

## **UK Public Houses**

The public house; more commonly termed pub is an establishment which sells alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages in the UK and Ireland. A traditional UK public house will follow a standard theme whereby a large bar serves two areas, the public bar and the lounge bar. These areas are usually segregated from each other by the use of a pair of doors. Originally the public bar was a space for manual workers and labourers, predominantly male; indeed women were often not allowed to enter the public bar. The lounge bar was decorated in a more refined fashion and would be the place a family would gather in the evening or a couple would spend time courting. Over the last several decades this tradition has changed almost entirely although many pubs maintain the original layout.

A public house will be either freehold, meaning the building and land are completely owned by the individual running the establishment or leasehold, which denotes the building is owned by a third party, usually a brewery, and is run by a tenanted landlord or in recent years a manager.

Public houses are strictly regulated by the licensing laws in the UK, there are stringent opening times and age limits for patrons, to run a public house one must first be interviewed in a UK court room and if found acceptable you will be granted a licence to sell alcohol on the premises.

### **The History of the Public House**

Since the Bronze Age folk in the UK have been drinking ale but it was not until the Romans arrived and built their famous road network that the shape of the UK public house started to take form. Inns were built so that travellers might refresh themselves, many offered lodgings and food along with the ale they served. The quantity of pubs became so prolific that King Edgar decreed in 965 that each village in the UK could have only one alehouse.

In 1688 the drink of Gin arrived in England, brought by the Dutch. Gin became an incredibly popular and cheap drink. The government generated a market for grain that was deemed unfit to be used for brewing purposes by allowing it to be used in the distillation of Gin; furthermore they imposed a heavy tax upon all imported spirits. By the mid 1700's there was six times more Gin being produced than ale being brewed and the Gin Craze was in full swing. Brewers responded by opening more and more alehouses. It wasn't until the third Gin Act was passed in 1751 that parity between the gin houses and the ale houses began to establish itself once again.

The 1800's saw the emergence of the coaching inn, these multi-purpose hostelries would provide not only the functions of an alehouse but also lodging for coach passengers and driver along with stabling for the horses and a secure area for leaving the coach itself overnight. These old coach houses are easily identified as they were usually built around a courtyard with high arch gate at the front allowing entrance for the coaches.

### **Pub Culture**

There can be no doubt that the public house has been the cornerstone of UK social culture for over two and a half centuries. No other type of establishment has had such a drastic effect upon the day to day lives of the populace.

Every aspect of life in the UK can and will be influenced by pub culture, be it working life or social life the pub is prelevant for a lot of people. It is only in recent years that employers have started to dissuade their staff from lunchtime drinking and a wind down drinking session after work with a group of colleagues is still an extremely common occurrence.

Social life in the UK for a high percentage of the population revolves around a public house; often a community will have a "local" pub that will form a natural hub for the inhabitants of its immediate area. More often than not there will be organised events several times a month ranging from a pub quiz to a full blown excursion. Quite often the public house will have sports teams, usually playing traditional pub games such as pool and darts; these team will most times enter into some sort of league on a local level although some sports have nationwide pub leagues.

When it comes to doing business in the UK then the concept of a "pub lunch" is something everyone will encounter at some stage. A public house makes an ideal venue for a business meeting in neutral surroundings and obviously leads to a very informal atmosphere, especially if quantities of alcohol are consumed during the proceedings.

In recent years the government and health services have gone to great lengths to expose the pitfalls of living in a drinking society and people are being encouraged to consume less alcohol to live a healthier life. Additional health concerns were addressed by a nationwide smoking ban which came into force for all public houses in the UK on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2007.

### **Real Ale and the Public House**

The most commonly consumed alcoholic beverage in the UK is beer; fashion has dictated which particular type of beer has been the most popular with each generation. The original drink sold in an alehouse in the UK was obviously ale, what happened over time was that other forms of beer became more popular and eventually ale was no longer offered for sale. What replaced ale is a very dark beer known in the UK as "bitter".

In the mid 1970's a group of friends were having a discussion in a public house regarding the terrible state of the available beer, they realised that there had been a steady decline in the quality of available products and decided that something needed to be done. Shortly after CAMRA was born (Campaign For Real Ale) and publicans, brewers and wholesalers were approached and encouraged to re-introduce real ale as a mainstream product.

The return of real ale has added a new and intriguing facet to UK pub culture, there are now nationwide awards given to "real ale" pubs and these are taken extremely seriously. It is even possible to study the keeping of ale as a vocational subject and many a landlord has become famous within real ale circles because they have displayed a natural flair for keeping good beer.

### **The Modern Day Public House**

Whilst it is still possible to find a good example of a traditional UK public house, many have been re-styled into more modern versions of the same theme. Interiors have been brightened and are kept much cleaner. Gone are the original draw pumps that would be used to pull beer stored in a keg up from the cellar using nothing but muscle to be replaced with gas systems that serve the beer under pressure by flipping a switch. Many of these re-styled public houses have been purchased by one of

the large breweries from the original freeholder and now have a manager installed. This new style of pub administration has been criticised for giving up the community feel of the original establishment in exchange for increased profits.

A more common occurrence is that of the original public house being completely remodelled to resemble something more like an American bar. More often than not a public house that undergoes such a drastic change will concentrate upon serving food with alcohol as a side product. Indeed some public houses such as this no longer allow a person to actually drink alcohol whilst standing at the bar and the customer must be seated at a numbered table.

Theme pubs are also very in-style, the theme can take a wide variety of forms. Sports pubs are very popular, usually providing live coverage of sporting events on large screen TV along with decor to match. The concept of a family pub is also seen frequently, this type of venue will often include an extensive outside play area for children and even an indoor area complete with toys and games to keep the younger patrons amused whilst their parents enjoy their favourite tipple in the main bar area.

Many public houses that undergo any amount of re-modelling choose to add a restaurant area, typically housed in a conservatory. Traditional pub food is forgone and replaced by exotic dishes, often with a chef in residence. Typically this kind of establishment will boast an extensive wine list.

A further twist on the theme pub are the places that become more akin to a night club than a pub, live music will sometimes be presented nightly and the customers will tend to be much younger than a traditional pub would entertain.

Modern public houses whilst often bearing criticism for ruining what used to be the centre point of a local community can certainly be more vibrant and interesting than their original often drab, old and tired donor venue.