



## MEET...

## GEOFF TROUGHTON FBII

THE ARDEN ARMS IN STOCKPORT IS A TRADITIONAL PUB WITH A STRONG HERITAGE. ITS LICENSEE GEOFF TROUGHTON FBII IS FOLLOWING A SOLID PATH USING HIS PAST EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE TO CONFIDENTLY NAVIGATE THROUGH THE CHALLENGES, AS THE BII'S PETER BASKETT REPORTS



Originally a coaching house, the 200-year-old Arden Arms in Stockport is run by licensee and Fellow of the BII, Geoff Troughton FBII. The building has maintained much of its original structure, while being updated to function as a modern-day pub.

With stables still in their original condition, a grand gated courtyard (turned beer garden), and traditional red brick walls, the Arden Arms is a truly charming pub like no other.

Offering a mix of food and drink at a 40/60 split, respectively, Geoff tells how they have a strong beer trade and are located just five minutes from Robinsons Brewery, with whom they're tied.

He explains that although they are well known amongst locals for their food, the live entertainment weekends hosted in the courtyard boosts drinks sales. "It probably surprised a lot of my customers to know that we're actually about 60/40 to wet, although we're very well known for our food, and it is a massive part of our business. That's probably because of the strong weekend trade that comes with the live entertainment, while through the week, we're very much led by the food."

The Arden Arms is also fortunate enough to benefit from the brewery tours at Robinsons, which undoubtedly

contribute to the high volume of drinks sales. "The visitor's centre at the brewery was never reopened after lockdown. It's still not open, but they do run brewery tours. So now, when they do a brewery tour, they bring them here for a drink after."

### Diversification

In what Geoff describes as a bustling market square that has seen significant growth over the past few years, his pub stands out as one of the few locations with a large outdoor space capable of hosting a range of entertainment options. Being at the heart of the town centre certainly helps with footfall, but beyond that, in true community spirit it allows the Arden Arms to collaborate with others who share that space.

"Every Saturday from about March to November we have live bands playing outside, because we've got such a big space. We only play full bands with drums and guitars, etc. So few venues do it these days that we get a real good following for it."

"We also do what we call *Foodie Friday*, where a load of traders come and set up in the market square doing street food type events, every last Friday of the month."

As well as facilitating live entertainment, the courtyard provides a space for customers who prefer to eat





said he would encourage him to think beyond the economy when considering what pubs mean to the country.

"I'd ask him not just to think about the massive income that comes from the hospitality industry, or the fact that hospitality is a massive employer, but to genuinely think about how important pubs are to people."

listen to the issues and take note of the places you can make savings. Be cautious, without a doubt, but please do not let it take 100% of your focus.

"For most of us, our strengths lie in filling rooms and filling pubs. If you can fill those rooms and justify the cost of heating and staffing them, it's surely a better way to go."

Balancing the need to save costs while providing the quality of service necessary to generate revenue is a fine line to walk. By focusing on what makes pubs and hospitality the incredible industry that it is, Geoff believes you will be heading in the right direction. "This industry is 100% about customer service. If you weaken your customer service by cutting your staff back, your offer becomes weaker

and it's a spiral in the wrong direction."

Putting his own advice into practice, he tells how he made the decision to extend his opening hours, rather than cut them back. "When a lot of people seem to be cutting their food service times and

shutting earlier, I saw an opportunity to open longer. We didn't used to open on a Monday or Tuesday evening for food, but I've since opened and we're thriving. I'd like to think it's because our offer is great, but it's also because there's less people out there that are actually open at that time."

The bottom line: "You've got to look to build rather than reduce."

When asked what he would say if given the opportunity to speak with the new PM Rishi Sunak, Geoff

or drink outside, away from others. "We still have a lot of people who want to eat and entertain themselves outside, as opposed to being too close to people," explains Geoff. "It was a Godsend for the first three weeks after (Covid) lockdown. Even though we could only trade outside, it still remains the three busiest weeks we've ever had."

### Rising costs

Hosting an outdoor space with live entertainment comes at a cost, requiring extra energy to power the heat lamps, lighting and musical equipment. With energy prices currently soaring, many people may be tempted to strip back their offering to save money, but Geoff doesn't believe this is the best course of action.

"I think people are panicking a little bit, and I did when I first heard about it.

There's a lot of people who are like rabbits in the headlights, and they're concentrating 100% of their focus on cutting costs and saving energy. I don't like hearing people say they're opening later or shutting early because they can't afford staff or heating."

Instead, Geoff recommends pub owners lean into their strengths, and give people more reason to spend time in their pubs. "If I had only one bit of advice that I could give everybody at the moment, it would be, yes, 100%

**"THIS INDUSTRY IS 100% ABOUT CUSTOMER SERVICE. IF YOU WEAKEN YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE BY CUTTING YOUR STAFF BACK, YOUR OFFER BECOMES WEAKER AND IT'S A SPIRAL IN THE WRONG DIRECTION"**

### Christmas

For instance, last Christmas, The Arden planned to bring the best festive experience to customers, after being closed over the holiday for the past two years.

Staying true to the pub, Geoff has decided to double down on efforts to make Christmas at the Arden Arms one to remember. "Christmas is massive for us; December is our biggest month. We're filling up rapidly with bookings at the moment and it's exciting."

Asking Geoff what his Christmas celebrations at the pub would entail, his response again was somewhat surprising. "Funnily enough, we don't do entertainment during Christmas, we're all about office and family parties. Over the New Year's Eve we will have a band on at the big party, though." ■

### THE BII MEMBERSHIP



**As a long time member and Fellow of the BII, Geoff has benefitted from the collation of industry relevant information that we regularly share with our members.**

"I use the BII for information more than anything. There are times, and this is one of them, where that information is invaluable. I also do trust organisations like the BII to put a good argument forward to those that can make change at the top."

We look forward to the return of the spectacular holiday celebrations at the Arden Arms. It is excellent to see licensees like Geoff maintaining a positive demeanour through the industry's current struggles, and choosing to tackle the challenges by doing more rather than less.