



**The Old Crown** is the only pub in the village of Hesket Newmarket, which nestles in the Caldbeck fells on the northern edge of the Lake District National Park.

The pub dates back to the 18th century, but our story starts in 1987 when Jim and Liz Fearnley had a dream of running a pub and brewing their own beer. With no experience of either, they bought The Old Crown because it had a barn at the rear which they converted into a microbrewery. While Liz ran the pub, Jim began experimental brewing in 1988 and was soon producing marketable and prize-winning beers.

In 1995 Liz and Jim sold the pub to Robert Robson. Four years later Jim decided he wanted to retire from the brewery. Worried that it might be swallowed up or closed down by a large brewer, villagers and supporters formed a co-operative to buy the brewery. Today Hesket Newmarket Brewery is a thriving microbrewery, selling its famous beers such as Skiddaw Special and Doris' 90th birthday Ale across a wide area.

Meanwhile, Robert sold The Old Crown to Kim and Lyn Matthews. After Lyn's tragic death in 2001, Kim decided to sell up. Yet again there were fears that the pub might fall into the hands of a major brewery and that its unique character would be lost forever, and so 125 customers of the pub clubbed together to buy it, helped by grant funding from Cumbria County Council Rural Regeneration Fund and the Lake District National Park Sustainable Development Fund.

The Old Crown Co-operative was officially registered as a Community Industrial and Provident Society in March 2003, and the purchase was completed on 21 August that year, securing its future as a vital amenity for the village and wider community. And of course, the special link between The Old Crown and Hesket Newmarket Brewery has been safeguarded, so that regular visitors can sleep sound in the knowledge that their favourite pint will still be waiting for them whenever they call in.

The Old Crown is living proof of the success of the co-operative model and the co-operative ownership of this important resource demonstrates the strong sense of community spirit in this small Cumbrian village and beyond. The co-operative is based on democratic and voluntary principles, with members contributing on an equal basis to the capital of the enterprise and actively participating in policy formulation. The members of the co-operative strongly believe that ventures of this nature contribute to the economy and social fabric of Cumbria, securing local employment and fostering pride in the community.

The Campaign For Real Ale, which has featured the pub many times in its Good Beer Guide, also welcomed the venture. Good Beer Guide editor Roger Protz said: "With the growth of pub chains and global breweries, pubs are losing their community role, so I welcome the efforts to keep this classic pub rooted in its community."

Julian Ross, who led the bid by customers to take ownership of the pub, says: "People say they don't care about making a return on their investment. They want to preserve something that is important for the community. This is a cosy, friendly pub, which you can go into whether you're wearing your wellies, walking boots or a suit, and you won't come out without having spoken to someone. Regulars and visitors alike always find a warm welcome, good home-cooked food, a friendly smile and a superb range of real ales."