

Few places in Gravesend resemble the Mug and Meeple, a gaming cafe housed in a former pub next to the entrance to Gravesend Town Pier.

Unassuming and low-key, this independent business has quietly become a hub for local hobbyists and gamers alike. Open daily from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., The Mug and Meeple offers a library of board games to play and a place to buy coffee, games, paints, cards, models and snacks. Yet, its most important USP (unique selling point) is the sense of belonging it provides.

MUG AND MEEPLE



GAMING

Founder Glen White has witnessed the gaming industry evolve from a cottage industry into the global communities of today.

"Gaming here is not one thing" Glen explains. There are four main areas; board games, trading card games, war games, and role-playing games. Each has its own following and rhythm.

Glen outlines the growth of the gaming world with genuine passion. He spent many years organising international semi-professional events, sometimes in partnership with global brands, often working around the world.

NEURODIVERSITY

Social media, especially TikTok and YouTube, has helped grow the gaming industry and broaden its audience. "Decades ago, it used to be mostly men. Now we have a much more diverse mix. That's made the place feel more welcoming for everyone."

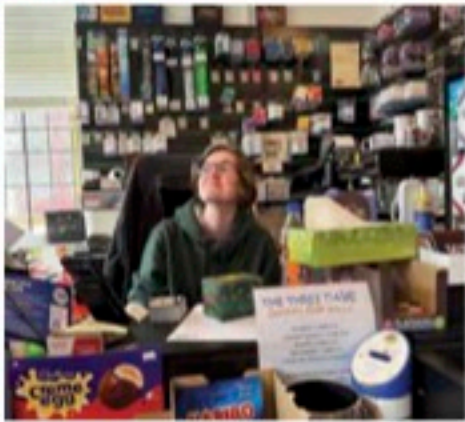
Glen sees strong links between The Mug and Meeple and the neurodiverse community. "Gaming gives you control. You can choose the rules, the pace, the people. It's structured but still playful. That can be hugely supportive if you are autistic or struggling in other ways."

As he says this, a mother enters to ask about booking tables for her autistic child's birthday. She explains that their specialist maths teacher had noticed a positive transformation since the child got into gaming and recommended the cafe.

BACKGROUND

Trained in drama at Hull University, Glen's path into gaming began in childhood. First role-play books, then Magic: The Gathering, (a trading card game) leading to a growing passion for organising events.

He moved to Gravesend in 2001 and has felt at home ever since. As the gaming industry became more corporatised, Glen stepped away from large-scale events and decided to open the cafe.



The name Meeple comes from the game Carcassonne – a contraction of "my people." It fits the space well. The Mug and Meeple is ultimately a shop that sells games, paints and cards, with a cafe that encourages people to gather. Events and clubs run alongside, giving hobbyists a place to connect.

HOBBY RECESSION

"We are a nation of hobbyists, and gaming is a hobby," Glen notes. "Hobbies often define a person, which usually makes hobby businesses insulated from economic downturns. But not this time."

He describes the current climate as the toughest he has known since he began selling games in 2001. "People are holding back. Even the big shops in central London are feeling it. There's just less money in people's pockets."

COMMUNITY

Yet tough times seem only to reinforce the value of spaces like The Mug and Meeple. "People come not just to play, but to talk, share, and feel part of something," Glen continues, "Gaming is ancient. Cathedrals have nine men's Morris boards carved into the stone. We're just the modern version."

FUTURE

Glen hopes to expand one day, but only as the community grows. He is watching trends like Gundam and sees AI as useful for running the business, though not the games. Smiling, he says, "We see ourselves as digital-adjacent. AR (Augmented Reality) is still a bit gimmicky."

As the interview ends, a couple arrives, only now emerging after the pandemic, hoping to start gaming as a way to socialise again. A further reminder of the pandemic's long tail and a fitting close. The Mug and Meeple is more than games, it's about connecting, sharing, playing, and laughter.

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