

# Minutes

## Minutes of South West Regional Beer Festival Organisers Meeting

Held at 12.30pm on July 19th 2025

The Imperial, Exeter.

### 1) Welcome, introductions and attending

See attendance list at end. 18 attending.

RD writes: My thanks to the pub for letting us have the use of this room for this afternoon & also to Ray Dwan for making the arrangements for today.

A particular welcome and thanks to Catherine Tonry, CAMRA's National Executive's Events Director who has travelled here from Kent today.

The suggestion was made to hold a session like this as, while we host a few beer festivals in the region, the hope is that we can all share the knowledge and learnings from each event with each other. Also, there are some branches in the region that do not currently hold a beer festival and while acknowledging considerations such as limits on the number of volunteers and finding suitable venues, there can be a significant positive impact of holding a beer festival for the branch and our campaigning such as:

- Activation of members
- Retention of members
- Recruitment of new members - target for new members in 2025 is 19,500. A 25% target would be 4,800.
- Raising the profile of CAMRA and real ale & cider
- Surplus funds for CAMRA - total branch remittances are usually somewhere in the region of £600,000-£750,000 per

### 2) Apologies

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## 3) Introduction

140+ CAMRA beer festivals are held annually

Objectives from the Branch Remit:

**Campaigning** – to campaign locally for CAMRA's aims

**Promotion** – to raise the profile of CAMRA within the branch area

**Enjoyment** – to provide a fun and social side to CAMRA

**Participation** – to play a part in CAMRA regional activities

**Fundraising** – to raise campaigning funds for CAMRA

All festivals must have the support of the local branch, so before you start – talk to your branch to see if there is adequate interest in having a festival.

The Events Committee have published an Events Policy, setting out the rules and procedures that must be followed to ensure that all events are safe, successful and enjoyable. Please ensure that you are familiar with this policy when running branch events: Events Policy 2020.

But the benefits of holding a beer festival are many and without an event such as this and if a branch doesn't have a magazine also, then its profile in the area will be diminished and membership is more likely to fall away.

We want our beer festivals to be the best that they can be. We put a lot of volunteer time and effort into preparing, setting up and running these events and we do them very well – but there is much competition out there and we need to have a continuous improvement culture.

Remember, there is also lots of help and information of the Festival Hub area of the national CAMRA website.

See the Festival hub for info on beer festivals.

## 4) Finding a venue

Contract: To be sent to HQ.

CAMRA also have one to be signed by the venue.

Note restrictions

First step to holding a beer festival – find a suitable venue. Not always easy as I have found with my own branch!

What venues do branches use to hold beer festivals currently?

Local Authority's Council House or as its called in Bristol, City Hall

Civic Halls (same as above?)

Other Civic buildings – often called things like the Corn Exchange

TA Drill Halls

Churches – including active ones and Church Halls – one branch uses a Cathedral!

Sports facilities including football clubs which have areas suitable for events

The last suggestion can include racecourses (Worcester) – maybe a marquee

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Various Halls attached to other buildings and even a Tithe Barn  
Arts and Culture Centres  
Sports & Social Clubs – with separate function rooms  
Heritage railway sites  
Living museums – one branch uses a railway museum  
Events in marquees

How to find a venue:

- Write to your members via the Comms Tool – but lay down some guidelines for the type of venue you are looking for e.g. near a public transport hub, minimum capacity, toilets (although Portaloo's can mitigate), do you need running water apart from in the toilets, etc.
- Put it on social media
- Media appeal
- Identify a long list of potential venues and approach in a professional manner

Do not book the venue until you have had your festival approved!

## 5) Health and safety

Planning

It does help if you have some experience of H&S. Look for someone who has done it before

Help is available in the region and HQ

Resources are on the CAMRA website.

Don't be daunted by Risk Assessments

Lots of forms but most are cut and paste from year to year; just change the year

Much work has already been done to improve the forms

Example filled forms will be put on the SW website

HQ: now trailing an online H&S briefing: Reviewing current paperwork: Will eventually be online

When live

Helps to have H&S on site, but can be slow

Report accidents AND near misses

Our beer festivals are quite safe

People do not like plastic. Some councils are mandating plastic. Plastic is cheaper

HQ will hire glasses to you

## 6) Beer Festival business plans

Use Focus online.

It covers Financial; Campaigning: Beer quality etc

It will become mandatory

New system is an improvement

S Devon recommends a core team of 6 people

Why can't Focus do 'what if scenarios. Can do drafts

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Assessor is cooperative not an exclusion: Use their help to develop the plan

Ask for a loan. 'Chicken and egg' with deposits/loans but HQ will consider

Can CAMRA publish national trends to help planning.

HQ would be willing to release trends to get numbers right: Contact CT

Free entry:

Membership is more profitable than beer festivals

Will be included in the business plan.

There will be a link between TICKTY and the membership system.

## 7) Staffing

Pre: Use comms. Manage expectations.

Setup: is important. Use aids

During: Have manager on site. Induction.

Sign in/out. Beware of over drinking.

Post: Rewards

## 8) Press and publicity including local and social media

Important

Can HQ help: Advice, yes. Possibly training

Consider pub walks, flyers, alternative themes. A rolling publicity program

Should have some paid advertising, especially targeted

Attract the public, especially evenings (trend is down) Late sessions are now difficult

## 9) Entertainment

A double-edged sword. Gauge the local scene

Big names can attract non-drinkers

Outside music may be OK

Consider education

## 10) Ticket sales

Tickty works well. Helps with income and planning numbers.

Info hard to find on the website

Consider selling tickets as soon as business plan approved

HQ has changed payment from Tckty sales to branch from weekly to monthly

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## 11) Sponsorship

A source of revenue.  
Industry is prime target  
Casks, glass, T shirts, programs

## 12) Stalls including food offering

May need to use venues' own food  
Picnics allowed in general  
Consider ventilation

## 13) CAMRA stands

Membership: Target beer festivals. A quarter meaning need 4800 at all festivals  
Free membership from 2026  
Tickety will enable membership checks  
Talk to customers in the queue  
Joining up offer to be advised (2 free pints at least)  
Free entry will have a financial and logistical impact

John Cottrell ([john.cottrell@camra.org.uk](mailto:john.cottrell@camra.org.uk)) or Laura Coles will give as much assistance for recruiting new members as possible. If your festival does not clash Laura might be tempted to join you to help personally.

Games: Available from HQ. Create an atmosphere.

Product: Can be ordered. Have samples for online ordering.

## 14) Beer festival tokens and programme

HQ can provide 'strike off' tokens  
HQ will print with sponsor. Contact events

Small qtys available free from HQ  
Coloured plastic tokens used by some  
Beer matrix proposed by Exeter  
Include CAMRA and branch information in program

## 15) Beer & cider ordering (inc suppliers)

Consider the offer to the customer  
Getting casks back is a big issue  
No takeaway rule still applies

Gluten Free. Seller needs to provide allergens which should be provided by brewer/wholesaler.

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Beer usually not entirely gluten free.  
Info should be available at the bar.

Cider: Can sell what you wish but must be labelled not real if not real. Use the real cider list (not up to date) to be sure. Fruit only 10% to be 'real'. Use an expert on the bar.

## 16) CBOB judging

Do encourage CBOB judging. Steve will recommend 6 beers.  
Judges 6-8 including 2 trained.  
Can also do bottled beers  
£200 credit. Allowed to be retained in branch funds and not returned  
CBOB can be done in a pub too.

CBOB Are always looking for Beer festivals to blind taste / judge.  
12 Categories of Cask plus 2 bottled categories.  
Exeter in January does 2 categories of dark winter beers.  
Chippenham like to do a "Stout" category as it gets some darker beers at a late spring festival.  
South Devon "Sunshine Festival" in July one or 2 categories of Golden beers.  
Bristol November normally does some darker beers.

We rarely anybody to judge bottled beers, but if Cornwall do have a festival then this would be a good opportunity as 4 of the 6 top nominations are from St Austell !!  
SM can assist in finding trained tasters / judges

## 17) First Aid

Some security firms are qualified for First Aid, but must be additional provision. They may refuse to provide it. Level depends on size of venue, often level 2. HQ may organise centralised training.

## 18) Security

Needed.  
Use to check age.

## 19) AOB

Festival planning:  
Bristol: WIP. Maybe in March.  
N. Devon. May be able to leverage an existing local festival in October.  
Bath. May be on for next February.  
Cornwall. WIP

Festival organisers:  
Tony Durbin - [tonydurbin01@gmail.com](mailto:tonydurbin01@gmail.com)

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(Bristol Dep Festival Organiser)

Ray Dwan - [efob@exeter.camra.org.uk](mailto:efob@exeter.camra.org.uk)  
(Exeter & East Devon Festival Organiser)

Dave Buckler - [bucklersuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bucklersuk@yahoo.co.uk)  
(South Devon Festival Organiser)

Trevor Cromie - [chair@bathandboarders.camra.uk](mailto:chair@bathandboarders.camra.uk)  
(Bath Festival Organiser)

Budget for 3.5 to 4.5 pints per person

Catherine organises a CAMRA forum (Ask Amy Nash at HQ. [Events@camra](mailto:Events@camra))  
Beer festival contacts in the list below. Can be contacted via the Regional Secretary

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## ACTIONS

No	Date	Status	Owner	Action

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## Attendees

Branch	Position	Name
South West Regional Officer	Regional Director	Pete Bridle
South West Regional Officer	Deputy Regional Director	Ray Dwan
South West Regional Officer	Regional Secretary	Michael Bertagne
South West Regional Officer		
CAMRA NE	Events Director	Catherine Tonry
Cornwall		Doug Polman
Cornwall		Dave Pedlar
NW Wilts		Judith Brown
NW Wilts		Tom Blanden
Exeter & East Devon		James Kirkcaldy
Exeter & East Devon		Steve Murray
South Devon		Dave Wheeler
South Devon		Edgar Halton
South Devon		Dave Buckler
South Devon		Amamda Buckler
Plymouth		Bob Holmes
Somerset		
N Devon		Andy Heath
Bristol		Tony Durbin
Bath and Borders	Treasurer	Jon Benger