



Coronavirus Diaries



Jo Eames, co-founder of Peach Pubs

‘I never imagined asking our managers to film themselves tipping casks of ale — a pub’s life blood — down the drain. I couldn’t watch’

Back in March, the government announced that pubs would get a refund on the duty paid on beer they were having to destroy — but they wanted video evidence.

Eighteen years in hospitality mean I’ve seen some gruesome sights. But I never imagined asking our managers to film themselves tipping casks of ale — a pub’s life blood — down the drain. I couldn’t watch.

We started our company, Peach Pubs, in 2002 with one gastropub, The Rose & Crown in Warwick. Our idea was simple: every market town needs a pub serving a quality steak with a decent glass of wine and great hosting. We went the extra mile on everything — and two years later, to our astonishment, it was voted best pub in the UK, with our second pub also in the top 20. By then we had three, and three more a year after that. Looking back, it was a golden moment for the gastropub. The past 10 years have been much tougher, but we still made it to 19 pubs and had a turnover of nearly £30m last year.

Pubs are special and unique in our culture. If you took a survey right now and asked people what’s the first thing they’ll do when this is over, the top answer would probably be: “Go to the pub.” They aren’t just places to drink and eat — they are characters in our lives. I don’t want to see any business fail, but if the pubs have gone bust at the end of this, it will be a real blow to our national psyche (especially if the only ones left are Wetherspoons!). People seem to think if it’s a three-month shutdown we’ll just bounce back—I saw someone on Twitter the other day saying pubs would make back all their losses in the first 24 hours. I wish.

What the public don’t realise is that hospitality businesses have been operating increasingly close to the wire for the past decade. Now we’re mass casualties in a global car crash and we’re all bleeding — the only question is how fast we bleed out, and whether some of us can survive. Whatever the government urges, the banks will triage in favour of the businesses that have a chance to survive and won’t support the lost causes.

This sounds pretty bleak. But we built a business from scratch. We’re used to putting everything on the line. We have hung on to our whole team of five hundred souls, almost all furloughed, with a skeleton crew manning the business in “sleep” mode. The last few weeks have been frantic dealing with the bank, our landlords and paying suppliers.

Now it feels like we’re back in 2002, with zero turnover and just an idea: every market town needs a hub where you can safely collect quality steak, a decent case of wine — and great service takes the form of volunteer chefs cooking fresh meals for key workers and the needy. Now, our Herculean labour is to mirror and reinvent all the systems from Peach to establish a totally separate social enterprise, yourhub.pub, to serve our communities in lockdown. Ten days on, we have converted six pubs to hubs. They are doing different things, based on their local community need. The Fishes in Oxford is cooking for the John Radcliffe Hospital. The Star & Garter in Leamington is delivering meals to the homeless. The Boathouse at Boulters Lock is busy selling ready meals, wine and groceries, generating a surplus of nearly £2,000 in its first week towards our meals for charity. Right now we’re working on how to deliver a family Sunday roast we’re proud to serve as a ready meal. There are standards to maintain, even in a pandemic!



Support

[View Site Tips](#)

[Help Centre](#)

[About Us](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[myFT Tour](#)

[Careers](#)

Legal & Privacy

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Slavery Statement ...](#)

Services

[FT Live](#)

[Share News Tips S...](#)

[Individual Subscrip...](#)

[Group Subscriptions](#)

[Republishing](#)

[Contracts & Tenders](#)

Tools

[Executive Job Search](#)

[Advertise with the FT](#)

[Follow the FT on T...](#)

[FT Transact](#)

[Secondary Schools](#)

[Portfolio](#)

[Today's Newspaper...](#)

[Alerts Hub](#)

[MBA Rankings](#)

[Currency Converter](#)

[Enterprise Tools](#)

[News feed](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[More from the FT Group >](#)