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“Gin has soared in popularity again after the Government changed the laws about making gin. Previously, the Gin Act 1751 outlawed small scale gin distilleries in London to stop bootlegging, but then it was repealed in 2008, and since then it has really exploded”

Jane Sharpe, Inn Doors micropub

The great gin renaissance

With more and more micropubs offering gins to their customers, **Alex Wright** investigates how this spirit has risen back to the top

Gin is making a big comeback. So much so that it has now overtaken vodka as the nation's favourite spirit, a recent YouGov poll has found.

Sales of the spirit, otherwise known as Mother's Ruin in its heyday in the 18th century, which were a mainstay of drinks cabinets in the 1970s and 80s, have soared in recent years, peaking at £2.1 billion in 2021, up from £1.9bn the previous year, according to the Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA).

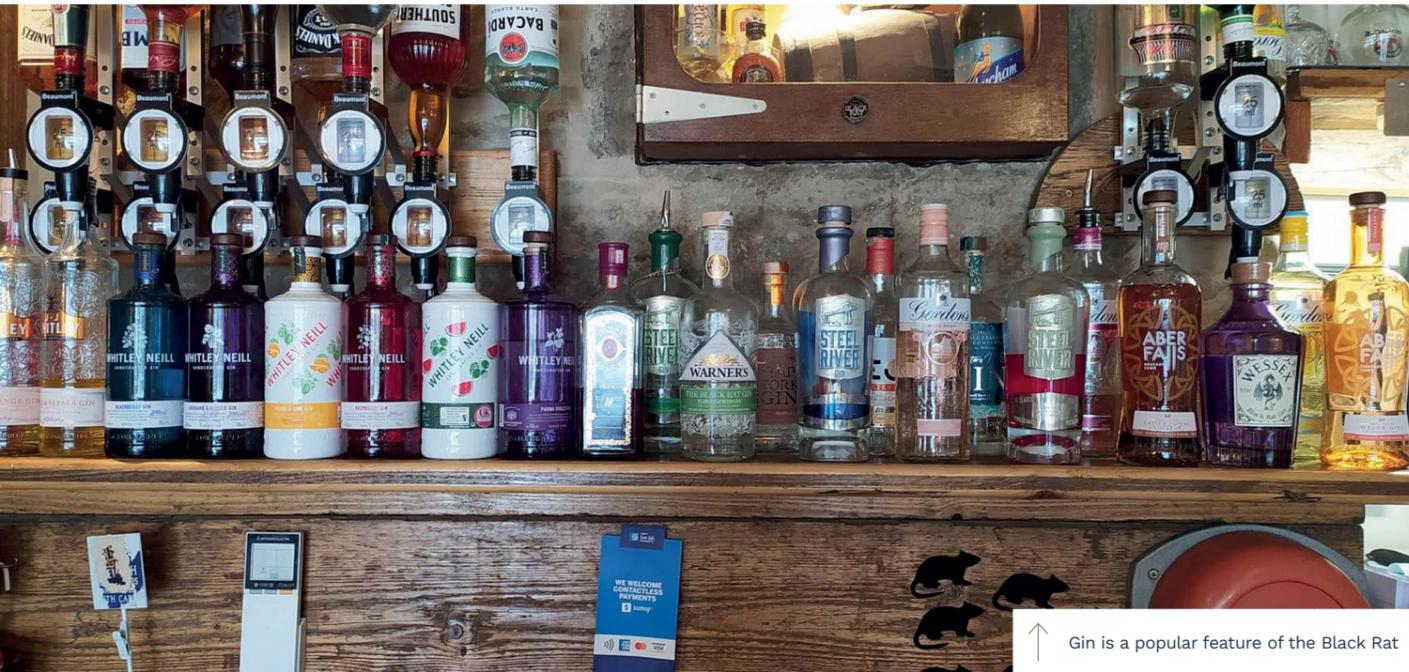
Bottle sales have also climbed, with 78 million sold in shops and online and 64 million in the off-trade in 2020. The number of UK distilleries has also grown by 110 during 2021,

topping more than 820, the Office for National Statistics figures show.

The craft gin boom, which has resulted in multiple small distilleries springing up all over the country, much in the same vein as microbreweries, is being driven by demand for different and more exotic and fruity varieties of the drink. And their exponential growth shows no signs of abating any time soon.

“It's heart warming to find a positive story from the gloom of 2020 – and our bold and growing band of distillers have delivered once again,” said WSTA's chief executive Miles Beale. →

The great gin renaissance



↑ Gin is a popular feature of the Black Rat



↑ Hopper's Hut's gin menu

“Ninety percent of our gin drinkers are female, so that represents a huge part of the demographic we would be missing out on if we limited ourselves to selling just beer and cider. So, it's really a no brainer to offer gin”

Simon Tippett, Hopper's Hut Micropub

More inclusive

Simon and Rebecca Tippett, who run the **Hopper's Hut** micropub in Sidcup, London, started offering gin to make their micropub more inclusive to a wider range of people. After opening in 2016, demand had grown so strongly for gin that they began stocking it the following year.

“Lots of people were asking for it,” said Simon. “Our beer sales were predominantly male-led and we wanted to offer their partners who didn't drink beer an alternative, so we decided to go for gin.”

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As he learned more about the distilleries and discovered new ones, so he went further afield to source his gin. Now, the micropub stocks 58 different varieties, representing 30% of annual turnover, from distilleries up and down the country from the Isle of Skye to the Isle of Wight, as well as its own brewery in France.

Among the most popular events at the micropub are a blind gin tasting night. Simon also puts a gin of the week on the board to encourage

punters to try new drinks such as strawberry and balsamic vinegar flavoured gin.

As well as selling the standard London dry gin in large quantities, fruity flavoured varieties including gooseberry, lemon, mango and rhubarb and ginger are winners too. Simon also likes to stock a wide range of mixers to suit all tastes from plain, aromatic, elderflower and Mediterranean tonics to orange juice and lemonade.

Different flavours

Different flavours were also what got Alyson Boote, who runs the **Black Rat** in Thackley, Bradford, with her husband Pete, into selling gin. Her micropub has offered a host of different varieties since taking it over in November 2021.

“Gin is such a versatile drink,” said Boote. “It comes in so many different flavours and you discover a new one almost every day.”

“That works well with our punters, many of whom are adventurous and like to try the more exotic and exciting varieties. They'll explore everything – from the Christmas pudding and blackberry and apple flavours we had on over the festive period to the mango and pineapple varieties, which tend to be more popular in the summer months.”



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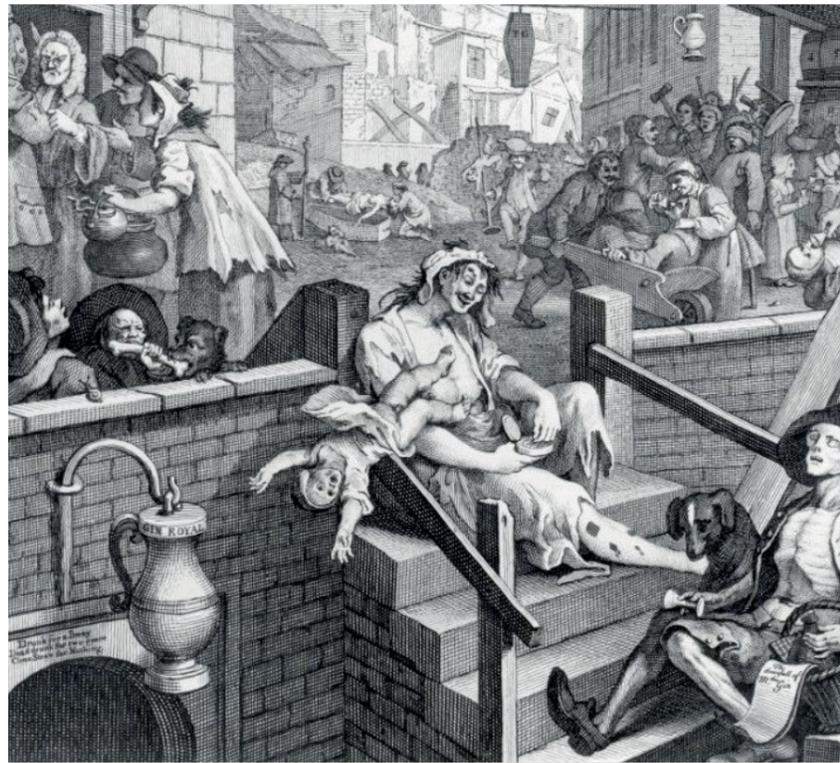


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The great gin renaissance



A brief history of gin

Gin has had a long and rich history.

It dates back to the Middle Ages, when it was first made using junipers, according to a 13th century Flemish manuscript.

By the 1600s, the Dutch had set up hundreds of distilleries in Amsterdam to produce the spirit called genever on a mass scale. Originally, it was made as a medicine and distributed to chemists for the treatment of ailments such as gout and dyspepsia.

Consumed in large enough quantities, it helped to ameliorate the perception of common symptoms associated with these disorders.

Gin gained further popularity during the 30 Years' War, when British soldiers fighting in the Netherlands consumed it to give them Dutch courage before going into battle.

But it wasn't until the latter half of the 17th century and early 18th century that it really took off in England.

At its height in 1720, during the Gin Craze, experts estimate that as many as one quarter of London households were frequently producing their own gin.

Despite Parliament's attempts to rein in gin consumption with no fewer than five major legislative acts passed in the space of 22 years, its popularity grew even stronger.

The spirit is immortalised in William Hogarth's 1751 Gin Lane print depicting the evils of drinking gin, at the centre of which sits a ragged woman taking snuff as her baby plummets from her arms into the gin vault below.

Gin was also used in some of the British colonies where people were prone to malarial infections to mask the unpleasant, bitter flavour of the antimalarial quinine. This medical elixir developed into the gin and tonic drink that we all know and love today.

↓ The Narrow Nick's extensive gin collection



Kathryn Boam, who owns the **Dog and Parrot** in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, with her husband David, complements her extensive gin range with mixers of all varieties. Her gin flavours run from orange, strawberry, raspberry, blackcurrant and cherry and lime to passionfruit, bramble, rhubarb and ginger, parma violet, and even bakewell tart and chocolate orange, as well as the infamous candy cane gin.

But it's really the mixers where she excels. As well as the standard slimline tonics, she also offers everything from orange juice, cranberry juice, lemonade and coke to ginger ale, pink soda, sarsaparilla and elderflower tonic.

"My customers tend to be quite adventurous when it comes to trying out new drinks," said Boam, for who gin accounts for 15% of drinks sales. "Some people like the cherry gin and coke, while others are partial to testing even more unusual and exotic combinations."

Something different

Sarah Johnson, who owns the **Narrow Nick** in Rothbury and the Ale Gate in Alnwick, Northumberland, with her husband Paul, was prompted to start selling gin because her customers are always on the lookout for something new.

"I started with six gins when we opened six years ago, but then, the more I found out about them,

the more obsessed I became," said Johnson. "Now, we have 55 different varieties at the Ale Gate and 37 at the Narrow Nick.

"People don't just want the regular gin and tonic these days, it's all about new flavours like raspberry, pink grapefruit and quince, to such an extent that they have become a talking point when people go out now. We had one gentleman in particular who had been working his way through our range at the Narrow Nick and got up to 55, but he started complaining because I keep changing them!"

There's no shortage of local distilleries to source gin from either, with Geordie-Gin in Newcastle, Hepple Spirits in Morpeth, and Northumberland Spirit Co and Pilgrim Spirit, both in Alnwick. To give it a more cosmopolitan touch, Johnson also brings in supplies of French and Spanish gins.

"I've had nothing but positive feedback about my gin," said Johnson. "You get the occasional real ale drinker sighing and saying, 'Not another gin', but it all good-natured banter really."

The new wave

Nicky Higgins, who runs the **Ainsbury** micropub in Bradford with her husband John, believes that gin is following the same trend as craft beer. Just as there has been a rise in small microbreweries starting up, experimenting with new types of beer, now every man and his dog is

“

Gin has become such a staple for our customers that now about 70% of the women that come in with their partners drink gin. If we didn't offer it, it would alienate them and have a very detrimental effect on business”

Nicky Higgins, Ainsbury micropub

making gin out of their garage. Since taking over the micropub in November last year, Higgins has quadrupled her gin range. Now, she has about 20 different varieties on her shelves.

"I'm constantly trying out and getting new gins in, to complement our current offering," said Higgins. "We are always looking at doing new offers to get people into trying gin with their friends and partners, such as four doubles for £20 with different mixers.

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Lee Price, owner of the **Saxon Bar** in Christchurch, Dorset, who has always sold gin since he bought the micropub in 2018 and currently has 24 on offer, added: "Gin has become both a very adult drink and an acceptable alcopop. When gin is mixed with a bottle of tonic you hardly realise you're drinking alcohol. On the other hand, if you don't dilute it, it's a completely different experience."

Gins only look set to continue in their popularity as people experiment with more new and exciting varieties. And it seems that it's only a matter of time before they have become a mainstay of every micropub's stock range. →



↑ The Ainsbury micropub's gin corner



↑ The Saxon Bar offers 24 gins



↑ The Dog and Parrot's sarsaparilla flavoured gin

Five popular gins to try

by Emma Eversham



Premium
Brockmans RRP: £34
 This premium classic British gin offers something a little more unusual as it blends traditional gin botanicals with more unusual flavours such as liquorice root, blueberries and blackberries, resulting in an incredibly smooth gin.

Flavoured
Warner's Rhubarb Gin RRP: £38
 Flavoured gin is a crowded market, but it's hard to beat this early-entrant - the world's first rhubarb gin - for taste and versatility. Fresh rhubarb juice joins juniper, coriander seed, elderflower, and more, for a quality blend.



Eco-friendly
Green Man Wildwood Gin RRP: £30
 Botanicals sourced from the Surrey forests provide top notes of pine, fir and birch with a fresh herbal base in Silent Pool's eco-friendly gin, the first spirit to be packaged in a cardboard bottle.



Non-alcoholic
Strykk not Gin RRP: £16
 An authentic non-alcoholic gin with the same distilled flavour profile as its alcoholic counterpart, with botanical hits of juniper, coriander, sage and basil. One hundred percent natural, without sugar, fat or artificial flavours.



Classic
Gordon's London Dry Gin RRP: £16
 Easily recognisable as the original London Dry, Gordon's has held its number two spot as the top selling gin in the on-trade for two years (only beaten by Gordon's Pink). Distinctive, juniper-heavy, and reliable.

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