

## **Brexit's Last Hurrah: Wine By The Pint**

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More than 7 1/2 years after the June 2016 referendum, almost four years after the UK formally withdrew from the European Union, we finally have the confirmation of Brexit's endpoint.

Wine by the pint.

The Department for Business and Trade excitedly announced on December 27, "'Pint' size wine stocked on Britain's shelves for the first time ever thanks to new freedoms from leaving the European Union."

The cynical and unpatriotic might cavil that the press release's "Still and sparkling wine to be sold in 200ml, 500ml and 568ml 'pint' sizes" shows Brexit Britain hasn't freed itself from the shackles of the metric system. They might point out that being measured in pints doesn't change the taste of a Chateauneuf du Pape or a Sangiovese (even if being served from a supermarket box rather than a wine cellar bottle does).

But they would be missing the point. Because you, the happy few, the Brexit band of brothers and sisters, will be drinking pints of \*British\* wine.

The Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business Kevin Hollinrake, updated Henry V for 2024:

Innovation, freedom and choice – that's what today's announcement gives to producers and consumers alike.

Our exit from the EU was all about moments just like this, where we can seize new opportunities and provide a real boost to our great British wineries and further growing the economy.

With such a striking pose, there was no need to heed the nay-saying of anyone like Mark Driver, a co-owner of the Rathfinny estate in Sussex: We don't understand why the government has introduced a pint measure for wine after consulting the industry and being told that no one seems to favour going back to imperial measures."

Drunk and Disorderly

This is not the first time a post-Brexit Conservative Government has embarked on a flight from reality. In February 2022, Prime Minister Boris Johnson named Jacob Rees-Mogg as “Minister for Brexit Opportunities”.

In just over six months in the office, Rees-Mogg distinguished himself by [launched six border innovation pilots](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transformational-border-pilots-to-create-an-ecosystem-of-trust) presenting zero opportunities. Instead, he opened the new cross-government hub at 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham”. When he departed in early September on the eve of the even more disastrous Truss Government, the Ministry went as well.

What makes the wine announcement special, almost 16 months later, are the alternatives that: 1) the Government still hasn’t learned the meaning of “ludicrous”; or 2) it thinks that the British public is yet to look the word up in a dictionary.

While the Department for Business and Trade was drafting its declaration of triumph, the UK’s GDP fell 0.1% between September and November 2023, again putting the country on the point of recession. The Office of Budget Responsibility forecast a stuttering growth of only 0.7% in 2024, and the Bank of England was even gloomier.

Far from addressing the economic stagnation, let alone reconsidering the isolation of Brexit, the Sunak Government tied itself in political knots over migrants and asylum-seekers.

For months, the Government enabled the Euro-bashing of Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who used migrants and refugees to portray the menace of the European Court of Human Rights. But summer 2022’s “small boats” campaign never came up with a viable idea about what to do over those small boats, or how to rework the reality that their passengers make up a miniscule proportion of migration into Ukraine.

The “big barges” campaign hit the reefs when the first vessel, the Bibby Stockholm, proved to be unfit for purpose from inadequate, overcrowded facilities to Legionnaire’s Disease to the death of an asylum seeker.

The Government’s resort to choking legal migration, with a steep increase in the income threshold for migrants and their families, backfired when the impact — including labour shortages in key sectors such as health and social care — was all too apparent.

See also Good-Bye to All This: The UK Government, Immigration, and Cruelty

It was back to the “Rwanda campaign”, with headline intentions of sending asylum seekers to the central African country. London handed out £240 million to Kigali, with £50 million to come. But it has yet to deport a single person because of the inconveniences of both British and European courts and international law. So Braverman made more and more vitriolic statements, finally arranging her dismissal by attacking the Metropolitan Police so she could pursue her Prime Ministerial ambition outside the Cabinet.

Last Wednesday, the Sunak Government finally pushed its Rwanda Bill through the House of Commons. However, because it could not bring itself to formally announce disregard for the European Court of Human Rights — and thus international law — it has incurred further wrath from the hard-right wing of the Conservative Party. The sniping will escalate when the House of Lords challenges parts of the Bill, and when — if the measures are finally passed — the courts knock back the legislation.

In a fitting coda for the Government’s campaigns, the Home Office has lost track of almost 6,000 asylum seekers. And London’s would-be partner, Rwandan President Paul Kagame when asked about the farce.

Ask the UK. It is the UK’s problem, not Rwanda’s problem.

Cheers!

Thus the Brexit descent continues. On 31 January, the Government will try for the sixth time to introduce import checks on animal and plant productions, risking disruption to food supply chains.

When the Scottish Government expressed its concern about the “availability of basic foodstuffs”, London responded with a dismissive hand, “The Government remains committed to delivering the most advanced border in the world. The Border Target Operating Model is key to delivering this and introduces an innovative approach to importing that will be introduced progressively.”

The Home Office, finally acknowledging that its muddled regulations were leading to bans on European Union nationals long established in the UK, “” U-turned on its ruling for the deportations — but EU citizens will still have to beg for their rights to be recognized.

Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party continues to hold London hostage with its two-year blockade of a functioning government in Belfast. Still demanding a “hard border” between the North

and the Republic of Ireland, taking Northern Ireland out of the EU economic zone, the DUP will ensure that Thursday's deadline for elections to Stormont comes and goes.

Cambridge Econometrica summarised the "Brexit dividend": by 2035, the UK's relative value of goods and services will have diminished 10.1%. There will be 3 million fewer jobs, 32% lower investment, 5% lower exports, and 16% lower imports.

But to give the Government credit, it has ensured that its constituents need not worry about any of this.

Because you can just get pissed on pints of British wine.