

# Tips from CAMRA, May 2016

## Courtesy of Vice Chair of East Herts Branch of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale)

- The constraints of the Church Hall (I presume you aim to hold it there) – enough WCs? If not, you might need to consider the hiring of additional portaloos. Or are you looking at a marquee?
- Outside space - you might want to create a pub garden, maybe with a couple of awnings in case of inclement weather.
- You will need to consider stillage for the beers and some trestle tabling for the bar. You can buy purpose-built stillage but probably not a consideration for a one-off event. Many publicans use scaffolding (maybe you have some in the church who work in the building field who can help – or better still, erect it). But watch out for any floor loadings in the hall – a run of full barrels and a stillage makes for a heavy unit. I suggest you have everything erected and the beer settling and conditioning at least 36 hours before the start of the event. Some beers may take longer than others to settle.
- And so to the beer. First off, you will need to consider how many beers you want to stock. For a first event it is often difficult to judge or to budget for how many people might attend. So, best not to over-order but on the other hand you would want to offer a good choice. I imagine that you would want to go for up to 10 firkins, perhaps less. If 10, I would go for at least one dark beer (perhaps two - a mild and a stout or porter), 2 stronger-strength bitters, 2 ordinary-strength bitters and 4 summer/golden beers – obviously ratio it down if you are having fewer beers. You will have a free rein (like a free house) to get the beer from whoever and wherever you want. There a number of distributors with beer lists who deliver to Hertford. Getting some of them from local Hertfordshire brewers would be a good idea. I wouldn't go 100% local though – Hertford beer drinkers, who I imagine you will be hoping to attract, like to see a range of beers with some from further afield to give a good variety and the taste of something new.
- You will need to consider the time of year. Keeping beer cool can be a major issue. You can achieve this in a number of ways. Sacking draped over the beer and regularly sprayed with cold water will work; cooling jackets are better and can be obtained (perhaps hired) through the trade or via a pub. Again, Tring or Red Squirrel may be able to help with jackets. Then there is the costly option of refrigeration.
- Traditional cask-conditioned beer is, of course, a living thing. The barrels will need a solid footing and nurturing – you will need to allow for settling, spiling and conditioning time. So, some chocks, hard and soft spiles (or race spiles), a mallet, sufficient beer taps, some bungs. And some cloths for when you spile – some beers can be a bit lively. A clear, tasty pint on a bright, sunshiny day is a fantastic thing!
- Suggest a few buckets or trays under the taps to catch any spillage when pouring beer – and avoid the ground getting too wet behind the bar – perhaps some matting. Have a mop handy for spillages. Have a broom handy for any breakages in the hall.

- Put up a card showing the name, brewer, strength, cost and colour/type of the beer on the front of the barrels – it helps people quite a lot. You could also put together a printed beer menu to place on the bar and tables.
- Should you go with glass, polycarbonate or plastic glasses? Flimsy plastic glasses don't usually go down too well with drinkers. Polycarbonate options are better. But glass is best for enjoying a good beer. Having a good number of half-pint glasses is wise. You might want to take a deposit on these, refundable as people leave.
- Glass cleaning will presumably be done on site – but someone has to do it! Plenty of tea towels required in the kitchen.
- Beer mats for tables, and maybe some bar towels for the bar.
- Ware BF is a generally a ticket only affair – you might want to consider that, or go for a more open event with entry available on the day.
- A good flow of cash is advisable. Everyone will arrive with a £20 note, won't they! You can help yourself by adopting sensible pricing – this will minimise the need for copper and 5ps etc. You might want to have a small festival entry fee to offset hall costs.
- If you are doing food – even simple things like samosas or cold pies - put some food menus around the hall and on tables. You'll need paper plates and cutlery.
- Sitting next to the real ale can I suggest a few boxes of real cider or perry – it goes down *really* well, particularly in the summer. Hertfordshire suppliers but other suppliers from further afield are now quite easy to contact.
- If anything is outside, sadly you may need to consider some security measures for overnight.
- A few staff keeping an eye on the clearing of rubbish from tables etc.
- You may consider some low-key live music – not bad to create some ambience, but not too loud so that people can still enjoy some conversation – unless you want to go for a beer-and-a-dance type of event.
- Consider how you are going to advertise your event - obviously with your regular churchgoers, Twitter, Facebook, possibly local newspapers etc. We have a bi-monthly local magazine called Pints of View which you can advertise in. Details can be found in the current Pints of View – loads of local pubs stock it.