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**TODAY**

Vienna Boys' Choir caught up in sex...  
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From The Times

March 20, 2010

## Volunteers running the local pub? Pull the other one ...

**This new Government scheme really takes the pork scratching**

Clive Aslet

10 COMMENTS | [RECOMMEND? \(9\)](#)

Things must be desperate: the Government is trying the old warm-beer-and- maiden-ladies-bicycling-to-matins routine. It is making a bid for that piece of the village green that is forever England (or Britain, if you must): the pub.

Having noticed that rural pubs are closing in droves, the Government has rallied round, offering to match funds raised by local people to support efforts to run such places themselves as community enterprises. Picture Gordon Brown, pint mug in hand, swapping wit and wisdom with the village elders, while the horse brasses twinkle in the firelight.

There is a tiny irony in this. Not only might it be argued that the Government itself has precipitated the closure of many pubs by making it illegal to smoke in them — a blow to the traditional boozer, where sons of toil would spend all evening, perhaps several nights a week. Without this trade, licensees have only been able to survive by reinventing their establishments as gastro pubs, serving meals at prices that few locals could afford. I shouldn't worry; I don't smoke. I like the fact you can get a decent meal on your travels. But now the Government is considering making it impossible to get into a car if you've had so much as a single pint of bitter. That means they'll lose my custom too.

But what really takes the pork scratching is the attitude to volunteering. Volunteers, and plenty of them, will be needed to run the new community-owned pubs. Hurrah for village spirit! But this is the very Government that has, for 13 years, been making it increasingly unattractive for ordinary people to step forward. Ministers can't help it, bless them; it's in their blood. The last bastion of socialism is the welfare state. Labour politicians have no interest in encouraging warm-hearted, unpaid members of the community to perform roles that might otherwise go to its professional client base. They prefer university degrees to caring hearts. A friend of mine used to take her dog into a hospital to be patted therapeutically by the infirm and elderly; she is wondering if it is worth getting the CRB check that she now requires, because her visits involve contact with vulnerable people.

**BACKGROUND**

'Don't ban children from drinking at home'  
 Minimum alcohol pricing plan setback  
 McLeish calls for Labour to back SNP alcohol plan  
 Labour close to deal on alcohol pricing

Nowhere is the death of volunteering more apparent than in the countryside. Traditionally, rural communities have been full of people who help out. They give each other lifts to town, tend each other's animals, weed the churchyard, put on pantomimes, organise charity events. But the will to do so is giving way. Run a village hall? You would have more fun sitting in the stocks while someone shovelled silage

on your head. It's the bureaucracy: health and safety certification, insurance, drinks' licences, the inflexible requirements of disabled access, the notion that a converted Nissen hut needs the same level of regulation as the Ritz .

**TIMES RECOMMENDS**

The Church is not trying to cover anything up  
 On the Führer channel: baddie gets just deserts  
 Fish deserve as much protection as rhinos and tigers

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If you still feel you've got the time, think of all the form-filling for grants — or Harriet Harman's Equality Bill, now going through Parliament. No doubt, when it comes into force, the village hall committee will have to include a quorum of travellers, Muslims and transsexuals, or be able to prove, with documentary evidence, that the participation of minorities has been sought.

Not surprisingly, fewer village folk feel they want to shoulder such burdens. The kind of people who would once happily stage charitable events in their gardens now think it's not worth the hassle of insurance. The other day I visited a pond in Sussex, once home to a fearsome dragon. The owners don't open the site up for picnics as they used to in case somebody falls in.

Don't think I'm looking the Government's gift horse in the mouth. I'm all for community-owned pubs. There is nowhere I would rather be than the Dykes End, at Reach, in Cambridgeshire — unless it were the Old Crown at Hesket Newmarket, in Cumbria (it has a community-owned brewery attached). But the small amount of dosh being offered, just before an election, does not compensate for the unnecessary fardels beneath which rural life grunts and sweats. Make a manifesto promise, someone, to get rid of these burdens. It would cost the Exchequer zero.

Clive Aslet is editor at large of Country Life



### Griffin: One benefit of immigration... Curry?

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#### YOUR COMMENTS

10 Comments (Displaying 1-10)

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#### andrew kelly wrote:

A fine article which serves to demonstrate one thing in particular: the mediocrity and incompetence of the politicians that come in on one policy and go out on another one - that their policies, which they are so desperate to turn into laws, are short-sighted, ill-conceived, badly legislated for and achieve precisely the opposite of their intention - plus, most are almost impossible to enforce effectively. And it seems there's no one left in the Civil Service to actually stand up and say "NO, minister!".

Smokers, fox-hunters, morris-men (or in Hatty's brave new world, Morris-persons) - the list is endless. I'm surprised (but delighted) that dart playing is still legal given that they are lethal weapons and invoke glory days of Agincourt and Crecy! There is no finer place on earth than a traditional English pub (be it in London or in the country) and they have been destroyed - and with them a hallmark of ENGLISH society and culture. But then nu-Labour is run by a bunch of Scots who'd have problems getting a job in any council north of the border, let alone being put in charge of anything. Sadly I don't suppose the Tories will do very much to alter the decline.

March 20, 2010 11:33 PM GMT

[RECOMMEND?](#) (4)

#### john wheeler wrote:

Brown is a real comedian-having been a serial community destroyer with the closure of post offices and the myriad new rules impacting every human endeavour ,having taxed the working mans pint relentlessly and kicked the smokers into the street he now thinks that he can gain some backing through this glib,transparent piece of hypocrisy.Brown is now so desperate to stay in power he will do anything to buy his ticket to continue his destruction of this country and its culture.

March 20, 2010 7:02 PM GMT

[RECOMMEND?](#) (18)

#### A Williams wrote:

I thought we already had Labour run pubs - called working mens clubs. Those that are left now seem to be populated by NON-working men and, for that matter,women.

March 20, 2010 8:57 AM GMT

[RECOMMEND?](#) (32)

#### anna polky wrote:

Where ARE all these volunteers? I run (as a volunteer) a community service under the Age Concern banner, in a small country town; we have had to curtail 50% of our activities because we just can't get people to help.

Either they are still working, or they are looking for work (with the DWP on their heels), or they are looking after their grandchildren full-tim so their children can both work, or they are taking their savings and thankfully emigrating to milder climes.

I think that he Government is fixated on the 1950s and imagines there's still a pool of under/unemployed grannies and middleaged

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ladies-who-lunch who are just crying out to do some do-goodery to fill their empty days. There ain't.

March 20, 2010 8:30 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (36)

**Jack Reacher wrote:**

Can these pubs also offer 24 hour gambling?

The really big ones could then become 'super casinos' which I believe was another idiotic idea of this dreadful government a few years ago.

The madness goes on....

March 20, 2010 5:02 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (39)

**Chris Brooks wrote:**

Of course Pubs could be saved. Most Pubs come equipped with a Saloon Bar and a Public Bar. Use one or the other as a "Smoking bar" and the problem is solved.

Just ensure there are smoke suction vents installed, please.

As far as the nulabour Community pubs are concerned - forget it. NuLabour never does anything without an agenda and spying on the general public is often at the top of any. There will be plenty of 'jobsworths' & part-time police wannabes available for recruitment into these treasonable tasks, so be very aware.

March 20, 2010 4:37 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (52)

**Steve Lee wrote:**

Pubs are the one place where it's still possible for white Englishmen to discuss the issues of the day without looking over their shoulder for the PC police - this is the reason NuLav have done everything in their power to destroy the pub.

March 20, 2010 3:59 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (66)

**Anthony Lester wrote:**

Pubs were a part of the community.

This Government introduces measures to improve public health by curbing 'passive' smoking.

This Government introduces draconian tax measures to curb the scourge of 'binge' drinking.

All measures were opposed by those not blinded by vested interests or ideological zeal.

They were ignored at best, smeared at worst.

Smokers stay at home where it is much cheaper and the binge drinkers still run riot.

Pubs close down due to being uneconomical to run

Government pledges taxpayers money that doesn't exist for volunteers to run said uneconomical pubs.

Stupid people vote for Government.

Its enough to make you cry

March 20, 2010 2:37 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (80)

**Nick dOE wrote:**

It's a shame really. The pubs are one of the most unique and wonderful aspects of Britain. I wish you well in figuring a way to save them.

March 20, 2010 12:56 AM GMT

RECOMMEND? (28)

**Tim Locke wrote:**

If you REALLY want country pubs to survive then:

Allow smoking again in at least one of the bars.

Give up on the idea of lowering the drink drive limit to 50 ml in fact raise it to 100.

Keep children out from the bars, only in the garden or the resto...if there is one.

Getting rid of a million other regulations would probably do no harm either.

March 19, 2010 11:27 PM GMT

RECOMMEND? (72)

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