

# THE SELECTION CRITERIA FOR CAMRA'S NATIONAL INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PUB INTERIORS

## 1. THE MISSION

The *National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors* is at the heart of CAMRA's mission to catalogue and gain heightened recognition for what survives of the country's dwindling pub heritage. Its total focus is on the **internal physical fabric** of pubs and what is **authentically old** inside them. Pubs which qualify for its listings are all of special national importance in terms of their intactness of historic layout and retention of old fittings, or, where there has been alteration, the survival of especially notable or rare individual rooms or features. Entries are graded at one of three levels of importance, providing a structured statement of what are considered to be the nation's highest priorities for pub preservation.

## 2. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

### 2.1 The defining elements

The emphasis is on internal elements that reflect a premises' historic function **as a pub**. These would include a floor-plan with as-built room divisions and décor specifically designed for a public house setting, often in ceramics, plaster and decorative glass; also fittings, such as counter, bar-back, fitted seating and other joinery, of which bar-fittings and other elements of the "theatre" around the serving area are especially important. Many pubs, of course, are adaptations of older buildings whose earlier (often residential) usage may sometimes have left its own distinctive legacy – in features like old fireplaces, panelling or historic plasterwork for instance – but our over-riding focus is resolutely on items of specific pub interest. The criteria also extend to what are unarguably 'pub-type' rooms in other kinds of licensed establishment such as hotel bars and railway station refreshment rooms (where public access is freely available).

### 2.2 Age

Interiors are eligible for consideration if their layout, or other historically significant elements of their internal fabric or décor, have remained essentially unaltered for at least half a century. These may be entirely original (ie as created when the pub was built) or be the result of refurbishment or alteration work done more than 50 or so years ago. However, even where no changes have taken place in the last fifty years, great caution is exercised in the assessment of pubs built or significantly altered during the tidal wave of modernising activity which took hold in the mid C20, particularly after 1960, and which engendered much work of very modest quality as well as widespread opening-up of formerly compartmented old interiors. In other words, being unchanged for 50 years will not of itself be sufficient to ensure a high ranking.

### 2.3 Rarity

All the interiors in our listings are, by definition, rare. So enormous has been the depletion of this heritage that they constitute only some 2% of all the UK's pubs.



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There are significant variations between them, however. Certain historic pub types, for instance, survive in such small numbers that they automatically command special attention - prime examples being rural 'timewarp' pubs (some unchanged for generations), pubs of Art Deco design (which were never built in large numbers), or completely-unaltered 'housing estate' pubs from the middle years of the Twentieth Century. Yet the concept of Rarity underlies every single one of our selections, be it of whole pub interiors or, where there has been alteration, of any especially notable internal parts or features that still survive

## 2.4 Intactness

The crucial yardsticks here are the extent to which historically significant layouts and internal divisions may have survived unaltered as well as the extent to which fittings and décor of proven historic provenance have been preserved in situ. Pubs qualifying for top ranking will generally exhibit a good level of retention in both respects and, critically, considerations of a pub's type or sophistication have no bearing here; a basic old rural alehouse, originally fitted out by the local joiner, is no less eligible than a lavish late-Victorian palace pub with its original high-class joinery, brass-work and glazing. Where a pub's layout has undergone modern enlargement - into a building extension or into rooms formerly used for other purposes - this does not necessarily count against it if done sympathetically and with minimum effect on the historic integrity of the old interior. Equally, realistic tolerance is exercised towards common evolutionary changes like the amalgamation of redundant off-sales spaces into other rooms, while careful modifications to bar-joinery (eg to answer modern needs for refrigerated cabinets) are not weighted too heavily as detrimental factors.

## 2.5 Notable Parts and Features

Pubs that are altered to an extent which would not meet the Intactness criteria may nonetheless retain rooms or features that are themselves of national historic significance. Some surviving elements of historic layout, like an intact off-sales department, a snug formed of settles, a walk-through servery, or an absence of counter service, are now of such rarity that they will elevate a pub's ranking. So too can the retention of an individual room of particular interest, with all its old fittings and décor intact. For fittings and decor generally, moreover, the concept of rarity takes on a whole extra resonance when combined with qualities of excellence in design and craftsmanship. Indeed, exceptional features of recognised rarity, such as ceramic bar counters, examples of highly-accomplished painted tilework or of rare Art Deco styling, can command the very highest ranking, regardless of the extent of modern alteration elsewhere inside the pub. Less rare but genuinely old features, where they survive with no or minimal alteration and have a presence which is more than 'fragmentary', can be duly recognised in the lower rankings.

## 2.6 Authenticity.

The genuineness of historic internal fabric is not always self-evident and great importance is placed on obtaining verification, wherever possible, by reference to documentary sources like original plans, building and planning records, early photographs and other kinds of authoritative historical material. Anecdotal testimony



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from people familiar with the pub over many years may also be of assistance, but needs to be treated with caution.

## 3. THE RANKINGS

**3.1** Simply stated, the greater the amount of authentic historic fabric and layout, or the greater its rarity, the higher the ranking. Yet other variables that come into play make it difficult (and over-restrictive anyway) to lay down hard and fast rules, one being the very diversity of the pub types themselves, ranging from basic rural 'timewarps' to ornate Victorian 'palaces', another being the challenge of striking the right balance between known fact and intelligent interpretation in a field that embraces both intact survivals and partial survivals. Much has to be left to considered judgement and to CAMRA Pub Heritage Group's pooled knowledge and carefully-weighted opinions of 'comparators' across the whole UK, built from more than 30 years of research and experience. In some cases, where neither layout nor surviving fittings in themselves support the highest ranking, but both are "near misses", then a combination of the two may be sufficient to allocate a pub above the lowest grade. In judging candidates, particularly for the higher rankings, a key question asked is "*given a reasonably well-informed and sympathetic audience, is this pub worth sending people out of their way to see?*"

**3.2 Three Star** pubs are of outstanding historic importance. They will have stayed wholly or largely intact for the last fifty years and/or retain particular rooms or features of very rare merit. Only limited loss of such ingredients is allowable before an interior fails this standard, and among those included are pubs which have overall intactness or other exceptional qualities of the very highest order, some displaying a truly memorable combination of the two.

**3.3 Two Star** pubs are of very special historic interest, highly important but falling just short of Three Star levels of overall intactness and/or rarity and with lost elements, often of layout, sometimes clearly in evidence.

**3.4 One Star** pubs, by far the most numerous category, are of special historic interest. They will have either readily identifiable historic layouts or retain fittings, features or decor of special interest, but more significant changes are allowable.

### **3.5 The bottom line?**

*Realistically, One Star is the lowest level at which a **strong** case for pub preservation might be made to a local planning authority should proposals for damaging alterations materialise.* If all that's left in an otherwise modernised pub interior is a couple of fixed benches and a bit of matchboard panelling, admission to the National Inventory is not remotely considered as such remnants are just fragmentary and still fairly widely encountered. Even for more refined fragments, like the occasional etched window or surviving panel of decorative tiling, much the same applies, however interesting and irreplaceable these features might be in themselves. CAMRA nonetheless does whatever it can to encourage the

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identification and cataloguing of such lesser survivals in 'Local Inventories' wherever interest and enthusiasm exists at the local level itself.

