

Boughton's COFFEE HOUSE



Scoop Malone, the beverage trade's finest reporter, brings you another magazine full of trade news and issues!

January 2014

Rescued barista championships will stage UK's first live Tamper Tantrum

There has been an unexpected benefit in the much-discussed emergency action taken to 'rescue' this year's UK barista championship. As we have already reported, there will be a radical change in the coffee trade's major skills contest – the familiar format of regional heats has given way to one single week-long 'super-heat', in Birmingham. Any barista who wishes to enter the contest will have to travel to appear at that central event.

The move is a last-minute rescue strategy devised by the temporary UK Co-ordinator of the Speciality Coffee Association of Europe, which organises the championships. Without it, the qualifying stages of this year's contest could probably not have been held in time for the final, due at the London Coffee Festival.

The initial reaction of the coffee trade was mixed – the concept of a single heat is not entirely popular, but it has been widely acknowledged that Steve Leighton, the coffee roaster of Has Bean in Stafford, stepped into the UK Co-ordinator role at a very late stage and took a necessary decision.

However, a more promising aspect of the current situation is that the new 'super heat', which will be at Birmingham's Millennium Point from



Steve Leighton - a craft roaster gets into showman mode for his super-event

9th-12th February 2014, now allows for a coffee 'event' to be run alongside it – and very interestingly, *Coffee House* has now learned that part of that event will be the first British running of Tamper Tantrums, one of the most imaginative and entertaining talking shops in the trade.

The Tantrums were started by Steve Leighton himself and the Irish barista champ Colin Harmon, in what has been described as a 'drunken rant' after the 2009 world championship finals. The concept rapidly took on a more formal format, and became a platform to present and debate trade issues and enter into question-and-answer sessions.

The online sessions were followed by 'live' events – the first, in Dublin, was a sell-out, and drew visitors from Russia, Germany, and even Australia.

"With just a few weeks' planning, the 'super heat' this year may be 'functional'," Steve Leighton told us, "but we will make sure it is fun and as good an event as we can produce. We have decided that a Tamper Tantrum will now happen on the Sunday morning, the first day of the heats."

The line up of speakers will include Lynsey Harley of Falcon Specialty Coffee, Maxwell Colonna Dashwood of Colonna and Smalls (a former British barista champ and a thoughtful writer on many café business issues),

Peter Dore Smith of Kaffeine in London (another writer of considered café business items), and James Hoffman, who was the UK's first world champ, and whose blogs on the trade have a worldwide readership.

Although the new idea of a central 'super-heat' has not gone down entirely well in the trade, partly because it will require contestants from all parts of the country to travel to Birmingham, it has been widely accepted that the existing format of regional heats, which has been in place for perhaps seven years, has presented several problems.

Ever since the regional heats were devised, around seven years ago, they have been under-attended – the hosting of these local events has always been done by generous local trade companies, but the events themselves have gained little attention. The major sponsors, and invariably the machine sponsor, have had to trail around the country setting up equipment for events which are often attended only by a few contestants and occasionally their workmates and relatives.

"Heats have been fairly depressing places, with the echo chamber of the industry talking to each other," Leighton remarked.

This is why doubt about the concept of a central super-heat has been widely qualified with a large amount of sympathy for the position Steve Leighton found himself in, and unanimous agreement of the principle that in a crisis situation, one decisive move to get things going is preferable to hesitancy.

The general attitude of the trade has been well summed up by James Hoffmann of the Square Mile roastery, who said to us: "Watching a barista competition is not, by and large, particularly compelling or engaging – an event that has other attractions for the wider industry, talks and workshops, is going to be a big draw. I'm going to do the best I can to support it."

INSIDE THE MYSTERY OF ROASTING

- or is it something than any café owner can try, and enjoy doing?

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THE PUZZLE OF WATER QUALITY

- "the question that worries everybody in coffee"

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DIRECT TRADING

- face-to-face business with farmers in Peru

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A most unusual themed coffee shop has opened in Lowestoft – it is the Dawn of Time, based on the Dr Who characters and stories. The themed coffee shop is run by Jim Poole, Beatrix Poole, Nikoya Sutton and Henry Baker, and features a Tardis-like entrance and even a Dalek, a Cyberman, and a K9. Jim Poole appears in the café dressed as the second Doctor, played by Patrick Troughton in the 1960s; Henry Baker appears as the fifth Doctor, who was played by Peter Davison. The café doubles as a stockist of science fiction comics, and the owners already have the interest of actor John Hurt, who played the Doctor in last month's 50th anniversary special, and who lives in nearby Norfolk.

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Yet another coffee-scalding case has come to the American courts - a woman in Los Angeles is suing McDonald's, which has figured in such a case before, for burns allegedly caused by carelessness at a drive-through. The claimant alleges that the lid for the hot coffee was 'negligently, carelessly and improperly placed' on the coffee cup, so that when the drink was passed from the serving window, hot coffee spilled on to her. And the midlands press here reports that a pensioner who tore her hamstring when she slipped on a spillage at a Starbucks store has accepted a compensation sum described as 'four figures'. The customer's case rested on the accusation that staff at the coffee shop had already been warned by a customer that the spillage presented an accident hazard.

The latest row over a proposed Costa is in the Preston area, where residents of Mellor Brook have protested about the idea of a new Costa unit beside an existing KFC. The council has already recommended approval. Complainers have said the application 'makes a mockery of all local businesses and residents that abide by planning regulations', and there are claims that the site is a cause of disturbance and littering. In Hinchley Wood, Surrey, councillors received a round of applause on their decision to turn down an application by Costa. Nine councillors refused the plans, saying they were worried about the effect of litter, and

about the proposed opening hours of 6.30am to 6.30pm.

Welcome Break has opened a drive-through Starbucks at Warwick South services on the M40, and have referred to 'a surge in customer demand' for the drive-through for - mat.

A deli in Cleethorpes has expanded by acquiring the coffee shop next door. The Deli-licious business has taken over the Coffee Lounge and Tea Garden, which it has re-named Gallagher's Cafe and Cakery, after the new owner's two-year-old grandson... with, said the owner, a view to the child taking over the business in 18 years or so!

A rather curious, but acceptable, award has been given to the Six Eight café in Birmingham - it has won the 'best expensive coffee' title from the Birmingham Mail. Rather curiously, the 'most improved brand' award went to Starbucks. The 'worst cup' was awarded to Caffe Nero.

The Lavender Fields tea room of Keighley has won the 'tea room of the year' award from hashtagteclub, a delightfully idiosyncratic online review site run by two tea fans in Yorkshire.

The Seasons coffee shop and deli of Woking has won the local Young Business award after just over a year in business. The owner, Victoria Ward, says that the award was in recognition of the shop's work in the community and its role as the 'soul of the village'.



Is foot-grinding best for coffee?

There has been an entertainingly mixed reaction to the invention of the single-portion coffee grinder which fits to the back wheel of a bike, and is worked by the pedalling action.

There are those who claim that the product is a send-up of the modern trendy link between coffee enthusiasts and cycling fans - but according to the product website, in spite of its light hearted language, the Gear Grinder is a serious prospect. It was invented by Dan Hill and Dave Buonaguidi from the Karmarama advertising agency, who call it 'the coolest grinder on the street' and 'an invention up there with the discovery of fire and the creation of the internet'.

The grinder is a steel canister that fixes to the seat pillar of a bike, and ideally grinds 14gm in 100 turns, or about half a mile. One of the inventors says, straight-faced: "I believe hand or foot grinding is better than machine grinding because the imperfections in the 'analogue' grinding process creates an unevenness which adds to the subtle notes of the coffee flavour." The other said, quite entertainingly: "there's a clear, and often moustachioed, overlap between those who love great coffee and ride fixed-gear bikes to work every morning. We saw that as a brilliant opportunity." The price is... £350!

In East Anglia, another bike shop and café business is to start up - two keen cyclists are to convert a former village pub in Hawstead, near Bury St Edmunds, into a combined cycle showroom, workshop and cafe, with a patio and garden and a large car and cycle parking area. The partners say it will cost about £100,000 to change the 17th-century building, but that the 'massive increase' in the popularity of cycling has created big demand for such a business.

The trend for other twin-business cafes has continued at Loch Lomond with the opening of Dug, a coffee shop and 'dog boutique'. ('Dug' is 'dog' in Scottish!) This is at Loch Lomond Shores, a visitor centre made up of 'leisure and shopping experiences'. The cafe operator, Laura Davies, has said that it was a long-held ambition to open a business where dog-owners would feel welcome to visit with their pets. The site management have reported 'huge' numbers of visitors and enquiries, and suggest that it is unique for such a site to make a positive business move towards catering for tourists with dogs.

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Free wi-fi - the first-class strategy

A coffee house in San Francisco has made a decisive move over the fraught and still-continuing puzzle of free wi-fi.

The standard problem is of how to offer the service, yet protect against the 'campers' who take up a table all day for the price of one coffee (if they even buy that), and a subsidiary problem is of users who dominate the available bandwidth by downloading high-capacity files. The Coffee Bar has approached the problem in a positive way - they give a certain amount of free wi-fi to casual laptop-using customers, but for those who want to work there all day, they now sell 'business-grade' high-speed wi-fi services for \$5 a day, or \$25 a month. Part of the key to the business is the way the café is designed - the working facility is on a mezzanine floor, so it does not interfere with the takeaway trade down stairs. The upstairs is divided into communal and private seating options, with the interesting addition of signs banning laptop usage in certain areas at peak times. There are now customers who do a full week's work there - the operator says that the five dollars, supported by a half a dozen drinks, makes the offer worthwhile.



The latest in unusual crisp flavours comes from Burton's, and is a re-launch of an idea the company tried in the 1980s - it is the Fish 'n' Chips flavour, which has re-appeared as the result of a Facebook petition, and also campaigns by the Sun and the Grocer to revive certain 'known and loved' products. The petition organiser said that as soon as his project hit 3,000 signatories, he would approach Burton's - he reached the target almost immediately.



Mallorcan coffee arrives

A new coffee brand has turned up, from the Spanish island of Mallorca. The Marabans blends were created there to provide a better coffee experience to holidaymakers who had complained about the poor quality of coffee on the island.

"From the outset the challenge was to strive to roast the best green beans for the perfect espresso," says Richard Fowler, who has launched Marabans UK in Wolverhampton. "Marabans now has almost 600 cafes, bars and hotels using the coffee across the island. We have created a company here to market the coffee across the UK, and we have already got clients who sampled it while on holiday."

The coffee will translate readily to the British taste, he says.

"The most important fact to clarify is that although the beans are roasted in Spain they are not Torrefacto!" Richard told us (Torrefacto is the rather distinctive Spanish coffee in which sugar is added during the roasting process).

"In Mallorca the locals prefer straight espresso, but the visitors expect coffee which will work with a variety of milk options."



This is, believe it or not, an espresso machine. It is made by the South African company Espresso Veloce as a tribute to the mechanical design of the formula one engine, at roughly half the size. The machine dispenses coffee through one of six titanium 'exhaust pipes' into stainless steel 'piston cups', and what appears to be an oil filler cap is for 'the blending of supplementary liquors into the espresso experience'. The Serie Titanio V12 is probably £9,000, and it is, not surprisingly, a limited edition.



The simplest, but perhaps classiest, coffee maker in the world may now be the Canadiano from Fishtnk Design Factory of Ontario. This is essentially a straightforward pourover, with a metal filter instead of a paper one, but is carved out of a single block of cherry, walnut or maple wood. The inventor says that, rather in the same way as ancient Chinese teapots act, coffee oils will be absorbed into the wood over time. In a quite delightfully straight-faced video presentation, the inventor, Ezra, explains: "my discourse with it has been defined by a sub-aqueous ambiguity... the disjunctive biomorphism sustains its physicality, and evokes the spatio-temporal narrative." Pure barista-speak... but as the video fades, he clearly adds: "it just makes ****ing coffee!"

Yet more coffee research – no, it doesn't dehydrate, but don't drink it after 6pm if you want to sleep!

A vast amount of interest has been generated by yet another study on coffee and hydration – and this one suggests that coffee dehydrates no more than drinking water does.

"Despite a lack of scientific evidence, a common belief is that coffee consumption can lead to dehydration and should be avoided, or reduced, in order to maintain a healthy fluid balance," said the author of the study. "We aimed to establish if regular coffee consumption under normal conditions is detrimental to the drinker's hydration status."

The question of whether caffeine is a diuretic has been regularly researched, with varying and occasionally contradictory results, ever since the first report published over 80 years ago.

This time, researchers at Birmingham University took 50 men and had half of them drink four cups of Nescafe Original a day for three days, while the other half of the group drank four glasses of water. Both groups had a controlled diet and were required to do no exercise other than walking. The guinea-pigs were existing coffee drinkers, usually consuming 3-6 cups per day.

The researchers report: "our data shows that there were no significant differences across a wide range of haematological and urinary markers of hydration status between trials. These data suggest that coffee, when consumed in moderation by caffeine habituated males provides similar hydrating qualities to water... our data confirms the author's conclusions that a moderate consumption of caffeine does not disrupt 'total body water'."

The team did point out that the same may not be true for females, as only males were tested.

In a rather curious footnote, the researchers suggested that "it may have been interesting to include a decaffeinated coffee as this would have identified any differences specifically caused by caffeine in coffee - however, we believe that it is unlikely that we would have found any significant differences."

There is never any shortage of research work on coffee, much of which falls into the category of 'non-essential knowledge' – and now the trade will be astonished to learn that the worst time to drink coffee is before bedtime, as it can have 'significant disruptive effects on sleep'. However, the interesting part of the work by the Henry Ford Sleep Disorders and Research Centre is the finding that even when caffeine is consumed six hours before going to bed, 'total sleep time' is dramatically reduced, perhaps by more than an hour. So, say the researchers, even a big cup of coffee after work can have an effect, and suggest that those who are worried about getting enough sleep should not drink coffee after 5pm.

Nine per cent of adults believe that coffee can cause cancer, according to a newspaper report at the end of last year - however, a spokesman for the World Cancer Research Fund has responded: "new evidence from our Continuous Update Project suggests drinking coffee may decrease the risk of womb cancer... we have found no consistent evidence that suggests coffee increases or decreases the risk of any other cancers, but there are still too many unanswered questions for us to provide any advice on coffee drinking."



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A quick public response saved the day for one of many cafes which opened on Christmas Day to feed the lonely and homeless and deliver to housebound customers. Marylou's of Chelmsford had raised £300 for its annual giveaway, but the entire fund was stolen ten days before Christmas - but when the story came out, the local Round Table, the Tiptree jam company, and individual customers all offered donations, which ended up at double the amount stolen, and allowed the café operator to do more for the community than she had expected.

Costa has provoked a very unusual row in Leighton Buzzard by refusing to display a poster asking for information about a local man who went missing over the New Year holiday. Other businesses in the town have displayed the notices, but Costa refused - however, when local customers complained to the chain's head office, Costa apologised and put the sign up.

An interesting statistic has cropped up in some otherwise fairly mundane news from the Coffee, Tea and Cocoa expo organisation in Germany. In welcoming a German herbal association into membership, Coteca happened to note that herbal and fruit teas are now by some distance the biggest-selling teas in Germany - in 2012, the country consumed 12.6 billion cups, which means that fruit and herbal teas now account for two-thirds of the country's tea drinking.

David Locker, formerly the sales manager for Bunn, is the latest recruit in the growing activity of Bewleys UK, which has seen the Irish roaster recently acquire both Darlings of London and the Bolling roastery in Yorkshire. He becomes Bewley's new head of business development. "David is very well regarded in the UK coffee scene and his expertise on filter brewing standards and blend profiling is amongst the best in the business," remarked Bewley's UK managing director, Brendan McDonnell. "We regard his appointment as strategically very important for our development in the UK."

Bitcoins, the internet currency which effectively avoids the use of banks and credit cards, has been taken up by a number of Indian tea exporters, reports the Hindu Business Line, which says that the country's commerce ministry and tea board have begun to get worried about the practice, because it deprives the Indian exchequer of revenue, and loses business held by cargo exporters. "The price of speciality teas is fantastic, around \$11 per 15 gm," reports the paper. "Any consignment of up to four kilos, sent out of India by international courier, attracts no mandatory surveillance or monitoring."

A very unusual coffee-shop theft has been suffered by Time Circa 2010 of Huddersfield - it has had all its distinctive external Union Jack bunting stolen. The 100ft length of bunting has been a recognisable feature of the café for some time, and owner Andrew Dunne was astonished to find it had disappeared over a weekend, which was taken by some locals to mean the café had closed down. He told his local paper: "It's a pretty unscrupulous and unpatriotic thing to do, especially during the season of goodwill. Our regular customers are very aggrieved by the theft and have asked if we will be replacing it - which we will."

The Belle and Jerome coffee shop of Nottingham has adopted a brain tumour research organisation as its charity partner and has pledged to raise money and awareness for the good cause. Business partners Rob Darby and Tom Vincent have said that the local medical centre does much of the charity's research work, and that while nine thousand people are now diagnosed with brain tumours every year, comparatively little research funds go to the work. They have said that they were surprised how many members of the public have come to speak with them, citing family experience of the problem. Ten pence from each coffee served will go to the cause, the café will host five or six charity events during the year, and staff members will run the next Robin Hood Half Marathon for the charity.

The rock band Blur has released a collection of merchandise including, of all things, a tea set. At £69, it is the most expensive item in the band's souvenir shop, and is made in the Potteries from fine bone china, decorated with the band's Britannia logo.

Shelter From the Storm, the homeless charity run and supported by several people connected with the coffee trade, has had another celebrity turn up to do an evening's cooking - this time it was actor Clarke Peters, known as Lester Freamon in *The Wire*.

Mercanta, the 'Coffee Hunter' green bean importer, has three new faces, including a world barista champion. Joanna Lawson, who set up the Collaborative Coffee Source speciality coffee trading company in Oslo, joins the London team, while Megan Rindt, once a Starbucks barista, has joined the American office. Most notably, Guatemala's Raul Rodas, World Barista Champion in 2012, has joined Mercanta of the Americas, and will support the London School of Coffee, which is now opening a Guatemalan campus.

The coffee car is for sale

The coffee-driven car which broke the world speed record for an unconventional-ly-fuelled vehicle is up for sale on the Ebay auction site.

The car is a Ford converted by Martin Bacon, who installed a charcoal stove which breaks down coffee-bean chaff into carbon monoxide and hydrogen; the result powers a modified petrol engine, and last February the coffee car reached 65 mph in a test monitored by the Guinness record people. After breaking the speed record, the coffee car completed a 2,000-mile round-Britain tour.

The guide price for the vehicle is £5,000, although the inventor says he will listen to offers. The revenue is believed to be funding a project in which a waste-powered boat will be sailed around the UK.

The car on sale is the third coffee car created by the inventor - the first, which appeared on BBC's *Bang Goes The Theory*, is likely to go on display in a museum, and the second version was taken apart to build the one now



on sale.

The coffee car is perhaps not the most unusual food-powered vehicle - four years ago, someone built a Formula Three eco-racer, in which the bodywork was made of vegetable fibres mixed with resins, and the fuel was a 'biodiesel' composed mainly of oils from chocolate extracts. It had a claimed speed of 145mph, but was prevented from racing because the fuel did not meet competition regulations!

Why do Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson appear to be drinking from Aeropresses? They aren't - but there is indeed a coffee-trade link with this curious scene from the recent TV drama. The containers are actually Academy 500ml cylinders from Cream Supplies, the wholesaler in Portsmouth which specialises in creative equipment and ingredients and is, among other things, probably the trade distributor with the widest range of flavoured syrups. The 'cylinders' are used by classy cocktail bars, and Cream Supplies tell us that in the Holmes story, were used 'as part of a carefully-calculated strategy to ensure that he and Watson consumed the precise amount of alcohol to induce manageable merriment, rather than outright drunkenness, on Watson's stag night'. The cylinders are in various sizes, and the 500ml ones are priced at £2.93.



The 'disloyalty card' concept, which was invented several years ago by barista champion Gwilym Davies in London, has now surfaced in Washington DC. The concept, in which six stamps from different local coffee houses wins the customer a free drink at any of them, is reportedly a project to divert attention from the local Starbucks.

Another American coffee-house campaign is also something which we have also seen in the UK - several coffee companies in California are now offering to accept Starbucks gift cards, as a way of luring consumers into the independent sector. One of these campaigns goes by the name of The Better Coffee Exchange.

The potential is apparently immense - unbelievable as it sounds (or maybe not), one in ten Americans received a Starbucks card as a festive gift.



This is promoted as the first coffee cup to express sympathy for an early morning - it is the Fred and Friends Wake-Up Cup, in which heat-sensitive ink responds to the filling with a hot beverage, by changing the drowsy face into a smile. It is around £10 from Amazon.



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Boughton's Coffee House

is published by Ian Boughton and Trudi Roark
The Old Farmyard, Mill Road, Dilham, North Walsham,
Norfolk, NR28 9PU

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The news website is www.coffee-house.org.uk
The newsfeed is boughtonscoffeehouse.wordpress.com

One of the most traditional trade names of all has made a new move towards the high street market – Ringtons of Newcastle has created a new range which is intended to give cafes an additional revenue source, by selling its Signature tea and coffee both in the cup and in the takeaway pack.

Ringtons originally made its name with one of the most charming stories in the trade – as a coffee roaster and tea blender, it first sold its tea from a horse and cart, going round the front doors of Newcastle. The horses have gone, but the core business model remains – astonishingly, Ringtons still delivers packs of tea personally, by van, to a quarter of a million customers across the UK.

(What is less known is that the majority of the company's business is elsewhere. It produces a vast amount of private-label products, probably far more than most people realise, and has a turnover in the region of forty million pounds).

The concept of the new Signature brand, according to Ringtons' head of beverages Stephen Drysdale, is to reach a new catering trade audience.

"We have several routes to market – we have the doorstep delivery by 210 vans, we have web commerce, and we have a trade division.

"Our trade work has always been centred on the north east and Cumbria, and my job has been to make it national. So we now supply to Aberdeen, we have cafes and restaurants as far south as Cornwall serving



Stephen Drysdale with his new range

Ringtons moves for the high-street cafe market

Ringtons, and we've even just picked up a library in Devon!

"What these trade customers see in us is a combination of quality and brand story – there's not a lot of old companies with a reputation like ours still trading, and our brand has a certain comfort factor. Everybody knows of the Ringtons doorstep service... although that does concentrate on a certain demographic, the over-45s.

"The problem we had with coffee shops was that some were asking for an additional retail proposition in packs, that we didn't have... but not all wanted it. So, what we have done is to say: 'if you don't want the retail product, put some talkers on your

tables which will lead the customers to our website – if they order, we can identify where they came from, and your café gets commission'."

Just how wide a product offering can the café owner expect to get from Ringtons? It's easy to assume that a domestic tea delivery based in the north of England would concentrate on everyday teas, but Ringtons' range turns out to be extremely wide.

The clue, says Stephen Drysdale, comes from looking at the reason for the recent success of the doorstep service. The idea of a personal tea delivery sounds if it cannot possibly be viable, but in fact the service has developed to a remarkable degree

because of the range of products on offer – it is no longer just tea, and the most recent products for home delivery include tea towels, toffee-apple cake, jams and preserves, and even a teapot-shaped bird feeder!

"This is just the same as the old-fashioned milkman service, except that he got swallowed by the super-markets," observes Drysdale. "There are 265,000 active customers getting our delivery every two or four weeks, and each driver averages 140 calls a day... that's how it's viable."

So, for the café owner, the range of teas and coffee is big.

"The potential for a range of speciality products is vast, because of the amount of them we produce through the factory for private label... we are an 'artisan' company, in that we do roast our own coffees and blend our own teas, and we do concentrate very much on freshness.

"But we keep our own Ringtons range tight. It's only in recent times that we've introduced rooibos for doorstep deliveries... if you want, you can also get a first-flush Darjeeling delivered to your door, but it would not generally be economic to fill our vans with our most expensive teas!

"However, for the caterer, this means that yes, you certainly can get a wide menu of teas and coffees from Ringtons... and what's more, even during December, we delivered 99.5 per cent of orders next day.

"We've worked very hard to get our trade offer right and interesting for the high street cafe."

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Costa has spoken of its intention to drive its Express business with a new, smaller and more attractive coffee machine called Marlow, which is intended to suit venues such as offices, universities and hospitals. The company has a target of 6,000 machines in the UK within the next four years. An investor conference was told that while the current Costa Express machines are 'fantastic in the forecourt arena - big, red, conspicuous, and generate impulse purchases', they are just too big and too red for offices. Costa estimates the market at around 20,000 possible machines, and currently has 30 of the new machines on trial across Europe.

The American coffee shop chain Dunkin' Donuts, which has returned to the UK after more than ten years with a new store in Harrow, proposes to open 15 drive-through doughnut-and-coffee stores in the next five years, from a total plan of 150 sites. For its second attempt at the British market, the chain proposes to seek 'cheaper locations'. The Harrow store is operated by DDMG, a combination of three experienced Dunkin' Donuts franchisees from America, and two British partners. This group proposes to develop sites in the next five years. The parent company says it is in 'advanced discussions' with other potential franchise partners. The chief executive has suggested that the sites serve coffee of a comparable quality to other chains, but with far better speed of service.

Two brothers have launched the new Syngé & Byrne coffee shop business in northern Ireland, and intend to begin with three launch sites, followed by three each year over the next five years. The Garvey brothers have been development franchisees for the O'Brien sandwich bars, and will now open 'coffee kitchen' units in Newtownabbey, Belfast and Londonderry. The concept is intended to combine the 'arti-

san' food and coffee movements with traditional Ulster cuisine.

There has been some surprise in Bristol over the appearance of the new entrance to the town's infirmary - the most noticeable feature of the site is a massive Costa sign, which, it has been pointed out, dwarfs any signs for the hospital itself. The redevelopment of the hospital foyer was a £5 million project, and it is suggested that while retail brands renting space in the new entrance area are not entitled to external signs, Costa simply made best use of the glazed front of the extended entrance, and made sure its interior sign was visible for a long way. The hospital's new 'welcome centre' also features a Marks and Spencer, a WH Smith, and a ladies' fashion retailer.

The founder of My Coffee Stop on Enfield Chase station, who moved all the way to Somerset to open her second site, has made her mark already - after just a few months in Shepton Mallett, Karen Mercer has been elected a town councillor.

The Millie and Me coffee shop in Brixham has won the 'high street hero' vote in its local paper. The contest was run to mark the UK's first ever Small Business Saturday.

The Tea42 café was opened in Manchester last month by actress Michelle Collins of Coronation Street. The venture is operated by Will Hannah and Jason Abbott, who run the luxury boutique hotel chain Blue Rainbow Aparthotels. The pair have said that they want to create an alternative to the traditional tearoom experience and also make a strong impression on the gluten-free market - the partners have credited the actress with suggesting the idea of a gluten-free menu.

Starbucks is to open in Witney, Oxfordshire, after some years of debate - it did put up signage at one stage but did not open. It will now open directly opposite a Costa.

Spanish coffee roaster Marabans has launched its exclusive brand of coffee to the UK and is looking to initially recruit 10 freelance sales agents to cover exclusive territories across the country, selling Marabans' selection of coffee beans, speciality teas, machines & associated products.



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Nespresso fighting a rearguard battle?

In yet another stage of the lawsuits over coffee capsules, Nespresso has now reportedly dropped a lawsuit in Germany over alleged patent violations by the Ethical Coffee Company.

In a statement reportedly e-mailed to a news agency, the multi-national brand said that it had 'decided to withdraw its counterfeiting case', which is a very curious turn of phrase - it was originally reported that Nespresso had sought a ban on capsules labelled 'Nespresso-compatible' but made without a licence. Counterfeiting, however, is an entirely different matter, and generally refers to fake products - that is, if a compatible capsule were to be labelled in such a way as to suggest that it were made by Nespresso.

This is not the first odd aspect of the case. In February last year, a German court reached the interesting decision that 'coffee capsules were not a key element of Nespresso coffee-makers', but that the machine's brewing technology was the key issue.

Perhaps understandably, Nespresso has said that it disagrees with this, but that it is in the company's interest to end the case.

Two compatible capsule makers had been named in the action. One of

them, the Ethical Coffee Company, responded with a statement saying that Nespresso now realises that it is under extreme pressure, and that 'Nestlé is wearing itself out with rearguard battles that it always ends up losing'.

However, a curious story from Switzerland suggests that the newest Nespresso machine destroys compatible capsules. According to the *SonntagsBlick* newspaper, Nespresso has changed the way capsules are pierced, using thinner needles which cannot pierce some compatible capsules. In the extreme cases, it is reported, the machine will crush the compatible. It is reported that one compatible maker suffered 60 per cent failures in Nespresso machines; however, one compatible maker has issued a statement saying that 'technical modifications that Nespresso machines have undergone in 2013 in no way impact on the functionality of our capsules'.

Costa - big sales in small towns

Costa has passed on some intriguing information to a recent meeting of market analysts.

In saying that it proposed to add 500 sites in the next five years, reaching around 2,200, the brand forecast that 200 sites would be in high streets, a hundred in retail parks and drive-throughs, 80 in universities and offices, 100 would be instore concessions, and 75 would be in transport hubs. Among the interesting figures given were that in small towns, such as a North Yorkshire one with a population of 1,700, average weekly sales have reached £6,900.

By contrast, it was said that Costa has suffered less than one per cent rent inflation per year over the past five years, and 80 per cent of its sites have had no increase on a rent review - this was put down to the over-supply of available retail space on the high street.

Costa Coffee now has 2.3 million names on its loyalty scheme, with 'demographic insights' captured on over half of them.

The average transaction value at Costa is £3.83, and coffee is now 49 per cent of sales, although 69 per cent of transactions involve both eating and drinking on site. Food sales account for 29 per cent of total shop sales, and are seen as a major subject for development. One snack item, a chocolate teacake, now sells 20,000 a week.

Staff turnover has decreased radically - ten years ago the figure was 120 per cent, and it is now a quarter of that.

The company also told analysts that

its managed sites take an average of £499,000 per annum, cost an average of £226,000 in capital expenditure to open, and produce £94,000 per site profit each before central overheads. Franchised sites take an average of £420,000 per annum. The Costa Express machines take an average of £28,000 per annum each.

Designers in north Carolina have come up with a coffee mug which is intended to keep coffee at correct sipping temperature for hours at a time, without using any electricity.

The Temperfect 16oz stainless-steel travel mug is a triple-wall flask using a layer of 'phase-change material'. Phase-change materials change from one state to another when exposed to heat, absorbing



some of that heat and storing it as energy. As they cool, the materials release the stored heat. In this case, excess heat from freshly-made coffee is absorbed, which has the effect of bringing the beverage down to a drinkable temperature. As the phase-change material cools, the absorbed heat is released to flow back into the coffee, making it again at a 'just right' temperature. The inventors hope to raise production money through the Kickstarter crowdfunding site.



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It is now perhaps eight or nine years since the concept of the roaster-retailer was seriously put up as a likely major step forward in the coffee trade. That has happened to a degree, but what was perhaps unforeseen, and overtook it, was the rapid increase in the number of small-business 'artisan' roasteries in the UK.

Just a few years ago, we were chatting to the 'coffee hunter', the head of the green-bean importer Mercanta, who remarked to us that he had been surprised at the number of roasters now operating in the UK, which had popped up into three figures.

This year, it is suggested, the number of people roasting coffee in the UK for some kind of commercial purpose, however large or small it may be, is now certainly in the plural hundreds.

"In this sense, coffee has much in common with beer brewing," remarks Mercanta. "We have giant enormous multinationals with entire stables of brands, and hundreds of artisans and independents whose total roasting all put together would not match a month at the Nestle plant!"

The standard of the new breed of roasters varies widely. There are some whose output is regarded with a certain respect, and on the other hand, there are some who have been derided for making a big thing of claiming to buy 'the world's best coffees', but whose output doesn't match that description – it is, as many people have pointed out, just as easy to be careless and burn a great bean as an average one.

So, where do all these roasters learn? It is known that some of the UK's best-established and respected craft roasters are self-taught... but the best of the new breed have taken advantage of the relatively-new phenomenon of a roasting school.

It was a slight surprise when the London School of Coffee launched a roasting course six or seven years ago, but the results have proved the value of it – many new roasteries refer to having been trained there.

And many of the student roasters have come under the care of one very distinctive trainer – Morten Munchow of Denmark, one of the most entertaining trainers in the coffee world. When many trainers come from the 'elite' end of the coffee world, Morten has an eminently practical attitude.

He's a biologist, but stresses that the everyday coffee-house owner who wants to develop into roasting doesn't have to be a scientist.

He enthusiastically supports the view of the roaster who recently said in our pages that: 'some people talk coffee roasting into being more complicated than it is. The reality is that roasting is little different from scrambling an egg, in assessing the right quantities of heat and air'.

Coffee roasting, agrees Morten Munchow, is something that any café

Coffee roasting for the cafe owner

The number of micro-roasteries opening up is quite phenomenal, and many of them have been trained by the London School of Coffee... and roasting is more fun than scary, says the trainer



Morten Munchow applies a practical froth test

owner can understand, and better still, can enjoy, whether for the fun of it or as a step in developing a business.

"I got into roasting by weird coincidence. My main science is philosophy, which gave me an understanding of how to manage teaching, and my recent work has been to develop teaching materials which show how to make complicated things more easy.

"I was doing a university project on the teaching of science, and I happened to choose the subject of teaching espresso-brewing chemistry to baristas. That brought me into contact with all the coffee people of Copenhagen."

He entered coffee sufficiently successfully to assist Troels Poulsen win the world barista title the following year, and Morten himself began work on the biochemical aspects of cappuccino foam for the University of Copenhagen, while then becoming roastmaster for a Danish business.

It is that reference to 'making complicated things easy' which sets the tone for his British roasting classes – the café owner with no science degree will get as involved as anyone else.

"The strange thing about roasting is that there is no learning material, other than some crude rules-of-thumb... and a lot of people on the internet contradicting each other!

"So, while I do a certification programme which goes from foundation to professional stages, the starting point for the entire thing is to let people grab some green coffee, heat it, and see what happens... no more than that."

The high street coffee bar owner can draw a lot of useful knowledge out of a little roasting experience, says Munchow. It doesn't take a science degree to tell the difference between everyday coffee and great coffee, and in his view, there is no need for a roaster to dedicate themselves monk-like to the lifelong pursuit of the ultimate in speciality coffee, as the geek sector of the industry would like us to believe is the true path.

No, says Morten, a café owner can achieve some satisfactory success by just devoting part of his business life to it.

"I understand, and I care a lot about, the high-street segment of the trade – it is the most important segment of our industry. And I also believe that it is more important to raise the general quality of coffee on the high street than to worry about the ultimate state of the art... so I spend a lot of time telling my students the difference between what is 'state of the art', and what is good enough to be called 'speciality'.

"My claim is that state-of-the-art coffee does have a unique profile, but that it is not necessary for the trainee to do more than map out a basic profile which can be used on different good coffees ... the character of each coffee will do the rest of the job.

"I say that on a three-day course, most people will nail a really straight-forward approach to roasting speciality coffee. By the third day, you're going to have it! One good profile, which you can learn in a few days, is enough to allow you to get started as a speciality roaster.

"And then I say 'now, you can go home and build a profile which will be good enough to serve as speciality.

"Then, if you really want to, you can spend the rest of your life playing with the ultimate state of the art!"

Is it reasonable to suggest that an average café owner can approach roasting at a level which suits him and his customers and can turn out a result which will be good enough for an average high street coffee bar?

"Definitely, definitely. The question is, what is your ambition? To make something which is good enough to serve as speciality coffee, or to tweak every bean to perfection?"

"As you can see, I think I'm a bit different from others in this business... I'm trying to keep things simple, and my aim is to make more people in the coffee trade think: I can do this!"

What good will this do the independent coffee business? Learning the skill of roasting develops café staff appreciation of how to treat coffee in general, says Morten Munchow.

"I often tell students that I prefer fresh coffee roasted badly, than stale coffee roasted well, because freshness is the really huge parameter in coffee.

"The definition of freshness is – using a fresh crop. Some places have one crop a year, some two; but don't use coffee more than a year old!

"When it's fresh, the aromatics are held in the coffee, not lost around the room, and this has a huge impact on the taste of the coffee. When roasted, and if you are very forgiving, it may last a month. When it's ground, maybe a few days.

"So, if you roast for yourself, you can control the freshness of your coffee. If you are using imported roasted coffee, then you may not be getting the strictest quality."

On the other hand, not too fresh.

"The other issue related to fresh –

“ I'm a bit different from others in this business... I'm trying to keep things simple, and my aim is to make more people in the coffee trade think: I can do this! ”



ness is that you must have some gases, but not too much – so you should not brew the coffee for the first five days after roasting, but you have an optimum window which goes to perhaps three weeks after roasting.

"I am associated with a roaster in Denmark, and sometimes we put coffee in our retail shop and the customer will say: 'you said this was fresh - it's five days old!' Well, in my mind, that is fresh, and may still be too fresh!"

Is it practical for new roasters to learn the art of blending? This magazine reported, some years ago, on a champion barista who decided to create his own coffee blend... he assumed that, as a champ and a coffee expert, he would dash it off fairly quickly, and was a little chastened to finally accept that creating his own blend took him six months of trial and error!

"You can learn the basics of blending in a day," responds Munchow encouragingly. "The way I teach it is to let the students take individual component coffees, roast them individually, and then create a blend by combining these now-roasted coffees.

"There is an interesting question of whether you roast the coffees individually, or whether you blend the green coffees and then roast them together. I say you should always roast individually, because this gives you much more flexibility - you have the chance to play with the character of each bean."

Not everybody does so, he agrees with a grin.

“ The strange thing about roasting is that there is no learning material, other than some crude rules-of-thumb... and a lot of people on the internet contradicting each other! ”

"When you are in business, you have to consider costs and resources, and spend time where it makes most sense... so yes, there are some roasters who roast coffee dark to be drunk with a lot of milk and sugar, and as they will have lost a lot of the characteristics of the bean anyway by roasting so dark, they might as well save and money by roasting the green beans together!"

The buying of beans is not difficult - there are several reputable sources in the UK. The main thing is, says Morten, to know that choosing only good-quality speciality-grade coffee does not mean going for the ultra-expensive Cup of Excellence coffees.

"A 'speciality' coffee is defined as one which accepts no defects at all - no broken beans, no damaged beans. Commodity coffee is that which accepts damaged beans because of the percentages - the more defects,



the lower the price."

(The really scary thing about the coffee market, he adds in an aside, is that there is no waste in the coffee industry... everything, even the worst beans, get to the consumer somehow, in somebody's product!)

"So I say, don't go to the top of the scale and Cup of Excellence coffees first, but concentrate on working on nice, good-looking, reasonable speciality coffee. Then just apply a few rules."

Apart from the fun and satisfaction of learning to roast, says Morten, there is a good business case for doing it, even in a relatively small way.

"The difference in price between a green bean and a roasted bean is a very good reason for doing it. This is the biggest price difference in the industry - a café margin is from roasted bean to cup, and if you increase that margin to stretch from green bean

to cup, it is a considerably bigger thing."

This does, of course, involve buying a roasting machine, and there, the range of prices can be baffling. There are still some little 'home roasters' available for hundreds of pounds; decent sample roasters and one-or-two kilo models in the low thousands, and then the professional models are £50,000 upwards.

It has been said that some excellent coffees have been created for retail sale on two-kilo roasters, and no newcomer is going to go for a big machine right from the start... essentially, as everyone agrees, the new enthusiast can have a vast amount of fun, and get into business quantities in a little way, with very small machines, which can also produce trial amounts of samples for sale.

What really is the standard of those who have started this way, the new small roasteries which have been trained and have now sprung up in the UK? Morten Munchow is encouraging:

"I have been to several small roasteries in the London area, and have never found one which I thought 'not good'.

"By contrast, I once went to a little roaster which was using a one-kilo machine, in North Germany - I thought 'wow' these people must really be taking care, this must be top speciality coffee... but it was awful!

"But in the UK, my impression is that most of those who are now opening roasteries are taking their time about learning and developing coffee."

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What is the big problem with British water? Why is it that in these pages, a few months ago, barista champ James Hoffmann complained: "London water wants to kill coffee machines!"

And if there is a problem, where does responsibility lie for the answer?

With machine manufacturers, to help their machines live longer? With coffee roasters, in knowing how their blends perform in various local water conditions? Does the best advice rest with the makers of filtration devices, or (as has often been pointed out) are they interested in selling only their own product?

Are resin filters good enough, or is reverse-osmosis the only treatment which can save espresso machines, as has been seriously suggested?

And how much responsibility lies with the café owner or beverage operator?

In very basic and simple terms, there are two issues. One is taste, and one is machine safety – in many areas, untreated 'hard' water will scale up inside a coffee machine, and descaling a boiler is expensive.

"Hard water and the scale issue can affect the serviceability of equipment," says Kit Free of European Watercare. "You can ignore it if you like..."

"Another is chlorine, which doesn't help the taste of coffee, and as far as I am concerned this is another major issue. In an area with no real water hardness, you may still have heavy chlorine."

This is not a situation to be solved by a smart salesman with a catalogue. The wise café owner should know exactly what is happening with the water in his area.

"There is gobbledegook in this market – there is a tendency to confuse," warns Kit Free. "No filter is going to solve everything just like that... it's too complex."

"The key to it is to look at the basics. The answer is always site-specific, because there is no magic formula for all water. To test your own water is a basic issue – you must know what you're working with, so test your water as seriously as you do your coffee."

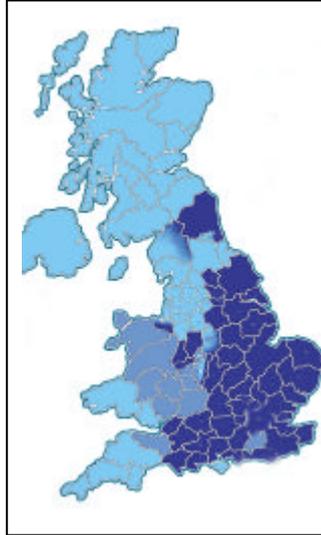
"Is every coffee bar owner likely to need something? On balance, I say 'yes'... A lot of water is moved around the country these days, and areas that may previously have had soft water may now have hard water. Should every café owner test their water before they start, to see what they're working with? Certainly - yes!"

"Water around the country varies considerably, so the really important thing is understanding what's in your water, and what you have to do to get it to where you want it to be," says Nigel Pask at Pentair.

"This is not all about hardness - a chloride content which may not affect your taste so much may affect your stainless-steel boiler. In areas where they mix ammonia, to get chloramine,

There's something in the water...

... but what is it? And do you need to get rid of it?



Hard water has high mineral content – it is not harmful to health, and the US National Research Council even says that hard water can count as a dietary supplement for calcium and magnesium. However, in brewing equipment it forms scale deposits that clog plumbing. In a very simplistic explanation (this is not a scientific magazine!) water hardness is expressed in 'parts per million as calcium carbonate' and many opinions say that 100-150ppm is the level which provides the best balanced content, and above that, coffee operators might think about the effect of their water.

The British Drinking Water Inspectorate says that drinking water in England is generally 'very hard', with most areas, particularly east of a line between the Severn and Tees, rated at above 200 ppm. Water is mostly hard in urban areas, but Manchester and Birmingham are exceptions, being 'soft' because of the reservoirs from which they draw their water.

Much of the south west is 'soft', but Bristol has areas at 228.5 ppm. While London water is said to be terrible for coffee machines, at around 275ppm, it is not the UK's hardest – in this magazine's Norfolk base, the rating is 332, and it is said that coastal Suffolk has been rated as over 400! In the map to the left, based on one kindly provided by 3M, the light blue areas are under 100ppm, the mid-blue is 100-200ppm, and the dark blue is 'hard to very hard'.

you need a different product – so you cannot just pick a filter off the peg.

"The first thing you must do is understand the water in your area, and what it may do to your equipment and your drinks. Your first step is to go to the local water board website, enter

expressed they were not happy with the results they had been getting. Most were concerned that despite installing a filter and changing them when they believed they should, scale was still causing breakdown problems with machines.

installation, and also assess your usage, which in turn will tell you how long the filter will last. Many customers assume that an ion-exchange resin filter needs changing every six months, but this is far from the truth – in a very hard water area a filter may only last two months, but the same filter could last nine months in an area with lower hardness.

"If you change your filter too late you are wasting your money, because you will have allowed scale to start forming, and if you change too early you are wasting your money because they still have life left. So, check your water hardness and your water usage to estimate the lifetime of the filter."

"In a soft water area (any water below 100ppm) the equipment protection is less of an issue; the 100-150ppm sector is a grey area, so you could take a risk and do nothing, but a resin filter would probably have a long life and be a relatively low-cost protection for an expensive machine."

"In a hard water area, scale damage to hot beverage equipment is a real threat, and above 250ppm it is a common occurrence. Above 300ppm, use at least resin, but seriously think about reverse osmosis. And ppm of 400 will certainly kill coffee machines if you don't do anything."

Essentially, says Gary Norwood at Brita, the filter concept remains a good one.

"UK water is extremely high quality and perfectly safe to drink straight from the tap, but it's not perfect for brewing coffee or tea."

"There's also a perception that you only need a filter in hard water areas, but this is not the case."

"It doesn't matter where in the UK you are – you will need a filter of some

“Is every coffee bar owner likely to need something? On balance, I say 'yes'. Should every café owner test their water before they start, to see what they're working with? Certainly – yes!”

- Kit Free, European Watercare

your postcode, and download the analysis of your water... you then take advice based on that.

"We're going to launch a do-it-yourself kit which will allow you to take a sample and get a fairly good idea of what's in your water and what it will do... then you may ask 'what do I do to get my parts-per-million down' or 'what will that chlorine level do?'"

"If an equipment supplier is unwilling to discuss the subject with you, the likely truth is that they only have one product to sell. So, choose a supplier who has a lot of tools in their armoury and can discuss the pros and cons."

Some café operators have already begun to question what is the market, observes James Russell, managing director at Jaguar Espresso Systems.

"Every operator has to recognise that without good quality water your drinks won't taste how you want them to."

"We decided earlier this year to review our water treatment offering, after many of our customers had

"The most common way to remove scale is to use a resin-based cartridge or 'blue bottle' system. There are a few drawbacks with this type of setup."

"The new generation of resin-based filters, if set up correctly, can ensure complete removal of hardness at a level which is harmful. These new types have other benefits – speed of installation and replacement is faster and safer, and the operator can have a very accurate idea as to how long the filter will still be working correctly."

"It is important to know why you are filtering and what quality of water you have to start with. Then you make the decision of what system you use."

"Prices are never like-for-like, and capacities quoted and achieved often vary greatly."

They do, which is why good judgment can save money, says Andrew Whitehouse, sales and marketing manager at 3M. It is wise to work out how long your filter will last.

"To get the most out of them you need to check water hardness before



sort fitted to your coffee machine to remove unwanted tastes, odours and particles. Some operators in very soft water areas think they don't need to treat it – they do, but they only need a good quality activated carbon filter, which will remove anything in the water that affects the taste of the coffee and particles as well."

"Water filtration works... as long as it's the right specification for your local water, and is exchanged at the correct time."

Steve Slark is an independent filtration consultant, with experience at 3M and Abbeychart, and not surprisingly advocates taking independent advice rather than listening to only one brand salesman.

"Various filter makers have had a go at basic target water parameters to make 'the perfect beverage', but there are so many variables that perfect water is almost impossible to hit. In the UK, a rule of thumb is that you need something around 70ppm carbonate hardness to make a reasonable cup of coffee, and pH should be as near to 7.0 as possible.

"Some operators see the filter as an unwanted cost, and some see it as preventative maintenance.

"I did try and launch a scale-control filter alliance to benefit the coffee providers, but too many salesmen are driven by naked self-interest.

"I find it easier to speak as an independent filter consultant, to talk about the subject and recommend technologies rather than products."



What the coffee-shop owners say:

What are the experiences of real cafe operators on the high street?

One operator exasperated by both the water quality problem and the water-treatment suppliers is former UK barista champ Thomas Polti of the Chequers in Bedford, who uses his own blend of coffee (unusually, he actually did blend it himself).

"Our water is very chlorine-y. I don't want that, but I do need some hardness in the water... I've tried making my coffee with pure bottled water, and it's nice, but just not the same.

"I have just not been able to get on with the big brand whose filter I was using. The probe, which checks the level of water in the boiler, was completely scaling up.

"So I challenged the company: 'don't give me the sales blurb science, when I can tell you it's not working! I want to be here and see you measure the water going in, and the water coming out'. They weren't interested.

"So I've gone back to a good old-fashioned resin filter, which must be pretty old. You just clean the cylinder with salt every so often, which re-generates the resin. The problem reduced

“ We were taking part in a Sherlock-esque hunt to find the culprit behind the nasty flavour transformation. More often than not the clues led to the same end – different water.”

- Maxwell Colonna-Dashwood ”

dramatically.

"I would like to see the water-treatment companies go head-to-head with some in-depth testing. We have seen no real information from them at all."

Many baristas defer to another champ, Maxwell Colonna-Dashwood of Colonna and Small's of Bath, as being the café owner who has gone most deeply into water analysis. He pinpoints one big problem which some suppliers avoid discussing – that one coffee can taste different in different places, depending on the water.

He has recently written:

"The more we look at water, the more it presents itself as one of the biggest players in coffee's flavour. We choose our coffees carefully, and on occasion we have really struggled with a few which were not just a little flat or uninspiring, but were actively unpleasant."

Here was a puzzle. Maxwell trusted his roasters, who said that samples at their roastery were fine, so why were the coffees bad at his café?

"On occasions they seemed like different coffees! We were each taking part in a Sherlock-esque hunt to find the culprit behind the nasty flavour transformation. More often than not the clues led to the same end – different water."

Here, noted Maxwell, was where things got very unclear. There are certain terms which are bandied about by salesmen, like pH (a measure of the acidity or otherwise of liquid) and TDS ('total dissolved solids') which, even to those who have bothered to understand them, remain far from straightforward.

"How often has the magnifying glass really been put on water?" enquired Maxwell. "We are all led to focus heavily on TDS as the measurement which has the biggest impact, and that we should concern ourselves with. But what is TDS... a broad and vague measurement that indicates the total amount of minerals and particulates in the water beyond the pure H₂O.

"A brief look at bottled water labels will display that the TDS number can consist of largely different proportions across varying brands... so, would two waters with the same TDS, one in London and one in Bath, be the same? Would they impact on the coffee in the same way?"

Maxwell has decided to go deeper into this, researching with a theoretical chemist. The results are to be published in an E-book some time soon.

Meanwhile, several baristas are still

involved in the decision over whether or not reverse-osmosis systems are the ones to make their business work best. It has often been said that RO is the only reliable solution - is it?

The noted barista champ Gwilym Davies has made an unflattering comparison with the water in Prague, where he now often works, and his Prufrock café in London.

"Here in Prague, my training centre water just needs a simple carbon filter to remove odour and chlorine, it rarely needs changing, and the water comes out of the tap at about 140ppm. It repeatedly wins when we cup with different waters.

"London water is a disaster – it destroys both machine and coffee flavour. In London we had very bad experiences with filters, and the worst were those especially formulated for coffee. When I say 'worst', I mean high pH, high ppm and accompanying bad flavour.

"All cafes should test their water for ppm and pH... a simple digital instrument will do it. Prufrock test their water every few days, and have also tested filters... the results were scary. Our filters used to run out after around ten weeks and never achieved the ppm and PH we wanted.

"We resorted to reverse-osmosis as nothing else was working. It is OK, so long as it is monitored and maintained, but it cannot be installed and forgotten about.

"In the perfect world, a cafe owner would find out what water they needed by brewing coffee with various waters, then work with a trusted supplier to achieve that water. In the real world this will not happen, so cafes should at least test their water weekly, if only to protect their machines."

At the Espresso Room in London, owner and barista trainer Ben Townsend says that reverse-osmosis has not proved an entire solution:

"Despite running RO, I have just had a scale-related blockage, which has cost £200-ish. I am shortly going to have to have a full strip down, which is £1,000-ish, so it's a massive problem, even with RO.

"You can't really reverse-engineer your coffee to suit your water... you can buy darker roasted, which has 'more' flavour, but not nicer flavour."

Therefore, he says, you have to make the water suit the coffee.

"Essentially, we think we know that we should have about 120-150 parts per million of total dissolved solids, and 7.0pH, but none of us know if it

should be more magnesium than calcium, or sodium for that matter, let alone any technology on the horizon that would reliably allow us to 'tune' the water.

"It would be great if suppliers could or would help... but speciality coffee is a tiny segment of the beverage market, and their R&D costs to get us to where we want to be would probably never be paid back.

"It's yet another depressing aspect of being in speciality coffee! My next project might well be a greasy spoon, with Nescafe in polystyrene cups..."

Simon Peace of Electric Coffee in Ealing is one of those who is attempting to judge his best water treatment.

"We are always reviewing the options, both to preserve our equipment and provide the best coffee.

"Reverse-osmosis is a relatively new option – however, in two blind tastings we know of, coffee made using traditional filters won by a majority. This cannot be ignored, and would appear to contradict the argument that RO makes a better coffee.

"RO units are not exactly environmentally friendly either, wasting a lot of water. We know that an RO unit would raise the cost of our water. I'm not sure this cost has been calculated fully - before investing in an expensive new system, we'd like to know the full cost, and whether it will actually produce better tasting coffee.

"I'm certainly not writing off reverse-osmosis, but the jury is still out. We'd like a little more investigation before jumping in."

At Monkshood, which is also the Gyre and Gimble coffee business, Elliot Wallis brews in both a shop and in vans, and finds he is working with different water in different places.

"Our water in north Bucks is much better than the evil London water, which really does kill equipment, but we also use water from all over the country in various situations and the quality varies hugely.

"The roaster Peter James recently opened my eyes to the benefits of the BWT system from Austria, which is a similar idea to Brita, but puts magnesium back into the water. This makes coffee and tea taste very good indeed, much brighter in the cup.

"I have been using it at home for the last month with good results, and we are going to put one of these systems into the shop."

Not a million miles away, Simone Aylward of Espresso-head in Leighton Buzzard changes her filter every six months.

"The water here is fairly hard, but not the worst in the country, so although it can damage machines that don't filter it, it tastes nice (in my opinion). I don't believe that many people would spot the difference if I invested in reverse-osmosis or other similar systems... I'm just grateful that we

Continues over...



... continued

live in a country where we can take clean, unlimited drinking water for granted!"

To illustrate how different water problems can be, Devinder Dhallu of Six Eight in Birmingham says that he suffers from water which is soft, yet also affects his espresso machine. This illustrates how some hardness is required.

"We have a problem on the other end of the spectrum - our water seems too pure! Two times a year we close for extended periods and close our espresso machine down, but when we re-open, the espresso machine fails to register the water as there are not enough total dissolved solids that can be picked up by the probes."

There are many who doubt the subject at all. A tea-room owner in Cambridge, where the water is rated as pretty hard, told us: "I don't believe that 97 per cent of customers (a figure I have carefully abstracted from the fresh air) would notice any difference in the quality of their hot drinks even if we only used the most carefully prepared, treble-filtered, ionised, mixed, de-ionised, sterilised, re-ionised, softened, partially re-hardened, oxygenated and/or purified water.

"It may well be that some, or each, of our teas would benefit to a degree from its own special matched supply of water... possibly. But I reckon all our customers will be happier if I concentrate instead on making a better brownie."



The RO option:

It has been said that reverse-osmosis is the 'only' system which will protect coffee machines and give good water – but opinions differ.

Reverse osmosis membranes work by removing all, or a very high percentage, of contaminants from water, so much so that it actually is common to 'blend back' some untreated water to bring the ppm reading to 50-150, which is regarded as the right one for coffee.

"RO is particularly good for very hard water (300ppm or over)," says Andrew Whitehead at 3M, "or where several pieces of equipment are located together, because one RO unit can run them all, so no need for separate filters on each item.

"An RO system also delivers consistent water quality, in contrast to an ion-exchange resin system where the filter performance reduces with age, and so the quality varies over time.

"But RO gets bad press due to 'water rejection' - some of the water is wasted, because it can't be consumed, although in theory it can be diverted to washroom use. As the technology improves, modern RO systems have lower and lower wastage

rates, and when put into context with total water usage of a facility, the wastage is often negligible."

It is expensive: "The capital cost is high, so at the moment it is not practical for much of the coffee house market, though it could become so," says Kit Free at European Watercare. "Where RO does work well is in kitchens, where combi-ovens suffer from scale and corrosion, and so we have put together a rental maintenance package for this business, at a very favourable price... I would think it a little more difficult to organise this for coffee houses, but we are looking at it. I believe there's a market for it."



Here's an unusual thing - Taylor's is one of the few suppliers to have shown a product option specifically for hard water.

The question is of whether you can achieve your target by cheaper means, remarks Pentair. "It's expensive to install, but cheaper in operation. RO wastes maybe 20 per cent of the water, and I would rather not be in the shoes of one coffee chain which I believe to have a very high percentage of wastage – but we do now have a system which creates considerably less wastage."

In some cases, it puts 20-40 per cent of the water coming in down the drain, agrees Steve Slark. "In the opinion of many, this is not community-spirited... and one of the largest brands has told me they could not risk the publicity of this.

"Traditional technologies work very well in the main, except that some allow for a large plastic vessel to be simply dumped, and many people take issue with that, too. European Watercare has a regeneration facility for these systems and should be applauded as being traditional but also kind to the environment."

There are those who have pointed out that RO is not good for any espresso machine that has a water-level sensor, because that needs to have some mineral content in the water for conductivity, to make it work (the problem that Six Eight in Birmingham described).

There is even a minority opinion which criticises its taste as 'straight' water – as one barista has said: "RO water is great for washing machines and swimming pools... but not really good for drinking."



What the machine makers say:

Water is a moving target, say many suppliers.

Wrongly-chosen filtration can be a danger, says Marco Beverage Systems: "the most aggressive cases occur when water is treated incorrectly – ion-exchange used entirely on soft water can deliver very aggressive and corrosive water. This is a characteristic that equipment manufacturers are becoming more aware of and concerned with."

"Our biggest problem is trying to strike a balance between having water soft enough that the machine doesn't suffer scale issues, but with enough hardness so that we can extract great coffee," agrees Martin Perry from Qualitasse Fiamma.

"To get the water feeding the machine, to a point where we have the totally dissolved solids down to a low enough level so that the machine stays in good shape, but high enough for great coffee extraction, is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to maintain.

"Not only that but if you have a bypass which allows unfiltered water in to the machine to get the "correct" TDS value, we still don't know what the dissolved solids in the water actually are. Therefore the water in London and Bristol can be filtered to the same level and yet taste completely different."



Let's use a 'water charter' to bring a common understanding

- Louie Salvoni



Even the much-repeated advice of measuring your water usage is not as easy as it sounds, remarks Carl Bjorkstrand at La Cimbali.

"We favour the use of sodium water softeners, which have a defined maximum capacity and it is important to size them correctly to avoid running out of treated water or paying too much for an over-specified unit. A double espresso cappuccino uses about 150ml of water which, for a busy machine servicing 200 drinks per day, would equate to only 30 litres per day.

"But be careful - your water usage could be 50 per cent higher than this if you take into account water for Americanos and tea. We have even found cases where staff are using the coffee machine hot water to fill buckets for floor cleaning! So, in order to know exactly how much water is being dispensed by a coffee machine, it is vital to fit a water meter."

What should happen next?

Almost unanimously, it is believed that all sectors of the beverage trade need to be working together, and also that it is time the water boards put in some help, and that the roasters are also invited to speak up on what they want for their products to work best.

"The water industry seem to be leaving us to do the research," observes Martin Perry at Qualitasse, a typical response.

"We want the water entering our machines to be safe, non-corrosive and scale-free," says Carl Bjorkstrand at La Cimbali. "The roasters should be able to tell everyone what properties they require to produce the best possible taste. The water industry should be able to tell us how to get both."

At Jaguar, James Russell says the same: "We currently offer what we think is the best solution, but getting an understanding of how water may change or become more variable in the future would be an interesting area of debate. We should hear from the water providers themselves."

Essentially, says Gary Norwood at Brita, different people approach the matter from different interests.

"The problem we face is that for service suppliers and equipment manufacturers, it's all about minimising scale and protecting machines, and for coffee roasters and baristas, it's about finished drink quality. What needs to happen is a better balance between the two interests."

It is time for an industry-wide approach, agreed Louie Salvoni of Espresso Service.

"The practical point of view comes down to two things – taste of drinks and scale prevention. Everybody in the industry knows that scale is the enemy of the coffee machine, but the roasters should also stand up on this – they should demand that if they take a lot of trouble over their blends, then they should expect the water standards in which their coffees perform best."

Some do, noted Cathal Burke at Marco Beverage Systems: "we've always found roasters very willing to talk about the performance of their coffee in different waters. They give us full access to their information."

But not all, it might be said – very few roasters or coffee brands responded to this magazine's invitation to talk on the matter.

It is time to share this more widely, is a general opinion.

"My suggestion is a forum to agree a basic standard of water that is acceptable to all," said Louie Salvoni. "There should be guidelines to the operators indicating what they should demand from all their suppliers.

"Let's use a 'water charter' to bring a common understanding to the coffee industry."



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If there has been one major buzz-word in coffee supply in recent years, it has been 'direct trade'. It refers to the practice of a British operator working in partnership with a coffee farmer. As such, it is often claimed to be a term used too loosely by some salesmen, who see it as a convenient modern marketing cliché - but in its true form, it means that buyer and grower actually know each other, face-to-face.

One of the most recent direct trade operations in the market is Freeman Trading of London, whose work is with several farmers in Peru. The coffee has made an impression here with some roasters - typically, it is featured as one third of Monmouth's organic blend. And the British operation works remarkably closely with the farmers, so much so that Freeman has recently personally delivered solar panels to one of their farmers in one of the more remote areas of Peru.

Freeman Trading manages a 30-hectare eco-retreat in the north-eastern sector of the Peruvian Amazon, about six hours by river from the nearest town. It protects indigenous endangered species from ancient plant-medicines to hardwood trees.

One of the three partners in Freeman is a world traveller with an existing inside knowledge of Peru. This is Leon Woffenden, who has been trading direct with farmers over the other side of the world for several years - he began doing so to sell at local market stalls in the UK, and won a 'best stall' prize at Worcester for his

Lighting-up time in darkest Peru

The concept of 'direct trade' has been much discussed in the coffee trade in recent months - one direct importer says that the most remote farmers still need very practical help from customers in the UK

direct trading policy with communities.

This is one of the more unconventional coffee importers - when not in his London office, he lives on a boat, with no permanent mooring.

"The boat sails up and down the river Lee," he told us cheerfully. "Without a permanent mooring, one has a two-week window in which to rest in one spot... however, in winter times one can melt into the cool waters and be left in peace. It's a widebeam boat, a 58ft by 9ft beauty, fitted with solar panels - it's a dream to be able to live so close to the city and have nobody pushing bills through the letterbox!"

Although a traveller in Peru, his first contact with coffee farmers was a touch farther south.

"My interest in Peru came first, as my fondness of Paddington bear goes back to my childhood! But interest in coffee was actually sparked in Guatemala back in 1996, when out of curiosity I lumbered a coffee sack down to the processing plant. I soon



Leon Woffenden in negotiation with a Peruvian coffee farmer

became aware of the difficulties faced by the producers."

This eventually led to a trading relationship with coffee farmers - a true 'direct' situation, he agrees, although he is sympathetic towards those who work through middlemen.

"Yes, direct trade is indeed a loose term, and 'direct with who?' is the question that you might always ask!

"Our business model with Tunki Coffee involves us working directly with the producers themselves, both in selecting lots to agreeing fixed prices.

"On the other hand, just because a roaster in Britain needs to go through a third party to handle logistics and finance, then who am I to say it's not traded 'directly', if the roaster has identified the coffee and the supplier?

"Would somebody say you had not 'traded directly' in buying ethical goods from, say, a collective of craftspersons in Africa for resale on a market stall here, because you had had to use a credit card or PayPal to obtain the goods?"

"Like it or not, there are companies who make it possible for the coffee to get from the farmer to the roaster. The farmers need cash in hand, and the roasters have funds tied up in overheads, wages and rates, and in many cases having \$100,000 floating out at sea, or in a coffee store for months, is not a direct-trading risk many roasters are able to take!"

It is the complications of pure direct trade which can put many importers off. The buyer not only has to deal with the paperwork headaches that a

merchant would normally handle, but when a farmer is in a remote area, there are some particularly tricky transport problems. Going through a merchant, a roaster can easily go for an 'FOB' price, which denotes that the seller or the middleman worries about the transport.

In direct trading with a remote farmer, the buyer really has to worry about how that farmer is going to get the coffee down the mountain - we tend to be told sometimes that the old image of the farmer and the donkey no longer applies, but it certainly does.

"Absolutely! In fact, in the location where our coffee comes from, its pretty hard terrain even for a donkey, and having a donkey generally implies the farmer can afford to feed one, which is another problem. For those who can, the donkey is the 4x4 of the hills.

"The downside to the location is the logistics of getting these amazing coffees to port. The upside is that the coffees are amazing and organically grown in lush mountains way off the beaten track, and deep within unspoilt beauty, with some of the most wonderful flora and fauna that one can imagine."

The coffee certainly has a reputation - speciality roasters and even Starbucks have been buying in the region.

"With our Tunki coffee we work with 157 farming families, and we select the best from each family. To date we have around 32 roasters in the UK using it, and a handful in Europe.

"The characteristics are all you would expect from Peruvian coffee -

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deep chocolate, floral citrus notes, clean in the cup, bright with a high acidity. The coffee has won many awards, a first place at the Peruvian Expo and a second in California."

It has also distinguished itself in the UK – barista Howard Barwick took third place with it in the barista championships in 2012, and was so keen on it that he decided to build his whole presentation to the judges around the character and story of the coffee.

To what degree is the story getting through to the consumer?

"We hope it is, because we went out of our way to be as transparent as we could - naming the source of your coffee is something of a taboo that we broke quite loudly, because that is a business risk, but we felt it was time the farmers got some credit. If that meant exposing our source than that was a risk we were willing to take, as we were confident that we had built a relationship with the farmers founded on trust and respect.

"What I'm also saying is that if the farmers had previously sold to other buyers, then perhaps the previous buyers were not doing the best for them... we came into the market against some heavyweights and in order to survive, we had to come in on the higher price point. Luckily, we knew we had a great coffee and that there are many roasters out there who do actually care about where the coffee comes from, and about the producers who make it possible."

There are more, and unexpected, hurdles. Peru is the largest exporter of organic coffee - however, says Leon, the downside of this is that on average, organic coffee yields are 40 per cent lower than that of non-organic. It is one thing to preach about the benefits of organic produce, and an entirely different thing to support the farmer who has to live on a smaller harvest because of it.

Caring for farmers can lead a British buyer to unexpected lengths – in the case of Freeman, it involved helping one Peruvian farmer achieve electric light for the first time, by using solar panels. This was not easy - even a 4X4 could not reach the farm.

"We didn't take the panels from Britain - we purchased them in Lima," explains Leon. "And yes, we drove the panels for four days over some pretty rough terrain, along with six 30-kilo batteries, a four-metre pole, the frame, inverter and all the rest of the cables and equipment. It took a team of 15 in total, not counting the cameraman we took along, and myself.

"We came up against both police and thieves, because we were in the heart of coca leaf country, and yes, at the end we carried it all by hand for five hours up into the cloud forest.

"To the best of my knowledge this is the first ever undertaking of its kind by any trading company to a coffee farm."

The recipient was farmer Raul

Mamani. Freeman describes the farmer as 'hard-working, honest and humble yet strong, and determined at ever-improving the quality of his coffee'. Having electricity would give him the opportunity to buy a computer so that his kids can advance in their education and yet have the opportunity to stay within the community and not have to drift to the big city. For his wife it would mean the pleasure of not working in the kitchen by candlelight.

In coffee work, Raul was excited that he would now have enough light to work by, and had promised to place his first light above his de-pulper and the fermentation station. (Mrs Mamani was presented with her kitchen light immediately afterwards!)

The experience of bringing light was, says Leon, an emotional one: "the moment of truth, providing a family with electric light for the first time in their lives. Imagine what it's like switching on a light for the first time – stepping into a new world!"

This, says Freeman Trading, is not intended to be a one-off.

"What better way to reward farmers of exceptional coffees? We would like to extend this project, and are seeking assistance from NGO's to help us expand this as our long-term vision. Sustainability begins at source, and improving the lives of the farmers is something at the forefront of our business."

Clotted cream wars

There is a new row over one of the major ingredients of the cafe trade's most profitable items, the cream tea – two Cornish dairies are arguing over the labelling of clotted cream, and the products in which it can be used..

The product has been classified under European law as a 'protected designation of origin' since 1998, but the Trewithen Dairy, in Lostwithiel has now filed an application to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with a proposal to change the description of how clotted cream can be made, and how it is labelled.

The crux of the argument is that Trewithen want to be allowed to use the 'clotted cream' designation in mass-produced items such as fudge and ice-cream.

However, their rivals Rodda have said: "cream produced for bulk foods would no longer have the characteristic crust which adds to its flavour, and would not be instantly recognisable as the Cornish clotted cream enjoyed on cream teas."

Trewithen says that the original PDO document is now outdated, and must be changed to recognise the evolution of genuine clotted cream as part of new mass-produced foods such as fudge, ice cream and custard, which should now be allowed to carry the designation of containing genuine clotted cream.



There has been a vast amount of international press comment about the first pay-per-minute café in London. The idea is not a new one - the Ziferblat is the first based British experiment by a Russian chain where 'everything is free, except the time you spend here'. Even the name of the café refers to the concept - it is Russian for 'clock face'.

The founder is Ivan Mitin, 29, who has ten other branches in Russia and one in Ukraine. His business is largely a social experiment, a direct response to the modern phenomenon of coffee houses in which so many customers sit in private with their laptops.

In Ziferblat, he has created an area in which the customers do the work - they serve themselves their own drinks (there is the option to have them made by staff), eat what they want from snacks provided or bring in their own food, and pay only for the time they spend on the premises. This is measured by taking an alarm clock from a cupboard and returning it when they leave - the charge is 3p per minute.

The concept has already achieved

the desired communal atmosphere, says the founder, who has observed a distinct trend for customers to open up conversations with strangers. He has remarked that Londoners have been very ready to understand the concept, and surprised him by even doing their own washing-up, which was not required.

In Russia, the cost is a rouble for a minute, but occasionally they have a free day where customers are simply invited to make donations - every time this happens, says the owner, it has turned out financially in his favour.

Restaurant critics have already compared the cost of Ziferblat, at what amounts to £1.80 per hour, as being generally cheaper than doing an hour's work in a conventional coffee shop and buying one latte.

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A lot has been said and written about cold-drip coffee, the system in which the filter process takes several hours - a designer from Texas has now introduced a commercial product intended for use in coffee houses. The Empire, from Bryan Runyan of Pure Coffee USA, is described as a 'slow drip, laboratory glass, coffee wonder'. The theory is that slow drip allows time to extract all the flavour of the beans while leaving behind unwanted acid and bitterness. The Empire is 45 inches tall, with a 14in footprint, and takes between six and eight hours to brew enough for 75 cups; it can be left unattended to work overnight. As there are three cylinders, a coffee house can either brew three different coffees simultaneously, or a large amount of one coffee.

One gets rather used to Starbucks taking action against any café with a name remotely close to its own, but it came as a surprise to learn that Heston Blumenthal, the Michelin-starred chef has threatened action against the Fat Duck Cafe in Melbourne, demanding that it change its name to avoid a clash with his own business. The chef has apparently been fairly sympathetic, explaining that now he has built a worldwide brand, customers could be misled into thinking that a small café was part of his gourmet empire - but the owner of the Melbourne café has said that she has never heard of him! In the face of a lawyer's letter, however, she has changed her business name to Loose Goose.

Curiously, this is the second time that Blumenthal has taken the same action against an Australian business - two years ago, the Fat Duck diner in Sydney was forced to change its name. Equally curious is the reaction this story received when it appeared on the Mirror website - of several dozen comments by readers, a quite remarkable number have been edited out by the website manager, presumably for being offensive.

Elsewhere, a Starbucks 'cease and desist' letter in Missouri has been greeted by sarcasm from the recipi-



Kaldi

ent. A micro-brewery had created a beer called Frappiccino, which Starbucks claimed could be confused with its Frappuccino.

The letter from the chain's lawyers complained that "Starbucks has sold millions of drinks under the Frappuccino trademark, and the mark is strong, famous and firmly associated with Starbucks in the United States and in many other countries". The brewer responded that he has proudly sold 38 of his drinks in Missouri, and has a particularly

strong presence in one suburb of St Louis. He sent Starbucks a cheque for six dollars, representing his total profit so far. He promised to rename the beer 'The F-word', and said to Starbucks that 'we small companies have to stick together'.

The staff at the Corn Dolly tea shop in South Molton, Devon, report being considerably cheered to find that the customer ordering a tuna sandwich was the actor Rowan Atkinson, and that the sandwich was his birthday lunch. Rather charmingly, a customer who was in the café at the time told the local paper: "we've never seen anyone famous in South Molton..."

One sympathises with the barista in an independent London coffee bar who saw a woman come in carrying a large Costa takeaway cup and a baby - she bought nothing, but put her takeaway down on a table and started feeding the baby. We thought it very reasonable of the barista to simply ask the woman to swap the cup for one of the café's own... but she still got abuse in reply. You get all kinds...



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