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What has happened to cask beer over the course of the crisis?

- Cask is best known for its serving style which for 99% of drinkers just isn't replicable at home therefore the style has suffered hugely.
- The closest thing to cask at home is minikegged beers filled from cask and whilst they have softened the blow for brewers, cask has all but died out during the crisis.

Why does cask matter?

- Cask matters now more than ever. The UK is the only country in the world to serve beer in this style in significant quantities and it forms part of our identity as a nation, something we are collectively currently reassessing due to Brexit.
- It's a tourist attraction. Overseas visitors include tasting cask beer on their tick lists and marvel at the whole concept. It's almost essential for a traditional British pub to serve cask be considered truly British.
Beer tourists flock to UK towns such as Burton upon Trent to soak up the heritage of cask ale, and understand how it revolutionised a town.
- Cask is a more sustainable way to serve beer. British ingredients are typically used, with less air miles attached to them. The casks themselves are reused hundreds if not thousands of times and as the beer is conditioned and served at higher temperatures than other styles it requires less, if any, temperature control. It's a product designed to thrive in our climate.
- Cask beer also forms part of the skillset of a publican. Less automation in the keeping, conditioning and serving of this beer style makes for more opportunities for publicans who are skilled in their trade to market their superior product, it also gives them the opportunity to impact the quality of the beer, often in extremely positive ways. Drinking a pint of cask beer kept and served by a skilled publican is a delight even the brewer themselves marvels at.

Would it be a problem if we had wall to wall Chilled and Filtered “craft beer”?

- Whilst chilled and filtered beer certainly has its place on the bar alongside cask, these products were invented and perfected in other countries. Many use hops from the new world, Belgian yeasts, German and Czech malts. Those beers, even if brewed in the UK, don't offer the same identity and heritage as cask.
- Alongside this, chilling beer to keg temperature hides certain flavours from our palette. Malt flavours simply do not shine as much as they do at a warmer temperature, and not having this option on the bar means a missed opportunity to offer customers a range of beers for every taste.
- Finally, seeing and hearing a pint of cask beer being pulled direct from the cask through a manual hand pull mechanism enhances the customer experience greatly. This theatre is simply not available in any other form for beer served in the UK.

What are the prospects for cask beer over the next 18 months?

- Publicans could reduce number of cask lines or stock no cask at all due to lack of confidence in sales volumes. They have no idea what volume of trade to expect and keg beer is much more flexible a product when it comes to longevity.

- There is an opportunity to capitalise on the shift in consumer habits to buying artisan produce during the crisis. There was already a positive change in sentiment around crafted, artisan products and the lockdowns have amplified this.

- The downtime in breweries across the UK has given brewers time to gather their thoughts and plan for the future. Brewers looking to appeal to younger generations with their cask beer are favouring non animal based finings, a barrier previously a lot larger than it is today due to developments in plant based finings.

What could Government do to help?

- Help educate the general public about cask beer and the benefits it has over other styles

- Subsidise new cask pump installs in pubs

- Subsidise research into the carbon footprint of products, so cask brewers can capitalise on the low environmental impact their beers have compared to other styles. Currently the cost of this research is prohibitive.

- Issue a protected food name. Whilst 'cask beer' is an internationally understood term, I feel it is too loose and larger, more technically capable breweries are capitalising on this by producing beer that treads the line when it comes to 'live beer'. Force carbonated, bright casks of beer are great for ease of use and yield but they are undermining the perceived value of cask beer. This type of beer should be clearly defined and separate from live cask beer which usually goes through 4 weeks of maturation with the help of yeast.

- Reward brewers and pubs when they supply and stock within their own regional boundaries. Cask beer is most valuable when it is kept with pride and served well. This is much more likely to happen when publicans have a personal connection to the brewery. Breweries would benefit from stocking local venues and would be more likely to keep an eye on the quality of their product at the bar as a result. Cask quality would increase and as a result perceived value.

- Launch an inquiry into tied pubs and force stocked products.

- Offer further financial support to organisations such as CAMRA and Cask Marque to move their financial reliance away from large pub co's and subscriptions. This will enable them to be truly independent in their endeavours to raise the profile of cask beer, free from financial pressures.

- Support brewers of cask beer in modernising their brand and offering though marketing courses aimed at younger generations and further financial support for R&D, specifically non animal based finings.

- Offer support to bars and restaurants in upskilling their staff in cask keeping, serving and upselling.