

Coffee with a social conscience

When I first came to live in Camberwell there were very few places where you could get a cup of coffee. The Jungle Grill, of course ... and does anyone remember Tadim? Now we seem to be drowning in coffee, and I would be the last to complain. But the two latest arrivals on the scene offer more than just a hot drink. They are social enterprises, and in different and rather complex ways.



Lumberjack opened in January at the premises in 70 Church Street which used to be occupied by House. The social purpose begins with its landlord which is the Well, an evangelical church based in Wells Way. The Well considers itself to be a community-focused church, and Lumberjack – like House before it – is one of the ways in which it engages with the community.

The other organisation behind Lumberjack is London Reclaimed, which makes bespoke furniture using traditional methods. It uses reclaimed timber,

which in itself indicates its ethical stance, but its main social purpose lies in the fact that it employs young people aged between sixteen and twenty-five, and puts them through a year-long training programme, during which they learn carpentry skills. The trainees are given mentoring, practical experience in the workshop, and the opportunity to go to college.

London Reclaimed makes furniture for individuals but it also fits out cafes and restaurants, including of course its own. The preponderance of natural wood gives Lumberjack a clean unfussy look, from the counter, to the chairs and tables, to the staircase winding down to the lower floor. Like its parent company, Lumberjack is training young people as baristas so that they are equipped to stand on their own feet. The café is also a showplace for local craftspeople, whose work is on the walls, on shelves, and even on the tables. All the profits are re-invested in the project.

But when all is said and done, we go to a café for refreshment. Lumberjack offers a range of coffees, teas and soft drinks. For breakfast it serves granola with honey and yoghurt, for lunch it serves soup and toasted bread with butter (very nicely presented with a carafe of water), and at all times it serves lots of lovely cakes. Wifi is available (and heavily used), it has a loyalty card, and there is a takeaway service. At present it only operates from the two rooms at street level, but plans to extend the cafe downstairs before too long.



The coffee comes from another social enterprise, the Old Spike Roastery in Peckham Rye. The Old Spike selects single-origin coffee as it becomes available throughout the year, roasts it in Peckham, and supplies it both retail and wholesale. It employs homeless people, giving them housing, training and a living wage. At present it is supplying Santa Isabel coffee from Guatemala and Itende JKT AB coffee from Tanzania. JKT is another social enterprise – the letters stand for Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa, which is The National Service in Swahili. This is a programme set up by the Tanzanian Army to equip young people who

have been unable to get a higher education with the life-skills that will enable them to get employment and income.

The other café with a social mission is Brewbird, which opened just before Christmas. It is in Havil Street on a site once occupied by the Camberwell Workhouse, which represented a very different way of dealing with society's outcasts. Over the road is the former Camberwell (and later Southwark) Town Hall, which is now being converted into student accommodation. Brewbird's landlord is another social enterprise, the Thames Reach Employment Academy, which helps unemployed and economically disadvantaged people find employment in London.



However, the organisation behind Brewbird is St Giles Trust, no stranger to members of the Camberwell Society as it was our Charity of the Year in 2010. The Trust's mission is "breaking the cycle of offending". The people it supports have complex problems involving homelessness, mental and physical illness, addiction, and poor life-skills: all too often, these problems will cause them to offend. Over 60% of people leaving prison after short sentences re-offend within the first year, and

the Trust is tackling this dreadful statistic, using a number of initiatives to give its clients the skills and self-belief to turn their lives round. Brewbird is one of those initiatives, and fulfils the Trust's mission by employing and training ex-offenders.

Brewbird occupies a large airy room, and when the weather improves will also be able to use a really lovely courtyard. It has sofas as well as chairs and tables, and customers have at their disposal a daily newspaper, books (including children's books), board games and packs of cards. It also has a larger kitchen than Lumberjack, and is able to bake its own cakes (I can recommend the chocolate brownie), as well as serve hot food at breakfast and lunchtime. For lunch it also has substantial sandwiches. Like Lumberjack, it offers Wifi, a loyalty card and a takeaway service.

I've visited Brewbird and Lumberjack a couple of times each, and it was evident that both already have regular and enthusiastic customers. I hear a rumour that



Starbucks might occupy the old library premises on Church Street. Really – who needs it?

<http://www.brewbirdcoffee.com/>

<http://londonreclaimed.co.uk/>

<http://wearelumberjack.co.uk/>

<http://www.oldspikeroastery.com/>

<http://site.stgilestrust.org.uk/>

<http://www.employmentacademy.org.uk/>

<http://www.thewellcc.org.uk/>