

WETHERSPOON NEWS PRESENTS BOTH SIDES, SO THAT READERS CAN DECIDE...

In the aftermath of 'lockdown', Richard Molloy, award-winning beer writer, criticised Tim Martin in local Torbay paper the Herald Express. In the best tradition of journalism, Tim was given the opportunity to reply, just as he was in other publications, such as Aberdeen's Evening Express and Portsmouth's The News.

Herald Express, Wednesday 22 April 2020

RICHARD MOLLOY

I WAS in my pub yesterday - cold, dark and stripped of the spirits, wines and other vestiges that welcome those wishing to escape the hectic rat race of the former outside world. The fruit machine stands yawning; propped open to deter those who may wish to soften their own hard times by breaking more than the current law that forbids the crossing of our threshold.

It felt unloved, unloved. A room so different for the absence of chatter and laughter of the drinking throng. It was sad and sobering - the antithesis of its former self.

The closure of licensed premises came upon publicans suddenly and with predictably poor timing - the Friday evening announcement rendering a weekend's worth of beer idle. Small business owners were stripped of their routine, income and purpose; and I guess we weren't so different to others as we entered the kind of survival mode that I had never contemplated before, but seemed unnervingly natural within a couple of days: premises were secured, staff furloughed and direct debits cancelled with debts and repayments negotiated. Within a few days we were mothballed.

Now what? A lot of bloody admin, that's what.

Thankfully not my job. The more efficient and organised members of the family have the complicated task of applying for grants and 'government guaranteed' loans that aren't actually available to anybody without the mental elasticity needed to crack The Da Vinci Code or understand what the hell is going on in 12 Monkeys (don't watch it again!)

After this obvious course of action came the real head scratching for many licensees. So used to being the ring masters, counsellors and clowns, we now found ourselves without an audience.

Most of us lost our incomes; temporarily for those awaiting furlough payments or self employed remuneration, but indefinitely for some who are directors of limited companies.

We also found ourselves estranged from those who used the pub as a support network, and their wellbeing became the focus for many landlords and landlords.

Reports continue to come in of pubs serving meals to the homeless, running online charity quizzes and music festivals. Many others are delivering food to the elderly and vulnerable. Some have set up community shops and one licensee in Woking is even providing PPE for NHS staff using the pub's 3D printer.

Even with the profits (over-estimated by most) taken away, many pubs continue to willingly and gladly shoulder the responsibility of being guardians of the community.

Contrast this then, with Tim Martin's kneejerk response to his JD Wetherspoons outlets being forced to close. The millionaire chairman stated his company could not afford to pay its staff until the Government released furlough payments.

He also initially refused to pay suppliers, many of them small companies whilst insisting, with absolutely zero proof, that there had "hardly been any" transmission of the covid 19 virus in pubs and also threatened to defy the authorities and keep his drinking foyers open.

It seems as though we are in this for the long haul and I urge people to take note of what many pubs - much maligned in certain sections of the media - are doing in these difficult times. I also urge you to remember how Tim Martin reacted when the pubs reopen and you decide where to celebrate.

» Richard Molloy is the British Guild of Beer Writers Trade Writer of the Year



Herald Express, Wednesday 29 April 2020

LETTERS EXTRA



Wetherspoon boss Tim Martin responds to columnist Richard Molloy's criticism of how his firm reacted to Covid-19

» TORQUAY publican Richard Molloy, like many commentators, is trying to find a pantomime villain to blame during the UK's lockdown.

His anti-Wetherspoon diatribe (Herald Express April 22) includes the ludicrous Twittersphere fantasy that Wetherspoon "threatened to defy the authorities and keep its drinking foyers open" past the pub closures. Cobblers actually, just ask any of our Torbay customers.

He also alleges Wetherspoon said it "could not afford to pay its staff until the Government released furlough payments" and criticises our behaviour towards suppliers. In fact, in a video sent to staff on March 23, three days after pubs closed, Wetherspoon said "all our endeavours are going to be on trying to make sure that you get your (furlough) money and that the pubs reopen."

At exactly the same time as the video, an email was sent to staff saying "all employees will be paid as normal on Friday, March 27".

Indeed, staff have been paid weekly ever since pubs closed, and agreement has been reached with most suppliers, many of whom we've traded with for 40 years.

Attacking Wetherspoon for its employment practices seems counter-intuitive. We have been named as a top employer by the Top Employers' Institute for 17 years in a row and pay about 50% of company profits every year as a bonus to pub staff.

More than 10,000 current employees have been awarded free shares over the years - and pub managers have worked for us, on average, for 11 years.

The surprising thing about Richard's comments are that he admits himself to "cancelling direct debits", negotiating payments and to delayed income for those "awaiting furlough" - the villainous actions for which he criticises Wetherspoon.

In reality, Richard's actions are completely understandable. His pub business, in common with the entire industry, is, as he says, "in survival mode".

However, in spite of the psychological need for a scapegoat, criticising competitors like Wetherspoon won't help pubs reopen.

For that reason, pantomime villains should perhaps stay within the confines of the theatre.

● Articles courtesy of Herald Express

LANGTON CAPITAL BRUMBY CORRECTS CLAIMS

Leisure analyst Mark Brumby of Langton Capital apologised to Wetherspoon for misreporting in his daily newsletter.

According to Langton Capital's website, the newsletter provides insightful views on the UK and global leisure industry.

The newsletter stated: "In our Thursday 16 April email, we commented on the broker suggestion that JD Wetherspoon may need to raise up to £250 million in new capital, some perhaps via equity."

"We reported Tim Martin's opposition to shutdown and his comments thereon.

"We added post the shutdown, the company said it would not pay suppliers or staff.

"It later agreed to pay staff for the work that they had already undertaken.

"These statements are untrue.

"Langton accepts that Wetherspoon stated, immediately after the shutdown, that it would pay staff for work done.

"Therefore it did not 'later' agree to pay them for this work, as Langton incorrectly said.

"Langton apologises to Wetherspoon for this error.

"JD Wetherspoon addressed staff on 23 March. It reports that 'all staff have been paid from the outset of furlough without interruption, notwithstanding that payments to employers under the government's scheme will not commence until next week'.

"It says that suppliers are being paid."

CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION WHICH?

WETHERSPOON WOWS IN HEAD-TO-HEAD... BUT WHICH? ERROR LEAVES BAD TASTE

Wetherspoon has come out on top in a Consumers' Association Which? survey - it compared our hotels with those run by fellow pub chain Fuller's.

Wetherspoon scored an overall 79 per cent customer score, against Fuller's 69 per cent.

The hotels were scored against three criteria (bed comfort, bathrooms and value for money), as well as comparing the cost of an average room rate per night, full English breakfast and 175ml glass of pinot grigio.

Wetherspoon scored five out of five in the value-for-money category.

The report added: "Readers raved about one of the chains ... Wetherspoon wowed in our UK hotel chains survey."

However, Which? then makes the following inaccurate and untrue statement (in relation to the coronavirus crisis): "Mr Martin later told staff that he might not pay them on time, while details of the government furlough scheme were still being agreed. He reversed the decision only after public criticism."

JAMES DORNAN MSP MSP STIRS STRIFE WITH SPOON SLUR



Scottish Member of Parliament (MSP) James Dornan (pictured) used his Twitter account to incorrectly accuse Wetherspoon of opening one of its pubs, when all pubs were closed.

And when it was pointed out to him by The Scottish Sun that this was completely untrue, he immediately deleted the tweet. However, he has refused to apologise for his incendiary tweet.

The Scottish National Party MSP wrote on Twitter: "Apparently a Wetherspoon (sic) pub near me is still open."

"I really hope that at the end of this the owner is sued if it can be proven anyone got the virus there."

After being contacted by journalists, he added on Twitter: "I've since been told that staff were on site for a short period, but it wasn't open to the public."

Wetherspoon's chief executive, John Hutson, added: "We categorically deny that the pub opened."

"It was shut, like all other pubs across the UK, in line with the government's directive."

"It would have been helpful, and the right thing to do, for Mr Dornan to tweet a message apologising to staff at the pub and to Wetherspoon itself."

Which? then added: "Our next pint will be in Fuller's."

Tim Martin said: "I'm delighted that consumers have awarded Wetherspoon's hotels top marks for value for money - and that we scored 79 per cent.

"Fuller's hotels and pubs are excellent, so this is a high-class comparison.

"Which? has got it wrong. It has based its comments on a distortion of the facts, which undermines its position as an impartial and unbiased organisation.

"In a video recorded less than 48 hours after pubs shut, I said: 'All our endeavours are going to be on trying to make sure that you (staff) get your money and the pubs reopen.'

"An e-mail was sent to all staff, with the video, on Monday 23 March, the first day of lockdown, which said that 'all employees will be paid as normal on Friday 27 March'.

"Staff were paid then and on every Friday since."

JO STEVENS MP • RACHEL REEVES MP

FAKE NEWS: MP URGED TO WITHDRAW FICTITIOUS CLAIM

Wetherspoon says an MP invented a story in which its chairman, Tim Martin, appeared before the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee (BEIS), whose chair is Rachel Reeves, now Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (she has since left her position on the BEIS Committee).

As a result of the fictitious meeting in front of Ms Reeves' committee, the MP alleged that Wetherspoon changed its policy towards paying staff.

Jo Stevens, MP for Cardiff Central, said on Twitter (25 March): "After a session in front of @RachelReevesMP @CommonsBEIS Wetherspoons have u-turned on decision not to pay 43,000 staff while pubs are shut.

"Staff to be paid on April 3 and weekly after that. Good news, but people won't forget political pressure forced your hand Tim Martin"

Wetherspoon's chairman, Tim Martin, said: "These comments by Jo Stevens MP refer to a meeting which never happened.

"I was never asked to appear in front of Rachel Reeves' committee, as both Ms Stevens and Ms Reeves know.

"It's also completely untrue to say that Wetherspoon had decided not to pay 43,000 staff while pubs are shut.

"In a video recorded on Sunday 22 March, less than two days after the pubs shut, and three days before Ms Stevens' comments, I said: 'All our endeavours are going to be on trying to make sure you get your money and the pubs reopen.'

"An e-mail was sent with the video, saying: 'All employees will be paid as normal on Friday 27 March for all hours worked up to and including Sunday 22 March.'"

Mr Martin added: "Ms Stevens' comments also appear on the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union's website and so will inevitably mislead the public.

"During the Leveson Inquiry, MPs made it abundantly clear that journalists have a duty to correct misleading statements.

"Ms Stevens and Ms Reeves also have a duty to uphold these principles themselves."

(Twitter 25 March 2020)



Rachel Reeves, MP



Jo Stevens, MP

Editor's note: Tim Martin explains how he wrote to Rachel Reeves MP to complain about Jo Stevens MP's invention of a fictitious appearance in front of Ms Reeves' BEIS Committee and about other matters.

Tim says: "I wrote to Rachel Reeves MP, chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee (BEIS) on 2 April, and copied all committee members, to complain about Jo Stevens MP's invention of a fictitious appearance in front of the committee.

"I also complained that a letter sent by Ms Reeves, which was critical of Wetherspoon, had appeared on the BEIS website, but my reply had not.

"I did not receive a reply from Ms Reeves, but received one from another MP, a member of the committee, regarding an earlier letter from Ms Reeves."

The MP said: "the reference (by Rachel Reeves) to the 'committee's deep concerns' does not include me. To my knowledge, the letter was sent without consultation with the committee. Committee meetings had previously been cancelled in line with guidance for entry to the parliamentary estate..."

In conclusion, Rachel Reeves MP had written to Wetherspoon, expressing her 'committee's concerns', but without the knowledge of committee members.

Jo Stevens MP had stated to her followers, tagging or copying in Rachel Reeves, that I (Tim Martin) had appeared in front of the committee, which was untrue; my reply to Rachel Reeves' accusations was not visible on the BEIS website at the time – and I received no reply from Rachel Reeves to the letter below.



Rachel Reeves MP
Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee,
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

2 April 2020

Dear Rachel

CC: Members of the BEIS Committee

Further to our recent correspondence, you will be concerned to note that Jo Stevens MP told her Twitter followers on 25 March that:

"After a session in front of @RachelReevesMP @CommonsBEIS Wetherspoons have u-turned on decision not to pay 43,000 staff while pubs are shut. Staff to be paid on April 3 and weekly after that. Good news, but people won't forget political pressure forced your hand Tim Martin"

As you and your colleagues are aware, no such "session in front of" your committee ever took place – and Wetherspoon never said that it wouldn't pay its staff while its pubs were shut. Wetherspoon actually said the opposite to staff on Sunday 22 March, two days after pubs were closed:

"All our endeavours are going to be on trying to make sure you get your money and the pubs reopen."

You will also be concerned that the highly misleading comments from Ms Stevens appear on the BFAWU website – and are likely, therefore, to have misled the public.

As an aside, I note that your letter to me of 24 March is publicly displayed on the UK Parliament website, yet our replies are not. On 30 March, we were told by your committee specialist, Ian Cruse, that you would be "publishing both replies shortly" (see below).

I am sure that the committee does not wish to mislead the public, or MPs, so a public correction of Ms Stevens' comments and the publication of Wetherspoon's responses to your letters would surely be advisable.

Best wishes

Tim Martin, Chairman
J D Wetherspoon plc

Editor's note: The correspondence between Rachel Reeves and Tim Martin is difficult to find on the BEIS section of the UK Parliament website, although a letter of 24 March from Rachel Reeves is more prominent.

Tim Martin's letter of 2 April, exhibited on this page, does not seem to be available at all on the website.

The correspondence between Rachel Reeves and Tim Martin is available on Wetherspoon's website (www.jdwetherspoon.com/RachelReevesMP).

Wetherspoon has been monitoring any stories in the press which it believes are inaccurate and asking for corrections and apologies.

While the company has never been afraid of criticism, it feels that it can't let the media report stories which are factually incorrect.

Here are some of the corrections...

sky news

Sky News inaccurately reported in its online article of 30 April that:

"Mr Martin ... angrily [suggested] his 43,000 staff go to work for Tesco" and that he "threatened "to withhold wages until compensation from the government arrived." It was also incorrectly reported that the company was "targeting a reopening date in June" and that the "the pub chain argued it should stay open during the coronavirus lockdown."

After Wetherspoon contacted Sky News to correct the inaccurate, misleading statements, it published the following correction on its website:

Correction: This story has been updated to more accurately reflect previous comments by Tim Martin. We have removed our interpretation that Mr Martin "angrily" suggested employees seek jobs at Tesco and that his stated position amounted to a threat to withhold pay. ”

Loughborough Echo

The Loughborough Echo incorrectly reported in an article printed on 15 April that:

"Wetherspoon's decision not to pay its 43,000 staff during the Coronavirus epidemic reveals a major gap in the government's pandemic response", according to Professor Alistair Milne, an "expert in financial economics".

Wetherspoon contacted the Loughborough Echo to ask it to correct the untrue statement and it printed the following:

Correction: Our article 'Retrospective insurance could save firms' 15 April, reported findings of Professor Alistair Milne, of Loughborough University's school of Business and Economics, which included the statement that 'Wetherspoons' took a decision not to pay its 43,000 staff during the coronavirus crisis'.

We have since been contacted by Tim Martin, chairman of JD Wetherspoon, who has advised that employees were paid as normal on Friday 27 March, and have been paid on every Friday since.' We are happy to clarify this. ”

MailOnline

In relation to Wetherspoon opening in June, as mentioned in two articles, the Daily Mail online offered to publish the following correction and clarification:

Correction: In articles dated 29 and 30 April 2020, we reported on the pub chain Wetherspoon's plans to reopen in June. We have been asked to make clear that Wetherspoon does not plan to open its pubs and hotels in June in breach of lockdown restrictions and will only reopen its pubs and hotels when allowed to do so by the Government. ”

It also stated that it would include the statement from Wetherspoon's spokesman Eddie Gershon:

Correction: Wetherspoon spokesman Eddie Gershon said: "Wetherspoon has no hotline to the government as to when pubs might be permitted to reopen and we doubt if the government itself has yet made a decision on this. Like all companies we are trying to make a plan for the future and are guessing that they may be allowed to reopen in late June, around three months after they closed. However, that is just an estimate and may prove to be entirely incorrect. Wetherspoon, like all pub companies, closed its doors when ordered to do so by the government – and will only reopen when it is permitted to do so. ”

As we went to press, Wetherspoon cannot see that the above corrections have been published and has gone back to the Daily Mail to ask for confirmation that it will publish the corrections forthwith.

DAILY STAR

The Daily Star, in an article entitled '12 pints of lager and a packet of crisps, please!', published in its newspaper and online on 30 April 2020, incorrectly stated that:

"JD Wetherspoon announced it will open its doors to drinkers again in a matter of weeks" and "the company said it wants to get back to serving booze "in or around June". It added that the "suggestion could anger ministers."

Wetherspoon contacted the Daily Star, which agreed to print the following correction:

Correction: Our article '12 pints of lager & a packet of crisps, please!' reported that JD Wetherspoon was 'set to reopen in June' and 'will open its doors to drinkers again in a matter of weeks'. JD Wetherspoon have asked us to clarify that at no point has Wetherspoon said that it intends to or will open its pubs and hotels in June, and that no reopening date has been decided. We are happy to clarify this. ”

Forbes

US business magazine Forbes made a large number of mistakes in two articles about Wetherspoon.

Wetherspoon sent the press release, below, as a correction, which was published by the London Stock Exchange:

Wetherspoon's press release:

7 May 2020 JD Wetherspoon plc ("the company")

Correction – Forbes:

Articles published online by the business magazine Forbes, on 27 March and 3 May 2020, made a number of factually incorrect statements regarding the company.

It was alleged that the company told the "workforce that not only would they not be paid, but they can trot off to get a job in a supermarket".

As regards pay, a company video, recorded on Sunday 22 March (transcript below, appendix 1), actually said, "all our endeavours are going to be on trying to make sure that you get your money and that the pubs reopen".

An email, sent out with the video, said: "All hourly paid employees will be paid as normal on Friday 27 March for all hours worked up to, and including, Sunday 22 March 2020."

Staff were paid on that Friday and have been paid on every Friday since.

The statement in Forbes that staff were told they could "trot off to get a job in a supermarket" is misleading. The video actually said "If you're offered a job in a supermarket, many of you will want to do that.

If you think it's a good idea, do it...I promise you, we'll give you first preference if you want to come back."

Furloughed pub and restaurant staff are legally allowed to receive extra income if they work for supermarkets as well.

Forbes also said that the company "announced that... pubs WILL (Wetherspoon capitals) open sometime in June." That is also incorrect.

In a stock exchange announcement on 29 April, Wetherspoon said: "the company's current assumptions are that its pubs will remain closed until late June 2020".

The assumptions related to the modelling of two financial "scenarios", for the benefit of investors, which necessitated an estimated opening date.

The date was only an estimate and the company made clear that it would only open when permitted by the government.

ENDS

As a result of the press release, Forbes changed the headline of its article and also printed the following at the end of the article:

Correction: In response to this article, JD Wetherspoon issued the following statement:

Mr Martin did not say his employees should get a job at a supermarket but accepted that if they were offered a job in a supermarket, he would understand if they wanted to take it. He also did not threaten or indeed withhold any employee pay.

Neither Mr Martin or Wetherspoon have refused to pay suppliers. Wetherspoon has paid all supplier invoices due up to the end of March and the majority (83%) of suppliers have been paid in full.

At no point has Wetherspoon or Mr Martin said that it intends to or will open its pubs in June, in breach of lockdown restrictions. No reopening date has been decided – and its pubs and hotels will only reopen when allowed to do so by the Government. ”