

Can you be one of the judges at this year's pie competition David? asked pork pie top gaffer boss Kevin Booth. He had been asking me a similar question for the last four years but unfortunately every year it fell on a day that I was working.

This year however was different and I quickly accepted the offer. My good lady wife (Cautious Carol) queried how come I was able to be there this year.

Ah, I said, it's all down to a man who dresses up in a pork pie suit and is getting married on the day they usually have the competition. When I explained that he was also having a three tier pork pie wedding cake she looked at me as though I was puddled. Yes folks Kevin's famous little brother Stuart (aka Pork Pie Man) tied the knot and caused a three week competition day delay which allowed me to gleefully accept for this years April 9th extravaganza.



Now I have always enjoyed a good pie, consider myself as something of a pie expert and having attended several previous competitions felt on top form this year. Will I have to wear a tie? Am I expected to make a speech? What happens if I eat the wrong pie? These were all questions going through my mind in the run up to the Saturday. Come the big day and Cautious Carol decided it would be better if she dropped me off at the Bridge Inn, went to do some shopping and then called back later to pick me up. Don't have too much to drink were her last words as she beckoned me back and insisted on a goodbye kiss in the church car park, how embarrassing. I then strode purposefully across the old packhorse bridge and into the specially cordoned off pub side room reserved for officials only. I was swiftly issued with green Timothy Taylor's polo shirt and one of my fellow judges Krakatoa Keith (so called because as a keen badminton player he is quiet for ages on court and then suddenly explodes) thrust a pint of Landlord into my hand. I looked at the clock (three minutes past two) asked if it was shandy to which he replied yes, yes, of course it is, have a taste it's beautiful but to be honest there didn't seem to be all that much lemonade in it to me.

The competition was called to order, the judges reminded of their responsibilities and team selection given out. Krakatoa Keith and partner were told to judge on table 1, that's the one in the corner on the sloping floor with the wobbly leg and the lean to starboard they were told, it's true, I kid you not. Table 2 that's David and David (blimey it sounds like a firm of dodgy solicitors to me). This continued until all 5 tables were allocated two judges sporting the sponsored shirts. With pints of Landlord (or water) at the ready the proceedings commenced with nine numbered plates of pies per table (no makers names) and we marked in three categories. 1. External inspection, 2. Cross cut with internal inspection and finally 3. taste. The first round took about 45 minutes to complete and when the scores were added up the best six pies per table progressed into round two. Krakatoa Keith enquired how it had all gone and noticed I seemed to have a bit of a dry throat so without further ado insisted that I have a top up. I asked for half but he must not have heard me.

The tables were rearranged ready for the second round and the officials called together for the announcement of the judges. Well blow me down after what I thought to be a marvellous opening effort from 'yours truly' I was quite staggered to find that I had been 'demobbed', 'stood down', 'omitted', 'left out' call it what you will but suffice to say that I was not on the list of names to be required any further. Taking this matter up with Gafferboss Kevin I was immediately informed in no uncertain terms that this is where the competition becomes deadly serious and it could be 'years' before I am allowed to progress any further than round one.

Then the second round kicked off, those officials not needed were told to 'get out there and mingle'. I was directed out towards the main part of the pub, two cameras were slung around my neck, a fresh pint of what I thought may have been shandy put in my hand and instructions ringing in my ear not to come back in until I have spoken to people. Well I mingled, mingled and mingled some more, talking to just about anyone who would listen. I also took the opportunity to inform those people that when 'Cautious Carol' arrived to pick me up that I had only had two pints of shandy. Now this mingling lark can really make you thirsty and some kind fellow, I've no idea who had obviously noticed this as my by now rather empty glass had been miraculously 'freshened up'.



It was at this point that I spotted a rather dapper looking gentleman resplendent in a green tartan waistcoat. I gently eased myself into his conversation (a bit like a bull in a china shop) and asked could I buy it for 50pence. Quick as a flash he offered to sell me the name of his tailor, now thats a true business man if ever I saw one. Well I was soon looking a bit silly 'cos when I asked him if he was aware there was a competition on or had he just happened to call in for a pint, he swivelled on a sixpence, gestured outside and pointed to a ten foot banner with his name on it!!! Yes folks I was conversing with John Coope one of the competitions major sponsors and I felt at that point he was not about to recharge my glass. We were very soon best of pals again, I took some photos of him and his battlebus parked outside and I really don't think there was too much harm done.

A while later I ventured outside again to look for the pint I had misplaced earlier when suddenly I came over all of a shiver. I stopped, turned slowly and looking back towards the church spied 'Cautious Carol' in the distance appearing out of the gloom over the packhorse bridge flanked menacingly by daughters one and two. It was a bit reminiscent of a scene from a John Wayne western. I greeted them warmly (if you know what I mean) and set off with a measured tread for the pub. I was immediately reprimanded by my good lady for shouting 'gangway' 'gangway' official judge coming through. I was only trying to speed up our journey to the bar, some of us were thirsty you know. I introduced Carol to various people that I had been speaking to earlier but that turned out to be a big mistake as they told her in unison that I had drunk at least 5 pints, none of it had pop in and for good measure had spilt the 'best part of arf'

down the front of my shirt. Oh dear, oh dear oh dear, like Queen Victoria, she was not amused. I'm afraid the events after that are somewhat sketchy and it's possible that I may have conducted my last foray into pie judging. If it is then I at least have two things to remind me of it, the tee shirt and the headache!!!

Crustily yours,  
David Onions. Ex Pie Judger (probably).