

**Nigel's Ale House Stroud  
(Pre Covid 19 version)**



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**This digital version has no images inserted and a paperback version with an update of the aftermath of Covid 19's effect on the pub and its publican will be published in the Spring of 2021**

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

The British pub is a major attraction for overseas visitors, ambassadors for Britain and for our tourism industry. They are a leading attraction and contribute to positive perceptions of the UK. The Government features pubs in its global Great Britain promotional campaign. Around 14 million of all holidaymakers from overseas visit the pub each year, one of the top three places to visit for tourists, (Facts on Tap). One of the major reasons is the diversity of types of pub: pub cultures, architectural and internal design, use and provision of outdoor space and different food offerings. There are at least three types of pubs that existed from early times, the Inn, the tavern and the ale house. The Inn was established to service travellers, the taverns, mainly in towns and then there are smaller ale houses. Many smaller pubs have been converted from houses in villages and small towns across the country and so reflect the style and architecture of their area. They meld into the local built environment and as we move around the country we come across different types of building that reflect the local terrain.

It appears that the great British pub started life as an Italian wine bar, and dates back almost 2,000 years. It was an invading Roman army that first brought Roman roads, Roman towns and Roman pubs known as *tabernae* to these shores in 43 AD. Such *tabernae*, or shops that sold wine, were quickly built alongside Roman roads and in towns to help quench the thirst of the legionary troops. It was ale, however, that was the native British brew and it appears that these *tabernae* quickly adapted to provide the locals with their favourite tippie, with the word eventually being corrupted to tavern.

These taverns or alehouses not only survived but continued to adapt to an ever changing clientele, through invading Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and not forgetting Scandinavian Vikings. In around 970 AD, one Anglo-Saxon king, Edgar, even attempted to limit the number of alehouses in any one village. He is also said to have been responsible for introducing a drinking measure known as ‘the peg’ as a means of controlling the amount of alcohol an individual could consume, hence the expression “to take (someone) down a peg”.

Taverns and alehouses provided food and drink to their guests, whilst inns offered accommodation for weary travellers. These could include merchants, court officials or pilgrims travelling to and from religious shrines, as immortalised by Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*. Inns also served military purposes; one of the oldest dating from 1189 AD is *Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem* in Nottingham, and is said to have acted as a recruitment centre for volunteers to accompany King Richard I (The Lionheart) on his crusade to the Holy Lands.

Alehouses, inns and taverns collectively became known as public houses and then simply as pubs around the reign of King Henry VII. A little later, in 1552, an Act was passed that required innkeepers to have a licence in order to run a pub.

By 1577 it is estimated that there were some 17,000 alehouses, 2,000 inns and 400 taverns throughout England and Wales. Considering the population of the period, that would equate to around one pub for every 200 persons. To put that into context, that same ratio today would be approximately one pub for every 1,000 persons (Johnson – Great British Pub).

Pubs evolved from a diverse range of drinking places to become in Victorian England a recognisable relatively homogeneous institution. But in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the pub once again fragmented into a variety of differing entities albeit that the local remained essential among them. We now have large pub chains, who decorate their pubs with the same brand décor, e.g.: Weatherspoons, pub companies (PubCos) who bought hundreds of them from Brewers when they were forced to sell them to break up what was a monopoly. We also have smaller more individually orientated PubCos and freehouses, with freeholds held by individuals and able to purchase supplies from anywhere and to develop their pubs in their own way, (Jennings).

Pub Chains, such as Weatherspoon keep prices down, use the same pub décor, serve pub grub throughout the day and evening and are often extremely busy with staff working very busy shifts and unable to interact with customers for any length of time. PubCos often have hundreds of pub which are run strictly to procedures and policies of the company and managers or tenants who are tied to them in terms of ale purchase and other sales items and pay rent

according to profit and so it is difficult to make a good living from them and not easy to develop the pub in their own way. However, an example of a pair of tenants who have bought a high level of individuality to their Punch PubCo owners is the Prince Albert Rodborough Stroud, where they manage to have a wide range of ales, lots music and entertainment and many other activities that makes it a very popular pub in its area.

Smaller PubCos and independent freehouses are pubs in which the publican has more of an input into the kind of pub they want to own or/and manage. An example of a small PubCo near Stroud is the Butchers Arms in Sheepscombe which is owned by Heartstone Inns, owning about a dozen freehold pubs of which the Butchers Arms, was its first in 2006. The current managers have been there since the PubCo took it over in 2005 and now it is the centre piece of their life and they specialise in providing a wide range of ales from around the country and are allowed this leniency by their PubCo owners who have central contracts with a major regional brewer but do not insist on the managers of the Butchers Arms buying only their ales.

Freehold pubs are the fourth category of owner, someone or a family or a small partnership or an individual who might own a few pubs, often in the same area. In these pubs the publican is a key figure who usually lives on the premises and has a say in the culture, decoration, activities and products sold there. The number of independently owned pubs in the United Kingdom (UK) rose from 19,200 in 2000 to 22,650 pubs in 2017. However, they fell between 2000 and 2010 to 18,000 but showed a steady increase in the last 10 years. (Statista). The approximate number of pubs in the UK in 2018 was 47,000 with about 48% being independent. BBPA says 40% in 2019 are independent.

As such, independent pub owners are finding new ways to drive sales and expand their business. Many opt for the obvious option of shifting from ‘wet’ sales – where most takings originate – to selling bar snacks, pub food or gastro fare, all of which have greater sales margins. They may not be able to do anything about high taxes on beer or competition from the supermarkets discounting alcohol, but business owners can better appeal to the drinking and eating public who are more inclined to spend money than a few years ago.

Renowned the world over, the great British pub is not just a place to drink beer, wine, cider or even something a little bit stronger. It is also a unique social centre, very often the focus of community life in villages, towns and cities throughout the length and breadth of the country. Added to these differences are the types and variety of British ale available.

We have seen pubs exploiting the recent trend for craft beers by introducing regular changes on the pumps, offering different guest ales most weeks and, in some venues, allowing punters to vote for what appears next. Others offer an impressive selection of wine, reflecting the shift from beer and spirits to wine-drinking on the part of many Britons over the last decade or so. And some are even more imaginative in the services they offer, as seen in some of the pubs helped by the not-for-profit organisation ‘Pub is the Hub, (BBPA).

- The Queen’s Head in Hawkedon in Suffolk has a butcher’s shop on the premises, offering meat and game provided by local farmers and suppliers.
- The Pheasant Inn in Gestingthorpe, Essex, has created its own market garden to grow produce for the pub menu, as well as offering fruit and vegetables for sale through a shop attached to the pub. This is to add to the smokery, and beehives already established by the pub owners for use in their food offering.
- The Blacksmiths Arms of Rothwell in Lincolnshire has been contracted by several local primary schools to provide the children with hot meals during the school day.

This book is the story of one such pub, independently owned by a partnership of two people and very much the creation of the publican Nigel.

## Chapter 2 - The pub's design, culture and ambience

The building which houses the current Ale House is an early Victorian building originally used for the delivery of subsidies to the poor by the Stroud Parish. (*Fig.1 Stone memorial*) and local council offices until the early 1990s. It is located next to the open market of the town which is used for this purpose every Saturday as a Farmers Market and allied arts stalls. The market has previously won the BBC Radio 4 Food and Drink award in the Farmers Market section. (*Fig. 2. Pub and market*).

In the mid-2000s the building was purchased as a wine bar/café known as Bar 9, but was not very successful and then sold to the current publican and his business partner in 2012 and quickly turned into a pub focusing on cask ales and renamed the Ale House redolent of the later Roman times when Ale Houses developed from wine lodges as indicated in the last chapter.

The entrance hall contains a staircase to the pub's facilities, a disabled facility, a door to private rooms and a dark wood cabinet in which the local CAMRA organisation store their magazines for re-distribution. On the top of the cabinet are varied collections of leaflets, all advertising or supporting arts activities or left orientated groups. One passes the kitchen entrance to the right and into the main bar to the right and immediately one notices a board advertising their many activities, (*Fig 3 – Events Notice*).

The main bar has a high ceiling with the central bar ceiling made of frosted glass which allows lots of light and yet unlike other pubs with similar high spaces the chatter is diffused and the whole atmosphere feels peaceful and accommodating.

There are seven distinct areas. The largest are the main bar and the market/front bar; one turns left as one enters the main part of the pub from the entrance hall to occupy the latter and one turns right entering the main space for the former.

The market/front bar has 6 sets of tables and high-backed chairs and the wonderful high sash windows look out onto the market (*Fig.4 Market/Front Bar*). The main bar area contains four areas and two more that recede either side of the fireplace, the meeting room and the courtyard. The long bar itself is opposite the fireplace (*Fig 5, Bar area*).

The main bar has four small areas: the fireside with a sofa and a traditional high-backed winged chair with a low central table for drinks; (*Fig. 5 Fireplace Area*). At the end of the bar is a long table with seating for 10, with a wooden bench on the longer side, (*Fig.6, End Bar Area*). Another table for 6 is set adjacent to the meeting room and supported by a welcome warm radiator. The meeting room is behind this area protected by two glass doors and is also used to watch rugby and cricket (only) on the TV which only has terrestrial channels. On the other side of the fireplace and the other recessive area is the outside courtyard for sun worshippers and smokers. It is a stone floored space with trellises supporting trailing plants opposite a walled bed with plants creeping upwards. A Robin has made this its home. There is an awning and a strong light when needed, casting shadows and comfort and 5 small tables and chairs, (*Fig 7, The Courtyard*).

The publican designed the interior setting of tables, chairs, stools used to furnish separate areas including the fourth area in the main bar,

I had a complaint put in the suggestion box that someone didn't like the settle benches that created one of these intimate areas because they couldn't watch the rest of the room. (*Fig 8, The Settle area*). I've deliberately created a little area there with a high settle area there, so a small group feel they have some privacy. The fire has a set of soft chairs and comfortable cloth covered stools to create another area within the expansive space of the main bar.

So, I have lots of different distinct areas which I think are far preferable. It's a bit like having an open plan office, people would prefer to be in their area than they would to be in the vastness of such a big building. If you put two or three people in a small area, they are comfortable whereas if you two or three people in a cavernous room they are a bit lost, (Nigel).

The pub is a comfortable space with a range of standardised but attractive high-backed chairs around tables, ‘There’s plenty of room if you like to have your own space for chit chat; you could easily find that here. It has a brilliant open fire, a great selection of real ales and a great selection of gin, generally just quite a welcoming place and very dog friendly which is always nice. It’s a very welcoming easy-going place to sit down and, talk to people rather than sitting on your phone and, ignoring one another. It’s a good place to be social, (Fiona–Staff).

Five gay women occupy the central table in the back room to watch the Scotland v Ireland 6 Nations rugby match and enjoy themselves. Two acquainted persons occupy the main high back chairs either side of the fire reading and drinking a glass of wine slowly. They only talk occasionally. Another trio of 2 women and a guy, visiting from abroad, enjoy a meal and each of them have thirds of beers in front of them. Other groups, familiar with the pub are scattered through it and another stands in the middle drinking viewing the large range of ales available. This is the Ale House, Stroud.

The results of a pub behavioural study corroborated the findings from a National Survey that, ‘people drinking in community pubs or locals felt significantly more engaged with the local community than those drinking in city centre bars. More importantly those in locals are more likely to be in conversational sized groups, whereas those drinking in city centre bars are in “ring groups” that significantly exceeded not only natural conversation group size but also the typical size of the support clique. This difference in social environment may be expected to have significant effects on the formation and maintenance of social bonds’ (Dunbar 2016). ‘Tuesday’s always my favourite night, because there are so many interesting clubs that meet: CAMRA used to meet once a month; a group of church bell ringers use us; a choir comes in after their choir session; Boss Morris the local all-girls Morris group finish up here; there’s a regular cribbage club and poetry. I like the way people feel they can come here and have their club meetings and enjoy beer and it makes the place buzzy. I just like the fact that people feel comfortable and that they can bring their communities into here, (Tania).

*(Fig. 9 The Morris)* At least once a year the pub becomes a central player for events in the Saturday Farmers market such as the Winter Wassail where Mummer and Morris groups circle the town dancing and singing. *(Fig. 10, The Mummings).*

It’s a pub that attracts those that enjoy the comfortable space and the chatter of a satisfied clientele and it attracts some young people, ‘When my generation go out, they’re very loud and rowdy, doing lots of shots and I’m just not about that. I prefer quieter pubs, more mellow pubs that don’t attract a kind of hectic ambience, which is what I really love about this place. It’s very rare that you get young people in here out on the lash. It’s quite a nice, comfortable pub to be in, and good ale, very good ale, (Fiona–Staff).

The space allows specialist groups to meet in their own corner without disturbing others,

Our poetry group decided to meet and bring something along which preferably isn’t written by yourself. So, we started doing that by working our way through the alphabet to select poetry we liked and now we’re working around the Shipping Forecast, from coastal areas of the country. You’re not in a cramped space, you’ve got space. Various things can be happening here at the same time without encroaching too much. I don’t think we’re any louder than any conversation around. People will sometimes just wander over not knowing us, but they’ll end up spending an evening with us and quite enjoy it. They’ve just dipped in and sat down. You can feel comfortable, in this pub. It’s a safe place in a way, (Ian).

There are a wide range of groups who have informal meetings here, and others that reserve the back room which seats about 20 comfortably, ‘It’s a nice place to be. It’s generally very relaxing. It can be lively when the music’s on but that’s no bad thing. It’s mixed. It caters for such a wide variety of people, political groups coming in and all sorts. I think that’s healthy. You might not agree with their political views, but the fact any political group can come in here and book a room irrespective of the landlord’s own political view, is a good thing. The Ale House is a great asset to Stroud. I think it’s something we should be proud of’, (Ian).

It is a very welcoming pub, despite its somewhat un-pub-like interior, in that the rooms are very large and they’re quite light. ‘It’s not your quintessential Cotswold pub made of stone walls and but the people that come here are inherently friendly. You can certainly come in here on your own and it would be no surprise at all if you ended up

chatting to someone. But it is also a pub where if you wanted to come in on your own and just be on your own, that's fine as well and people would respect that. You can just contemplate your pint, or use your iPad, or read your newspaper, or in fact do whatever you want and that's fine' (Steve). The pub is cosmopolitan and attracts cross generation and cross gender/sexuality patrons, 'The pub has a wide range of customers. You have young people just beginning to explore ales and you have those in their 80s and 90s. There's something for everyone. The publican is very well organised in all he does. He offers anything I need. I don't see the point of going anywhere else', (Barry).

As noted earlier this large space can feel cavernous when there are few people in it but for some that's better than being squashed together in some of the town and village pubs which have small bars and are popular,

You can choose to stand at the bar and have a bit of a chat or you can get yourself a little corner and get your head down if you want to get on with something or if you're not feeling overly sociable. It's maybe a bit too big. Unless there's lots of people in here, it never really feels like it's busy. So, if there's just a couple of people in here, like today, it can feel quite empty. But then I quite like it. I don't like anywhere when they get too busy. This pub can accommodate a lot of people and it takes a lot of people to make it feel crowded. You go to some pubs and it's three-deep at the bar. It doesn't take that many people in these small pubs to feel packed and you can barely move, and I feel it's a bit claustrophobic. I don't like that (Ivan).

However, the space available to different groups and the neutral spaces between them allows patrons to develop transient relationships 'I suppose one thing with the space is that I can come into this pub and there might be two or three groups of friends spread throughout the pub. So, you could talk to one group, then stroll over to another group and then stroll over to another group if you want to circulate. Even as we're doing this recording, there's another group of friends on the sofas beside the fire. If I wasn't doing this, I could potentially be doing that. It's a very laidback pub. You can pretty much do your own thing' (Steve).

Comfort means more than appropriate furniture, real fires and good lighting. It is also about feeling comfortable and many patrons spoke about that feeling, which is very important to it being a successful pub. The atmosphere and feel of the Ale House are set by the publican,

I want it to be as comfortable and pleasing to me as it possibly can be. One of the most important things to me, one of those silly little dictums you have rolling around in your head is would my mother be comfortable in here? My mother spent 25 odd years in the pub trade, so she's got a rough idea about what makes a pub tick and when she finished in the pub trade, that wasn't the last time she went in a pub. She still goes to pubs now and she's 92. I ask myself; would she be comfortable coming here? Yes, is the answer, she would be comfortable coming here. It's difficult to say whether it's the language that people use, whether it's the furnishings, whether it's the décor, the artwork but it's the ambience of a place. She's a fairly good judge, even in her dotage, she's still as sharp as a tack, she'd tell me or she would have told me the first time she came in here if she disapproved of something in here, I would have been told, I have no doubt about that whatsoever, (Nigel)

Part of that ambience is the friendliness of those who use the pub, especially to those who work in it, 'Oh, I really enjoy working here. I was worried about working in a bar because of the drinking, but my opinion of bar work has changed quite a lot. I find it social and I really enjoy meeting new people and talking to people and working hard. So, it's a good combination of everything and people aren't as drunk as I thought they might be and there's lots of regular faces so that's good. I am not from Stroud, so this was the first job I've had in Stroud where I've been able to socialise and network with people. I much prefer Stroud to Cheltenham as it turns out, which is where I'm from. I never really felt like I fit in Cheltenham, but I find everyone's friendly and warm and welcoming here in Stroud and I feel I fit in to the job well because everyone was so kind', (Tania).

The pub's open space makes it a safe place, 'It's a nice place to come in during the day and have a soup or a sandwich and a drink. It's an environment I know, and it is a comfortable place to come in here on your own, particularly for women' (Brenda). It welcomes all comers, 'My friends from Swindon love to come down here for

an evening because of the beer range. Even the dogs like it here because Nigel makes a fuss of them and they know where to go to get their welcoming biscuit', (Barry).

It appears that the space available in this pub has many advantages despite it feeling a little 'cold' when virtually empty.

It's quite nice that there's an open fire. There's quite a nice courtyard outside if you like to smoke and it's a bit of a suntrap as well in the summer. It's well-designed. There's music here from time to time as well, there's a bit of everything going on. You can come in here and there could be half a dozen people in here, or you can come here and there could be 150 people in here and it's got a completely different environment, This place can fill up when there's a band on, you are shoulder to shoulder, (Sam).

However, it is difficult to keep this large open building with a high glass ceiling warm in the coldest time of the year but those who enjoy its ales and its culture are committed to maintain its survival,

### **Friday 2 November 18 - 18.45.**

There is a quiet hum in the pub, busier than normal for the other weekdays. The pub's front bar is full of middle-aged persons and the main bar has 3 people sitting round a limp fire with a couple of tables accommodating a pair of drinkers talking quietly. Nigel seems happy as he surveys the pleasant atmosphere, cooking one or two meals and at the same time renewing ales at the bar. Tania is kept busy but not overwhelmed and people wait patiently and quietly to be served. A request for a sauvignon blanc is heard together with a pint of ale. The courtyard has two cold drinkers puffing away on a near freezing evening and the doors to the meeting and TV room are kept closed from the cold air that flows from the unused chimney and the single glazed windows. A couple who have a business in the town wander in and then leave. Perhaps it is too cold, and the 2 smokers come in from the courtyard cold to a slightly higher temperature. Everyone keeps on their coats, jackets scarves and anoraks. The smokers grab a couple of seats by the fire. There is still a pleasant hum in the dim lighting determined by the publican as the appropriate atmosphere for a cold winter night. Two greyhounds stand patiently at the bar shackled by their owner as they both wait patiently for a treat.

A child sitting with parents maintains the quiet culture by playing on a tablet with earphones attached and a couple of small dogs sit quietly on their owners laps on one of the comfortable sofas adjacent to the door to the courtyard grateful that they are sitting next to a radiator. A quiet musical background compliments the low level, chatter in a physically cold pub with a warm atmosphere.

The Ale House is aptly named as a pub that specialises in providing a wide range of cask ales and therefore attracts engaged enthusiasts, 'Somewhere good to drink in your local town is pretty important and this pub certainly drew me in. When it re-opened as the Ale House, I came in to have a look to see what he's got to offer, and it was a joyful array of tasty beer. The publican was a proper beer aficionado who was very knowledgeable and very willing to talk about beer. I think most of us in a pub will talk about beer and then music and sport, to a greater or lesser extent. I've made a lot of good friends in here. It's an engaging place' (Eric). It has been the Stroud CAMRA's Pub of the Year consecutively from 2011-2019. (*Check*)

Fiona, who started work in the Ale House at the age of 19 in 2017 and is still here in as we turn into the 2020s discovered a new interest in cask ale, 'To me at 18 ale was ale and then I worked here and I started to get to know about CAMRA and, all these different people who really enjoy ale and have knowledge about it and care about it. I didn't realise it had that depth to it and a society around it, (Fiona).

The Cask Report 2019 notes an increase in sales of cask ales with premium cask 'alive and kicking'. Their annual survey that what 'becomes apparent is that in certain types of pub, cask can still work brilliantly as a point of difference and a driver of new custom and loyalty in the on-trade. Get it right and it's hard to beat cask ale'. This certainly applies to the high standards applicable to the Ale House. The report goes on to suggest that 'Pubs that do well with cask' are those pubs which are 'wet led' and that cask ale is 'less likely to do well in large high street pubs'. They summarise what makes cask ale sell in a pub,

The answer is simply, it's the right kind of pub (64%). It's also likely that the people serving it care about it themselves (53%) to the extent that they believe it is Britain's national drink, part of the DNA of a proper pub (54%) (CASK Report 2019 p.11).

For those who value cask ale it is a haven. 'It effectively offered the greatest range of ale I have ever seen in this area and it continues to do so. For someone like me who wants to see a different range of ale whenever I walk into a pub the Ale House is ideal. I am a tinker, keeping records of all the ales I have tasted', (Barry)

The Ale House was also an educative experience for the young people employed as bar staff,

I tried a few ales and out of work started going to other places and I'd try an ale and it just clicked. I now know what I like and certain hops I don't like now. I prefer more, citrusy ales than very hoppy. I'll go to the pub with my friends and choose a beer and I lecture them on some facts. I'm there, smelling it and I know what I'm talking about. It's great to be able to stand at a bar and when someone asks something about the ales to be able to have some knowledge about them. I sometimes think the customer finds it unexpected coming from a young woman, (Fiona).

Keane regards himself as one of those connoisseurs,

I like drinking in different pubs, and I like drinking good beer. To drink a selection of good beer, when I moved here, we'd have to travel around to various pubs. But the scene changed with the opening of The Ale House where it's eight or nine handpumps with beer on at any time and an ever-changing rotation of those beers. So, you can stay in Stroud and drink beers from all over the UK without having to travel that far. It's not just about having a range of beers, but it's about keeping the beers in good condition and having a great pint. It's the quality of the beer that interests me and the variety. People these days are more inclined than ever to try different types of beer, perhaps try something they haven't had before, (Keane).

The Ale house is 'catering for a particular person who is more likely to be into their beer. Some people wander in here and if they see that the pub doesn't sell Fosters or Carling or any of those lagers then they're not really that interested. I'm happy with that. We often talk about the different beers and our opinions of them. It's a theme running through here, (Ivan). Ale quality is paramount for the regulars, 'His ale is fantastic as is the kind of conversation that is generated. People come here rather than going to a chain where prices are low for the quality of the ale. I travel a few miles from the village in which I live with 2 pubs because of the quality and range of the ale here', (Brian).

High standards also apply to everything related to ale, 'He keeps it clean and tidy. He trains the staff well. The pumps are always shiny and polished. The smell of Brasso is always in the air. His cellar is immaculate. You could eat off the floor in there. It's unbelievable. He smiles when he knows people are saying nice things about him, (Eric).

The publican has high standards and staff who stay for a long time appreciate the values on which the pub is based and strive to maintain them, 'I've left jobs before because I didn't like the quality of what I was selling. I worked in a tearoom, and I found out that their sausage rolls were only ten percent pork meat and not free-range pork, so I left. They were telling customers lies about their product and that's not okay to me. If you're selling something you need to be honest with the person and tell them exactly what you're getting for your money. I'm proud to work in Stroud's CAMRA pub of the year five years running, I tell people that, (Tania).

Being in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide brings people from far and wide, 'People call in here because they're real ale enthusiasts and could come from anywhere in the country. I can remember somebody who lived in Solihull but had been on holiday in Cornwall. He had broken the journey back home from the holiday to come in here and try the beer because it got a good write-up in the Good Beer Guide. I had quite an interesting conversation with him that evening, (Keane).

Ian invoked an early English term for ale participating, 'I am a believer in quaff tide. It's early evening drinking, when the sun's over the yardarm and it's time for a drink when the day's work's over. Beer is at its best at this time in the evening' (Ian).

The regulars 'like to be involved; there's a degree of ownership that they feel about it. Often, you'll get people turning around and saying, "oh I think you've got a wrong'un over there, Nigel". Six months ago, this bloke rolled in and started trying to sell drugs. One of the regulars came rushing out to me because I was out in the office and warned me and I threw him off the premises. My regular was outraged that anyone would think of possibly doing that, (Nigel).

The staff enjoy being the specialist, an extra skill and interest added to their service role, 'we get lots of people that drift in often don't know much about beer. I've learnt quite a lot about beer, and I enjoy helping people find what they're looking for. I have a series of questions now, such as "do you like fruity or citrusy" and I enjoy the look on their face when they indicate "ooh that's the one"' (Tania).

The Ale House also holds two beer festivals a year with each one focusing on a different UK county to increase the knowledge of its customers about regional brewing.

### **28 May 2016 6.30**

*(Fig. 11 Beer Festival 1)* It's the bi-annual beer festival, housed in the meeting room with 19 barrels of beer suitably coated in wet towelling to keep them cool. Victor, a local beer expert looks after them and serves them with a dose of expertise thrown in, if the opportunity arises. One table near us seats two men nursing two unfinned pints and two female friends each sampling three thirds of three different beers from those available. At an adjacent table sit three women and two men in their thirties. The women arrive first and choose two sets of thirds beer and when the men arrive, they ask them to taste them and then they tell them which they are from a tasting sheet provided by the pub. After some lively discussion about hops, Citra and cascade, the men go to choose some other beers for tasting and they take photos of the beers and themselves at the ale fest bar. Another couple drink halves of two of the beers and seem to be discussing them. A continual flow of customers drifts in viewing the tempting array of barrels and coming away with half pints. A beer festival is about trying the beers not necessarily about having a few pints. Every table in this part of the pub has drinkers consuming beer in half pint glasses or thirds.

*(Fig. 12. Beer Fest2).* Customers are choosing from an array of two levels of 19 barrels with wonderful names such as Franklin Cowshed pale, 4.5% Gun Zamana IPA 6.5%, Firebird Summer Sorachi 4.2%, each colour coded to indicate mild, pal, red or dark. The whole pub gradually fills and are entertained by a guitar duo entitled 'Swing from Paris' and then suddenly joined by a double bass player. The adjacent open area for smokers fills up and the clientele represents all ages. The ambience is of a friendly place with lots going on, interesting beers, string sounds complemented by happy chatter and an atmosphere of delight and surprise of the wide range of beer flavours and subtle melodious strumming.

However, the Ale House also provides specialist music and supporters engage enthusiastically with it alongside good ale,

### **Sun 26 May 2019**

The Dave Ayre jazz quartet are in full flow with probably the best electric organ player, John-Paul Gard, in the country joining the group, according to Dave. The meeting room with the TV is full of people with chairs facing the band and the main bar is full of people who have come here for this locally well-known quartet. The rhythm is joyous, and the saxophonist John Graham gets applause after his solo and leaps out of the way as the organ player takes the musical stage. The drummer, Austin Rose, and the base player, Dave, quieten the music and the latter performs his piece and then the bass player takes his turn as the organ dies away. They all then join in quickly as they all now develop the musical theme and then slow it to a stop with the saxophonist having the last notes. There is enthusiastic applause and one table finishes its lunch and another, puts in an order but most people are here for the jazz, and the ale, of course. Tania

waves cheerfully to one and all as she collects glasses, and given she virtually did a 12 hour shift the previous day she is remarkably live and jolly. She's a diamond. (*Fig. 13, Dave Ayre Quartet*).

The band chat between numbers about the last offering and then they decide what to play next. It is announced as 'One day my prince will come' but with lots of improvisation. The sax plays the lead working his fingers rapidly and when he misses a note he says 'ah' and then continues as do the others. At the end of his solo he leaps again and raises his arms in the air in mock jubilation with a smile on his face and is clapped enthusiastically. The organist takes over again and after him the bass and they all get appreciative applause.

This is clearly an informed audience who love their jazz and their ale of course. There are over 70 people here and even those in the main front room of the pub where the ale festival is housed clap from some 30 yds away. A couple of plates of food are taken through the bar and the band chatter between numbers. This pub is ideal for this kind of event with people easily accommodated in comfortable surroundings. A woman on the sofa closes her eyes and Dennis tries to negotiate the sleeping dogs. The band break into a fast and loud number with saxophonist again leading.

(*Fig. 14. Quartet Audience Appreciation*). Loud clapping and woops of delight are proffered as the organist takes his turn. Nearly everyone has a smile on their faces as the drummer gets his solo at last. Rapturous applause is given and the band end on a loud climax and they break for a well-earned pint. This a wonderful example of the way a town pub can entertain and emanate joy and pleasure and the publican smiles on benignly. Oh, happy days.

Community pubs even those in the centre of a small town have a cultural value: they represent something authentic and traditional in the face of powerful commercial and market pressures towards standardisation and 'cloned pubs' (IPPR).

## Chapter 3 – The birth of the Ale House

So, how did this building in the middle of Stroud's market area, first used for the distribution of poor relief become the Ale House? We know it was an unsuccessful wine bar/café – Bar 9 - in the late 2000s and was put up for sale in 2012. At about the same time Nigel had 'got fed up with paying what amounted to extortionate rents to Fuller's for the pub he rented in Hertford; 'over £50,000 a year on rent'. He decided to hunt around and see what he could find, something worthwhile, either leasehold or freehold. He looked at well over 100 different pubs all over the south of England over an 18-month period.

The original reason for coming to Stroud was to look at The Duke of York, which appeared in the trade press for sale. However, he noticed the price of the café business Bar 9 was steadily falling in price and wondered why it was this low for a massive site in the centre of town. Before he had a chance to speak to the agent the price had dropped again. So, he and his business partner agreed he should have a look at the building. He reported back to his partner and told him that, 'it is absolutely vast and that his last pub would have fitted in the front bar area'. He put in a 'cheeky bid', just below the level at which VAT kicked in, and expected to get knocked back, but the owners were desperate to sell and so an agreement was reached. Having purchased the building with his partner Nigel set began to design his pub and to imprint his values upon the building, the bar and its culture.

Nigel has been in the pub business all his life. He grew up in a pub down in North Devon, just outside Bideford halfway to Clovelly in a big 13th century thatched Devon long house with ten acres of grounds. 'If you want an idyllic childhood I pretty much had it. We were a mile from the beach down at Bucks Mills. As a small child I would just run off across the fields with a sandwich and would come back again sometime in the early evening and in those days, there was none of this worrying about where the boy had gone'.

He was given pocket money, but he had to work for it doing odd jobs, bottling up or laying the fires. By the time he was twelve he was working behind the bar, 'I wasn't allowed to serve but during the summer, when it was packed to the gunnels with grockles (visitors), I was basically pot man and general skivvy behind the bar'. As he grew older, he was employed by his parents to carry out practical work on their holding, mowing lawns, digging ditches, running the wine cellar, repairing dams. It was in 1974 that he got his first full wage packet - £45. He was being given an apprenticeship, 'it was a case of I'd turn up in the office in the morning and the old man would tell me where I was going or what I was going to be doing that day'.

When he was 18 in 1978, he left to do his catering degree. 'The original idea being that I was going to take over the old man's pub but the idea of me going away and getting a piece of paper behind me to say that I was trained in all these things was a backstop more than anything else, something to fall back on' He, worked in The Ritz for a year as part of the course, 'I enjoyed it, but hotels wasn't where I saw myself. I can't tug my forelock 400 times a day with any conviction'.

After college he began working in one of the local pubs, where he lived in Devon. He worked in the Lansdown Inn, in Torquay 'which is right opposite the nick, and a busy, busy pub. It had students at one end, and it had locals mixed with the police from across the road in the middle, and then you had your public bar down the end'. He graduated to becoming a relief manager for Bass Wales and West for 2-3 years. Then a good friend of his from catering college had got himself a Charles Wells pub in Bedford along with other business interests and asked Nigel to take the pub over for him as his manager. After a year or so he moved on to a little pubco called Licensing Solutions Ltd, which had 15 pubs dotted around East Anglia and London and 'they were a really nice company to work for. They really looked after the people and they wanted me to 'trouble shoot' some pubs'. He was given The Trafalgar in Ipswich to turn around. 'It was small, but we ended up in the Good Beer Guide. When I took it over, we had two hand pumps on the bar, something like Tetley and Burton and I ended up with eight on the bar. That was the first free house he had managed'.

He was there two to three years, by which time, Licensing Solutions Ltd, the company he was working for, had been bought out by a firm who were called Town and County Taverns, who were a similarly sized company They

became a company of about 30 and they were dotted up and down pretty much the East Coast and some in London and they moved him into a pub in Chelmsford which, at the time, was called Beau Jolly's Ale and Wine Lodge.

It was a long thin corridor of a pub and the manager showed me around and explained how things worked. Eventually he said 'can I get you a beer', Nigel, and I said, 'oh well, you only have Burton and Tetley on the bar' and I said, 'well, go on then I'll just have a pint of Burton'. He said, 'don't drink the draught beer in here, have a bottle'. That's what I was taking over.

As part of the sweetener to get Nigel to leave Ipswich to go to Chelmsford, was the power to alter the range of ales and that they were going to redecorate the pub and rename it,

We managed to get 10 hand pumps installed on the bar. I got them to change the name back to its original name, which I'd researched, - The White Horse - because it overlooked what had been the White Horse fields. The back half of the pub didn't have windows, so it was dark, even at mid-day. It was dark at the height of summer, but the pub grew. My relationship with various wholesalers developed and it became a successful pub, but they didn't refurbish it as promised and there were a lot of little niggles.

Feeling a little dissatisfied so when someone said, 'I'm buying a pub down in Haverford West, do you want to come and have a look at it, it'll be a totally free house, you can do what you want with it, I said yes, enthusiastically'.

After 4-5 years managing pubs in East Anglia Nigel moved to Pembrokeshire in Wales. He had more say over the internal design of this pub in Haverford West than he had in the past and he made the most of it, 'We stripped it all out and got all the rubbish out of it. There was an architectural salvage yard just around the corner. We would give Giles, who ran it, stuff that we didn't want and in exchange we would get stock to re-equip the pub with settles, and he built us a slate topped bar. I had an old red telephone box installed, so we had our pay phone in a red telephone kiosk. It was just a little bit of fun'. He thoroughly enjoyed it down there and the people were Ok. However, the freeholder, who owned the place, wasn't paying the bills and after warning him and warning him that these things had to be done, 'I said, consider this to be my notice'.

Fortuitously, he had stayed in contact with people from the previous company he had worked for and they asked him to take over the White Horse again in Chelmsford. He was there for 4-5 years until 1998 when he found the new, 'whizz kids running the PubCo didn't actually understand how you run pubs and I started hunting around and I saw this free house in Hitchin requiring a manager. It was owned by a company called the Dark Horse Brewery'.

After about two and a half months there, the owner asked Nigel to look at the White Horse, a pub they owned in Hertford he liked it and took it on.

It was a beautiful little pub, probably the only pub I have ever taken over in my longstanding career where the first thing I didn't have to do was go downstairs to the cellar and disconnect all the beer lines and clean the beer lines, because they were clean. I had a readymade clientele, and a good clientele, an incredibly varied clientele, everything from the local bikers to the mayor often sat side by side on benches. It was a wonderful atmosphere. We had a very small public bar on the left hand side, a slightly bigger, one on the other side and then upstairs there were four separate rooms coming off a central area which you could use as meeting rooms. We allowed children to go up there because smoking was not allowed, but we didn't allow them downstairs.

However, it was sold fairly quickly to Fullers and although Nigel had the opportunity to take the leasehold on what at first appeared to be a decent contract allowing him to sell a variety of beers alongside Fullers ales, but 'the rent went up and it reached the stage where, there's a thousand quid gone to Fullers before I even get out of bed on a Monday morning. I was beginning to lose the pleasure of being a publican and becoming someone who was making money for somebody else and very little for me'.

So that's when he started looking around with his current business partner whom he had met at The White Horse in Hertford. He, 'scoured a couple of estate agent columns and went around visiting pubs as far north as Northampton, but nothing inspired him'. And the rest is history. He and his partner settled on the building in the

centre of Stroud's marketplace and Nigel bought all his lifelong experience and values to bring about the birth of the Ale House in Stroud for which we are all very grateful.

## Chapter Four – The life of the place.

The Ale House, like any other pub is a place for socialising with friends and family and with other regulars as well as a place for engaging with new acquaintances regularly and maybe finding more long-term relationships. One of the more distinct features of the Ale House is its open environment as noted in Chapter 1. In the past many pubs had different sections for different classes with lounges, saloons and public bars and many still have those features where owners have either preferred to keep them like that or have found it impossible to alter the internal structures. However, many more are open in our more pluralistic society,

Where the class divide was at its greatest the widest gulf existed between places where working class people drank and the hotels, cocktail bars and gentlemen's clubs, which their so-called betters frequented. With social mobility and the breakdown of class barriers middle and upper-class drinkers invaded the pub and the pub came to meet them, losing some of its grit and character in the process, (Boak and Bailey).

In today's 'open-plan' society such walls have been removed, and now anyone and everyone is welcome in the great British pub. So welcome, in fact, 'that almost one in four Britons will now meet their future wife or husband in a pub' (Johnson-Great British Pub). The pub is,

the original social network. The pub remains one of the few places where you can strike up a conversation with a stranger. It's frowned upon on public transport or in the street but in a pub, there is a tacit understanding that if you loiter you are up for a chat. 'As his new acquaintance stuck out a hand and introduced himself. It was awkward but not insincere and we left them an hour later buying rounds for each other and engaged in an animated conversation, friends for the afternoon if not for life,' (Boas and Bailey).

Once having engaged with a total stranger class differences are cast aside as, 'Buying rounds enables people with little money to make generous gestures; to distinguish themselves from neighbours by what they drink and it causes affection progressively by giving each person in turn the character of a warm and hospitable friend'. It is a, 'moral improvement on the Greek symposium where the host alone was the giver and in the country house and Oxbridge common room'. The buying of rounds 'enables even the speechless and the downtrodden to briefly receive the thanks and the honour of their neighbours' (Scruton). One of the most important contributions pubs make,

to local community life is that they act as hubs for the development of social networks between local people. Our national opinion poll found that outside the home the pub scored the highest of any location as a place where people 'meet and get together with others in their neighbourhood': 36 per cent of respondents said that pubs were important for this purpose, compared with 32 per cent saying other people's houses, 20 per cent saying local cafes and restaurants, and 15 per cent saying local shops, (IPPR Report).

The Ale House is a space that lends itself to social engagement and interaction and therefore engendering a feeling of social well-being.

I have been coming here for 4-5 yrs. and have lived in Stroud in since 2003. The Ale House is virtually the only pub in which I drink and its mainly to do with the quality of the beer and the ale attracts a discerning type of person. The conversation goes hand in hand with beer and that's what pubs should all be about, interaction between people. Good ale is connected to a form of social engagement. The very concept of this pub is for people to talk to each other. It is not a place just to get drunk. It's a social centre, (Brian).

Opportunities to take away ale is also provided which assists those driving the consumption of alcohol 'brings about an endorphin release. It enhances psychological well-being, enhances close bonds and in some ways is the same as laughter and alcohol affects the social and cognitive skills' (Dunbar). (*Fig. 14, Take away Ales*)

The Ale House has a notice outside, which says that it's a pub for conversation,

There's not a telly in here. There's not a fruit machine in here. I like to drink at the bar. I don't like to be in the way, but I like to drink at the bar, where I am much more likely to end up talking to somebody. Even people who do come in and sit at a table quite often will end up becoming engaged in whatever the loudest conversation is anyway, (Eric).

Aside from direct health benefits that might arise from up regulating the endorphin system by drinking socially rather than alone, 'the principal benefit of the social consumption of alcohol may thus be that it acts much like many other endorphin, stimulating activities that we use in social and community bonding - notably laughter singing, dancing and even storytelling' (Dunbar). The regulars at the Ale House are conscious of the social possibilities in such an environment, 'It's completely open, it's not trying to be exclusive in any way at all, it's inclusive. There have been times when I've seen somebody looking a bit lonely sat on their own and I have said "come and join our poetry group if you like", and they do, (Ian).

The staff benefit from social interactions during quiet times,

My number one thing for any job, ever, no matter what I'm doing, is people. A job must be people orientated. I don't think I'm academically the most amazing person, but I feel that my people skills are what I run off. I can talk for hours to someone. So, working in a pub has been ideal. I didn't pre-plan it like this, but I spend most of my time talking, communicating to people, and learning about people. Talking to some patrons is almost like counselling from behind the bar, which I hadn't anticipated. Honestly, people pour their heart out to me. I just stand and I talk, and I talk, and I talk, and they talk back. It's a two-way thing. I learn things about people. It's something I really loved, and I love working in this kind of industry, (Nicola).

Joining in conversation with people is a feature of its long bar which can tolerate groups of 4-6 people chatting away and newcomers can still get to the bar to be served. It is a vital feature that enables anyone to join in. If they look uncertain about which ale to choose, those at the bar may offer some advice and if they hang around after getting their ale, they may be asked to introduce themselves. This rarely works in small pubs with a small main bar, which may well be dominated by one small closed group. 'Those who visit a local feel more socially engaged, feel connected and trust other members of the community' (Dunbar). Community pubs like the Ale House, also have a cultural value: they represent something authentic and traditional in the face of powerful commercial and market pressures towards standardisation and cloned pubs.

I like the people, the regulars, who come in the same nights I do. I enjoy the banter with them, and I like the fact that The Ale House gets a very wide range of people. Not just the people who come in several times a week, but the people who perhaps come in on a one-off basis and quite often one engages them in conversation. I enjoy chatting to different people from different walks of life. It's easier to do that in this pub as opposed to many others in the area', (Keane).

Like most pubs, regulars look forward to bumping into each other at the bar, but the staff are also part of that activity, 'It's a friendly place to come to and its unusual not to find someone here I know. When I come in from the station for a pint before going home there's always someone to chat to and if it is quiet the bar staff will talk to you. They like to chat as well. We sometimes collect glasses if they are busy' (Barry).

The social engagement along with some alcoholic well-being can become somewhat addictive, 'I come in here to do a bit of work, because I'm self-employed. On an afternoon or a Saturday, I bring in the laptop, do a bit of work and have a couple of nice pints. But inevitably, there's always someone to have a bit of a chat with and that's why it's always difficult to leave. You try and leave then someone else walks in and it's like the Tardis where the crowd grows and then you end up having about three more pints than you planned (Ivan).

'The public house is more than just a retail business: it plays an important role at the heart of many local communities, providing a hub through which social networks can be maintained and extended' (IPPR) and the openness of the Ale House and its prioritising of social exchange and interchange is able to provide a context where major social issues are discussed and explored.

It bothers me that people in pubs in the past have avoided issues such as immigration because they are afraid of being called racist. As an immigrant I think we should talk about national and cultural issues in a pub rather than avoiding controversial subjects such as racism and immigration. As an immigrant myself I would welcome discussions like these as it is a European tradition to examine issues and philosophy. In the European tradition issues and events are dissected, investigated, rigorously examined and we should not tolerate any attempt to restrict this process. This is the European restlessness and demand for the truth that must not be smothered, and I enjoy it happening here at the bar of the Ale House (Brian).

This regular represents an aspect of a British culture that has been celebrated through the centuries, 'The one human corner, a centre not for beer but bonhomie; the one place where after dark the collective heart of the nation could be seen and felt, beating resolute and strong.' (AP Herbert, MP, on the role of the pub during the second world war - Jennings 2007: 209).

The opportunity to engage with a wide range of diverse characters is one that attracts people to the Ale House, 'We get this very wide range of people. I enjoy talking to other people to get a different experience, a different take on things. I can think of one guy who lives in Stroud and comes from Colombia in South America. Absolutely fascinating to talk to about his background, about the political regime there, the reasons why he came here, what he used to do in Colombia, what he does now and the differences between the two. It's stuff like that that interests me. It's the people side of it,' (Keane).

There is a causal relationship between happiness and pub visits, 'Beer and jazz should be a religion. I'm very, very fortunate. I never take it for granted, but I'm in a place where I can play, good music with some of my favourite musicians and drink excellent beer at the same time. When my wife says, what do you want for your birthday this year? I say, 'I'd quite like to play jazz in the bar and drink beer' (Eric).

It is clear from history that the relationship between ale and well-being is a given and that 'we discovered how it could be used to trigger mechanism the endorphin system that is an adaptation for the social to be a bonding experience. Indeed, there is now widespread view among archaeologists that cereal cultivation was first started in order to brew beer rather than to provide food. We suggest that like these other social bonding activities, the consumption of alcohol, once it has been discovered, came to be adopted as part of the complex set of activities and rituals associated with bonding our large social communities' (Dunbar).

The Ale House has been created to enhance and develop this social bonding, This lovely community, this lovely social place. It just feels like a big family, like a big lovely beer loving family, (Tania).

The Ale House like many pubs act as a third place for its patrons, after home and work and feel as comfortable as home, 'I'm constantly entertaining customers and I don't have that office banter or people that I can go for a pint with at the end of the week. I don't really have people to whinge about work issues with my day-to-day job because I'm constantly with customers and I'm putting on my happy, happy face. So, the Ale House is where I come to unwind after work and let off a bit of steam. But it's nice to have somewhere you can let off a bit of steam' (Ivan). There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn', (Samuel Johnson, 1791 - Kingsnorth 2008: 21).

Nigel sees himself as a publican who has an overall perspective of the life of the pub and that refers to user's behaviour as well as other responsibilities. 'There are certain ways that one should behave in public. I acknowledge that they are here to have a good time, but they've got to be conscious of the fact there are other people about using the pub you mould them. I might turn around and say "whoa, calm down a little bit, everybody else is here to have a good time as well"' (Nigel).

For some it has become the place they bring their friends and relatives who they have not seen for a while to show them where they have taken root, 'If anybody ever comes to visit me, I know that I can always bring them here. It's a bit of a home from home and they associate this place with me as well. Nowadays when they arrive, they ask to go to The Ale House' (Keane).

Ale House staff are given the responsibility of running a bar on their own, once having learnt the basics although the publican is not far away and it is good management experience,

In this pub you are often the only person behind the bar, responsible for everything pertaining to the pub being open for service and this helped me learn how to cope. On a busy night you might have 40 people wandering around and having no control over what they might do but you get quite adept at dealing with that. The bar is a bit like a no-mans-land and so long as the activities are not destructive or damaging you cope except that customers coming behind the bar is forbidden. On your own in the bar you just deal with whatever comes up, a barrel going or the fire needs stoking. On a Saturday or Sunday morning there may well be children bouncing off the walls and you find something to keep them calm and the same with the dogs. Your confidence does grow in that situation, but it also must as you are on your own and you don't want to drag the publican from the office or the kitchen.

It can be daunting taking on such responsibility, but it also was a chance to increase confidence with a little help from your friendly regulars,

Before I started, I tended to suffer with anxiety quite bad, So, when I first started this job it was terrifying, I was very, very scared. You get all self-conscious and it's a new job and you worry about making mistakes and fumbling things and it can get very overwhelming. Customers reassured me that I was doing okay when they saw I was getting a bit overwhelmed even shedding a tear. My co-workers and customers helped me to find my footing. I had to learn how to interact with so many people and different kinds of people and, speak over loud music and having to shout things like last orders in front of a room full of patrons. It has helped my general social development. I go out much more like and I'm quite confident. I can now see the difference in my friend's confidence when they haven't worked in this, social environment (Fiona).

For some of these young people it was the first time they had handled money and they appreciated the trust placed in them by the publican, 'You're on your own behind the till, and handling money on your own, which is something I've never done before and also being in charge of a till is a huge responsibility. When he's upstairs if anything went wrong it's all on me. I've never had that. There's a sense of trust in that he leaves me with the money (Nicola).

Nigel recognises his responsibility towards his young workers, 'it's a chance for them to stand back and instead of thinking about themselves to find out about the adult world across generations'.

Working behind the bar in the Ale House when quiet sometimes has a major social benefit for these young people,

You may be faced with a drinker complaining about the world and you must go along with that or be sympathetic with someone griping about a small part of their life. Unknowingly you help them and learn about them and about dealing with those situations. My Forces Officer job, after leaving the Ale House, involves driving things forward, personal relationships, helping with soldiers their careers and talking openly to them. I learnt a lot about talking openly in an unbiased way, giving something back and allowing people space to talk, dealing with their problems and issues when I worked here. I use some of these examples when working now with young people out on manoeuvres or in the training rooms (Carl).

The building of confidence is done within a social context of a pub through the many social exchanges that are inimical to pub life, 'You start to get to know what people like and you just instantly know what, kind of, drinks they're going to like and you know what's been going on with their week. It's very nice to have that, personal level of relationship with so many people, it's just quite a nice release. It's weird being in a job getting to know so many people on a human level. I couldn't imagine now being sat on a till all day and, never engaging with anyone for more than a minute or so (Fiona). Their relationship is two-way, 'It works both ways as the regulars help the bar staff if they are busy and they make sure they are not abused. They look after you and we look after them' (Brenda).

The publican is aware of his role seeing young people through this status passage into adulthood, 'I had a young girl called Lottie who shortly after we first started doing Sunday lunches began to help me out. She was too young to work behind the bar. She came in here, and she was so shy. She walked around with her head lowered all the time. Gradually, little by little she grew, and she grew, and she grew, and she just blossomed. She ended up working behind the bar for me and she was great, wonderful. She has gone off to university in Aberystwyth, a fully-fledged person as it were now' (Nigel).

Leaving staff on their own to manage and at the same time supporting his staff gives a sense of ownership, I wouldn't say this bar is mine obviously it's Nigel's, but I like the fact that when I walk in to work, I know exactly what to do, I know exactly where to go. I know who's likely to come in and I know what they want. You get into a routine but one in which you feel secure, (Nicola).

The social aspect of working behind a bar varies from pub to pub but those that prioritise conversation can have some surprising benefits for staff in some slack times

I just poured my heart out to one of the regulars and I was going on. Eventually I said sorry, I must be boring you. He said, 'you know what, you just have to stand and listen to people all day long so it's completely okay for me to listen to you for once'. I said 'You're right. I do listen to a lot of people's stories and with the regulars and people who come in on a semi-regular basis, there's this kind of connection that happens, (Nicola).

These connections sometimes have a lasting effect, 'I left here over a year ago, but I always like coming back in here when on leave and renewing relationships with regulars. I am a fan of real ale, but I also come back because there are people I know. I walked in today to watch the rugby and felt at home, an extension of my family' (Carl).

Those staff that stay for a while find a way to be themselves in the pub for its culture is an open one enabling them to do so, 'I like working hard and I like work to be enjoyable. I like to be proud of what I'm doing. I don't want to go to work and be miserable and then go home and be miserable because I've just been at work. I want to go home and although it was busy, I see that as positive because we worked hard and got through it, (Tania).

Pubs matter to our communities in various ways. 'They act as hubs through which local social networks can be strengthened and expanded. Pubs generate more jobs and more government revenue per litre of beer than beer sold in shops and supermarkets. While large town centre bars and a small minority of badly run pubs can cause problems of alcohol-related disorder, the vast majority cause no such problems. If anything, it is preferable that people should drink in the controlled environment provided by a pub. Pubs are an important local social institution for encouraging people to mix with others from different backgrounds to their own. They enrich local civic life by hosting meetings of local clubs and associations, promoting local charities and events.

## **Chapter 5 - The Publican's Pub**

The central figure in the establishment, culture, character and values is Nigel the publican. We have described the culture of the pub, learnt how he acquired the pub and how he used the space to create a pub for conversation,

respect for a wide variety of groups and perspectives and openness. We have learnt about his extensive lifelong experience in the pub trade which enabled him to create a successful business. We have gathered the perspectives and experiences of regulars and staff as to what they find attractive about the pub and what it means to them and we have provided some vignettes of its life.

However, to appreciate the extent to which this pub is Nigel's Ale House we need to dig a little deeper into the values he brings to this pub and to examine how it continues to survive in a competitive market where other Stroud pubs have closed since the Ale House opened.

Creating a successful business means for Nigel getting his hands dirty in more ways than one, as he demonstrates with an example of pub he took over in the past, 'They'd bought an old restaurant and converted it into a pub and it ticked along. it was okay, but it needed a kick up its jacksy and so I took it over and scrubbed the place from top to toe and smartened up the clientele. I got rid of the less desirable ones who would have put off other better clientele who might spend more money'. His extensive experience has made him creative in providing what he sees as a good and responsible pub,

The pub in Chelmsford was a drugs ghetto. I got rid of them very, very simply. We ran out of lager permanently, the wires got ripped out of the back of the juke box and we started playing jazz and insisted on respectable language being used. I also installed my Doberman called Baldrick, who was a pathetic wimp, but he was large. There were a couple of lads in there one evening saying something rather loud and obnoxious to the bar staff and Baldrick, who was curled up underneath my table where I was chatting to some builders, got up for a stretch. That's all he did was get up for a stretch and he walked to the step in the middle of the pub and these guys looked at the dog, looked at me, whacked their pints down their throat and ran out the door never to be seen again in the pub. I would see them often on the street and they would stop, say hello and enquire about how well the pub was doing but they never dreamt of ever coming back into the pub.

He is keen to 'enhance the business', for it is a business as well as his home and to some extent they both overlap, 'Well primarily developing the business further and further and further, because what's better for you as a user is eventually better for me, because you spend more time here. It involves putting a coat of paint on that wall, interesting new beers in the bar and changing the food and even down to, throwing somebody out of the pub and not letting them back in, because it makes those who are left happier'.

The Ale House does, to some extent, aim to satisfy its customers but only up to the point where they might clash with Nigel's values and then he asserts them. The 'customer is not king' but perhaps a respected colleague in the establishment of a pub based on a clear set of shared values. This pub is, in some ways, a pinnacle on which he has total control and he is able to instil his values without hindrance, 'I'd never work for a chain or anything like that, but even in small PubCos it meant somebody somewhere has made some kind of rules. What they always forget when they start making rules about pubs is that every pub is different, so it might work in nine of your 10 pubs, but that tenth pub might be completely different from the other nine pubs.

His current autonomy allows him to maintain high standards unencumbered by those higher up in an organisation telling him what he can and cannot do, 'He is a passionate, knowledgeable beer expert. He turns away reps who are trying to sell him boring, uninteresting beers. He encourages variety' (Eric). In 'enhancing the business' in this way he keeps regulars returning to try new ales every week, a rare phenomenon in many pubs who stick to a narrow range and argue that their customers like them but they eschew the role of publican-educator which is a vital value that Nigel pursues.

(*Fig. 15. Menu*). He is also the chef of the pub and provides a menu he likes cooking, mainly an Asian cuisine with a tasty range of sandwiches. 'Nigel has his particular way; it's his pub. He does the food he likes. He does what he does, he doesn't pander to people's whims, for example there are no chips', (Fiona).

He completely commands this place, every nook and cranny. I think it is very much about his professionalism. He's not a bumbling landlord. He knows exactly what he's doing' (Eric). Needless to say, he organises the monthly quiz (*Fig. 16 The Quiz*). The regulars realise how lucky they are, 'He's been in the trade a long time. It's

something he's always wanted to do, run his own pub effectively and run the kind of pub that he wants to, with a wide range of well-kept beer. I think we're perhaps lucky to have him in Stroud. He could have picked somewhere else and we wouldn't have had the opportunity to drink the beers that we do today, (Keane).

Nigel isn't afraid to publicise his personal values. (*Fig. 17, Values on his sleeve*). The Ale House is not only his pub and his home but his third place as well, 'The landlord has liberal views and doesn't mind indicating his political persuasion. However, this perspective also reflects many of those who live in Stroud. If you go to a lot of pubs up and down the country, particularly some of the village pubs, they'll have newspapers on the bar. Nine times out of ten it's The Telegraph, The Times and the Mail. Here it's the Guardian, Private Eye and of course the Rugby paper, (Keane).

He only has the leaflets of associations with whom he agrees. I think that's important, because it gives an identity to the place. I like the attitude that this is the way it is, take it or leave it. Most places that you go to are 100% anonymous, aren't they? Nigel's his presence here and the openness about his values makes it a bit more interesting. There's an integrity about it which would not be the case at somewhere like Wetherspoons, which is basically a retail outlet. I can't really think of many other places in town, with which I would want to affiliate myself. What's unique about it is that Nigel's character is apparent in the building, even in his absence. I think that's a positive thing. It's the take it or leave it side that I quite enjoy. I come here and, I'll be pleased to be known as a regular of The Ale House' (Sam).

Nigel noted in another conversation that he wasn't the only pub in the town to publicise its political values. The Wetherspoons advertised its support for Brexit.

Nigel also is not averse to providing behavioural guidelines. He has pinned an article on public display focused on the behaviour of children in pubs from the Good Pub Guide in 2016. He has laminated copies of suggested behaviours placed on all tables, 'Well supervised children are welcome, please keep them under control. However, out of consideration for others, we request that children leave the premises by 7pm. Should snacks miss little mouths, we are happy to provide you with a dustpan and brush'.

He is, very old-school, isn't he and doesn't take any crap and doesn't take any prisoners and doesn't take fools kindly. Obviously, he has amazing methods for keeping his beer and that's why we all come back. He lets the beer do the talking, but he's very old-school. He's just how I imagine an old-school landlord of a pub to be, doesn't take any nonsense, calls a spade a spade and he'll talk to you if you're being an idiot. He's very particular how he keeps the beer. Between each cask, he cleans the lines properly whereas a lot of pubs would just quickly put on a new one straight away. So, sometimes you wait for a beer to come on, but it's always going to be in immaculate condition. He doesn't rush it. He doesn't cut any corners. He does it how he knows it should be, (Ivan)

He brings his general social values into play in the way he treats his staff,

when I'm interviewing people, I describe the clientele and say, 'I do allow you to drink behind the bar but obviously don't take the mickey. I believe in you socialising with the customers. I hate it when staff are not allowed to do this or that because it stops them being a person. When staff have a chance to stand and chat with patrons, they often develop friendships; people with whom you wouldn't even have thought of talking to, if they had come in as customers. I don't ban staff from using their phones, but if ever one customer turns around to me and says, 'oh I can never get served because so and so is always on their phone' I tell them that all staff will lose their right to have their phone in here. In the same way as if a customer walked to the bar and started ordering a round of drinks and halfway through started talking on their phone, I put their drink on the back of the bar and I'll carry on serving other people.

Nigel believes in giving his staff a great deal of responsibility while he is working on other pub duties such as administration, cooking, cellar work, ensuring supplies are available and a myriad of other jobs entailed in running a pub. He cannot be in the bar a great deal and it would be inefficient for him to hire staff and then constantly oversee them. Nevertheless, he still worries about what's going on in the bar, 'You're wondering what's going on

down there all the time and you've got to put somebody in charge, and you've got to be able to trust them. However, you still have that nagging little doubt, would s/he be doing the right thing? Will s/he do it the way that I did it? Or would s/he make the right decision on that? It is very difficult to hand authority over to somebody and to make sure they maintain your standards'.

His high standards are a result of his extensive experience where he developed them, 'My old mum talked to me about ways to judge a pub when you walk in. If they haven't changed a light bulb or if they haven't polished the brass - simple jobs like that, what else aren't they doing? Whether it's this pub or any other pub, I want it to be the best that I can offer'.

The UK is well known for its range of pubs with different characters and the Ale House is one of that group that exemplify an individual ambience. It is no better than other similar pubs, but it is different from them. Some of the regulars at the Ale House also frequented other local pubs that have created their own individual characters,

I think every pub has its own character. At one level, every pub is the same because you go in and there's a bar, there's the pumps, there's tables and chairs, they sell beer and other stuff and food. So, on that level, every pub is the same. Yet, you go into most pubs and find it has a different atmosphere. In Stroud, the Prince Albert has got a different atmosphere from the Crown & Sceptre which has a different atmosphere to The Ale House, and again a different atmosphere to The Clothiers. It's hard to define why those pubs have different atmospheres. I guess it is down to the landlords and the type of pub that they want it to be and whatever it is they find, attracts as regulars the type of person that feels most comfortable in that pub most of the time. You can't define it. You go into some pubs and you feel more comfortable than you do in other pubs. It's the character of the pub. I think Nigel's done an excellent job of making a pub here, that is, if you're of the type that likes this type of pub, then you're going to like it a lot. It's full of civilised people and civilised conversation. It's very much Nigel's pub, isn't it? You could say the same with Rodda and the Crown & Sceptre, it's his pub' (Steve).

Many appreciate and admire what he has done and some do their best to show that appreciation, 'I'm quite understanding of people and I know that he loves this pub and doesn't get away from it much, so I try to be understanding and bring joy to him. He's, on his own and lives here whereas I get to go home and see my family and get out to do other things, but all his time is spent here. So, it needs to be enjoyable for him and he needs to get on with the staff who he sees most days such as me, (Tania).

It is clear from the evidence so far that the Ale House is a place appreciated by those who enjoy cask ale and that the publican has been able to fashion a pub based on his values and experience. However, many pubs survive on a shoestring and with the dedication of their owner or tenants and without any extensive financial reward, (Jeffrey). Nigel cleans the pub each morning, refreshes the cellar, carries essential running repairs, takes deliveries, shops locally for essential supplies and preps for lunch – all before he opens at 12am. During the day when he has staff to manage the bar, he deals with paperwork which takes about 60% of his time. He could either employ an accountant/administrator or staff to cover for him while he does it and chooses the latter. He rarely goes off on a jaunt, perhaps 4 times a year at most and has, as it has been noted he is always around. He sees off the evening shift and locks up, sometimes after 1am at the weekend.

He is ensuring the survival of the Ale House, 'a small pub' defined as one with fewer than 10 employees (ONS). More than 11,000 pubs have closed in the UK in the last decade – a fall of almost a quarter (23%). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) analysis shows that it's small pubs that are disappearing, as the big pub chains consolidate their businesses around bigger bars. The closure of British pubs is a well-known story. Organisations like the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) and the British Beer and Pub Association have charted the disappearance of pubs for many years. ONS data confirm the large fall in the number of pubs, from around 50,000 pubs in 2008 to around 39,000 pubs in 2018. Most pubs in the UK are small, independently owned businesses – and it is mainly these kinds of pub that have closed over the last decade. The large "pubcos" (nationwide companies with 250 or more outlets) have almost completely abandoned small pubs, disposing lots of them in the early 2000s, concentrating instead on their bigger bars.

The Ale House, as a small independent freehouse, only survives because of the hours worked by its publican and the commitment of his partner and himself to keep open a niche pub of this kind. The partnership will no doubt have debts related to the purchase and they will want a return on the investment that matches other forms of return. The consequence of these demands is that its publican makes every effort to reduce running costs by carrying out a wide range of management and staffing activities himself. He is the ultimate multi-tasker committed to provide an Ale House in Stroud for its residents and visitors from across the UK and abroad who value the role he has taken to bring a wide range of ales, every day, to his bar and to provide a welcome for all those who appreciate his values. We see the Ale House is a throwback to the *tabernae* of the Roman and later Anglo-Saxon times where our ale houses began. They were places to enjoy ale and socialise as a third place, distinct from home and work. Let's hope Nigel is here for a long time for it won't be the same place without him.

## **References**

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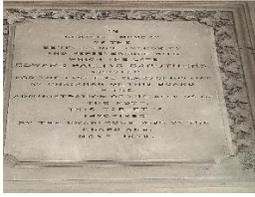


Fig.1 Memorial Tablet



Fig 2 Pub and Market



Fig 3 Events Notices



Fig. 4 Market/Front Bar



Fig 5. Main Bar



Fig. 5 Fire area



Fig.6. End Bar Area



Fig. 7. Courtyard



Fig 8 The Settle Area



Fig 9, Morris



Fig 10, The Mummers



Fig. 11, Beer Festival 1



Fig 12. Beer Fest 2



Fig 13. The Dave Ayre Quartet



Fig. 14, Quartet Audience Appreciation



Fig 15. Take Away Ales

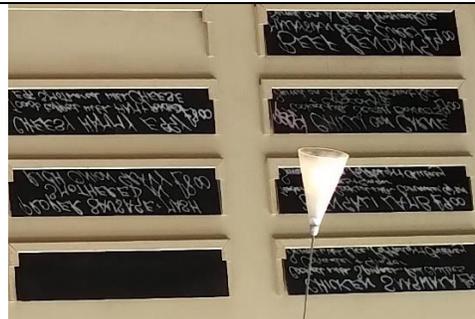


Fig.16 - Menu

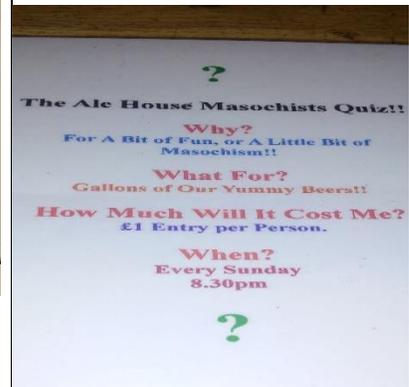


Fig. 17. The Quiz.



Fig. 18, Values on his sleeve

