

VENUE

Three cheers for new virtual beer festival!

This year's Hitchin Beer & Cider Festival went down well... online!

Every year since 2013, the North Hertfordshire branch of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) has held a festival in collaboration with Hitchin Round Table and Hitchin Rugby Club, hosted at the latter's grounds in a marquee.

That clearly wasn't possible this summer. That might have been the end of it, until, at their May 20 virtual committee meeting held over Zoom, and the first since lockdown, one bright spark suggested they do 'something' to mark the occasion, like share old festival photos. Within eight days, a cross-media, online campaign was launched, so regular festival-goers could still enjoy some of the usual experiences, albeit at home indoors or in their gardens, plus a new twist – quizzing!

The 'festival' was run over

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Instagram, Facebook and CAMRA North Herts' own website.

The campaign was the brainchild of Elia Vallejo, a Hitchin resident and frequent CAMRA festival volunteer.

She suggested, rather than just photos, why not celebrate with a range of online activities? Elia suggested six topics and they formed the basis of what the virtual festival became.

From May 28, when it was announced on Facebook, Instagram and the website, real ale and cider could be ordered from the festival's 14 partners.

From 5pm on Thursday, June 4 – the intended opening time of the physical festival – spot quizzes were held, sponsored by the pub



Bryan Bird, CAMRA North Hertfordshire pubs officer, quiz runner-up Sophie Kelmore, overall quiz winner Ian Albert, Jamie Meek, who came third, and Dean Barrett, publicity officer, outside the Garden City Brewery
Picture: JAMIE MEEK PHOTOGRAPHY

and brewery partners, for beer and cider related prizes.

CAMRA North Herts also ran a quiz throughout until midnight on the Saturday, awarding prizes to the top three players.

Such was the response, the organisers never even got to count the number of quiz entries, as there were over 20,000 'visitors' across the three media platforms.

"We were astonished," said Jon Kirby, organiser of the regular

festival. "Our best live festival to date, in 2017, saw 3,425 enter our marquee. We were hoping we'd get to some of those online! We're so grateful to our partners for their support and the public in turn for supporting them and us."

The overall winner of the CAMRA quiz, earning a year's free CAMRA subscription, was North Herts councillor Ian Albert.

Letchworth resident Jamie Meek won two prizes. On the

Friday he scooped eight pints from The Orange Tree, Baldock, by correctly answering their trivia question, and then came third in the overall competition, and chose to spend his winnings at the Garden City Brewery.

For details of the festival partners' offerings and links to their websites and social media, go to <https://northherts.camra.org.uk/dont-miss-out/>

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