

CAMRA's Good Beer Guide warns of the impact of COVID-19

- Expert commentators in the Guide, including celebrity chef Tom Kerridge, warn of the impact COVID-19 will have on the industry
- The Good Beer Guide 2021 reports 4 breweries across the Isle of Wight

This year's Good Beer Guide warns of the impact of COVID-19 could have on the pub and brewing industry, as the national brewery numbers decline for the first time in nearly two decades. However, CAMRA IoW is not aware of any brewery closures locally, though while breweries and most pubs in the Isle of Wight appear to have weathered the COVID storm so far, campaigners fear that ongoing trading restrictions and the threat of localised lockdowns could begin to bite in 2021 – with the positive trend reversing over the next six months.

Nationally, the 2021 Guide has found the total number of independent UK breweries has dipped from 1,823 in 2019 to 1,816 in 2020* - the first time CAMRA's guide has recorded a decline in numbers since the explosion in UK breweries started in 2008. While most of the recorded decline will be from data captured pre-COVID-19, the trends in breweries no longer producing raises concerns the real impact of COVID has yet to be felt.

CAMRA is currently calling on the Government to go further with its support package, arguing that it has not been able to mitigate the damage done to a sector that has been scarred by ongoing restrictions and curfews.

CAMRA's National Chairman, Nik Antona says: "Many pubs and breweries have fought hard and the majority have survived the first lockdown, but it's clear the industry was already in a vulnerable position when COVID-19 hit. Since then, breweries have all but been forgotten about, and may even be hit with higher taxes as the Government considers changes to Small Brewers Relief. "This is a pivotal time that could make or break the industry. Our pubs and breweries are going to need significant long-term support and funding throughout the coming months to survive. Otherwise, I expect to see substantial closures in future editions of our Guide."

The Good Beer Guide has also warned of the impact of COVID-19 on pubs, with celebrity chef Tom Kerridge penning the foreword, urging the country to 'stay strong and stay positive' despite the ongoing challenges. Kerridge says: "We are now facing a difficult year of lockdown restriction and social distancing measures and, while every sector across the UK has felt the burden of COVID-19, brewers and pubs have most certainly taken the brunt of the impact.

He adds: "The one thing that I think we have all missed during lockdown is human connection and social interaction, which above all else, is everything that the Great British Pub provides - a warm, happy and friendly place for people to drink and eat. It is imperative that we continue to support our breweries and pubs to preserve them for generations to come."

The Good Beer Guide is the Campaign for Real Ale's premier publication, featuring the very best pubs in which to find a great pint across the UK. Despite being hampered by a national lockdown and ongoing restrictions, thousands of independent volunteers have worked together to compile this year's entries, helping to identify significant trends and themes locally and nationally.

The Good Beer Guide 2021 is now available from the CAMRA shop at <https://shop1.camra.org.uk/product/the-good-beer-guide-2021> and there is an updated app version available for download on both iOS and Android devices. Every effort has been made by CAMRA volunteers to ensure the accuracy of the Good Beer Guide but due to the ongoing restrictions and local lockdowns taking place, please ensure that you check directly with pubs for their latest opening times.

Brian Jacobs, Press Officer of the Isle of Wight Branch adds 'These are clearly exceptional times and require exceptional effort and patience. It might not be possible to just walk into a pub for a pint or a meal for some time, and you might have to queue or make a booking. No one likes this, as it's contrary to the whole ethos of public houses, but we do urge pub-goers to carry on making the effort to visit pubs because now, more than ever, we need the companionship they offer and to know that our favourite pub will still be there to offer it when this crisis is over. Likewise, we urge pub owners, landlords and managers to be as flexible and accommodating as possible when dealing with customers to ensure that they don't deter people from continuing to use their services.'