

Social Secretary

Whilst not being one of the "named" posts, the Social Secretary's role in the life of the branch is, nevertheless, not to be underestimated. Many branches hold their meetings on midweek evenings, leaving little time for socialising. Even daytime weekend meetings can leave little time for socialising as members head off for dinner or to fulfil family commitments. Socials are important ways of getting a chance to meet members in an informal setting and are probably the best way of activating "sleeping" members. They are far more likely to turn up for a pub crawl or brewery visit as their first contact with the branch than at a branch meeting.

Whilst the types of social activities are limited i.e. pub crawls, brewery visits and visits to other branches beer festivals, the possibilities are almost endless. Virtually every branch will have a brewery within its borders and even geographically large branches will have breweries within 30 or 40 miles of the main population centre(s). Not only do most folk like the idea of a free pint, even if they have paid for a minibus, it gives newer members the chance to learn about the brewing process whilst they are being chatted up by the branch committee about surveying pubs for the GBG. It also allows the branch to get to know their local brewer. Full weekend trips away to other parts of the country give plenty of scope for checking out pubs and beers that most branch members wouldn't ordinarily get to or taste.

Pub crawls in specific parts of the branch area give members a chance to survey pubs for the GBG that they may be unfamiliar with and, possibly, uncomfortable about going into on their own. Once again it gives sleeping members the opportunity to talk to branch activists in a more relaxed atmosphere, in fact most likely in the kind of environment that persuaded them to join CAMRA in the first place, to enjoy and protect good quality real ale in good quality pubs.

With over 150 CAMRA beer festivals every year, an average of three per week (end), there must be a beer festival fairly close to your branch area, whether you run your own beer festival or not. Depending on the size of the beer festival, it will most likely give branch members a chance to try beers they have not tried before and, lets face it, even the non- tickers amongst us enjoy trying new beers. It might even start someone thinking "Why don't we have a beer festival, I'm sure we could organise one." It also gives you yet another opportunity to speak to non active members in a neutral environment.

The role of Social Secretary involves some planning skills, even if it is only organising minibuses and speaking to breweries to arrange convenient dates and times. Pub crawls should ideally consist of a maximum of six or seven pubs as the enjoyment starts to diminish as you rush round trying to visit all the pubs on the list. The old adage is that "The branch that drinks together, stays together" and the Social Secretary is best placed to ensure that this is the case.

You may have noticed that there has been a theme running through all the above suggestions. Something that should happen naturally without you having to do anything other than organise the event. The active members will get the chance to talk to the non active members and, hopefully, persuade them to become active. It is the way a large number of current branch activists got involved themselves and this should continue for many years to come, with your help.

One last thing. CAMRA has been described as the most successful consumer organisation in Western Europe. The recently retired vice chairman of the Campaign also described it as "the largest social club in the country". Beer and pubs are there to be enjoyed. Your job is to ensure that your branch members get the opportunity to enjoy more of both.