



↓ In amongst the tanks! Paul Harris, managing director of Derby Brewing Company

Next step in the micro evolution

The number of microbreweries launching micropubs is on the increase. In the first of a two-part report, *Alex Wright* covers the north of the country and finds a growing interest in the micropub scene

“It had been a business model we had been looking at and we had been searching for a suitable premises for a long time. When the building became available, we thought it would be the perfect site and location to set up a micropub”

Paul Harris, Derby Brewing Company

Microbreweries are big business in the UK. The number has risen exponentially over the last decade, peaking at 1,908 in 2018, according to research company Statista.

At the same time, there has been an explosion in the growth of micropubs, with about 750 currently in operation today. And yet, it hasn't been until recently that the idea of having both has caught on.

The synergies are obvious: microbreweries have a dedicated outlet for their beer that they can control because they own the micropub. In return, micropubs have a guaranteed supply of beer from one source, so they don't need to use any other microbreweries.

Opportunities abound too, with more retail units becoming available because of the Covid-19 crisis, and communities and businesses focusing on sourcing more of their product locally in the wake of Brexit.

Micropub Magazine spoke with several owners who have both a microbrewery and a micropub in the north of England to find out about their experience of running the two operations side-by-side. We'll cover the southern microbreweries with micropubs in the next edition.

Location, location, location Derby Brewing Company was started by Trevor Harris in 2004 and following its success, over the next few years, he decided to open four pubs to sell its beer: The Tap and The Greyhound, both in Derby,

The Middle Bell in Barton-under-Needwood and The Pig in Lichfield, both in Staffordshire. Then, at the start of 2020, just before the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the first lockdown in March, he opened his first micropub: The Hole in the Wall, at the site of the former Natwest bank in Micklegate, less than four miles away, after scouring the area for a viable premises.

“It had been a business model we had been looking at and we had been searching for a suitable premises for a long time,” said managing director Paul Harris.

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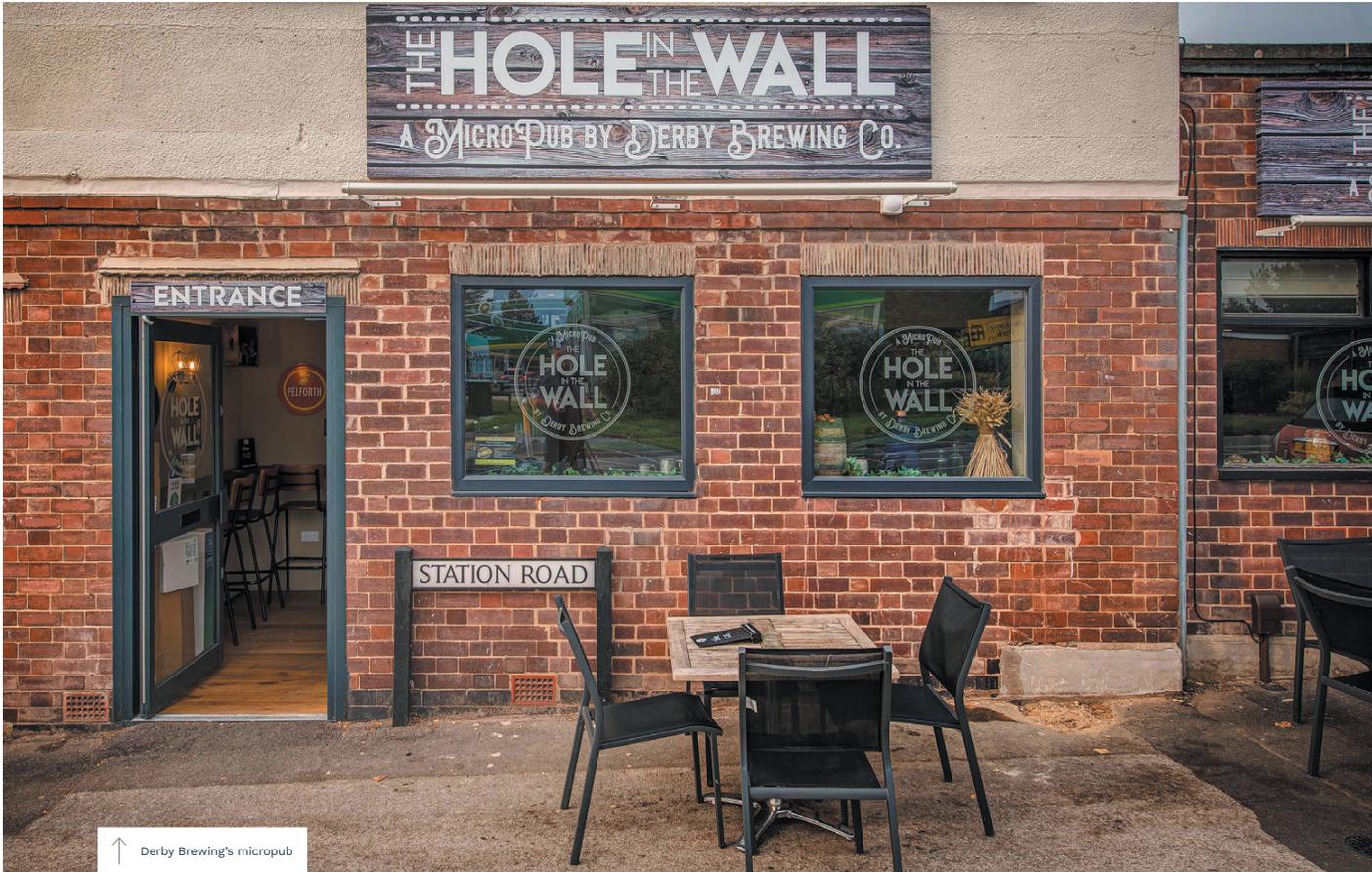
“We knew the area well because my dad had run other establishments nearby and the feedback we got from local people was that there wasn't anywhere around where they could get a good quality drink.

So, we decided to launch our own mini Derby Brewing Company offering to cater to those people.”

Derby Brewing Company is truly a family-owned and run business with directors Trevor Harris, Paul's mum Kes Harris and his wife Leanne Harris, and area manager Tim Norris. The micropub is run by a four-strong team.

Harris said the pub cost about £30,000 to establish as the landlord had already provided the shell of the building, so the main expenditure was fitting it out, and setting up the bar area and cellar. The pub takes in about £6,000 to £9,000 per week before tax. →

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↑ Derby Brewing's micropub

The Hole in the Wall sells its own craft beer as well as guest beers from local, regional, and national breweries, and international brands such as Carlsberg and Birra Moretti.

Among the bestsellers are Business as Usual, a 4.4% ABV multi-amber beer in the Bass and Pedigree tradition; Hop Till You Drop (3.9%), a fruity blonde ale; Quintessential (5.8%), a golden ale; and Penny's Porter (4.6%), as well as a range of pale ales and low alcohol beers.

During lockdown, the pub operated as an off-licence. As well as its beer, the pub offers premium wine, cider and artisan spirits, hot drinks, and bar snacks including pork pies

and scotch eggs, all locally sourced.

Inside, the pub has 53 covers and outside there are 30. To try and bring more customers through the door, it promotes heavily on social media, posting its latest products on a regular basis.

Harris plans to upgrade the outdoor area, with the addition of covering and heating. He would also be keen to open another micropub if the right place became available.

"So far, it has been a big success: the key was getting the right location with a good catchment area and tailoring our offering to the feedback we have received from

the public," Harris told *Micropub Magazine*. "Because we are operating a smaller site, the rent and running costs are lower too, and you can also turn a nice profit.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's a no brainer for a brewery to own a micropub. It's a ready-made market to sell your wares and showcase your product."

Early pioneer
The Marlpool Brewery Company was launched by Andy McAuley in June 2010 after he became disillusioned with his job in the printing trade.

Starting part-time, while he was still working, he and his brother Chris, who he runs the business with along with his wife Francesca, converted the buildings attached to his old family home in Heanor into a brewery.

Then, in January 2012, Andy quit his job and opened the micropub, Marlpool Brewery Ale House, next door. As an early pioneer, it was the first micropub in Derbyshire and only the fourth in the country.

“

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Paul Harris, Derby Brewing Company



↑ The 'pulpit bar' at Marlpool Brewery Ale House

"Initially, we opened it as an outlet for our beers and have never looked back since," said Andy. "We brew four days a week and the micropub is open the rest of the week.

"It's a micropub in the true sense of the word. We are predominantly a cask ale pub, selling wine and real cider, and we haven't got any keg lines."

One of the key features is a pulpit from the local Methodist chapel, which was acquired for the princely sum of £600 and has the words 'Do this in remembrance of me' inscribed on it. It doubles as the bar and draws many a joke from the regulars who come to pay their respects.

All of the beers are unfiltered and suitable for vegans, with bestsellers ranging from Blind Boris, a 4% ABV English mild, made in support of a local bull rescue centre, and Frank (4.5%), a red ale, to Maisy Moo (5.2%), a golden ale, and Scraty Ratty (4.4%), a pale ale.

Asides from his own beer, Andy does swaps with other microbreweries across the country, including those from Manchester, Rochdale, and Birmingham.

Despite a healthy annual turnover of £80,000 though, Andy isn't keen to open another micropub. For the moment, he's quite happy with his lot.

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“ Our motivation for setting up the micropub was to give our beers a wider exposure in the local area, We also wanted to offer something a bit different to what was already out there ”

Stuart Hurst, Hophurst Brewery

Winning team

David and Wendy Steeple opened **Fuggle Brewery** in 2014.

Having worked in the brewing industry for 37 years for the likes of Whitbread and Bass and won a host of awards from the Society of Independent Brewers and the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), as well as at the Magna Beer Festival in Rotherham and the Roundhouse Beer Festival in Chesterfield, David decided to branch out on his own and set up the Fuggle Bunny Brew House in Sheffield.

Then in 2017, the couple decided to establish a micropub to complement it. Conscious that they didn't want to be in central Sheffield because it's saturated with micropubs, after finding a prime site in Worksop and refurbishing it, they launched the Fuggles Chapter One.

Such was the micropub's immediate success that it won CAMRA's Pub of the Season 2017. In a typical year, it brings in about £180,000.

“We ploughed all our savings into it and did everything off our own back from day one to make a success of it,” said Wendy, who used to work at Sheffield Crown Court.

“David does all the hard graft in the brewery and I do all the boring paperwork and help behind the bar, so we work well as a team.”

The pub's most popular beers include Cotton Tail, a 4% ABV pale ale; 24 Carrot (6%), an IPA; Russian Rare-Bit Stout (5%); and Jammie Dodger (4.5%), a ruby red ale. The brewery also has its own brewery tap where, before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the Steeples hosted sessions for the public to drink and chat, and sample their famous bread and dripping.

“We opened at the worst possible time at the height of the recession,” said Wendy. “So, if we could make it happen then, anything is possible.”

“It just goes to show what you can do if you have an idea and truly believe in it. If you are willing to work hard at it, you can make a success of it.”

Listening to the customer

Stuart Hurst operates a joint venture between the **Hophurst Brewery** in Hindley, Wigan, which he owns, and the Twisted Vine Ale House, 15 minutes away in Ashton-in-Makerfield, which is run by his wife Melanie and business partner Robert Nelson.

After setting up the microbrewery in October 2014, he decided it needed to have a dedicated outlet for its beer.

Because there was no space to set up a brewery tap, after two years of extensive searching, they found a site for a micropub.

And, after seeking advice from a host of local and regional pubs and breweries, and a £30,000 investment, in February 2018, they opened it.

“Our motivation for setting up the micropub was to give our beers a wider exposure in the local area,” said Hurst. “We also wanted to offer something a bit different to what was already out there.”



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↑ Bar and seating area at the Twisted Vine Ale House

“Asides from that, the key advantage of having a microbrewery is that we can do swaps with other breweries. We can get our beer into their pubs as well as buying their beer at a discounted price.”

They regularly swap with Torrside Brewing in High Peak, Derbyshire, Empire Brewing in Huddersfield, The Revolution Brewing Company in Castleford and 4T's Brewery in Warrington. The micropub also offers lager, real cider, wine and spirits, with their gins sourced from Touch Lucky Gin in Wigan.

The favourite beers among the cask ale drinkers tend to be 4% ABV hoppy pale ales and for the keg drinkers it's fruit-based IPAs ranging between 4% and 6%. The bestseller is Cosmati, a 4.2% American pale ale.

“We always get regular feedback and listen to what our customers say,” said Hurst. “Whenever they ask for a particular beer, we try and get it in for them.”

Although Hurst is pleased with how the micropub has done so far, raking in £140,000 in a normal year, he has no immediate plans to open another. But he told *Micropub Magazine* that he's looking to set up a brewery tap at a different site in April 2022.

Separate businesses

The Edwards family also set up two separate businesses, so that the performance of one operation wasn't affected by the other.

Dave Edwards started **Peakstones Rock Brewing Company** in Alton in 2006, before his son James

“**We intentionally decided to keep the two businesses separate in case one failed. The brewing industry was very competitive at the time, so we wanted to find an outlet to sell our beers direct to the public, which is what we continued do throughout lockdown**”

Dave Edwards, Peakstones Rock Brewing Company

launched Crossways Micropub, five miles away, in the centre of Blythe Bridge, Stoke-on-Trent in 2016.

“We intentionally decided to keep the two businesses separate in case one failed,” said James. “The brewing industry was very competitive at the time, so we wanted to find an outlet to sell our beers direct to the public, which is what we continued do throughout lockdown.”

“We knew a few other people who had successfully set up their own micropubs in the area, including Gary Morton from Hail to the Ale in Claregate, Wolverhampton. So, we tapped into them for advice.”

As well as serving his own beer, James collaborates with other breweries in Staffordshire and Derbyshire. He also stocks draught cider, premium German lager, wines, and soft drinks, as well as crisps, peanuts, and pork pies.



→ James Edwards, owner of Crossways micropub

As a one-man operation, the pub is relatively inexpensive to run, with only stock, rent and electricity bills to cover. He spent between £20,000 and £30,000 setting the place up, with a bar and cooler room the main expenses.

The furnishings were sourced from e-Bay and charity shops, to give it a “rustic, lived-in feel”, said James, who is weighing up opening another micropub.

“To make a success of it, you need to focus on your local clientele and make sure they are happy,” said James. “I have also concentrated on keeping my running costs as low as possible to make it a viable business.”

The more the merrier

As if one micropub wasn't enough, **Magpie Brewery** in Nottingham, which has been going since 2006, decided to open two in the space

of four years. Doctor's Orders was launched in 2014 and The Barrel Drop followed in 2018, both in Nottingham, before opening its Crafty Taproom at the brewery. Asides from the micropubs, the brewery also owns a pub, Crafty Crow, in the city.

“Doctor's Orders felt like a real community pub, and we've managed to maintain that feeling since we took over – that's something that can't be forced,” managing director Katrina Mitchinson told *Micropub Magazine*.

“Similarly, The Barrel Drop has a cosiness that comes with being 'micro'. Now we've got our taproom too, we get the best of both worlds.”

“Given the vacant units currently available, now would seem the perfect time to invest in a micropub.”



↑ Welcome all! (l-r) Dan Hickman (Barman) and Dan Hancock (General Manager)

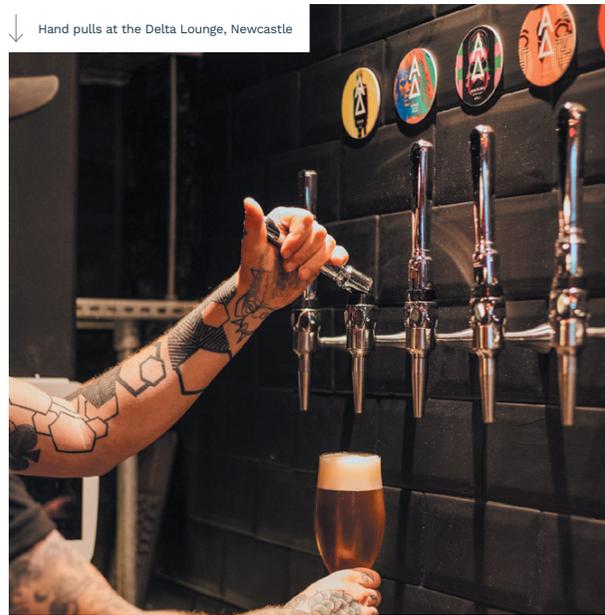
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Covid has taken its toll of course, but now more than ever people are after community, and ultimately smaller and safer venues. Done correctly, micropubs can be perfect for this.”

Another brewery that has its own micropub and brewery tap is **Alpha Delta Brewing**. The Box Social Tap Room in Newburn, Newcastle opened in 2015 before the brewery, also in Newcastle, in 2019.

The rebranded micropub, Delta Lounge, launched in August, on the old brewery site, which itself was moved to a larger premises to provide more capacity. The motivation for having the micropub was to establish the brewery's brand.

It has certainly done that, building a reputation with its exports across Europe. Now it collaborates with breweries throughout the continent including Sudden Death Brewing in Lubeck, Germany, Basqueland in Gipuzkoa, Spain and Nova Runda in Jaska, Croatia.



↓ Hand pulls at the Delta Lounge, Newcastle



↑ Wentworth Arms micropub, Mapplewell

Among the pub's bestsellers are Apollo, a 6% ABV IPA, and Hera (4.2%), an Australian pale ale. It also does wine, cider and spirits.

Another mini micro empire is the **Nailmaker Brewing Company** in Darton, Barnsley, which owns three micropubs: the Anvil Arms in Darton, and the Talbot Inn and the Wentworth Arms, both in Mapplewell, as well as having its own brewery tap.

The brewery produces a range of beers in casks, kegs, bottles and cans, including a 3.6% ABV Yorkshire Bitter, Anvil Porter (4.5%), Chocolate Safari (5.6%), Mango Magic Mosaic (4.1%) and Wentworth IPA (4.9%). It also has a distillery attached which makes gins.

There's good business to be made if you own a microbrewery with your own micropub, either attached to it or otherwise.

Given the right location, catchment area, loyal customer base and steady supply of your own beer, the sky's the limit.

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