

Invaluable guide for real ale devotees

CAMRA'S Good Beer Guide is invaluable, particularly if you are new to an area or travelling around and seeking out a quality watering hole.

Now in its 47th year, it includes entries for more than 4,500 of Britain's best pubs in rural and urban areas.

It is a mine of information on beer, food, pub gardens, accommodation, family facilities, disabled access, opening hours and transport links.

What's more, it is completely independent as pubs are checked regularly by CAMRA's 190,000-strong army of volunteers.

Entry is dependent on merit, not payment, and listings are checked many times before publication to ensure they are accurate and up-to-date.

It might surprise some to see their favourite local NOT in the guide however it is no surprise at all to see Little Green Dragon in Green Lanes, London (N21 2AD) listed.

Four changing beers are served in this shop conversion and this micropub was voted Greater London Pub of the Year in 2018 and is the local CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) winner again in 2019.

Yes, there is an eclectic range of seating, including a church pew, bus seats and padded kegs, but this boosts the atmosphere and so does the produce from the temperature-controlled cellar room behind the bar.

It was also no surprise to see the Volunteer Arms (Staggs), Musselburgh (81 North High Street E21 6JE) included. It has been in the same family for 160 years and beers change regularly. It was, incidentally, one of three other finalists in the Pub of the Year won by The Wonston Arms near Winchester in Hampshire.

The core purpose of the guide is to seek out quality real ale, but it also takes into account history, architecture and food, gardens and special events.

There is also a comprehensive listing of more than 1,800 breweries currently operating in Britain and a section of 'entertaining and informative' features.

The 1,059-page work also has a three-page spread on how beer is brewed and a feature on how to get the most out of one of Britain's crown jewels, real ale.

An explanation of British beer styles is informative, particularly for those new to real ale, and pub design awards are featured along with the Cider Pub of the Year (Firkin Shed, Bournemouth).

Many people see the Cask Marque – a not-for-profit organisation which accredits 10,000 pubs nationwide – sign outside pubs and wonder. Well, wonder no more, it is explained in the guide.

Ben Wilkinson, CAMRA national director, said "Perhaps we just have to accept the hard truth that the biggest threat to the pub is the pub itself.

"Or rather, the perception of the pub. We know how one bad pint of cask ale can put someone off for life, but perhaps we're less ready to consider the equivalent risk with pubs.

"You go in one where the welcome is unfriendly, the beer is stale, the tables are sticky and an insufferable bore persists

in engaging you in conversation, and maybe staying at home with the TV wins out for evermore.”.

He added that you don't have to go on a march or demonstration to be a pub campaigner.

Head out for a pint and encourage your friends to join you and he added: “Most of us recognise that the local pub is part of what makes the UK the country that it is. What we don't recognise enough is that to survive, they (pubs) need us.

“The clearest way we can all demonstrate how much we value our community pubs isn't to shout about them, it's to use them.”

So, if you like real ale then purchase the guide to keep you right.

CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2020: £15.99

Photo courtesy of Ugli Fruit Media