

Now, is that a German lager beer we see in your hand? Put it down immediately; there's a new drink in town. Actually it's an old one, but it's on its way back. Britain's noblest brewing tradition, real ale, is on the up – and you need to be part of it.

The rise in popularity of real ale, or 'cask conditioned ale', has been sharp. According to the Campaign For Real Ale (Camra), 50 per cent of all adult drinkers have now tried the beer, up from 35 per cent last year, destroying the myth that you need a sandal-sock combo and an unhealthy interest in steam power to be a real-ale drinker. Even the ladies have taken a fancy, with 30 per cent now indulging, almost twice as many as in 2008.

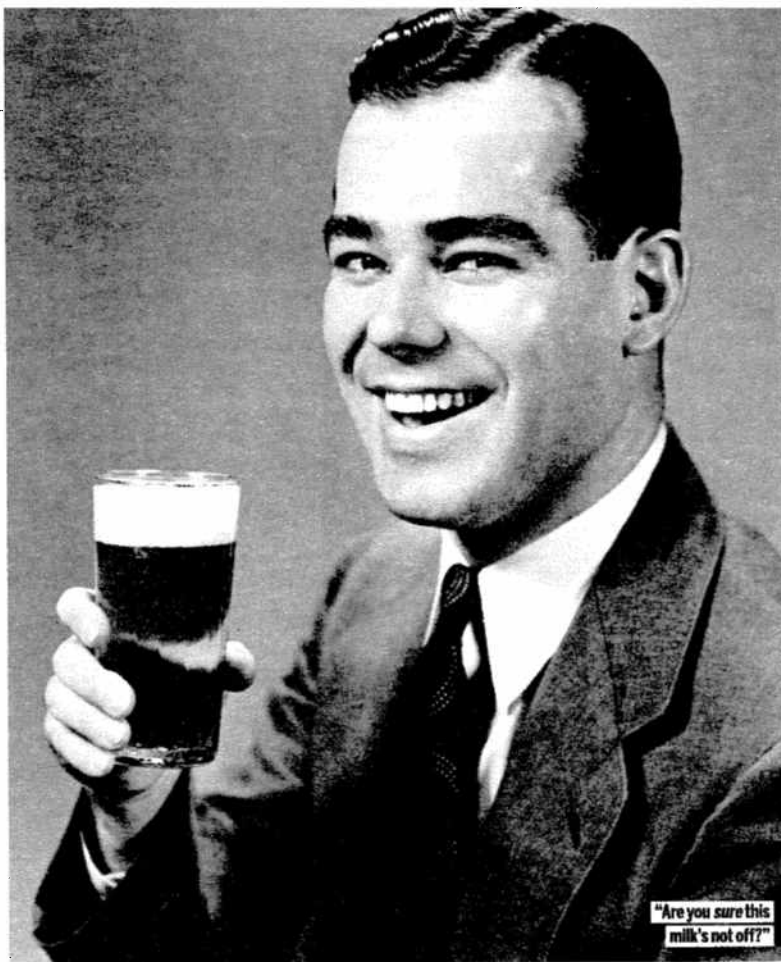
If you've not converted yet, you need to let ale into your life. Here are four reasons why:

1. IT'S BRITISH THROUGH AND THROUGH

There's no doubt that the British are champion drinkers. Let's face it, in a climate like ours there are only two things you're going to become good at: drinking and inventing. We often lose sight of how well we've combined the two, of how many great beverages we produce. There are regional specialities like Scottish whisky, London gin and West Country cider, but only one drink is produced in every corner of this Sceptred Isle – real ale. From Scotland to Cornwall, you'll find local breweries, producing thousands of individual beers. We've been brewing the same way for 500 years, so we're pretty good at it.

2. IT'S A THINKING MAN'S BEER

We're not knocking lager, it has its place (curry houses to name but one), but almost every lager you get from the shiny chrome tap in your local Dog & Partridge is mass-produced and unlikely to need tasting notes. Real ale, however, is our answer to wine. Where the French are excited at the blackberry and tar in their



The real-ale revival

It's no longer the drink of trainspotters and old-timers. Andrew Dickens tells you why

equipment used. Some brewers even throw in a few secret ingredients. All these variables mean there are thousands of beers, each completely distinctive. There are currently more than 670 small brewers in the UK, providing over 2,500 different beers,

dark beers are more beneficial than lighter lagers due to a higher level of antioxidants (a bit like red wine). The natural ingredients also lead to a protein-rich (a litre of ale will provide 10 per cent of your daily requirements), vitamin-packed liquid, all of which means the odd pint of real ale can lead to a longer, healthier and more fulfilled life.

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merlots and pinot noirs, at any decent pub you can sup your way through ales each with its own distinctive aromas and flavours.

Way ahead of the trend for organic dining, real ale is (and always has been) brewed from traditional natural ingredients: these include hops, yeast, water and malted barley. How the barley is treated, plus the types of yeast, hops and water used, all affect the flavour, not to mention the brewing time, temperature and



and that's not even taking into account the larger brewers.

3. IT'S GOOD FOR YOU

First up, alcohol in large quantities is not good for you. It can lead to all kinds of health problems, not to mention potential appearances on booze-based ITV2 fly-on-the-wall documentaries. However, as science and your gran will tell you, a little bit of what you fancy does you good. It's been shown that the occasional drink can reduce the chances of heart disease and cancer, and

4. FAMOUS PEOPLE DRINK IT

OK, not really a reason to drink ale per se, but if appealing to your national pride and desire to cultivate a more sophisticated palate hasn't worked, then we might as well go down the celeb route. After all, who wouldn't want to have something in common with men of intelligence such as Stephen Fry (left), James May and David Mitchell? Or drink the drink that pleases the taste buds of Marco Pierre White and Jamie Oliver? Even former icons of 'lad' culture such as Chris Evans, Neil Morrissey and Tim Lovejoy have converted.

Your star for four...

Beer expert Roger Protz a quartet of introducto

Caledonian Deuchars IPA (3.8%)

India pale ale is a fine example of the 19th-century style that was first brewed to refresh the British Raj in India. Available throughout the UK, English Goldings hops give Deuchars a spicy peppery note that balances juicy malt and tart citrus.

Marston's Pedigree (4.5%)

Pedigree proves that you can be both a bestseller and also magnificent. It's brewed in Burton-on-Trent, where the first pale ales and IPAs were perfected in the 19th century. Thanks to Burton's salty spring waters, the beer has a complex sulphury, malt and gently fruity character.

Adnams Bitter (4.5%)

Adnams is brewed in the remote seaside town of Southwold in Suffolk, but is widely available. If you like beer with hops, you'll revel in this one: three hops – First Gold, Fuggles and Goldings – give great bite and attack, balancing biscuity malt, citrus fruit and a distinct hint of seaweed.

Timothy Taylor's Landlord (4.1%)

A superb pale ale brewed in Yorkshire. Pennine spring water, Scottish Golden Promise barley and English and Slovenian hops combine to make a beer with spicy and earthy hops, tangy citrus fruit and sweet malt with a rich pale

For 20 of the best places to sup real ale go to ShortList.com

Roger Protz is the author of *300 Beers To Try Before You Die* (Camra). Visit beer-pages.co.uk