

APPBG Inquiry – Robinsons' submission

1. Why does cask beer matter? In a word **choice**. Cask beer requires less equipment than keg or bottle/ can formats and therefore small, local independent brewers have been able to start up a cask beer brewery with minimal investment. This has driven a significant growth in the number of breweries which has created greater choice for the consumer. It is these small brewers who have driven innovation in the UK beer market. Do we really want to see the massive multinational breweries dominating the beer market? The same question was asked back in 1980 when keg beer and lager were the new kids on the block. Back then, the big brewers were buying up and closing the small local breweries resulting in less choice for the consumer and less manufacturing jobs. It was the re-growth of cask beer that reversed that trend.
2. What's special/unique/different about cask beer? Cask beer is what makes British pubs special. It is seen as a premium, classic pub drink and adds to the uniqueness of our pub heritage. Cask beer is as natural as you can get as it still contains brewer's yeast and protein from the malted barley which gives it a full and rounded flavour profile. Keg, bottle & can beers are filtered and carbonated to give the extra fizz and can never match the complexity and depth of flavour that you get in cask beer. Cask beer is served slightly warmer than keg beer and again this gives choice to the consumer. Ice cold, fizzy beer is not to everyone's taste. Pub landlords nurture their cask beer because they need to control the natural secondary fermentation which occurs in the pub cellar. Brewing and serving cask beer is both an art and a science. The best way to describe the difference between cask beer and keg beer is to compare it to a different food eg Ham, and ask yourself this question: If you wanted to make a ham sandwich would you choose processed ham out of a packet or would you choose ham sliced straight from the joint. My answer would be to choose the high-quality option every time. In the case of beer this is cask !
3. We have seen the growth of "craft beer". Surely it is a better alternative to cask beer? Craft beer is a term which incorporates all premium or unique beer styles, and this includes cask beer. Craft keg beer has helped drive more choice for the consumer, but this should not be seen as a replacement for cask.
4. How has the pandemic changed patterns of consumption of alcohol? With pubs shut or severely restricted, cask sales have been disproportionately hit hardest due to the shorter shelf-life of cask beer compared to keg. The everchanging restrictions which occurred during 2020 meant that Publicans were reluctant to purchase cask beer with the risk that they may not be able to sell the entire volume before it started to deteriorate. With what impact? Likely to be temporary or permanent? Until consumers can once again go to the pub and socialize at the bar, the sales of cask beer are unlikely to return to previous levels.
5. What effect did the pandemic have on cask beer sales? Catastrophic decline in volume and choice.
6. What effect did Covid have on overall beer sales? 98% reduction
7. What was happening to cask beer sales before Covid? They were level in our estate
8. What additional costs are incurred producing and distributing cask beer in comparison to other alcoholic drinks? Cask beer has a much shorter shelf-life than other formats and therefore frequent production runs and deliveries of fresh stock are required. An analogy would be fresh milk versus sterilized milk. Smaller, more frequent production runs are less economic than large runs and this increases the cost base of cask beer compared to other formats.

9. What are the barriers to stocking cask beer? You need a cool cellar with enough space to store the beer for 3 days before serving. Once opened the beer needs to be sold in 3 days otherwise it will start to deteriorate. Therefore, you need enough trade throughout the week to make this viable.
10. Surely “real ale drinkers” are all white middle-aged men? Do any other drinkers really care about cask beer? When you go to the pub with a group of friends you expect to have a wide selection of drinks available to cater for the needs of everyone. This includes cask, keg, wine, non-alcoholic etc. it is not uncommon for consumers to choose a pub specifically on the quality and range of cask beers available. Good cask beer is the standard which many consumers judge a pub.
11. What will stop people returning to pubs after lockdown? Continued restrictions on mixing in the pub.
12. What will stop pubs opening after lockdown? Lack of support from brewer/pub owner
13. Will people feel safe to return to the pub? Yes, they have already shown confidence in pubs during the eat out to help out scheme in 2020.
14. Is cask ale more difficult to brew or serve than other types of beer? The difference is in the cellar management that is required for cask beer.
15. What do you think the cask beer market will look like in 10 years’ time? If we support it, robust. Support is the key as we migrate through consumer trends. Cask ale will come back in fashion if we continue to support it. If we loose it, its lost for ever.
16. Is cask beer important to a community pub? Absolutely. It’s the bed rock and without it I worry about the future of community pubs
17. What support did pubs get during the pandemic? 100% rent relief in first lock down. 90% in 2nd. We also credited any cask and keg stock left in cellars at 100% cost to us the brewer.
18. What support did brewers get through the pandemic? None with the exception of furlough
19. How important is the UK’s cask beer heritage in promoting UK beer exports? We export beer to 55 countries and every visitor which comes to our brewery from abroad is genuinely excited to try our cask beers. Cask beer is seen as the “original and best” and export sales are influenced by cask beer. We have sealed many export deals whilst sampling our cask beer selection.