

# Investing in the village pub: Owning the Red Lion.

## Introduction

According to the British beer and pubs Association the total number of pubs in the UK decreased from 67,000 to 51,200 in the period 1982 – 2014 (Cabras and Mount 2017). One of the main reasons for this decrease was the Parliamentary orders that forced breweries with more than 2000 pubs either to sell their brewery business or to free pubs over the 2000 that they owned from its ties (Mount and Cabras 2015). In 1989 only 115 breweries delivered beer, down from 6290 and 75% of beer came from 6 brewers. The brew orders tried to break up this monopoly however it resulted in the construction of PubCos (IPPR 2012). Tied pubs, those that are tied to buying their beverages and other supplies from specific retailers, soon became the majority in the market, controlling approximately 55% of all pubs into 2011. So the beer orders merely shifted the concentration of pub ownership from a small number of large breweries to a small number of highly profitable and acquisitive PubCos (Cabras and Mount 2017).

More recently some of the largest PubCos have incurred financial losses, which led to significant disinvestment and changes in the ownership structure, and inevitably to pub closures. As a result, at the end of 2014, four out of 10 British pubs were free houses, with about the same proportion of pubs owned or administered by PubCos and the rest owned by breweries. However, many tenants in the market are still struggling to generate a profit above the minimum wage. This is despite the introduction self-regulated bodies and other forms of financial control in the pub industry aimed at improving their contractual conditions (Cabras and Mount 2017).

PubCos controlled more than 55% of the pubs operating in the UK in 2015. Urban and town areas guaranteed pubs higher profits given the critical mass in terms of custom but, there is little surprise that pubs struggle to survive in rural areas. However, the economic perspective remains a narrow perspective compared with the positive impacts rural pubs have in the villages they serve. The decline of village pubs does not only relate to business closures, but has a much wider impact on the local ecosystem (Mount and Cabras, 2015).

Rural areas have been hit particularly hard with 14 pubs shutting each week in 2012 and reported beer sales lower than at any point since the depression of the 1930s. As previous studies suggest, the presence of services, communal spaces and wider social activities is often tied to the presence of a pub in the area, particularly in rural localities. Kingsnorth points out that while the location might remain once a village pub is lost it is no longer a 'place' (Mount and Cabras 2015). The dispersed nature of rural population and a reduction in catchment areas in terms of custom make these pubs more vulnerable to changes.

The major employers are no longer in the district and there's no infrastructure to encourage anything to come back. I've just built some houses up in Frampton, there's no electricity supply that is adequate, the water supply is barely meeting requirements, no gas, there's no gas at all in this side of the River. But they're talking about building as a nation a quarter of a million houses a year, it's never going to happen, we don't have the roads, we don't have the hospitals, we don't have the schools, we don't have the doctors, we don't have the facilities, the infrastructure's not there (Riley)

Fewer opportunities with regard to public and/or alternative transport magnifies the effect of drink-driving laws and a reduced availability of amenities and infrastructure discourages individuals working, shopping and maintaining social networks in the rural areas in which they reside.

The Red Lion in Arlingham was one of these casualties when in 2013 it was put up for sale in an auction by the PubCo that owned it as the pub was not considered a viable business. Arlingham had a population of 459 in the 2011 census. The village is 11 miles from its nearest town, close to the River Severn. This article charts some aspects of this process and the nature of the developing relationship between the village and the pub.

In the lowlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century arable farming required a large labour force and conferred upon rural society a rigid social hierarchy. The land owning farmers were scattered on their own farms and away from the centre of the village. In fact the village working class culture excluded them (Newby, 1985). However, the village pub in the 1960s was not a place frequented by all the villagers and farmers either,

I've always lived about 100 yards from the pub. I remember looking through the doorway and it was quite a raucous place and more spit and sawdust then in the early sixties. I remember the pub as being a place where not everybody socialised in those days. It was a place where some people drank. A lot of the villagers didn't use it. A lot of the village life was centred on church, chapel and village hall. The tradition here would be that only one member of the family worked, generally that was the male; the wife was at home and their only socialising was either in the pub or organised events in the village hall. The pub served a narrow clientele; there wasn't much food, in fact there was no food served in the pub; it was a drinking place for working men mostly. When I was a child here the local confectionary factory was in full swing and a lot of people would go there to work. So they'd come home with all their chocolate waste and their wives would spend the evening eating the chocolate and the men would go to the pub. It was somewhere where not everyone would have gone, so it served a narrow section of the community compared with now, (Richard).

Another significant factor in the survival of the English Village pub has been the change in the nature of the population of our villages. The number of second homes, with more than a hundred and 65,000 households owning more than one dwelling in England, has had an impact on the social fabric of rural communities. Second homes are frequently concentrated in areas not located in proximity to major road or railway networks, with seasonal residents coming from very diverse backgrounds generally not possessing a sense of local identity. While second homes and seasonal residents may generate some positive outcomes for rural communities, for example increased accumulation of social capital due to networks expanding outside the community, they frequently resulted in an increase of service rate and housing market prices with social costs in terms of gentrification and empty houses (with the risk for communities to be transformed into ghost towns). The disappearance of these places, in terms of business closures, is often associated with the decline of several other initiatives and activities taking place at a local level - village shops and local libraries, 'When they closed the village shop the heart went out of the village basically although the post office is still open two hours a week.... When the village shop closed down there was no local meeting place, the villagers used to meet in the shop and they'd stand in there for a couple of hours and have a chat. Had the pub gone out of the village we would then be just a satellite of Frampton on Severn, it would have killed the village completely. I mean they've ripped the telephone box out and taken that away, (Riley). Their vanishing, therefore generated 'black holes' within local communities whose effects went far beyond the mere closure of commercial business and services (Cabras and Mount 2017)

The middle class have been attracted by cheap housing since the late 60's, by an idealised view of rural life, which their ownership of a car allowed them to include.

Communities have changed and also people don't have time to come to the pub. You don't move into this village now unless both partners are working, it's just not possible

to buy in really, unless you're extremely fortunate. Probably both partners are in quite well paid jobs, certainly one if not both and people don't have the time to come home and then say, 'oh, we're going to organise something in the village hall this evening'. People need to go out and have something more ready-made, so you could organise a party or something but you'd want to go in and be served and you've got the income to dispose of and to be served. You didn't have that amount of wealth in the village years ago, (Richard).

So, the village pub was not, in the past, a place where all the villagers congregated and a similar situation is in place today. According to anecdotal evidence from our research only about 15-20% of villagers support their pub regularly, 'When you look at the population of the village you only ever get about 10 per cent that come in here, we're totally reliant now on others coming in from a distance... A lot of the regulars don't live in the village. They come from the other villages. And the cream on the cake is the summer months when you've got the tourists, we get a huge amount of walkers, we've got two caravan sites in the village for campers and caravans and they come and they eat here, (Riley). Nevertheless, when the Red Lion was put up for sale by the PubCo that owned it in 2013 some of the incomers gathered together with families who had lived in the village for generations to save their pub.

## **Taking Ownership**

Rural pubs differ considerably from those in urban and suburban areas regarding the type of custom these businesses target and rely on. In urban areas, pubs represent an important component of the so-called 'night time economy' is based on clubs, spas and other licensed premises that attract residents as well as tourists to urban centres and have an impact on the local economy in terms of employment and revenues. Government supported the city centre development but this support was not given to pubs located in rural areas and many needed to reconfigure themselves into different types of businesses, for example, gastro pubs, and bed and breakfast accommodation in order to survive (Cabras and Mount 2017).

In the face of a sale of the village pub to be converted into housing Arlingham villagers realised the importance of maintaining a village pub, its added value and by purchasing it they took advantage of the symbiotic and resourceful relationships that already existed in a village with a multi-skilled population.

### ***Added Value***

One of the central aspects of the relationship between the pub and the village is that of added value. The village had received an influx of more wealthy incomers over the last 30 years or so buying up cottages and larger properties as they moved from the towns and cities with extra purchasing power. Many felt that an intended purchase of a house in the village was enhanced by the presence of a pub;

If I was buying a house down here and the sales advertisement said 'if you buy the house you get £10,000's worth of shares in the pub as part of the package' that would make me interested because I know I'd be buying into something else as well as buying a residence. I would be interested in that property because there's a broader picture of what I'm getting. You would become part of something already here; you buy into something (Richard)

Villagers and regulars became deeply immersed in the pub and its culture; owner/managers recognised the importance of commitment to retain the pub and the necessity of the village and pub immersion.

It sold at auction for £235,000. It was a bargain really. It's a big place. We had a bit of a shortfall because you had to add VAT on that and I just thought, if I have to put

thirty, forty grand of my own money in, it will come back to me with the pledges. So, having got the three fifty we bought it and then set about a process of renovating the place and interviewing people for a tenancy or as employee managers. We then got their Enterprise Investment Scheme relief. We therefore had got a situation where people invested three hundred and fifty odd grand, they then have had a third of that back through the tax relief, and so what they have paid is two hundred and thirty-five odd, which was the price they paid for the bricks and mortar on a fire sale' (Raymond-Chair of the Directors at the time of purchase).

Historically, there have been a number of community projects involving pubs such as the Gothenburg project, in Sweden, where managers of pubs had no pecuniary interest in sales and surplus profits, which accrued to the local community – disinterested management. In the late 1800s, in Hampton Warwickshire, a pub was held in trust of the rector for the good of the parish. His servants managed it, receiving a salary and the profits from soft drinks and food. The People's Refreshment House Association (PRHA) was formed in 1896, which within 5 years had 18 pubs. Shareholders received no more than a 5% dividend with surplus profits going to the community. Then there were Trust Companies, e.g.; 'The Central Public House Trust Assoc. In 1910 the PRHA had 100 pubs and other trusts made up the number to 250 – not many overall but were not that successful. 25% were in industrial areas but most in rural or small towns (Jennings, 2007).

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) reported in 2014 that there were over 50 pubs owned by their communities and there are other organisations supporting community ownership. The village owners of the The Red Lion knew that they would not receive a dividend for at least the first three years on their investment but they had received tax relief for starting up a small business. However, they also knew that they were improving the property and its value would increase;

So, I basically went to the board and said look, we have got to refurbish the kitchen. We are going to have to put, in my view, twenty to thirty grand; its sounds painful, but it will be more efficient. It should relieve staffing costs because of the efficiencies that it will bring. It means that we don't need to add staff to get through put. The washing area for example is a lot quicker, so you don't need two kitchen porters doing the washing up because it's like a production line (Raymond)

The Directors considered a possible structure for ownership which was to be directly responsible for the pub for the first three years and then to lease it to a publican. However, that still hasn't happened after five years of ownership as it was being seen as increasingly problematic,

What rent do you charge, do you do what the PubCo did? The shareholders, potentially, will want to charge the proper market rent. Well, what is the proper market rent? It might be twenty or thirty grand and that might kill it; or should you say no, it's better that we have got a pub in the village that is open, supporting the capital prices of your house, (Raymond).

The Directors were also fully aware as how difficult it is to make good living from a village pub, 'The 100 odd shareholders have put their money in, kept their money in and haven't tangibly seen any return other than the fact they've got a capital investment but that wouldn't come to fruition until they sell their house' (Robina, Chair of the Board from 2016). The Directors and the shareholders were also keen to keep shares held by villagers and so the sale of shares became a vital issue,

When we had the first meeting of the shareholders, just after we'd bought the place, we talked about what if other people wanted to buy shares, what if people wanted to

sell the shares? So we said, if shares are being sold outside of the village envelope, it would need a special majority, a 70 per cent majority of shareholders to approve it, (Roland).

Having made a financial investment the Board who operated the pub began to draw on village resources to renovate it.

### *Symbiotic and resourceful relationships*

The regulars, in this case the village shareholders, also lent their skills and expertise in a symbiotic form,

All the shareholders are lovely; the board of directors are absolutely fantastic. We've just had a kitchen refit a couple of weeks ago and one of the directors used to do that job as a living anyway so he was in here. They altered the bar ready for our new coffee machine that's arriving. They just don't stop. I've never worked in a place where the directors actually have a hands-on approach. They are normally, for want of a better word, pencil pushers; they cross the Ts, dot the Is and check the bank balance. Whereas here, they get involved to keep the overheads down and just do the work themselves. Most of them own their own businesses as well; it's not as if they've got a lot of spare time, but in their spare time they like to help us because it's a close knit community. It's the sort of area where you could pretty much leave your doors open at night and no one would come in (Robert-Past Bar Manager).

Working with tradesmen in the village is much easier as their reputation is on the line in the pub and the community so a higher level of trust is enacted;

If you come from living in a town and getting three quotes for everything it's really hard to let go of that and trust people. But with some of the guys around here the best thing you can do is to say, 'just come and do that for me, will you, and then just send me the bill'. Then it'll be cheaper and they'll work out a price for you because they protect themselves if they do that and I know they're not going to rip us off (Raymond).

The pub acts as a skills centre for the local community, 'Oh, absolutely, our plumbers, our electricians, our skip delivery; every single service that I have called and used has probably come from a contact from the main bar; computer experts, clock repair, log delivery, staff, accountants; it's never ending, (Richard).

There is a clear symbiotic element,

There's a gang of local trades' people, agricultural workers who you see in here and there's a gang of professional people and there's a symbiosis there. They need each other, they need to know each other and if you want something done around here you need to know the right people and those right people you're going to find in here. And some of those trades' people will really look after you because they like doing stuff in the local community (Richard).

In the case of the Red Lion the investment was in the pub itself, which added to the social investment, 'I've actually got a gentleman coming in this evening who did the glass on the front doors. He's overwhelmed with work, but he's doing us a mirror as well with our logo on it. He makes our pint glasses which have our logo on them. It's like these chairs, we bought the chairs and we had a local lady re-upholster them for us for nothing and we're just in the process of buying ten more chairs and again, they're going to redo them and re-upholster them for us. One of the other shareholders is a decorator by trade, and we give him a free meal for him and his family and he does all our painting. It's like the olden days when you used to trade stuff, isn't it, (Robert).

The pub has ensures co-operation with other service outlets nearby,

Oh, we get on very well with the manager who runs the very up market fish restaurant down the lane on the banks of the main river. If we're struggling for staff we've rung them and said 'have you got any staff that have just left we might approach?' I think it probably works because we're not competition at all, we're not taking her trade, she's not taking our trade, (Robina).

The purchase of the village pub increased social relations across many different occupations and across class boundaries. Each village pub has its own unique identity but they are similar in that they have a congregation of members or a communion (Newby 1985), some of whom who develop symbiotic relations, trouble free public houses that act as a resource to its members and a viable venture for those investment.

...each village pub has its own unique cultural terrain....Thus terrain is used as a metaphor to refer to the sedimentary layering of networks of these specific cultural resources. A pub's cultural terrain is therefore a kind of 'spaghetti junction' that includes foremost the pub network, referring to links with suppliers/customers, but also the pub and village networks (i.e. cultural resources); thus different practices and meanings overlay one another to shape the pub's terrain overall (Mayo et.al. p.844)

### *Strategy for survival*

Rural areas registered a net immigration of 92,000 individuals during 2009, but only if people in rural communities have ready access to local schools local jobs, local shops and pubs and homes which are affordable, will they and their children thrive. Yet the progressive disappearance of services and the decline of facilities in these areas cannot match the demand in terms of increased population. It also has a significant impact on the local supply chain as many local businesses are dependent on the services and facilities their activities. Therefore promoting these factors, enabling community cohesion and social integration becomes crucial to preserve and maintain a quality of life of rural residents (Cabras and Mount 2017).

However, this is not enough to maintain a good business model as the village pub still cannot survive on village custom alone due to all the factors we saw earlier that impact on pubs in general. The Board of the Red Lion needed, like all village pubs, to reinvent themselves as attractive places to customers and visitors from outside the village as well those living in the village. The establishment of a good product was essential for the Red Lion management to meet the higher standards demanded by the new villagers and to make it attractive to visitors to the area. They developed a strategy for survival involving the development of a good product, creating a destination value for the pub, welcoming children and parents and providing a restaurant image as essential.

### *Good Product*

Publicans have to increase their income significantly to ensure economic survival and reaching out to a wider market is crucial for survival. Those running the pubs have to continually be aware of improving the pub experience;

The model that we decided was best for us was to keep the village theme, it's a village pub but the thing that drives sales is the kitchen. People would come and use it if it is a decent boozier doing decent beer and drinks but if you are doing good food then you will get more people from the village and then it will bring people over the canal bridge at Frampton. Good food will drive more drink sales; people don't sit and eat a meal without having a drink (Raymond).

Building responsive, supportive, integrated, business networks with local suppliers are central to the pub's survival as is constantly being creative in establishing new networks.

You then ask the local farmers, who have got apple orchards if they've got leftover apples; they bring them to us, so we can make our crumbles. There's Jimmy, who all the way through the summer, brings us all the extra veg he's got; that's what keeps our menu prices down because it's all locally produced food. Like our mulled cider that we did over the Christmas period; we've got a gentleman that's fully licensed do it. He's not allowed to sell it but he has all the certificates to be able to brew it and it's just given to us. He's another shareholder. We try to get racks of lamb and stuff like that from the local farmers and again, nine times out of ten, that's given to us (Rebecca-Bar Manager 2017--).

The pub also has to provide a variety of activities, not just drinking and eating.

There is a plan to improve the skittle alley. We've had it repainted in the last number few months. That is an area where we feel we could get more revenue and more activity. It is slightly difficult in that it has to be a skittle alley and we don't want to lose the skittle alley because that's important to us. (Robina).

The pub organises monthly special menus focusing on international cooking, beer and cider festivals in the summer, folk nights, quiz nights, meal offers, eg: children free meals on Saturdays in March-April 2018, steak nights and Easter Egg hunts. However, the importance of encouraging visitors from further afield cannot be underestimated in maintaining all village pubs.

#### *Creating a destination pub*

Village pubs now advertise their services via the internet, social media, responding to Trip Advisor and making everyone, irrespective of ethnicity, geographical location, age, class and culture feel welcome. The owners/managers aim to make their pubs attractive, authentic and open to all, to be seen as the heart of the village. Through this approach they gain recognition and reputation. Making the pub attractive isn't just for the locals as village pubs need to attract customers from across the county and in many ways the survival depends on having a lot of strangers in the pub, 'We know it can't survive without attracting people as a good place to come and eat, (Richard).

The villagers knew that they had to make the village attractive to visitors. 'Firstly, I saw it as similar to looking after your house. The second thought that was running through my head was that even though there are a number of people in the village, there were not enough to sustain the pub. So, we looked for other aspects of the environment that would attract people from the outside world', (Raymond).

The survival of the English Village pub is dependent more on the 'blow ins' from further away than on the village itself and publicans are having to be more expansive in their marketing, advertising and promotion,

In a small village its hard work attracting visitors. We do need walkers coming in. We need people coming in from outlying villages and we've got to offer them something to make them want to come. So we can't just do the same thing all the time, we have to have special evenings; special offers and we try bringing a bit of variety. We need to have an offering for people who come in a number of times a week and we have to have an offering for those who come in once a month. So it's got to be a special occasion for those who come a long way but equally it needs to be a lovely atmosphere for those villagers who want to spend time with their friends and with their families, (Robina).

Saving the village pub was not the first venture in village survival for some of the pub Directors, as they were also involved in projects to attract visitors to the village to maintain village services prior to purchasing the pub.

A couple of years prior to the village taking over the pub we had a lottery fund award, which had allowed some of the farmers who dealt with all this to do two things. One was there is a footpath called Silver Street, which they had managed to refurbish. So, they cleared all the brush out and the trees and then put down a new pathway. So, there was a nice link between two sides of the village. And then the second thing was they had used the lottery funding to create a map and walks and put signs up and new stiles and, basically, formalised these walks. We have got a map in the pub here that shows them. It's, four horseshoe walks which range from something like four to eight, nine, ten miles depending on which one you want to do. And they all start and end here at the pub, (Raymond).

High visibility is now inevitably on social media sites and travel sites such as Trip Advisor. 'It's completely 50-50 for locals and those who come from further away. We do get a lot of people that travel to come and see us and have used Trip Advisor. Some of them have come from a few hundred miles away and they come back year after year on holiday, (Robert).

One of the attractions of the village pub is, of course, it being a trip from the city to the country,

I get the sense that most are customers from the village or trippers from the county city. A tall guy in a T shirt and a dark trilby on his head buys a drink and is accompanied with an equally older person in a short dress and a popular sun hat on her head. Two of the eaters are another older couple with him sporting many tattoos on his arms and they arrived on a motor bike. A middle aged guy wearing a T shirt with the name of the county rugby team on it gets a drink and joins an older generation friend implying he is local. What appear to be a local couple - because they sit at the bar - talk quietly; he drinks and she has a coffee. The menu is good pub food and they have had a busy weekend and run out of ham for their ploughman's board and chorizo type foods for a similar tasty board (FN-29Aug16).

The pub provides information about local walks, local houses to visit and open farms, 'You've got the Court just down the road, as well and working farms. It is a farm that works for visitors. The family still run the farm for deer or arable or whatever and the farmers that are around don't mind the kids trotting up to see the cows and giving them a handful of hay, (Raymond).

The Red Lion also acts as an archive of village history. It has over 50 framed photographs or drawings representing a history of life in the village as well as contemporary activities and these have been published in an E book which refers to the River alongside which the village exists. There are also hardback books available.

### *Children*

Children were another group of customers making a return to the pub as laws relaxed over time. A past development was the provision of family rooms separate from the bar area and by 1984 there were reported to be between 2000 and 3000 of such rooms but 10 years later so-called children's certificates were introduced, which could be granted by licensing justices to allow children under 14 in bars where meals were sold, provided the 'environment', was suitable for them. The 2003 licensing act then effectively ended restriction with accompanied children now to be allowed unless conditions specific to the premises forbade it (Jennings, 2007).

Where pubs have under-utilised space they act creatively to generate projects that add to their income, 'We've got a children's birthday party booked for two weeks' time on the weekend in our long skittle alley. We've got Zack who works here but who also does the Dj-ing; they've asked for him as well so he's going to be doing that and we put a buffet. Then we've got a christening in August booked for possibly 60 people. We had a children's Christmas party in there, a kids Halloween party that went really well. We did the New Year's Eve party at the back' (Rebecca).

Children are sometimes allotted their own space.

We are actually changing that around a bit within the next week or so, because where the kids are running up and down and we don't want to walk into the kids or anything when we're carrying hot food. So we're actually changing this end round, we're going to have sofas, put this big table round the other end, get a big toy box, brighten it up a little bit, and actually have this as a family dining area. There are other pubs where kids are not allowed in after seven o'clock. If we did that around here, the locals wouldn't want to come in, because they want to come in and have a meal, have a few drinks. They don't want to have to leave at seven o'clock, especially in the summer when they let their kids stay up until nine o'clock because it's the summer holidays and they haven't got school the next day. So we're just going to make it more child-friendly. You do get a few people who that don't like kids running around, which is understandable but then why should we segregate kids and parents just because somebody doesn't want kids in here. If you want quiet dining you sit at that end of the restaurant and if you don't mind the hustle and bustle and family dining, sit this side. Again, we're investing a bit of money buying new toy boxes and making it a bit more child-friendly. So we're spending money but its spending money to make money and to keep people happy (Robert).

The Easter Egg hunt is another children's even which is widely appreciated by the villagers,

It's Easter Sunday, 16 May 2017 and family groups filling in a questionnaire from clues put up round the village and then returned to the bar. Excited children hand in their completed forms and say 'thanks Rebecca' to the current manager. She then gives them some chocolate. She and a friend do it every year. Another young lad hands in his quiz and is offered a choice of Easter Egg in a 6 inch square box. Another pair of quizzers in their teens hand in their own answers together with their pencils and take the cream Easter egg in a box. Three infants arrive saying 'can we have our chocolate' but they have to work out the magic word first from the clues they have been researching. The word is 'chocolate'. They then say thank you for their chocolate eggs, clamber onto some bar stalls and call out 'thankyou Rebecca'. On an upholstered stool adjacent to a corner table there is largish puppet dressed in bright colours presumably to be played with by children.

### *Restaurant Image*

Many of the old industrial and village communities surrounding local pubs have changed out of all recognition, reducing the number of devoted pub regulars in some areas. Tastes and lifestyles have changed, with more people drinking wine and fewer people drinking beer, the mainstay of most pub income. These village pubs try to make their pubs look attractive to those with more money to spend,

We put the wine glasses on the tables for the evening sessions but not at lunchtimes. People who come in the evening eat from the main menu and they usually tend to have a bottle of wine. When it's busy it also makes it a lot easier to have glasses are already there. It makes the tables look a bit nicer I think, (Rebecca).

Recognition comes from being known for something specific and in some cases gaining awards for their activities, 'We've been getting compliments about the actual bar and we get people who actually travel further to come to us because we do things they like, such as the Chase Vodkas, the Cirocs and seventeen different gins. We've just got the 2016 certificate of excellence for TripAdvisor and we're in the Beer Guide 2016 as well, (Robert).

Friendly chatter, laughter and staff moving swiftly to deliver drinks and meals reflects a village centre alive and well, a space and place that is inclusive and spirited,

It's Friday night at the Red Lion and at 6.30 there are four women sat on the settle in the middle of the bar with three young children occupying a low table next to them playing some board games. Another trio occupy a bench and table opposite the bar and a couple arrive and sit round the corner from the main bar. There are eighteen tables spread through this long L shaped bar approximately 50yds long and the other end of the L being 15 metres long. On this night four of the tables are reserved. A local stands at the bar drinking. Five young teens arrive with father and two women and the youngsters make themselves at home by disappearing to the Boules room. The girls re-join the family as it grows bigger. There is a sound of pounding feet as one of the younger girl's sprints through the bar to get the menus. Another regular greets someone from the large group with a kiss as they are surprised to see each other. All of the tables are set for dinner with wine glasses and paper serviettes occupy the space between the cutleries in a tetrahedron shape. The lighting is subdued with lots of wall lights (FN-Fri 22 April16).

All publicans live their lives in front of their clientele but in Arlingham the Directors and shareholders are the owners, all of whom live publicly alongside each other.

## **Living the Ownership**

Villages and rural pubs are perceived by local residents as vital and essential networking places. They provide physical spaces for people to congregate and join together, shaping and delineating frameworks and boundaries for individuals and groups and facilitating the accumulation of social capital within the communities they serve, with social capital defined as the whole of relationships and ties among individuals which provides a degree of social interaction, cohesiveness and networking in a given community.

However, actually trying to maintain this social setting as a shareholder Director in the early days it was a daunting and stressful at times in the early days and at one point considered leasing the pub after three years of ownership

Well, I think the issue is this; this place has actually sucked up a lot of time for the five directors, and they are a bit fatigued to say the least; particularly when the managers left last May. The month leading up to their leaving I flew out to China for a week's business trip. I had a month of doing my day job, coming home, working until two, three o'clock in the morning and then getting up at six to do my day job. So, I was getting three or four hours sleep a night for a month, running on fumes to keep it going. You have got to have a particular skill set to be able to do that sort of thing and then still keep the place open. The shareholders know that there was a lot of pain around that time and I am not sure we will get many volunteers sticking their hand up and become Directors for another three year period. If you get tenant directors in the risk is we might end up with people in there who frankly aren't competent to deal with the business, (Raymond).

So, the shareholders and the Directors decided that control was crucial to ensure the maintenance of a high quality of service from their village pub and postponed any idea of

leasing the management of the pub and instead, appointed new Directors for a second three year period to manage the pub.

Nevertheless taking ownership was still a voluntary job,

I'm an accountant by profession and I had been helping the first Chair of Directors with the finances who had struggled to make time from his full time job time to carry out his role in his tenure. Then, when the old board resigned, we needed new people to put themselves forward for the new board and I thought, why not? My obvious strength was on financing and I ended up as Chairman. There are five on the board, two are retired, two others work and I've got a young family, so am not employed at present. It is very enjoyable but it's an enormous challenge. The three of us who are not in paid employment are already doing more than enough to keep us going. Roland does a huge amount of maintenance and that can only happen during the day, so that needs a retired person, a DIY handy person, or you have to pay somebody; well, we can't afford to pay somebody so it requires volunteers to do it. Then there's our HR Director who makes sure everybody's happy and content and that we have staff. You can't meet staff at weekends and in the evenings because they're working so it requires you to meet them before a shift starts so, again, that couldn't be somebody who's got a full time job; it requires people that have time during the week when the pub isn't open to deal with the more mundane issues (Robina).

Being a Director required is still a pervasive activity even if it is voluntary,

It does take up more time than you might imagine, it probably takes one day a week of my time but I'm always thinking about it and I'll always be on my phone, answering emails, doing this and that and then I spend one day a month doing the accounts or paying invoices plus ad hoc stuff. So it doesn't ever go away; I'm always thinking about it but it's my free job. I don't lose sleep over it but I do certainly worry and think about what do we need to be doing, what's coming up, what are the guys doing, (Robina).

Nevertheless the Directors are very conscious of allowing some autonomy for the pub manager and chef,

They have lots of autonomy, probably because we are Directors, we're not chefs, and we're not bar managers. We're not here to run the pub, so the chef together with the bar manager have autonomy over what they produce and the special evenings that they do; it's all their ideas; we don't impose anything on them really.... Nevertheless, I'll go along from time to time and say, 'look, January, February is quiet, we need to be doing something, please can you suggest something, devise a special menu or something else to increase sales? I thought it would be quite good to look into getting a wood fired pizza oven and they gave me their views and we've listened to that, (Robina).

Owning the pub means focusing on new ventures to improve its turnover and in a village owned pub this is the responsibility of many more people than when a pub is owned by one or two persons or a leaseholder,

We now have an entertainments team of three people, not just shareholders, to help the board and the management come up with other ideas that we haven't thought of yet. The key to it is just keeping fresh ideas, doing new things and seeing what the village wants. The board, who are in their middle age don't necessarily know what the 85 year olds want and we don't know what the 18 year olds want. So it'll be good to have a broader spectrum of people thinking about a programme of activities using the

skittle alley and using the front of house as well and the garden in the summer to just try and boost the turnover and boost the interest, maintain the interesting (Robina).

Being a Director of a village share owning company means shareholder-villagers appear to feel more at liberty to address the Directors about anything to do with the pub when they see them in the pub or in the village. If a leaseholder was running the pub any concerns about the pub might be curtailed for fear of damaging the publican-customer relationship, but the Red Lion Directors were easier to approach because the shareholders were investors,

On the whole people respect the fact that you're there for a drink and you don't necessarily want to talk about the pub but they feel entitled to approach us with queries as we represent their interest as shareholders. They have divested their responsibility to us to run the place and we need to listen to their opinions and, hopefully, we do. At most board meetings, somebody will say, 'oh, somebody suggested this or somebody's asked this, somebody's asked that, what do we need to do'? And we do what we feel is right, (Robina).

Accountability for the management is spread more widely in a village owned pub, nevertheless, 'it takes something special to keep a pub going. There's a great deal of goodwill in the village to make it happen here. You're never going to please everybody all the time. Everybody has a different idea of what they would like. But by and large, the pub being open, the pub serving decent beer, having the menu on, is the basic service that everybody wants' (Roland).

Owning the Red Lion created a positive feeling of immersion into village life, 'it's very rewarding, as a director and just as a shareholder generally. It's very rewarding to know that we own it, we've put the effort in, it's under our control, it's not PubCo owned. We know we can make the decisions as a community which is very good. So, it's definitely been worthwhile doing' (Ryan).

## **Owning and Belonging**

In recent years many studies have explored and examined the societal role and significance of *third places*, defined as places and locations other than private homes and working environments, where people tend to spend significant amounts of their time. (Cabras and Mount, 2017). Community cohesion is part of the broader concept of social cohesion, which is the 'glue' that ties and brings together people coming from different classes, religious and cultural components of society. The level of community and social cohesion in a group determines the levels of social capital inside that group. In other words communities with high levels of cohesion, where people feel as if they belong to something that goes beyond their attachment to the geographical location, are the ones producing a higher number of network human relationships, (Cabras 2011).

One of the overall biggest single changes to pub social relations was the opening out of the interior, where the traditional pub with different rooms was consolidated into just one as happened at the Red Lion.

It's all changed completely, this used to be the door in, there used to be a wall across there and the bar was this area here with the bar stretching up here to the toilets and that wall where the roof changes level that was a wall with a fireplace in and that was the lounge with a little serving hatch where the pumps are now. And the door used to go the other way; so there was a door here, a door going through into the lounge and this little area here was the off-sales, where kids used to come and buy bottles of pop, Corona, and bars of chocolate.

It was much smaller when I first moved here some 40 years ago. That was a solid wall across here that used to be a mortuary. Just underneath where that clock is there used

to be a serving hatch and the people who lived next door - Farmer Hinman; they used to be able to open the hatch and call through and they used to pass a pint of beer through for him every now and again into his living room, through the mortuary as was (Riley)

Greater supervision, the use of waiters and fewer men in working clothes meant no need for a tap room. Changes in the social world meant more women and young people were using them and all restrictions have been relaxed such as 'women only' bars. Customers still form their social spaces but they now do so in an open space. In general the result of the opening up of interiors was that the pub filled up and more alcohol was consumed, so the social spaces imploded or dissolved, (Jennings P216).

The pub as a place and as a space appears to be more egalitarian than when the publican saw the bar as an extension of their living room and determined all behaviour and standards. It is appropriated in different ways by many of the visitors regular or otherwise. 'This is why I love the village; there are no social barriers, everybody is equal and they all come in and they'll have a beer and they'll have a chat. I'm not saying they all get on; there's several feuds going on in the village at any one time and always has been. There's two farmers that never spoke to each other and they were brothers, never spoke for 40 years, (Riley)

The warm and familiar ambiance of a village pub usually needs working at by the publicans who attempt to create an all embracing and welcoming space and place but at the Red Lion it came more natural as they all felt part of the village-pub community. Family and friends events take place alongside regular's chatter and strangers like feeling the warmth of this friendly and socially mixed environment.

The regulars of the village pub buy into the pub community both embracing it and its connections, taking ownership, feeling attached to a space and place that matches valued and interests. The first aspect of belonging is buying into the community, even if as shareholders some of them only live in the village at weekends,

From Monday to Friday they're outside the village, the other side of the bridge – over the canal that separates the village from the rest of the county - in the real world, and that bridge is our gap between the lands that time forgot, our village and the real world. I'm guilty of that as well, I used to have an office down in West Drayton, in London, and I used to commute there. But when you come over that bridge you leave reality behind you and all the responsibilities of the world stay the other side of that bridge; you come over here and you step back 50 years in time. I think you see people buying into a lifestyle which includes being part of something, and actually quite liking the rurality and the community aspects (Riley).

Their sense of belonging is based on a commitment to village and community life, albeit living a portfolio existence in that they work elsewhere.

The village pub's place and its space are central to how it is perceived; its atmosphere and ambiance together with a sense of belonging, membership and existential connections constitute its place. Russell returned to the area after farming in Canada,

We love the rural countryside and rural area and it couldn't be more rural than here and everyone we have talked to is always friendly, says 'hello' especially now I'm working in the pub. You get to know more people and they couldn't be more welcoming to outsiders to people who haven't always lived here. It's strange hearing the people who have been here their whole lives and to see a new generation that are coming here and actually want to stay here. Without the pub, which is so crucial to the village, there wouldn't be a lot else here and that's why I think the community was so

desperate to keep this pub going because they knew how important it was to the village, (Russell)

Being a member means sustaining connections even when the reason for the connection has been surpassed, 'We've got a gentleman that comes in called Rick, he used to live around the corner with his best friend; they've known each other for 35 years. He was his live-in carer. The gentleman unfortunately passed away. He's just bought himself a new house but he still comes and supports his local, even though he's living 15 miles away now. Comes in, has a pint and a half of Guinness every night and then goes home, (Robert).

Taking on new ventures has resulted in unanticipated feelings of belonging as Emily took up an assistant manager role at the Red Lion,

I was living with my mum so it was a big change coming here, moving out, different job, not knowing anyone. It was very different to what I expected to be honest. I thought of it as a little country pub that would be quite quiet and not very busy. I wasn't sure if I'd like being in the country and not being able to get about and coming from a city. I don't drive either so I thought 'oh god I don't know if I'm going to like it', but actually it's very different to what I expected. It's a lot busier than I was expecting and actually I don't mind being down here; I don't really miss being in town to be honest; I quite like it. I don't miss nights out with the girls; I thought I would but I don't at all, I really don't; weird because I thought I would but it doesn't bother me, (Rebecca).

Social relations are seen as a social investment where inter-dependent relations are constructed and seen as a healthy mix as class and gender uses of the pub become more prolific. Intimate social relations and spiritual relations are present alongside more infrequent use of the destination pub by those from a wide catchment area. A 1980 study concluded that while the pub remained a very important focal point in the community, the widening of their clientele meant it become a focus point for a greater range of social relations, (Jennings 2007).

The village pub stimulates social mixing and counters the possible narrowness of class friendships,

Just hanging around with your best friends is not being part of the community, it's important but that's not the community. If we're not careful we can break into our separate, insular little groups, a form of tribalism. If all you do is mix with people who agree with you, then if you're not careful you end up demonising other people. Whereas, I know there are people in this pub with whom I disagree politically and religiously but I know they're good people, nice people who just happen to think differently. If you don't have that social cohesion and you're all separated it's easy to demonise others and think 'because I don't agree with them they're horrible', they're not, they're lovely people, we just happen to have different ideas, (Ryan).

Social interactions in the village local generates understanding of 'the other',

Being a pub regular is socially and 'incredibly healthy intellectually to bounce ideas off other people. If you are in that tunnel where you're only socialising with your immediate peers and like-minded people you never get that. So it's broadening your mind, isn't it, because you've got more exposure to contrary perspectives. It might actually make you re-evaluate your position. There are some lively debates in here sometimes, (Rachael).

The village pub is, according to some, an antidote to the digital world of social media in which social relations are limited to contact with others who hold similar perspectives and values.

The nice thing about a pub is the doors are open; you come in, whether you're this, whether you're that, you get together and mix. I can't think of any modern social forum to encourage people with different interests to get together. All modern Facebooks are about having similar interests, 'if you're the same type of person here's the group for you'. The village pub is not about this sort of thing, it's about, everyone being welcome, 'come on in and rub along'. That's an important community thing and an important social aspect, (Rachael).

Nevertheless, even in these open spaces regulars were able to create social boundaries if required and they were observed,

I've come in and sat in the corner with a pint and a book. Then there are times when we maybe we want to chat about stuff. People know if we come and sit down at one end it's because we want to chat as a couple. People might come down and say hello but they know we want to chat. Or we stand at the bar. People generally know depending on where you position yourself whether or not you want to engage. We might come up and sit in a corner for an hour and have a drink and then having caught up we might then go and join in with everybody else (Rachael).

Good weather aids the intermingling as do outdoor smoking areas of course, 'During the summer outside the front here, everybody will just sit here, even though there's a beer garden out the back. All the locals will grab a table and intermingle and anybody will just sit out the front at those tables. I always think of it as an example of an older time. When we've been to Greece you see people, old fellows or old ladies just sat outside their house watching the world go by. That's the lovely thing about the front of this pub, (Ryan).

Frequenting the pub enables villagers to socialise beyond their close neighbours and to become villagers,

It's so easy nowadays to just go home turn on the computer or watch TV and never actually mix and I think that's what the people would feel if the pub wasn't here, there would be no way of everyone mixing so easily. Friday, Saturday, Sunday is always packed in here. If you didn't have the pub to come to you might mix with your next door neighbour or if you know someone in particular but without the pub you might not know half the people in the village, (Russell).

It is the nature of a contemporary village pub that regulars support this open-hearted characteristic and is one of the reasons regulars use the pub; that they enjoy, not only their own 'clubs', but also the opportunity to meet and talk to strangers.

You do hear of some villages, places and towns where if you're an outsider or incomer, some of them don't like too many people coming in because they are worried that it will change the balance of the village or change the way it is, but here they appreciate you coming here and want you to come here because you bring something else to the village. Every time you walk into the pub, customer or working villager, people speak to you, ask how you are and generally take an interest in you, (Russell).

Managing a pub in village and one owned by the village is often an intimate affair,

Here's completely different. I'd prefer to work in a pub than a hotel; I wouldn't go back to a hotel. It's just a lot more laidback; it's friendly; it doesn't feel like you're at work a lot of the time. It's enjoyable, especially weekends, when you get all of the locals in; all come in have a good laugh; yes you're working but it doesn't always feel like that. It's just like coming down and talking to your friends really, it doesn't feel like you're coming to work, (Rebecca).

The intimacy between staff and between staff and pub members generates familiar, close social relations, 'Everyone is brilliant to get along with. You know they are not just coming in for a pint; they're actually taking an interest in me and my family, so it's not a chore coming to work. Yeah it's been perfect for us when we moved here just for a short period because we got to know people quickly and when I come here with my family we have people to talk to and it's been great really. Even when the managers have their days off they are usually down here and when we have our days off we usually come here for a drink or for a meal with the family, (Russell).

The warmth can extend to more tangible offerings between regulars and staff,

You get the local farmers, young and old. My favourite ones are actually farmers who own the biggest farm locally. The whole family is just lovely. One of their sons works here and we get on really well with him. Actually we went around there for Christmas dinner. We were open Christmas Day; my mum had gone to visit my sister because I was working. And they said 'we're not having you on your own Christmas Day', so they invited me around. I went around there, watched a film, enjoyed my lunch, had a few drinks and it was just really, really nice. I'd only known them for a few months and they just made me feel part of the family. And that's what all of the locals are like, they're just all friendly and will do anything to help you (Robert).

Being a member of a village pub is, according to some a different experience than that of going to a town pub, 'the fact that it's a village pub ensures a social interaction opportunity. You go into a city pub it's all very anonymous. It could be a lovely pub, you can have lovely food, great service, whatever, but it hasn't got that same sort of warm sense about it, there's no community, it's a very sterile experience. Whereas going to your rural village pub it's got way more atmospheres generated by the community than you'll get just going into an anonymous city pub, no matter how good that pub is, (Ryan).

These are warm and familiar places.

More groups arrive for dinner but because the bar is so long and has a low ceiling the noise level is comfortable, in spite of the piercing chortles of the youngsters. A young couple depart and another more smartly dressed couple of men enjoy a chat. Two more local regulars join the original guy and they chat quietly at the bar. There are bar stools upon which to sit and a low chair that appears to be reserved for the main regular. Robert proudly carries a glass bulb full of a cocktail to a member of one local group and she greets it with a smile and says 'who ordered this' as her husband who ordered it stands adjacent to her seat touches her shoulder. More locals pile in at about 8pm and stand around the bar drinking. These appear to be more professional locals, although the skilled local crafts persons, here originally, still occupy their space. The sound of an accordion is heard emanating from the end of the long bar through the throng of bar drinkers and a waiter or two has to glide through them with some panache to avoid spilling their plates (FN, 22 April 2016).

It is widely believed that over the last 30 years we have become a more private and individualistic society. Policymakers across the western world are rightly concerned about the social consequences of populations who increasingly stay at home, keep themselves to themselves, and becoming disengaged from their surrounding communities. While supporting community pubs will not on its own reverse such trends, doing so should form part of any wider agenda aimed at raising levels of social capital and fostering better connected, more vibrant local neighbourhoods, (IPPR, 2012).

## Conclusion

The Arlingham village owned pub has a number of advantages: it ensures that village values are maintained; that the villagers are centrally involved in all pub development and this meets their interests; it adds value to the homes of the villagers that own their own property; it gained a tax credit for shareholders for the first three years; it was a capital investment in the property market for the pub itself and possibly as an investment for any future sale of the pub; a possible rising income stream if a leaseholder was to be appointed and some return on their capital if the leaseholder has to make a down payment.

The downside of being a Director is the voluntary time needed to effectively manage the pub, the accountability to a 100 shareholders, who may well find you supping a quiet glass or two as you relax with family and friends. The bar manager may well have to field many more queries about how the pub operates from shareholders who have taken 'ownership' of the pub. When the first managers to run the village owned pub left, after a couple of years, they exclaimed 'we had too many bosses'.

However, the ownership by the village has also created a more integrated village society as many villagers joined together in a communion to ensure the pub's survival and development by offering their skill, both practical and intellectual as well as their time. The villagers developed a sense of shared ownership and this also led to a more intense sense of belonging as many villagers added a practical contribution to their engagement and owning and belonging became more integrated.

It would seem that the survival of the Red Lion is assured, in its current form so long as there are enough volunteers come forward to manage the pub as Directors once every three years. However, survival is also based on the necessity to have enough investors living in the village who can afford to invest financially in it. Villages in poorer areas of the country may not have this level of financial support available to the Red Lion. The village is fortunate but the survival and development of the pub is still dependent on attracting customers from across the county as are all the pubs in this study and so the mix of local and 'blow ins' is an essential contributor to their survival.

