

The pub where even the dogs get table service!

HAMMERSMITH: Sweeping changes win Chris's hostelry top London title

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A LANDLORD who turned around the fortunes of a Hammersmith hostelry has beaten thousands of rivals to win the venue the title of the best managed pub in London.

Chris Kemp is now in the running to take the national title at this year's Great British Pub Awards, thanks to his tireless work in transforming The Black Lion.

The 35 year-old, who lives in Hammersmith Grove, says he risked the wrath of some of the regulars when he decided to make sweeping changes after operators The New Pub Company drafted him in last May.

"The pub was pretty unloved, so I came along and put some love in it," said Chris (pictured right).

"All the food was frozen and pre-packaged. I don't think they made anything. It had a really bad

reputation for food, and the service standards were shocking.

"People would queue at the bar for 20 minutes to order their food before being given a wooden spoon. It was just lacking everything a good pub should have."

Chris opened up the venue, in South Black Lion Lane, by stripping out its four-person booths, and scrapped the pub's curry and film nights in favour of less frequent and more unusual events, including a mini-festival in June.

And he is proud of having built a new ethos revolving around good, freshly prepared food, well-kept beer, table service for those who want it and overall attention to detail.

"All our fish is fresh, our chips are home-made and the batter is made fresh every morning with beer from the bar," said Chris.

"Our chicken is free range and we don't deal with poor quality produce.

"Even the dogs get table service - we'll bring them a bowl of water and a chew stick."

The finals of the pub awards, run by brewing industry magazine The Morning Advertiser, will be held in a glittering central London ceremony on Wednesday, September 9.

Inspectors and mystery customers visited The Black Lion, and the judges praised it as "a shining example of everything a good pub should be, with excellent food and drink, a welcoming atmosphere and high standards throughout."

Now he is hoping to take the top title, and to persuade the pub's operators to invest some cash in The Black Lion's riverside garden.

"There was a lot of trepidation from the locals at first," said Chris, "but now we get a lot of repeat business.

"It's the best it's been in five years, which is pretty good considering the current trading climate."

