

Irish pubs keep spark despite a decade smoke-free

March 28 2014, by Conor Barrins

Ten years ago this week, landlord Christy Ruane feared the introduction of the smoking ban in Ireland would stub out his business, and with it the popularity of the traditional Irish pub.

On March 29 2004, Ireland became the first country in the world to adopt a total workplace smoking ban.

Controversially, that included the traditional pubs where a cigarette was once as part of the scenery as pints of Guinness, traditional Irish music and peat fires.

"We thought it was going to interfere with our business," Ruane told AFP at the Coachman's Inn, the bar he has run near Mountbellew in Galway on Ireland's west coast for the past 40 years.

"The introduction of the smoking ban was a big departure and we were very, very wary."

But a decade later his fears of losing his customers—mainly elderly farmers who liked to have a cigarette with their pint—have gone up in smoke.

"We thought they were going to get upset with the idea they could no longer smoke in the pub, but it all worked out fine in the end," he said as he leaned across the bar.

"I would desperately hate to think that cigarettes could be introduced back into the pubs again," he said, with the only smoke now coming from a wood-burning stove inside the pub.

"At least you can get up in the morning and put on your clothes and not smell like cigarettes," he added, reaching down to pet his terrier dog who had wandered into the bar.

- Really positive effect -

In The King's Head pub in Galway city centre, bar manager Stephen Murphy told AFP the ban had had a "really positive effect" on customers and staff.

"There was obviously a period of time when the smoking ban came in where it was obviously affecting sales, but very quickly it generated additional business."

He said that many pubs had now "gone down the food route as it's better to have that in a non-smoking environment".

Ireland broke new ground in the global battle against tobacco-related illnesses, and its workplace smoking ban has since been taken up by many other countries.

But when the then-minister for health Micheal Martin first announced that the ban was to come into effect, publicans rallied against the move fearing it would hit an already struggling sector.

Padraig Cribbon, chief executive of the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI), said those "concerns were well-justified."

"If you look at the intervening 10 years, there has been a significant drop

in the pub trade. Not all down to the smoking ban, but it certainly was a contributory factor."

Figures provided by the VFI show the number of licensed premises fell from 7,831 in 2005 to 6,565 last year—a drop of over 1,200 in less than a decade.

But a study by Trinity College Dublin published last year found the overall impact of the Irish smoking ban on bar sales appeared to be very small.

Tobacco-free Ireland

Originally the ban was introduced to reduce workers' exposure to passive smoke but a by-product of the ban has been a fall in the smoking prevalence rate.

Irish health service figures show a drop from almost 29 percent in March 2004 to 21.5 percent at the end of last year.

But separate data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development last November showed Ireland had a prevalence rate of 29 percent, well above the OECD average and above the likes of France, Poland and China.

"We can't be complacent," the Health Service Executive's Dave Molloy told AFP.

"We still have 750,000 smokers in Ireland and we still have in the order of 5,000-plus people a year dying from tobacco-related diseases."

Last October, the government announced plans to make Ireland a tobacco-free country by 2025.

Measures include plain packaging on cigarette boxes and banning smoking in cars when children are present.

The [smoking ban](#) has had some unintended consequences—as smoking areas in pubs and nightclubs have become one of the most popular areas to socialise.

"I'm a non-smoker and I spend most of my night in the smoking area now because that's where the craic (fun) is," Laura Collins told AFP on Galway's Shop Street.

© 2014 AFP

Citation: Irish pubs keep spark despite a decade smoke-free (2014, March 28) retrieved 22 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-03-irish-pubs-decade-smoke-free.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.