



↑ A Hoppy Place's team of Naomi Hayward, Jason Whitehead and Dave Hayward

Looking to import beers from the EU following Brexit? Two micropubs have with disastrous results. *Alex Wright reports*

Brexit has been another huge challenge for small businesses who have struggled to get to grips with Britain's new trading arrangements with the European Union (EU) amid increased costs, rules, paperwork, and delays, particularly with the movement of goods across the Northern Ireland border.

This is reflected in the fact that UK exports to the EU fell 40.7% in January, while imports were down 28.8%, according to the Office for National Statistics.

More than half (58%) of UK businesses have also reported longer delays at the UK/EU border since the start of January, mainly because of the time customs take to complete new paperwork, research by the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply has found.

It has proved problematic for micropubs too. **The Paper Mill** micropub in Sittingbourne, Kent, was forced to cancel a virtual beer tasting session after 100 cans of beer imported from Hungary were held up at customs due to the new Brexit regulations.

The beer was being shipped by Hungarian craft brewers Rothbeer for a Meet the Brewer session, but delivery was delayed after reaching Stanford-le-Hope in Essex, where it was kept for several weeks. Owner Harvey Melia, who runs the pub →

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with his mother Marianne, had to break the news to disappointed customers on the pub's Facebook page after they shelled out £30 each to sample five different beers – Tivoli Gardens, Bakancslista Sabro, Midlife Chris, Double Mango Madness, and Brain Fog.

“Normally the beers take up to a week to arrive, but this was the first session since January and the new post-Brexit regulations,” said Melia. “I followed their progress using a tracker and they were doing fine until they reached Britain.

“I’m told there has been a complication over their value and paperwork. It’s unreal. The problem with beer is that it doesn’t last indefinitely if it isn’t stored properly.”

He added: “I dare not set another date now until I have my hands on the beers. I don’t want to keep disappointing people.”

Melia subsequently called the carrier UPS several times to try and get to the bottom of the hold-up and get his beer delivered. He was eventually told he would be required to provide an Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) number to release the goods.

When it did finally start to arrive – in various consignments – only two-thirds of the order was delivered, with the last batch arriving six weeks late. And most of the cans were damaged.

“They look like they had been kicked all the way here,” said Melia. “There were burst cans and all sorts arriving in dribs and drabs – it was a real mess.

“At least some of them arrived - if I hadn’t phoned up the carrier they would still be sitting there today. I’m now working with the brewery to try and get a refund.”

But Melia insists this experience won’t put him off holding future events.

“I met one of the chaps who works for Rothbeer at a beer festival in Leeds and decided to set this up,” said Melia. “They are amazing beers under the brewery’s Mad Science brand, and we hope to be able to try them in our session some time.”

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Harvey Melia, The Paper Mill

↓ Ant Shaw, chief barman, and Harvey Melia, owner of The Paper Mill



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Dave Hayward, A Hoppy Place

Dave Hayward, owner of **A Hoppy Place** in Windsor, Berkshire, has fallen foul of the new Brexit rules as well: both as an importer and exporter. He too ordered 400-500 cans of Mad Scientist beer from Hungary through a wholesaler in January. They were supposed to be delivered in March but after being held up at customs in Hungary and the UK they arrived seven weeks late in May.

Hayward, for who international beer accounts for one third of his range, said that the delay was due to goods checks.

“A year ago, I would put in a commercial invoice for single line items, listing aluminum and glass as the packaging, and it would go straight through,” said Hayward. “Now I have had to register for an EORI number and declare every single product detail including quantity, price, package size, image, ABV and any allergens: that's even before customs starts asking about every single aspect of every product.”

Going the other way, Hayward sent a package of beer to a customer in Spain 11 weeks ago and it still hasn't arrived.

“Customs will usually ask some



↑ A typical consignment of beer ordered by A Hoppy Place

initial questions and then give it three or four days before coming back with another one, the details of which we have either already provided them with or didn't think we needed to,” said Hayward.

“I would assume it's just a small team of customs officers dealing with hundreds more goods than before, some of whom just want to prove a point by being awkward.”

Then there are the added fees incurred under the new rules. As a result of all these problems, Hayward's export trade has dwindled from five percent to almost nothing.

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“Every country seems to be different in the way they do things – some worse than others. Spain has been an absolute nightmare and Romania has been challenging too.”

Brexit has been a problem for brewers, malt and hop suppliers and distributors too with widespread reports of missing pallets, delayed shipments, and cancelled orders. One hop supplier has even seen its shipping fees leap 400% since Brexit.

Wylam Brewery in Newcastle has been unable to sell to customers in the EU, which accounts for a quarter of its business. Its beers have been languishing in ports or sent back.

“Before January 1st, we could sell to Paris as easily as Peterlee or Copenhagen as easy as Carlisle and now that has just completely stopped,” said owner Dave Stone.

Stone was advised by the Government to move some work to the EU to help overcome difficulties, despite being forced to cut jobs in Newcastle due to the pandemic.

“The only answer we have had from the Department of Trade and Industry is to set up a European office, which is a little bit strange given what the idea of what leaving the EU was,” said Stone. “If we have to set up in Europe in order to be able to serve half of our trade then we would be losing UK jobs.”