

Raising a glass of Christmas cheer

Festive ales are becoming increasingly popular in micropubs among discerning punters looking for a hearty tippie this holiday season. *Micropub Magazine* spoke with a range of microbreweries across the country about their latest offerings. **Alex Wright reports**

Christmas is a critical time of year for micropubs to boost their trade. As the nights draw in, one of the best ways to achieve this is through offering festive beers. From ruby porters to imperial stouts, the types of ale available are wide-ranging.

While some microbreweries have stuck with the traditional warm and rich Christmas flavours through their hops and malt, others have been more inventive, with the addition of everything from chocolate and toffee to pine needles.

They have also got creative with their beer name, and labelling and packaging, with some eye-catching products on offer.

But how are breweries making their Christmas ales stand out from the crowd? And how are they coping with sourcing ingredients and judging demand during the current cost of living and energy crisis?

Micropub Magazine profiles some of the most popular offerings currently available from microbreweries for this festive season, including where to buy them, their key features and how production is going:

Arkell's Brewery

Owner: The Arkell family
Address: Hyde Road Kingsdown, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN2 7RU
Telephone: 01793 823026
Email: arkells@arkells.com
Website: www.arkells.com

Festive beer: Sir Noel Ale (5% ABV)

This festive ale was named in honour of Sir Noel Arkell, who was born on Christmas Day. This full-bodied beer is cleverly disguised by its distinctive light colour and slides down easily, leaving drinkers with a warm, tingling feeling. **Available in cask and 500ml bottle.**

Sir Noel was the third generation of the family to own and run the Victorian brewery, which was on the exact site where it still stands today.

Sir Noel is always our best-selling seasonal beer, which is why we keep bringing it back. We will brew at least 16,000 pints this year.

*The greatest challenge to our Christmas beer this year is the timing of the World Cup, for which we have another seasonal beer. **Arkell's Brewery***



Beer Brothers Brewery

Owners: Phill Leyland and Davis Reece
Address: 335 Ranglet Road, Walton Summit Centre, Preston, Lancashire, PR5 8AR
Telephone: 01772 587441
Email: info@beerbrothers.co.uk
Website: www.beerbrothers.co.uk

Festive beer: Spruce'd Up (4.6% ABV)

A deep, golden pale ale with a lovely piney aroma, a warming toffee malt flavour and a slightly sweet aftertaste. **Available in cask and 500ml bottle.**

*The beer gets its unique taste from the Cascade hops and Norwegian Spruce tips sourced from the Tree Barn in nearby Blackrod. Notes of crisp pine and hints of ginger make it a Christmas special. **Beer Brothers Brewery***

Bishop Nick Brewery

Owner: Nelion Ridley
Address: 33 East Street, Braintree, Essex, CM7 3JJ
Telephone: 01376 349605
Email: info@bishopnick.com
Website: www.bishopnick.com

Festive beers: Halo (3.8% ABV)

Enjoy a refreshing hit of zesty spiciness as you breathe in the essence of Willamette and Centennial hops. Comforting flavours of toffee and biscuit malts are balanced by tangerine, spice and a floral finish derived from Cashmere hops. **Available in cask, 500ml bottle, mini-cask, mini-pin, and poly-pin.**

Rejoice (5.6% ABV)

A winter ale which packs a figgy pudding punch. It owes its rich copper colour to a sprinkling of chocolate malt, and a chorus of English hops impart a festive spicy bitterness to balance warming malty flavours. **Available in cask, 500ml bottle, mini-cask, mini-pin, and poly-pin.**

Bishop Nick takes great pride in its history and heritage. As the sixth generation of Essex brewers, we use the finest malts and hop varieties in the traditional style. Expertly hand-crafted by a multi-award-winning brewer.

Christmas is undoubtedly our busiest time, and we brew two limited edition beers to cover the festive lead up. We would normally brew one in addition to our core range. We find sales of all our core beers increase at this time of year. We expect to sell twice as much of our festive beers in cask as we would a normal limited-edition beer, but in bottle it will average out because of the wide range we have available. We tend not to be overly 'Christmassy' with the branding for our festive brews because the styles are well suited to the winter months which take us beyond New Year's Eve.

*As a brewery we are flexible and light on our feet, so we can respond to unpredictable demand. It is undoubtedly going to be a challenging winter for our industry, but we do have a number of customers whose pubs are thriving. We will brew to cater for the demand and don't foresee any major problems. **Bishop Nick Brewery** →*



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Black Tor Brewery

Owner: Jonathon Crump
Address: Units 5 & 6, Gidleys Meadow,
Christow, Exeter, Devon, EX6 7QB
Telephone: 01647 252120
Email: beer@blacktorbrewery.com
Website: www.blacktorbrewery.co.uk

Festive beer: Advent (4.8% ABV)

A ruby red beer which is nice and malty with a rich flavour. **Available in cask.**

It's a popular specialty Christmas brew that we have brought out every year for the last seven years, made using chocolate, dark and specialty German malt, English hops and a premium Coburn's special reserve port that gives it a fruity kick at the end.

It's probably our best-selling seasonal beer and has won a Taste of the West gold award. We can't brew enough. As with all our limited-edition beers, it always sells out. It has also got an attractive red pump clip that makes it stand out.

*Last year, we produced 60 casks, compared to 150 the year before Covid. This year, we plan to produce 90 to 120 casks. Getting hold of the ingredients isn't a problem, we're only limited by the conditioning time required for the strength of the beer, which means all of our brewing has to be completed by the second or third week of November. **Black Tor Brewery***



Botley Brewery

Owners: Meg and Rob Sanderson
Address: Botley Flour Mills, Mill Hill, Botley,
Southampton, Hampshire, SO30 2GY
Telephone: 07909 337212
Email: botleybreweryltd@hotmail.com
Website: www.botleybreweryltd.com

Festive beer: Naughtly or Spiced (4.6% ABV)

A dark, spicy beer full of the taste of Christmas.
Available in bottle and mini keg.

It smells like Christmas, is warm and dark in colour, and tastes amazing.

It matches sales of our most popular core ale, our IPA. We sold a lot last year. We are planning to produce 1,500 litres this year.

It will be harder to do additional production runs this year due to the costs of ingredients increasing.
Botley Brewery →



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Bradfield Brewery

Owners: The Gill family
Address: Watt House Farm, High Bradfield, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S6 6LG
Telephone: 0114 285 1118
Email: info@bradfieldbrewery.com
Website: www.bradfieldbrewery.com

Festive beer:

Farmers Belgian Blue (4.9% ABV)

A deep red-coloured winter ale. Available in cask, bottle, and 5-litre mini-keg.

The Farmers Belgian Blue is a unique winter berry brew with an unusual blue tint to the head. It's attractive branding and unusual colouring creates a talking point between drinkers but it's the taste that keeps the customers asking for more.

It is our best seller on the seasonal calendar and sells in line with our core range best seller Farmers Blonde when it is in circulation. Last year, we sold just over 1,000bbl.

This year, we plan to produce around the same amount, depending on demand. We plan our production schedule well in advance, especially this year given that we could have faced additional challenges, but fortunately we don't anticipate any difficulty in keeping up with demand for our products, despite it being a busy time.

Bradfield Brewery



Cheddar Ales

Owner: Jem Ham
Address: Winchester Farm, Draycott Road, Cheddar, Somerset, BS27 3RP
Telephone: 01934 744193
Email: sales@cheddarales.co.uk
Website: www.cheddarales.co.uk

Festive beers:

Festive Totty (4.7% ABV)

A dark porter brewed with ruby port. Available in cask and 500ml bottle.

Frozen Deep (4.5% ABV)

A winter pale ale. Available in cask and bottle.

By handcrafting such relatively small volumes, we ensure that character and consistency lie at the heart of all our beer range. We use the traditional method of bottle conditioning, and all our bottled beers are gluten free as well as vegan friendly.

We made the conscious decision to only produce one brew at a time to balance production and customer demand so that we sell out by Christmas. We have increased the size of brew from last year in the hope that we do not disappoint our customers.

We are planning to produce one full 3,500-litre brew. We just do not have the time or capacity to do another brew as well as maintaining our stocks in cask and bottle of our eight core range beers. **Cheddar Ales**



Conwy Brewery

Owner: Cadman Group via Highfield Beverages
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Telephone: 01492 514305
Email: enquiries@conwybrewery.co.uk
Website: www.conwybrewery.co.uk

Festive beers:

Hoppy Christmas (4.3% ABV)

A single hop beer brewed with Challenger hops. A well-balanced golden bitter. This beer stands out due to the spicy aftertaste, giving a distinct holiday taste we have come to associate with traditional Christmas goodies, while being light enough to see the drinker through Christmas dinner and into an evening of merriment. Available in cask, and 4.5% ABV in bottle and mini-keg.

Telford Porter (5.6% ABV)

A rich Victorian porter first crafted to commemorate the opening of Thomas Telford's Conwy suspension bridge in 1826. This beer puts itself above the competition due to its semi-dry finish with hints of a lactose-like sourness, keeping it from being over-the-top sweet. Available in cask, and 6% ABV in bottle and mini-keg.

Hoppy Christmas flies out due to its lightness in a season of heavy drinks. Telford Porter is available all year round in bottle, but it is highly requested by our local pub clients in cask in the winter.

We are planning to produce one brew (about 40 barrels) of Telford Porter in late November and the rest will be bottled. We have already brewed multiple batches of Hoppy Christmas for bottling, mini-kegs, and casks for a Wetherspoon's listing, although casks for our local pubs will not be brewed until November.

We will brew as needed from then. It will absolutely be more difficult to do additional production runs this year, especially with the hop shortage alongside the rising costs. **Conwy Brewery**

Derby Brewing Company

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Email: office@derbybrewing.co.uk
Website: www.derbybrewing.co.uk

Festive beer:

White Christmas (5.5% ABV)

A flavoursome, rich golden pale ale with a hoppy finish. Available in cask and bottle.

To mark our 30th anniversary, we are producing White Christmas for the first time in bottles.

Most Christmas beers are dark in colour, so when we first made it, we wanted to do something slightly different.

It's probably the best-selling of our Christmas beers. We normally do a couple of brews in our 15-barrel plant. Last year we did one brew, but this year we plan to do a couple, depending on demand. We have already had some pre-sales and hopefully we can get a few more.

We have had some price increases, which we have tried to keep to a minimum for the customer. I'm afraid it's just the world we're operating in at the moment.

Derby Brewing Company →



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Mauldons Brewery

Owner: Charlie Buckle
Address: 13 Church Field Road, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2YA
Telephone: 01787 311055
Email: orders@mauldons.co.uk
Website: www.mauldons.co.uk

Festive beer: Scrooge's Revenge (4.9% ABV)

A bitter tawny red ale made using Perle and Bramling Cross hops with a malt and fruit aroma which gives way to a rich and full-bodied finish. **Available in cask and bottle.**

The deep red colour and Bramling Cross hops give it this warm Christmas spice flavour. The flavours are targeted for the Christmas palette.

We sell a lot at this time of year. Last year we sold 350 firkins and 6,000 500ml bottles. This year, we plan to do about the same amount. We are brewing for Wetherspoon's as well this year, so firkin sales will almost considerably be higher.

Just like most other breweries, the increasing costs are having an impact. In terms of capacity, we have no problems with production numbers, it is purely down to demand as to how much we're going to produce.
Mauldons Brewery →

Lakeland Brewhouse

Owners: Scott and Kirsty Mackenzie
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Telephone: 01229 581387
Email: contact@lakelandbrewhouse.co.uk
Website: www.lakelandbrewhouse.co.uk

Festive beer: Frostbite Bitter (4.2% ABV)

A copper coloured ale with a sweet, soft aroma which leads to a full mouth feel with a solid bitter finish. **Available in bottle.**

The beer was produced in collaboration with Best of British Beer. Its traditional rich, malty taste makes it the perfect drink for cold winter days. **Lakeland Brewery**



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Quartz Brewing

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Telephone: 01543 473965
Email: info@quartzbrewing.co.uk
Website: www.quartzbrewing.co.uk

Festive beer: Cracker (5% ABV)

A dark, easy drinking ale. **Available in bottle.**

Last year we produced 10 barrels' worth and we plan to make about the same quantity again this year.

*It will be harder to do additional production runs this year. The main issue comes down to cost. We operate a brewery using electric heaters and energy costs have gone through the roof: they are double what they were last year. At the same time, raw material and delivery costs have gone up significantly too. **Quartz Brewing***



Rhymney Brewery

Owner: Steve Evans
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Email: enquiries@rhymneybreweryltd.com
Website: www.rhymneybrewery.com

Festive beers:

A Winter's Ale (4.5% ABV)

A dark beer with lots of body to it made using Centennial and Willamette hops. **Available in bottle.**

Gift Horse (4.5% ABV)

A chestnut brown Christmas ale, which is nicely balanced between the hop and malt flavours and has just enough bitterness to give it a distinctive character and for a refreshing pint. **Available in cask.**

We did a one-off special limited edition run of A Winter's Ale last year and it went really well, so we're doing double the production this year.

We have been producing Gift Horse for the last eight years, so it's an established favourite, which we offer to micropubs. We produce it in cask, so we can brew it based on demand.

Sales for both beers tend to be steady as they are popular drinks. We had many people contacting us asking whether they could source it from us again this year.

*It has been more difficult to produce because of the current economic and inflationary environment, but it just means we have to roll our sleeves up and try to do our best. **Rhymney Brewery** →*

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Rudgate Brewery

Owner: Craig Lee

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Telephone: 01423 358382

Email: sales@rudgatebrewery.co.uk

Website: www.rudgatebrewery.co.uk

Festive beers:

Evil Elf (4% ABV)

A biscuit pale ale with hints of fruit. **Available in cask and bottle.**

Rudolph's Ruin (4.6% ABV)

A deep chestnut premium ale bursting with seasonal malts and a spicy hop aroma. **Available in cask.**

Evil Elf is an easy drinking and tasty Christmas beer, something a little lighter for those who aren't as taken by the darker and richer seasonal ales. Rudolph's Ruin is balanced beautifully and offers that richer, more intense seasonal flavour.

Elf sells better as it's a more sessionable, lighter ale. Last year, we sold just under 6,000 bottles and almost 170 nine-gallon casks.

We plan to produce a similar amount to last year. But we will be careful about the quantities we produce based on the amount we're likely to sell to avoid any waste and make the most of the ingredients and costs
Rudgate Brewery

St Peter's Brewery

CEO: Derek Jones

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Telephone: 01986 782322

Email: beers@stpetersbrewery.co.uk

Website: www.stpetersbrewery.co.uk

Festive beer:

Christmas Ale (7% ABV)

A copper-coloured smooth, fruity, and full-bodied ale. Aromas of toffee and caramel lead to rich and smooth flavours of Christmas fruits and spices – the perfect companion for Christmas savouries, sweets, and snacks. Serve at room temperature or slightly chilled. **Available in the brewery's uniquely shaped oval 500ml bottle.**

Our Christmas Ale is unique because it is a completely different recipe to our other beers. Toffee and caramel aromas are combined with a rich Christmas spice flavour.

Only available during the seasonal months and with a special festive label featuring our historic, medieval St Peter's Hall, which dates back to 1280 and stands next to our beautiful brewery. Produced with East Anglian malt, brewed with water from our deep bore hole and filled in our idyllic rural location in Suffolk.

Christmas Ale is a sell-out beer year-after-year and is a firm favourite amongst all our customers. We have finished brewing the Christmas Ale for this year and have produced approximately 24,000 bottles.

St Peter's Brewery



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