

# How You Can Help To Select Cheltenham's Good Beer Guide Entries **REVISED MAY 2019**

With around one hundred venues in Cheltenham eligible for just eight places, it is important that a robust and transparent selection process is put in place to ensure that only the best make it into the Good Beer Guide. The venues which are recommended for inclusion in the guide should be ones that we are proud to recommend, and are included primarily due to the high quality of the real ale served.

It is vital that all Cheltenham CAMRA members are given the opportunity to help in the selection process. This document will detail how members can be involved at every stage of the selection process, from beginning to end.

**Cheltenham Branch Members can get involved in THREE ways:**

- 1. By recommending a venue that you believe is a strong candidate for inclusion in the Good Beer Guide. In order to qualify the venue must meet the 'Candidate Venues' criteria below.**
- 2. Fill in beer scores on WhatPub website each time you drink real ale at a Cheltenham pub/club.**
- 3. Attend the final Good Beer Guide selection meeting in early February. The meeting date will be announced in advance.**
- 4. Attend the Pub and Club of the Year Selection Meeting in late February. The meeting date will be announced in advance.**

## **Candidate Venues**

The criteria used for Good Beer Guide selection will be:

- The venue must be in one of the four Cheltenham Branch Post Codes - GL50 to GL53;
- The venue must **consistently** serve high quality real ale. Establishing this will require frequent assessment and scoring, over a period of time, by multiple individuals;
- The score for beer quality (in any numerical analysis of candidate venues) must be the primary factor in choosing GBG entries. Peripheral issues (i.e. sympathy with CAMRA aims, community focus and value for money) are supporting factors, which will count where competing venues are very close in terms of beer scores and for deciding the Pub and Club of the Year.
- The number of real ales available at each venue is secondary to quality.
- Inducements such as CAMRA member discounts, or loyalty cards, should not be factors in selecting pubs for the guide.
- The cost of real ales served by venues is not the same thing as value for money and should not be a prime factor in selecting venues.

## **SELECTION TIMETABLE**

The GBG Selection Process will run between September and February, when the results are submitted to the Regional Director.

This is how you can help to choose the Cheltenham Branch entries for the Good Beer Guide.

### **September:**

Following the launch event for the Good Beer Guide, Branch members will be invited to recommend GBG candidate pubs for the following year's Guide. Any pub in the Branch area is eligible, providing they serve real ale in accordance with CAMRA guidelines.

### **Mid November:**

A "Long List" of GBG contenders is finalised by the branch committee/branch pubs officer (maximum 20 venues). For "Long List" criteria see below. Branch Members are advised of the pubs in contention.

### **November - January:**

Individual member WhatPub scoring and organised surveys continue, but focus on "Long List" venues only.

### **Late January:**

Pub surveying ends. Whatpub beer scores are calculated to rank the venues to assist the selection process.

### **Early February:**

If required a 'Short Listing' will take place to list the final 12 venues. The Good Beer Guide Selection meeting takes place (open to all members) to decide the 8 entries plus 2 reserves and the results are submitted.

### **Late February:**

A separate Pub and Club of the Year meeting is held (open to all members), with WhatPub scores and other factors are discussed before a final vote.

### **Early March:**

Results submitted to Regional Director.

## **The "Long List"**

After the call to the membership for nominations, the best (max 20 venues) are selected as a "Long List". This will take place at the December Business Meeting. These venues will be selected from:

- All venues in the current GBG and the previous two GBGs;
- + Pubs nominated by branch CAMRA members and Committee;

Members can nominate a pub, club or bar at any time to the branch Pubs Officer via email ([pubs@cheltenhamcamra.org.uk](mailto:pubs@cheltenhamcamra.org.uk)), face to face or at branch meetings. For consideration for

the next GBG these need to be received by the end of November.

The “Long List” will be published to branch members. Efforts are then directed at surveying these “**Long List**” **venues only**, to gain as many scores and survey visits as possible. This will help to make the final selection meeting as informed as possible. Details of how to survey and score venues via WhatPub, and the criteria for scoring real ale, are at the end of this document.

Qualifying scores will count between the beginning of the process in mid September and the closure of voting at the end of January.

## **SURVEY TRIPS AND INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENTS**

From November to January the branch will suggest areas for survey trips to try to cover the ‘Long List’ venues. Individual Cheltenham CAMRA members should input National Beer Scoring System (NBSS) scores in WhatPub whenever a pub is visited on surveys or privately.

### **“Short Listing” Meeting**

At the February Branch Business Meeting, and GBG selection meeting, committee members will reduce the “long list” to a **FINAL LIST OF 12 VENUES** who will compete for the 8 available, and 2 reserve places in the GBG.

#### **Exclusion criteria will include:**

- Any venue that has not been surveyed by at least three separate members;
- Any venue with less than 6 real ale scores (not necessarily 6 different real ales);
- Poor beer quality scores or reports, i.e. repeated scores below 2.5 out of 5;
- Any evidence/pattern of scoring that suggests an attempt at vote rigging;
- Reports of ‘short measuring’;
- Temporary closure, or a change of licensee (or brewer in the case of a brewpub), during the assessment period. Exclusion will only take place if, following a review, this change has had a material effect on real ale quality or availability at the venue.
- Any verified discriminatory behaviour reported at a venue on any grounds, including race, faith, gender, sexual orientation or membership of any lawful organisation.

Other than the above, the selection of the 12 shortlisted pubs will be based primarily on the quality of the real ale.

## **GBG SELECTION MEETING**

The GBG Selection Meeting will take place at the February Branch Business Meeting. The date, time and venue will be publicised to all branch members with an invitation to attend.

Every effort should be made by committee members to visit the bottom 6 pubs ranked on

beer score in the shortlisted 12 before the final selection meeting to make a comparative judgement of their beer quality.

Licensees, or anyone with a vested interest in any pub, must leave the room whilst that pub is debated as a candidate. In order to assist in the selection process, prior to a vote on each pub, the Chair will make available the shortlisted pubs ranked in two lists:

1. Beer Quality score ranking from Whatpub;
2. Overall score, which will include factors such as sympathy with CAMRA values, value for money, community involvement, atmosphere and décor, service and welcome.

The non-beer quality values should be taken into account during debate where beer scores are very close for the remaining GBG places.

**EIGHT** venues will be selected for inclusion in the GBG, together with **TWO** reserves.

The results are announced and the meeting closes. All present are requested to keep the results confidential until the GBG is published in September.

## **PUB AND CLUB OF THE YEAR MEETING**

A separate Pub and Club of the Year will be held, in late February, where WhatPub scores and other factors are discussed before a final vote.

WhatPub beer scores will help to identify the strongest candidates, but other tangible qualities should be considered, and compared, in the final vote:

a) Atmosphere and Décor:

Is it a nice place to be and do you feel at ease? Is the décor in good repair? Is it comfortable, warm, clean and are the toilets acceptable?

b) Service and Welcome:

Are the 'Front of House' skills we expect to see from staff in a well-run venue? Did you receive a good welcome? Is the service prompt, efficient and friendly? Do you get full measure, or at least a top up without having to ask? Do staff demonstrate good product knowledge, especially of the real ales available? Can they explain each beer in terms of style, colour and flavour, or are they just paid to serve? Did they warn you (when ordering a beer) that it would be hazy - due to being unfiltered, or that it contains wheat? Did they warn you that a particular beer will have an unusual flavour, and why?

c) Community focus:

A good venue is inclusive, and it is a place where anyone can go in and feel comfortable. If a pub, intentionally or unintentionally, operates in such a way as to exclude some sectors of the community then that should count against it. A CAMRA POTY/COTY must be inclusive. Does the venue attract a good cross section of people and age groups? How much is the pub a focus for the community? Are there sports teams based there, or community groups that meet there? What about charity fundraising, deals for pensioners, mums and toddlers groups during the day?

d) Sympathy With CAMRA Aims:

Does the venue espouse and promote our values? Is cask beer given a positive push here? Is information offered about the ales sold? Does the venue try to stimulate interest in the sorts of issues we're concerned about? Is CAMRA literature present – Tippler and other branch magazines?

e) Good Value:

This is about value for money, but in the widest sense of the term i.e. not just how cheap the ale is. Remember a pub's costs will vary by location, rent, business rates, staff costs and owner policies, factors which are not entirely controllable.

The questions to ask revolve around the experience. Having made the effort to come here, how good a pub experience has it been?

f) National Competition:

Judging Regional and National POTY/COTY is dependant on the very best candidates being put forward. A final judgement criteria, at branch level, should be:

'How strong a candidate is our POTY/COTY for judging at a higher level'.

## WhatPub Beer Scoring

Obviously the quality of beer sold is the most important single factor in judging a pub for inclusion in the Good Beer Guide. If it doesn't sell excellent quality beer, **consistently**, then it should not be a candidate.

It's important to note that the pub doesn't need to sell a wide range of beers to score highly. A pub selling a couple of ales in tip-top condition is infinitely preferable to one selling seven or eight of variable quality. Also the fact that a pub is a tied house mustn't be held against it in any way. Quality is paramount.

### WhatPub - How do I score a beer?

You can score beer online at home or, if you have a smart phone, in the pub!

To submit your scores just visit <http://whatpub.com>.

Log into the site using your CAMRA membership number and password. Once you have agreed to the terms and conditions and found a pub on the site, you can start scoring.

On the **Submit Beer Scores** beer section you record the beer name and brewery together with a score. Beer scoring is based on a 1 – 5 scale (half points i.e. 3.5 are acceptable). The generally accepted criteria for awarding a score as are follows:

- 0. No cask ale available.**
- 1. Poor.** Beer that is anything from barely drinkable, to drinkable with considerable resentment. However, you may have been unlucky and were served the last pint in the cask. If the beer is exchanged without a problem and taken off sale you may use your discretion and not score the beer at all. Conversely if the staff argue the point, refuse to exchange the beer, or keep it on sale, then they have earned a score of 1.
- 2. Average.** Competently kept, drinkable pint but doesn't inspire in any way, not worth

moving to another pub but you drink the beer without really noticing.

3. **Good.** Good beer in good form. You may cancel plans to move to the next pub. You want to stay for another pint and may seek out the beer again.
4. **Very Good.** Excellent beer in excellent condition. You may decide to stay in the pub and drink nothing else.
5. **Perfect.** Probably the best you are ever likely to find. A seasoned drinker will award this score very rarely.

You can also add a comment. This could be on comfort, atmosphere, staff knowledge or general comments on the beer or service.

### **So how do you decide on a score for a beer?**

Firstly, remember that it is not a question of whether you like a particular beer style. The score must relate to how well kept, and served the beer is at the venue.

However, there are factors that can help you decide between awarding a good 3 and a very good 4? You don't have to be an accredited CAMRA taster, simply use the skill you have built up over the years as a dedicated real ale drinker. Just bear in mind a few basic criteria to ensure that you score each beer accurately.

The first step is to make sure the beers you taste are served at the right temperature. Real ale should be served at cellar temperature, 12-14 C (54-57 F). With experience most people are adept at judging beer temperature to within a degree or two just by picking up the glass and taking a sip. Be aware that Cask Marque pubs can be colder, with a recommended dispense temperature of between 11-13°C.

If real ale is too warm it loses its natural conditioning (the liveliness of the beer due to dissolved carbon dioxide). On the other hand if the beer is too cold it will kill off the subtle flavours.

### **Judging Beer Quality**

There are three of your senses that come into play when judging beer quality. Firstly it is important to take your time. Diving right in, and downing half a pint in one swallow, will make any considered judgement very difficult.

#### **STEP 1: Use Your EYES**

Beer should look good. It should be colourful, clear and bright. If it is meant to have a significant head of froth, then it should be well-formed and hold its form. Some beers, such as wheat beers may be cloudy, as will some unfiltered beers. Generally, your beer should be bright and clear and your glass should not contain any sediment.

However, there is a trend for American style 'Murkbombs' – beers that look like mango juice - think Cloudwater and Deya. Although generally served in keg dispense, some do appear in casks. These beers are brewed with protein-rich wheat and oats, fruitier, hazy yeasts and

are massively dry-hopped to create murky, silky smooth beers. This is deliberate and not a beer fault.

## **STEP 2: Use Your NOSE**

If possible cup the top of your glass and take a nice deep breath. There should be lovely aromas appropriate to the beer style - hoppiness from a classic golden ale or American Pale ale, the burnt chocolate/coffee flavours of a stout or the banana nose of a wheat beer. Unless the beer is advertised as a 'sour', there should be no trace of vinegar in the aroma.

## **STEP 3: The TASTE**

Each area of the mouth recognises different flavours (salt, sweet sour, etc.). As you take your first taste of the beer you'll notice the sweetness from the malts at the front of your mouth and dry bitter flavours from the hops at the back of your mouth. Swish the beer around your mouth to ensure that you pick up all the flavours. As you swallow the beer the 'finish', will tell you a lot about the quality of the beer and its condition. Is it one-dimensional with a flavour which fades quickly, or does the flavour linger and change, revealing layers of complexity? Look for vinegar, damp cardboard, musty, or cloves/TCP flavours which, in most beer styles, are faults.

**Guidance on how to use WhatPub to score beers can be found at**  
[www.camra.org.uk/nbss](http://www.camra.org.uk/nbss)