



The FREE CAMRA Regional Magazine covering Central, East & South Manchester; Stockport; Tameside; Trafford; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield



ROBBIES REVAMP

NEW LOOK FOR LOCAL BEERS & PUBS



Local family brewer Robinson's has embarked on a major rebranding exercise which will see a new look for both the company's beers and, ultimately, its pubs as well.

One of the main aims of the exercise is to raise national awareness of the Robinson's portfolio of cask ales. As a result the entire range has been given a face-lift and Best Bitter has been renamed 'Unicorn' after the Unicorn Brewery, a prominent Stockport landmark.

"Best Bitter is sold in 98 per cent of the Robinson's estate and its our biggest known brand and we want to try and develop it nationally," marketing director Oliver Robinson told *Opening Times*. "As a name, Best Bitter is not distinctive enough as lots of brewers use it," he added.

"Although we have national distribution we wanted to establish a national brand name that is recognisable and ties in to the company logo. The new look portfolio will encourage more people to try these great beers. This is the first step to making Unicorn a truly national brand." He was keen to stress, though, that while the name may have changed, the beer remains the same.

Each new pump clip has been designed to be clearly identified as belonging to the same family

of beers to further enhance brand loyalty. Their embossed 3D production makes for an attention-grabbing presentation at the bar.

The new look was unveiled in front of 6,000 visitors to London's Pub and Bar show in March, and supported by trade advertising in both *The Publican* and *Morning Advertiser*. Reaction was highly encouraging as fellow brewers crowded round the stand for an early glimpse of what was to come.

Rebranding the beers is the first stage in what promises to be a major makeover for the entire company, with the trademark Robinson's blue being swapped for red. The next stage will see the re-signing of the entire tied estate with the new colours and lettering to give a more modern yet traditional image. This process is likely to take a couple of years, given the number of pubs involved.



The new-look pumpclips will gradually appear in the Robinsons Estate, and almost immediately through the free-trade



MACCLESFIELD BRANCH AWARD

On Monday 8th April Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch of CAMRA presented a special outstanding achievement award to the George & Dragon, Higher Hurdfield.

The award is in recognition of the sterling work undertaken by Martin & Vicky Courtvriend since they bought the pub some 15 months ago. The G&D was to be branch Pub Of The Season for Spring but Martin and Vicky had decided to sell the pub and move on to pastures new. Therefore the branch voted to present the special award instead.

During Martin & Vicky's time at the G&D, beer sales have increased, with three constantly changing cask beers being available at all times. The beer quality has been of a very high standard and I feel sure that if they had stayed the G&D would have featured in the next Good Beer Guide. A lot of work has also been done to improve the building in the last 15 months making the pub a welcoming place to visit. We are sorry to see Martin & Vicky leave but wish them all the best in their future ventures. SB

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NATIONAL CAMRA AWARD FOR OPENING TIMES

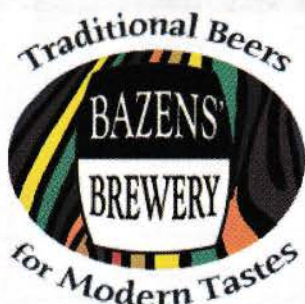
We always new *Opening Times* was one of the best – and now it's official! At the recent CAMRA AGM in Southport, we were delighted to be presented with the special award for CAMRA Newsletter of the Year. It was over 10 years ago that *Opening Times* won the first ever CAMRA Newsletter of the Year Award, and last year we were presented with a Special Award to mark our continued high standards. This latest award was in recognition if what we have achieved since then, particularly the move to colour.

In MAY'S OPENING TIMES ...

| | |
|-------------------|----------|
| Pub of the Month | 2 |
| Editors View | 3 |
| Brewery News | 6 |
| Stockport Supping | 8 |
| Letters | 9 |
| CAMRA Calling | 12 |
| 5 Years Ago | 13 |
| High Peak News | 14 |
| Pub Grub | 16 |
| Mcr. Matters | 17 |
| U26 & RAZ | 19 |



Details of Stockport Beer & Cider Festival on pages 4 & 5



The Newun 4.2% (April-June)
eXSB 5.5% Blue Bullet 4.5%

FlatbaC 4.2% (Beer of the Festival, Stockport, 2003)

Knoll St Porter 5.2% Black Pig Mild 3.6%

(Bronze Award for Mild, Champion Beer of Britain, 2003)

Pacific Bitter 3.8% Best Bitter 4.3%

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The King's Arms, The Albert Vaults & The Crescent, Salford,
The Trackside, Bury, Waters Green & The Sun Inn, Macclesfield,
Corbieres, The Marble Arch, The Knott Bar, Bar Centro &
The Smithfield, Manchester, Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar,
The Marble Beer House, Chorlton-cum-Hardy.

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PUB OF THE MONTH MAY 2004

| Su | M | Tu | W | Th | F | Sa |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
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| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
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| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| 30 | 31 | | | | | |



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for May 2004 will be the Lass o' Gowrie, Charles Street in Manchester city centre.

Run by Ellie Owen for the Laurel Pub Company, this remains one of the few multi-beer houses on the south side of the city. In fact, such is the reputation that the Lass commands, that this is probably Laurel's largest cask ale outlet in the North West. Ellie has been at the Lass for some fifteen months, prior to that having done stints in pubs in Sunderland, Barnsley and Sheffield.

The beer offering is impressive, with four permanent cask ales - Boddies; Black Sheep bitter; Old Speckled Hen; and Lass Ale (this last beer being brewed by Titanic of Burslem as a replacement of sorts for the in-house brews once produced in the pub's cellar brewery - the plant is still there, but is now mothballed and dormant). Then, add a further five guest beers (all sourced from the Beer Seller list) and a second Titanic beer (Titanic ales are especially popular, it seems); all of this adds up to weekly sales of six eighteen gallon containers of the permanent beers, plus ten different guest beers! Food plays a large part in the success of the pub too, with a keenly priced, albeit corporate, menu accounting for over 40 meals per day (food available 12 to 8 daily).

The pub's clientele, amongst others, consists of quite a mix: students (who definitely come in for the cask ales); office workers; and the TV football folk. The busiest times for the pub are Friday teatime and when live TV sport is on; Thursday nights usually play host to a quiz. The style of décor is very much 'Ale House' and traditional, part gaslit with plenty of wall décor to interest the eye; the exterior brown tile work is a delight. There is even a separate No Smoking room for those of a tobacco-sensitive nature. With all that said, make a note in your diary to get to the pub early when we present this well deserved award on Thursday 27th May, from 8.00pm.

The Lass o' Gowrie is on Charles Street, off Oxford Road (by the side of the BBC offices) in Manchester city centre, a two minute walk away from Oxford Road rail station and city-bound bus stops. Recommended Train: 1943 ex Cheadle Hulme; 1948 ex Stockport (also stops at Heaton Chapel and Levenshulme). Buses: 41, 43, 48 and 143 ex Northenden via West Didsbury; 42, 142 ex Stockport via Didsbury, Withington, etc.; 197 ex Stockport via Burnage; 45A, 130, 157 ex Cheadle Hulme / Cheadle and Gatley areas.

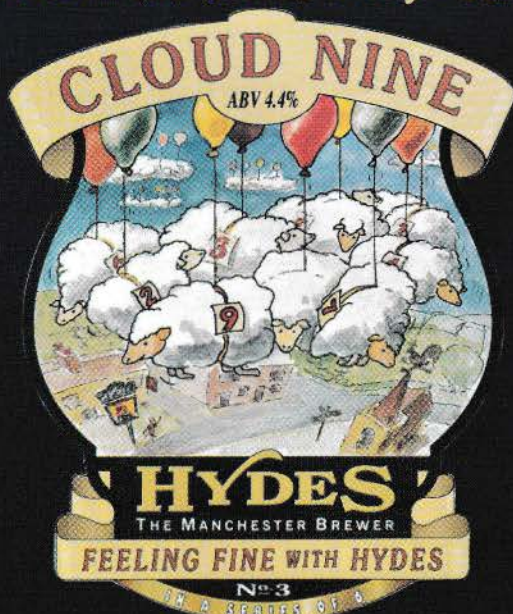
The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.

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**COPY DATE FOR MAY ISSUE OF
OPENING TIMES IS MAY 29**

IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

Space it at a bit of a premium in this issue so, I'll have to keep this one brief.

Firstly, I have to mention the award presented to Opening Times at the recent CAMRA AGM. Achieving recognition such as this from your peers is always pleasing and goes a long way to making all the hard work that is put into OT worthwhile.

My coeditor, Paul Hutchings, was in Southport so he was able to bask in some well-deserved glory. I would however like to take this opportunity of publicly thanking him for all the effort he puts into OT each month, it really is very much appreciated, and without Paul's efforts, Opening Times would look half as good as it does. He was particularly instrumental in the move to colour last year, a move which certainly helped us clinch this award.

Thanks are also due to the legion of people who contribute to OT, those who distribute it and of course to those pubs which stock it and all our advertisers, without whose support we just couldn't put together such a large publication.

Finally, it's Stockport Beer Festival time - make sure you all get down there and have a few pints. I'm sure myself and Ed(2) will be there extensively toasting OT's success!

John Clarke

Within a month of Opening Times being printed, there will be a whole batch of elections, for councillors and MEPs as well as London's Mayor. As is quite well known, I am no great fan of politicians as individuals or as a class, but this last week I was amazed to see that a few are twitching in the direction of common-sense. The Parliamentary body that scrutinises the work of the uncommonly useless Department for Trade & Industry (second only on my hate-list to DEFRA), the all-party committee on the DTI, appears to have woken up to the fact that the pub industry is now dominated by a handful of giant pubco's, owning 5-11,000 pubs each, and they are (or so it often seems) using their power to raise rents unfairly and exploit their tied tenants to the detriment of them AND their customers. An investigation is promised, and possibly a monopoly referral. Somehow I get the feeling all this will be lost when the next general election is called, probably this time next year. So it only gets two rather feeble cheers, but where there's a semblance of life.....

I must also return John's compliment. Opening Times wins awards and readers for the quality of its content. His continuous searching out of material, and cultivation of contributors is exemplary, and very time-consuming. Added to his duties as Branch Chairman and other CAMRA work, his long term commitment has been and continues to be, awesome. Well done indeed. I just wish he'd learn to use his spell-checker!

Paul Hutchings

That's QUITE enough mutual back-slapping....Ed(1) & Ed(2)

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 241

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or preferably ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or CD-R, or via e-mail to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com. Adverts or photos should be "hard copy" or in CorelDraw 3,5 or 7 (*.cdr) format or TIFF or EPS files (submit printed proofs for checking and ensure that any "include all fonts" options are on). All editorial items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged. All Advertising images are copyright the respective design sources (Largely CPPR, but all other copyrights and trademarks acknowledged).

OPENING TIMES ADVERTISING

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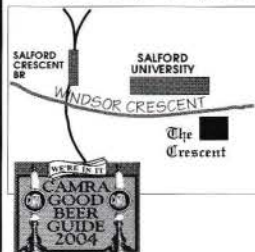
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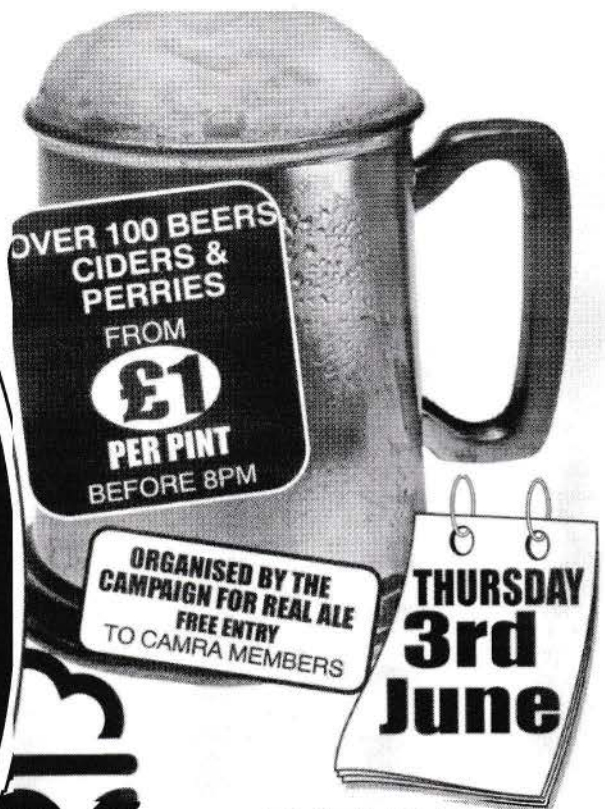
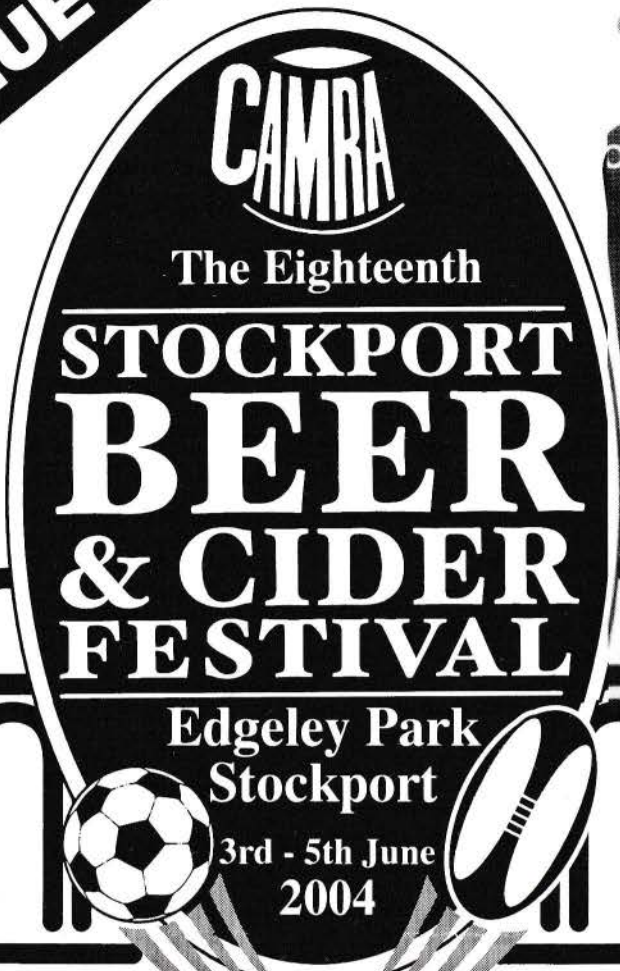
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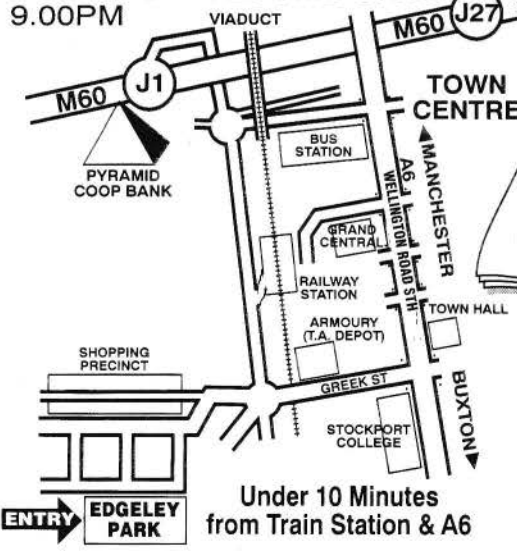
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FESTIVAL FEVER

COUNTDOWN UNDERWAY TO STOCKPORT'S MAIN EVENT

We are now well and truly in the run-up to this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, once again kindly sponsored by the Stockport Express. The entertainment is booked, the glasses and T-shirts ordered and, most importantly, the beer and cider order has been worked out.



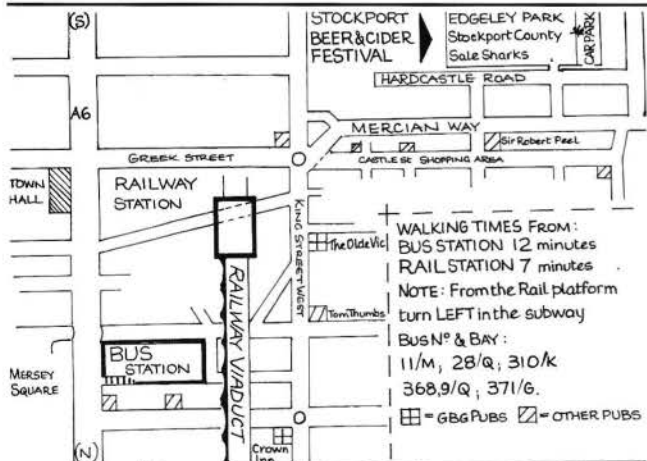
As usual Opening Times is taking this opportunity to bring you just a small taster of the many beers on offer. There really will be something for every taste, whether you like mild, bitter, stout or strong ales. There will be up to eight milds available from the classic Bank Top Dark Mild, Rarbarber from Anglo-Dutch Brewery, Buddy Marvellous from Wales's Bryncelyn Brewery and the rare Hydes Welsh Dark. Lovers of bitter will be well catered for with no less than 62 standard and premium bitters available during the course of the festival. The Festival special beer will be from Bazens' and is being brewed to mark the 20th Anniversary of Opening Times, which also falls in June. Named '20 Not Out' this 4.1%, golden and aromatically hoppy beer will also be available to the free trade after its launch at the festival. More about this beer next month.

There will be beers from Brecon, Ceredigion and Cwmbran breweries in Wales, and from Scotland, Houston, Fyne and Hebridean. Local micro's will feature with many new beers, including Millstone's Windy Miller, and the latest specials from Facers and Shaws. There will also be a special brew from Ossett.

9 stouts and porters will include a strong imperial chocolate stout from Abbeydale, Hen Darw Du from Ceredigion, Sjolmet Stout from Valhalla and the superb Pictish Black Shiver. There will also be 10 special beers including a spiced beer from Abbeydale, a cask lager from Bazens'/Facers, Nethergate's classic Umbel Magna coriander beer, and a brand new beer from Bank Top. This is now confirmed (but still unnamed) as a 5% version of the superb Dark Mild, with three bottles of port added to the fermentation. This beer will also be available to the local free trade but is being launched at the Festival.

Bringing up the rear we also have 8 strong ales and this year there are some real treats here. Robinson's Old Tom is a firm favourite of course but others to try include Anglo-Dutch Tabatha The Knackered at 6 per cent, and very rare 6% bitter from Hydes' and a new 10%(1) stout from Porters. The 8 per cent Liquid Lobotomy from Garton isn't to be sniffed at either.

So, something for everyone. Do remember, though, that not all beers will be on at the same time and one or two may not even arrive (although we usually have an acceptable alternative if that happens). You can also visit the Festival Website at: www.stockportfestival.fsnet.co.uk



How To Get There

This year our new venue is at Edgeley Park, home to Stockport County and Sale Sharks. Many *Opening Times* readers will know how to get there but, if you don't, then here's a map/ The actual festival entrance is marked with a star on our map - it's normally used as an exit from the Cheadle Stand and, naturally, is at the Cheadle end of the ground.

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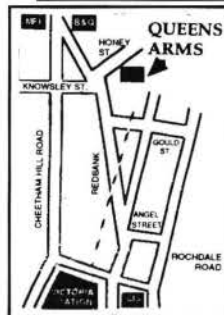
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SWINGING THE AXE

The national brewery news has been dominated by two major closures at opposite ends of the country.

Having announced the shutdown of the Scottish half of their operations, Scottish Courage has now announced the closure of the Tynes Brewery in Newcastle. The home of Newcastle Brown Ale and much of the Theakston's range will close next spring with 110 job losses. The shake-up also involved the purchase of the Federation Brewery in Gateshead, which is scheduled to be the new home for Newcastle Brown (or should that be 'Gateshead Brown' in future?). The Theakston's beers will move to the John Smith's plant in Tadcaster. Meanwhile global drinks giant Diageo is to close its Park Royal Brewery in west London, home of British-brewed Guinness since 1936, with the loss of 90 jobs. Park Royal's output of 1.2 million barrels a year is to be transferred to St James's Gate Brewery in Dublin, which is to be expanded by 50 per cent to cope with the new volumes. However, this particular cloud may well prove to have a silver lining. Informed speculation has it that the UK may well be supplied in future with the unpasteurised Guinness that is the norm in Ireland, and widely held to be a far superior drink. There is also a possibility that bottle-conditioned Guinness may also once again be available here.

FAMILY FAVOURITES

HYDES New beers from the local family brewers this month. In fact, two from Hydes, although one may have been and gone by the time you read this. Last month Hydes again brewed their special beer to commemorate St. George's Day. The brewery describes it as follows. "Hydes By George 'St. George's Day Ale' is specially crafted to celebrate the patron saint's day on 23 April using the finest English malts and hops, this 4.3% Premium Ale will quench the thirst of even the most famous Dragon Slayer!" It was available in the usual outlets in the *Opening Times* area including the Nursery, Stockport; Crown, Cheadle; Horse & Farrier, Gatley; Victoria, Withington; Friendship, Fallowfield and Q Bar, Stalybridge amongst others.

The new Hydes' seasonal is Cloud Nine (4.4%ABV), where "carefully selected best malts and hops combine to provide a classic beer with a silky smooth finish"

Robinson's latest seasonal is a welcome return of Northern Glory at 4.4%ABV. According to the brewery this is "specially formulated for the cask and brewed traditionally using a carefully selected blend of pale, dark and roasted barley and wheat malts, this light oak coloured ale is bursting with a rich array of sweet, malt and hoppy flavours, complemented by a crisp, dry roast finish." It is indeed a very quaffable brew and well worth seeking out. Local outlets should include the Arden Arms and Swan With Two Necks in Stockport, and the Castle, Oldham St. Mcr.

There's a new seasonal from **JW Lees**, too. This is Maypole Madness (4.5%ABV) described as "a thirst quenching

ale...brewed with amber malt to give a biscuity crispness, complemented by the sharpness of the Northdown and Fuggle hops". Look out for this in outlets such as Rain Bar in the City Centre and the Lloyds Hotel in Chorlton.

And let's not forget the other **CAINS** family brewer with a presence in the *Opening Times* area. This is Liverpool-based **Cains** who own the Gothic in Gatley. This pub, in common with a number of other Cains pubs is to be converted from a managed house to a tenancy. More news on developments there when we get it.

England's nine Regional Directors of Public Health met in Cains Brewery's Dr. Duncan's pub in the city's St. John's Square to discuss initiatives to address Britain's binge drinking culture. Joining them in the talks were Sudarghara Dusanj, joint managing director of Cains Brewery, which has already set its stall out by displaying guidelines for sensible drinking on the labels of bottles and cans amongst other initiatives. Professor Dr. John Ashton, the North West Regional Director of Public Health who hosted the meeting, said: "As brewery owners, the Dusanj brothers have shown great courage in highlighting the dangers of binge drinking and actively promoting a more responsible attitude to alcohol. "They have taken the intelligent view that drink producers and retailers have a responsibility to the people who buy their products. They know that current levels of alcohol misuse in our society blight lives, contribute to violence, needlessly damage health and put an intolerable strain on the NHS and other public services."

MICRO MAGIC

As ever we bring you the latest round-up of the region's burgeoning micro-brewers.

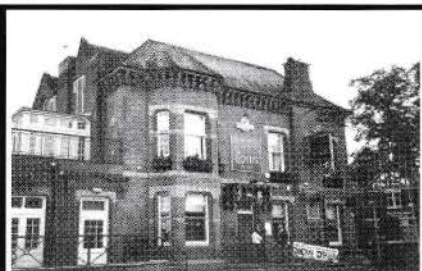


Three Rivers - at last, we can reveal the names of the other parties involved as they are now full-time at

the brewery. These are Chris Mottershead and brewer Mike Hitchen, who comes from the Beechams micro-brewery in St Helens but has a wealth of experience behind him. The brewery continues to thrive and the capacity has been increased to 10 barrels, and they are also acting as consultants in the installation of other micro-breweries.

On the beer front, the mainstream GMT has had the hop rate increased to make for a more characterful beer - a massive improvement, according to Ed(2) - and as a result it has been gaining even more repeat orders. Two new beers are out. A beefy 4.8%ABV mild is Delta Dark while at the other end of the spectrum is Summer Rays, a 4%ABV, 'very hoppy' summer ale. The Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport, acts as the Three Rivers 'tap' and always has two of their beers available.

Facers - The dry hopped Rhapsody experiment did not really set the world on fire, so David Facer has been working on a session beer with a more mainstream appeal than Rhapsody, which he suspects was marginally too strong (4%) for the session market, and perhaps a bit too golden brown in colour for today's tastes. The replacement for Rhapsody is 'Northern County'. This is based on some of Facer's most popular seasonal beers such as JAS, Keats and Prancing Pony; it is 3.8% and very light in colour with a good malt/



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hop balance, the hops adding moreish summer fruit notes to the palate.

Next up in the 'Greats of English Literature' series, arriving mid June, will be 'Chatterley's' at 3.9%. The recipe hasn't been developed yet, but David tells us it will be loosely based on his one-off (and equally romantic) brew 'Balcony Scene'. In early June Facers will be producing a one-off special dry-hopped version of Crabtree to commemorate the Transit of Venus across the face of the sun on 8th June this year. This phenomenon has not been seen by any person alive today as it is only visible from Earth about every 120 years. William Crabtree, after whom the beer is named, lived on the Cliff in Salford, just round the corner from the brewery, and he was the first (along with his friend and fellow astronomer Horrocks in Preston) to observe the Transit in 1639.

Bazens' - have taken a 9-gallon cask of eXSB (5.5%) to be bottled at Leek Brewery and this bottle-conditioned beer will be available about the time you read this. Outlets had yet to be confirmed as we went to press. The Newun (4.2%), which is available until June, is proving very popular and is continuing to sell well nation-wide. Look out, too, for '20 Not Out' a special beer to mark the 20th Birthday of *Opening Times*. This 4.1%ABV aromatically hoppy beer will be launched at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival and then made available to the free trade.

Glossop Breweries - have their beer at the Cambridge beer festival this month. In addition Don Pape's 'oppo' Christopher Abbott has developed a new beer which

should be on sale now. It is a very light and refreshing bitter beer at 4.1%ABV and is simply called Summer Bitter. They hope that as a clear lager 'look alike' it might appeal for those warm summer afternoons, the beer gardens or as a home barbecue beer.

Pictish - another month and another award, for Richard Sutton's Pictish Brewery in Rochdale. This time it's a Beer of the Festival Award for Brewers Gold at the recent Doncaster Beer Festival. Black Diamond Mild makes a welcome return this month and in addition several beers will be available for Stockport Beer Festival, including Black Shiver stout and, if we are lucky, the wonderful Blue Moon, 6%ABV IPA.

Greenfield - another micro doing very well. New beers out include Frieze Ale (4.4%ABV) a very dark 'old fashioned mild' but with plenty of body. Pride of England (4.2%ABV) was brewed for St George's day but is continuing as it sold so well. It's described as a 'traditional English bitter', mid-brown in colour and well-balanced. Finally, look out for Jabeth's Bitter (4.2%ABV), a light, hoppy beer using First Gold, Pioneer and Cascade hop varieties. Two regular outlets for Greenfield beers are the Ashton Arms and Whittle in Oldham.

Phoenix - more goodies out from this respected Heywood brewer. Out as we went to press were Black Shadow (4%ABV) a superb dark mild, and Mayfly (4.4%ABV) a pale springtime ale. To come are Midsummer Madness (4.5%ABV), Tennis Elbow (4.5%ABV), and Sticky Wicket (4.7%ABV), all excellent, refreshing beers.



Millstone - there will be a new beer out on Whit Friday. This will be Windy Miller (4.1%ABV), brewed for the Saddleworth Band Contest, and using Green

Bullet hops for bittering and a new hedgerow hop variety 'Ros' for aroma. This beer will be available at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. Two other beers in the pipeline are Summer Daze, a summer seasonal, and in late August Square Peg will be brewed for the local rushcart festival. The Church Inn in Mossley now takes Millstone beers on a regular basis and they are also regular guests at Stockport's Olde Vic.

Bank Top - the next new beer will be launched at Stockport Beer Festival. This will be a 5%ABV version of the excellent Bank Top Dark Mild, with bottles of port added to the fermentation vessel. As yet unnamed, this promises to be a superb beer. Bank Top beers (along with those from Phoenix, Pictish, and Eastwood & Sanders) are regularly available at the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport. Bank Top has recently installed two new fermenters, making 10 in total and allowing for a 50-barrel brew-length.

Boggart Hole Clough - Boggart Light Mild (3.8%ABV) is now a regular beer. Boggart Brown Ale (3.7%ABV) has been well-received and a new beer (Arnhem Bridge, 4.6%ABV) was brewed for the Cambridge Beer Festival.

Shaws - will have a new beer out for Stockport Beer Festival, in line with the policy of having a new special every two weeks. A dark mild had also been produced for May. Well-worth seeking out, Shaws beers can regularly be found at the Globe in Glossop.



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Ed(1) raises himself out of his torpor. "I think," he says, reaching for his customary barley wine 'pick-me-up', "that we may have taken our eye of the ball with our Stockport coverage. I want a column dedicated to news and views about the local pub scene – and you, Clifton, are just the man for the job." Ed(2) vigorously nods his assent before returning to his doppelbock, so my goose is well and truly cooked. So welcome to this new *Opening Times* feature. I'll be covering the whole Borough, so if you have any news or comments about any of the town's pubs send them to me at the editorial address.

OUT ON THE TOWN

I have finally got to the bottom of the cask ale policy at **Abbey Bar** on St Petergate. This is to alternate a beer from the Scotcot list with other beers, typically from local micros. Recent beers have been Pedigree, 3 Rivers (GMT, I think) and Old Speckled Hen. The owner is keen to run a modern "style" bar rather than a traditional pub, but one that does something a bit different from the typical example of the genre and therefore appeals to a wider audience. So, a welcome step in the right direction. All we need now is something a bit more interesting on the bottled beer front. One pub that continues to impress me is the **Bakers Vaults** in the Market Place. It's probably better now than it's been for years. Not only does the pub itself look great but the beer is on top form – I've had some particularly good Best Bitter in there recently. Not far away, the town's two Sam Smith's pubs are reeling from the brewery's first price increase for about 15 years. The Old Brewery Bitter is now, wait for it, £1.20 a pint. Elsewhere, I'm still mystified as to what is going at the still-closed **Bridge Street Wine Bar** (I still call it the Castlewood, myself). Despite the sign saying 'sold', the pub remains firmly closed and boarded and has been for ages now. Just what is going on, I wonder. Another pub which looks to be shut is the **Nicholsons Arms** on Lancashire Hill – well, at least there have been no visible signs of trading when I've been past. There's a sign on the side 'tenancy to let' but with the number of broken and boarded windows, and pretty bleak surroundings, I can't see anyone taking it on.

UP THE HEATONS

Two real ale losses to report here, I'm sorry to say. Both the **Grey Horse** and the **Railway** in Heaton Norris have gone keg. On the plus side, though, the **Elizabethan** in Heaton Moor, part of the Orchard Pub Co, so I'm told, continues to go great guns on the real beer front. There was a 'Spring Ale Promotion' last month, with 13 guest ales over the course of the month. These included beers from Butcombe, Nethergate, Titanic, Arundel and Oakham amongst other tasty treats. I keep hearing good things about this pub and really must get in more often. Not too far away, the Rudyard had now been renamed the **Heaton Chapel** and this sells Draught Bass (although I hear that this may not always be available). I must also get into the **Chapel House** – I read in these very pages that cask ale was going in, but since then – silence.

At the **Nursery** on Green Lane they have bitter on the handpump as well as retaining the bitter on electric pump. According to the bar staff this is to see what the customers prefer and I noticed on my visit one or two went for the handpump. It will be interesting to see if this is retained in the future

ON EDGELEY

By and large, not good news. The **Swan** on Shaw Heath remains boarded following last year's fire and there must now be serious doubts about its future as a pub. Almost next door, Pete Kaut is leaving the **Armoury** with no news of his successor. Another **Robbies** pub about to lose its licensees is the Church where Lorraine and Mich are leaving on 18 May, again with no obvious successors. The **Jolly Crofter** has been closed due to the licensee's ill-health – the cask **Boddingtons** reported in *Opening Times* has been replaced by cask **Thwaites**, but this seems somewhat academic now. Nearby **Windsors** has lost its real ale.

So, where to drink on Castle Street if you want some real ale? Luckily there's an oasis at each end. The **Royal Oak** sells Holts and Boddingtons in a much-improved pub, while at the Shaw Heath end, the **Grapes** still does the business under the sure touch of Dave and Sandra George. Let's not forget the **Olde Vic** on Chatham Street with its 4-5 cask beers and real cider. I am told that Millstone Brewery beers are now regular guests here, which is another reason (as if one was needed!) to visit this well-run free house.

OUT AND ABOUT

There a new bar in Bramhall. This is **207** at 207 Moss Lane, and it's keg. In Cheadle the range at the **George & Dragon** is now down to Theakstons Bitter while the **Crown** has Hydes' Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and a seasonal! Finally, it's all go in Cheadle Hulme. Last month *Opening Times* reported on the much-improved **Cheadle Hulme**. Nearby, Millington Hall is starting to take shape now the scaffolding is coming down and it has a roof on again. There's even a website at www.johnmillington.co.uk. This shows that this is one of "Hydes Heritage Inns", and is expected to open mid-July as the '**John Millington**'. The **Ryecroft Arms**, previously the Conway, is also doing well – so much so that an in-house beer festival is planned. This was originally pencilled-in for 3 June but the clash with Stockport Beer Festival has seen his put back to 10 July.

Well, that's it for now – back next time with more news and views. Don't forget, if you've got anything you'd like to see in this column, please get in touch, c/o Opening Times.



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O P E N I N G T I M E S

LETTERS

From Geoff Johnson (via e-mail):

Correction to page 15 of the April edition of Opening Times. The Millpond in Stalybridge does not yet have any handpumped beers. JW Lees have recently acquired this formerly privately-owned pub which sold keg-only Thwaites beers. They are considering putting on handpumped beer which, if it happens, is likely to be the Lees seasonal beer - but no firm decision yet. Lets hope it happens because in all other respects this is an extremely well-run pub catering for all tastes. It operates an over 25s policy and there is a dress code on Saturday and Sunday evenings - the food is very good value. For now the beers are Lees Smooth on draught or their more acceptable bottled "John Willies" beer. I tend to go for the imported Tiger beer.

From John Holland, Gateshead:

The Manchester Matters column in the April 2004 edition of Opening Times reporting on the closure of Bar 5 in Manchester City Centre asked "Anyone remember the days when it was the Old Bank Street Brewhouse?". Well I do. Having worked in the area a few years earlier and half re-calling the premises I was most intrigued to read in What's Doing an article reporting on the installation of a small in-house brewery there. So it was, if my memory serves me correctly, that in the spring of 1984 on a visit back to Manchester that I called in to sample the real ale brewed there; I think they only did one beer (bitter?). Which although quite reasonable was not nearly as memorable as Stockport's own pioneering micro brewery of the same era, Pollard's, which had sadly only recently closed back then. I also seem to re-call that the only memorable feature of the pub which was quite up market, lunch time food orientated and fairly expensive, was the large amount of copper and chrome used to furnish the interior of the pub. However when I next called in on another return visit to the City probably about 12-18 months later it had permanently ceased brewing and the short-lived days of the Old Bank Street Brewhouse were over, for ever?



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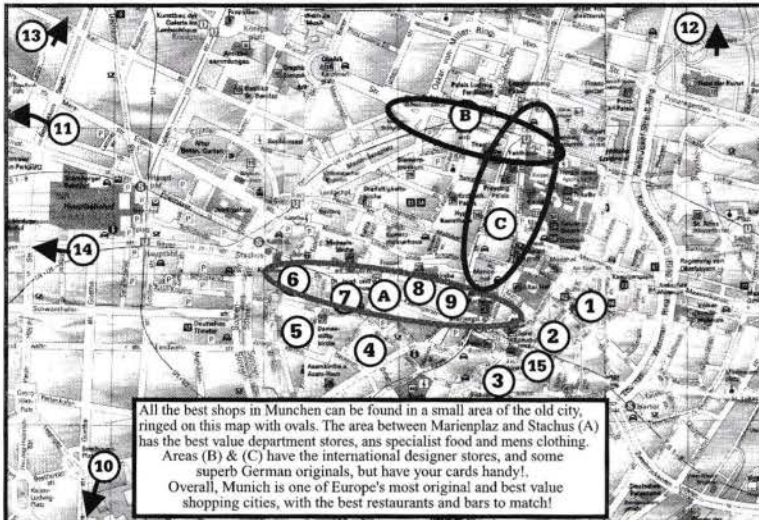




MUNICH DRINKING IN 2004

This was supposedly a longish article about pubs & beers in Franconia (specifically the region around Bamberg) with an addendum to my Munich article of a few years back, that was referred to in a letter some months ago. Hopefully the article on Franconia will find its way into print next month, but here at least is part one of the Munich update, to be followed in a few months time by part two, specifically about beer gardens. There are certainly enough good drinking establishments close to the old city centre to keep you busy for a long weekend, or for a visit to the Ocktoberfest by which time you will probably want to drink

inside rather than in a garden. I have to admit to being a total convert to outside drinking in Germany - for a start there seem to be far less intrusive wasps flying about to bother one. (Presumably the colonies died out through alcohol poisoning generations ago). Secondly, there are surprisingly few real 'beer halls' left in Munich. The mid-size ones are restaurant-ish (yes, they have served food for centuries) but the emphasis on serious consumption has shifted with the demolition of the Mathauser. Sure, the Hofbrauhaus (1) still goes strong, and still has a solid local patronage (especially in the upstairs rooms) but it is largely a place for Japanese men to drink a litre of strong beer for which they have (genetically) little tolerance, and fall over, dance or otherwise embarrass their wives. For a one-off 'Munich Experience' outside the Oktoberfest though, it cannot be beaten. The beer's pretty good too. The Weisses Brauhaus (2) used to be the Schneider (Weiss) Brewery tap, but the brewery fled to Kelheim (on the Danube) during the war. Now a very echt-Bayern high-quality food purveyor, and very busy almost exclusively with locals, it serves beer from the Karmeleiten



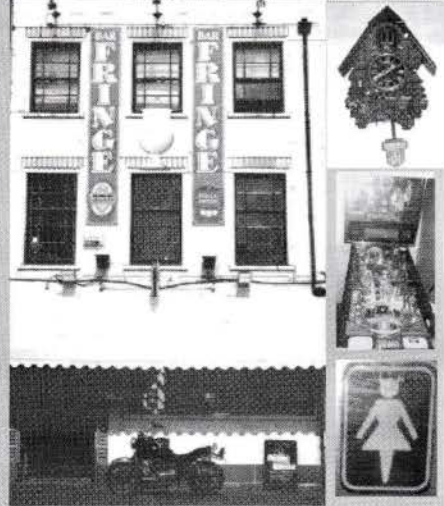
Bars/Gardens

- 1 Hofbrauhaus
- 2 Weiss Brauhaus
- 3 Victualien Markt (see Text)
- 4 Altes Hackerhaus
- 5 Hundskugel
- 6 Spaten Keller
- 7 Augustiner Gastatte
- 8 Alt Nurnberg BG
- 9 Donisl
- 10 Paulaner Brauhaus
- 11 Augustiner B.Garten/K
- 12 Chinesischer Turm/Seehaus
- 13 Lowenbrau Keller
- 14 Augustiner Brauerei
- 15 Paulaner Im Tal

Kloster Brau alongside the Weiss. Directly opposite is the modern Paulaner im Tal(15) with small bar at the front, good food, and excellent Paulaner beers (but seasonals only in bottles alas), adjacent to its west side in an alley leading to the Victualienmarkt (fruit & veg market and beer garden(3)) is a small Paulaner bar that does usually have the draught seasonals. The Victualienmarkt beer-garden, open during dry daylight hours serves beers from one of the six big Muich brewers in rotation. A truly splendid place to watch the world go by (as are the Seehaus (Paulaner) and Chinesische Turm(Lowenbrau) in the Englisher Garten - a giant park - to the north. The six are Lowenbrau and Spaten,(co-owned), Paulaner, Hacker-Pschorr (co-owned and brewed at one plant), Hofbrau (associated with the last two), and fiercely



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independent Augustiner. Lowenbrau have a brew-pub 'Unionsbrau' which will be covered in the next feature, Paulaner have the Paulaner Brauhaus (10) which serves trendy though good food and excellent unfiltered beers, and there are a number of smaller brew-pubs further out including the excellent Air-brau at Munich Airport (nb. do NOT order food here if you are short of time, its very slow). Although in Manchester I drink a lot of Paulaner at Bar Centro (the Helles - draught Wheat beer can be got in Kro2 amongst others) and the odd Lowenbrau Helles in Knott Bar, I have as most Muncheners do, come to realise that it doesn't get much better than draught Augustiner, which is why four of my recommendations serve their beer. By the Dominican Cathedral there are now two Augustiner pubs - the frighteningly expensive (and ludicrously short-measured) Nurnburg Bratwurst Glockl am Dom (8) - but the beer (Aug. Vollbier from wooden barrels on gravity - holzfass) is magnificent. Next door the new Augustiner am Dom which is a big music/jazz venue. On the 'main drag' Neuhauser Str. is the Augustiner Gastatte (7) which used to act as the brewery tap, has a superb Italianate courtyard beer-garden at the back, is much bigger than it looks and is THE place to eat the famous Munich White sausage (washed down with a Weiss bier, but NOT after noon, its bad luck!). Going west from the Hauptbahnhof (main Railway station) on the road north above the tracks is the Augustiner Biergarten (11). Litres of Augustiner Edelstoff from 100 litre wooden barrels on gravity. Oh my....!, on the south side of the tracks is the brewery itself and in what used to be the barrelling hall is (recently built) what passes for the best beerhall in town(14) (behind and through the rustic restaurant). All the beers, often with the seasonals on gravity. The May and Winter bocks are superb. The Lowenbrau keller and garden, about 1000m north west of the station and in sight of both Spaten & Lowenbrau breweries is clearly a good place to try the most well-known (to Brits) bier, though the HunsKugel (5) two streets behind the Augustiner Gastatte is both the oldest pub in town, and a great eaterie as well. Also worth trying for hearty value food is the Lowen am Markt (in the Victualienmarkt) where I had some splendid Triumphator on draught (Lowenbrau's Doppelbock). For Hacker, either Donisl(9), off Marienplatz, or the Altes Hackerhaus(4) on Sendlinger Str., the old brewery site with a fabulous courtyard garden, but which the new owners have sadly dumbed-down from its former splendour. There are vast numbers of Spaten pubs to allow you to complete the set, none of which have quite hit the money with me yet. The Spaaten Keller, towards the station from the Augustiner Gastatte can be good. I miss Mathauser.

Given the lack of space, and the consequent tiny size of the map, an extended full 2-page version of this article (with no adverts!) will appear as pages 21 & 22 of this issue on the Internet pdf edition, accessible via our website (see page 19).

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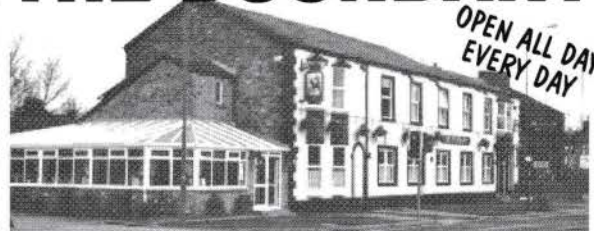


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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak, Macclesfield and Trafford & Hulme

Diary

MAY 2004

Friday 21st - Stagger: Fallowfield & Rusholme. Meet White Swan, Green St, Ladybarn 7.30pm; Friendship, Wilmslow Rd, 8.30pm.

Thursday 27th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Lass O' Gowrie, Charles St, City Centre. From 8.00pm.

Tuesday 1st - Sunday 6th June - Set up, run and take down 18th Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. All members please support this important event.

Thursday 10th - Branch Meeting: Waldorf Hotel, Gore St, Manchester City Centre. Starts 8.00pm

Friday 11th - Denton & Hyde Social: Meet Lowes Arms, Hyde Rd, Denton 7.00pm for food and drink (brewery visit to be confirmed). Adjourn to Cheshire Ring, at 9.30pm.

The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:

Saturday 15th - Evening trip to Altrincham. Details from Tom Lord on 0161 427 7099.

Monday 17th - Branch Meeting: Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 19th June - Annual Sponsored Branch Walk. Meet at Kinder Lodge, Hayfield. Start at 11.00am finish at Star Glossop.

Monday 21st - Branch Meeting and AGM: Globe, High St, West Glossop. Start 8.30pm. Will members please attend this important meeting.

MAY 2004

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following events:

Monday 17th - Social Evening: Rose & Crown, Allgreave. From 8.00pm.

Saturday 22nd - Macclesfield Mild Meander: Railway; Dolphin; Sun; Porters; Waters Green

Monday 7th June - Campaigning Meeting: Crown, Lower Peover. Starts 8.00pm.

Saturday 12th - Pub of the Year Presentation: Beartown Tap, Congleton. Brewery tour 1.30pm, presentation 3.00pm.

The Trafford & Hulme Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester west of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. They have advised us of the following events:

Thursday 1st July - 8.00pm - Branch meeting, at The Wheatsheaf, Altrincham. Note change of Venue.

Regional CAMRA Under-26 social group

Friday 21st May - A Stagger with S'port & South Manchester branch. Meet at the White Swan, Green St, Ladybarn at 7.30pm or the Friendship, Wilmslow Rd, Fallowfield at 8.30pm

Tuesday 1 June - Beerienteering Marshals meeting in function room at Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, Manchester. Starts 8.00pm

Saturday 12th June - **BEERIEN TEERING** 1-2pm Start at the Knott Bar, Deansgate, opp. Deansgate/GMEX stations, Manchester City Centre. See article. Meet by the CAMRA sign.

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA Planner

12



CAINS

BREWERY TOURS

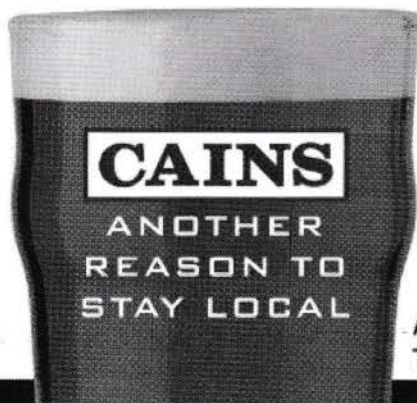
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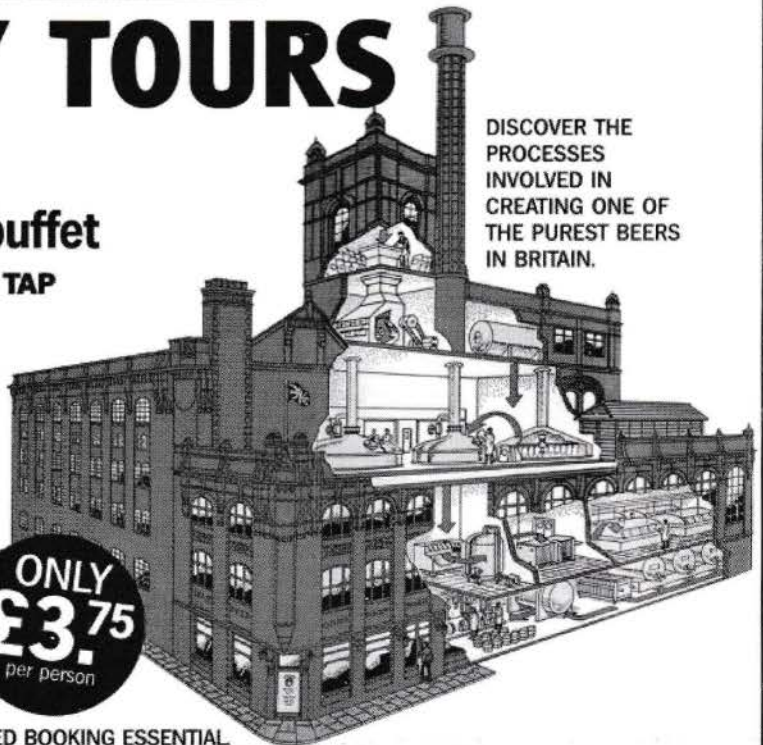
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SOLD DOWN THE FORTH ?

If there was one beer that defined the real ale revival of the 1970s, it was Ruddles County. This powerful, rich, malty brew was a stark contrast to the insipid kegs of the day, and it became a cult beer that people would travel well out of their way to drink. But, almost inevitably, this success went to the heads of the owners of the brewery. First they entered into a national distribution deal with Grand Metropolitan, who were desperate to restore some credibility to their pubs after the Watneys brand had become a laughing stock. After this, it wasn't too long before GrandMet bought the company, and the quality of the beers went into a spiral of decline. Eventually the brewery was sold off and closed, and Ruddles County is now a much weaker shadow of its former self produced many miles from its original home by Greene King. One of the greatest real ale success stories of the last ten years was Edinburgh's Caledonian Brewery. Their flagship brand, Deuchars IPA, because almost a national beer in Scotland, and its distinctive, fresh character and citric hoppiness attracted many new, younger drinkers to real ale. But now, in a complex deal, Scottish & Newcastle have decided to close their giant Fountain Brewery in Edinburgh, and to buy Caledonian's physical plant. The existing Caledonian management will continue to own and run the brewing business, but S&N will market their products within the UK. While on the face of it this may seem to provide new distribution opportunities for Caledonian's portfolio of excellent beers, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that, once the dead hand of the big brewers has touched it, in ten years' time Deuchars will have gone the way of County.

TURN IT OFF!

Like many people, for a long time I was sceptical about mobile phones, but, again, like most of us, I grudgingly succumbed to their lure in the end. It comes in handy ordering cabs home from the pub, and I suppose it might be useful in an emergency, but apart from that I still think it's a gross invasion of privacy. How can you escape down the pub if people are still able to track you down when you're there?

But even if you do manage to take refuge for what you hope will be a quiet pint, it's still impossible to get away from the damn things. Every few minutes you're interrupted by the teeth-grating trill of the latest ringtone, followed by which people proceed to hold half-witted conversations at the tops of their voices which seem to consist of nothing more than "I'm in the pub", "Yeah" and "I know". Worst of all is when they decide to change all the settings on their phones accompanied by a maddening ten-minute symphony of beeps and warbles. I've heard of some pubs with a scheme whereby anyone allowing a phone to ring in the pub has to pay a forfeit, although I've never come across this personally. But surely even better would be a withering stare from the dictatorial landlord of old, with the unmistakable one-word instruction of "Outside!"

Curmudgeon Online: <http://members.lycos.co.uk/curmudgeon>

5 Years Ago
 MAY 1999
 by Phil Levison

Most of the front page was devoted to the "Cask Champion Award" which the Stockport & South Manchester Branch of CAMRA had just introduced. It was to be presented annually to the person, company or organisation that had done most during the previous 12 months to further the case of quality in cask beer. The first winner of the award was Tony Phillips of Hydes' Brewery, a company that had seen the quality of its beer improve enormously during the five years that Tony had been with them. He had joined the company with a quality remit, and his first aim was to improve the consistency of the beer leaving the brewery. This was followed by training beer tasters at the brewery, and they were sent out to check the beer quality at the pubs. His success in improving quality had been evident from the increase in the number of Hydes' pubs in the Good Beer Guide.

★ ★ ★ ★

The 'smooth' variety of beer had started to appear in Joseph Holt's pubs, and they had chosen the method where the beer was in cask conditioned form when it left the cellar, but it arrived on the bar in 'non-real' form, having passed through a "nitrogenator". There was also some doubt about the future of bottled Sixex, as it was proving difficult to find a bottler for the nip size bottle. Luckily, it is still with us today.

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There was news of some of the Scottish Courage beers. The previous year had seen the axing of contract-brewed Wilsons' Mild, and now it was reportedly the turn of Theakston's Best Bitter and XB, which were to be replaced by a new beer in the mid-range of 4-4.2%. It also looked as if John Smith's Magnet was due for the chop - ironically, it had been widely regarded as the best beer to come out of Tadcaster brewery for years. As it turned out, none of this happened and all three beers remain available today.

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There was bad and good news from the Bramhall area. The 'hard to find' Bromale had lost its real ale, and although the handpumps were still in place, they were unmarked - a barperson described them as "permanently disused". There was better news from Shires, which is, or was, the public bar of the County Hotel, near Bramhall Station. There were three cask beers available - Greene King IPA, Worthington Best Bitter, and as a permanent guest, Fuller's London Pride. On a visit early in 2004, the range had been reduced to one cask beer only, Flowers Original, which was said to be "not ready, in the cellar".

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Shock news from Stockport - the Crown ("Corner Cupboard") on Hillgate had closed. After a chequered few years, it seemed to have found a new lease of life, culminating in a first-class refurbishment a couple of years previously. Now that the entire Vaux pub estate was on the market, the pub's future was in doubt. Today the Crown is open again but sadly, and inexplicably, sells no cask beer.



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Karen Walls is the newly appointed steward at Stalybridge Labour Club. She is returning to the post after a 12 year absence, when the Club won an award from Whitbreads for her cellar during her spell there. There will be no change to the beer policy, being four handpumps, Boddingtons Cask and three guest beers always available. Recent beers have included on our members visits have been Otter Bitter, Thwaites Lancaster Bomber, Gales HSB, Black Sheep Special, Pendle Witches brew and Coach House Squires Gold. Geoff Burrows will continue as the cellarman.

At the Moorfield Arms on Siloh Road, Rowarth, Draught Bass is now the permanent draught beer after several experiments with various brews over the months.

At the Dorbriere managed Surrey Arms, Victoria Street, Glossop, a handpump has re-appeared after a lengthy absence. The regular beer on it is Grays Best Bitter and the pricing policy, whilst not quite the £1.19 that the Crown across the road sell their Sam Smiths for, it is cheap for the area.

The Red Lion in Ashton has had a compulsory purchase order by Tameside Council as it is in the middle of their re-development area (see last month's article on Opening Times regarding the Witchwood across the road). A point of interest historically here, Neil Hay from Shaws, tells me that it was the first pub that the original Shaws Brewery opened up.

Reports from Hyde are that the Beehive and the Talbot, both closed for some time, are to be demolished.

Finally, on the Mild Trail, one pub that never has managed to sell mild before, but who entered the Mild Trail to give it a go, had sold five firkins within 2 weeks of the trail starting. The Star in Glossop had sold Tetleys Mild, two firkins of Moorhouses Black Cat, a Man in the Boat from Boat brewery and a Monkeytown Mild from Phoenix. There was no sign of the sales slowing down as I wrote this on 20th April and Paul & Viv, the licensees were expecting to sell 10 in total over the duration of the Mild Trail.

The Oddfellows in Ashton, on Kings Road, celebrated being managed by three generations of the same family, over a 90 year period in April. John Lucas the current landlord, who has been there himself for close on 20 years says he was born there, as was his father. The regular Good Beer Guide entry, a Robinson's pub, do not have loud music or a pool table and have a non-smoking part, is an atmospheric pub where people go to converse.

HIGH PEAK BRANCH WALK 2004

Following the success of last year's event, when 48 walkers took part in a walk from Buxton to Hayfield, for local Mountain Rescue teams and raising around £1,600, the Branch walk this year has been planned with a 10.30am meet up at the Kinder Lodge, Hayfield on Saturday 19 June 2004, and ending at the Star in Glossop.

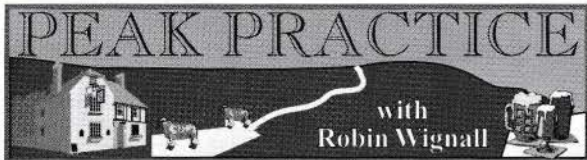
This year's theme is Hospices in the Branch area, currently being chosen by the organisers. There are likely to be three that share the proceeds, to try and cover the Branch area as a whole.

The walk takes the entrants down the Sett Valley Trail, calling at the Pack Horse on Mellor Road, then crossing various trails and fields to Mellor, to visit the Oddfellows, before heading across country past Robin Hoods Picking Roads, to call at the Hare & Hounds in Simmondley, the Beehive at Whitfield, the Queens in Old Glossop and finishing at the Star Inn, convenient for trains home.

We welcome anyone from the Opening Times circulation area to ring up for a walking pack, which includes the route and a sponsor form. Anyone wishing to take part, please contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426 or 07960074996 (evenings).

14





Until fairly recent times, family brewers probably supplied a large proportion of beer to pubs in this country. The Peak District would have been no exception. Smiths of Macclesfield had a toehold in the west before being taken over in 1962 by Marston's, itself an amalgam of three smaller brewing companies. The place of Marston's in the Peak, especially now it is owned by Wolverhampton & Dudley, deserves a separate article.

Wards of Sheffield were well represented and retained their own badging and brewery even after takeover by Vaux. The Devonshire Arms at Peak Forest, and the Cheshire Cheese at Hope were part of that estate, an estate which was dismantled after the demise of Vaux as brewer and pub owner.

One family brewer still supplies the Peak District - Stockport's own Robinson's. There seems to be a swathe of houses in New Mills and district. Whaley Bridge pubs were mentioned last month, apart from the Railway in the village centre, which sells Best Bitter and Old Stockport, the latter a successful and well-presented replacement for Hatters.

Many villages have the odd Robinson's house, whilst Chapel-en-le-Frith can boast four. At the east end of town is the Jolly Carter, a well-furnished, opened out pub selling Best Bitter. In the town centre is the Old Pack Horse, a fine multi-roomed pub, even after updating. A separate vault and a lounge/meeting room lead off the main room. Hatters, Best Bitter and Old Tom are available on handpump.

Nearby is the Shoulder of Mutton, which looks to date from around 1970. It is a big, open-plan pub selling Best Bitter and Young Tom (the current seasonal as this was written). Further west is the New Inn, a pub with a much altered, possibly rebuilt, exterior. It is still a multi-roomed pub, but the side rooms were not available on a quiet Wednesday evening. Historic photographs adorn the walls, and these show that the New Inn was once a Bell's house - the Hemphaw Lane brewery was taken over by Robinson's in 1949. Hatters Mild, Best Bitter and Double Hop were available.

None of these feature in Andrew McClay's *Peak District Pub Guide*, but they are worth a visit. Quick calls on a quiet Wednesday evening left me with the impression that the Old Pack Horse was probably the pick of the bunch, but as ever, try them yourselves.

MILD CHALLENGE UPDATE



As the Organiser of the Mild Challenge, writes Mark McConachie, I also make it my business to visit each of the participating pubs at least once during the course of the event to see how things are going and to resolve any problems that may arise.

It provides a great chance to sup some great beers, visit some super pubs, chat to customers and meet the licensees (without whom the event would not be possible). One such licensee is the amiable mine host of the Masons Arms, New Mills - Vic Chappell. Vic has been at the Masons for some nine years now, with a stint at the nearby Queens prior to that; in all that time the pub has been in every Mild Challenge (I'm unsure whether that is a record or not). A Robinson's house, the Masons is a plainly furnished two-room house with bar area. Decorated in a comfortable style with a mixture of fixed seating and converted church pews. Photos of the Millennium Walkway and old New Mills provide interest, along with framed poems extolling the various virtues of the 'Happy Man'; 'Derbyshire' and 'The Landlord'. The bar has a collection of German beer mugs and a vast number of key-rings that act as a festoon.

Beers are Hatters, Best Bitter and Double Hop (or Old Stockport), all served in oversized glasses (full measure always guaranteed). Although the pub is a little way out of the centre it attracts a good mix of folk who appreciate Vic's beer and welcome; by the way, Vic hails from Kent, although many think he is a Londoner. The Masons has been a past winner of the town's 'Pub in Bloom' contest; it plays host to a weekly meat raffle on Sundays, with funds supporting Cave and Mountain Rescue charities. Two further Robbins pubs are further down the hill - Pineapple and White Hart, with the impressive Pack Horse (Free) a little further on.

The Masons Arms is on High Street, New Mills. It is around a five minute walk (steep downhill at times) of the town's bus station and New Mills Central BR; go via Market Street. Bus 358 is the core service to get you to New Mills from Stockport - any day, day or evening. The pub is open all permitted hours; no food is served bar for pork pies at a reasonable 50p.

15
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PACK HORSE INN, MELLOR ROAD, NEW MILLS

The Pack Horse is a pub that had been recommended to me many times by former work colleagues as being good for its ale and its food. So, taking advantage of a fine midweek Spring day, and the fact I was 'On Strike' that day and needed something to get me out of the house, I ventured out onto the hilly countryside above New Mills.

This is a fine stone-built house that rewards you with great views of the surroundings hills and down to the town which seems far below. It comprises a number of buildings, with the pub being only a small part; the rest is mostly taken up with the well-used letting bedrooms. The interior is a well-judged muted rustic - cream walls with horse brasses; horse bits (part of the bridle, not horse body parts!); mounted antlers; and other brass paraphernalia. A stone fireplace features a wood-burning stove that acts as a focal point. Seating is of the discrete table and chairs kind, with some settles neatly breaking up the space.

The Pack Horse attracts a good mix of customers, a lot of whom travel further than the local catchments of Marple, Romiley, New Mills and so on; weekends can usually find it bustling at lunchtimes. To the ale lover, this long-time Good Beer Guided house will draw those who enjoy a variety of well-kept beers. On my visit there were four beers - Tetley bitter and three guests (one each from Wylam; Frankton Bagby; and Hoskins & Oldfield) - beer prices range from £1.80 to £2.10. Of note, is that many of these guests are supplied by "The Major", a man well-respected in the local trade who also supplies beers to the Olde Vic on Edgeley, for example. The two pints of Wylam that I had with my meal were excellent.

Bound, multi-page menus are in plentiful supply and detail some really tasty sounding fare. Beginning with the range of Starters - from Soup of the day (£2.50) to Thai fishcakes; Paté; breaded mushrooms; and battered prawns; all around £4.25. Then to the Main Courses (divided into food types on the menu): Fish (£7.25 to £8.95) - Scampi; Cod and chips; Sweet and Sour Prawns; Stuffed Salmon fillet; and a wonderful sounding Seafood Casserole. Chicken (both £8.50) - in Mushroom sauce or Stilton cheese sauce Grills (£8.25 to £10.-) - Lamb; Gammon; and a brace of Steaks Veggie (£5.95 to £7.25) - Curry; Lasagne; Stroganoff Hot Pots (all c. £6.-) - Lasagne; Chilli; Steak & Kidney Pie.

Added to this are a small number of blackboard specials - today, Ham & Mushroom pasta; Liver & Onions; and two Curries of the Week - Chicken Bhuna or Chicken Methi (all £7.25). All of the above are served with new potatoes, jacket potato or chips (or rice if appropriate.) and three vegetables. Other menu items include Snacks - Toasties (£3.-), jacket potatoes (from £3.-); Sandwiches from £3.75. Again, to warm the stomach of Ed(1), all hot desserts are £2.75.

I was more than tempted by the appeal of the Seafood Casserole, but in the end I chose the Steak & Kidney Pie. My meal was served with boiled new potatoes, carrots, peas and cabbage; all very hearty, with the 'pie', served in a ramekin (hence the 'Hot-Pot' label). They do not skimp on quantity here, my large oval

plate was substantial with a goodly quantity of fine braising steak, and there were so many potatoes, that I had the ones I could not finish wrapped up for me, so I could enjoy them at home later! My verdict was that it was an excellent meal served in very hospitable surroundings; my one and only gripe being that there was not enough kidney in the pie and thus the gravy of the pie lacked that luscious kidney sweetness. But hey, that's just my taste, as I'm sure there are others who dislike too much kidney. Building work outside is going on at quite a pace so Summer-time (July, perhaps), should see the trading space double as new and expanded rooms come into use - a separate dining room; a new kitchen; separate Tap Room (fashioned out of the former kitchen) and more letting rooms (up from five to 11). On the beer front the current range may well be extended to be Tetley bitter plus up to five guests. All of this comes from the owner's, the Crossland family, people who obviously know their onions as they have been running the Pack Horse successfully for 23 years. Do not miss this if you are in New Mills. **MMC.**

The Pack Horse Inn is on Mellor Road, New Mills, SK22 4QQ. Tel. 01663 742365; Fax. 01663 741674; www.packhorseinn.co.uk. It is about a mile north (steep at times) of the town centre (bus station and New Mills Central BR) up Market Street. Alternately, get the daytime bus 375 from Marple to the junction of Shiloh Road, Mellor, and you then have a leisurely 12 minute walk, downhill! Opening hours and food serving times (in brackets): Mon-Fri 12-3, 5-11 (12-2, 6-10); Sat 12-11 (12-10); Sun 12-10.30 (12-9).



PUB NEWS

There is much change in licensees and managers in Bollington: the Meridian is now a free house (the other free house being the Poachers) run by Dianne and Keith. They are trying really hard to drum up business which should be commended. Black Sheep Bitter is a regular beer, with a guest beer also. Regular jam sessions feature on Monday and Thursday with a Sunday quiz night ever two weeks. It's believed that Dianne & Keith don't actually own the pub but rent it from a third party, but this could be just village talk.

The Cotton Tree has suffered a recent spate of smashed windows. It's hoped this can overcome as the pub was going from strength to strength and it's in danger of getting back its old label as a rather rough establishment.

The status of the Church House is a little vague. We thought it was being run by Sarah but that she had left. Anyone else know? We should have found out recently on the National Pubs Week crawl but the Church House was closed...

The landlord of the Holly Bush has moved on (if you buy petrol from Tesco, you might meet him again) and we're waiting a change-over soon. Hopefully the beer quality (Robinson's) will improve as it didn't appear to go down too well during the pub crawl. This pub has great decor inside and could compliment the Spinners and Meridian as central Bollington pubs. The Spinners continues to attract a younger clientele.

The new landlord of the Dog & Partridge is settling in, very well by all accounts. The Lord Clyde was up for sale (Pubmaster) and it's thought it has been sold, so yet another change! The Vale is picking up a bit, possibly helped by an article in the local magazine. This pub is a bit out of the way and probably does better in the summer when there are more people out on the canal and Middlewood Way.

The Durham Ox in Macclesfield is currently boarded up and sports a 'For Sale' sign. Likewise the Bull & Gate is boarded up but it sports a 'Sold' sign.

The Robinson's web site shows the following pubs in our branch area as requiring new tenants:

Bulls Head - Kerridge (currently being refurbished), Wild Boar - Wincle, and the Barnfield - Macclesfield. The George and Dragon - Higher Hurdsfield and the Harrington - Bosley are under new management.

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MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

For a variety of reasons, I haven't been out and about much at all this month. I do however have one or two snippets of information...and one bombshell

WHAT'S DOING IN THE CITY

The shock news concerns the Pot of Beer, on New Mount Street. This excellent little free house was due to be sold at auction on 13 May. Paul and Sue are moving to the Beer House but will continue to try and run the Pot of Beer for as long as possible. It is likely that the new owner will want to develop the site so it's clear that the pub's days are numbered. But it is good news that these top class licensees will be taking on the Beer House and hopefully can go some way to recapturing its former glory. Nevertheless, the Pot will be a sad loss to the City's drinking scene.

Tim Ellis contacted me to let me know that The Salutation on Higher Chatham Street in the Hulme/Uni area changed hands in March. He and his business partners took over the lease on Monday 8 March and intend on getting the pub back on its feet as soon as possible. This will include a refurbishment in a sympathetic traditional style to the interior and exterior and will also include renovation of the cellar equipment and the inclusion of cask bitter on sale in the pub. The refurb will come in the near future (hopefully) funded by the owners Punch Pub Co. The work will keep a traditional theme as they prefer to keep it in spirit of the pub's Victorian roots. Cask ales will be one permanent in the form of Taylors Landlord and another to change monthly.

IN THE SUBURBS

Ructions at the Parrswood in Didsbury. It seems that the licensees have taken exception to our Stagger report that their handpumped Boddies is the new, much-improved, 4.1% version. The unfortunate distributor of this estimable organ was berated by the indignant licensees, questioning both the eyesight and accuracy of the article's author. After all, it does say '3.8%' on the pumpclip. I suppose they have a point of sorts apart from one tiny fact. The last of the 'old' cask Boddies was brewed in November, since when all cask versions of Strangeways finest have indeed been brewed to the new 4.1% ABV. The Stagger in question took place in March...

In Didsbury, the Woodstock is now open following an extensive refurbishment. I popped my head in and they had three handpumps selling Boddies, Tetley's Bitter and Fullers' London Pride. Not very imaginative apart from the Pride (which I assume is a Guest). I didn't have time to sample any of them, but let's hope they're on better form than previously. The refurb is... well, different. I'd be interested to see what other people think.

And that's your lot, I'm sorry to say. I'll be out and about over the coming weeks, so expect more news next time.

FESTIVAL SPONSORS KEEP THE PRICE OF YOUR PINT DOWN

After the accolades Festival-goers gave the pricing policy at last year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, the organisers have announced that once again the Festival's sponsors have helped keep prices really keen.

The Festival has also continued with beer priced at only £1 a pint before 8.00pm, which must be amongst the most competitively priced beer at any festival in the UK.

Festival Organiser Jim Flynn told Opening Times "As a consumer organisation CAMRA is very conscious of the need to provide value for money. However without the help and loyalty of our sponsors, prices would be at least 15p a pint dearer. The commitment of these companies and businesses to the Festival just shows how it has become part of the local social scene. With all the costs associated with moving to a new venue we are especially grateful to them all this year."

At the time of going to press, the following festival sponsors had been announced:

- The Stockport Express – sponsors of the Festival itself, the Dining Suite and the Entertainment Suite.
 - Frederic Robinson Ltd – sponsors of the Festival glasses and souvenir t-shirts.
 - Hydes Brewery Ltd – sponsors of the Festival programme and the Festival Stewarding Team.
 - Three Rivers Brewery – sponsors of the main beer bar and the festival entertainment
 - The Navigation, Heaton Norris – sponsors of the cider bar
- There are still a few sponsorship opportunities remaining for local firms. If you are interested, contact Jim Flynn on 0161 432 1816.



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| Name(s) of account holders(s) | Originator's reference |
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RAZ + U26 = FUN

Back in March saw the brewery visit to the excellent Bazens' & Facers Breweries (Salford Brewery Syndicate) for the CAMRA Under-26 social group and the CAMRA-affiliated Salford University Real Ale Society (AKA Raz - for short!).

A packed out 16-seater mini-bus left the Crescent pub, to arrive bang on time to be greeted by no less than all three brewers - Dave Facer and Jude & Richard Bazens. The party was treated to Bazens' Flatbac, the new Facers seasonal Wordsworth, a great spread and then a guided tour. The Raz Chair Ms Andi B gave a speech of thanks and presented the brewers a framed opened letter of thanks for the visit from both organisations. Back in the Autumn the Bazens' had very kindly donated a free pint of Freshers Special for all students who signed-up for the Society, boosting numbers considerably! A plan that was hatched on the sun patio of the near-by Good Beer Guide listed Star Inn last summer,



during a boil of a brew. I kid you not.... The next big event is on **Saturday 12 June** when it's Beerienteering, starting at the Knott Bar (Marble Beers), on Deansgate in Manchester City Centre from 1-2pm for checking-in. The

challenge and the game to visit six pubs in correct order, using buses, trains, trams and on foot only, with various ordeals on the way southwards. Each team member pays £1 on the day (teams are to be from 1 to 4 in number) with proceeds going to the Parkinson's Society. Each member is advised to buy a System1 bus day ticket (£2.95) on the first bus of the day. The team that finishes the course the quickest or with the least time penalties wins a commemorative plaque and the team that comes last gets the wooden spoon. A map & clues are provided. Teams to have their own name and to wear sporting gear (as it's a skit on Orienteering) or fancy dress. Anything that can be easily identified! The day will finish around teatime.



The judges are myself and Mike Flynn and our decision is final. Those members who wish to marshal this new event and for full details for any interested parties, please ring Dave Hallows on 0161 708 9151 or email: davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk Dave Hallows



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LOCAL CAMRA AWARD



Sandra Booth, licensee of the Sidings, Levenshulme, with partner Mike and (far right) Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA committee member Mark McConachie, look on while the April Pub of the Month award is clasped by the pub's oldest customer, 92 years young. A very successful night.

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