

The Three Blind Mice brewery and micropub owners  
(l-r), Stewart Barrett, Daniel Chinery, Alex Bragg →

# From brewing to serving pints

In the second part of his feature covering microbreweries with micropubs, Alex Wright reports on southern-based outlets and finds an upbeat tone

There is a growing trend of microbreweries setting up their own micropubs as an outlet to sell their beer.

In turn, micropubs benefit from having a constant supply of beer, with the option to exclusively sell that from their own microbrewery or swap guest ales with other breweries.

Last issue we focused on microbreweries with micropubs in the north of the UK. This time, we look at those that have established operations in the south of the country.

## Baptism of fire

Three friends, Alex Bragg, Daniel Chinery and Stewart Barrett decided to establish their own brewery, **The Three Blind Mice Brewery**, in 2013, after starting brewing in their back shed.

Bragg and Chinery, who are both engineers by trade, produced their first batch of beer the following year and since then the brewery has grown from a five-barrel capacity to sixteen barrels.

The brewery is quite literally “in the middle of nowhere,” according to Bragg, in the Cambridgeshire Fens, four miles from Ely. It cost £40,000 to set up, with the installation of one fermentation vessel, and since Bragg and Chinery quit their jobs at JB Engineering in 2016 and 2017 respectively, production has been ramped up to supply micropubs across East Anglia and the rest of the UK through two main wholesalers, Jolly Good Beer and Distant Lands.

Then, in 2018, the opportunity for the trio to buy their own micropub

arose when the landlord of their local, the Liberty Bell, in Ely decided to sell up and gave them first refusal. Perfectly located in the centre of town and a 10-minute walk from the train station, they decided the chance was too good to pass up.

“The locals heard about our brewery and were constantly asking us where they could try our beer, so we decided to throw our lot in and buy the pub,” Bragg told *Micropub Magazine*. And so, after a £90,000 outlay, the **Drayman’s Son** was born.

“It was a bit of a baptism of fire, having had no previous experience of running a pub, but we just went with it, and it has worked so far, touch wood,” admitted Bragg.

Recently, the trio have extended the pub, which is run by four staff, to add more seating as well as expanding the beer range, which includes beer from their own brewery as well as guest ales from across the country.

They typically have six different beers on cask and six on keg, ranging from traditional best bitters and stouts to IPAs, pale ales and other modern craft beers, the most popular of which is the Juice Rocket, a 4.5% ABV pale ale, as well as a host of international wine, local cider and spirits.

“The key advantage of having a micropub if you already own a microbrewery is having a constant outlet for your beer,” said Bragg. “You have got permanent customers that are always buying your product, as well as being able to do swaps with other breweries →

“

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Alex Bragg, The Three Blind Mice brewery



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↑ Micropub owned by The Three Blind Mice brewery

to sell your beer and theirs.” Bragg said he would have had no qualms about opening a pub during the Covid-19 pandemic either and has even benefitted from three new customers: micropubs that have started in the last 18 months.

While he is currently busy with upgrading the capacity of the microbrewery, he would not rule out opening another pub further down the line and has his eyes on finding a site in Milton Keynes, which he believes has a good catchment area and is underserved for micropubs.

### Hungary for more

Husband and wife team Richard and Sue Green launched their microbrewery, **Dovecote Brewery** in 2017 – the culmination of 20-plus years of Richard, an industrial chemist, experimenting with different recipes and following a trip to Budapest in Hungary to see the micropub concept in action.

Then one day he decided to make his dream a reality after learning how to scale up production and established the microbrewery in Colomendy Industrial Estate in Denbigh, Wales, investing £100,000 in the new venture.

Such was the early success that six months later, in 2018, having opened a tap room at the brewery, they decided to set up their first micropub, the **Dove at Rhyl**. After supplying forty-two different outlets across Wales, they put all their energies into producing beer for their own micropub.

The following year, having done their homework, the Green's opened four more micropubs nearby in quick succession, the Dove at Prestatyn, The Hoptimist in Rhuddlan, The Hoptimist in Abergele, and the Salusbury Arms in Denbigh, which doubles as a restaurant, with each one costing anywhere between £3,000 and £8,000 to establish.

The plan was to open twelve micropubs in two years, but then the pandemic struck and they were forced to scale back, so they ended up sadly closing the Dove at Prestatyn and The Hoptimist in Rhuddlan, whilst The Hoptimist in Abergele was taken over by a local family in April this year.

Now the focus is on the two remaining micropubs, both at the heart of the local community, which turn over £80,000 in a normal year. As well as stocking a full range of their own beer, including Speckled Gin, a 3.9% chestnut bitter, Dove Down Under, a 4.8% New Zealand hopped IPA, and Solidarity Lager (4.0%), all of which are vegan, they also stock ales from local breweries such as Wild Horse Brewing Co, Hafod Brewing Co, and Cwrw Ial Community Brewing Co.

The Green's also produce their own Dove gin at the brewery and have a selection of international wine and cider from Dee Ciders, a family-run business in Whitford. They are also a significant local employer, with three staff in the microbrewery, two at the Dove at Rhyl and eleven at

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Sue Green, Dovecote Brewery

↓ The Dove at Rhyl



the Salusbury Arms.

“Having a micropub is brilliant for marketing our beer and getting our brand out there,” said Sue, a former lawyer. “We're very much a people business, so it helps us to develop that face-to-face relationship with our end customer, get their feedback, take it on board and constantly strive to improve our product.”

Despite closing three micropubs, the pandemic has not put them off opening more. In fact, they even have their eye on a site in mid-Wales, where they are looking to set one up in March next year.

### Sign of the times

Beer and pubs have been in Simon Scamp's blood since the 1980s, when he started brewing in his cellar in Faversham, Kent using hops and yeast from Shepherd Neame. He is also a signwriter by trade and produced the signage for the UK's first micropub, the Butchers Arms in Herne.

Scamp launched Oxbrew with his stepson Aaron Baldwin in Enstone, near Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire in 2016 before it merged with Ian Hemingway's Little Ox to become **Little Ox Brewery** and moved to Freeland, four miles from Witney.

In 2018, Scamp decided to set up **Drummers Bar** micropub in Witney as an outlet for the microbrewery's beer.

Scamp intentionally set up the two businesses so they are separate from each other, to avoid being tied to only offering the microbrewery's beer. When establishing the micropub, he sought advice from all quarters including the Micropub Association and other micropub owners such as Martyn Hillier at the Butchers Arms, as well as insurance companies.

The micropub cost £25,000 to set up and is located on the site of a former charity shop, in an alleyway connected to the town's market square, with capacity for forty people, all seated. Among the most popular beers it sells from the microbrewery are Yabba Dabba Doo, a 4.8% IPA, and Oxford Pilsner (5.0%).

The micropub also stocks local and national beer from Siren Craft Brew in Wokingham, Purity Brewing in Alcester, Elements Brewery in Burford, and Titanic Brewery in Stoke-on-Trent. And it features a range of gluten-free beer from Westerham Brewery in Kent, with plans to introduce Belgian beers soon, as well as wines from France and Argentina, local gins and soft drinks.

The pub is named after Scamp's passion for music: he has been a drummer for the last 45 years, playing in numerous bands including with Hugh Hopper, who toured as bass guitarist with Jimi Hendrix. In this vein, he hosts acoustic jam sessions in the micropub on Sunday afternoons.

“Micropubs are the future,” Scamp, who runs the micropub with his

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Simon Scamp, Drummers Bar micropub



↑ Simon Scamp (far right) at the Drummer's Bar

barman Owen Harrison, told *Micropub Magazine*. “Being small and independent means you don't have many overheads and the business is easily manoeuvrable, and because they are intimate venues it means you get much more human interaction and conversation than in a mainstream pub.

“People need to have a proper social outlet and feel like a part of the local community, and that's exactly what micropubs provide. The beauty of it is that wherever you go in the country, each one is completely different to the next with its own unique character and identity.” →



↑ Artistic design to the micropub's frontage

## From brewing to serving pints



↓ Billericay Brewing's micropub bar area



↑ Trevor Jeffrey (left, owner, Billericay Brewing) with Richard Coppack (head brewer)

### On-site micropub

**Billericay Brewing Co** is a true microbrewery and micropub combination. The microbrewery was formed in an industrial unit in the town centre by Trevor Jeffrey in 2012. Since then, he has expanded the business with the addition of three directors, Alex Watson, Richard Coppack and Seb Roberts, and six staff, and opened the micropub next door in 2015.

Initially, the brewery sold half of its beer to trade and the other half through its shop. But launching the micropub enabled the business to sell the vast majority direct to the public.

Before starting the micropub, Jeffrey went to look at other micropubs around the country and sought feedback from their customers. He also joined the Micropub Association, which advised him on the asset finance needed to buy the equipment for the operation.

It cost £10,000 to set up the micropub, including installing furniture, a bar area, beer racking, chillers, a keg machine, glass washer and beer fridges. It reflects the provenance of the microbrewery with the company's beer bottles being used as lights and other distinctive features.

The micropub has capacity for twenty-five people inside and twenty outside and it also occasionally uses a snug bar inside the brewery, which has room for sixteen.

The company also offers brewery tours and tasting experiences, as well as holding sessions where people can have a go at brewing their own beer.

Despite furloughing half of its staff, the microbrewery continued production throughout the pandemic, moving to a delivery and

click and collect service when the micropub had to shut.

The micropub also runs a loyal card scheme where customers get a free drink for every ten they buy.

Among the most popular beers are Billericay Blonde, a 4.0% golden ale, Billericay Zeppelin, a 3.8% session ale, named after the Zeppelin that was shot down over the town during World War I, and Billericay Dickie, a 4.2% amber ale, named after the famous Ian Dury song. Other testaments to Dury include Rhythm Stick, a 4.8% rich amber, and Sex&Drugs&Rock&Roll, a 5.0% IPA.

In addition, the micropub has guest ales from Brentwood Brewery and Leigh-on-Sea Brewery. It also stocks German lager and Belgian fruit beer, wine from New Hall Vineyards in Purleigh, near Chelmsford, local cider, a range of Essex gins and soft drinks.

The micropub is also highly active on the events front. It hosts four festivals a year, a food night every Tuesday, ranging from pizza to vegetarian, a quiz night once a month and a vinyl night, also once a month. →



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↑ Farr Brew's micropub that opened in 2018

“The distinct advantage of owning a microbrewery and a micropub is that unison of being able to make a great product that you can control the quality, supply and price of, direct to your customers. You can also more easily source the style of beer your customer wants when requested”

Nick Farr, Farr Brew



↑ A crowded bar but full of goodies!

**Cheaper by the half dozen**  
Friends and co-owners Nick Farr and Matt Elvidge started **Farr Brew** when Farr's kitchen became too small to brew beer in.

After successfully supplying beer to various farmers and Christmas markets, they both decided to establish the brewery, so quit their jobs in construction and recruitment respectively.

Having found an old cattle shed unit on a farm in Ayot, Hertfordshire, the pair launched a crowdfunding campaign, which attracted a small number of main angel investors, and raised enough money to buy the brew kit, thirty to forty casks and the ingredients needed for the first two brews.

They began selling to local pubs and before they knew it were supplying 200 pubs across the South East of England.

Two years ago, they took on a head brewer, Jason Moyland.

Such was the success of the brewery tap they had built on the site of the microbrewery over the first 18 months, that they decided to open a micropub, **The Reading Rooms**, in a former florists in Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire. After visiting twelve micropubs in Kent to see what was required, and installing a bar and cellar, Farr and Elvidge launched the pub in June 2018.

The micropub, which has a turnover of approximately £250,000 per year and capacity for forty people, certainly has a unique character with the bar being built from scaffolding boards and reclaimed wood, and the walls adorned with “weird and whacky art” as well as books - in homage to its former life as a reading room, used, ironically, given its current use, by the Temperance movement. At any time, it typically has twelve different beers on rotation, the most popular of which is Golden, a 4.1% dark, golden ale.

“The distinct advantage of owning a microbrewery and a micropub is that unison of being able to make a great product that you can control the quality, supply and price of, direct to your customers,” said Elvidge. “You can also more easily source the style of beer your customer wants when requested.”

Since opening the micropub, the duo have taken on five more pubs: The Rising Sun in Slip End, The Red Cow in Harpenden, and The Eight Bells in Old Hatfield in 2019; The Elephant and Castle in Wheathampstead in 2020; and The Bull Inn in Whitwell this year. Now they supply all the real ale to the pubs and have joined forces with Black Bridge Distillery in Wheathampstead to create their own gin, spiced rum and whisky, and buy cider and wine from local suppliers.



↑ House of Hammerton (l-r), Lee, Karina and Yigit Demirel (sales & operations manager)

**Keeping it in the family**  
Lee and Karina Benavente-Hammerton opened **Hammerton Brewery** in Islington, London in 2014 after Lee decided to follow in the footsteps of his family, who had initially been brewing beer from 1868 to 1950.

Seeing a gap in the market to supply the Islington area, he set up the microbrewery and brewery tap. But due to the brewery tap only being able to open irregularly because of limited capacity, Lee decided to establish the **House of Hammerton** pub, fifteen minutes away in Holloway Road.

Because of its location, it always gets good footfall, particularly when Arsenal FC are playing at home.

Among the most popular beers on offer are N7, a 5.2% IPA, N1, a 4.1% pale ale, Groll, a 4.7% lager and Crunch, a 5.3% peanut butter milk

“Having a pub is great because it is the main sales channel for our microbrewery. It also allows us to try out our beer on customers to see whether they like it”

Lee Benavente-Hammerton, Hammerton brewery

stout. The pub also serves other beers from across the UK and gins from London distilleries.

The microbrewery employs ten staff, while there are five in the brewery tap and four running the pub. Sometimes employees change between the different operations.

“Having a pub is great because it is the main sales channel for our microbrewery. It also allows us to try out our beer on customers to see whether they like it”, said Lee.

Many of those microbreweries that have set up their own micropubs are clearly reaping the rewards. It looks set to be a trend that will only continue to gather pace as there becomes a greater focus on local communities and the production and consumption of quality beer moving forward.