



This book is dedicated to the 40,000 Greene King team members who lived and worked through the Covid-19 pandemic. And to those we sadly lost. It's been created with enduring gratitude and sincere thanks to you all.

We will never forget this time



COVID STORIES

LIVING AND WORKING DURING A PANDEMIC



A WORD ABOUT THIS BOOK

NONE OF US COULD HAVE FORESEEN THE EFFECT A VIRUS WOULD HAVE ON ALL OUR LIVES

GREENE KING HAS a long 220-year history and the business has weathered many storms over the years. But the Covid-19 pandemic will go down as one of the most seminal. And so this book has been produced to capture the highs and lows, so we can tell our story for future generations.

Many choose to work in our sector because they get a real buzz from being around others. So, it was devastating when Covid-19 meant we were stuck at home, shielding, self-isolating or simply not working. But we have many truly inspirational stories to tell. Stories that couldn't go untold. Put simply – we've never been so proud to be part of Greene King. It's full of selfless, creative, giving, community-minded, team-spirited, endlessly resilient and frankly, inspirational people.

People battled through constant uncertainty and a seemingly never-ending series of hurdles... closings, reopenings, tier changes, social distancing, Pub Safe, Office Safe, one-way systems, roadmaps and border closures. And the fortitude and can-do spirit shown was phenomenal. The tales of fundraising, volunteering, giving and pulling together are breathtaking in number.

So, this publication aims to document just a handful of stories by featuring everyday heroes who, like so many others, stepped up, got on, rose to the challenge and went the extra mile, for company, communities, charities and each other. While we can't feature all team members due to lack of space, we know that every single one embodies our values. And for that reason, we believe we'll come out on the other side of the pandemic not only surviving, but stronger, thanks to our amazing people.



Covid Stories is a Greene King Team Member Commemorative Publication

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GREENE KING ANNOUNCEMENT



A MESSAGE FROM GREENE KING

20 MARCH 2020

Dear All,

It is with great sadness that I am writing to let you know that we are calling last orders in all our pubs for the time being, given the escalation of the coronavirus crisis.

*I would like to thank our **amazing team members** who have been doing a great job over recent weeks in increasingly challenging circumstances.*

*We are looking at other ways we can support our regulars while we are closed and our intention, with government approval, is to offer a **takeaway and delivery service** from some of our pubs. This is already available in all our Metropolitan pubs in London and some of our Greene King and Hungry Horse pubs across the country and we will expand this over the coming weeks, allowing more people to enjoy the pub experience at home while they are socially distancing. To find out if your local pub offers this service, visit our **Greene King Takeaway page**.*

*We also have beer delivery for our Greene King, Old Speckled Hen and Belhaven beers and these can be ordered by visiting our **Greene King Shop**.*

I would like to wish you and your families good health and thank you for your support now, and in the weeks and months to come. We look forward to when we can open our doors and welcome you back to our pubs again.

Kindest regards

Nick

Nick Mackenzie, CEO, Greene King

"Pubs are about community - Covid has proven that"

Steering the business during a pandemic has been challenging. But **CEO, NICK MACKENZIE**, says the new company purpose and values have helped Greene King to come out stronger

AT THE START of 2020, I put together a crisis committee to deal with the 'what ifs' of a new virus rampaging in China. At that stage no one thought we'd end up fighting it here for more than 16 months. In fact, in March 2020 we were in the final stages of rolling out our new values and company purpose, 'We Pour Happiness Into Lives' when the news headlines became alarming.

We cancelled all launch events and put the new values to work immediately to help us set objectives that could guide us through the crisis. They informed the way we ensured the survival of the business, cared for our people and emerged from the pandemic stronger than our competitors.

But at times it felt like a real battle. I caught Covid-19 early on and worked in isolation from my bedroom, sleeping between meetings, feeling pretty rough and staying away from my family (we were especially nervous because my son has chest problems). And it worked: we took an antibody test and I had lots; the rest of the family didn't have any.

SHOWING THAT WE CARE

Whenever I had to make a complex decision I kept coming back to our value: 'We Care'. I sense-checked everything against this, asking how we could demonstrate it with real action so it didn't become just a meaningless statement.

One of the ways we did this early in the first lockdown was to pay everyone until 5 April – even though the government hadn't announced any financial support yet. I also took a 50% pay cut. It felt like the right thing to do, and our executive team joined me. The money was used to set up the Support Fund for team members in real financial need.

I felt strongly that 'We Care' had to include everyone, so quite quickly we reduced rents for our tenanted partners by 90% to help them through the crisis.

But caring isn't just about money. It's about being open, honest and sharing, too. That's why I did regular videos for our teams. I'll be honest, I didn't quite feel comfortable speaking to camera, but the feedback I got was that people appreciated it. I was determined to be open from the start: if we didn't know what new rules meant for us, I said so. The executive team often needed a few days to make important decisions in a fast-moving situation, and as the government frequently sent out mixed messages, I didn't want to add to uncertainty by making a hasty decision, and then changing things the next day.

I SENSE-CHECKED EVERY DECISION
AGAINST OUR VALUE 'WE CARE' SO IT WASN'T
JUST A MEANINGLESS STATEMENT

We also made a point of listening to our team members – and when pubs reopened, we asked our customers for their opinions, too, mindful that this was a health crisis, not just a financial one, and safety was a top priority. Staying in touch meant we were able to adapt quickly and the communications team were fantastic at getting messages out to everyone under some really testing conditions.

STRONGER TOGETHER

I was so impressed with how the industry came together, too. We collaborated with our competitors, working as one to get the powers-that-be to listen to us. At times I was at the end of my tether because it felt like we were under siege. I think that's why people speak about working during the pandemic as being like a wartime effort.

Reading the stories here you'll see how many of our people went above and beyond during the pandemic. Take the

brewery, for example, where many weeks were like brewing for Christmas as they worked hard to meet the rise in supermarket orders during lockdowns. And I don't think anyone could foresee a shortage in metal cans as demand rose. Or that teams would have to work out how to move full kegs of beer out of deep cellars. But they did it, and did it admirably.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Team members were patient, resilient and caring... even when we had to make some tough decisions. They really stepped up, working – or not working – under challenging conditions. Whether navigating Pub Safe and adapting quickly and effectively, being in and out of furlough or working from home in quite isolating conditions, everyone came together as a team... as a family.

We've seen this too in how team members have responded: giving to food banks, preparing meals for NHS workers, raising money for good causes, lending a helping hand in local communities. The fact that we raised a mind-blowing £1.5 million for Macmillan during the pandemic shows that not only do we care as a company, but our people do, as well. Everyone stepped up on all levels – even heading online to keep the spirit of Greene King alive while our pubs were closed.

There's no doubt at all that we've succeeded in coming through this stronger. I read my direct messages, saw posts on our employee app, Kingdom, listened to stories of people pulling together and I really mean it when I say I was blown away. More than once I got pretty emotional: I couldn't be more proud. And, you know, I think despite all the challenges we faced, our customers and teams came back re-energised. We've all found a true love for the pub again. 🍻



NICK MACKENZIE,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Timeline of a pandemic

The 16 months from **MARCH 2020 UNTIL JULY 2021** were like a rollercoaster ride for the hospitality industry. To help you make sense of what happened – and when – here are the key dates...



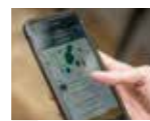
16 MARCH
Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, tells people to avoid going to pubs

20 MARCH The Prime Minister announces all pubs are to close. Greene King confirms employees will receive full pay until 5 April

CLOSED DUE TO COVID-19

6 APRIL
Greene King introduces furlough scheme for 99% of employees

22 MAY
Metropolitan Pub Company launches takeaway services at 29 pubs. Greene King follows suit on 10 June at 40 pubs



6 JULY
Greene King reopens 1,300 managed pubs; official launch of Order & Pay app



15 JULY
Pubs reopen in Scotland



3 AUGUST
Pubs reopen in Wales; Eat Out To Help Out scheme launched, UK-wide



24 SEPTEMBER
Further regulations for pubs: 10pm curfew; table service only. England follows Scotland with face coverings mandatory when not seated



2020

SHUT



OPEN

OPEN

OPEN



23 MARCH
First UK-wide lockdown announced

6 MAY
Team Member Support Fund launches for employees in most financial need, part-funded by executive board members taking a voluntary pay cut

17 APRIL
Pub Partners Support Fund launches – rent concessions offered for tied tenants not eligible for government help

12 JUNE
Launch of Pub Safe promises



4 JULY
Pubs legally allowed to reopen in England



14 AUGUST
New guidance in Scotland states no music in pubs; TVs to be muted



14–18 SEPTEMBER
Rule of Six limits social gatherings in England and Scotland; face coverings compulsory in Scotland when not seated at a table; regional restrictions increase, especially in the north of England; customer details collected for Test & Trace mandatory

7–9 OCTOBER
Ongoing restrictions mean 79 pubs unable to reopen – 33% close permanently. Greene King increases rent discounts for tied tenants until Christmas; Scotland announces circuit break lockdown; Pub Partners discount rents for Scottish tied tenants by 90% during this time



14 OCTOBER
A three tier system of regional restrictions begin in England



CLOSED DUE TO COVID-19

23 OCTOBER
Start of a two-week firebreak lockdown in Wales. Pubs close; restrictions on travel

31 OCTOBER

Announcement of a new four week lockdown in England from 5 Nov; Greene King reduces tied tenants rents by 90% across the board until May 2021

SHUT



2 NOVEMBER
Greene King announces pubs in Scotland to receive new rent concessions to match new regional restrictions



5 NOVEMBER
Second lockdown begins in England



2 DECEMBER
Pubs that are allowed to reopen can do so in England



8 DECEMBER
First Covid vaccines administered; roll out of mass vaccination scheme begins



16–19 DECEMBER
London moved to Tier 3 as Covid-19 cases rise; planned relaxation of rules for Christmas cancelled; introduction of new Tier 4

SHUT

2021



26 NOVEMBER
Confirmation of tier restrictions for England; pubs cannot open in Tier 3; alcohol only served with a 'substantial meal' in Tier 2. Out of approx. 2,300 Greene King managed and tenanted pubs in England, only six are in Tier 1



31 DECEMBER
All of England in Tier 3 or 4, requiring pubs to close



CLOSED DUE TO COVID-19

26 DECEMBER
More areas of the UK move to the highest level of restrictions



26 APRIL
Pubs reopen in Scotland and Wales for outdoor service



17 MAY
Pubs reopen indoors in England and Wales, if social distancing permits. Restrictions ease on indoor drinking in Scotland. Pub Partners move rent concessions for tied tenants to 40%



12 APRIL Pubs in England reopen for outdoor customers only. Greene King opens 442 managed pubs with outdoor space large enough for social distancing



12 JUNE
Delay to planned total easing of restrictions on 21 June due to rise in the number of Delta variant cases

19 JULY–7 AUG
Restrictions ease, but with different rules across three nations; in England, bar service resumes





RICHARD SMOTHERS,
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

"Operating through Covid was like being the conductor of an orchestra"

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, RICHARD SMOTHERS, is experienced at leading a business during a crisis – so he was the natural choice to head up the Covid Crisis Committee

YOU COULD SAY I'm fairly used to working in crisis mode. A decade or so ago I worked in Thailand during a constitutional crisis and was twice evacuated from my home and also escorted out through the back door of the embassy under armed guard. I've lived with curfews and locked down buildings and I'm used to pandemic planning, too. Asia has had outbreaks of avian flu and I'd been involved in 'pandemic in a day' themed workshops, where you focus on the developing situation as it unfolds, hour by hour.

So, when I saw news reports about a new coronavirus in December 2019, the hairs stood up on the back of neck. I had knowledge of what to expect. By the time the virus reached Italy, it was time to form the Covid Crisis Committee.

PLANNING AHEAD

As well as being responsible for finance I also have accountability for managing risk across the business, and knew that if the pandemic came here, things would happen fast. Early on I started to think through who would be on the committee, how often we'd meet and what to consider in terms of operating going forwards. We decided that I would chair the committee rather than our CEO, Nick, because he was best placed to deal with government, media and of course, leading communications across the business. I'd do the internal work, which was a bit like being the conductor of an orchestra, pulling everyone together.

Very quickly the committee went from meeting fortnightly to weekly, then daily to twice a day. We were well practised as a team because we'd just come through 18 months of Brexit planning. A different situation, but the concept of preparing

for a big event meant there was experience of looking at various scenarios, and often with conflicting information. Practice makes perfect with these things.

By early March I went to an international rugby match and was mindful that being in a big crowd made me feel a bit uncomfortable. I felt it was the last time I'd be around that number of people in a long time. Soon after we moved to working from home.

THE BUSINESS WAS FUNDAMENTALLY
CLOSED FOR MOST OF THE PANDEMIC

CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

Working from home meant a huge life change for me. Pre-pandemic I left home on Monday mornings at 6am and returned home on Friday night, spreading my time between Burton upon Trent, London and Bury St Edmunds. I lived out of an overnight bag and spent a lot of time on trains. My wife wasn't used to seeing me much at all – and suddenly, we were having lunch together every day. Being at home meant that I had more time to keep fit and do those jobs around the house I'd been meaning to do, and it made me think about post-lockdown life being a bit more balanced.

The business was fundamentally closed for most of the pandemic. During that time, we restructured; an organisational change that was due to happen, anyway. Just before the pandemic, myself and other executive board members had reviewed our culture and values. I'd say



Covid-19 has stress tested and reinforced those core values, rather than break them. I'm really proud of how quickly we took those new values on board during a crisis, when it would've been very easy to go back to type.

We worked hard on many other changes, too. We launched the Order & Pay app across 1,700 pubs within six weeks of lockdown, got teams set up to work from home within six weeks, and rolled out takeaway services really speedily.

TEAM SPIRIT

The thing I'm most proud of is how the senior leadership team rolled up its sleeves. We asked them to take a pay cut through two lockdowns – and that wasn't easy to ask – but there was no debate, no question, no consideration... everyone felt it was the right thing to do. And the money didn't just go into some kind of corporate bucket but was used for a real purpose, to help those experiencing true financial hardship. I'm really proud about that.

I was also really pleased that our teams overwhelmingly couldn't wait to go back to serving customers in pubs. And that's the same kind of spirit that those of us on the board had, too: we were really looking forward to having face-to-face meetings again. That's because we're a good team, that enjoys working together. We came out of the pandemic prepared for whatever might hit us in future, and in fact, we're now a better, stronger business because of it. Ultimately, we came out of it knowing that pubs are the centre of British society... and the pandemic didn't change that. 🍷

"I had just two weeks to get 400 people ready to work from home"

KARRIE BAUGH is a **GROUP SERVICE DELIVERY MANAGER** working in IT. She organised the technology and support that enabled home working throughout the pandemic

I STARTED WORKING for the company in 2013 and over the years there has been chat among team members about wanting to work from home more. People liked the idea of working in an agile way, but the consensus was always that it wasn't possible, mainly because the tech couldn't support it.

But in February 2020 everything changed. The news about Covid-19 coming from overseas was worrying, and at work we started to have conversations about what would be needed if people had to work from home. Very quickly it went from being 'we should think about this' to 'we need to make this happen'. Basically, we had two weeks to organise everything.

OPERATION HOME WORKER

Anyone who used a desktop computer had to have that replaced with a laptop. I had to secure the equipment, including all the bits that go with it... monitors, docking stations, hubs, plus components like computer mice, headsets and keyboards. Luckily, I had pre-empted the rush for laptops. I have a very good relationship with our supplier, who held a lot of equipment for me for 48 hours while I got the money signed off. I'm so glad I did: laptops were like gold dust in the ensuing weeks and a lot of other companies were left on something of a back foot.



People told me that they were amazed to see trolley after trolley of computer equipment arriving at our head office in Bury St Edmunds, like some kind of military operation. At the same time we were also rolling out Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams, a process that we'd started in June 2019. We had to redouble efforts to really speed everything up to ensure everyone was on board with that, and I'll admit that I found it quite stressful. There were a lot of spreadsheets involved.

Obviously, I didn't do it all alone. I have a team of nine, plus the telephony and networks team. But together we had to get nearly 400 people into a position where they could work from home as seamlessly as possible, as quickly as possible.

TEST AND TRAIN

It wasn't just about people having the right tools – we also needed to do trials to make sure the network could support everyone working remotely. Could the infrastructure cope with the traffic? There was a lot of testing involved. Also, we had to ensure security was top of the agenda and that systems were not at any risk from external threats.

We also had to make sure that we had the training aids in place so that team members could set themselves up at home without any glitches. Telephones had to be sorted: everybody was used to using a desk phone so we had to get the software installed on laptops so that they could use a soft phone. Then we had to organise training for that, too.

I ended up pulling in people from other teams to help. Not everyone is tech minded and we created a lot of support documents. I'm not particularly techy – my skills are ones of planning and implementation – so I often asked my team to explain things in 'Karrie language'. If I can understand a training document, anyone can.

A WELL-ROUNDED TEAM

By the first week in March, we had everyone set up for home working – a week before the government demanded it. We did it by the skin of our teeth. When lockdown finally came my team did an immense job of supporting everyone remotely, because remote working was new to them, too. It's a lot easier to help people when you can physically go to their desks.

WE DONATED OUR OLD DESKTOP COMPUTERS TO CHILDREN WHO NEEDED THEM FOR HOME SCHOOLING

In addition to all the set-up, training and support, the team worked together to prepare our old desktop equipment and get it ready to donate to local schools who had pupils unable to home school because they didn't have access to a computer. In the end, we donated 140 computers to children who needed them the most.

I've got a brilliant team behind me. Some are very, very technical, so with my organisational skills we complement each other. However, we do have something in common: we all love a challenge. We're so proud of what we achieved during the pandemic. We've been able to give the business what it needed to be able to work at a very difficult time. Dare I say it, but it was actually fun. And definitely rewarding. Going forward we've enabled team members to enjoy that agile working environment that people have wanted for so long. Although personally, I couldn't wait to get back to the office. 🐼



KARRIE BAUGH,
GROUP SERVICE
DELIVERY MANAGER

SORCHA DRAKEFORD,
STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION
DIRECTOR



"Sometimes we opened pubs, then closed them four days later"

STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION DIRECTOR, SORCHA DRAKEFORD, was a lynchpin at the heart of our pandemic response, co-ordinating operations teams and communications

I WORK IN the transformation team and in non-pandemic times my job involves looking at, scoping out and implementing change to the business. I look at new ways of working to be more efficient. More often than not that involves IT, so as an example, I was involved in developing the Kingdom and Order & Pay apps.

But my background isn't in tech. I grew up in hospitality – I was a kitchen porter at 14 and then worked for Pizza Express and got my first site at 21. I worked for a few pub companies before Greene King and understanding the business at a real grassroots level means I recognise when people feel uncomfortable about change and require support. I also understand the importance of putting myself in other people's shoes, especially when it comes to communications – I anticipate who is receiving information and how it might make them feel.

FAST MOVING

I remember very clearly when Covid-19 first appeared on my radar because I was planning a trip to Venice and was obsessed with the news, wondering if I'd be able to go. I went, but when I returned there was an outbreak of the virus in Brighton and managers were nervous. My boss said, 'We could do with your help thinking about what would happen if we had to close because of a Covid outbreak.'

So, my first job was to create a checklist based on a 'What if a pub had to temporarily close?' scenario. By the next day it was, 'What if we had to close more than one pub?' and two days later: 'Where ARE those checklists?'

It was an incredibly fast-moving situation and we were having lots of cross-team meetings. Because of my background in the pub industry, I created checklists by envisaging walking around a pub, room by room, imagining exactly what needed to be done.

The following week I was a bit unsettled to see Army tanks on the motorway heading south, and a few days later we were about to push the button on closing London pubs when the Prime Minister came on TV to do a briefing. When he announced he was closing ALL pubs, I was so shocked: I remember that meeting like it was yesterday.

THE HEALTH ASPECT OF COVID ALMOST PASSED ME BY... I WORKED SUCH LONG HOURS, I BARELY LEFT THE HOUSE

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

It was a good job that we'd pre-empted things and put theoretical plans in place because it meant that the operations comms team could then swing into action rolling out the closing up checklist. Those initial weeks of pub closures were a blur of very long days and nights. I was working from a room in my house and for three months I barely left it. The health threat of Covid-19 almost passed me by, because I just got everything delivered to my door, worked solidly, and didn't leave the house.

Of course, although at home, I absolutely did not work alone. We created the Phoenix Team which included HR, the risk and property teams (who decided whether to board up pubs and turn off water); supply chain (who removed food from pubs and donated it to good causes), marketing, digital, Pub Partners, EPOS and of course, the internal and operations comms teams. I pulled everyone together and made sure information was cascaded down to ops managers and then onto business development managers and general managers. I also led the retail operations team.

SECOND WAVE

But if the early days were crazy, by November 2020 I thought I was going to lose control. We had all the varying tier systems and different things going on in different countries and nothing was aligned. I had spreadsheets, books and Post-it notes everywhere... it felt like I'd created about 420 checklists in 14 months. The need to communicate and distribute information was endless – sometimes pubs were opening and closing up again a few days later with local lockdowns and tiers constantly changing. Keeping track of that was a job in itself. Luckily, I have a good memory but I'm also very grateful for the operations comms team I had working with me because they were all phenomenal.

The pandemic was a massive learning experience for me. I've learnt about sides of the business I didn't know too much about, like the brewery and Pub Partners. And while it was exhausting, there was an incredible feeling of being in the trenches together. We all said that we couldn't imagine what the pandemic would have been like without Nick and the new leadership team. I was hugely grateful to be working – and working with them – at that time. ☺



"We cooked up the pub's unused turkeys to deliver Christmas meals to nurses on the Covid ward"



GENERAL MANAGER of Locals pub, the Fox & Pheasant in Stoke Poges, **TERRY RIGG**, found pub closures hard to handle. But his two dogs and a spot of DIY helped him through

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT announced that they were closing pubs in March 2020, I wasn't massively surprised because I'd seen my pub becoming quieter and quieter over the course of a few weeks. People seemed to be nervous about going out. But even so, I honestly didn't think we were really going to close.

On the night of the first closure, I was upstairs watching the news. I came down and it was such a weird feeling. We were all shellshocked by the suddenness of it. One of the older customers said it must have been what it was like during the Blitz. After everyone went home, I found myself just sitting in this empty shell – a place that's usually buzzing and is the centre of the village – and I thought, what am I going to do now? I live here alone, and it was a very odd feeling. Some of the team came in the next day to help clean the pub down and properly close up. It was then – when we were taking the spirits away and stacking tables and chairs – that it really hit me.

I WAS SITTING IN THIS EMPTY SHELL AND I THOUGHT, WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW?

EMOTIONAL TIME

The hardest thing was ringing people to cancel their bookings for that weekend. Many customers hadn't heard the news yet, so were totally shocked. But even worse was when I had to do it all again for the second lockdown. Calling customers up to effectively cancel their Christmas festivities was dreadful. We have a lot of elderly customers who were planning to

come for a Christmas meal because otherwise they wouldn't see anyone. I had 230 people booked and there was a lot of crying on the phone. It was really tough.

When the third lockdown came I was left with so much stock for Christmas – the fridges were full of fresh turkeys and the pub had thousands of pounds worth of food and drink – that I sat in my office and broke down. My assistant manager came in and told me we'd tackle it all together, so we got on the phone and donated turkeys to local hospices and care homes.

I also worked with the church, cooking and delivering meals to residents who were on their own, and delivered meals to the nurses working on the Covid ward of our local hospital. I'd heard they weren't allowed to use the canteen and were just eating sandwiches, so we cooked off some of the pub's turkeys and delivered roasts to them.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

The hardest part was the loneliness. I've been in this industry for 20 years; I'm used to having lots of people around me, and to have everything taken away and being left isolated was hard. We had area manager support groups and I had 36 people working for me, aged between 16 and 70, and found staying in contact crucial. In fact, I formed a support bubble with one team member who has worked at the pub for 39 years. He'd pop in for a coffee and a chat. But the winter was hard. I felt really low and couldn't snap out of it. The short days and cold and darkness made everything worse. I went to the doctors and he suggested antidepressants, but I didn't want to take them.

STAYING BUSY

Instead, I tried to focus on the positives. I did a lot of DIY, which I'd never done before, and tried to keep fit in the pub garden. I spent time training my two dogs, Lucy and Rosie, which was rewarding. I also took them on walks in the local countryside, which I hadn't had time to explore since moving in 18 months before the pandemic. But what really helped was that Greene King stayed in touch with us. I know they handled things a lot better than other companies because I have friends in the industry, and their stories are not so positive.

We were able to reopen on 12 April 2021 because our huge three-acre garden made social distancing easy. Greene King invested in a pergola and lights the November before, so it all looked amazing and we went from zero to 100 in no time at all, taking £5,500 on the first day. That first week we experienced record sales. I was buzzing. I had never imagined it would be like that on reopening – everyone was so bubbly – it felt like a celebration every day.

My team worked so hard after being off for such a long time, but they were happy to do it. They said that Greene King had looked after them so well through the pandemic, and they were just really delighted to be back. We all were. 🐾

TERRY RIGG, GENERAL MANAGER
OF THE FOX & PHEASANT IN
STOKE POGES, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE





GREG SAGE,
CORPORATE AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

"Pubs were placed front and centre of politics like never before"

IN EARLY 2020 we were very focused on Brexit, putting plans in place to ensure food supply from Spain and Italy. At the same time a few of us were keeping an eye on Covid-19 as it spread from Asia to Europe. By February, hand sanitiser started to appear on desks.

Myself and other members of the crisis group began talking about what we would do if we caught the virus. We realised that we ought to put deputies in place in case we became ill. And it all became very real when our CEO, Nick, caught Covid.

CRISIS SITUATION

Over the years I've taken part in various crisis simulations. As the scale of Covid-19 started to unfold, the daily headlines became more surreal and reminded me of a simulation I took part in after the bird flu outbreak while I was working in Asia in 2005. Back then the mocked-up BBC news bulletins seemed so far-fetched, but incredibly it was now all playing-out for real.

In March 2020 there was big uncertainty over whether pubs would be forced to close. The Prime Minister announced that he was sure that 'pubs would do the right thing', which unfairly threw it back on to us.

After a few days of uncertainty, the Prime Minister finally made the announcement about pub closures. But it came at 5pm on a Friday – the busiest time of the week. I thought that was a crazy decision. I worried how pub managers would deal with that as people rushed for a last pint. We were then told to work from home and schools closed, too, as we went into lockdown.

It was a fast-moving situation. The following weeks were spent working closely with trade associations and government to ensure that hospitality was looked after during the pandemic

and making sure we were telling our team members what was happening and what it all meant for them. I think we were all fuelled by adrenaline. There was a sort of Blitz spirit.

LOBBYING FOR HELP

I spent a lot of time working together with our competitors and trade associations with a common aim of getting help for our industry by talking to government. The urgency of getting financial support meant we were having daily meetings with ministers, MPs and government officials.

WE HAD TO BALANCE SUPPORTING OUR TEAM MEMBERS AND TENANTS AND PROTECTING JOBS, WHILE TRYING TO WORK OUT HOW LONG THIS WAS GOING TO GO ON FOR

In addition, the media wanted to talk about the plight of pubs, which was important as they really helped us to tell the story of the threat to our industry. But this meant that we had media calls coming in 24/7 and had to respond quickly to generate stories to help highlight the terrible situation we were in.

As the government became more focused on pubs, we were able to raise the profile of Greene King, too. We had some really difficult discussions, and some well-publicised arguments, but it was great to see the industry speaking with one voice and I think we came out of the pandemic with a reputation for being a responsible business who did its bit representing all our interests. Needless to say it was a huge relief when the Prime Minister and Chancellor responded with support for our sector and all the people that work within it.

CORPORATE AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, GREG SAGE, usually works between Bury St Edmunds and London, dealing with government and media. During the pandemic he worked from his spare room

Of course, all of this was done while working from home. My wife and I both have busy jobs so we had to split the day to share the home schooling while juggling meetings and working late to catch up. But I found it a real challenge to manage work alongside playing the role of teacher. I remember being on a call with government officials but I had to put myself on mute while dialling in to a 'show and tell' Zoom lesson to talk about pirates!

VITAL SUPPORT

With 99% of our team furloughed it wasn't long before concern grew about the financial hardships some team members were experiencing. Our executive board and leadership team volunteered to take a pay cut and the money saved went towards a new initiative to help support employees that needed it most, with a top up from central funds. I called the Licensed Trade Charity to ask if they would independently manage the process for us, and the Support Fund was launched.

The charity did a truly brilliant job and we set a scheme up from scratch in just a couple of weeks. In total we donated £1.1m in grants which helped over 4,000 colleagues in desperate need.

The biggest thing I've taken away from this pandemic is to stay true to your values. It would have been easy for the decision makers to take a tough view in such a challenging climate, but we've done our very best to protect as many jobs as possible, while assisting our tenants and helping out as many people as we could along the way. We've had a terribly challenging time – and the third lockdown over winter 2020/21 was very hard – but we came out the other side having made some very positive changes. 🌍



ROSS O'HARA,
HEAD BREWER,
WESTGATE BREWERY,
BURY ST EDMUNDS

"At the brewery we had to get used to working in a very different way"



I WAS ON holiday when I realised that Covid-19 was becoming very serious in the UK. I was in the Galápagos Islands and the headlines were unbelievable with news of cities across Europe locking down. It was very surreal hearing about it from a beach with iguanas on it, so far away. On the journey home everyone seemed very edgy at the airport and a week later the country went into full lockdown. It was a shock to the system.

I've worked at Greene King since 2016, when I joined as a shift manager, and I became head brewer in 2018. There are 50 of us working in brewing, which includes the production team and engineers. It's a good thing that I have a first-hand understanding of all the people and processes involved, because Covid-19 changed everything in terms of how we worked.

LOCKDOWN UNCERTAINTY

When the Prime Minister's announcement came to close pubs, it was such a strange time. Immediately my phone started to ring. My team wanted to know whether we were going to close the brewery down, but I was also had questions like, 'Am I going to do die if I leave the house to come to work?'. There was quite a lot of confusion over the stay at home messaging, too. Did brewery workers fall under the category of key workers, like food manufacturers did? No one really knew. All brewing stopped that weekend while we figured everything out.

When I drove into work on Monday morning the roads were empty. It was almost post-apocalyptic. Everywhere was dead quiet and when I arrived at the brewery, people were very wary of each other. It was a weird atmosphere as everyone tried to work out what was going on for the brewing side of

things. It took two or three days before we got the message to carry on, but stay away from each other.

What was really interesting was that in those first few days of lockdown one, our support systems were not there. So there was no one working in Abbot House (our head office), no cleaner and no milk delivered. Once the initial shock of pub closures had passed it turned out that people were mostly concerned about not having milk for their coffee!

AT THE HEIGHT OF DEMAND FOR BOTTLED AND CANNED BEER WE FILLED 47 TANKERS IN ONE WEEK – WE USUALLY FILL 30 TO 35

HIGH RETAIL DEMAND

As soon as we heard that brewers were classed as key workers we figured out safe work systems. We work in a very clean environment anyway, but we put in extra cleaning measures like cleaning stations and antiviral sanitisers were placed everywhere, and we introduced one-way systems. We changed shift patterns to form bubbles.

I was involved with discussions about how to extend the shelf-life of cask beer, which only lasts for seven weeks. As no one knew how long the lockdown would last, we concluded that there was no feasible way to save the beer that was already in pub cellars. We had to lift kegs out and dispose of all the beer safely.

Pubs were closed so there was no need for us to brew cask beer, but the demand for bottled and canned beer rose

While the pandemic closed pubs and the need for cask beer vanished, the demand for bottled and canned beers rose dramatically as people stayed home. This meant big changes for **HEAD BREWER, ROSS O'HARA**, and his team

astronomically. Everyone was drinking at home more, and it was crucial to keep the supermarkets supplied. I think volumes for bottled beers like Old Specked Hen, Abbot Ale, Greene King IPA and Golden Hen increased by almost 50% and our online shop sales escalated, too. One week we produced 1.4 million bottles and at the height of demand we filled 47 tankers (around 2.35 million pints), when in a normal week for that time of year we'd fill 30 to 35. Both the filtration area and tanker loading bay were exceptionally busy.

ALL CHANGE

We do the bottling ourselves but use a third party for canning our beers. At one point there was a shortage of aluminium for cans and we got very close to running out. Then our canning supplier had to pull out of production for a short time because of staff shortages due to Covid-19. We had to quickly find a new supplier, otherwise we'd have lost half of our supermarket trade, and probably wouldn't have got it back. In normal times it would take six to nine months to get a new supplier like that on board, but we did it in eight days, because we had to.

For those of us who continued to work it was tricky at times. We had to change the way we organised shifts. Team members had to get used to different sleep patterns; some had to reorganise childcare. Life was just different. But I'm very proud of how the brewery team responded. When you know a business has lost 95% of its cash flow, but you can help a bit by bringing in about £3.5 million a month selling canned and bottled beer, it's a great feeling.



First step on the roadmap to reopening

ON 12 APRIL 2021, pubs in England welcomed customers back – albeit for outdoor service only. We headed to Cambridgeshire with a camera to capture the day

MONDAY 12 APRIL 2021 was a momentous day for pubs and the hospitality industry in England. It was the first – very tentative – step towards the long winter lockdown relaxing a little. Venues were allowed to open up for outdoor service only, with social distancing measures in place to remain Covid safe.

Of course, not all our pubs and restaurants were able to enjoy this easing of restrictions due to lack of suitable outside space, and pubs in Wales and Scotland had to wait until 26 April until their restrictions eased. But around 30% of English pubs welcomed customers into their gardens and outdoor spaces, as others eagerly awaited the next step of the government's roadmap in May – and some even longer than that.

Despite the fresh spring weather, we hoped that everyone would look forward to pubs being open for the first time in four months, so we headed to Cambridgeshire, to find out...



“ TO BE OPEN AND TRADING AGAIN AND SERVING CUSTOMERS IS AMAZING. I'M BUZZING ”

TARIQ VEJA, GENERAL MANAGER, THE BRIDGE, WATERBEACH



ANDY WILSON, MD, DESTINATION FOOD BRANDS, HAPPY TO BE BACK

Everyone was welcomed with open arms (but no hugs!)



Great to see you...

“ I WAS A BIT NERVOUS THIS MORNING ABOUT HOW IT WAS GOING TO BE, BUT EVERYONE IS SO HAPPY TO BE BACK. IT'S SO GREAT TO SEE EVERYONE FACE TO FACE ”

ELIZABETH HARPER, ASSISTANT MANAGER, FORT ST GEORGE, MIDSUMMER COMMON



“ IT WAS A BREATH OF FRESH AIR AFTER FOUR MONTHS OF THE PUBS BEING CLOSED. I FELT EXCITED AND POSITIVE. IT WAS WONDERFUL TO BE WITH THE TEAM AGAIN ”

RAYMOND WALLACE, KITCHEN MANAGER, THE ROBIN HOOD, CHERRY HINTON



Cheers!





ANDREW BUSH,
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

"I'm proud of how we responded in a crisis"

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, ANDREW BUSH, was part of the management team that led Greene King's Covid response throughout the pandemic and put team members' wellbeing at the heart of his role

WHEN I FIRST heard of Covid-19 right at the very start of 2020, I thought it can't be that big a deal, can it? But I remember talking to Richard Smothers, our chief financial officer about news of the virus hitting ski resorts in Italy, and I turned to him and said, 'It's coming here, isn't it?' and he replied, 'I think it probably is.'

Within a week we noticed a fall in sales in a lot of areas. People's hours were reduced and, understandably, we had some really concerned team members. So, we took the decision early on to pay everyone for their usual average hours until April to take the pressure off. The government hadn't announced the furlough scheme at that point, and I admit I didn't really know what furlough was, I had to google it. Everything was an unknown.

COMMUNICATING FROM HOME

After the government told pubs to close, the next day was pretty hectic. My wife went to pick our son up from university as all his friends had already left to go home – I was feeling really concerned about all our young people, actually.

Meanwhile, I knew our team members wanted to know about pay if pubs were closed, so I was busy trying to figure out what we were going to say to everyone. We wanted to communicate, but in all honesty, we didn't really know what the near future was going to bring.

I usually work in our offices with just the odd day working at home, so it was strange not seeing colleagues. But in the early weeks of the first lockdown things were actually not unpleasant. I felt this was something that we had under control and my kids were safe at home, none of us were ill,

the sun was shining and I wasn't travelling for work every day. I honestly thought things would be alright in a few weeks.

LOOKING AFTER OUR PEOPLE

Of course, the pandemic lasted a lot longer than anyone could imagine. As we began to furlough team members, I had to move between working on big picture planning to dealing with day-to-day issues, like staff holiday pay. We all had to do what was necessary and important for our teams.

I spent a lot of my time managing the complexities of furlough and working out how to apply these new schemes and making the right decisions for our people. And as the year progressed, the pressure grew: we had to make the very difficult decision to close some of our pubs and keep redundancies to an absolute minimum by redeploying our teams, where possible. In fact, Covid-19 has really brought it home to me that whatever we do it has to be done with a sense of responsibility to our people.

OUR HR BUSINESS PARTNERS SUPPORTED PEOPLE ALMOST 24 HOURS A DAY

We knew how important it was to support our teams' wellbeing at all times. One of our key objectives was to, as far as possible, protect our employees from the worst impact of the crisis, whether that might be social isolation, financial hardship, health problems or loss of loved ones due to the virus.

So we put a wellbeing programme in place right from the start of lockdown one. We created a wellbeing section on our Kingdom app and started a programme of content focusing



on four key areas – financial, family, physical and emotional. We held virtual fitness classes, competitions to give away wellbeing-themed prizes and encouraged managers to keep in touch with furloughed teams. Our HR business partners spent a lot of time supporting people, responding to queries on Kingdom almost 24 hours a day. I'm really proud of them for that.

TACKLING MONEY WORRIES

Financial hardship was a real challenge for many. We set up the Support Fund and also sped up the roll out of the Wagestream app. It enables people to access their salary whenever they need to, rather than wait until the end of the month, and helps avoid the use of high interest payday loans. We soon had around 30,000 employees accessing it, with around 7,000 using it to save, thanks to its tools which help people to budget and manage their money.

A lot has come out of the pandemic that we, as an organisation, can be proud of. There have been plenty of opportunities for people to take a step back, but there's a heartening number of people who took a step forward – and in some cases, 10 steps – to say, 'I'll do that.' I'm looking ahead to the future with a fresh perspective and a positive heart.

"We lifted up to 8 tonnes of unused beer from pub cellars a day"

When pubs were forced to close, their cellars had to be emptied of beer. That tricky task fell to **DRAYMEN**, like **ED SULLIVAN** and **JOHN PETERS**

ON THE NIGHT in March 2020 when the Prime Minister suddenly told pubs to shut their doors, it is estimated that there were around 50 million pints left unsupped in pub cellars. Beer doesn't like being left unused. It has a limited shelf-life and spoils after a few months. There's also a good chance it could explode. So, it was important that unused and part-used kegs and casks were lifted from cellars. And that task fell to the beer delivery team, the draymen.

Draymen not only deliver to Greene King managed and leased pubs, but also to freehouses – basically, any venue that serves Greene King beer. So, back in spring 2020 the dray teams had the unique challenge of collecting 120,000 firkins of beer from 6,000 closed pubs, while working under Covid restrictions.

"Being a drayman is a physically demanding job, even under normal circumstances. We're rolling and lifting kegs weighing 50 to 120kg, day in and day out, sometimes for 50+ hours a week," says drayman, Ed Sullivan. "My physio says it's in the top tier in terms of physicality, along with firefighters. But lifting these heavy kegs out of cellars was a whole new level of physical difficulty for all us."

HEAVY LIFTING

Ed has worked for Greene King since 2000 and is one half of a dray pair, along with John Peters, who's been a drayman since 2018. Together they work out of Westgate Brewery in Bury St Edmunds, arriving before 5am to load 20, 50 and 100-litre kegs on to trucks (if it's an extra busy day their truck will be pre-loaded for them). The pair usually deliver to Essex, Hertfordshire and Suffolk, but



more flexibility was required during the pandemic: usual routes changed, as did teams. "For lifting full, heavy kegs out of cellars we could only use the lorries that had tail lifts, and not all lorries had them," says Ed, who was furloughed early on due to asthma. John continued working with another dray pair, as lifting beer out of cellars is a three-man job. "We're used to moving empty kegs – but very rarely do we lift a full one," says John. "And if we do, it's only ever a single keg. On one visit, during the first lockdown, we lifted 50 or 60."

A MECHANICAL HOIST WAS QUICKLY DESIGNED TO RETRIEVE HEAVY, FULL KEGS FROM OLD, DEEP, NARROW LONDON PUB CELLARS

Removing heavy kegs from 500-year-old pub cellars in central London, like the cramped 'bear pit' cellar at Prospect of Whitby on the River Thames, required ingenuity. "We used a purpose-built electronic hoist for the old, narrow London pub cellars," says John.

The winch-like hoist was designed and tested especially for this purpose by the transport team in Bury St Edmunds. Draymen were then trained to use it safely in confined spaces before special permission was gained for its use in London boroughs.

"For most other pubs we used a retrieval net," explains John. "One pub manager was curious to see what invention we were going to use to bring the beer up, and was very amused when she realised it was just three men and a big long net, like fishing for beer."

NET GAINS

The nets were laid flat on the cellar floor and a keg was rolled onto it, with the two ends secured at surface level by kegs as anchor points. One drayman stayed in the cellar while the other two hauled the keg up and then placed it on the tail lift. "There was a technique to it," says John. "There's not much room to move in a cellar – and pubs might enjoy regular refurbishment, but cellars rarely do. Some are small and strangely shaped with voids where walls should be and crumbling mortar."

It's estimated that each dray team lifted an average of 4–8 tonnes of unused beer a day in lockdown one. They returned it all to the car park at Westgate Brewery. All own-brewed beer was disposed of responsibly using an environmentally sustainable method, known as anaerobic digestion.

Approximately 100 tankers-worth was disposed of in this way, the resulting non-alcoholic slurry was then used for farm animal feed. A further 200,000 containers were sent back to other brewers for them to dispose of themselves.

During the third lockdown John was also furloughed. Both he and Ed were happy to go back to work when restrictions eased in spring 2021, for lots of reasons. "You need to consume a lot of calories in this job, and I forgot to stop eating like a drayman," says Ed. "I put on four stone."

John was keen to get back to normal fitness levels, too. "It was impossible to replicate the level of activity you get from doing this job. I certainly felt the aches and strains when I first returned to work, but it was good to be back. Face masks, gloves, sanitiser, windows open, regular cleaning of the truck... it was the new normal, but it was some kind of normality, at last."



ED SULLIVAN AND JOHN PETERS, DRAYMEN, BASED AT WESTGATE BREWERY, BURY ST EDMUNDS

"I threw myself into working for my local community"

MARK GORDON, GENERAL MANAGER of the Kings Arms in Bagshot, worked tirelessly to ensure his pub remained a community hub during the pandemic. He even took on some very special roles...

OUR PUB IS at the heart of the village here. It's a Hungry Horse, but a wet-led pub, and everything that happens in the village happens through the pub. The first sign for me that Covid-19 was affecting us was when I noticed a lot of customers taking their drinks outside – and it wasn't even that warm in March 2020. Bookings for Mother's Day were very low too, and when Ireland said it was going to shut down for Paddy's Day I knew things were serious.

Despite all that, we were really shocked on the night the government announced pubs were to close: we couldn't believe it was happening so soon. We shut the bar at 10pm and let the place empty organically rather than chuck everyone out at once, because it was rammed.

I KEPT THE PUB FRONT AND CENTRE
OF PEOPLE'S MINDS BY GOING ONLINE

I work here with my wife. We've been here 10 years and three of my eight kids work for me. Most of my team of 42 have been here for over seven years. We work together and play together, so that night we were here until about 2am. We just wanted to be sure we closed up properly. It wasn't until everyone had gone and the pub was empty that it sunk in. We knew it would be OK, because the messages from Greene King were so reassuring. My phone beeped nonstop with messages from colleagues in other pubs and we all felt confident. The message that stuck with me was, we'll get through this together. A month or so later we started losing people to Covid.

My best friend had lung cancer and all her treatments stopped because of the virus. She caught Covid and that was it. We lost about 15 customers – it was a very sad and uncertain time. A lot of the team are quite close to our customers, so it hit them hard. We tried to meet weekly for a walk and a chat, which helped.

To help me get through it I took my usual Friday night Pub Landlord's Quiz online by doing a Facebook Live, with about 300 to 400 people joining in. It kept the pub front and centre of people's minds and I really enjoyed the banter. People couldn't come in, but they could call us if they needed anything because the team put their numbers out on social media. We had quite a lot of late-night calls – often people just wanted someone to talk to. We've also got a lot of older regulars, so we rang them regularly to check on them.

SPREADING JOY

And then my mum passed away in December, and it knocked me for six. I felt like I wanted to do something positive. Usually around that time I would visit local pubs dressed as Santa. Obviously, that was a no-no in 2020, but a friend told me her nephew was really ill and could Santa call to cheer him up? Of course, I did it, and thought that there were probably a lot of kids missing out due to the pandemic. I posted on Facebook to see if anyone wanted a free Santa video call and ended up doing 109 calls, spending eight hours a day on camera. It kept me going through some dark days.

I also thought about those who were unable to travel or see loved ones and would spend Christmas Day alone. I set up a GoFundMe page where you could buy a dinner for a relative or pay it forward and buy for a stranger, and we raised just



under £3,000 in 10 days. On Christmas Day my chefs gave their time for free to cook 158 Christmas dinners and I had 45 volunteers delivering. It was a community coming together.

GIVING BACK

I'm a local councillor and was part of a task force providing support for those in need, so I was getting a lot of Covid-related queries from people. I'm also involved with a charity which did shopping and took hot meals to those in need and delivered medication and dog walked for people who were shielding. As the pandemic wore on, I realised there were many struggling financially, so I set up a collection point for food donations and started volunteering at a local food bank on Sundays.

The pandemic gave me time to grow as a person and realise the importance of doing things for other people. No one missed buying things during the pandemic – they missed connecting with others.

In 2021, our year may have begun in April when our pub reopened for outside trading, rather than January, but we started with a bang. Nick Mackenzie paid us a visit, we won a We Care award at the Pride of Greene King Awards and experienced record-breaking figures on reopening. Every single table was booked, profits were up 30% on 2019 and we enjoyed the second-highest week's takings since 1936. We had a lot of reasons to feel proud. 🍀



MARK GORDON,
GENERAL MANAGER
OF THE KINGS ARMS IN
BAGSHOT, SURREY



DAN STRETTON,
SENIOR SUPPLY
CHAIN MANAGER

"Covid tested our supply chain to the absolute limits, but we came out stronger"

IN EARLY 2020 the supply chain team was focused on two things: Brexit and Covid-19. We'd done our Brexit planning and warehouses were full in anticipation of delays and supply issues. We work very closely with key partners, such as XPO Logistics, and in March 2020 I was a speaker at their conference. It was a challenge because my phone was constantly ringing and emergency meetings were being arranged as word had got out about impending pub closures.

Just before closures were announced we were all told to work from home. I had some concerns about this, albeit we had little choice. Some team members struggled with working from home and preferred being in the office. For me, the issue was being in our tiny spare room with my two young children banging at the door, not understanding that Daddy was home, but working. Trying to operate via virtual calls rather than face-to-face meetings was difficult, too. It made it harder to ensure everybody was OK and meant very long hours sitting at a desk.

FOOD DONATIONS

When the lockdown finally came, we had stock that was already on its way to pubs, and replenishment stock was coming into depots. Of course, suppliers still wanted to be paid – they'd produced food according to our requirements – so I needed to address that.

The next job was to donate depot stock, with minimal wastage. Perishable food, like fresh fruit, veg and meat, was donated to charities we have an ongoing relationship with, such as FareShare, The Bread & Butter Thing and the Felix Project. They were delighted: they don't usually receive fresh produce, which is naturally the best type of product. We donated around £500,000-worth of food during the first lockdown.

But very quickly food charities became inundated. We had to find new organisations to donate to and contacted everyone, from large charities right down to very small community centres, and encouraged pubs to give to causes close to their hearts. Some of our pubs use an app called Too Good To Go to donate food rather than waste it, and it proved invaluable. In total we donated over £800,000 of stock from our depots over the course of the pandemic.

WE DONATED OVER £800,000 IN THE FORM OF FOOD, PPE AND HAND SANITISER SENT FROM OUR DEPOT TO CHARITIES AND GOOD CAUSES

LOCKDOWN PAIN

My team is also responsible for dealing with pub waste recycling. A phased furlough started to kick in, which reduced the capacity of both my team and our wider partnerships' teams. We had to balance people's welfare and cost management while supporting the pubs as much as possible. And challenges such as lockdowns and tier changes meant some pubs needed their waste collecting very quickly. Thankfully, we pulled together and made it happen.

On a personal level, the lockdowns were fairly tough. I usually unwind by running and playing football – but football stopped and gyms closed. At one point we were advised to only exercise outside our homes for 30 minutes a day, and pounding the pavements aggravated a back injury, which was also made worse by sitting at my desk at home for very long periods.

I felt a responsibility for people's wellbeing, too. Furlough was a brand-new concept and I couldn't provide the clarity required around lockdowns easing. The uncertainty was also

Getting supplies to where they need to be, and recyclable waste collected, is all in a day's work for **SENIOR SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER, DAN STRETTON**. But Covid-19 created unique challenges

difficult for XPO; Greene King is their main customer in the Foodservice sector and they have over 500 employees contracted to work with us. People were naturally anxious and it was our duty to support them as best we could.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As the pandemic wore on, we got used to the patterns of closing pubs, cancelling orders and deliveries and collecting waste recycling. But the real difficulty was ensuring we got our forecasting correct so we could support our pubs when the time came to reopen.

With the Eat Out To Help Out scheme in August 2020 demand was so high, it was the equivalent to the week in the run up to Christmas, which we plan for six months in advance. However, the high demand lasted for six weeks, with minimal notice from the government in order to plan for it. I think it's fair to say we stress tested our supply chain, teams, partners and suppliers to the limit; but we stuck to our values and expectations and showed great flexibility.

I believe some positives did come out of the pandemic. Lockdowns gave us time to reflect and work through our strategy. We made progress on our sustainability and accountability agenda for what we do as a business by achieving zero waste to landfill for our managed pubs. We're working towards zero net carbon emissions, too, as we embark on science-based targets in partnership with The Carbon trust.

Covid-19 also gave us the opportunity to prove we can be agile and demonstrated how much our values have landed. People showed they care and are prepared to take ownership. 🌱

"City pubs survived terrorism, wars and plague, but the virus closed our doors"

MY JOB MEANS I predominantly lead on our city pubs, but also work with more entrepreneurial pubs across the country to develop new ideas. This includes Metropolitan Pub Company, which is owned by Greene King, but runs independently. Consequently, I knew by January 2020 that something was sweeping towards us; tourists started to disappear from central London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Tour parties cancelled pub bookings and tour companies warned we wouldn't see a return for a long time.

People started working from home. Tubes emptied out. Big Thursday nights in the City diminished. Shopping stopped. There was a nervousness about travelling into city centres. It was dramatic and alarming. The capital rapidly became a ghost town as life as we knew it stopped.

PUB PEOPLE ARE AMAZING... THEY'RE THE SALT OF THE EARTH, AND IT'S A JOY AND PRIVILEGE TO WORK WITH THEM

BOARDING UP LONDON

We decided to shut London pubs just before the government announced national closures. It was very, very emotional. Some of these businesses have existed for centuries; some were here in Shakespearean times. They'd survived plague, wars, acts of terrorism... and never shut. And yet a virus meant these historic properties had to be boarded up.

Even getting beer out of city centre pubs was difficult. Some of our drops are tiny and the hatches hundreds of years old. They've never pulled full casks back through those holes in the

CLOSED DUE TO COVID-19

floor, so all credit to the dray crews, because physically, it was probably the most difficult aspect of closing. It was a team effort; managers got up before dawn to help push the beer back up.

TRAUMATIC IMPACT

We have more than 1,600 team members in London who live above the pub and many are overseas workers. In April 2020 they were living in deserted pubs while worrying about friends and family back home. News reports from southern Europe showed the devastating impact the virus was having there. Some team members had relatives who were seriously ill, or worse. But they couldn't get back to their countries; we were locked down and borders were closed. It was distressing.

We had a particularly traumatising situation where a highly regarded team member lost her mother and needed to get back to her country. The logistics and costs of doing this were significant and it really made us reflect on what we were facing with Covid-19. We asked: have we got enough provision to help those in desperate need? Meanwhile, the issue of hardship came to the fore really quickly in London because people have very high living expenses. They also depend on us for their homes, some rely on table tips... the unique difficulties the virus was causing needed special consideration. So when the entire leadership team signed up to contribute to the Support Fund, it felt like a big moment for the business.

It was difficult to get some of our London pubs reopened when restrictions started to lift. Small, atmospheric, historic pubs were not built with social distancing in mind. They might

KAREN BOSHER is MANAGING DIRECTOR of Premium, Urban and Venture – a diverse range of pubs, many of which are in cities and town centres – and all greatly impacted by the pandemic

have 20 seats inside, but on a Thursday or Friday night in normal times they could have 400 drinkers outside, thanks to the City of London's vertical drinking rights that permits outdoor drinking within a certain area. Unfortunately, the pandemic meant this was suspended by parliament for the first time ever, and until that suspension was lifted, those pubs were not viable, so they were sadly mothballed.

In fact, it was tough on all the pubs I oversee, because city centres were slow to revive. People didn't return to offices and tourists kept away. Few had gardens so they couldn't reopen on 12 April 2021 and social distancing rules made the 17 May reopening difficult, too. Most were holding out for all restrictions to lift and 30 pubs were closed long term.

BRILLIANT TAKEAWAYS

In spite of all the difficulties, I came away thinking that pub people are amazing – they are the salt of the earth and really stepped up during the crisis. For example, the Metropolitan team were trailblazers, figuring out really quickly how to get takeaway services underway and offering our customers alternative services.

We also saw remarkable examples of people pulling together. Business development managers kept teams connected with singing competitions, painting contests, jogs in parks, cookery sessions... people did all they could to help others with their mental wellbeing.

It was a special time of bonding. It wasn't easy for those who continued to work long hours to keep the business on track, either. But there were many examples of people taking time to care for each other. Mine is a new team and the pandemic bought out the best in people working under the worst conditions. 🍀



KAREN BOSHER,
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
PREMIUM, URBAN AND VENTURE

MIKE GORE,
RISK & ASSURANCE
DIRECTOR

PLEASE
RESPECT
SOCIAL
DISTANCING
THANK YOU



"I don't think any amount of planning could've prepared us"

As **RISK & ASSURANCE DIRECTOR, MIKE GORE'S** life is spent looking at worse case scenarios – but even he couldn't anticipate just how life changing a pandemic would be

I'VE WORKED FOR Greene King for over 20 years and my job is to look at everything from risk management to reputational damage. I spend my working life talking to insurers and lawyers and making sure that as a business we prioritise risk – that we measure, manage and mitigate it. That might mean health and safety, public health, security, financial... every aspect of risk. We're a very regulated industry, so I have to ensure that we're looking ahead so we know what kind of risk might be coming down the pipeline. But I didn't imagine that it would take a global pandemic to shine a spotlight on my team and the work we do.

CLOSING DOWN PUBS SAFELY ISN'T EASY.
IT TAKES A LOT OF WORK AND PLANNING

Of course, we knew things were looking bad at the start of 2020. A Covid Steering Group was formed very early on and we started to track and plan for what at the time was an emerging threat. Sales were falling pretty drastically as media increasingly focused on the ease with which coronavirus spreads. I can remember visiting a pub and it was like the Mary Celeste, virtually empty. At that point I realised things were going to get much worse. By March we were expecting the government to make that call, but we didn't expect it to be: you will close pubs tonight – full stop.

CLOSING TIME

Closing all pubs safely is not an easy thing to do. It takes a lot of work and planning and close collaboration between all parts of the business. There was no well-rehearsed game plan. Closing 1,700 pubs and dealing with 40,000 people is especially hard.

There was a very, very long 'to do' list associated with a close down. Removing money, disposing of food, draining down water systems, cleaning kitchens, moving gaming machines so they're out of sight, even boarding up some premises... the logistics were huge. One of the biggest headaches was getting unused beer out of a cellar, safely. Lifting full casks of beer out of the cellar required special mechanical hoists, and we didn't have many of them.

So, whether you're closing or reopening a pub (and we did a lot of that over the crisis) there's a lot involved. I have 34 people in my team, but many of them were furloughed early on so those left had a big span of responsibility.

TEAM SAFETY

When it came to reopening our pubs when lockdowns eased, we had to ensure that our team members and customers were safe. We created the Pub Safe and Office Safe concept: five promises to keep everyone as safe as possible. It almost became a brand and the whole business got behind it.

Everything we did was within the context of Pub Safe – and we did it well – including more audits and data tracking, so safety was assured. The procurement team did a great job sourcing and buying PPE, sanitiser, face coverings etc, which of course, the whole world was chasing. And keeping up with Covid regulations across three nations was a challenge in itself: over 70 new sets of regulations, all feeding into Pub and Office Safe.

But it has come at a price. As a risk manager, I love dealing with problems. I like a tight deadline, a bit of adrenaline, and thinking on my feet. So, in many ways the pandemic has been hugely rewarding for me on a personal level. The time I saved



not driving to meetings or the office I invested in keeping fit, cycling and doing some weights. And I've seen much more of my family. But it was also utterly exhausting. The stress hit me in September 2020 when I was fortunate enough to go on holiday to Skiathos. The resort was totally deserted. On the first day I went to the empty pool, sat on the sun lounger all alone, and just

burst into tears. And I was the lucky one, still working and on a foreign holiday.

I know that many in my team have also struggled because we stayed in touch with weekly calls. In fact, one positive is that we've all got to know each other better. My role is usually field based and pre-pandemic I would drive around 40,000 business miles a year, but I did just 100 miles in over 15 months from March 2020. We've had to stop and stay at home and that's really given us time to bond, even if it has been virtually. And I know that for lots of people that checking in with each other has been vital.

So, what did we learn? Risk planning and mitigation is now better embedded, and we are more resilient for it. We are rightly proud of what the whole business achieved, but most importantly, we looked out for, and looked after, each other. That's a legacy we can build on. Oh, and we all learnt a new word: 'efficacy' – welcome to risk management, everyone!

"Demand for bottled beer was so high, the pandemic passed in a blur"

With pubs closed for months on end, **BOTTLING HALL TEAM LEADER, DAVID KEFFORD**, worked hard to keep up with online sales and the exceptionally high supermarket demand for bottled beers

MY JOB IS extremely process-driven. Everything has to be done to a set routine, because of the nature of what we do... consistency in the beer bottling process is key. Of course, things go a bit wrong at times, but it's always in a controlled way, and each shift has its own ebb and flow.

We have a schedule that looks a bit like a TV guide detailing what we're bottling and when and it anticipates eventualities like machinery breakdowns – we even refer to each order run as a programme. We have an engineer on hand just in case bottling has to stop for a breakdown so we can very quickly sort it out and get everything back up and running as soon as possible. We might get ahead of ourselves and gain an hour on the schedule, but we never relax because the next minute a pump on the labellers' glue might stop working or we might have a steam leak or a belt might go and need fixing. But every scenario is planned for, as far as it can be.

UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

Of course, the pandemic was something out of the ordinary and not something that could be scheduled or programmed for. I don't think anyone where I work at Hen Hall in Bury St Edmunds could anticipate how crazy things would get as a result of it. I certainly didn't. I find it hard to pinpoint times and dates of when things happened, because we were just so very busy in Bottling that the pandemic is all one big blur.

Traditionally, March is a quiet time of year for us – there's a lull after Christmas and there's a good while before summer

barbecue season starts. But when pubs closed in March 2020, that very first lockdown coincided with a spell of warm weather and sunny days. Suddenly, everyone was working from home or furloughed, and pubs were shut, so if you wanted a beer you had to go to the supermarket or a shop to buy it.

Supermarket orders rose by 43% compared to figures for 2019 and online sales via our beer shop website soared by over 2,000%. I think everyone was hoping to chill out in their gardens with a beer and sit the pandemic out for a few weeks. Of course, it all went on for a lot longer than that – and demand remained high.

SALES OF BOTTLED BEER WENT THROUGH THE ROOF; ONLINE ORDERS WERE UP 2,000%. WORKING TOOK MY MIND OFF THINGS

LEANING IN

We had to work out a way of fulfilling all these orders, while operating in a way that was safe for the team. Hats off to the management because whatever we needed to do this, we got. We put in place one-way systems with floor stickers and barriers to ensure everyone was socially distanced. There are about 18 of us here and everyone was split into two bubbles, so you only ever worked with the same team members.



I was doing 6am until 6pm shifts one week and then 6pm to 6am the next. I'd do my handover by phone, to limit contact

with my colleagues and each shift was so full on. The team worked nonstop and we all had to adapt quickly to changes in how we operated, for example, trying to avoid each other while working with the machinery. But we managed it, and everyone did amazingly well. Of course, there was a bit of nervousness about working during a pandemic, but we were all sensible about following the rules, both in work and outside of it. None of us caught Covid-19, as far as I'm aware.

STAYING SAFE

Personally, I just worked and worked, and it helped me to take my mind off things. On my days off I didn't go anywhere or do anything, I just stayed at home because that felt like the safest thing to do.

I found Christmas hard because my daughter lives in London and we hadn't seen her for seven months, and of course, we had to cancel all our plans to see her. It was sad, but we just accepted that it was how things needed to be.

It's fair to say that I used work as a distraction from the pandemic. I found the sheer volumes of beer arriving by tanker from the brewery to be bottled exciting. The constant activity was brilliant and shifts flew by. It was really hard work, but I enjoyed it. I just got my head down and focused on the job at hand, which meant I could avoid all the news headlines. Because it did get pretty dire. If I'd been furloughed, I'm not sure how I would have dealt with it all, if I'm really honest. ☺



DAVID KEFFORD,
BOTTLING HALL
TEAM LEADER

Thank you, you've been amazing...

WOW!

The pandemic didn't stop team members from doing great things for good causes. From supporting the NHS to raising much-needed funds for charities, we were blown away by everyone's efforts

CLAPPING AND SUPPORTING the NHS, donating food, hand sanitiser and PPE to people who needed it most, cooking hot meals for key workers and nursing staff battling on Covid wards, raising money for charities whose donations plummeted... the list of good works carried out by team members during the pandemic goes on and on.

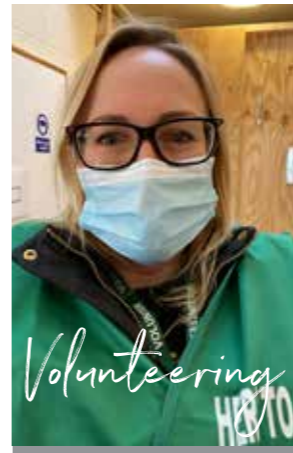
We know that an awesome £1.5 million was raised for our official charity partner Macmillan during a pandemic year, but it's impossible to quantify the collective amounts raised nationally for good causes. Our employee app, Kingdom, was packed with truly amazing news from pubs and people up and down the country who used their time, creativity and goodwill for the greater good. Lockdowns, home working, furlough and self-isolation simply meant that people went online to help others, or when pubs were open, they ramped up their efforts. And we've loved reading about what everyone achieved, under the most testing of circumstances, so here's a small selection of images that shows the breadth of giving that went on...



Caring



Love our NHS



Volunteering



Giving



Donating



Feeding key workers



Give yourself a clap!





"Joining the Jabs Army helped me cope with a closed pub"

As **GENERAL MANAGER** of The Broadwater in Worthing, **DIANE GUEST** missed having people around her. And then she joined the Jabs Army as a vaccine volunteer...

HERE IN SUNNY Worthing Covid-19 just kind of crept up on us. We'd heard a few whispers that a number of people up the coast in Brighton had the virus, but it just didn't seem like a thing to worry about here. It was mainly business as usual for us.

The Friday night in March 2020 when the Prime Minister announced pubs were closing for the first time was weird. There was a lot of camaraderie between customers and team members because it was a totally unique situation that no one had ever been through before. But privately I was thinking: 'He hasn't even given us the weekend to prepare ourselves!'

AS A GENERAL MANAGER YOU HAVE TO BE A GOOD ACTOR; YOU HAVE TO PUT ON A BRAVE FACE

Once the customers left, we knew exactly what we needed to do because very quickly the Greene King well-oiled machine kicked in. We were told what to do with the beer lines, what to do with the food, what we should say to our team members, what to put (or not put) on social media... and we just went all out to get through the jobs together. But it was a horrible, uncertain and sad feeling. I was mainly worried about my team. One thing you have to be as a general manager is a good actor; you can't let on if you're having a bad day or things are getting you down. So, I just put on a brave face.

MISSING CONTACT

The first lockdown was tough. I contacted customers who'd normally drop in for our Meet Up Mondays (a social group I started for anyone who needs company). Some are widowed, so I'd call them for a bit of a chat. I busied myself, but felt really down that I couldn't see my daughter and twin granddaughters. The girls were only three, and all I could do was talk to them over the pub wall because they weren't in my bubble.

I missed all the occasions that we'd normally celebrate in the pub. On VE Day in May 2020, I sat outside the pub all dressed up in red, white and blue with my flags and everything – but on my own. A few people came by and I chatted from a distance. We're in a really nice position here, quite close to Tesco with an alleyway down the side and a big frontage, so I'd hear cars pull up and rush out to see who it was so I could have a natter over the wall. We've got a really strong WhatsApp group so all the team members stayed in touch on that. We all put a lot of effort into special occasions like birthdays, where we'd go on Zoom to celebrate. And we got dressed up for Halloween, which was funny. I encouraged a few who I knew were struggling with money to apply for the Support Fund, and they got it, which took the pressure off for them. They knew I had their back and they had mine, too.

VACCINE VOLUNTEER

Early in 2021, as the vaccine rollout got going, I joined the Jabs Army as a vaccination centre steward. I really enjoyed that because it was good to feel useful again. And it was just



fantastic to be able to talk to new people face to face.

In fact, the organisers had me

cleaning chairs to start with and spotted that I liked to chat and asked me to be the person who greeted people as they came in for their Covid jab. It got me out, kept me busy and I saw some of my regulars from the pub, which was great, and some people who I hadn't seen for donkey's years.

All in all, I didn't find lockdown three to be too bad. I have one daughter living here with me and the other daughter and grandchildren were in my support bubble then, so I could see them. I lost a stone and half with healthy eating and got my head around all the closing up routines and so it was just all easier to deal with.

I couldn't wait to get customers back in the pub, though. I've lived here for 30-odd years and I'm well known in the area. I used to run my own pub and a sandwich bar – in fact, I've lived here for so long that I often see people's grandchildren coming into the pub. So, it was lovely to call up regulars and tell them when we could welcome them back.

Customers were keen to get back to the pub, too. When I started taking bookings again in April 2021, I had some customers wanting a table for August, which made me feel hopeful. I was even looking forward to welcoming back the ones who wind me up, like the noisy football fans who slosh beer on the ceiling when their team scores and make me worry about my TV screens! 🍷

"We needed screens on bars to be able to open pubs safely, but there was a shortage of materials"

Keeping our properties maintained and safe to work in during the pandemic involved speedy decision making from the Property team's **SENIOR PURCHASING MANAGER, MITESH PANIKKER**

I JOINED GREENE King in May 2019, so my first year had a very interesting end. My initial 10 months or so were focused on looking at where we could reduce property repairs and maintenance costs. My background is in property procurement, so I also look for efficiencies, like bundling jobs together rather than calling a contractor out twice in one week to the same area. Processes, practices and pricing structures, you could say.

I GOT APPROVAL TO BUY ACRYLIC TO MAKE BAR TOP SCREENS... JUST BEFORE A SHORTAGE, WHEN PRICES ROCKETED

When Covid-19 came onto the radar in January 2020 I think my initial thoughts were: how does this impact our owners and wider group colleagues in Hong Kong? And what will it mean in terms of potential supply disruptions, especially for products and components that might come from, or via, the Far East?

I honestly didn't think about the health implications at first – not until my partner caught the virus in early March 2020. She was very poorly, and although she wasn't hospitalised, she was extremely breathless. It was a very worrying time and while we self-isolated at home, she stayed in the bedroom and I had to keep the kids away from her. I had to call around friends and ask them to do food drops to us; there were no delivery slots available, as everyone was doing online grocery shopping.

By the end of that month things were looking serious. With our sites closed, I had to make sure that suppliers weren't

going to complete orders already placed, because now we were shut. I also had to communicate safe practices: if work had to be done at a pub where team members lived on site, how could that be done in a Covid-secure way? With a large maintenance supply chain such as ours, everyone had to be kept up to speed with what they could and couldn't do under new restrictions. I also had to contact key suppliers to explain the situation so they could understand the impact on their own business.

SCRAMBLE FOR SCREENS

My department works closely with the Risk team and quickly thoughts turned to reopening – and the risks associated with that. As the concept of Pub Safe was being developed the plan was to create protective screens around tills and pay points to form a physical barrier between team members and customers to keep everyone safe.

It was a good safety measure, and one that all public-facing businesses were looking to use. Doug Chadd, a colleague in Property, was working on a concept to create a design suitable for all our sites, which meant producing screens that could be quickly and simply installed on bar tops by team members. As this solution was being developed and tested, our strategic signage partner told us they sensed there would be an explosion in the number of businesses requiring screens. They foresaw that supplies of materials to make them, like acrylic, would very quickly run out, with stocks already being used to make PPE items, like face shields. A shortage of supply would also cause prices to rocket, and availability of large quantities would become scarce.



I fed this back to our management team in the first week of May and was quickly given the approval and funds to buy a significant amount of acrylic via our strategic partner. Thanks to great relationships and quick decision making, less than two weeks later we had secured the materials we needed – not long before national shortages became an issue.

We really did get ahead of the game, because sure enough, prices for these kinds of materials increased rapidly and delivery times went well beyond our 6 July reopening date.

AL FRESCO READY

Over the winter lockdown I was flexi-furloughed and worked with our garden furniture supplier to make sure we had enough stock to serve the maximum number of customers when pubs eventually reopened for outdoor service only. Of course, these things were in high demand, but thanks to excellent working relationships I managed to secure extra tables, chairs, benches and parasols and then organise speedy deliveries so that pubs were able to hit the ground running on 12 April 2021, or whenever they were able to open again.

All in all, I consider myself very lucky because I came out of the pandemic relatively unscathed, working for a great business in a very supportive team, with very little health impact on my friends and family. Home schooling brought its challenges. I have two kids and a kill switch on the wi-fi, so if my Teams calls were affected by a teenager turning on the Xbox, I could boot them off. But I know other team members have had it worse with very young children and not being able to easily work from home, so I'm putting it all down as a unique experience I hope never to experience again.



MITESH PANIKKER,
SENIOR PURCHASING
MANAGER, PROPERTY



DYLAN MAYER
WORKS FRONT OF HOUSE
AT THE GARRICK INN,
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

"Getting financial help from the Support Fund was a huge relief"

Working front of house during a pandemic had its challenges, says **DYLAN MAYER**. But lockdown with a young family to support was worse. Which is why he was grateful for the Support Fund...

I WORK IN The Garrick Inn, the oldest pub in Stratford-upon-Avon. It's a lovely building in a prime location in the centre of Stratford with a really great team. I only joined Greene King about six weeks before the very first lockdown, so it was a strange time all round. Not only did I have to get used to the Greene King way of doing things, but, also the Covid way of working.

It's not my first job in this industry. I've worked in hospitality for about six years, on and off. I work at the pub while studying to be a railway engineer as I've got a young family to support. When the first lockdown was announced I was unable to drive and we live in a small village quite a long way from supermarkets, hospitals and things like that. So when the Prime Minister announced the country was closing down my first thought was, 'What do we do now?'

We had to rely on my partner's mum to do all our shopping and I couldn't see my family as they're in Stoke-on-Trent and we weren't allowed to travel. Being isolated was my main concern at that point.

IN TIERS

During the first lockdown the financial pressure wasn't so great because we immediately got an email from the directors and Nick, our CEO, telling us that we'd get paid for the next few weeks. It was so reassuring and meant that things were actually OK and I got to spend a lot of time with my then one-year-old daughter. Compared to my previous employers, who had no empathy for people with young families, and moaned if I booked time off to take my daughter for her injections, Greene King is just amazing. There's no comparison.

So, when we returned to work in July 2020, I loved it. Great atmosphere and a brilliant team, serving really good food – we were so busy with Eat Out To Help Out, but the team just pulled together. And then bookings started to drop off. One night it got to 9pm and we had seven staff serving just one table. I was also getting concerned about the tier system. People weren't supposed to travel, but we didn't know if customers were coming in from outside areas to visit the pub. It wasn't enjoyable going to work worrying about who you're going to meet that day, and whether they were really bothered about the virus.

SUPPORT FUND ASSISTANCE

In the winter time the money worries kicked in. I'd cut back my hours so I could fit in studying, but then another lockdown was announced. On reduced hours, and with wages based on average earnings, we had to get by on £350 a month. And we were expecting another child. It was also Christmas time. Stress levels from December 2020 to February 2021 just went through the roof.

With another baby due in spring 2021, I applied for the Support Fund. I didn't expect to get it, so it was a huge relief when about a week later I heard that I was eligible. I might have to worry about Covid and whether I'd be allowed in the hospital when our baby was born, but at least I didn't have to worry about how I was going to buy food. In fact, that's exactly what I did spend the money on – and a few bits for the new baby. The money also covered my daughter's nursery fees.

THE SUPPORT FUND MONEY HELPED
US TO BUY FOOD AND COVERED MY
DAUGHTER'S NURSERY FEES

TEAM HELP

Mentally, it was incredibly challenging living and working through this time. Like a terrible rollercoaster. In fact, the whole of the third lockdown was just the worst. But my manager Chris and his wife were so supportive. We met up a few times and Chris and I went cycling together. I had the rest of the team on WhatsApp and the Greene King mental health and welfare team were in touch to see how things were going. The company was amazing. I really couldn't fault them.

It's fair to say that Greene King did everything a company could do to support us and I was really looking forward to going back to the pub and seeing everyone. It's a really nice place to work. 🍀



"People needed to talk and have someone listen to their worries"

HUMAN RESOURCES BUSINESS PARTNER, KIRAN ELLIOTT, helped deal with a multitude of queries from team members during the pandemic – and experienced being in and out of furlough herself, too

THE FIRST LOCKDOWN was strange. I was furloughed for eight weeks and really didn't know what to do with my time. As a human resources business partner (HRBP), I'm usually on trains, travelling to pubs to deal with everything from recruitment, retention, reward and training to disciplinary issues. Suddenly, I had all this spare time and it was very odd – it took some time to adjust.

Just before the pandemic we'd moved to a new area, coincidentally very close to where Captain Sir Tom Moore (Army officer and NHS/Covid fundraiser) lived, so there were plenty of house jobs to do and a lot of local activity. I made the most of this rare free time with family and enjoyed walks discovering our new neighbourhood, while marvelling at all the media interest and community spirit going on around me.

Back in March 2020 I was supporting our Locals pubs in the London area. We found ourselves dealing with a lot of staffing issues because team members were falling ill or had come into contact with someone with Covid-19 and they'd had to self-isolate. Some had to shield because they lived with someone vulnerable.

We also had team members living in houses of multiple occupancy who couldn't form a bubble because their house mates worked across different pubs. It was a challenge trying to keep pubs staffed. There was a lot of fear too – about the virus – but also because customer numbers had been falling.

FURLOUGH FEARS

Being furloughed a few weeks later was quite demoralising. No one really knew what it meant at that point and although I knew pubs were closing, I didn't think the HR team would stop working. When I got the call I went through so many emotions, and I worried whether I'd have a job at the end of it. I was reassured by all the Teams calls we had and regular management updates.

The HR team was really busy dealing with queries about everything from furlough to the future of the business, and I was asked to go back in June 2020. People wanted to know how furlough would work for them, how much they'd get paid, whether holiday entitlement was included, how long furlough might go on for. Team members were genuinely worried about how they would put food on the table for their families. We were inundated with queries on our intranet.

PEOPLE WERE ASKING ME HOW LONG THE PANDEMIC WOULD GO ON FOR

We organised ourselves into a rota so that we were available seven days a week to support and respond to queries and concerns – we were keen to put people's minds at rest. We really pulled together as a team so that we could respond quickly to the crisis.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

The hardest calls came from people who were really struggling with their mental wellbeing. Coincidentally, just before the virus hit many of us in HR were trained as mental health first aiders, which was so useful. We distributed a lot of information about mental wellbeing support on our internal training portal, TAP, and encouraged business development managers to have weekly check-ins with general managers. We were also there for support, where needed.

Ops managers also held regular catch-ups with their business development managers and listening sessions for pub managers. These sessions would include an update on work matters but they were mainly to check in with our people and to see how they were feeling and discover what they'd been doing to help boost morale.

The HRBPs would drop in on those calls and be available if anyone felt the need to talk. It was a good opportunity to remind people of the support available, such as the Support Fund for those who were in real financial need. I also told people about the 24/7 Employee Assistance Helpline, which is a benefit that's always been available, but in the past wasn't used as much as it was during the pandemic. It's staffed by mental health professionals who could help those who were really struggling.

I think the majority of people just wanted to talk to someone who understood their concerns and would listen to their worries. People would say to me, 'Oh, Kiran, how long do you think this will go on for?' and of course, I couldn't answer that, but I could be there for them while they expressed their fears and frustrations.

WE ARE FAMILY

As part of a restructure during the pandemic I moved across to the newly formed division, Premium and Urban. I was itching to get back out and meet my new team, but of course, I couldn't. Technology was great, but you can't really replicate face-to-face contact, especially in my role. Holding a meeting over Teams means you can miss nuance and hints that you'd get about how someone's feeling from their body language.

I'm proud of how Greene King responded during the pandemic. The communications, the Support Fund, the weekly updates from Nick Mackenzie, the care and support shown by everyone that's filtered down from the top. We're a huge company but with a genuine family feel – and I was so excited when I was able to go back to work.

KIRAN ELLIOTT,
HUMAN RESOURCES
BUSINESS PARTNER





TOBY BROWN,
GENERAL MANAGER
OF THE OLD FERRY BOAT INN,
HOLYWELL, ST IVES, CAMBS

"The Employee Assistance programme was quite literally, a lifesaver"

Living in a closed pub in a rural location during lockdown was not good for **GENERAL MANAGER, TOBY BROWN'S** wellbeing. He missed constant work, customers and camaraderie

I'M THE GENERAL manager of a lovely old thatched pub in a beautiful location, down a quiet country lane and right by the river's edge. We've got seven hotel rooms and are thought to be the oldest inn in England – we even have a resident ghost. When I took over at The Old Ferry Boat Inn in 2017 my family said I was almost destined to be GM, because I practically grew up here. My grandparents used to live on a boat on the river, so I've been coming here for as long as I can remember.

I FOUND THE SILENCE OF LOCKDOWN DEAFENING. IT MEANT SO MUCH THAT SOMEONE WAS AVAILABLE TO TALK TO ME

The village has an amazing community – and my team is a community in itself. I have around 30 people working for me. We're tight-knit and I suppose in some ways I act like a confidante to the younger team members: we definitely share the good times... and the bad.

When the pub closure announcement was made in March 2020, I think the locals were expecting it, because the pub was heaving. Every table was booked: it was nuts. And as soon as we were told to shut most of my team turned up, too. One person drove 20 miles just so he could help close up. I remember being on a call to management and when I got off the phone my kitchen had been totally cleared in about 30 minutes flat because 11 team members worked together on it for me.

LOW ABOUT LOCKDOWN
After all the buzz and amazing feeling of 'We're all in it together' came the come down. I've worked non-stop since

I was 16 and really didn't know what to do with myself. We're in a very rural location and I found the silence of lockdown deafening. It was unseasonably hot and I couldn't sleep as the thatched roof held the heat. I also struggled with reassuring my team that everything was going to be OK, when I really wasn't feeling it myself. I missed the rhythm of day-to-day pub life; I missed getting up at 6am; I missed seeing hotel guests for breakfast; I missed chatting to customers; I missed my team. The weather was beautiful, there were lots of people down by the river, and I couldn't stop thinking: I should be open now – I should be making money.

I just missed everything. I even got a thrill when they came to take all my beer out of the cellar because I was delighted to see the draymen again. An operations manager came to tape off the kids' play area and I spent ages chatting to him. It really helped to feel connected to work again and later that afternoon I called the Employee Assistance helpline.

Just being able to talk about work with someone was a game changer and I started calling the wellbeing team two to three times a week. I also took a lot of comfort from chatting with Belinda Steward, the business unit director for Hotels. It meant so much that she was so willing to be available to talk. I can't really explain how important that was to me.

VOLUNTARY HELP
As the first lockdown dragged on, I read a few books and did a short online mental health course to help me deal with other people's loneliness and lockdown issues. But I'm not someone who enjoys sitting on the sofa or having long lie-ins.

I remembered that I'd volunteered at an animal shelter in my teens and had done some dangerous dog handling. So, I rang the shelter and told them I had an empty pub with a massive garden and lots of time, so could I help them? They sent me

a very damaged German Shepherd. At first you couldn't approach her. She had cigarette burns on her ears and was so aggressive; she hated people. But gradually I won her trust and worked on training her. It was fantastic to have something to get out of bed for, and she was eventually re-homed.

The last lockdown was a lot easier for me to deal with. I'd got my head around the uncertainty and knew where to go if I felt I needed support. I also did more voluntary work as the vaccine rollout started. There are lot of elderly people in the village who don't drive, so I volunteered to take them to the vaccination centre for their Covid jabs. I think I took about 67 people in total, and it was rewarding to feel part of this big community effort.

We also found out that my partner and I are expecting our first child. Having something positive to look forward to made the dark days a lot brighter.



"We had to find a way to create a good pub
ambience under Covid conditions"

With very strict rules in place governing behaviour in pubs, **SENIOR GAMING & ENTERTAINMENT MANAGER, LEE NEWMAN**, and team had to find ways to create a familiar, relaxed experience

FOR SOMEONE LIKE me, whose life is spent visiting pubs to figure out how we can create the perfect pub experience, the pandemic was extremely challenging, both professionally and personally. I lead the gaming and entertainment team for Local Pubs and we're responsible for creating a fun, innovative experience for our customers, using everything from touchscreen gaming, pool and quizzes to competitive socialising concepts, such as digital darts and Shuffl.

Unfortunately, social distancing, one-way systems, mask wearing and table service were enough to restrict a pub's ambience. But with no sport, a live entertainment ban, a restriction on decibel levels (so customers didn't lean in close to hear), as well as a discouragement from speaking loudly, and we really did face an uphill struggle. In Scotland, no sound systems were allowed at all. At one point Scottish customers were sitting at spaced out tables watching crowd-free football with no sound on.

It was clear early on in the pandemic that we had to act quickly if we wanted pubs to remain attractive places to visit with such strict measures in place. My role moved from a fun and sociable one to, understandably, very health and safety conscious and checklist-driven.

CASH AND GAMING MACHINES

When pub closures were announced in March 2020, it was a race against time to empty gaming machines of cash. We didn't want a security risk – the last thing GMs needed were break-ins – so we quickly sent collectors to get as much money out as soon as possible. We had spreadsheets to reconcile the cash, but everyone did things differently because it was so rushed. It was super challenging, but we had to leave pubs safe and secure.

Before reopening in July 2020, we had to figure out how we could physically move gaming machines so that customers were not standing too close. I did a whistle-stop tour of pubs to see if we could place machines back to back or at angles, for social distancing purposes. We also had the great idea of adding numbered shelves so that drinks could be pre-ordered and delivered to the shelf, for uninterrupted play.

SCOTTISH CUSTOMERS WERE SITTING AT
SPACED OUT TABLES WATCHING CROWD-FREE
FOOTBALL WITH NO SOUND ON

The use of cash was fast disappearing and I was concerned about the move to contactless transactions. At that time gaming machines and pool tables most definitely relied on cash to operate. We also had to ensure that cues and balls were sanitised between use – and in some pubs, a pool player bending over a pool table with a cue was taking up an essential space that could be used for an extra table for six people. It was a tricky balance and there were regional nuances that had to be taken into consideration: in Scotland, pool playing was banned all together.

DIGITAL SWITCH

During lockdown, we worked on creating some alternative digital entertainment ideas, such as online games and quizzes that connected pubs virtually to play. These were concepts we'd been thinking about for a while, but the pandemic helped to speed things up. I didn't want our planned Macmillan

fundraising to be ignored just because pubs were shut, as it's a charity that's close to our hearts. So we collaborated with the developers of Rock And Roll Bingo™, quiz partner Red Tooth, and the marketing department and in just four weeks managed to launch events via Facebook and the Greene King website. We raised funds for the charity and gave away prizes sponsored by our very own Ice Breaker, which helped to keep people connected to Greene King.

On a personal level I experienced a lot of frustration and uncertainty because I live in Wales but most of the pubs I deal with are in England, and the rules were different between here, there and Scotland. For example, we had a firebreak lockdown here in Wales in October 2020 which meant I couldn't leave Porthcawl, where I live. The crazy thing was I had colleagues from England travelling here to climb Mount Snowdon to fundraise for Macmillan, but I couldn't join them. It was really frustrating and I found the restrictions on movement and ever-changing rules hard to cope with.

I also really struggled during the times I was furloughed. The first time was very hard. I missed the connections with others and fell into a bit of a chasm. My wife was very concerned. In contrast, the winter furlough was life changing. I'd got my head straight and threw myself into study, fitness and self-improvement. I lost weight, learnt loads and really grasped the opportunity to grow as a person with online courses and meditation. It also gave me the chance to really think about the future of pub gaming and entertainment. I had a fresh perspective and came out of lockdown excited about the new opportunities.



LEE NEWMAN,
SENIOR GAMING &
ENTERTAINMENT MANAGER,
LOCAL PUBS



GREENE KING
PUB PARTNERS
SARAH BARRON,
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER,
PUB PARTNERS

"The early days were tough for Pub Partners, but Greene King's response was phenomenal"

THE PANDEMIC WAS a whirlwind for me. In early 2020 I was working as a business development manager (BDM) for Pub Partners in the south east region, but I wanted to move back to the north east to be closer to family. So, when pub closures were announced I was packing to move back into my house up north that I'd been renting out. But the people living there had other ideas and refused to leave. In a pandemic, there was nothing I could do. I had to find somewhere to rent temporarily, but was unable to go and view properties. It was so stressful.

Meanwhile my phone was going day and night with calls from anxious tenants. People were in a panic and I was effectively running two areas as my old region didn't have a replacement BDM. I couldn't turn my back on my old pubs, but I also had a duty to my new team, many of whom I'd never met. I took calls at midnight, while stressed about moving and talking to solicitors about my own situation.

INDIVIDUAL APPROACH

In that first week of closures, I had tenants asking: what will you do about my rent? We had some criticism early doors for not offering support quickly enough. But we had to wait for government grants to be announced, and then work out what our rent support would be. Unfortunately, the grant system varied greatly: some pubs got £25,000, some £10,000 and others nothing. We offered everyone an individual financial assessment within the first 12 weeks of lockdown to work out the level of need.

These assessments were an in-depth profit and loss analysis of every single pub. It meant BDMs arranging phone appointments to go through the books together and asking questions like: what does it cost you to run a closed pub for 12 weeks; what commitments do you have; are you eligible for a grant and what do you need from us, in terms of support?

I did more than 80 of these assessments in three weeks and once people knew it was a staged process in accordance with government help, they felt a lot happier.

What people don't always appreciate about working with the leased and tenanted part of the business is that we're landlords, and while BDMs are here to advise, we're dealing with self-employed people running their own businesses. So, every tenant has their own financial situation with different capabilities and skill sets – and it's diverse – I deal with everything from a backstreet boozier to a pub that does really high-quality food. Consequently, I had some difficult conversations, but it helped that I've run pubs and worked in the industry for 25 years, so I understand the pressures and personalities involved.



IN THE FIRST WEEK OF CLOSURES I HAD TENANTS ASKING: WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT MY RENT?

PERSONAL TOUCH

Sadly, my area was very badly affected by Covid-19. Some tenants were unable to reopen in July 2020; they were either very ill with coronavirus or undergoing cancer treatment and shielding or self-isolating. And when the government announced the tier system in November 2020, we experienced very tough restrictions. At that time Greene King moved to offering support in line with what tier a pub was in. Again, we offered up to 90% rent concessions and did this quicker, and for longer, than many of our competitors.

Originally from the north east, Pub Partners **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, SARAH BARRON**, relocated 'home' as the pandemic hit – just in time to help anxious tenants

What also helped were the rapid comms put out by our central commercial manager, Yvonne Fraser. They were phenomenal and kept people fully up to speed with government updates. Yvonne also created a spreadsheet of frequently asked questions which she updated and distributed to BDMs daily, so we could answer questions as they arose. I truly believe that things like that made a huge difference to the way people felt.

We also saw a lot of bonding between tenants. We started Zoom meetings and WhatsApp groups to share knowledge, ask questions and offer support – which was great because many tenants had never met. It was heartwarming to see the rapport grow. When there was a partial reopening of pubs for those with large enough gardens in April 2021 WhatsApp went crazy with good luck messages for those able to open. One partner even travelled a fair distance to go and support another partner who'd taken on her first pub in the midst of a pandemic!

I also felt incredibly supported by both the company and my colleagues and was proud of Greene King's response. So much so that I emailed Nick Mackenzie to tell him and was delighted to get an email back. That tells you everything you need to know about how this business is run. And now I'm finally back in my house and raring to help my region grow. It's great to be home. 🏡

"I was clocking up 500 miles a day, covering almost 2,400 pubs"

I LOVE MY job. I fix and install beer lines and cooling systems for our own pubs and our free trade customers. I usually cover the west of Scotland, from Glasgow to the other side of Fort William, including west coast islands like Mull and Islay. But during the pandemic most of the team was furloughed, so I covered the whole of Scotland by myself. I was clocking up around 500 miles a day, easily.

I've been working for Belhaven, now Greene King, for 17 years and been a techie for 23. We are known as the Quads team – Quality and Dispensing Services. Essentially, we're the ones that keep the pumps in good working order. Our services cover all kinds of pub premises... and the whole spectrum of the business. Up here in Scotland, that's almost 2,400 pubs in total.

So, when we went into lockdown and the team of 10 of us went down to just me here in Scotland, it was a little bit strange. I went from chatting and seeing team members at the depot, to working more or less entirely on my own. Although I'm being 100% honest when I say that even when working alone, I always felt supported.

REMOTE SERVICE

During lockdown times it was an emergency service only. Initially, I was troubleshooting over the phone, covering the whole of the UK, supported by two others tech guys. We had to talk to pub managers and try to verbally guide them through how to sort problems out for themselves. The main issue was my accent – an engineer with a strong Glaswegian accent talking technical stuff to someone in England and telling them what to do was a bit of a challenge. But we got through it.

There were a few very typical problems that I'd encounter time and again. For example, publicans were going in to clean their beer lines and then finding that nothing was coming through. You need to pressurise the gas so that the

cleaning system can push the water through: and if you don't, you can't clean the lines. And then there were issues with reopening pubs because the systems aren't designed to be hibernated for long periods of time. I also saw a lot of electrical faults and problems with thermostats not working.

EVEN WHEN WORKING ALONE,
I AM BEING 100% HONEST WHEN I SAY
I ALWAYS FELT SUPPORTED

Over the first lockdown, I had calls from Penzance, Durham, London... I remember talking to one woman in a pub in Camden about a problem she had with the gas pump that



Lockdown saw the majority of Quads technical service engineers furloughed. But **JACK DICKSON** was one of three 'techies' who continued to work. And he took on the whole of Scotland

works the cleaning system and I told her to go and find a hammer and stand in front of the black gas pump. She said, 'You're not going to ask me to hit it, are you?' and I told her that yes, that was exactly what I was telling her to do. She thought I was a mad Scotsman joking with her and couldn't believe it when she gave it a thwack and it cleared the problem. She burst out laughing.

CAN-DO ATTITUDE

Once lockdown eased in Scotland I hit the road to resume pub visits. I had to organise my own working week as there was no one else to do it. A typical day was: do the store run, where I'd pick up any parts I might need; move on to do a survey at a new premises we'd taken on to see what condition their equipment was in, then drive to a pub 150 miles away. I live just south of Glasgow and know my way about Scotland, which was just as well really. I think the longest day I had was when I to drive four hours each way to a pub in Inverurie, the other side of Aberdeen.

I didn't feel scared about working during the pandemic. The company had some great communications talking us through what we needed to do with PPE, distancing and stuff, which I was thankful for, as I was worried about my elderly parents. I did their shopping for them and I'd have hated to think I was putting them at risk in any way. Realistically I think my wife would have been more at risk working in a supermarket, as I had more control over who I met, where and how.

I'm guessing I was asked to work during the pandemic because I've got a reputation for being someone who'll go anywhere. I had one situation when I'd booked in a job in the Borders, but they'd had eight inches of snow down there, so, I just put the snow chains on and got on with it. The boss man, Jimmy (who's been working here 50 years), has probably got a better word for me, but I guess I'd say I'm fairly flexible. 🐾



JACK DICKSON,
TECHNICAL SERVICE ENGINEER,
SCOTLAND

Step two... customers are allowed to come inside pubs!



While some pubs were able to open their gardens to customers in April 2021, many others were waiting with great anticipation until **MONDAY 17 MAY** when indoor hospitality could properly resume

IT'S TRUE TO say that while there was some relief when pubs were allowed to reopen for outdoor service in April 2021, only around 600 of our managed pubs had gardens large enough to welcome customers in a way that was safe. The majority had to wait until 17 May, when the government's roadmap allowed customers back inside pubs – and Scottish customers could enjoy an alcoholic drink indoors, once again.

The day couldn't come soon enough. The weather had turned unseasonably cold, wet and windy over most of the UK, making al fresco pub visits less appealing than they were the month before. Although restrictions were still in place, it remained a day of positivity for team members and customers, alike. We angled our lens to Scotland and the north west to witness this next key stage...



“ I'M SO EXCITED – I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT FOR A LONG TIME AND I FEEL QUITE EMOTIONAL... I LOVE MY JOB, AND IT'S WONDERFUL TO NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE WEATHER FOR OUR CUSTOMERS ”

JANE POLLITT, WAITRESS,
THE RING O' BELLS (CHEF & BREWER),
DARESBUARY, WARRINGTON



“ I'M ECSTATIC TO HAVE PEOPLE BACK IN THE PUB. IT'S A STEP BACK TO NORMALITY ”

LIAM COOKE, SECOND CHEF,
THE RING O' BELLS (CHEF & BREWER), DARESBUARY, WARRINGTON



“ IT'S BRILLIANT TO HAVE EVERYONE INDOORS AGAIN. IT'S MADE LIFE SO MUCH EASIER – ESPECIALLY WHEN THE RAIN COMES. OUR LOCALS COULDN'T WAIT TO GET BACK INSIDE THE PUB ”

VINI KNEALE, GENERAL MANAGER, FARMHOUSE INNS,
CHAPELFORD FARM, GREAT SANKEY, WARRINGTON



DAVE DAVIES,
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER, METROPOLITAN
PUB COMPANY

"I joined just as the pandemic hit, and helped pivot the business"

I'VE BEEN WORKING in hospitality ever since I got a job collecting glasses in a club at age 16, and I've never stopped, so I was gutted when I was furloughed in March 2020. I'd only joined Metropolitan Pub Company as a business development manager a few months before, and was keen to get working for our London pubs.

Here at Metro, we're part of Greene King, but separate. We use the same systems for things like training and health and safety, but we run alongside the main business. For example, we have our own supply chain and we're small, so can be agile. During lockdown one I was brought out of furlough to work with a team including our head of food development, Ray Corrie, to look at the feasibility of running a takeaway food service. I was of the opinion that it absolutely could be done, and in a few days we had a plan in place.

We realised we could develop the takeaway idea, using closed pubs as pop-up stores selling groceries that were in short supply. We turned 10 pubs into shops in two weeks and it was brilliantly successful – people were popping in for pastries for lunch and a pint to take away, too. My role was a strategic one: I number crunched, analysed and tweaked and it went so well that we extended the idea to other pubs and made £1 million in four weeks. I never imagined when I joined Metro that within a few months I'd be an area manager for 13 shops!

GORGEOUS GARDENS

I was brought out of furlough again in March 2021 when it was announced that we'd be able to open up pubs for outdoor service in April. As a team, we looked at how we could do this safely with Covid restrictions in place. We'd already invested in pub gardens during lockdown – in fact, seven out of 20 of the pubs that were able to open had enjoyed beautiful outdoor makeovers. For example, the Duke of Sussex in Chiswick has a modern Spanish menu so we

created a lush Spanish-themed garden to complement the food. I had some input into the look and feel and was just blown away by how amazing it looked when it opened.



ONE OF GREENE KING'S VALUES IS
THE FREEDOM TO SUCCEED... AND WE
CERTAINLY EMBODIED THAT

Wherever a pub was unable to open due to lack of suitable outside space, we looked at creative ways to make it happen. Not everyone was out of furlough, so we mixed our areas up a bit and I got in my car and travelled to pubs to ask, what do we need to do to get these gardens operational? Sometimes this meant literally shifting plant pots out of the way to fit more tables in to increase the number of covers. Other times it was a case of coming up with cool, quirky fixes, like extra planting, to create a better pub atmosphere.

As a team we came up with some great ideas. For example, the riverside location of The City Barge in Chiswick means the pub is partially submerged at high tide, taking away some

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, DAVE DAVIES, only joined Metropolitan Pub Company weeks before Covid-19 hit, but helped create new opportunities and assisted pubs to achieve their highest ever earnings on reopening

of the outside seating at the front, so we solved this by putting up a marquee out the back. At the Tulse Hill Hotel we created a garden in the car park with a marquee, furniture from closed pubs, fairy lights and plants, and doubled the capacity. At The Crabtree in Fulham we set up an outdoor bar within the grounds, which attracted passers-by. We also got table licences on pavements where we've never had them before, such as The Mitre in Holland Park, and at The Ram in Kingston we took over a large area of a public square.

We had various hurdles to overcome along the way, such as national shortages of marquees, barbecues and gas bottles due to soaring demand. Not a problem for our team: we simply got in our cars and went hunting. We found gas bottles in camping shops, for example.

INCREDIBLE RESULTS

Once we'd done all we could with the space we had, we focused on maximising sales. I set up a bit of fun, good-natured rivalry between myself and another area manager on our team WhatsApp group. There was a lot of banter and geeing the teams on and I told them that they're all fantastic, but Team Dave was going to smash it and beat the other team's sales figures when we reopened. It was all done in a tongue-in-cheek way, but I knew what I was doing; I wanted to instil that sense of competition to motivate everyone.

When 12 April came, I was checking in with pubs at 4pm and 9pm and I couldn't believe the numbers. To be fair I had the biggest and busiest sites, but in that first week of reopening, five of our pubs enjoyed their highest ever sales. By the end of April, we were consistently outperforming industry averages: one pub took £97.1k in a week. I honestly couldn't believe it. One of Greene King's values is the freedom to succeed: I'd say that the Metro team certainly embodied that sentiment during the pandemic. And enjoyed the rewards. 🍀

"Customers were so generous, donating over 250 children's gifts to the Salvation Army, even during lockdown"

When **MICHELLE RICHARDSON** started working front of house at The Bell Inn in Yeovil during the pandemic, she didn't imagine that within weeks she'd be making Christmas happier for underprivileged children

I STARTED WORKING at The Bell Inn in Yeovil in October 2020 after being made redundant due to Covid-19. I had been working as a service co-ordinator for a machinery repair company for 10 years, but there had been very little communication about what was going on while I was on furlough, so the news came as a shock. It was a very worrying time. I'd never been unemployed before and I was concerned about having no money coming in.

My sister-in-law works at The Bell and told me that there was a job going working front of house. It's my local Hungry Horse and we always enjoy meals out with the kids there because it's really family friendly. So, although I didn't have hospitality experience, the pub is really familiar to me. I applied and was so relieved when I got the job and started straightaway. I was a little bit nervous on my first day, but everyone was so lovely. I shadowed another team member to learn the ropes and settled in very quickly.

MONEY WORRIES

In the past I've planned and organised a few parties, weddings and other events and the manager here knew that I enjoyed that kind of thing, so a few days in I was asked if I'd help with fundraiser planning. Of course, with Christmas just seven weeks away thoughts immediately turned to festive fundraising. It occurred to me that having been worried sick about money prior to starting my new job, and scared we'd be having a bleak family Christmas if I didn't find work quickly, that there must be lots of other people in similar situations.

In fact, there were thousands of people facing unemployment and an uncertain Christmas. The news was full of headlines about the increase in poverty and the number of families using food and clothes banks escalating. The amount of people who were really struggling financially was heartbreaking. With potentially so many Christmases massively impacted by the virus we wondered if there were any charities in the area doing a Christmas appeal that we could get involved with.

EVERYONE WAS GOING THROUGH DIFFICULTIES, AND YET THEY STILL FOUND THE TIME, MONEY AND GOOD SPIRIT TO GIVE TO A CHILD THEY'D NEVER MET

FESTIVE FUNDRAISING

We quickly found out that Operation Christmas was being run by the Salvation Army. It was a scheme where you buy a present for a child, deliver it to a drop-off point for collection, and the Salvation Army distribute to kids who'd otherwise go without. It seemed perfect, so we decided to use the pub as a drop-off point and get word out to raise awareness around the appeal.

Just two weeks after I joined, on the 22 October, we put up the biggest Christmas tree we could find – it took over a corner of the pub – you couldn't miss it. We decorated it and wrote gift tags which gave details of the type of present on a child's wish list. We dotted them all over the tree and the idea

was that if you wanted to get involved you took a tag from the tree, bought the gift and then dropped it back into us. It was a busy time, so I was hopeful that if we communicated the event effectively, we'd manage to get a good number of gifts donated for underprivileged families.

SECOND LOCKDOWN

And then we went into the second lockdown on 31 October. We were worried because the appeal had only been going for a few weeks so we plastered the event all over social media, telling people they could still donate gifts via The Bell and if they messaged us on Facebook, we would organise drop offs while the pub was shut. Donations came flooding in. We had over 250 Christmas presents donated in total and when I saw them all it actually gave me goosebumps.

When we reopened in December it took several car journeys to drop the gifts off to the Salvation Army. They were blown away by the generosity of our local community. Donations included everything from baby clothes to hair straighteners for teenagers. It was so humbling because everyone was going through difficulties, and yet they still found the time, money and good spirit to give to a child they'd never met.

A few weeks later we went into the third lockdown, so I didn't actually get to experience working at Christmas at all. But I felt so lucky to be working for Greene King. I'd previously worked for a company that kept everything to themselves and didn't communicate with staff, and Greene King was the opposite. The information that came out to keep team members up to date during uncertain times was amazing – and it made a big, big difference to everyone. 🍷



MICHELLE RICHARDSON
WORKS FRONT OF HOUSE
AT THE BELL INN,
A HUNGRY HORSE IN
YEovil, SOMERSET

"When flour and yeast were in short supply in supermarkets, our pubs stepped in"

I'M NOT VERY good at relaxing, so when pubs closed in March 2020, I wasn't one of those who got into Netflix or reading books. I've worked in kitchens, with food, chefs and suppliers for over 30 years and I'm a do-er, so didn't enjoy not working.

Thankfully, in early April I got a call from my boss, Michael Horan, managing director of Metropolitan Pub Company. We operate 61 pubs across London and are known for our excellent food, so Michael's call was asking for ideas for ways to keep the pubs alive and bring some team members out of furlough.

We talked about offering customers 'make at home' boxes with recipe sheets and all the ingredients you needed to make our classic dishes, like Charter Pie. I thought we could extend this by bringing some of our chefs out of furlough to run a takeaway food service for customers who were fed up with cooking. People were stuck at home and were cooking more than ever: they were going banana bread and sourdough mad, and supermarkets were running out of flour and yeast as everyone was baking their own bread.

I called around my suppliers: they had all the food items that were in such short supply everywhere else, so as well as offering takeaways we thought, why not turn empty pub spaces into food shops and provide a service to local communities? We'd be bringing customers back in, creating a bit of a buzz and giving people a chance to engage with their local pub again. Plus, we could sell draught beer as a takeaway service, as we'd be operating as a shop.



READY TO SHOP

At that time there were no fruit, veg, meat or fish markets operating, so I got on the phone and asked the question: is this feasible? I spoke to suppliers to allay any fears and explained how we would work safely, choosing pubs that were large enough for social distancing and using a small team to manage everything, including putting one-way systems in place with one door for entry and another to exit.

PEOPLE POPPED IN FOR COFFEES, PASTRIES, A TAKEAWAY PIE AND A PINT... BUT ALSO A CHAT

Suppliers thought it was a great idea. We got the green light to go ahead and had literally days to sort out the logistics. We planned it so that pubs offered takeaway food on a rota basis, so that suppliers could fulfil orders and drivers could limit their contact to a handful of pubs each day, rather than driving around them all.

There were other issues, too: the whole country was also going wild for takeaways, because no one could go out. This meant a shortage of containers and boxes – you couldn't get a plastic pint container for love nor money. If they'd wanted to, our suppliers could have hiked the price right up, but they didn't: instead, they found exactly what we needed so we could open in just a few days.

FLYING IN A FORTNIGHT

I wanted the pubs to look like olde worlde food markets with a customer journey that had a sense of flow. Suppliers provided wooden crates and coffee bean sacks so that we

What do you do when the government closes your pubs at short notice? **HEAD OF FOOD DEVELOPMENT** for Metropolitan Pub Company, **RAY CORRIE**, helped turn his pubs into shops...

could display produce in a rustic food hall kind of way. We were ready to open our shop doors in just two weeks... but we had no idea how the pop-up shop-in-a-pub concept would be received.

It went amazingly well. Alongside flour we offered takeaway coffee, charcuterie, premium smoked salmon, wines, ready-mixed cocktails, really great quality fresh produce and pastries to the people of neighbourhoods like Crouch End, Kensal Rise and Fulham. And everything flew off the shelves. I remember people coming in and whispering, 'Got any yeast?' like it was some kind of under-the-counter contraband. But they loved that they could come in for the baking ingredients they couldn't find in the supermarket, then wander home with a takeaway pint, as well.

Our takeaway services were a huge winner, too. People became bored with being stuck at home and creating three meals a day, so they ordered a pub meal online to enjoy at home, instead. Our roast dinners were our biggest sellers – we could have sold those several times over. Demand for all our classic dishes was so great that in the end we signed up to Deliveroo so that customers could get our pub meals delivered to their door.

The shops and takeaway services were so busy that general managers had to control the flow of customers, for safety's sake. People were popping in regularly for everything from a freshly squeezed juice or a takeaway cocktail to a croissant and a good chat. It meant that locals working from home or furloughed were discovering our pubs for the very first time and the atmosphere was fantastic. These ideas really brought the pubs back to being what they should be: a community hub. It was hard work, but I'm really chuffed that the team pulled it off. And I believe we found new customers, too. 🍷





ROB KEITHLEY,
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER,
HUNGRY HORSE

"We raised £1.5 million for Macmillan during the pandemic"

ROB KEITHLEY is a **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER** for the Hungry Horse brand and helped to raise the highest ever amount for Macmillan, despite Covid restrictions being in place

I'M USUALLY A very busy person. Working as a business development manager (BDM) covering Cheshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and some of Shropshire, I cover a lot of miles during a normal working week, so when Covid-19 struck and I was furloughed I really didn't know what to do with myself.

I've been working in the hospitality sector all my working life, and most of that has been in pubs. I'm a people person, and work is a huge part of my life. I'm always happy to go above and beyond and put in extra hours, so I found pub closures tough. I threw myself into volunteering for a charity, cooking and delivery meals to elderly and vulnerable people. It was great to build relationships within my own local community.

**I'M UNOFFICIALLY KNOWN AS THE
'MACMILLAN TASK FORCE COMMANDER'**

CHARITY STRUGGLES

Part of my job is helping general managers to look at entertainment and events options. This was really difficult during a pandemic with Covid restrictions in place. Sport stopped, live music wasn't allowed and our main charity events for Macmillan May couldn't go ahead because of lockdown.

Macmillan, our national charity partner, is a cause close to my heart because both my parents died from cancer. In fact, I'm unofficially known as 'Macmillan Task Force Commander' because I co-ordinate a lot of the fundraising events. Charities were really suffering from lack of fundraising due to Covid, and Macmillan was pretty desperate, but the question was, what could we do to help?

I came up with some ideas, but we were nervous: would people put money in a bucket if everyone was avoiding

handling cash during the pandemic? Would customers donate if they were worried about their incomes? How could we even run events with restrictions in place?

GET APPY

Technology came to the rescue. We trialled Rock And Roll Bingo™ – a really fun music quiz with bursts of music instead of numbers being called. It's all done via an app, and we tested it out with our own teams. I promoted it on our Kingdom app and we offered great prizes, like big TVs, to encourage people to get behind it. It went well: there was a lot of energy and excitement, and that helped pub teams to sell the idea on to customers.

We ran it on a Saturday night in September. At that point pubs were really quiet, so I was anxious. I popped along to one of our pubs to see how it was going down, and it was brilliant; socially distanced of course, with only six allowed per table, but the atmosphere was great. We had a really good night and raised about £9,000.

FUN AND GAMES

During the third winter lockdown when pubs were all shut, I tried a new online quiz event. I'm not a huge quizzier myself, but joined in with one and really enjoyed it. The organisers were in a studio managing everything remotely via screens so they could view participants. If they saw people enjoying themselves they shone a spotlight on them for everyone to see. It was a bit like the TV show Gogglebox, and it created a really good, high energy community atmosphere.

I decided it would be good fun for our team members to try. So, I ran a trial session with managers and teams from across Hungry Horse, and it was a great success. I knew then that we were onto something.



Next we decided to do a Macmillan event and advertised it on Kingdom. We had over 200 Greene King employees join us for the first event, including many of the executive board members. Of course, the spotlight fell on our CEO, Nick Mackenzie, who seemed to be really getting into it! Some people dressed up in Macmillan green and there were banners and balloons... it was absolutely fantastic.

We raised £23,000 and so I decided to take the quiz to customers via a Facebook event. It was wild. The event went on until 1am and became a bit like a party towards the end – people were going crazy. It was clear that with pubs closed, the public were desperate to enjoy themselves, somehow.

Alongside my efforts, team members threw themselves into other fundraising ideas. Everyone's been touched by cancer in some way, so we've had a lot of walks, runs and cycling challenges. I think fundraising when furloughed gave people focus, so it worked both ways.

Greene King raised over £1.1 million for Macmillan during September and October 2020 and £1.5 million overall. That's the highest figure we've ever achieved for a fundraising campaign in nine years of supporting them, and I'm absolutely blown away by it. To have been able to help people have a good time during a time of worry and uncertainty, while doing good for a great charity, was just amazing.

"I took on a new pub in the middle of the pandemic and smashed my targets"

TARA WEARING is **GENERAL MANAGER** of The Cherry Tree in Newcastle-under-Lyme. By using social media and harnessing her passion for the job, she exceeded all sales expectations when pubs reopened

I GREW UP in pubs, because my mum always ran them. I worked in a Greene King pub while at college studying sports science and drama and got made a team manager at 18. I realised I wanted to make a career in this industry, so didn't finish my college course and was assistant manager here at The Cherry Tree before I got my own pub in Crewe, nine months later. So, I was in my first role as a general manager (GM) when Covid-19 struck.

In February 2020 I was on a team ski trip in France with other GMs when we heard that someone on the complex had the virus. We'd all heard about coronavirus but just thought it was something in China. I was only 22 at the time, but certainly wasn't the only one who was naïve enough to think it wouldn't affect the UK. Little did we know that pubs would be completely shut a few weeks later.

STRANGE TIMES

I got back from skiing and noticed customer numbers were really down. It was extremely quiet and the pub was so empty, it felt eerie. The night the Prime Minister said pubs must close I had a handful of regulars in. I was pouring a Carling and had the TVs on listening to the briefing and suddenly all eyes were on me. I was bombarded with questions. I even had regulars ringing to ask me what was going on. Within 20 minutes the pub was full. I'll never forget it – it was a crazy, crazy night.

My business development manager came in and took management calls from my office while I took control of the pub. Luckily, I managed to get everyone to



leave without any hassle. The actual closing down was very, very efficient but I did find the following weeks tough. I hadn't even been a GM for a year and was living alone. Support from other GMs in the area got me through, though. I found staying active with exercise like running really helped, too.

FLYING START

My goal was always to come back to The Cherry Tree. I grew up around here, so this is my local. It's close to family and friends, and feels like home. I returned as GM in July 2020, just before the Eat Out To Help Out government scheme was launched, and it was all systems go.

I was nervous. It's a big pub, with a big team – but I was also really excited; I definitely felt ready for it. Taking over during a pandemic was odd. Team members were looking to me for answers, rules were changing a lot, and I was working with Covid restrictions in place. I was always super aware of being Pub Safe because a pub down the road (not a Greene King pub) was closed down for not following rules.

But we did record sales in my first week. In August 2020 we continued to consistently beat previous sales figures. And that's with all the rules of six people to a table only, no customers allowed at the bar, table service, masks on when you moved... so many restrictions on behaviour.

OUTDOOR INVESTMENT

We had to close again in November 2020 and at that time were lucky enough to receive some investment in the pub garden. It's a huge garden, that's well-known in the area, and it



had quite a makeover. New landscaping, three new huts, new lighting... it effectively improved the number of covers I could have outside to 250, which is more than I can seat inside.

I POSTED A PIC OF MY TEAM IN THE PUB GARDEN ON FACEBOOK... IT GOT 10,000 VIEWS

So when we re-opened in April 2021 I was so ready for it. I posted a pic of the team in the garden on Facebook and it was our most viewed post ever – around 10,000 people saw it. Previously, the most this pub had earned in a week was £36,000; in that first week we took £43,000, and that was with outdoor seating only.

What we weren't ready for was a move from serving 55% as drinks, versus 45% food, to 88% drinks. After four months of lockdown, people were very ready to sit in a pub garden and enjoy a drink. We were fully booked, to the point that I was receiving personal messages from friends begging me to squeeze them in.

It's been an amazing experience and I'm so grateful to Greene King for trusting me, giving me these opportunities and investing in me. They gave me my first pub at 20 and I cannot fault the support I've received along the way. I've seen the way they handled the pandemic and it fills me with pride that I'm part of this incredible team. It just makes me want to work even harder.

TARA WEARING,
GENERAL MANAGER
OF THE CHERRY TREE IN
NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME



"We set up an award-winning free food delivery service that brought the town together"

All across the UK, our pubs provided support to their communities during the pandemic. At The Fountain in Aberfeldy, licensee **GAVIN PRICE'S** efforts saw him win awards, including an MBE

I HAVE THREE pubs here in beautiful Aberfeldy in Highland Perthshire; one at either end of the town, and The Fountain Bar & Restaurant, which is right in the centre. I'm also a professional football manager for Scottish League 2 team, Elgin City FC, so the first sign that Covid-19 was going to affect us was when football stopped the week before the first lockdown was announced. I could see the pubs were going to shut, so we cooked up the food sitting in our fridges and delivered meals to 10 elderly residents the day before the official announcement.

We're in a very rural area – the nearest city is Perth, 35 miles away – and there were people in Aberfeldy and surrounding villages who were already self-isolating back in March 2020. And people are isolated enough here as it is, so I was worried how those in older households would cope. Myself and one of my managers, Julie, felt that providing meals to the vulnerable over 70s here was essential. And that's how Feldy-Roo was born (the name was Julie's spin on Aberfeldy Deliveroo).

FROM PUB TO HUB

When we first delivered meals we were filmed doing it and the video went online. The next day we delivered to 20 homes. The day after it was 40. By the end of the week it was 100. We had flyers printed and local schoolkids delivered them for us. We also posted on social media and had messages back from people living miles away asking if we could add their mum and dad to our delivery list because they couldn't visit due to the travel ban and were worried about how their elderly parents were going to eat.

Feldy-Roo took on a life of its own. We had donations of toilet rolls, sanitiser, PPE, baby wipes, jigsaws, puzzle books...

you name it. The Fountain went from being a pub to a hub: it looked like a warehouse. The generosity was staggering and in a few weeks we had a full-blown delivery service up and running thanks to the many volunteers who came forward to help us. We got branded hoodies and t-shirts made so we could properly form a team and ensure our volunteers were instantly recognisable to the folk receiving the meals. And quite quickly we realised we couldn't do this alone; we needed to get other businesses involved.

FELDY-ROO WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT RENT SUPPORT. WE WOULD HAVE GONE UNDER WITHOUT IT

TWO MEALS A DAY

We planned and co-ordinated everything from here and eventually had a network of about 140 volunteers helping with the cooking, packaging and delivery of hot meals around Highland Perthshire. It was amazing how everyone in the town, including local businesses, came together. Our chefs cooked meals like fish and chips and steak pies four nights a week while the Indian restaurant did curries on a Monday and other restaurants did fantastic roasts and other dishes. The local Co-op donated free desserts and cafes and food businesses provided lunch, or the funds to provide a free newspaper and cake.

At Feldy-Roo's peak we delivered two meals a day to 250 homes across a 30-mile radius. As restrictions dragged on, we needed proper funding to keep going. We put a separate

committee in charge of fundraising, and again, local businesses stepped up. We were also lucky to receive substantial grants from SSE Renewables, The National Lottery and local funding bodies, which alongside our own imaginative fundraising efforts, brought in over £200,000 in total. But also crucial was the rent support we received from Greene King: we got 90% discount after the first 12 weeks of lockdown and that carried on throughout the pandemic. It was a real lifeline: we would've gone under, I think, if it hadn't been for that support and we wouldn't have been able to keep providing that vital service for our community.

COMMUNITY AT WORK

By spring 2021, we'd planned, cooked, packed and delivered over 50,000 meals. And while Feldy-Roo was brilliant for our vulnerable residents, we all benefited, because the camaraderie was fantastic and we had some really good laughs along the way. I hate to admit it but before the pandemic I'd probably have passed other business owners in the street, but thanks to Feldy-Roo, we now know we can work well together.

It was great to be recognised with things like the Great British Pub Awards and Greene King's Pub Hero of the Year and be given an MBE (which I'm embarrassed about, if honest), but Feldy-Roo wasn't about prizes and pats on the back; it was about doing our best for our community. We used the award money to pay for the town's historic drinking fountain to be renovated, so everyone here can benefit. It'll be a nice reminder of how we all came together during a difficult time.



"I've always wanted to be a GM
- a pandemic wasn't going to stop me"



WENDY OMOLLO was homeless when she applied for a bar job with Greene King back in 2015. Her positivity and resilience saw her move on to the apprenticeship scheme and excel. And the same attitude got her a promotion to **GENERAL MANAGER** during lockdown

I STARTED WORKING for Greene King when I was 24, homeless, and at rock bottom. They've given me a career, a home and so much happiness. They're like my family. My real family live overseas, so when I was made redundant from my job as a photographer's assistant in 2015 and couldn't afford to pay my rent, I had no one to turn to. I slept rough for a few days and then moved to a YMCA hostel.

My career started by accident. I was walking down the road one day and saw a job ad in the window of the Duke of York pub in Surbiton. I had nothing to lose by applying – I'd been applying for jobs non-stop, without success. I spoke to the manager, Alex Wells, and told him I'd never pulled a pint before but had lots of customer service experience from working while at college and was keen to learn. I was willing to give anything a go, and he took me on. Being given a chance by someone is a beautiful thing.

DREAM JOB

I'm a positive, jack-of-all-trades type of chatty person who loves people and telling and hearing stories. The job suited me down to the ground. As soon as I'd learnt the ropes, I wanted to learn more, so I went on the apprenticeship programme. It was mind blowing: the training is so intensive and the investment in you is great... you're given the tools and opportunities and the rest is up to you. I've always been very up front about my ambitions. When a visiting area manager asked me where I saw myself going, I told her I wanted her job. I realised later that I was actually talking to our managing director, but I stand by my statement!



I'M EXCITED AND HAPPY ABOUT
EVERYTHING. WE'VE COME THROUGH SO
MUCH LOSS, PAIN AND STRIFE, THINGS
CAN ONLY GET BETTER

I worked as a trainee assistant manager with Alex for a while before moving to other pubs in central London and the City. I was assistant manager of The Railway Tavern in Liverpool Street when the pandemic started affecting us. For weeks before pubs were told to close London was becoming like a ghost town. The night of the official announcement I felt like I was in a disaster movie. The streets were eerily quiet and the mood very sombre. I closed up that pub with such a strange feeling. There were people I didn't know if I'd see again.

LONDON LOVE

I lived at The Railway Tavern during lockdown, and although everywhere was so, so quiet, I didn't let it get me down. I knew I could handle anything and that things would get better, eventually. I did creative things like painting and spent a lot of time walking around a very empty London. In fact, I fell in love with London all over again – with the crowds all gone, I discovered parts I never knew. I also used the time to focus on my future. I was determined to manage my own pub, so continued to apply for general manager roles in lockdown.

Even though it was an uncertain time, I felt very reassured that Greene King was handling things well – there was no gap in the communications – it was seamless. Compared to friends working for other pub companies, I felt very blessed. I just tried to be positive, staying in touch with the wider team via Zoom chats and watching movies together to try to keep everyone's spirits up. At times it was difficult. I lost my grandmother to Covid-19 in March 2021, and she was in Kenya, so it was hard to process. But we'd come through so much loss, pain and strife, things could only get better, I truly believed that.

I applied for the role of general manager of The Rose & Crown in Mayfair in April 2021 and couldn't believe it when I heard I'd got it. I was on a rollercoaster of emotions – petrified and excited in equal measure. The pub had been closed for a long time and I had to recruit a new team while numbers of Covid cases were beginning to rise again in early summer, which wasn't easy. Interviewing online, or face to face, but wearing masks, wasn't ideal, but I got on with it. Pandemic conditions were not ideal either, with no garden, limited table capacity and no vertical drinking – but finally, my dream future was happening, and I wasn't going to let Covid-19 hold me back.

Whenever I'm asked about Greene King I'm always afraid that I'm going to come across too gushy. I owe them so much that I literally don't have a negative word to say. And the pandemic hasn't changed that; it's strengthened my love for the company, this industry and London, itself. 🍷

WENDY OMOLLO,
GENERAL MANAGER OF THE
ROSE & CROWN IN MAYFAIR,
A PREMIUM, URBAN AND VENTURE PUB



"We were hugely impacted, but I can't argue with the level of support"

Pub Partner, **ROBIN DAVIDSON**, co-owns 18 pubs, four of which are with Greene King. He says the help he received during the pandemic was impressive

I'VE BEEN A leasing tenant for over 25 years and during that time I've had more than 40 pubs. Now I'm a co-director of 18 sites, mainly in the South Birmingham area and we work with a few pub companies, Greene King being one of them.

Greene King has been very good to work with right from the beginning. We kind of inherited the relationship because of the Spirit acquisition and started with three pubs, but we took another one on. Pre-Covid each pub had received significant investment from both Greene King and us to turn them around from not being particularly good trading outlets, to pubs trading very healthily.

But of course, we were hugely impacted during the pandemic. In spring 2020 it was very worrying and there were times when we thought we wouldn't be able to survive. We received government grants for some of our pubs, but not all.

LARGE MEASURES

At the start things were looking bad, what with the food and stock disposed of or donated when we mothballed our pubs, plus electricity, gas, water, insurance and fixed loans to pay and no revenue coming in. We usually pay our own wages

from pub profits, and of course we didn't have any. So, when Greene King announced that we were to receive a 90% rent discount early on in the crisis, it was a huge relief.

Greene King also introduced other financial measures that were really significant for us. For example, when we reopened in July 2020, we received a discount on our beer. In the first month of reopening, we received an additional discount per barrel and continued to enjoy discounted barrelage in the following months, too. This meant we were able to settle our Covid-related debts – which was a huge boost to us.

WE WERE ABLE TO KEEP OUR HEADS ABOVE WATER AND CAME OUT OF THE PANDEMIC WITHOUT TOO MUCH OF A BLOODY NOSE

There was help on a practical level, too. I deal with a few other pub companies who sent templates for Covid-safe posters for us to download and print. But Greene King sent packs of ready-printed posters and floor stickers that we could use immediately to help keep customers socially distanced and staff safe. The level of support was faultless. Greene King sent PPE packs with hand sanitiser, gloves and face masks, too.

SCOTCH EGG-GATE

During the first lockdown there were certain pubs that we couldn't see surviving. But having gone through that first



reopening period, and seeing the trade that was there, it gave us a lot of confidence to carry on. And with Greene King's support, my relationship with my regional manager and government help, we were able to keep our heads above water and see a way out of the pandemic without too much of a bloody nose.

But as 2020 progressed it was difficult to keep up with all the complex and changing regulations. Much of it was nonsense, and so very little of it based on science. You could only drink in a pub when you had a substantial meal – and did that, or did it not, mean a scotch egg?

Curfews meant pubs were all emptying out at the same time, creating bottlenecks in town centres. And the idea that a pub is a hotbed of infection, but only when people were drinking alcohol, was just naïve. So, you could sit in a pub all day drinking coffee or Coke, but you can't nip in for a quick pint? And the tiers system was mind boggling.

OLD-SCHOOL APPEAL

We came out of the pandemic thinking that perhaps our traditional way of planning our business had gone out of the window. People used to come to the pub for karaoke evenings or quiz nights, but when we initially reopened in 2021, there was none of that. It wasn't allowed. And yet, still the people came. And they came, not for entertainment, but to be with other people. So, I was left wondering if the public really want the pub to be just more of a traditional meeting place once again, without the Sky Sports and a disco night? I guess we'll have to wait and see.

Greene King's pandemic, at a glance

The COVID-19 VIRUS threw us some curveballs which meant we had to work differently during 2020 and 2021. But by working together we achieved great things. Here are just some of the facts and stats...



CHEERS FOR CHARITY

£1.5 million

At £1.5 million we raised the **HIGHEST EVER AMOUNT** for our charity partner Macmillan, with **£1.1 MILLION RAISED IN JUST TWO MONTHS**. The charity estimated it lost up to 50% of its revenue during the pandemic



HELP FOR EMPLOYEES

4,000

The number of team members helped by our **SUPPORT FUNDS** hit 4,000. Initially set up a few weeks after pub closures were announced and relaunched in subsequent lockdowns, Support Fund pots **TOTALLED**



£1.1 million

and were partly funded by executive board and the leadership team taking salary cuts

DRAYMEN HIT THE ROAD

217,000 MILES

DRAYMEN travelled from Falmouth in Cornwall to Wick in the north of Scotland, **RETRIEVING** approximately **120,000 FIRKINS** of unused beer. On average they covered **150 MILES** per route **PER DAY**



BEER TO GO

The **ONLINE BEER SHOP** was **BUSY** as customers were forced to stay home. During lockdown one, year-on-year **ONLINE BEER SALES** were **UP** by

2,188%



TENANT SUPPORT

90% OFF PUB RENTS

Tied **TENANTS RECEIVED HELP** while pubs were closed, receiving up to **90% DISCOUNT** on their **RENT** to **HELP** their businesses **SURVIVE**



FIVE STEPS TO SAFETY

To keep our **TEAMS AND CUSTOMERS SAFE**, we launched **5 PUB SAFE PROMISES**. They were well received – a **SURVEY TAKEN** shortly after Pub Safe launched showed 98% of **CUSTOMERS AGREED** they'd be comfortable **RETURNING AGAIN** in the future

98% CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE



Last word

From quizzes and film nights to group chats and fundraisers, we connected online... and discovered some amazing talent

One of the hardest aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic was the loneliness and isolation so many felt due to pub closures and furlough. Thankfully, tech helped, as we headed online to stay connected.

In May 2021, we held a virtual Greene King Talent Awards, which revealed the wonderful words of process improvement analyst, Lloyd Scarsbrook (pictured, below). Lloyd used poetry to sum up so beautifully what many of us felt as we headed out of lockdown three.



UNLEASHED

by Lloyd Scarsbrook

*Soon we'll be back to a version of normal
Teams on screens still seems so informal
Working from home started lacking appeal
Give me 3D faces, fleshly and real*

*Our final online meeting ends
Ta-ra my pixelated friends
Goodbye table, so long chair
My office dining room lies bare*

*'Cos soon we'll be back, taking no pleasure
From being ladies and gents of leisure
Dust off the costume and on with the show
Forgetting we know the word 'furlough'*

*At Sunrise House a new day is risen
And Abbot's unleashed from its perspex prison
Face to face, we'll embrace in the space
Wearing more than pyjamas below the waist*

*Soon we'll be back with wide open doors
From each empty venue happiness pours
Ring the first orders bell with all your might
So let's get 'em in – and make mine a pint!*



Cheers!