

The Good, The Bad & The Murky

Brew Britannia: one year on

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Introduction

We submitted the text of our book, *Brew Britannia: the strange rebirth of British beer*, in October 2013 and it was published in June the following year. Because the 'strange rebirth' it described was still underway, it wasn't possible to provide a satisfying full stop to our attempt to tell the story of how British beer got from Big Six monopoly of the early 1970s to the vibrant scene we currently enjoy. The purpose of this update is to summarise developments in the past 18 months, to explain how (if at all) they fit into the ongoing narrative, and perhaps also to see if a punchline might be in sight.

In doing so, we have considered the ongoing creep of 'craft beer' into the mainstream – or is it the mainstream annexing and absorbing 'craft'? We have also identified points of stress and increasing tension in an industry in which there is a decreasing amount of elbow room.

Like the last couple of chapters of *Brew Britannia*, this is commentary rather than history. It is in many ways a greater challenge to squeeze the truth out of people who are running active businesses than it was to get 40-year-old gossip out of CAMRA veterans of pensionable age. Nonetheless, as with the book, we have tried where possible to track stories back to their sources, to pin down dates on the timeline, and to avoid making assumptions – 'Sez who?' has been our constant challenge to each other. In a handful of instances, however, the only answer has been, 'Sez us'.

A London Particular

In *Brew Britannia* we wrote about Moor Beer Co. whose unique selling point is that its beers are not fined (that is, cleared of suspended yeast using 'finings') and thus may be served in any state from clear to cloudy depending on the preferences and skill of each publican. As we observed in the book, that alarms many drinkers who believe firmly that beer should always be perfectly clear – a proxy for underlying quality – and the debate has continued to rumble on, giving birth to a buzz-phrase in the process: 'London murky'.

In [September 2013](#), Glasgow-based blogger and CAMRA activist Robbie Pickering wrote that, 'Five Points Pale Ale is in the "London Murky" style pioneered by The Kernel.' In an email, he explained what prompted him to come up with that turn of phrase:

In 2011 or so, there were three things that distinguished The Kernel's beers: their flavour, their downright cloudy appearance and the inexplicably thick layer of sediment in the bottom of every bottle. It seemed to justify giving a name to this sort of beer which was different to anything else in the UK market at the time.

There was something catchy about the phrase 'London Murky' and, before long, it began to crop up frequently in the conversation around British beer. Though Pickering did not intend it as pejorative, those irritated by the idea of craft beer as a movement, and prone to complaining about fanboys, hipsters, hype and hazy beer, found it easy to weaponise. Tony Naylor, one of the few people regularly writing about beer in the mainstream press, had this to say in a *Guardian* article entitled 'Unfiltered beer: would you drink a cloudy pint?' published in May 2014:

I'm torn. I can't deny the aesthetic appeal of the perfect clear pint. But I also realise that is a rather daft, inherited prejudice. Moreover, this criticism of 'London murky' (the argument is that upstart hipster brewers are using the excuse of making raw, natural, big-impact beers as a cover to chuck out haphazard, unbalanced rubbish) seems to spring from a general cynicism about the febrile creativity of the craft beer scene, rather than objective fact.

Elsewhere, however, there are signs that it might yet become a vague localised style like Irish stout or Yorkshire bitter. In May 2015, The Pelt Trader, a City of London bar run by the Bloomsbury Leisure Group (Holborn Whippet, Euston Tap), was featuring this description of a beer on its website:

The Kernel 4cs IPA 7.1% £3.00/half – Punchy Bermondsey IPA in the 'London Murky' mould.

Beer writer and blogger Bryan Betts has [even attempted to define the parameters of this possible new style](#) describing 'cloudy golden ales with some underlying sweetness, tropical fruit notes, and lots of hoppy bitterness'. In the same

piece he also sounds a note of caution, suggesting that some London brewers are 'deliberately over-murkying things, which is just silly'. (And note the use of murky as a verb – this beer is not merely passively unfined.)

We would not be surprised to see this new London style, which some love and others hate, recognised formally in brewing competitions in years to come. When we can buy a bottle of London murky brewed in Berlin, Barcelona or San Diego, then we'll know for sure it has become 'a thing', as London porter did centuries before.

I Can I Can't?

When we were writing *Brew Britannia* canned beer remained largely the preserve of bigger breweries. Bass and London Pride could be found in cans in supermarkets, priced more cheaply than in bottles, but the canned beers that tended to come to mind were things like Carlsberg Export, Stella Artois and Fosters, or maybe Gold Label Barley Wine and Mackeson stout. Real ale drinkers by definition like their beer on draught, in a glass, and, depending on their age, might equate canned beer with either Ind Coope Long Life or with UK-brewed global lager brands. Meanwhile, most craft beer aficionados were hung up on elegant glassware, corked bottles and draught keg.

Once again, we must look to BrewDog as the source of a change in the those perceptions and preferences. Seeking ideas from the US scene, as they have always tended to do, James Watt and Martin Dickie took inspiration from an American brewery, Colorado's Oskar Blues, [which started canning its beer in 2002](#). In 2010, BrewDog [began to discuss with their fans on the brewery blog](#) the idea of canning their own beers. The reaction was fascinating with comments falling into two broad camps. First, there were those appalled by the idea, like 'JH':

No way to the can!! The design is good granted but your beers are way too high quality to be put in a can – cans are for mass produced shite like Foster's. How on earth are we meant to enjoy an imperial stout out of a can?! This wouldn't be innovating-it would be trying to drive more sales and margin out of your product but at the expense of your product. You are pioneers in bringing the UK scene up to scratch with the US scene but this would be a kick in the teeth to those aspirations. Don't become Foster's!

Others, however, were tentatively interested, either because they had been impressed by canned beer from the US, or because they could see other advantages as summarised by 'Tom':

More environmentally friendly, easier to store & ship, you can take cans to many beaches and campgrounds where bottles are prohibited, AND it's better for the beer too – less light & air makes for a much fresher brew!

After several more such blog posts and discussions, by February 2011, the first cans of Punk IPA were [rolling off a line at Daniel Thwaites's brewery in Blackburn](#). Having listened to feedback from customers on preliminary designs, they were small 330ml containers of the kind more usually used for soft drinks which helped to set them apart from the 500ml or 440ml cans used by mass-market brands. That summer, many discovered the appeal of a fast-chilling, more portable vessel and cans found their fans, though the bulk of Punk IPA and BrewDog's other beers continued to be sold in bottles.

From 2011 to 2014, beer geeks got used to the idea of a beer they liked in a format for which they had previously reserved derision, more US imports in cans

began to appear on the UK market and, soon, cans became a kind of fetish, each new canned product being greeted with fizzing excitement on social media. Camden Brewing acquired a canning line in 2013 and suddenly Camden Hells, a good but unexciting beer, gained a new glamour in gleaming post-box red 330ml containers.

The UK brewery which is perhaps most closely associated with canned craft beer, however, is another London firm – Beavertown. It began life in 2011 in the kitchen of a pub-cum-barbecue restaurant in Hackney, East London. In 2013, its founder, Logan Plant, son of Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, moved to larger standalone premises and then, in May 2014, to an even bigger industrial unit at Tottenham Hale, out near the top end of the Victoria Line. With the move came the installation of a new toy – a canning line from the same Canadian firm, Cask Brewing Systems, that had supplied Camden. Nick Dwyer is part of Beavertown's management team, though he joined the company as an illustrator, which is telling in its own right – it is a highly image-conscious business. We spoke to him in May this year and asked, first, why Beavertown began canning:

We were bottle-conditioning our beer, hand-filling bottles, and found that it tasted a certain way at packaging but, down the line, the taste was changing. The seal was bad on the bottles, and light-strike was affecting them within minutes of leaving the brewery.

He confirmed that the idea came from America – 'Logan spends a lot of time in the US and had been hanging out at Oskar Blues' – but also via BrewDog, with whom Beavertown have close ties. Even in 2014, the reaction was not universally positive:

We did have people say, 'I'll never buy your beers again!', and asking, 'Cans? Why?' But all it took, really, was a couple of leaflets explaining the benefits and people became more positive, and before long it was, 'What are you putting into cans next, guys?'

As far as Mr Dwyer is concerned quality and shelf-life were the primary drivers but he acknowledged the aesthetic appeal of the can, too:

Cans are a great canvas, although they can be hard work. You've only got six colours to play with, and the underlying metallic colour of the can, and you can't really do special finishes. We did ask for a varnish to make them more matte, more tactile. The designs aren't anything special – you wouldn't want them as prints in their own right – but if you don't know the beer, they'll grab you.

Beavertown's colourful cans, splashed with Dwyer's quirky sci-fi artwork, speak of youthfulness and a hip sensibility which is very distinctly not that of your real ale drinking uncle. When we visited the brewery last summer as part of our book promotion tour, no-one was interested in buying bottles from the on-site shop and bar – all they wanted to know was which cans were in stock, and which beers were

being canned next. At around £2 each, the cans were good value and, crucially, easy to carry on buses and the tube.

Not everyone on the industry side is convinced by 'craft canning', however. Rob Lovatt, head brewer at Thornbridge, [wrote a blog post explaining exactly why the UK craft beer pioneers had no plans to jump on this new bandwagon](#):

Although the can format is being sold as the best way to eliminate oxygen from the beer after packaging, it is during the packaging process itself that the greatest danger lies. I am unconvinced that the canners towards the lower end of the market are capable of sealing the can without potentially picking up detrimental levels of dissolved oxygen.

When we spoke to Roger Ryman, head brewer at St Austell in Cornwall, he echoed these sentiments, and expressed scepticism that the kind of canning lines being installed in smaller breweries are really up to the job. (Though St Austell does have its Korev lager packaged in 330ml cans under contract at a larger brewery.)

Nonetheless, in the last year, hardly a week has gone by without one brewery or another announcing that they have acquired the capacity to can their beer, or are at least making plans to do so. Companies operating mobile canning lines have even popped up, setting up on site at breweries around the country to package limited runs of beer in unprinted cans to which labels are later applied. These ad-hoc products look rough and ready and, in our experience taste rather the same way. But apparently, while can fever continues, that almost doesn't matter: they are still cute-looking, convenient, cold after 15 minutes in the fridge, and, perhaps most importantly, are simply something different in a culture which craves novelty.

Crowds & Community

BrewDog's Equity for Punks (EFP) crowdfunding scheme closed in January 2014 while *Brew Britannia* was on its way to print. It raised more than £4 million and reached its funding target a month early. Grumbling from habitual critics of BrewDog, however, was a taste of things to come.

Beyond the world of beer, so-called 'crowdfunding fatigue' has been growing for some time and really seemed to set in during 2014. It is a response partly to the overwhelming growth in the number of such campaigns – in 2011, 11,130 projects [were successfully funded](#) through the Kickstarter platform; [in 2014, it was 22,252](#), even in the face of increased competition from a flood of new services working the same territory. But it is also an inevitable response to attempts by the already wealthy to exploit this new source of finance for their projects. *Scrubs* actor Zach Braff's attempt to fund a film through Kickstarter caused a major stink – why didn't he pay for it himself?

It is in that context that there was a strong negative reaction to a project launched by Stone Brewing in 2014. Greg Koch, founder of the San Diego brewery, has long taken a mentoring role with BrewDog's James Watt and Martin Dickie who are open in the inspiration they take from him and his brewery's beers. In August that year, Koch launched an IndieGoGo crowdfunding campaign to help raise money for a bold European expansion plan. There was an immediate backlash, as summarised by Canadian beer writer Jordan St. John:

When a really large brewery creates a Kickstarter it's absolutely inexcusable. Stone's current Indiegogo campaign is shockingly exploitative and cynical. Worse than that, it is actively evil.

Stone raised the \$2.5 million they wanted but Koch, whose public persona usually tends towards the brash and sarcastic, felt obliged to issue [an uncharacteristically meek video statement](#) in which, though he stopped short of apologising, he expressed his sadness that the scheme had upset people, and attempted to reframe it as a 'beer pre-sales event'.

What all this meant was that when, in February 2015, Camden Brewery launched a crowdfunding scheme of their own under the name 'Hells Raiser', it was not greeted warmly by worn-out commentators or some hardened beer geeks. Camden's public image did not help. Though it is, for the moment, much smaller than either BrewDog or Stone, Camden is a slick outfit with high-gloss branding and a pointedly commercial mainstream lager, albeit a good one, as its flagship product. None of its beers, even Pale Ale, are cask-conditioned thus alienating a substantial body of more traditional drinkers who equate 'real ale' with good beer. A proportion of Camden Hells has at times been brewed in Germany and Belgium, despite the implications of its name, and this fact was, if not concealed from consumers, then at least obscured, which irritated those (including us) who value transparency. Camden has also been involved in two trademark disputes, of which more later, and, in both cases, though Camden did nothing wrong, per se, they emerged faintly tarnished as corporate-minded bullies pushing around underdogs. There were, however, also

criticisms of Camden's scheme based on the numbers they presented, as explained to us by financial journalist and former beer blogger John West:

Camden Town Brewery's crowdfunding effort looks to raise £1.5m in return for a 2% stake. On this basis, they are valuing the group at £75m... That is an eyebrow-raising valuation.

He crunched some numbers and was unable to come up with a valuation anything like Camden's. He also pointed out that the value of a key investors' perk in the form of discounts on Camden products was not as exciting as it might seem at first:

Ponying up £100 will give you a lifetime 5 per cent discount; £1,000 a 10 per cent discount. As with BrewDog's Equity for Punks Mk.1 in 2009 (which offered a 20 per cent lifetime discount to participants), mileage will vary on the usefulness of this reward: discounting the Camden investment to zero by way of illustration, to break even on the reward alone would mean spending £2,000 on Camden Town Brewery beer online or in their tap and pubs (of which there are currently just three venues, all in London).

Despite all that, Camden not only reached their target but smashed it, raising 188 per cent of their initial goal.

BrewDog launched Phase IV of Equity for Punks in May 2015, seeking to raise £25m in 12 months; within a month, it had already reached £5m. People outside the commentariat are, we might conclude, less cynical and fatigued, and perhaps also just less coldly logical: they know they might not make a profit or even get their money back (BrewDog are obliged to warn them of that fact at every turn) but the game itself is fun. As well as being an extremely attractive source of finance, crowd-funding schemes are also yet another way for breweries to offer 'fan service', and to engage with their consumers.

On the Turn

In the last 18 months, there have been a handful of public spats between breweries over trademarks, most notably:

- [Camden vs. Redwell](#)
- [Camden vs. Weird Beard](#)
- [Brewster's vs. Anarchy \(formerly BrewStar\)](#) and
- [Everard's vs. Elixir](#)

The first on that list arose when Camden mounted a legal challenge against Redwell, a small brewery in Norwich, on the grounds that, by calling one of their beers Hells, like Camden's best-known product, they were attempting to mislead consumers ('passing off'). As part of their response Redwell, who had previously defeated a similar trademark claim from energy drink brand Red Bull, launched a crowd-funding campaign aiming to raise £30,000 to cover legal fees. Despite its relatively modest target and an underdog story, it closed in March 2015 having raised less than £2,000.

Some disputes, though they have also gone public, remained civil, such as Chapel Down vs. Magic Rock, which was resolved by Magic Rock agreeing to change the name of one of their beers – Curious pale ale became Ringmaster because Chapel Down's Curious Brew had a stronger claim to the name. Brewers have told us, however, that these are just the tip of the iceberg: Oliver Fozard of Rooster's reports 'a few', while Magic Rock's Richard Burhouse says that his brewery has had four such disputes, all solved behind closed doors, though he suspects there have been hundreds across the industry. There are only likely to be more such conflicts, some no doubt nasty, as the market becomes more crowded, and as better established breweries grow and have more at stake.

Meanwhile, we have begun to receive emails and private messages via Twitter that suggest more widespread tensions, unfortunately usually on the condition that we won't share details or name names. For example, we have been told of small breweries struggling to compete with, first, even smaller ones willing to sell their beer cheap, if they get paid at all, for the sake of exposure; and, secondly, with an emerging class of well-established firms who can afford to shift beer in bulk, and have the cash-flow to wait for payments. At the same time, the owner of one tiny brewery has told us that he has been all but bullied by existing local concerns who feel they have first dibs on the handful of free-houses and farmers' markets in town.

Of course beer is a business like any other – [Richard Burhouse says](#) it is 'naive that people think breweries wouldn't want to protect their brands' – but for consumers who have bought into the admittedly facile mantra that 'beer people are good people', and an ideal of community co-operation between 'little guys', it is rather saddening. When a national or multi-national company brings in the lawyers and 'bullies' a small brewery, there is a reliable goodies vs. baddies narrative, but that is not always the case when one part of the supposed community butts up against another.

Another blow to the idea of the inherent goodness of The Beer Folk came with [the news in November 2014](#) that the founder of Hackney's London Fields Brewery, Jules de Vere Whiteway-Wilkinson, had been given more time by courts to repay a

£3.2 million debt to Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) resulting from a 2004 conviction for dealing and smuggling cocaine and other drugs. (Joel Golby of Vice magazine [called him 'the hipster Tony Montana'](#).) Though his past had not exactly been hidden it came as a surprise to many. When he was [arrested on a separate charge of tax evasion](#) in December the same year, and the brewery was raided by police, there was a palpable sense of disappointment. London Fields looked doomed but, in fact, has struggled on, its owner having convinced the courts that the best way to ensure he is able to pay his debts is by continuing to sell beer. In March 2015, it was revealed that brewing staff had been made redundant as [production of beer was moved to Tom Wood Beers in Lincolnshire](#) – a PR problem for a brewery with 'London' in its name, regardless of practicalities.

Vertical Integration

In the 20th century, the largest British brewers did everything: they had breweries, bottling plants, fleets of lorries, teams of salesmen, PR departments, cooperages, carpentry shops, brass bands, typing pools and, of course, vast estates of pubs. The kind of micro-brewery that emerged in the 1970s has tended to reject all of that, remaining instead small, lean and agile, largely out of financial necessity. But, like gravity, the urge to ‘bring it in house’ seems to be an irresistible force and, even as *Brew Britannia* was at the printers, we observed an interesting development: more and more hip bars were setting up breweries, while at the same time breweries were building bars.

The Sheffield Tap’s brewery was up and running when we interviewed Stuart Ross there in 2013. Mark Dorber, formerly of the White Horse in West London and now running two pubs in East Anglia, as well as the Beer Academy training programme, commenced brewing at the Swan in Stratford St Mary in 2014. Small Bar in Bristol acquired a small brewing kit in the summer of the same year, and Leeds’s North Bar (*Brew Britannia*, chapter twelve) announced the launch of their brewing company in May 2015. There are more, and more on the way.

At the same time, UK breweries have begun to realise the benefits of selling draught beer direct to the public. Traditionally in the UK brewery taps, if they existed at all, were in pubs near the brewery gates rather than on site or, in the case of larger breweries, were on site but reserved for staff and corporate events. In the US, however, where many craft breweries grew out of brewpub setups, the tap room has long been a quintessential part of the experience. For British brewers inspired by the American scene the idea of delivering beer straight into the waiting hands of drinkers, as fresh as can be and without interference, in stylish industrial-minimalist surroundings – bars made from old pallets, concrete flooring and so on – was irresistible.

The Kernel brewery launched in Bermondsey, South London, in 2010 and began opening its doors to drinkers on Saturdays from 2011 – ‘basically two tables with rickety benches right outside the tiny brewery’ as recalled by London-based beer blogger ‘Jezza’ who now co-manages the website *BeerGuideLondon.com*:

[It was a] hugely enjoyable opportunity to drink the freshest possible beer at source, in amongst the brewing equipment with a chance to chat to the owners, brewers and staff.

Two more breweries, Partizan and Brew by Numbers, run by disciples of The Kernel’s founder Evin O’Riordain, opened nearby in the following year so that, by 2013, a low-key, ultra-hip bar crawl had been established. That July, food and drink blogger Matt Hickman wrote a post on his website, *MattTheList.com*, suggesting a route taking in the three tap rooms and, with Distillery Row in Portland, Oregon, partly in mind, referred to it in a throwaway comment as the ‘Bermondsey beer mile’. He explained how that particular term came to stick:

It came up in conversation many times with friends who live in Bermondsey, in a very harmless way really (hence why it's quite understated in the blog). It is my invention as far as I

know ... Lots of people were already writing about it, calling it similar things – Bermondsey made a few appearances – and somebody else would surely have got to Bermondsey Beer Mile soon after us.

In the months that followed, more breweries arrived in the area – FourPure (2013), Anspach & Hobday (2014), Southwark Brewing (2014) and U-Brew (2015) – along with an upmarket bar-off-licence called the Bottle Shop, and the Bermondsey Beer Mile became longer and even more enticing. Matt Hickman recalled, however, that efforts to market the Beer Mile, driven primarily by Jack Hobday of Anspach & Hobday, caused some friction between the brewers:

A Twitter feed was set up just to retweet tap lists and opening times, and to gather photos and friendly tweets as people enjoyed their Saturday afternoons. A website was considered but after chatting to other brewers, not everyone was keen for understandable reasons and we ended up not taking it any further. I think had it not been called Bermondsey Beer Mile (which has the ring of a boozy stag-do unfortunately) and just been a nice info account, it might still be there.

Regardless, like The Rake back in 2008, Bermondsey attracted journalists and bloggers who liked the catchy name and the sense of a 'happening'. As a result, it was soon overrun with visitors who had read about it in the *Evening Standard* or *Time Out*, in search of something new and interesting to do with their precious leisure time. Here's how Ratebeer forum user 'imdownthepub' [described it in April 2015](#):

The first time, a year ago, was with the Ratebeer crew and I remember it having families and couples popping into the Breweries, all civilised and very pleasant. Now I'm not sure I had rose coloured spectacles on for the first trip, but this second trip seemed very different. There were huge groups of lads getting pretty drunk, stag parties and a very confused Hen Party, rather over dressed for the occasion... Huge queues for single loos, people urinating in the factory unit areas, The Kernel closing early due to the issues, no family groups that we could see just a few couples clinging together.

So we should perhaps not expect too many more such crawls to be established in other cities, though it seems now almost obligatory for start-up breweries to include space for a bar in their plans – showrooms for their style as much as commercial ventures. We asked Richard Burhouse of Magic Rock what lay behind the decision to open a tap room at his brewery in Huddersfield, after some false starts:

Essentially so the brewery has a 'heart', somewhere we can serve the beers as fresh and well looked after as possible. Doing it this way is convenient as the tap can help contribute to the lease of the whole brewery site. Plus people are very

interested in visiting breweries, and having the tap at the brewery means they can do a tour while they're here. It just makes a lot more sense to me than running a bar off site. Although that might follow at some point.

In November 2014, thanks to campaigning from a dedicated group of publicans, CAMRA, and others, the possibility of more small-brewery owned pubs perhaps came a little closer within reach. It was then that the Government introduced a compulsory 'market rent only' (MRO) option for pub licensees, loosening the grip of 'pubcos' on Britain's pubs. Pubcos (pub companies) are the large and largely unpopular businesses which acquired surplus pubs from the Big Six breweries in the 1990s when the so-called Beer Orders took effect. Their business model relies on luring publicans with the promise of low property rent which is then made up by requiring them to purchase beer and other stock through a central supply network, from a limited range, at inflated prices. MRO now gives those publicans the opportunity to say, when their rent is reviewed, that actually, they'd rather pay full-whack for rent on the pub and then buy whatever stock they like, from whomever.

That joins another piece of potentially significant legislation on the books -- the power to designate pubs as 'assets of community value' (ACV) as introduced in the 2011 Localism Act. Where pub companies had previously been in the habit of selling off supposedly unprofitable pubs for repurposing as shops or for demolition, the ACV power, as long as someone is motivated to evoke it, now gives them motivation to sell such 'community locals' on to businesses, campaign groups or individuals who might be able to make something of them. ACV has already, according to a Government statement at the end of 2014, already saved some 100 pubs.

None of this is likely, frankly, to lead to a flood of paradisiacal free-houses bursting with micro-brewery beer – pub companies have already begun moves to sidestep the challenge by converting some of their premises to managed chain pubs rather than tenanted houses, and many publicans are understandably most excited by the freedom to buy not better or more interesting beer, but cheaper. Nonetheless, it may well give room for manoeuvre to enterprising individuals, existing pub chains and, of course, breweries. Thornbridge, for example, already run many pubs in the Sheffield area, most of them through an arrangement with pub company Enterprise. With money rolling in from profitable brewing operations and the MRO enshrined in law, breweries keen to take on pubs ought now to find it easier to do so, and it is just possible that estates of tied houses, Big Six style, could make a comeback.

If so, however, they might well find themselves in competition with a new, smaller, more agile competitor.

Almost Too Wee

A couple of people have asked why we didn't write about micropubs in *Brew Britannia*. The honest answer is that we'd hardly registered their existence. When we started writing our book, there were around 15 micropubs in the UK and by the time we submitted our draft, there were 40 or so. But, 18 months on, there are 116 with more on the way, and the founder of the original micropub, Martyn Hillier, believes this is only the beginning:

The FT asked me last year – how many will there be in five years' time? I think there'll be 10,000 if they keep opening at their current rate but I couldn't bring myself to say it – I thought they'd laugh -- so I said 5,000.

If micropubs were a chain then Martyn Hillier would be the CEO. As it is, he runs his own tiny pub in Herne Bay, Kent, while acting as the figurehead for something that, for once, truly does deserve to be described as a movement. Born in Ruislip in North West London in 1959, he grew up there and in Kent, moving back to the city when he was 21. As a young man in the 1970s, he gave up on his preferred draught mild because it was so often of poor quality and became instead a lager drinker. Then, in the 1980s, he discovered David Bruce's Firkin brewpubs which led him to become a fervent believer in real ale. (Though, as it happens, CAMRA did not consider the Firkin beer to be 'real' under the strict terms of their technical definition, as explained in chapter seven of *Brew Britannia*.) A few years later, Hillier moved back to Kent and opened an off-licence in Canterbury selling cask ale to take away and bottled Belgian beer, alongside the usual wines and spirits. After many successful years, that was put out of business by the opening of a big-brewery-owned off-licence nearby in 1997, and so Hillier moved again, to Herne Bay. There, he took on a former butcher's shop and converted it into another off-licence. In 2003, he had a bad-tempered conversation with a local licensing officer, which concluded with a suggestion from the policeman:

He said, 'You know they're changing the licensing laws, don't you? You could open a pub.' I thought, 'A pub!? Me?' Pubs were all lager drinkers and smokers and trouble. But I thought, 'Hang on – this would be my pub, so no smoking, no lager.'

Until 2003, would-be new licensees were required to demonstrate the *need* for a new pub or bar in a given area, which it was all too easy for breweries, pub companies and other competitors to challenge. Gaining a new licence was expensive and fraught. With the introduction of the Licensing Act 2003, all they had to do was convince magistrates that there would be no increase in crime or public nuisance, and no risk to public safety or children – a far easier and, crucially, much cheaper process. By the time it came into effect in 2005, Hillier was ready to go and immediately turned his off-licence into a tiny pub under the name The Butcher's Arms. It has space for a handful of customers and only the smallest of bars as a mount for beer pumps rather than as a barrier between Hillier and his customers.

Within three years, it was CAMRA Kent pub of the year. In 2009, I supplied beer to the regional CAMRA AGM, and then got invited to deliver a presentation to the national AGM in Eastbourne... So I stood up in front of 400 people and told them to open their own. Most of them didn't get it – when I said micropub, they thought I meant microbrewery, and that I was getting my words muddled... Peter [Morgan] from Hartlepool got it straight away, though – he understood it. He opened [the Rat Race] within six months, and then Just Beer in Newark opened soon after.

The appeal of the micropub to would-be publicans is easy to understand, as especially as explained by the evangelical Mr Hillier:

Micropubs make money. Some of them have turnover of £250k a year... I stay below the VAT threshold and I don't have any staff. Shops are ten-a-penny thanks to supermarkets and what else do they do other than turn them into charity shops, pound shops, bookies? I don't pay business rates – I'm at less than £6000 rateable value... Running a micropub is perfect for a 55-year-old who's just taken early retirement. I take the piss – if the pub is empty at 9, I close up, because it's my pub. (It's usually busy, though.) It's the 10th anniversary on 24 November and it's flown by because it's not like work.

With a certain type of drinker, too, they are undoubtedly popular. Sussex-based [beer blogger Glenn Johnson is a huge fan of micropubs](#) and explained why in an email:

The appeal of micropubs to me is their simplicity. Beer plays a massive as they all sell an ever-changing beer range from independent micros which is what I want from a pub. Many towns are now dominated by Wetherspoons when it comes to a decent beer range but micropubs offer a better beer range without the distractions, in an intimate friendly environment. They are all run by beer enthusiasts from what I have seen so you won't be fobbed off with anything that isn't in great condition and the beer novice will be guided to a beer they might like depending upon what they normally drink. This personal service also has great appeal. They are probably aimed at real ale drinkers in their 40s + who feel alienated by modern town centre pubs.

But how important are micropubs in the story of beer and breweries? By definition (that is, the official definition provided by the Micropub Association) they serve only real ale and their focus (to generalise very broadly) is on session-strength bitters and golden ales, usually with a local connection. For breweries too small to deal with Tesco or Enterprise Inns, but not trendy enough to generate huge amounts of excitement among geeks – that is, the kind of brewery that makes up the vast majority of the much-trumpeted c.1,300 – they might well be a boon. Martyn Hillier is

certainly convinced that they are good for small breweries which, instead of selling via SIBA, pub companies or distributors, can deal directly with publicans, thus maximising the profit on each cask of beer sold.

We gave quite a bit of space in the book to the emergence of 'craft beer bars' – a type of drinking establishment that was and is pointedly not a pub – but they remain fairly scarce, even with BrewDog's rapid expansion across the country, and are primarily found in larger cities. Might it be that the micropub is part of the same phenomenon but expressed differently to suit the needs of smaller towns with older populations? That is, an alternative to corporate blandness and central control which could not have existed before the Beer Orders of 1989 under the iron grip of the Big Six brewers, or (in most cases) before changes the 2003 Licensing Act made it easier to turn a retail unit into a drinking establishment.

At any rate, there can scarcely be any town in Britain that does not have empty shops and that cannot muster 20 dedicated real ale drinkers, so we'll be surprised if there aren't 500 micropubs by 2017.

Sorry, Ronnie!

One of the most significant developments of the past 18 months has been the launch by the J.D. Wetherspoon (JDW) chain of a dedicated craft beer menu with its own BrewDog-style logo and punning sub-brand, 'Craftwork'.

There are more than 800 Wetherspoon pubs around the UK occupying prime spots on high streets. The first opened in 1979 when Norwich-born, New Zealand-raised entrepreneur took on a pub in Muswell Hill, North London, and renamed it after one of his school teachers. To a certain extent a product of the CAMRA-led 'real ale revolution' of the 1970s, for a long time, JDW pubs were popular because they had beers other than the usual suspects – 'We were offering a range that others couldn't – like the craft beer bars do today, I suppose,' Tim Martin told us in an interview in February 2015. Nor did it hurt that those beers were sold at below the usual price, in clean, comfortable, traditionally pub-like surroundings, even though the units they occupied were often former shops or showrooms. In the 1990s, the chain went national and became more ambitious, taking over old cinemas and other large premises, while retaining a steely focus on low prices.

These days, the pubs divide opinion. They can lack character and, in an age when traditional pubs are under threat, sometimes seem to represent a Wal-Mart tendency, out-pricing competitors. Those who love them, however, dismiss critics as snobs and point to Martin's continued commitment to offering a keenly-priced and varied range of real ale – even quite average branches offer six or so at any one time – as an example others should follow.

Even those who turn their noses up, however, had their attention grabbed by new arrivals from New York City which hit the shelves of JDW pubs in March 2014: three different and exclusive canned beers from Brooklyn's hip Sixpoint Brewery. Since 2013, JDW had been carrying Brooklyn Lager, Goose Island IPA and BrewDog Punk IPA but those beers had lost their glamour through ubiquity (all three are readily available in supermarkets) and, in the case of Goose Island, big-brewery takeover. But Sixpoint was different: these beers were not brewed under contract in the UK, or under a sly sub-brand owned by a multi-national brewing company, and so by most standards, and certainly under the definition established by the US Brewers' Association, they are bona fide 'craft brewers'. Nor were they otherwise available in the UK. As if that were not lure enough for Britain's beer geeks, JDW sold the cans in the first instance at two for £5 – cheaper than most bog standard lagers in the average UK pub. (And as of June 2015, they are available in our local branch for £1.99 a can.)

Some beer geeks refused to play along, insisting that they would continue to support independent local businesses rather than a colossal chain. Others, however, bought cans unopened and took them home to drink, or began to use JDW to bring down the overall cost of a night out by 'pre-loading' on bargain craft beer before heading to a more expensive specialist bar. Some were simply pleased to know that they could rely on JDW for an interesting beer during their Saturday afternoon shopping trips.

JDW must, to some extent, have been happy with this first phase as the range was expanded six months later, in October 2014, when the Sixpoint cans were joined by kegged beers from BrewDog (This Is Lager) and US brewery Devils Backbone (though the beer is actually made at Banks's in Wolverhampton), as well

as bottles from Rogue (Oregon) and Lagunitas (California). Types of beer that were once to be found only at North Bar in Leeds or the Rake in Borough Market are now available, at pocket money prices, a few steps from WH Smith and Boots the Chemist, everywhere from Penzance to Inverness – a remarkable change in the landscape of British beer.

Have Wetherspoon customers taken to the new offer – are people actually *buying* these beers? Perhaps unsurprisingly, JDW are not willing to share commercially sensitive sales information and gave us only a bland PR statement in response to that question. Members of staff we have asked in various JDW pubs in different parts of the country have, however, given similar answers: they sell well enough to be worth the bother. One barperson said, 'We get through 'em, but it's usually the same few people who come in and drink a few in one sitting – they tried them and got a taste for them and now that's what they drink.' Meanwhile, commentators have observed deep discounting in some pubs, which they have interpreted as a sign that the experiment is failing. In an email, however, one experienced industry journalist questioned that assumption:

My perception, and this is entirely anecdotal, is that the JDW craft experiment has been a bit patchy. They have definitely been using discounts and deals to shift the Six Point cans, the BrewDog bottles and some others, but the thing to bear in mind is that JDW, ironically given [Tim Martin's] views on supermarkets, operates a lot like Tesco in that they have a built in promotions strategy so there will always be certain products from every range offered on discount or buy-one-get-one-free style deals. The craft beer is no exception, so it might be that the bargain bin offers and discounts that I've seen, and clearly others have reported to you, are planned rather than panic.

Ultimately, the best indicator of the success of the Wetherspoon craft beer package will be whether it is still there when the chain's menus are refreshed in autumn 2015. If the craft beer range is not selling, we can be sure that Tim Martin won't hesitate to ditch it.

Breaking Away from the Peloton

The announcement in May 2015 of the launch of a new body called United Craft Brewers (UCB) may or may not be big news – not enough time has passed, nor enough detail been specified, for us to say at this stage. Its founding members, however, are an interesting bunch. Along with beer distributors and importers James Clay they are:

- Beavertown (London)
- BrewDog (Aberdeenshire)
- Camden Town (London)
- Magic Rock (Huddersfield, W. Yorkshire)

Whether those are the best breweries in Britain today is open to debate but they are certainly some of the most talked about who, between them, occupy a huge amount of space in the conversation around 'craft beer' in the UK.

Inspired by the highly successful US Brewers' Association (BA), UCB aims to produce its own definition of the contentious term 'craft brewer' in consultation with members with the intention of preventing companies such as, for example, Greene King from successfully marketing themselves as such. With the marketing nous of the names above, and the media clout of BrewDog in particular, we would be surprised if they are not to some degree successful in that endeavour. Here's the BA's definition, which will likely form the basis of UCB's:

Small

Annual production of 6 million barrels of beer or less (approximately 3 percent of U.S. annual sales). Beer production is attributed to the rules of alternating proprietorships.

Independent

Less than 25 per cent of the craft brewery is owned or controlled (or equivalent economic interest) by an alcoholic beverage industry member that is not itself a craft brewer.

Traditional

A brewer that has a majority of its total beverage alcohol volume in beers whose flavor derives from traditional or innovative brewing ingredients and their fermentation. Flavored malt beverages (FMBs) are not considered beers.

(Those numbers will, of course, require adjustment for the UK market – all but a handful of the big multi-nationals operating in Britain would meet those criteria.)

With the Campaign for Real Ale representing cask ale producers to a limited extent, and SIBA representing better-established independent brewers (i.e. microbreweries founded from the 1970s-2000s), there may well be increased tension

between these factions... Or perhaps, if overlap between membership is limited, helpful collaboration?

Regardless of its success, the confidence of the founders of UCB in founding an entirely new organisation is perhaps a sign that Britain has an emerging class of young brewers who are the most likely to follow the path set by Sierra Nevada in the US, which is now so big that it operates across multiple sites in the US and has a vast fleet of trucks to service them.

Perestroika & Glasnost

There are signs, at last, that the Campaign for Real Ale is taking active steps to find a way to live with 'craft beer', though the organisation's leadership daren't state it quite so boldly for fearing of prompting hard-liners to mobilise the tanks.

In March 2014, Mike Benner stepped down as Chief Executive of CMRA and took a job at SIBA. In September, he was replaced by Tim Page who, after 27 years in the army, worked in government and the charity sector. The Chief Executive is to Colin Valentine, the current chair of CAMRA, as a permanent secretary is to the secretary of state in a government ministry – that is, ostensibly a servant of the elected representative but, in fact, powerful in his own right. In April 2015, at CAMRA's annual general meeting (AGM) in Nottingham Page gave an agonisingly careful speech in which he repeatedly emphasised his love of real ale and his belief in its quality, while also attempting to send subtle signals about the need for change:

My key role, as I see it, is to challenge the organisation. At the moment I still consider myself a bit of an outsider – I'm still learning. And because I've got no past history in the campaign I can come in and ask, quite legitimately, some questions – you've been inside the organisation maybe you've just thought, well, there's no point in asking it. Well, I'm asking those questions and perhaps in doing that, I might act as a catalyst for change, where change is appropriate – change for the better, not just change for change's sake.

Later in the same presentation, he suggested that CAMRA ought to be 'inclusive rather than exclusive, tolerant rather than intolerant'. This may have been an oblique acknowledgement of CAMRA's ongoing struggle to address the issue of sexism in its ranks – in October 2014 a leaflet distributed to universities with the aim of recruiting young members featured a young man flirting with burlesque dancers, and sexist cartoons and articles continue to crop up in branch magazines. In the run-up to the AGM, Robbie 'London murky' Pickering attempted to propose a motion addressing this problem which was not put forward on the grounds that the bulk of what he suggested was already policy; that policy was reaffirmed at the AGM and there is evidence of steps being taken to tackle instances of sexism in branch magazines in its wake.

Talk of tolerance and inclusivity served double-duty, however, as a reference to the politics of beer dispense and culture, and Page went on to observe that, like him, many who later fall in love with cask-conditioned beer do not start out that way. Though he didn't say as much outright the implication was that those who are excited by kegged craft beer are primed for conversion to the cause, and should not be seen as the enemy. We spoke to Tim Page and, though his every word was chosen with care, he did make more explicit his own attitudes to 'craft beer':

There's a distinction between acceptance and recognition – we can acknowledge that there are other types of beer out there while still promoting real ale as the 'premier cru'... I think the dispute with CAMRA [in 2011] was canny PR on the part of

BrewDog but I also believe there is a false distinction, and my own kids are evidence of that. They'll drink something like Adnams in one round and then, in the next, some craft beer at £6 a bottle, which they also enjoy, because it's very clever and tasty.

He was also at pains to emphasise, however, that his views are not fundamentally important:

I've been out and about meeting and greeting branch members and some have been wary, while others have said, 'Oh, great – you're just the man we need.' And I have to say, well, wait a second – I'm not here to force change the membership doesn't want. I'm confident that common sense will prevail and that the will of the majority of members will win out. Will there be some who don't like change, however careful? Of course.

Veteran beer writer Tim Webb, co-author of *The World Atlas of Beer* among many other volumes, has been a member of CAMRA since 1974. In recent years, however, he has become an eloquent critic of the Campaign's failure to react to the emergence of good beer that does not conform to its definition of 'real ale'. For example, in a letter to CAMRA's newspaper, *What's Brewing*, that appeared in February 2014 he wrote:

The challenge for the Campaign is how to adapt to the much-improved world of beer it helped create. Luke warm acceptance of, or being not against the greatest improvements to beer tastes in a century, is not a good enough stance. To younger eyes it makes CAMRA look like a much-loved grandparent who wants to keep driving even though they can't make out the road ahead.

He expanded on his views in an email in June 2015:

I am frequently shocked by the lack of knowledge a large number of older Campaigners have about beer, a fact reflected in the dotty definition of 'real ale' that has been perfected in recent years. Obsessed with the presence of yeast and the absence of extraneous carbon dioxide it has nothing to say about ingredients, brewing methods or even the type and quantity of conditioning. Two generations of beer drinkers now seriously believe that a fast forward version of light ale, often barely conditioned at all, is the finest achievement of 300 years of British brewing, while at the same time most of the rest of the world enjoys discovering infinite variations on the beer styles that put British brewing on top of the world for two centuries. It's ignorant and what is worse a sizeable proportion of these cognoscenti don't want to learn.

In recent months, though, Tim Webb has grown more optimistic. Tim Page has convinced him that he means business and, in practical terms, in the kind of gesture that would have excited Cold War Kremlinologists, in the spring of 2015, Webb was invited to join CAMRA's influential Technical Committee. This announcement about a motion passed at the AGM sent a similar signal:

CAMRA's technical group previously confirmed that beer served from Key Kegs can qualify as real ale (providing there is yeast in the keg which allows secondary fermentation and it is served without gas coming into contact with the beer) – however this motion called for the introduction of a pro-active labelling system to help promote and highlight real ales being served via key-kegs.

Unlike traditional casks, key-kegs prevent oxygen coming into contact with the beer inside. Unlike the standard design of keg, however, nor do they allow it to come into direct contact with carbon dioxide (which gives standard keg its fizz), instead using gas to press down on the *outside* of an inner sac which contains the liquid. That liquid might have been carbonated with an injection of gas but, in many cases, any fizz it has was acquired as through the action of yeast as it fermented and conditioned in large tanks at the brewery. Their existence has highlighted a division between, on the one hand, those who believe 'real ale' requires live yeast and the absence of carbon dioxide and, on the other, those who apparently believe it requires the beer to come into contact with oxygen.

The announcement sought to placate members who might be anxious that the way was being opened for CAMRA to embrace Watney's Red Barrel by reassuring them that this was nothing new while, at the same time, sending a signal to 'progressive members' that the juggernaut was grinding slowly forward. And that's how we expect CAMRA to play this in the years to come – slow change without big announcements – merely the occasional sounding of a dog whistle through selected channels. That way, they will hope to avoid scaring away conservative members many of whom (not all) also happen to be older and therefore, for various reasons, make up the bulk of the *active* membership. But even if the process of change does prove turbulent, as Tim Page put it:

There's never been a better time to undertake this process of navel gazing. We've got more members than ever – 173.5k – and we're in good health financially, with trading and so on. So now, while we're riding high, is the right time to make changes... if they are needed.

Poochie Is One Outrageous Dude!

Larger, better-established breweries have continued to make attempts to engage with the craft beer craze with mixed results, often inviting derision in the process. In the first instance, they have continued to launch sub-brands and spin-offs.

In the spring of 2014 Marston's of Burton-upon-Trent – who own several other breweries including Ringwood, Banks's and Jennings – launched a range under the Revisionist name with its own distinct branding and website. It included a black IPA, steam beer, German-style wheat beer, Belgian-style saison and several other such stylistic oddities. These beers were made available in kegs through the Marston's pub estate and elsewhere and in bottles as an exclusive own-brand line for Tesco supermarkets. The Marston's name appeared prominently on the labels and there was no attempt to pass the range off as the products of a smaller independent brewery.

In the autumn of the same year, though it already had a range of bottled and kegged beers being pitched as 'craft', Greene King of Bury St. Edmunds launched a range under a new name, Metropolitan, also distributed exclusively through Tesco. Few breweries agitate beer geeks like Greene King and this prompted grumbles, notably from beer writer Will Hawkes, who described it on Twitter as 'Greene King pretending to be a small brewery'. Others argued that these projects and others like them were good news – hadn't we all been demanding strong IPA and saison in supermarkets for years? And now we had it, we still weren't happy.

In January 2015, a piece of creative mischief by Jon Rowett cast a light on how awkward it can be when lumbering beasts attempt to imitate more agile independents. Trolling in the old-fashioned sense, he posted what purported to be an email from the Greene King marketing department announcing a product launch to an unofficial Facebook forum for CAMRA members and sat back to watch the reaction:

Following a bumper year in 2014, which saw over 22% real sales growth in our craft range (Old Golden Hen, Hoppy Hen, and Greene King IPA Gold) this February we are launching a fresh new beer: Greene King IPA X-Treme.

Initially available at select Greene King pubs in London and the South East, Greene King IPA X-Treme is a hopped-up, punked-out IPA for the Download Generation. Weighing in at 4.5% ABV and dry-hopped with Northdown, Centennial and Fuggles hops to a blistering 35 BUs, this new addition is guaranteed to create a stir amongst craft beer aficionados and die-hard real ale fans alike. This IPA has been hand-crafted by our craziest beer anarchists in Bury St Edmunds and we're rather proud of it!

It was perhaps a touch too believable in a world where Charles Wells, brewers of the staid Bombardier Bitter, works with US brewery Dogfish Head to produce DNA New World IPA. Before long, social media was alight with outrage and mockery: 'Frankly it made me want to be sick on my own face' said one Twitter user;

'that's like giving David Cameron a Mohican' said another. (Some of the commenters knew it was a hoax but were simply joining in the trolling.) Greene King issued a denial through the trade press and the excitement passed. It was only a bit of fun but, like all the best jokes, it was amusing because it had the ring of truth about it: it was just the kind of thing everyone expected Greene King might do.

Greene King are big but they are not multi-national, and huge multi-nationals tend to take a more direct approach: they increasingly buy into 'craft' simply by buying craft breweries. In recent years, brewing companies such as AB-InBev have been on a shopping spree acquiring established American craft breweries such as Chicago's Goose Island. When they took over the Seattle-based Elysian Brewing in January 2015, we wondered on our blog when they might turn their attentions to the UK and, when they did, which breweries might be in their sights. Beer writer Melissa Cole repeated her prediction that South London's Meantime, founded by Alastair Hook (*Brew Britannia*, chapter eleven), was a likely target in the wake of the appointment in 2011 of a new CEO who had previously worked at SAB-Miller. There was little surprise, therefore, when in May 2015 it was announced that SAB-Miller had indeed bought Meantime.

What were SAB hoping to achieve? Meantime's brand remains strong and its position in the London market – a staple of restaurants, style bars and 1990s-style gastropubs – was no doubt appealing. From Meantime's point of view, there was cash in hand for the founders and investors (most of whom are Alastair Hook's friends and family), the promise of investment in the brewery, and access to SAB-Miller's sales and distribution network. Meantime's credibility among true believers has been somewhat diminished, though it had already been on the wane for some years beforehand; and SAB-Miller has perhaps gained a little second-hand 'cool'. It makes complete sense commercially but it is hard not to feel a little sad at Meantime's loss of independence and, perhaps more importantly, anxious for what the future might hold. In June 2015, [reporting for the Business Insider website](#), business journalist Oscar Williams-Grut said that Camden Brewery had fended off a takeover attempt from an unnamed multi-national during their crowd-funding campaign. (The offer was of \$116 million dollars, said Williams-Grut, so perhaps that £75m valuation wasn't so eyebrow-raising after all.) Camden refused to respond to his queries. We can expect much more of this in the next year or two.

Co-opting craft beer through sly imitation or buy-outs is not the only way for established firms to breach the gulf: friendly cooperation makes for much better PR. Early in 2015, Adnams of Southwold collaborated with one of the stars of the craft beer scene, Magic Rock of Huddersfield. Whatever antagonism beer geeks may feel or perceive between these two camps is not necessarily reflected in the feelings of the brewers themselves. Fergus Fitzgerald, head brewer at Adnams, and Stuart Ross of Magic Rock are of similar ages and are both easy-going. When they worked together to brew a cask-conditioned saison called The Herbalist early, it gave Adnams a bit of glamour but without winding up those on the lookout for evidence of big beer muscling in on craft turf. Friendly cooperation is ultimately more appealing to many consumers than 'them and us' rhetoric.

Approaching Total Beer

There is a sense in the air that a golden age has passed – that the days of giddy excitement are over, when almost anyone could snap up a vacant industrial unit, brew something half-way interesting, and then wait for the cash and adulation to roll in. There is less room for the homespun and the naive in 2015 than there was in 2013 – people are still happy to pay a premium for the strange, the rare or the local, but they want to get their money's worth. In the words of Andy Parker, the award-winning home-brewer behind the embryonic Hampshire-based brewery Elusive, 'Who would start a brewery in London selling hoppy pale ales today?'

I wouldn't want to rely on it. There are many established breweries who are likely to have a more refined product and much more capacity than the new kid on the block.

Indeed, the boom in London brewery numbers appears to have peaked in 2014 after a frantic few years which saw the total surge from less than 10 to more than 70. (See Des de Moor's recently published second edition of *London's Best Beer* for more detailed information.) With the arrival of the much-lauded Cloudwater among others, 2014-16 appears to be Manchester's moment. Perhaps Birmingham will be next? Depending on which list you consult, Britain's second biggest city has only five or six active breweries, none of them of the post-BrewDog school, which suggests there might still be at least some territory waiting to be seized.

So, micro-brewing, craft beer, or whatever you want to call it, is leaving its 'growth spurt' phase, but there's no need for gloominess: the fact remains that the modern British beer drinker is spoiled compared to those who blazed the trail in the 1970s. Tensions or not, there are more breweries and more beers than there have been for decades, and more stylistic diversity than there has ever been in the UK with everything from German-style Gose to old-fashioned Burton ale currently in production. (And contrary to hysteria from some quarters, this broadening of variety has not put traditional bitter in danger of extinction, though mild might be said to have fallen between the cracks.)

Looking at the IPAs in Wetherspoon and saison in Tesco, perhaps the legacy of 50 years of alternative beer culture is that the standard – the quality and variety of beer on offer in non-specialist outlets, no hunting required – has been tugged a little nearer the ideal.

Appendix: Where are they now?

One of the problems with traditional media such as books is that no sooner has a draft been submitted than it is out of date. With that in mind, here are updates on some of the key players mentioned in *Brew Britannia*.

- **Mike Hall**, chair of the Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood, who capped the book off with a single-line perfect summary of 50 years of beer history, sadly died not long after that meeting took place.
- **David Bruce**, founder of the Firkin chain, has once again failed to retire: the advisory role he was taking with the West Berkshire Brewery has become a more hands-on involvement and another venture, the City Pub Company, has seen him involved in opening a new brewpub at Temple in central London.
- **Brendan Dobbin** has been busy working with Conwy Brewery in Wales to recreate his own 1990s classic Yakima Grande Pale Ale, and continuing to advise other breweries, including supplying them with recipes and yeast. We profiled him in some detail, based on a new interview, in the Summer 2015 edition of CAMRA's *BEER* magazine.
- **Moor Beer**, the brewery around which we based a substantial chunk of Chapter 16 of *Brew Britannia*, has moved lock, stock and keg to Bristol, closer to the action on the craft beer front than the remote Somerset levels.
- The revival of interest in **Ian Nairn**, who we mention in several places in the book, has continued apace. His 1966 classic *Nairn's London*, which includes much material on London pubs and beer, was finally reprinted in a fine facsimile paperback edition in October 2014 and several of his classic 1970s programmes have been made available by the BBC through its online iPlayer service.
- **Thornbridge** turned 10-years-old this year and celebrated with the launch of Jaipur X, a one-off strong version of the beer that made its name. Dada, the keg-led craft beer bar the brewery ran in Sheffield, closed in 2015; though we found it quiet on our visits, they insist the closure was a result of routine issues to do with building maintenance and the lease.
- When we interviewed them in 2013, Andrew Cooper and Brett Ellis of **The Wild Beer Co** had plans to use wild yeast to ferment their beer, which have since been realised. Somerset Wild (5%) rather resembles scrumpy cider, as you might expect. As of June 2015, they have announced their intention to open their first permanent bar, in Cheltenham, with more to follow, along with a second brewing site.
- An earlier version of this article stated that the recently opened **Piccadilly Tap** in Manchester is a stablemate of the Sheffield Tap and Euston Tap; in fact, as a correspondent has informed us, the PT is owned by Bloomsbury Leisure who,

though they do co-own the Euston Tap, have no connection with the Sheffield Tap, which is run by Pivovar.

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