadsheet on the PC of a branch officer creates a bottleneck that will ultimately constrain the ability of the branch to maintain complete and accurate

pub data. More information about three recommended and supported online pub database systems can be found at <http://whatpub.com/addpubs> or directly at <http://whatpub.com/download/camra-branch-pub-databases-and-online-pubguides>.

- 4.8 While we need to promote all pubs, it is desirable to selectively promote pubs offering quality real ale, and by this we mean a far greater number of pubs than are in the Good Beer Guide. Pubs that offer quality real ale are more likely to thrive and more likely to survive. Encouraging pubs to offer quality real ale is good basic pub campaigning. Local online pub guides should highlight the pubs that offer quality real ale, but that means you need to continuously monitor beer quality in order to know which pubs **are** offering quality real ale.
- 4.9 Beer quality scoring is therefore an important element of effective pub campaigning. Beer quality scoring within a branch can be done in two complementary ways: (1) pub contacts and newsletter distributors can be encouraged to use the branches online pub database to record beer quality scores, because this will encourage those active members to also update pub details at the same time; (2) all other branch members should be encouraged to use the online NBSS system (www.beerscoring.org.uk).

Appendix 1 - Selecting your Pub of the Year – Guidance for Branches

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The vast majority of CAMRA Branches make a Pub of the Year award. There are several strong campaigning reasons for doing so:
- pubs need all the publicity that they can get these days and award announcements stimulate interest in the winning pub in particular, but also in pubs generally. The media love competitions so getting lots of publicity for your winner will be easy
 - it rewards excellence and, hopefully, inspires other pubs to achieve similar high standards
 - it makes clear what we in CAMRA consider makes a great pub
 - in most cases, the Branch POTY will feed into the national POTY awards.

2. National Pub of the Year

- 2.1 Each of CAMRA's sixteen Regions selects a Pub of the Year. In the smaller Regions this can be done by judging each Branch's nomination against the others. For larger Regions, a County round is usually inserted to make the judging process manageable.
- 2.2 Regional winners go forward to the Super-Regional round, where four batches of four pubs are judged. The four finalists go into the final round and a national winner emerges, to be announced during Pubs Week in February.
- 2.3 The timetable for the competition does vary a little but, usually, Branch winners need to be notified to the Regional Director by the end of March so that a Regional winner can be sorted out by the end of July.
- 2.4 Branches are not compelled to enter their own Branch POTY into the national competition. There may be very good reasons why they feel another pub would be a more appropriate candidate and that's fine.

3. National Judging System

- 3.1 The judging criteria, guidance notes and judging form for the national competition are circulated to Branches early each year.
- 3.2 The criteria have served us well for several years now. There will always be arguments about particular categories and weightings but the criteria have been successful in helping us come up with winning pubs which we can enthusiastically endorse.
- 3.3 Branches (and Regions) are very welcome to use the national system in making their own selections and many do so. However, the use of the system is compulsory only at the Super Regional and Final stages of the competition – it's entirely down to branches to decide how their own POTY should be chosen.
- 3.4 The rest of this Guidance looks at possible selection methods for Branches. It has been developed following a workshop at the 2005 AGM where Branch representatives submitted a host of experiences and ideas.

4. Organising Your POTY

- 4.1 Before getting on to judging systems, it goes without saying that any Branch contest must be properly organised. This means one person coordinating the exercise to ensure members are aware of the competition and are asked to take part, to make sure timetables are complied with and to sort out the result. Most importantly they then need to ensure that the maximum publicity is garnered from the result, including all the necessary media releases. A formal presentation to the winning pub is an opportunity not to be lost, not least because it can be a great social occasion for members.
- 4.2 Who should administer the competition is down to each Branch. The Pubs Officer will often be well placed to do it but it could just as easily be another official.

5. Selection Methods

- 5.1 Whatever selection method you choose, it needs to:

- be transparently fair and above board;
- enable as many Branch members as possible to take part;
- be simple enough to avoid undue bureaucracy but robust enough to stand up to close scrutiny;
- be capable of producing the right result i.e. a pub which the Branch genuinely feels worthy of reward.

- 5.2 Open Nomination

- In this method, any Branch member can, by a certain date, nominate any pub to go into the contest. They are then judged against one another using either the national criteria, locally-developed criteria, or an entirely subjective “I liked best” method.
- Problems obviously arise here if a large number of pubs are nominated. To be fair, anyone doing the judging needs to have visited each of the pubs before delivering a verdict – which could be quite a commitment if, say, 10 pubs were in the frame.
- On the judging, some Branches ask a few keen activists to do it whilst, in others, it's open to anyone willing to visit all the pubs.
- Conclusion This method is certainly fair in giving every pub a chance. However, it is only likely to be manageable in smaller Branches where a limited number of pubs will be nominated.

- 5.3 Shortlisting

- The nomination method is the same as above but there's then a process to whittle down the numbers to a shortlist of 3, 4 or 5.
- How that shortlisting is done is the tricky area. If there have been lots of nominations from lots of people then it could just be the 3-5 pubs getting the highest number of votes. More usually you will have the sort of scenario where ten people have nominated ten different pubs.

- The Branch Committee could decide to shortlist on the basis of own knowledge, weeding out those which are known to offend CAMRA policy in some way or are, for some other reason, considered weak candidates. This of course could lead to accusations of bias or prejudice against the Committee so their reasoning would have to be able to stand close scrutiny.
- The shortlisted pubs, however chosen, are then judged using whatever method is preferred.
- Conclusion Shortlisting does allow you to get the number of pubs to be rigorously judged down to a manageable number. You do though need to be careful that no pubs are excluded on questionable grounds.

5.4 Simple Majority

- All that happens here is that all Branch members are asked to vote and the pub getting the most wins.
- An essential here is that every Member has the chance to vote so this means a mailout. Voting can then be postal or at a meeting to which every member is invited. Even so, there is a danger of “packing” – it isn’t unknown for licensees especially keen to win to encourage local members to vote for them (to the extent that some licensees have been known to get members signed up just for this purpose!).
- “Packing” is even more of a possibility if the vote is taken at an open meeting.
- Conclusion The method has the virtue of simplicity but there is the potential for abuse as mentioned above. Also, the “judging” methodology is hardly rigorous!

5.5 Using GBG Votes

- Some Branches shortlist from those pubs getting the highest number of votes for inclusion in the GBG.
- An obvious problem here is that the criteria for GBG selection (beer quality) and POTY selection (much wider) are (or should be) different so there is likelihood that strong candidates will find themselves excluded. On the other hand, beer quality is the most important factor in the national criteria and good quality and good pubs generally go together. It’s also a simple and open method of shortlisting.
- Conclusions Has its merits but clearly likely to skew the contest towards certain types of pub.

5.6 Geographical Areas

- Here, the Branch area is split into three or four and, effectively, a mini-contest held in each one, using whatever method is felt best. The area winners are then judged against each other.
- Conclusions Certainly militates against geographical bias (which can easily happen in Branch areas dominated by one town or city) but obviously more complex and time-consuming.

6. Other Issues

- 6.1 Judges Once you've got a manageable number of pubs to select from, who should you ask to do the judging? The options seem to be:
- anyone who volunteers
 - the whole Committee
 - a chosen few (decided by the Committee)
- 6.2 On the last option, one Branch makes a point of asking people who are "on the edge" of the Committee to do the surveying, partly as a way of avoiding accusations of bias and partly as a way of engaging more people in important Branch activity.
- 6.3 Another Branch makes sure that the judges selected to survey the shortlisted pubs are people who don't drink regularly in them and are therefore less likely to have predispositions.
- 6.4 Postal Ballots Should these be used either for shortlisting or deciding the final winner, it might be advisable to ask the Branch Auditor to oversee the counting.
- 6.5 Scoring Systems As previously mentioned, many Branches use the national system at their final stage (if they have one) and there is much to be said for this. The system is tried and tested and its use should ensure a degree of consistency. However, the method to be used is entirely up to Branches and if they wish to develop their own or rely simply on the expressed preferences of the judges, that's their business.
- 6.6 Pubs of the Month or Season Some Branches select these, in which case shortlisting for the annual POTY becomes very simple. There are strong arguments to say the more pub awards the better because they all generate positive publicity and help reward excellence. The obvious downside is that a lot of work is involved and not every Branch has the resources or activation levels to be able to manage this. You also need to have fair and open selection criteria for these awards as well. But if you can do it, then it's an excellent campaigning opportunity.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The key message is that Pub of the Year contests, at whichever level, are a Good Thing and make an important contribution to our pub campaigning. Any Branch which doesn't currently select one should certainly aim to do so.
- 7.2 How the decision on a winner is reached is down to each Branch; this Guidance will hopefully help them to ensure that the process is fair and open.
- 7.3 Finally, if you know of any other effective selection methods or have any comments or suggestions about the Guidance, please tell your Regional Director so that this can be taken into account in future editions.