

# Saving Your Local Pub: Success Stories

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# Saving Your Local Pub: Success Stories

Every year, CAMRA works with local campaigners and others across the country to help save pubs from redevelopment and closure.

In this document you will find examples of pubs which have not only been saved but have gone on to be successful. These “phoenix” pubs had mostly been written off by their previous owners as commercially unviable; in many cases developers had used the argument that the pub was in terminal decline to support their change of use plans. However, our examples go to show that, in the right hands, most pubs can be made to succeed.

The first set of stories feature campaigns by community groups to prevent the loss of their beloved local. We then move on to pubs which were 'failing' or had been closed, sometimes for a long period, but which have been rescued by new owners who saw the potential that the previous regime missed. In each category, we follow up the stories with a list of other saved pubs we know about.

If you have a story you would like to share or if you would like any advice, please contact us on [campaigns@camra.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@camra.org.uk)

## Pubs saved by their communities

### **Wheatsheaf, Tooting Bec, London SW17**

Website: [www.thewheatsheafsw17.com](http://www.thewheatsheafsw17.com)

- When the pub closed in 2012, there were strong rumours locally that owners Enterprise Inns were in negotiations to sell the site to Tesco. A campaign was formed to save the pub, supported by the local MP, Sadiq Khan. He obtained assurances from Tesco that they would not pursue the purchase but concerns remained about the intentions of other supermarkets.
- ACV status was obtained but at that time this did not remove permitted development rights so Wandsworth Council was lobbied to make Article 4 Directions which would achieve this. The Council agreed, the first time they had made such a Direction.
- At this point Enterprise announced that they no longer had plans to sell. They were as good as their word, leasing the business to Urban Pubs & Bars who have refurbished the pub to a high standard.

### **Drovers Inn, Gussage All Saints, Dorset, BH21 5ET**

Website: [www.droversinngussage.com](http://www.droversinngussage.com)

- When their local suddenly closed in late 2014, villagers formed a group dedicated to saving it. Their first steps were to get the pub listed as an ACV then to persuade the Council to refuse a planning application for change of use to residential. They compiled a viable business plan and ran a series of fundraising events,



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- securing initial grant funding by working with the Plunkett Foundation.
- Once sufficient funds had been raised to buy and refurbish the pub, an army of volunteers descended to bring it back to life. It reopened in July 2016.
- The Save the Drovers group is the first winner of CAMRA's annual Pub Saving Award.

## **Hare & Hounds, Blackburn, Lancashire**

- Enterprise declared the pub unviable in 2013 and put it on the market. Local people started a petition to save the pub and the Council accepted an ACV nomination. Of the five bidders, four were developers uninterested in continuing pub use but fortunately the fifth person, a local, outbid them. He has invested significantly in the business, including a new kitchen and lounge area. It also sells a wide range of real ales and has been the CAMRA Branch's pub of the season.

## **Golden Lion, Camden, NW1**

- In December 2011, the tenant of this handsome Victorian pub was told by the owners, Admiral Taverns, that it had been sold to a private individual. The new owner applied for planning permission to convert the building into flats and, in the meantime, piled costs on the tenants, whose lease ran until August 2012.
- The tenants engaged a planning consultant to help fight their cause. The pub was nominated as an ACV and a strong campaign began to generate local objections.
- In March 2013 the Council refused the planning application. As a result the owner submitted both an appeal and a new planning application which would retain a small pub on the ground floor – described as a 'trojan horse' by the consultant. The appeal was rejected and when the second application was refused the appeal on that was also dismissed.
- The developer then sold the pub to the tenant, albeit for significantly more than he had paid for it.

## **Centurion, Vicars Cross, Chester, CH3 5LN**

Website: [www.centurionpub.co.uk](http://www.centurionpub.co.uk)

- This community pub, owned by Admiral Taverns, was closed for eight months after a construction company failed to get planning permission to build a care home on the site.
- The Centurion Community Action Group had fought very hard against this application through two planning meetings and an inquiry. The company then conceded and Admiral offered the lease to the Group.
- The necessary donations to enable the Group to take on the lease were raised from local people within a week. After many hours of community input to refurbishing the pub, it reopened in September 2016.



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- The Centurion Group was a runner up in the first CAMRA Pub Saving Awards

## **The Anglers Rest, Bamford, Derbyshire**

Website: [www.anglers.rest/](http://www.anglers.rest/)

- In 2013 this became the first community-owned pub in Derbyshire and is now run for the benefit of the community. As well as the pub, the building houses a cafe and the village post office. Rave reviews on TripAdvisor tell you all you need to know about how well it is doing.
- The pub had been shut by Admiral Taverns in early 2012 after a succession of unsuccessful tenancies. Several local people came together as a community benefit society (Bamford Community Society – BCS) and got the pub registered as an ACV. BCS raised funds so that as and when the pub came on the market they could use the ACV process to bid for it.
- There was a hiccup when Admiral sold the pub as a going concern to a third party. Although that person claimed to be committed to keeping the venue running, BCS protested so strongly that Admiral rescinded their decision and sold it to BCS after all.

## **The Chesham Arms, Homerton, London E9**

Website: [www.cheshamarms.com](http://www.cheshamarms.com)

- After closing it in 2012, the new owner ripped out the bar, turning the upper floor into a flat and the ground floor into “two office suites”, all without planning permission. Local people formed the Save the Chesham Action Group and a two-year legal battle ensued.
- In 2014, the Group's application to have the Chesham registered as an ACV was approved. Shortly after, the Council issued an Article 4 Direction removing permitted development rights. They also served an enforcement notice regarding the unauthorised use of the upper floor as housing; the owner's appeal to the Planning Inspectorate was dismissed.
- The owner then threw in the towel and sold the building to new owners who reopened it as a pub in July 2015. Six months later it was voted Pub of the Year by the local CAMRA Branch.

## **The Angel, Spinkhill, Derbyshire**

Website: [www.theangelatpinkhill.com](http://www.theangelatpinkhill.com)

- Punch Taverns closed the Angel in 2013 after years of under-investment. They sold it to developers who sought planning permission to convert the bulk of the site to housing – the small public bar which was to be retained was unlikely to have been viable. A Save the Angel group campaigned strongly for the pub's retention and got it registered as an ACV.
- Even though their planning officers had recommended approval, the District Council's Planning Committee



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unanimously refused the application, with the pub's status as an ACV being cited as the primary reason for doing so.

- The pub was bought by a Community Interest Company who, in turn, sold it to experienced local operators. They have developed it into a successful pub and restaurant.

## **Bristol House Inn, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 2UY**

Website: [www.facebook.com/SaveTheBristolHouseInnWestonSuperMare/](http://www.facebook.com/SaveTheBristolHouseInnWestonSuperMare/)

- Owners Enterprise Inns closed this 1930s pub in 2012, the intention being to redevelop it as a Tesco Express store. The Save the Bristol House Inn group coordinated local opposition, securing over 160 objections to the planning application plus a 3000+ signature petition; they also got the pub registered as an ACV. The adverse publicity persuaded Tesco to back away from the purchase and the pub re-opened in January 2014.
- More recently, the Co-operative Group sought permission for conversion to a convenience store and the campaign group sprang back into action, gathering objections to the proposals. These were successful in persuading the Council to refuse planning consent. They now hope that Enterprise will invest in the pub to secure its future.
- The campaign group was also a runner up in the first CAMRA Pub Saving Awards.

## **The Kings Arms, Shouldham, Norfolk**

Website: <http://kingsarmsshouldham.co.uk/our-story/>

- When the Kings Arms in Shouldham closed in 2012 locals rallied together in an attempt to save the pub. The Shouldham Pub (Norfolk) was the sixth pub to close in the village.
- Villagers and people from all over the world raised £150,000 towards the cost of buying the pub, with help from grants provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Pub is the Hub, and the Geoffrey Watling Charity.
- The bid was backed by the local CAMRA branch which helped gain momentum for the campaign, as well as Nigel Pickover (Editor of the Eastern Daily Press) and Stephen Fry who tweeted his six million followers his support: "Shouldham's fight to save its village pub enters the final few days – good luck selling the remaining shares."
- In September 2014 villagers raised sufficient funds to buy the pub and it reopened later that month. The pub is now running successfully with over 20 real ales on offer.

## **The Golden Ball, York**

Website: <http://www.goldenballyork.co.uk/>

- The Golden Ball Co-operative Limited began as a conversation between Bishophill locals in the summer of 2011 about the possibility of taking over the lease of the Golden Ball when the



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current lease owners retired. There were ten founding members of what became the steering group, which met weekly to discuss strategy and objectives. The key focus became to ensure the pub had a strong community focus and employed full time management and staff.

- After a year of meetings, and invaluable assistance from the Co-operative Society in an advisory capacity, the steering group submitted a bid of £30k. This was initially rejected, leading to a revised and final offer of £45k. This bid was accepted in summer 2012, and the steering group set about producing a share issue document and also initiating a publicity campaign for the purchase of the pub. This included local radio appearances and press releases which gained national coverage. They then raised funds through community shares from all over the world.
- The Golden Ball is now York's first community owned pub and a real hub for the community.

## **The Pineapple, Kentish Town, London**

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/ThePineapplePub>

When The Pineapple closed in 2001 the lease was assigned by the departing licensees to a property company that promised to keep it open. It later submitted a planning application for the pub to be converted into flats. The regulars weren't going to let 133 years of pint-pulling go down the drain so they set up an action group. Their first success was to get the pub listed by English Heritage in just eight days which put a large spoke in the developer's wheels.

They drummed up publicity by getting support from the likes of Ken Livingstone, Jon Snow and Rufus Sewell. After hundreds of objections the planning application was refused by the Council. The pub is now one of London's treasures.

## **George & Dragon, Hudswell North Yorkshire**

Website: [www.georgeanddragonhudswell.co.uk](http://www.georgeanddragonhudswell.co.uk)

- The first community-owned pub in North Yorkshire was officially opened by local MP William Hague in June 2010. The pub closed in 2008, so a group of villagers founded the Hudswell Community Pub Initiative to raise funds to buy it back through a variety of grants and award schemes.
- The pub is now open and is busier, friendlier and more profitable than ever before. It has also brought the community closer together and several social groups regularly use the pubs.
- It was crowned CAMRA's 2016 Pub of the Year, the first community owned pub to take the top prize.

## **The Raven Inn, Llanarman-yn-Ial, Denbighshire**

Website: <http://www.raveninn.co.uk/>



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- The Raven Inn pub closed in 2009 and was destined for conversion into housing estate when it failed to reach its reserve price at auction. The local community decided to buy back the pub with the help of the TV programme "Save our Boozer".
- Raven Mad Ltd (a company limited by guarantee) was then set up to buy and run the pub.
- It is now staffed entirely by volunteers, and all profits fund local community projects. A committee of nine runs the pub on a day to day basis with sub-groups responsible for various elements such as cellar management, accounts and a wine club. The Raven is running as a traditional country pub serving real ales and good food. It won local CAMRA Pub of the Year in 2011 and is in the 2013 Good Beer Guide.

## Additional Pubs Saved by Community Efforts

Ivy House, Nunstead  
Phene Arms, Chelsea  
Cross Keys, Chelsea  
Shurlock Inn, Shurlock Row, Berks  
Jolly Angler, Reading Bevy,  
Bevendean, Brighton  
Bay Horse, Burythorpe, North Yorks  
Black Bull, Lowick, Northumberland  
Crown, Heskett Newmarket, Cumbria  
Falcon, Huntingdon, Cambs

## Pubs saved by enlightened new owners

Kelham Island Tavern, Sheffield, S3 8RW  
Website: [www.kelhamtavern.co.uk](http://www.kelhamtavern.co.uk)

- This small pub in what was then a run-down part of the city had been closed for nearly ten years and was semi-derelict when bought by its new owners. They saw its potential to deliver their vision of a local pub based on the virtues of good service and a wide range of well-kept beers served by knowledgeable staff.
- Within a year it was being rated one of the top five real ale pubs in Yorkshire and it won CAMRA's Pub of the Year contest in both 2008 and 2009 (and was runner up in 2015).
- In the meantime the surrounding area is being revitalised and many other real ale pubs have opened nearby, hence this now being known as the 'valley of beer'.

**Albion Ale House, Conwy, LL32 8RF**  
Website: [www.albionalehouse.weebly.com](http://www.albionalehouse.weebly.com)



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- The Albion had long been known to heritage pub enthusiasts for its unspoilt 1920s interior which had earned it a place on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors.
- However, in the hands of Punch Taverns, it had become run down and unloved so when it closed in 2011, many feared the worst. Happily, a Conwy businessman and four local breweries – Conwy, Great Orme, Nant and Purple Moose – joined forces to run the place.
- They spruced up the time-capsule interior, earning a CAMRA/English Heritage Conservation Award for their efforts. This was also CAMRA North Wales Pub of the Year in 2014 and 2015.

## **Central, Gateshead, NE8 2AN**

Website: [www.theheadofsteam.co.uk/pub?pub=1](http://www.theheadofsteam.co.uk/pub?pub=1)

- A Grade 11 listed building, dating from 1854, the Central had been neglected for many years and was in a sorry state when bought by the small Head of Steam group – it had a leaky roof, crumbling stonework and broken windows.
- After a refurbishment costing over £1m (partly grant funded) it re-opened in 2010 and is now established as the premier ale house in Gateshead.
- It is on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors, the Buffet Bar being the star feature.

## **Fat Cat, Norwich, NR2 4NA**

Website: [www.fatcatpub.co.uk](http://www.fatcatpub.co.uk)

- Colin Keatley opened the Fat Cat in 1991. It had previously been the dilapidated New Inn but was, in Colin's view, crying out to be converted into a traditional real ale pub. Although Norwich is now awash with real ale, that wasn't the case in 1991 and Colin can take much of the credit for this becoming a 'City of Ale'.
- The Fat Cat has won a host of awards, including twice being CAMRA national Pub of the Year. Colin has gone on to rescue two other failing pubs in the city, now the Fat Cat Brewery Tap and the Fat Cat and Canary. All the pubs serve a wide range of real ales including products from the Fat Cat brewery itself.

## **Trafalgar Arms, Tooting, SW17 0RT**

Website: [www.thetrafalgararms.co.uk](http://www.thetrafalgararms.co.uk)

- Then owned by Enterprise Inns, the pub closed in July 2013 and was sold to a developer who intended converting the building to residential use.
- There was much local protest and the pub was listed as an ACV. Happily, in 2014, Youngs stepped in to buy the pub – they refurbished



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it extensively and it re-opened in August 2015. It now operates successfully as a food-led pub, part of Youngs' Geronimo Inns chain.

## **Crystal Fountain, Cannock, WS11 0AL**

Website: [www.blackcountryales.co.uk/the-pubs/the-crystal-fountain](http://www.blackcountryales.co.uk/the-pubs/the-crystal-fountain)

- Neo-Georgian style pub of 1937 closed by Enterprise Inns in May 2012 in the wake of claims it was being used as a swingers' pub!
- After being closed for nearly a year, it was bought by local outfit Black Country Ales who were attracted by its unspoilt interior which retains the original fourroom layout and Moderne-style fittings.
- The new owners carried out a very careful refurbishment as they had done at the Vine, Wednesfield, another National Inventory-listed pub. A good range of real ales is offered and the pub is trading successfully.

## **Volunteer Arms, York, YO24 4BH**

Website: [www.volunteerarmsyork.co.uk](http://www.volunteerarmsyork.co.uk)

- A pub which faced closure in 2011 when Punch Taverns tried to turn it into housing, claiming it was no longer viable.
- Their planning application was, however, refused and when it was marketed as a pub it was bought by Paul Crossman and Jon Farrow who are also involved with several other pubs in the city.
- It now operates as a true community pub with a fine choice of mostly local real ales plus regular live music and other events.

## **Tapping the Admiral, Kentish Town, London, NW1 8SU**

Website: [www.tappingtheadmiral.co.uk](http://www.tappingtheadmiral.co.uk)

- The pub had been closed for four years when bought by the folks who also own the nearby award-winning Pineapple. What they got was a run-down squat with no roof and no cellar equipment but within a year it was an attractive community pub with an excellent reputation for its real ales and food.
- It has twice recently been North London CAMRA Pub of the Year.

## **Woodman, Digbeth, Birmingham**

Website: [www.thewoodmanbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.thewoodmanbirmingham.co.uk)

- This magnificent late Victorian pub is on CAMRA's national inventory of historic pub interiors. For many years it stood unloved in an urban wasteland and had been shut for four years when rescued by its current owners. At the same time, the area round about was being revitalised.
- The new owners were determined to restore the pub to its original splendour and, despite a number of setbacks (like an occupation by squatters half way through the work), they succeeded magnificently. The high standard of the architecture is matched



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by that of the real ales and food and the pub is now a much-loved and hugely popular local institution.

## Devonshire Arms, Cambridge

Website: <https://www.individualpubs.co.uk/devonshire>

- Once arguably the city's worst pub, the Devonshire Arms officially became the best when it was crowned local CAMRA Pub of the Year in 2012. When it closed in 2009 it had been a run-down local pub, and one of a very few city pubs not to sell real ale. It was turned around when local Milton Brewery bought it from Punch Taverns and subjected it to a thorough refurbishment. It reopened in 2010 when Cambridge was suffering a spate of pub closures.
- The most positive change was the arrival of a variety of real ales including five Milton beers, three guests and real cider. High quality, good value food was also an innovation. The licensees have created a friendly, welcoming atmosphere which attracts a great mix of customers from the cosmopolitan area around the pub.

## Other Saved Pubs

- *Bay Horse, Marygate, York* – closed 2003 to 2008 – now free house (Little Tap Pub Co.)
- *Jefferson Arms, Thorganby, N Yorks* – closed 2009 to 2014 – now free house Phoenix Inn, York – in wrecked condition when bought as free house in 2008
- *Crown & Shuttle, Shoreditch, London* – closed 2001 to 2014 – now free house
- *Well & Bucket, Shoreditch, London* – became Chinese Restaurant in 1989, reopened as free house in 2015
- *Clapton Hart, Clapton, London* – had become nightclub when closed in 2008. Reopened as free house in 2012.
- *Bedford Arms, Finsbury Park, London* – had been closed at least five years when reopened in 2014.
- *Greenwood Hotel* – closed 2010 to 2016 – now Wetherspoons
- *Boot Inn, Repton, Derbys* – Ex-Enterprise, closed for several years before reopening as free house (Bespoke Inns) in 2014
- *Cross Keys, Carleton, Cumbria* – Closed as pub in 2001 and converted to residential. Reopened as pub (Kyloe Inns) in 2008
- *White Horse, Stonefield, Oxon* – had been closed for four years when bought in 2006
- *Killingworth Castle, Wootton by Woodstock, Oxon* – bought from Greene King by current owners in 2012 after standing empty for 11 months
- *Hare, Milton under Wychwood, Oxon* – had been closed for five years when bought as a shell. Reopened 2016.



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- *Crown & Kettle, Manchester* – reopened in 2005 after being closed for 16 years
- *Fairway, Stockport* – ex-Robinsons, now free
- *Platform One, Stockport* – ex-Robinsons, now free
- *Wanted Inn, Sparrowpit* – ex-Robinsons, now free
- *Gamebird, Beverley* – closed as free house, rescued by Batemans
- *Oak Tree, Helperby, N Yorks* – saved by Provenance Inns
- *Jolly Sailor, Cawood, N Yorks* – ex-Thwaites, now free
- *Schooner, Gateshead* – bought when for sale as a house, developed mainly as a music venue