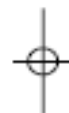

A Year Behind Bars



*When you have lost your inns, you may drown your empty selves,
for you will have lost the heart of England.*

Hilaire Belloc

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A Year Behind Bars
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The author asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

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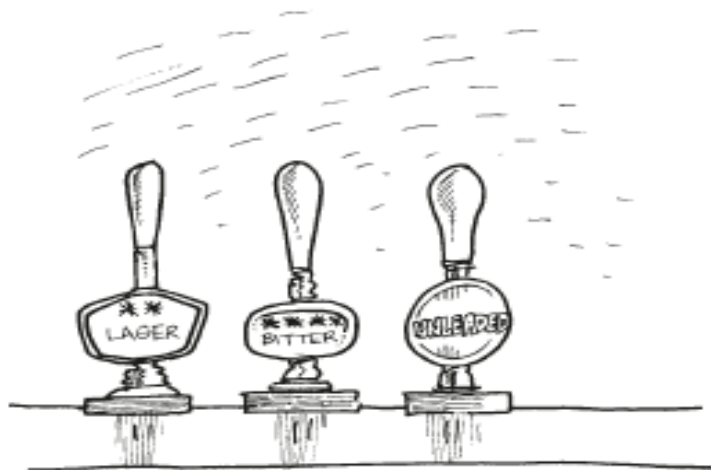
There are said to be more than 80,000 public houses in Britain. According to official statistics, someone visits a British pub every three seconds. That someone is not always George East, though he claims to be doing his best to keep up with the average.

A committed pubologist, George has been writing about inns, taverns, hostelries, good old-fashioned boozers and the people who run and use them for more than twenty years. In *A Year Behind Bars*, the author invites us to join a new publican as he attempts to create the perfect local...and discovers that life on the other side of the bar counter is not always plain sailing.

All the characters in this book are by necessity fictitious, but anyone who has ever run or regularly used a pub will instantly recognise most of them. If you enjoy visiting the Great British Pub you'll love this revealing diary of a year behind bars. If you have ever thought about the delights of running your own pub, perhaps it might be better to read no further.

Author's disclaimer

All the stories in this book are untrue and all the characters fictitious and should not be taken to bear any semblance to any persons living, dead or permanently pissed. All the names, locations and situations were invented to avoid possible embarrassment, legal action or grievous bodily harm.



A Brief History of the British Public House

The origins of the Great British Pub are understandably lost in the mists of time and alcoholic haze. However, some eminent pubologists believe that the tradition of inviting people into your front room for a drink and then charging them for the pleasure must have begun in Scotland.

Others claim our great gift to the world originated when an entrepreneurial Ancient Briton saw a chance to take revenge on the Roman occupiers. Virtually overnight, the story goes, the first pubs appeared at all garrison gates, offering the inmates a taste of British culture and hospitality and unlimited access to the national beverage. Lacking the climatic conditions or inclination to make wine, the first British innkeeper allegedly invented and served his overseas customers with a drink made from fermenting (ie rotting) vegetables laced with honey. For marketing purposes, this concoction was advertised as the nectar of the British gods. To the locals, it was known as Arghh, the Celtic deity of bodily functions.

Over the centuries and in the way of all living languages, the word evolved to Ale. Some historians claim that the quality of our national drink accounts for the sudden and final departure of the Roman legions, and is also the reason why British beer was for so long held in such low esteem by other foreign visitors.

Though there is little hard evidence for the above account of the origins of the British pub, much excitement was caused by the recent discovery of some unique artefacts uncovered at a dig on the site of a Roman encampment near Colchester.

Along with a board bearing the traces of a sign showing a busty and alluring Celtic barmaid and a legionnaire's helmet, they also found what may be one of the first ever pub notices. When translated from ancient Latin and allowing for contemporary vocabulary and common usage, the sign read:

Please do not ask the gov'nor for credit, as a punch in the mouth often offends.

Little is known about the public house in medieval times, but the enormous growth in popularity of going down the pub and drinking vast amounts of beer to forget one's troubles during these hard times is said to be why the period is known to historians as the Dark Ages.

Moving on to the 16th century, a survey in 1557 confirmed that there were up to 25,000 public houses in England. As the population was then less than four million, we were obviously developing a taste for our traditional home-from-home.

By 1725, a census revealed that 'stronge drynk' was on sale from more than 6,000 homes and shops in Greater London, which meant that there were, on paper, more pubs than houses, a tradition which continues to this day in some parts of the capital.

The situation was made even worse (or better, depending upon your view) when the Beerhouse Act of 1830 allowed any ratepayer to turn his house into a pub. As there were nearly as many public houses as customers to use them, the major brewers fought back by building huge 'gin palaces' to persuade drinkers to go out rather than stay in for a drink.

At the start of World War I (1914-18), there were around 90,000 registered public houses in Britain, and licensing hours were introduced to prevent munitions factory workers from staggering back to work in the afternoon and blowing up the neighbourhood.

By the late 1980s, somebody in authority had realised that the Great War was over, and all-day drinking was once again permitted. But the damage was done, and the great British public had got into the habit of spending at least part of the working day sober.

Though nobody has apparently bothered to count and catalogue them all, there are nowadays believed to be around 80,000 proper public houses in Britain, all with their individual ambience,

character and charm. Regardless of the inevitable march of so-called progress, the true character of the Great British Pub has changed little over the centuries, and is still an institution admired and even envied throughout the civilised world. If not always by individual customers.



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DECEMBER

My wife has bought me a pub for Christmas. Or rather, she has allowed me to buy one for myself. Soon, I will be able to drink at cost price and entertain hundreds of customers and friends in my front room. What's more, I will actually be paid for enjoying myself instead of shelling out to visit other people's pubs.

I am also a man with a mission, which is to create the perfect public house. In doing so, I shall be following in the footsteps of John Fothergill, author of *An Innkeeper's Diary*. Like me, he was a man of letters and familiar with the celebrities of the day. From the 1920s, the Spread Eagle at Oxford became a popular watering-hole for such artists and writers as Augustus John, George Bernard Shaw and Evelyn Waugh. Literary hangers-on like the Sitwells were also regulars in his snug bar.

In this age of plastic pubs, I shall concentrate on offering the traditional delights of the classic local to ordinary people. Like the landlord of the Spread Eagle, I will keep a record of my progress, but I shall not start my first year behind bars with his attitude. He established an almost breathtaking reputation for rudeness during his time as a licensee, and died in straitened circumstances after half a lifetime in the business.

Perhaps he was not a natural innkeeper. It may be that he had a darker view of human nature than me. I like to think that I can bring out the best in people in any circumstances, and innkeeping is in my blood. My grandfather ran a corner local in this city more than sixty years ago, and I have visited and spent more time in pubs than most people I know.

The only cloud on my horizon is my wife's reservations about the new project. When I initially suggested the idea she was unusually pessimistic about our chances of finding happiness

*for PJS, without whom AYBB
would not have happened*

behind bars. She forecast that running a pub would be absolutely nothing like visiting one, and that my favourite hobby would become much less appealing when I had to do it for a living. She even predicted I would drink more than ever, put on masses of weight, become coarsened by exposure to the true state of human nature, and that it would all end in tears. It is unusual for her to take such a cynical view of my ideas, and she has always been supportive of whatever trail I have chosen to follow across the years. Admittedly, she prefers animals to people and has a low estimation of human nature, but I am sure she will come round when she sees how successful I am. After much debate, she has at least agreed to give me a year to prove that I can make my dream a reality, and after months of searching for just the right pub, I have found it in the Ship Leopard Tavern.

It is true that the Leo is in the inner city, and does not have a lot of natural appeal in its architecture and setting. Built around the turn of the century, it is a fairly typical and undistinguished corner local. There are some fine examples of decorative etching on the windows which have not been broken over the years, but the glazed green tiles covering the brickwork make it look, according to my wife, more like a public lavatory than a public house. Inside, it is sad to see how changing tastes have vandalised what must have been a classic example of an Edwardian local. There are still some echoes of past elegance and solidity, but now laminated plastic has triumphed over lovingly carved hardwood, and harsh neon strip lighting has replaced the gently glowing gas mantles. Apart from The Ship Leopard, there are another eight pubs in the close proximity, but as I said to my wife, this is a good sign. So many pubs crowded together in such a small area must mean that there is a demand for their services. Besides, having visited and spied on the opposition, I do not expect much serious competition.

Apart from my ideas for luring customers away from the other pubs on the strip, I have already started work on a business plan

and phased strategy, with monthly budgets, turnover targets and key objectives. The man from the brewery company which owns the Ship Leopard is nearly as enthusiastic as me, and confided how pleased he was to have found someone with such an obvious flair for the business. With my mix of acumen and natural ability, he says he is sure we will be a great success in our new venture.

We do not take over until next month, which is a disappointment but probably for the best. The outgoing landlord advised us to leave all the complications and aggravations of the Christmas trading period to him. We will make our seamless transition during a time when things begin to quieten down. He is clearly a considerate man, but obviously not cut out for the job. I have noticed that he does not go out of his way to entertain the regulars beyond a grunt when he serves them, and his customer service techniques seem virtually non-existent. I don't wish to belittle his efforts over the past decade at the Leo, but he is clearly not suited to the role. He has even cautioned me about the customers 'taking liberties' and how important it is not to give credit to or trust anyone, including the staff. He is also, I have noticed, nothing short of penny-pinching. Something in his past has soured him, or perhaps he is just not made of the right stuff to be a successful innkeeper.

I will obviously have much to learn in my new life, but cannot see the difference between running a pub and any other business involving people. My wife is still full of dark foreboding, but has agreed to give me a chance to show what I can do. If for some reason things do not work out, we can easily sell up and at an increased price given that I will have doubled or even quadrupled the takings.

Whatever happens, it is sure to be a memorable year.

Pubs with no Beer

On Christmas Eve, 1867, the first British Working Man's Public House was opened to great acclaim from the various temperance organisations. The unique selling-point was that this prototype of a proposed nationwide chain sold no alcoholic beverage, and the snappy advertising slogan read:

*A Public House Without The Drink
Where Men May Read And Smoke And Think
Then Sober Home Return
A Stepping Stone This House You'll Find
Come Leave Your Rum And Beer Behind
And Other Pleasures Learn...*

Somewhat predictably, this desperate attempt to stop the lower orders enjoying themselves was a total failure, and the first dry pub closed through lack of support within a year of opening...

JANUARY

Running a pub may not be as easy as I thought.

When I told my father that I was becoming part of a great British institution, he asked me why I would want to live in an institution. He recalled his father (who was also a licensee) saying the only thing wrong with the pub business was the customers, and I am beginning to see what grandfather meant. My wife has also been a little tight-lipped since our arrival, and has started referring to the Ship Leopard as The Lubyanka or even The Loonybin. When I asked her to explain, she said that she doesn't relish the idea of living in a prison for a year, especially as all the inmates are clearly certifiable. I pointed out that we have inherited the trade, and that it is accepted in the industry that the customers reflect the character of the landlord. She would soon see some changes when I started to attract my sort of people. At this, she gave a hollow laugh and said it might then be an idea to go the whole hog and put bars on the windows and issue the staff with white coats.

Thursday 7th

I am going to start a register of weird visitors. Most of the regular customers are not what I would call normal. Some seem to be from another planet. I have always prided myself in an understanding of human nature, and bought a book on psychology last month to help with the study and treatment of my regulars. Given the behaviour of some of them, I should have bought a book on psychiatry. The latest refugee from *The Twilight Zone* arrived this morning and calmly introduced himself as the original Baron Von Richthofen. According to the locals, he is a wealthy

scrap metal dealer who lives in a rambling, near-derelict house in the poshest part of the city. He is understandably unpopular with the neighbours as he likes to take his work home with him, and his back garden is full of old cookers and the odd government surplus tank. When he shambled in, I had my doubts about serving him as he looked like a vagrant, but he pulled out a twenty pound note and ordered a large schnapps, so immediately became a valued client. As the bar was deserted, we fell into conversation and he told me quite matter-of-factly that he was a reincarnation of the illustrious Red Baron. He said he can clearly remember every one of his dog-fights with British air aces as well as the exact moment and circumstances of his heroic death. When he had spent all his money, I escorted him to the door in case he had trouble finding it, and was quite disappointed not to find a World War I bi-plane parked at the kerb. After giving me a crisp military salute, he pulled on a flying helmet and goggles and buzzed away in a battered old sports car while singing a German marching song.

Later, I learned that the car is a very rare 1950's Ferrari, and worth at least twice as much as the freehold of the Ship Leopard.

Wednesday 13th

It is after midnight, and I am sitting alone in the lounge bar. There is a peculiar stillness about any place which has once been full of life, but my problem at the moment is the silence in the Leo during opening hours. Takings are not nearly as good as I had been led to expect from the departing licensee, but it is after all the month after Christmas. Perhaps my predecessor has taken most of his regular patrons with him to his new pub, though a customer said yesterday that the Leo is actually doing better business than usual at this time of year. He also took delight in telling me we are having what is known in the trade as our 'honeymoon', and that the local pubgoers are taking a look at us, and will not be back. He seemed to like the idea of having the place to himself, and passing on bad news is obviously what keeps

him happy. Apart from being a Job's comforter, I have already classified him as a self-appointed pub pundit, and there seem to be many of those at the Leo. In my short time as a licensee, I have already found that there is nothing more irritating than people who have never been on the business side of the bar telling you how your pub should be run. Especially when trade is so slack. Another pub truism I have discovered is that every customer thinks he could run any pub better than the present licensee. I am already beginning to see why the previous landlord at the Leo found it difficult to look pleased when some of his regulars arrived to tell him what he was doing wrong.

Thursday 14th

Tonight was comparatively brisk in the public bar. It was a darts night, which increased the usual number of customers. I have been keeping a head count, and it was the first time since our free opening party that we reached double figures, not including myself and the staff. All went reasonably well for our first attempt at entertaining a visiting team, except for the sandwiches. As our captain explained, there is an ongoing competition between participating pubs to have the biggest and best spread of food for visiting players (for which the home team pays), and our team were very disappointed with the two plates of paste sandwiches that my wife grudgingly served up. Normally, the teams would expect much more of a variety and choice, with pickled onions, roast potatoes and even pig's trotters as accessories. The match (which we lost) went reasonably well except for an incident when the visiting team complained that the light over the board was not at the exact angle, height and brightness demanded by league regulations. The shade is also peppered with holes caused by the ladies darts team, and the visitors said this lessened the brilliance of the light and caused them to miss many vital shots. From my observations, it seems that the more mediocre the ability of an individual player or team, the more they will blame the environment and equipment for lack of success. I tried to lighten the atmosphere

by buying the players a drink and letting the visiting landlord beat me in the last game, but they still went off in a surly frame of mind. Totting up the takings after midnight and allowing for the staff, rent, heat light and other expenses it appears we only lost around £100 on the day, so things are getting better.

Looking at the scraps of paper put in the cash register by the staff when I stood a drink, it also seemed that I was the biggest spender of the evening. I don't remember buying half the rounds put down to me, so must organise a more efficient system. It is so easy to hand out courtesy drinks without ringing them up, and I don't want the bar staff getting into bad habits. The outgoing landlord gave me little advice, but he did mutter cryptically that I should 'watch the till', and I can now see what he meant. On my first session with Twiggy our busy barmaid, she insisted on buying me a drink which she made up from the most expensive bottles on the top shelf. It was called a harlot's fart, and I should imagine the flavour was not far away from the real thing. I also noticed she did not put any money in the till for the drink she stood me, nor the one she had herself to join in the celebration.

* * * * *

I am still full of enthusiasm, but now realise that life on this side of the bar will be very different, and that my estimate for our first month's turnover will be much lower than I had hoped. I did my initial calculations after spending Christmas on a customer-only basis at the Leo, and I was amazed at the money cascading over the bar. Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves and spending without reserve. At one time I heard the landlord make an aside to Twiggy that they would have to get a bucket of water to throw over the cash register to cool it down, and it was the only time during our many visits that he made a joke or seemed to be remotely happy. For a man with as much personality as a pump handle, he seemed to come alive as the crush grew, and I even caught him smiling at his customers on several occasions.

Now we are in the depths of January, and I did not think that

business could be this bad. A new customer is a talking point and the only people coming in are the diehard regulars, who are not the sort of people I had in mind when I planned my creation of the perfect pub. Fothergill says that atmosphere in an inn is created solely by people. If that's true, I think my father's crack about living in an institution may not be so far away from the truth.

Before we took over at the Leo, a friend who used to run a pub said the licensee's main problem is that he can choose his friends but not his customers. After my short time behind bars, it seems to me that the acid test of suitability is to ask yourself if you would have a customer as a guest in your house. So far, the answer is invariably no. The problem at the moment is not being able to do much about the sort of customers I encourage as there are so few to choose from. I can bar the most objectionable types, or be so rude as to make them look elsewhere for a local, but if I only have the sort of people I like on the premises, I will soon be talking to myself.

I suppose I will have to learn to be more tolerant, but we seem to have inherited a collection of individuals who would try the patience of a saint. Some are petty, others merely boring, and some so shallow that, as my Irish granny used to say, you wouldn't be able to see them if they turned sideways. Others could obviously start a row in an empty room, and they all seem to be totally selfish in their view of what a pub is for and why they are using mine. As a result, I am beginning to revise my opinion of the average landlord. I used to believe the wrong sort of people took on the role, but now I can see that they often look so miserable because of the people they have to deal with.

Saturday 16th

Our first fight, but the only severe damage has been to the pub's reputation. During his first official visit last week, I was warned by the local beat bobby to be careful about allowing too many Irish casual workers into the public bar at the same time.

Of Irish descent myself I was shocked at this apparent display of prejudice, and sarcastically asked him if there was a quota agreement amongst the local landlords. He looked at me blankly for a moment, then explained that a large number of itinerant Irish labourers live in a hostel in the area, and drink as hard as they work. They collect their wages on a Saturday morning and do their best to spend them before closing time that evening. Sometimes and especially to an inexperienced landlord, they could be a bit of a handful. I assured him that I would do my best not to encourage them to use the Leo, and immediately made up some posters and leaflets announcing a dress rehearsal for St Patrick's Day. As an extra gimmick, I added a note that glasses of stout would be on sale at half price for anyone with a true Irish accent. Having bribed our paper boy to distribute the handbills around the area, and particularly to the hostel, I spent this morning dressing the public bar with huge paper shamrocks and green bunting, filled the juke box with suitable music, and stood by to see how our first promotion would fare.

By seven o' clock, the Leo was packed with happy men in black suits with muddy trouser bottoms, and the public bar was busier than during the peak Christmas trading hours. It was a joy to see the staff struggling to cope, and I took great pleasure in telling Twiggy to stand by with a bucket of water for the till.

At nine 'o' clock, I considered putting a 'house full' notice on the outer door, but could not bring myself to turn custom away.

The trouble broke out just before closing time, when I light-heartedly challenged a very big man's accent before agreeing to the half-price stout offer. When he said that he came from Belfast, I could not resist querying if that qualified as part of real Ireland, and immediately wished I hadn't. A debate then ensued between customers from both sides of the border about what constituted a proper Irish accent, and words suddenly turned to blows.

An hour later and the public bar was as empty as usual, and I had received an official warning from the police. I spent another hour clearing up the mess while revising my plans for a really

lively St Patrick's Day promotion.

Thursday 21st

Although it's my birthday, it has not been as enjoyable as last year, when we spent the day visiting pubs rather than running one. Things started badly when the draymen arrived before dawn had broken across the rooftops, and woke me by making a lot of noise in the road outside. Leaning out of the bedroom window, I observed quite reasonably that I had not finished work till midnight and that, unlike draymen, landlords usually have to go to bed and get up to start work on the same day. The driver showed little sympathy and said he would be happy to work night and day for the money I was earning, and that it didn't rain inside pubs, as far as he knew. He also made a coarse remark about kicking the barmaid out of bed earlier so that I could get some sleep. From my position it was not easy to enter into a philosophical discussion about relative income and responsibility rates, so I told them they would have to come back later. The spokesman for the duo retorted that they had already unloaded and were on their way to the next call, and if I didn't want the stuff, he was sure that passers-by would. Doors and windows in the side street alongside the Leo were already beginning to open, so I had to give in and go down to let the delivery men in.

They may have won the argument, but I got my own back by insisting that they took away all the empties from the former landlord's Christmas bonanza. I also turned down their offer of a bargain tub of bitter that had somehow been loaded on their wagon by mistake. Nor did I give them a tip. Eventually, they departed in a flurry of expletives, leaving broken glass all over the yard, and one of the gates hanging off its hinges. I shall have to talk to the brewery about their customer care training standards.

Friday 22nd

Another poor session, but I have found that there are some

consolations for spending endless hours with little to do but look at the door in hope. As far as I know, there are no post-graduate courses which involve studying public houses and what goes on in them, but I can think of no better place for observing human nature in all its diversity. Today, the subject for my consideration has been the traditional pub activity of buying by round.

In theory, it should be all very simple, and merely involve each person in a group taking it in turns to pay for the drinks. In practice, it is a far from straightforward arrangement. In my short time on this side of the bar, I have learned much about how devious some people can be when it comes to not paying their turn.

A typical ploy for the classic round-dodger is to make straight for the toilet when arriving with a group, then answer an alleged call of nature every time glasses in his circle become dangerously low. I have seen some really audacious offenders visit the Gents on a dozen occasions, then seek sympathy for their imaginary prostate condition.

Another favoured device is to pretend to spot a long-lost friend elsewhere in the pub at the vital moment. I have even known advanced round-dodgers arrange for a friend to call on their mobile phones at regular intervals, so they can excuse themselves to go outside to get a better signal just before their turn to be 'in the chair' comes round. By careful manipulation and only paying for a round late on in the session, the skilled operator can also maximise the total number of drinks bought by other people in the circle, then make good his escape before his turn comes round again. With really good timing, he can blame me for not being able to stand his final round before the bell sounds at closing time.

Another common type of freeloader is the stalker, who will literally do the rounds of all suitable groups in the pub, weighing up the prospects and always on the lookout for suitable victims. Like a tiger watching a gathering of antelope at a watering hole, he will wait for exactly the right moment, then strike. As glasses are drained, he will invent a reason for talking to any member of

the group he can get away with pretending to know, and the person in the chair will have no option but to include him in the forthcoming round. After claiming his drink, the stalker will find an excuse to move on and wait to strike again.

Some round-dodgers hunt exclusively in pairs, with the male and his female partner looking for any solo drinker they can find a slim excuse to join. Despite all talk of equal rights and responsibilities in the outside world, women in men's company never seem to buy a drink, especially in the Leo. Thus, the solo drinker will be buying two drinks for every one he will receive from the couple. With the more brazen operators of this scam, the female will not have a drink when her partner is buying, but make up for it by graciously agreeing to accept a large one when the unaccompanied man is paying.

According to a book on pub running I bought before taking over at the Leo, the system of taking it in turns to buy a round of drinks should be encouraged by the licensee, as it 'draws people together and encourages social intercourse and conviviality.' As far as I can see, the majority of my younger customers would be much better off following the example of our veterans and buying their own. In the Leo, it is an accepted fact that all single men of retirement age and past sexual activity treat nobody but themselves, though it is rumoured that one of our most unsociable and penny-pinching aged regulars bought Twiggy Brissole's a drink last month. When she recovered sufficiently to ask what he was celebrating, he explained that it was the tenth anniversary of his wife's death.

Saturday 23rd

It looks as if I shall have a valuable ally in learning the tricks of the trade. This morning I received an official visit from an interesting character who has run pubs in the city all his life. Tez Eldon is also local president of the Licensed Victuallers Association, and called in to sign me up as a member. He is a real character,

and of all the licensees I have met across the years, Tez The Prez is exactly my idea of a real landlord. A solid and imperturbable individual, he has a bluff though kindly manner, a nose like a ripe strawberry, and his many years of witnessing the worst side of human nature have somehow not soured his outlook on life. Although not given to ostentatious display of wealth, he carries a wad of ready cash which would choke a pelican, and has the respect of both licensees and customers throughout the city. It is said that, despite his advancing years, he has never had to call the police for help in removing troublemakers from his two pubs, and his technique for discreetly giving them something to remember him by as they hurdle through the door is much admired in the trade. He is clearly a good, honest and open man, and has already called me several times to see if he can be of help as I settle in. I think I shall learn much about pubmanship from him, and if the Ship Leopard prospers half as well as his two little goldmines, I shall be more than content.

* * * * *

Yet another miserable evening session, and I am beginning to wonder if I have made a fatal career move. I am now on my seventeenth profession, and time is getting short for me to find contentment for myself, and some sort of future security for my wife. I left school without bothering to wait for any qualifications, and have still not found my true *métier*. In spite of a run of setbacks and reversals, I have remained optimistic, and always felt that I was just marking time until my ability was recognised by the rest of the world, so it would not matter too much what I did in the meantime. In hard times I have turned my hand to gravedigging, factory work and delivering beer as well as drinking quite a lot of it. Then there were our attempts at setting up family concerns like the pickled onion manufacturing company and a lonely hears club. For a while, I was even a dressmaker's assistant, until we were stitched up by a false friend.

Generally, I have enjoyed everything I have done for a living until I have learned to do it, then boredom and discontent have set in and I have had to come up with a new way of keeping my mind occupied and making ends meet while waiting for real success to arrive. And all the time my wife has been foursquare behind me, putting up with the hard times and being full of enthusiasm for every crazy proposal I have made. I have dragged her from one financial crisis to the next, and still she has smiled bravely and supported me in everything that I have tried to do. I do not know of any couples happier to be together than us, but the trick of making money and keeping hold of it seems to have passed me by. I know that love of a good and faithful woman is much more important than having a positive bank balance, but I would dearly like to have both for my wife's sake. She does not need convincing that I am of worth, but as the inside of the Ship Leopard continues to resemble an empty tomb, I find myself increasingly prey to self-doubt, and even self-pity.

Monday 25th

Another entry for the weird customer register this morning when one of my aged regulars arrived in duplicate. For three weeks I have been bemused by an old codger who comes in every day to cast a miasma of gloom over the public bar. On Mondays, he takes up his position by the juke box just so he can complain about the noise level while he is making his pint of mild last a good hour. On Tuesdays he stands at the other end of the bar, staring gloomily into his pint of bitter and telling anyone who tries to talk to him that he is deaf.

Today I discovered that I have not been dealing with a paranoid schizophrenic, but one half of a pair of identical twins. According to the older regulars, they were born in the side street alongside the Leo, live there still, but lead completely separate lives. One occupies the top half of the house, while the other keeps to the downstairs area. According to legend they fell out over the ownership of a toy trumpet around seventy years ago, and have