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# OPENING TIMES

Volume 22 Issue 1

FEBRUARY 2006



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

## VALE COTTAGE SCOOPS TOP AWARD



### LOCAL PUB OF THE YEAR 2006

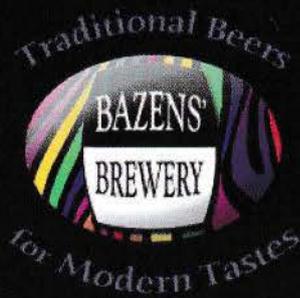
**W**HEN JOHN AND MAUREEN SMITH picked up their Pub of the Month award last December, they hoped that they might win Pub of the Year in the next couple of years. Little did they expect that they would clinch the title less than one month later. Despite a large number of nominations, voting at the Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA meeting on 12 January rapidly turned into a two-horse race, with the Kirk Street, Gorton, local clinching the top spot. Hidden away off Hyde Road behind a wooded conservation area, the Vale Cottage has always been one of the better pubs in the area, with the almost-rural aspect outside matched by the warm, country-pub atmosphere within. However, in recent years a feeling of drift had set in and the cask beer range reduced to an uninspiring offering of John Smith's Cask. However all that changed 12 months ago with the arrival of John and Maureen Smith, who took the pub by the scruff of the neck. One of John's first actions was to remove the beer that bore his name, replacing it with Well's Bombardier, which has found great favour with the pub's more mature clientele and is invariably on top form. Taylor's Landlord had joined the line-up and John also hopes add a third beer, of more standard strength. Draught Hoegaarden wheat beer is a recent introduction and has also proved popular. There are no pool tables and apart from the increasingly popular acoustic nights on the last Wednesday of each month, music is confined to the taped background variety, often reflecting John's keen interest in Northern Soul. The Thursday quiz nights also attract a large and enthusiastic following. Maureen runs the kitchen and the pub is also building a reputation for the range of good home-made food, available every lunchtime apart from Saturdays. John and Maureen have used their considerable trade experience to revitalise what has always been a good pub. Commitment and quality shine through every aspect of the operation at the Vale Cottage, which would be judged a good pub against any competition. In Gorton where truly great pubs are thin on the ground it stands out like a beacon and is well-deserving of this top award. Needless to say, John and Maureen over thrilled with the award. A stunned John could only say "I'm really very chuffed" when the news was broken to him. He did however recover enough to say that he would 'push the boat out' for the presentation. This will take place on Saturday 25 February from 8.00pm - join us for what promises to be a memorable night.

### ...AND YE OLDE VIC IS RUNNER-UP

The second runner in the two horse race for the top title was a pub that needs little introduction in these pages - Ye Olde Vic, Chatham Street, Edgeley. Famously the first Stockport pub to offer changing guest beers, the pub is now in the capable hands of Steve Brannan and Johanne Quinn, both huge fans of real ale. There are six handpumps on the bar, one dedicated to Westons Vintage Cider and the other five dispensing an ever-changing range of guest beers from all over the UK. Steve says that some 1,200 different ales have passed through the pumps since he took over, many supplied by Dave Ball ('The Major') of the Really Nice Beer Co. The consistent quality of the beer has made the pub a seemingly permanent fixture in the Good Beer Guide. While the interior is basically open-plan, it has a multi-room feel and the cosy atmosphere is enhanced by the open fire in the winter months. The atmosphere is enhanced by the decoration in classic 1930s junk shop style with memorabilia from forgotten eras adorning the walls, shelves and any other available area - all tastefully done and providing interesting topics of conversation, with Steve being able to provide a history of most, if not all, of the items on view. To the rear of the pub is a stepped marquee covered area that may be available for private functions during the summer months, and effectively doubles the size of what is quite a tiny pub. Steve and Johanne operate a strict no swearing policy throughout the pub, with persistent offenders being ejected and advised to clean up their act if they wish to be served on future visits. The result is a welcoming pub where no-one is a stranger for long and good ale can be enjoyed in a relaxing, friendly environment.

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# PUB OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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2006



**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month Award for February 2006 goes to the Nursery on Green Lane, Heaton Norris. The award is particularly appropriate this year as it coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary in the pub of licensees George and Susan Lindsay, who have been there since 1981, making them amongst the longest serving licensees in the area, now ably assisted by Simon and other family members as well as a loyal team of friendly staff. It's a conspicuously well-kept, spick-and-span pub where it's hard to find anything out of place.

The Nursery was CAMRA's National Pub of the Year for 2001, the first time the award had been won by a brewery-owned managed pub, and marks a relatively rare victory for a pub in an urban location, the majority of winners having historically been rural free houses. The great news is that comparatively little has changed, and much of that for the better.

The most noticeable improvement is that the cask ales, Bitter, Mild (or is it 1863 now?) Jekyll's Gold and the Hydes Seasonal are all on handpump. The beer quality is consistently good and the pub has been in the Good Beer Guide since 1984 without a break, by several years the longest record of continuous entries in the Stockport & South Manchester branch area. In the warmer days (hopefully) to come, the superb bowling green behind the pub is now complemented by a patio deck to enjoy the sunsets. The superb food is, if anything even better, and although the front room is often now a food area, it is returned to non diners as soon as feasible after service.

The Nursery is a superb all-round pub that appeals to a wide clientele and offers most of the things you would expect in the perfect pub. Originally built in 1939, the multi-roomed interior, including a superb wood-panelled lounge, and that endangered species, a proper vault, is little changed since then and the pub is on CAMRA's National Inventory of historic pub interiors. The spacious upstairs room is popular for meetings and functions.

The Nursery is a real hub of the community, with a strong local trade and supporting numerous sports teams. Despite its well-hidden location, the pub draws customers from a long way around, particularly for the food, which has earned it an entry in CAMRA's Good Pub Food Guide. The Nursery has been maintaining the same high standards consistently for 25 years and long may it continue! The presentation night will be on Thursday 23rd February from about 8.30pm onwards. While it's a big pub, it's likely to be a very busy night, so make sure you get there early. *It's not the easiest pub in the world to find - probably the best way to reach it on foot is to get the 192 bus to Belmont Way on the A6 and then walk along Bowerfold Lane in a westerly direction across the railway bridge for six or seven minutes until you reach the pub on your right.*

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## IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

The new licensing hours continue to bed in well, with the expected widespread disorder stubbornly refusing to materialise. Luckily most of the popular press has now cottoned on that this is in fact a very small revolution in pub hours although hacks at the *Daily Mail*, bless 'em, are still gleefully predicting mayhem on the streets.

The Mail's latest 'shock horror' headline concerned the extended 36-hour opening that is available at the New Year period. The paper seemed to have just discovered this concession which has been in force for several years now and has nothing to do with the recent changes. Once again, the Mail has been caught out crying wolf. Our local police forces encountered no additional problems: Greater Manchester reported a 'pretty quiet' night adding the telling comment that most drink-related arrests were made in private homes. Cheshire police described it as a normal New Year's Eve while Lancashire reported a quieter night than usual.

While it is still early days it looks as though the changes have been implemented sensibly by most pubs - the Festive Season was obviously the first big test and this appears to have been passed with flying colours. We will certainly be keeping tabs on developments over the next few months and while it is too early to say for sure, it is looking more and more likely that all those who sought to derail this modest reform are going to end up looking very silly indeed.

Staying on this subject, despite most of the press now twigging that last year's hysteria was misplaced, there are still too many lazy journos and others with agendas to push who still keep referring to the government having introduced "24 hour drinking". No. It. Hasn't. It is no easier to drink 24 hours a day now than it was previously. The fact that this sort of nonsense still appears in the media just goes to show how far the propaganda from the anti-alcohol lobby has entered the mainstream.

*John Clarke*

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### OPENING TIMES ISSUE 261

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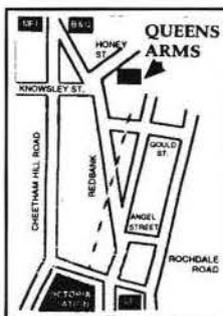
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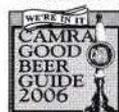
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The search for draught Old Tom continued over the Christmas period. First, though I need to correct a mistake from last time. I reported that the Old Tom at the Travellers Call, Great Moor, was £1.61 a half. Not so – the landlord tells me that the correct price is in fact a very reasonable £1.30 a half. The makes the Old Tom at the Travellers, alongside that at the Blossoms, the best value in town. I popped out to the Devonshire Arms at Mellor and found the Christmas decorations had been toned-down a tad from last year's efforts, however they were still great fun and in very good taste. On the beer front, Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn were joined by seasonal beer, Robin Bitter on handpull, whilst from a small cask on the bar was an excellent drop of the powerful Old Tom - £1.70 a half. Here, it is also sold in pints and in nips (one third of a pint) too. Great beer, super food, and an all round excellent pub. A ride out to Strines (bus 358) in the quest for Robinson's Old Tom, bore fruit at the Royal Oak. I sampled a warming glass for £1.60; the Hatters and Unicorn were equally good too. All, incidentally, were cellar-cooled. Landlord, Jamie Moon, told me that the evening food menu had begun to find favour with customers - I sense the need for a "Pub Grub" article...

Also going very well is the Old Tom at Stockport's Swan with Two Necks. Ange and Dave have seen sales of the powerful brew soar since it was installed prior to Christmas. Served cellar-cooled on handpull, it retails for £1.50 in halves only. Such have been the sales though, that Dave switched from pints (four and half gallons) to nine-gallon containers within a week of it going on! A new handpull installed on the main bar has done wonders for sales of Double Hop (the strong bitter); it seems now folk know it's there, they are ordering it in numbers. Elsewhere in the pub, Ange has been commended by Robinson's on the food being offered during the day, and for making the "dining room" (the one at the back) into a No-Smoking room. People may now enjoy their meals in a smoke-free environment. Keep up the good work Ange and Dave, I say.

The Armoury on Shaw Heath is also selling from a Pin on the Vault bar at £1.60 a half. Not a bad drop either; this complements the Hatters and Unicorn on handpull which are the big sellers. Landlady, Sheila, told me they had some difficulty in getting the Old Tom in the Pin-size casks as Robinson's had only a limited number, but this has now been resolved at the brewery. They had tried selling the beer in Firkins (9 gallon), but were finding that it took too long to sell before quality was compromised.

Over the road at the top of Castle Street, the Grapes (also Robbies) has received a tasteful makeover just prior to Christmas. Nothing drastic, just neat, clean and bright. It's all status quo really, the beer offering remains as Hatters and Unicorn. Worth a look.

#### REFURBISHMENT AND CLOSURES

I called in at the Three Bears on Jackson's Lane on the south side of Hazel Grove, following its reopening after refurbishment. There had been reports that it was being changed to a more "modern" style, but in fact it is firmly traditional, with much use of dark wood. Some of the internal partitions have been removed, creating a more open and less cluttered feeling, but it retains a cosy and comfortable atmosphere. Two-thirds of the pub is now non-smoking, and there is no smoking at the bar. There is a comprehensive food menu but it still feels like a proper pub rather than an eating house. Cask

beers available were Robinson's Hatters, Unicorn and Robin Bitter, the then-current seasonal. Well done to Robinson's for doing a good job here.

It's not so good news elsewhere. I have already reported that both the Tom Thumbs, King Street West, and the Black Lion, Hillgate, were closed, boarded and up for sale. It looks like both have now been sold. Word is that Tom Thumbs is set for demolition while a planning application has been lodged to turn the Black Lion into offices. Now news of some new licensees...

#### FAMILY PITCH IN TO LAUNCH NEW CAREER

The hours may be long and hard, but at the Adswood, Adswood Lane West, Michaela Cox is in her element and says that she couldn't be happier as the new licensee. For Michaela, who has been a regular of the Robinson's house since the age of 18, it has meant just a short move with her husband Lee from their home in neighbouring Shaw Road. "It was a case of being in the right place at the right time," she explained.



Michaela and husband Lee (left) with brewery director Paul Robinson

The opportunity to take on the pub came when she learnt that the tenancy was about to become available, and so Michaela wasted no time in putting her name forward for the post.

"This is a complete change of career for me from being a textile machinist, but a great way to start life as my own boss in a place where I have so many good memories. The Adswood is what I regard as a proper pub where people from all walks of life get together to create a wonderful atmosphere. I want to make sure it stays that way for my friends and customers," she enthused.

To help Michaela launch her new career and provide a winning combination of service and hospitality, her sister and sister-in-law, both named Louise, are pitching in as volunteer bar staff. Meanwhile, Michaela is getting to grips with every other aspect of running the public house. "It's proving to be a big change in lifestyle with an enormous amount to learn but I'm enjoying every minute of it and look forward to keeping the customers happy for a long time to come," she concluded.

#### SHIP SHAPE AT THE CROWN



Peter Tamblin (right) with Brewery Director David Robinson

Residents of Hawk Green are benefiting from the arrival of new licensee Peter Tamblin who is busy injecting his own brand of enthusiasm into the Crown.

Having originally trained as a chef in the Merchant Navy, and then having spent 23-years in the licensed trade, Peter says that at the helm of the Crown he has a great deal to offer to the pub's customers. With the support of his son Anthony, 17 and daughter Sophie, 15 who are both working with him on a part time basis, Peter is now on course to achieve his ambition of earning a reputation for running the best pub in the area.

"In my experience it is attention to detail and the quality of service that can make a pub stand out from the crowd. It goes without saying that as a Robinson's house we are serving top quality real ale, but we are also matching that with our own personal touches such as waitress service and a slick, front-of-house presentation."

Already people in Hawk Green and the surrounding area have noted the way in which Peter and his family run the business, as new customers have been won over.

"I have always worked for other people, but I felt that the time was now right to take on a pub of my own. Although I am originally from Cornwall, I have lived close to Stockport for 25-years and so I wanted to remain in this area. It was just a case of finding the right place, and now after an 18-month search I'm absolutely convinced that taking on The Crown was the right choice for me and my family," says Peter.

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## NATIONAL WINTER ALES SUCCESS

LAST MONTH'S NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL, the second to be held at the New Century Hall, hopefully its permanent home, turned out to be a great success, with record amount of beer and cider being consumed and the big problems from last year being resolved.

An increased beer order ensured stocks lasted until closing time on Saturday night and hiring the second hall did away with the overcrowding that caused some complaint in 2005. Add to that much better food, provided by the Co-op caterers, and reduced beer prices, aided in part by the generous sponsorship by many brewers, and we now have an event firmly on course for may successful year to come.



The highlight of the event is of course the competition to find the Champion Winter Beer of Britain, last year won by Robinson's Old Tom. While no local brewers picked up the Supreme Champion award, they were still in the medals. Robinson's, perhaps disappointingly, only picked up a bronze award for Old Tom in the Barley Wine class but local micro Bazens' triumphed in the Stout & Porter category, with a gold medal for Knoll Street Porter. Brewers Richard and Jude Bazen (pictured), present at the Trade Session



when the awards were (finally!) announced, were stunned. "It's just not sunk in" an amazed Jude Bazen told *Opening Times*. Richard was equally dumbstruck, and anticipated a hugely increased demand for the beer, a rich satisfying brew with a hint of smokiness in the backtaste.

### SUPREME CHAMPION

The overall winner, the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain, is 'AOT' from Hogs Back Brewery in Surrey. 'Aromas Over Tongham' to give the beer its full name, is a barley wine of a deep tawny colour, complex and powerful yet well balanced with hints of chocolate and raisins in the taste.

At the announcement, Festival Organiser Steve Prescott congratulated Hogs Back on their victory. Steve said "Congratulations to hog's back. AOT is a fantastic barley wine that fully deserves this accolade. I hope this award will encourage more drinkers to try this style of beer." Steve continued "It is also excellent news that Gales Festival Mild won the national silver award. We hope this recognition will encourage Fuller's to continue brewing this excellent beer at Horndean in Hampshire.

Hogs Back was overjoyed at winning. "A Over T is our flagship dark strong ale at 9 per cent ABV, and is our king of ales, too. At Hogs Back we have always been proud of our range of winter dark ales and having the opportunity to exhibit at Manchester and win the national title was amazing".

### RESULTS IN FULL

Here are the category and overall results:

#### OLD ALES & STRONG MILDS

- Gold - Gales Festival Mild
- Silver - Goffs Black Night
- Bronze - Orkney Dark Island

#### STOUTS & PORTERS

- Gold - Bazens' Knoll Street Porter
- Silver - Fullers London Porter
- Bronze - Bath Ales Festivity

#### BARLEY WINES

- Gold - Hog's Back AOT
- Silver - Skye Cuillen Beast
- Bronze - Robinson's Old Tom

#### OVERALL RESULT

- Gold - Hog's Back AOT
- Silver - Skye Cuillen Beast
- Bronze - Goff's Black Knight

#### FOOTNOTE - FESTIVAL CIDERS

One particularly pleasing statistic from the Festival is that Cider consumption soared, ensuring some rapid re-ordering with total sales up from 18 to 40 casks. Traditional cider and perry are not dead yet. Congratulations to Applejack and his team.



images from the NWWAF Trade session captured by Oliver Mason



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# BATTLE FOR GALES



## CAMRA HAS MOUNTED one of the most rapid responses in its history to the takeover of Hampshire family brewer, Gale's by Fullers.

The London brewer's swoop on Gale's and its 111 pubs came out of the blue. On November 8 the two companies announced an 80 per cent acceptance of Fuller's offer of £44.21 for ordinary shares – more than twice the price they had last been traded at. Only later did it emerge that the boards had been in talks for three months.

Fuller's have given little in the way of assurance about the future of the Gale's brewery, apart from saying that "a number of well-respected brands" would remain in its portfolio. Other than that it has only commented that the future of Gale's is under review. Senior representatives from Fullers gave assurances at the recent National Winter Ales Festival that HSB, the award winning Festival Mild and Prize Old Ale and Trafalgar had a long term future, and hinted that Gales Brewery would remain open for some time to come: 'years rather than months'. CAMRA's bid to save Gale's was launched at the Still & West in Portsmouth on 17 November. Local member John Buckley said that an on-line petition had already been launched, which can be signed at [www.savegales.org.uk](http://www.savegales.org.uk) or by logging on to the CAMRA website. John Buckley added "Reaching out to the public is going to be really important – we want Fuller's to be made aware that there is very strong public affection for Gale's."

### GOOD & BAD NEWS FROM INBEV

The policy of rationalisation by international brewing giant Inbev continues apace. Last year saw the closure of Boddington's Strangeways Brewery but now they have hit closer to home. This time it is the Hoegaarden Brewery in Belgium that is doomed, with production of the famous wheat beer being moved to the large Jupiler beer factory. Several years ago Interbrew as it then was got very snuffy when *Opening Times* suggested that test brews of Hoegaarden were being made elsewhere. All Hoegaarden was brewed at Hoegaarden we were told. Brewing it anywhere else would undermine the brand. How times change. On the plus side, InBev UK has introduced a new dispense system for cask beers to help licensees 'improve service standards'. The new-style beer engine pumps beer direct from the cellar to the glass with no beer being left standing in a cylinder where it often sits and warms up in readiness for the next pint (*what about cylinder coolers? - ed(2)*). The new font also has a raised tap, lifting the point of dispense above the bar to add to the "theatre of dispense". We will see.



### FAMILY FAVOURITES

**Holt's** – beginning this month, Joseph Holt Bitter will be available through the Scottish Courage Cellarman's Reserve Scheme. This means that pubs involved in the scheme all over the country will be able to order Holts Bitter. The next seasonal beer in the tied estate, following on from the 4.5%ABV Touchwood will be the 5.5% Fifth Sense.

**Hydes** – the current craft ale is Free Spirit (4.5%), a "full tasting deep copper ale derived from the finest malt, English Challenger and Fuggle hops". Also available at the moment are limited quantities of the powerful XXXX strong ale (6.5%) – get it while you can. Next month's craft ale is Heavenly Draft (4.2%), "a classic amber coloured beer worthy of any celebrity and ideal for early Spring with light and fragrant overtones", brewed using Goldings and Fuggle hops.

**Robinson's** – current seasonal is the excellent Enigma (4.7%), a refreshing amber ale brewed using Styrian hops. This will be

followed for March and April by the return of Young Tom (4%), a tasty, darker than average beer. You might also see another new beer in some Robinson's pubs. Robbies now brew and market Wards Bitter under license and this may be made available to the Robinson's estate. While the new version of the classic Sheffield beer tastes little like the original, it is still a pleasant enough drink. **JW Lees** – last month we reported that this year's seasonals would be on a quarterly basis with the first one being a cask version of the keg Greengate Bitter. So, what do we see when visiting the Lloyds in Chorlton? A wheat beer called Icebreaker. Hmm – looks like this might be Plan B. Hopefully all will be cleared up by next month.

**The 2006 Stockport and Manchester Mild Challenge is coming up soon, and we hope more locally brewed milds than ever before will be available. See next month's OT for early details.**

### MICRO MAGIC

As usual here is our monthly round up from some of the local micros – as ever apologies to those we weren't able to contact this time round.

**Bazens'** – are celebrating two wins for Knoll Street Porter. As well as picking up gold in its category at the National Winter Ales Festival, the beer had previously won a similar category at the northern awards run by SIBA, the Society of Independent Brewers. Visitors to the National Winter Ales Festival will also have seen the new bitter, iBeer. We asked Richard Bazen to give us the lowdown and this is what he told us: "This is a fantastic result for us. Every year we have bemoaned the fact that we didn't get the chance to brew as much Knoll St Porter as we would have liked, and indeed it had all but been relegated to being a seasonal beer. This most prestigious award, following hot on the heels of the Silver at the SIBA North Beer Competition, really gives us the chance to push this brand back into our main range and we hope to be still brewing it over the summer months."



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Robinsons Hatters, Old Stockport & Unicorn  
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Those with detailed memories may remember Bridgewater Delph Porter achieving Beer of the Festival at Stockport Beer Festival in 1999. This was the forerunner of Knoll St Porter, pretty much the brainchild of Ken Birch. The only real change has been the hop grist which has been redeveloped to give a better balance and broad flavour spectrum.

iBeer was brewed specially for the Winter Ales Festival, and was designed to be on the dry side for its ABV. Not an IPA as such - more a very dry and hoppy pale ale. The remainder of the brew was snapped up by publicans who tried it at the Festival!"

**Bank Top** - this month sees the last of the Knight of the Round Table series with Sir Percival, a 4.6% ABV bitter. The brewery is planning a produce a dry stout for St Patrick's Day.

**Boggart Hole Clough** - Boggart Blond (4.6%) has been produced and, as you might expect, is pale and hoppy bitter. When we contacted Boggart a new 3.8% bitter was in the fermenter but no name or description was available.

**Howard Town** - still chugging along up in Glossop and continuing to do well. Turnlee Tipple (4.1%), a very pale and hoppy beer is a recent brew and later this month Howard Town will be producing their first mild. More details on this next time.



**Millstone** - also attended the recent SIBA (North) meeting and beer competition and, like Bazens', also picked up a gold medal. They had entered Grain

Storm (4.2%) in the best bitter class (i.e. 4.0% - 4.5%ABV) and True Grit (5.0%) in the strong beer class (5.0%-plus).

To Nick & Jon's surprise and amazement Grain Storm was awarded 'gold' for the best bitter class and overall 'silver' for the whole competition. As you can imagine they are most chuffed with such recognition by their peers. The competition was judged by SIBA members from other regions and Nick & Jon were presented with a cup (sponsored by Charles Faram & Co Ltd, the hop merchant) and two certificates. Overall Millstone have had a really good 13-14 months with SIBA and festival awards with Windy Miller (4.1%) bagging two, True Grit (5.0%) bagging four and now Grain Storm with two. "We're happy and humbled," they told *Opening Times*. **Owl** - we reported last time that Oldham's Owl Brewery was on the move, following the sale of the Hope Inn where it was based. Its new home will be at the Acorn Centre on Barry Street, Oldham. Brewer Gordon Potts will be operating as a free trade brewer with no on-licence, but will be pleased to supply beers in either 9-gallon casks or 15 pint 'party pigs' for customers organising a party or night in. The beers will be Owl OB Bitter, Greenacres Gold, Yon Owl, Russett Owl and Night Owl, plus a seasonal special.



**Phoenix** - two one-off specials appeared at the beer festival run by the Smithfield (Swan St, Manchester) during the National Winter Ales

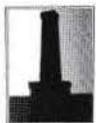
Festival. These were a ginger wheat beer and a blackcurrant porter. There's not much new for February although Massacre (4.7%) is worth looking out for. Next month will see more new beers out.

**Pictish** - brewing flat out to meet demand for their exceptional



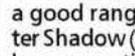
beers. February's seasonal is Claymore (4.5%), "A light refreshing straw coloured ale with clean crisp malt flavours and a powerful spicy hop aroma." This month may also see a new brew of Mistral, 5.2%, pale and hoppy. Brewer Richard Sutton is still trying to brew his hoppiest beer ever. The wonderful Centennial was overtaken in the hoppiness stakes by Chinook - hopefully both will reappear this year.

**Ramsbottom** - the new beer from Paul Robinson's Ramsbottom Brewery is Stroll On (3.8%) a copper-coloured bitter with a hoppy taste and fruity flavour.



The current ranges includes, amongst others, the excellent Old Ground Mild (3.8%), Tomfoolery (4%) and highly successful Wendolene (4.2%), very pale and hoppy.

**Shaws** - staples such as Golden Globe continue to sell well, but Shaws also produce a good range of specials. New out is Winter Shadow (4.7%), light and hoppy. Shaws beers are still supplied to the Angel Hotel in Ashton but supplies are not constant as a couple of readers found out.



3 Rivers new Brewery Tap drinkers club opening soon after regulatory approval (full details of this exciting venture next month).



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**STAGGER**

with Mark McConachie

A mid-November evening saw a number of folk gather at our start point for the Burnage and Heaton Mersey Stagger, the Rising Sun at the northern end of Burnage Lane.

Built in the eighties, I believe, and originally called the Milestone; it is now and has always been a Banks's house. This is a multi-gabled building set back from the road with a lawn to the front. It is quite plush and reasonably open-plan done in an L-shape. Part of it is panelled, with much space given over to tables and chairs; there is a raised area that is used for viewing TV sports and such. Although a Banks's house, none of that beer brand was available; indeed, just one cask beer was offered - Marstons bitter - not too bad a drop either.

We headed south next, to the junction of Mauldeth Road, and the Victoria (formerly a Boddies house). This is a large, corner property, the lounge is formed from several former rooms; nicely panelled with some original features remaining too - look for the quality fittings on the doors. The far end is punctuated by a raised seating area; this modest comfort is in sharp contrast to the austerity of the vault. Your author was (un)lucky enough to get one of last drinkable glasses of Boddies served, but even that was not at all nice. My colleagues got the end of the barrel and returned their drinks for a refund. The staff were unable to change the cask as they were untrained, unfortunately. We were offered Smooth Boddies, but we declined. Was it our bad timing, or that of the pub's for there to be no replacement cask beer so early on a Friday evening? Whatever the cause, it is very probably worth another visit to check the true potential quality of the Boddies offered.

A little further south lies the Farmers Arms (Hydes), just opposite the Clinic and Library. Hydes acquired this pub some ten years ago; it only sells the Hydes bitter, and that is done into oversized glasses via an electric font (only pub of the night so to do). The beer scored reasonably well. The Farmers is a true, two-room establishment - vault with pool table, and lounge with raised area to the rear. An area was set aside by having flowers on the tables - we gathered that these were from a wake for the death of a local young person killed in a motor accident. These sombre remnants did nothing to deter the lively, youthful crowd of folk in on our visit though. Oasis records were playing (fitting, perhaps, for Burnage...).

Out again, and south once more, past the High School and to Green End and into the blue-bathed beacon of its eponymous pub to find? To find that it resolutely remains unwilling to serve cask ale! Onward along Burnage Lane to another Hydes pub, the Albion this time. For reference to folk who follow the "Mild Challenge", this is on the junction of Barcroft Road (you can walk through from Kingsway where the 50 bus shall drop you). I was told that this is the largest seller of Hydes Light (or should that be Hydes 1863 now?) in their estate; here, it outsells bitter by at least two to one. That beer is joined by stablemates Bitter and Jekyll's Gold - all beers tried were very good indeed. The Jekyll's is being tried as a new venture, I wish it success. The building is a large corner house comprising two rooms, all recently refurbished to a very high standard; very comfortable and accommodating. A new and very useful feature is a door linking the lounge to the vault. This and the next pub are worthy winners of their respective Pub's of the Month. That 'next' pub was Sam Smith's Sun in September. It only sells one cask beer - Old Brewery Bitter (OBB), but then again, they only make one cask beer. Only one beer, however one of the best pints we were to have that night. The licensees have been in post for 14 years now; they do a very good job. Formerly a large house converted some years ago to pub use; it can be difficult at night to see the pub as it is set back quite a way and is shrouded by an umbrella of mature trees in a lawned setting. The house room layout remains inside, with various 'knock-throughs' for access. The former "Raj-theme" is still evident in the glass of the doors. The decor is, I am lead to believe, to gradually be changed to echo that of the house prior to it being a pub; all very pleasant.

There followed a long ten-minute walk to Didsbury Road in Heaton Mersey to visit the refurbished 1970's Dog & Partridge. It had a refurb not so long back, but in my opinion this latest, modern decor is an improvement on the old, and a move in the right direction for a pub that, perhaps, did not know where it was going. It's a difficult position, being so close to Parrs Wood and Didsbury, folk will pass this pub by to visit other delights. The new

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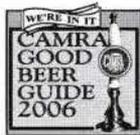
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look opens the bar out to good effect, the clientele (a more grown-up brigade than previously) appeared to enjoy the atmosphere; the staff were friendly and attentive; and the beer range has improved massively. Beers are Boddies, Old Speckled Hen (OSH) and Bombardier. Those ordering the OSH were disappointed by its condition, but this was speedily remedied with pints of the Bombardier being offered; this latter beer scored best of the three. A damn good effort all round, and I wish it well for the future.

Towards Stockport lies a pub that is seventy years senior to the D&P, Joseph Holt's Griffin. A beer-drinkers' and sometime CAMRA favourite, this is a Victorian pub with many original features - entrance lamp, mahogany bar with glazed-screens, much etched glass. All this was replicated in an extension added some years ago; at the time, much was made of how detrimental to the pub this would prove. Well, if being the busiest pub of the night is detrimental, you should visit the Griffin to copy the formula. You may say it was busy because it was 10.30? I doubt that though, this is a genuinely popular pub, steeped in the pub-lore of its locale. Two draught beers are on sale - Holt Mild and Bitter. Unfathomably, no one tried the bitter! We must have known that a quality pint of Mild is to be found here, and so it proved; it took first place as our beer of the night too.

The crawl's end beckoned, so sadly, we had to leave. The Frog & Railway does not serve cask beer, so it was on to the final pub in Heaton Mersey, the Crown (Robinson's). This is low-set cottage-like building that is obviously of some age. It is set back from the road, it has parking to the front of it, whilst the entrance is up some steps to the side on Vale Close. The entrance also boasts a small terrace, which can be a most pleasant place to drink in clement periods. Some months ago the whole pub was given a modern decorative makeover. This has resulted in a less fusty, "olde worlde" atmosphere to give a contemporary feel but without the need to remove walls or alter the structure in any way. The upper bar room is a small, cosy space, whilst the lower 'restaurant' area is larger and has many tables set out. The changes have also led to the loss of cask Robinson's Hatters to leave two beers on the bar - Unicorn (which went untried) and seasonal beer Robin Bitter; this scored fairly average marks for taste and price (£2.10). Pint supped, bus home, job done! See you on the next Stagger.



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Friendship Inn, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield  
The Hillary Step, 199 U. Chorlton Rd, Whalley Rge  
Pineapple, Garrett Way, Gorton  
Albion, Burnage Lane, Burnage  
Sam's Chop House, Black Pool Fold, Manchester  
City Arms, 48 Kennedy Street, Manchester  
The Waterhouse, 67 Princess Street, Manchester  
All Bar One, 73 King Street, Manchester  
Rising Sun, 22 Queen Street, Manchester  
Fletcher Moss, 1 Williams Street, Didsbury  
Victoria Hotel, 438 Wilmslow Road, Withington  
Dog & Partridge, 665-7 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury  
Gateway, 882 Wilmslow Road, East Didsbury  
Sedge Lynn, 21a Manchester Road, Chorlton  
Old Wellington, 4 Cathedral Gates, Manchester  
Moon Under Water, 68 Deansgate, Manchester  
The Bishop Blaze, 708 Chester Road, Stretford  
King's Ransom, Britannia Road, Sale  
J P Joule, Northenden Road, Sale  
Old Plough Hotel, 56 Green Lane, Sale  
Bank at Sale, 70 School Road, Sale  
Lowes Arms, 301 Hyde Road, Denton  
Red Lion, Crown Point, Denton  
English Lounge, 64-66 High Street, Manchester  
Lloyds No 1, The Printworks, Manchester  
Tim Bobbin, 41 Flixton Road, Urmston  
Ash Tree, 9 Wellington Road, Ashton U Lyne  
Calvert's Court, St. Petersgate, Stockport  
Poachers Inn, 95 Ingersley Road, Bollington  
Hanging Gate, Higher Sutton, Macclesfield

Porters Ale House, Roe Street, Macclesfield  
Jar Bar, Silk House, Macclesfield  
Society Rooms, Park Lane, Macclesfield  
Cotton Bale, 21 Market Street, Hyde  
Society Rooms, Grosvenor Street, Stalybridge  
Stalybridge Buffet Bar, Stalybridge  
White House, 1 Water Lane, Stalybridge  
Q Bar, 3-5 Market Street, Stalybridge  
Angel Inn, 197 King Street, Dukinfield  
Wye Bridge Inn, Fairfield Road, Buxton  
Bamford Arms, Buxton Road, Stockport  
Pack Horse, 3-5 Market Street, Hayfield  
Farmers Arms, 209 Stockport Road, Stockport  
Four Heaton's, 63 Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris  
Nursery Inn, Green Lane, Heaton Norris  
Duke of York, Stockport Road, Romley  
Hare & Hounds, Dooley Lane, Marple  
Bulls Head Hotel, 28 Buxton Road, High Lane  
Crown, 81 High Street, Cheadle  
Old Star Inn, 13 High Street, Cheadle  
Prince of Wales, Gatley Green, Gatley  
High Grove, Silverdale Road, Gatley  
Kings Hall, 13 Station Road, Cheadle Hulme  
Cross Keys, Adswold Road, Cheadle Hulme  
Ryecroft, Turves Road, Cheadle Hulme  
John Millington, 67 Station Road, Cheadle Hulme  
Horse & Farrier, Gatley Road, Gatley  
Governor's House, 43 Ravenoak Rd, Cheadle H'ime  
Bollin Fee, 6 Swan Street, Wilmslow  
Coach and Four, 69-71 Alderley Road, Wilmslow  
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9



# 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

### February 2006

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Waldorf, Gore Street, Manchester. Starts 8.00pm. Good Beer Guide 2007 Selection. **If you want your say, be there!! All please attend this important meeting.**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup>** - Openshaw Stagger. Starts 7.30pm Railway, Manshaw Road (bus 7 from Stockport bus station at 6.53pm) 8.30pm Albion, Ashton Old Road.

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup>** - Pub of the Month, Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. From 8.00pm

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>** - Pub of the Year, Vale Cottage, Croft Bank, Gorton. Bus 203 from Stockport, 201/204 from Manchester to Waggon & Horses, Hyde Road, use short cut path opposite. Starts 8.00pm.

**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup>** - Committee Meeting, The Tiviot, Stockport. Starts 8.15pm

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

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Mottram Road, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.

### February 2006

*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 6<sup>th</sup>** - Social Meeting: Borough Arms, Crewe. Starts 8.00pm

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup>** - Campaigning / Good Beer Guide / Pub of the Year Selection Meeting: Boarhound, Macclesfield. Starts 8.00pm

**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March:** Brewery Visit: Storm Brewing, Macclesfield.

*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:*

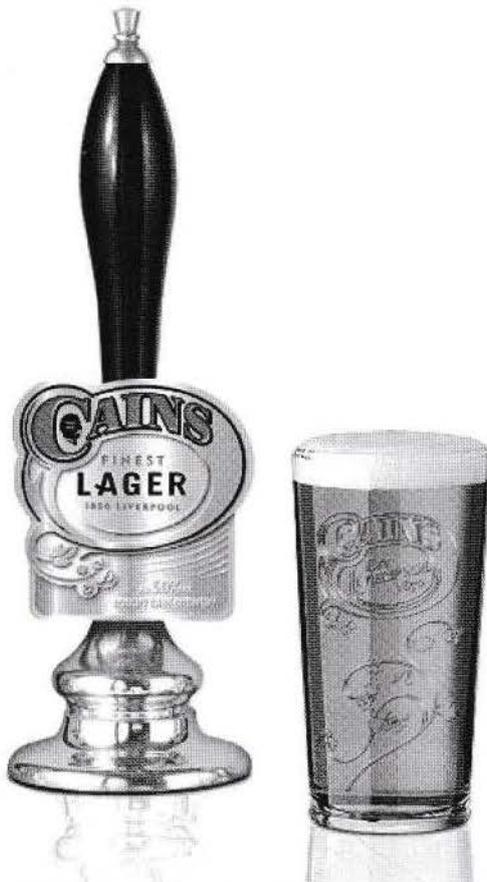
**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>** - 12 Years in Good Beer Guide Presentation: the Beech, Beech Rd, Chorlton. From 8.00pm

**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup>** - Good Beer Guide 2007 Selection Meeting: The Orange Tree, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> March** - Branch Meeting: Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

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# 5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JANUARY '01

**T**he Nursery is Pub of the Year 2001" was the headline. The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year Award for 2001 had gone to the Nursery on Green Lane, Heaton Norris. The award was particularly appropriate for the year as it coincided with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the pub of licensees George and Susan Lindsay. (Pub of the Month this month - Ed).

The Nursery was, and remains, a good all-round pub, appealing to a wide clientele, offering most of the things one expects to find in the perfect pub. It was built in 1939, with its multi-roomed interior including a superb wood-panelled lounge and a separate vault - there is even a bowling green, an increasingly rare feature on the local pub scene. The interior is on CAMRA's National Inventory of historic pub interiors, and the excellent food has earned the Nursery an entry in CAMRA's Good Pub Food Guide.

★★★★★

Remarkably, the runner-up in the Pub of the Year competition was the Arden Arms on Millgate, Stockport. It had been slowly declining until the arrival of Joe Quinn and Steve King in late 1999, which heralded a huge revival in the pub's fortunes. A high class catering operation, and well kept Robinson's beers soon proved to be a winning combination, finally resulting in the well-deserved accolade of runner-up to the Nursery - and it was a close run thing in the final voting. Of course, the Arden went on to win the top award itself for 2004.

★★★★★

The story of the long-awaited Wetherspoon outlet in Stockport seemed to have taken a different turn, when it was confirmed that it was going to be not one but two Wetherspoon's pubs. The new build next to the NatWest bank on Underbank was going ahead, as was the development in the Partingtons/Bensons for Beds shop on St Petersgate. However, the Underbank site was eventually abandoned (and remains vacant) while Wetherspoon are now well-established at the Calverts Court on St Petersgate.

★★★★★

Marble Brewery's Mark Dade was now brewing on his own account as Boggart Hole Clough Brewery. He had taken over a large, but derelict industrial building in Moston - two month's hard work had seen it transformed into a spacious and well-equipped new micro. The five-barrel brewing kit had been acquired from the now defunct Bridgewater Ales. It did however look rather different from the Bridgewater days, having been stripped out and refitted internally.

★★★★★

Meanwhile, back at the Marble Brewer, based at the Marble Arch pub on Rochdale Road, was James Campbell, a brewer of considerable experience. He had worked as assistant and head brewer at various Firkin outlets (Sheffield, Birmingham, Brighton and Worthing). Then in 1998 he moved to the Irish Republic and became joint head brewer at the Tipperary Brewing Co, and subsequently to Messrs Maguires, a brew pub, where he was assistant brewer. The prospect of a head brewer's position tempted him back to the UK and Marble Brewery. There was also the challenge of brewing using only organic ingredients.



## THREE DRINKS AND YOU'RE OUT

**A couple of months ago, I referred to the growth of anti-pub and anti-drink sentiment in society, and suggested that if we ever reached a situation where it was considered socially unacceptable to consume more than three pints in one session, then there would be precious little future for the traditional pub.**

Not surprisingly, the head-in-the-sand brigade dismissed this as exaggeration and scaremongering. But, lo and behold, within a couple of weeks of those comments being published, up pops Professor John Smith, the President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, saying that he believes that, as a means of curbing excess consumption, pubs and bars should be prevented from serving their customers more than three drinks on one visit.

Obviously, there are serious practical difficulties with this, as people can always move on to another bar once they have had their quota, and it does nothing to address the issue of at-home drinking. But when respected professors are saying such things without being immediately howled down as swivel-eyed loons, these ideas have entered the mainstream, and it would be a grave mistake to ignore them on the grounds that "it will never happen here." Many of our freedoms have already been extinguished in a way that a generation ago seemed unthinkable. And it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that some of the dining pub chains will take up this idea as a way of promoting an image of social responsibility. They won't ban it, not at first, but a message of "sensible drinkers combine alcohol with food, and don't go beyond three" could work wonders in terms of public perception. This policy has already been implemented on a voluntary basis in some parts of the USA, and all too often, where America leads in politically correct nannying, Britain follows.

Professor Smith goes on to say "it is the logical follow-up to banning smoking in pubs and other public places". This completely gives the lie to the claim of the anti-tobacco zealots that the campaigns against tobacco and alcohol have nothing in common, and reveals only too clearly that they are two sides of the same coin. Once one domino is knocked over, they move on to the next.

## DON'T ALL RUSH AT ONCE!

A recent issue of *Opening Times* offered the following instructions on how to reach the Hanging Gate in Higher Sutton: "To get there by public transport, take the Arriva Number 14 Langley Service from Macclesfield and alight at Sutton Village. Cross over the road, down Church Lane, bear right into Judy Lane, follow this to the end turning right again onto Ridge Hill. This eventually leads on to Meg Lane. At the end turn right and follow the road into Cophurst Lane, where the pub is situated. Allow at least an hour for this." Pardon me for thinking that the bar staff are not exactly going to be knocked over in the stampede. When are CAMRA publications going to abandon this ludicrous waltz of political correctness and acknowledge that a large majority of customers of country pubs like the Hanging Gate are going to travel there by car, and vanishingly few of them will break the law by doing so? *Curmudgeon Online: www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk*



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The Little Mill in Rowarth hit the news recently, both in the papers and on regional TV, with the news that the new landlord Ian Fletcher has bought a London double-decker bus to transport customers to and from his remote pub in the hills between New Mills and Marple. It is a Routemaster that was still in use in the City until very recently - the vintage bus was only taken off the streets on December 8 last year, being the very last of 400 to be sold. Ian has publicly said that people from surrounding areas such as New Mills, Marple, Hayfield and Glossop will be able to be dropped off and picked up without the need to worry about transport and getting someone to drive.

Quite a collection is forming at the pub. Many years ago, the previous landlord Chris Barnes had a pullman railway coach transported there and it was converted into plush accommodation that is still in use today. Also, the pub boasts its own water wheel that a local builder Len Hesketh ('Liquid Len') helped put in as well as building lots of stone walls and constructing a barn nearby.

**At the recently refurbished Railway in Buxton, Hardy & Hansons Bitter and the premium Olde Trip were the available beers on my visit on 6 January. However, the beers were not the best I have had from this brewery as they weren't on my previous visit on 17 December when several Branch members called in.**

News now of a new pub in the Branch area. Near the Snipe Retail Park in Ashton, a new JW Lees pub is reported to have got the go ahead, located not too far from the Snipe Inn.

**In Glossop, the Prince of Wales in Milltown, a W&D pub, a new handpump has been added, bringing it up to four. Burton Best Bitter and Pedigree will continue to be the regular two, but with two guest beers from the company's list of available beers.**

Also in Glossop at the Good Beer Guide listed Star Inn, just outside the railway station, the licensees have had their wrists slapped by Punch Taverns for selling too many beers from local microbreweries. However, they continue to be in not only the Good Beer Guide 2006, but in the Good Pub Guide, and the Good Cider Guide. Paul and Vivienne Hilditch, the licensees, are very proud of this hat trick of accolades, the only pub for miles around to be in all three. They are also CAMRA members and take a real pride in ensuring their beers are in quality condition when they come out of the pumps. Keep up the good work Paul & Viv.

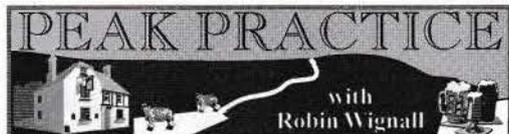
**Big changes at the newly named Mill Brook at 142 Huddersfield Road, Stalybridge, where new owners have brought a completely new look to one of Stalybridge's most prominent pubs. Mike and Michelle McClusky have taken over as licensees with Michelle's brother Stewart the pub's chef. A £150,000 refurbishment has given it a comfortable new look. The pub has been split into smoking and non-smoking areas, where food is served, and a comprehensive menu also includes changing specials, a children's' menu, Sunday lunches, and a two-course set menu. On the beer front, a changing guest beer has been added to the range, which we will detail more in next month's edition when a visit has been made.**

The Robinson's website, updated at 6 January, reveals that wholesale licensee changes are in the offing for the New Mills area, the tenancies of the North Western, Pineapple, Rock Tavern and the Swan are all currently available. Nearby the Printers Arms, Thornsett and, slightly further afield, the Wanted Inn at Sparrowpit are also available.

**Finally the Lantern Pike in Little Hayfield also made regional headlines at the turn of the year when the residents of the village and pub regulars posed naked in various parts of the village, for a local calendar, with the money raised going to charity. My favourite was the one of Mike Dean photographed in a telephone box with his dog with the door open, though the landlady of the pub was snapped naked leaning over a tree branch. Needless to say, the calendars all sold out in record time and by New Year's Day lunchtime, when I was in with a large party of walkers, when there was a very good atmosphere at the pub.**

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As expected, the Navigation at Buxworth has had an interesting selection of winter and Christmas brews in recent weeks. Only very regular customers would have caught all of them so I am sure my list is incomplete. It does of course represent a fair sample of the beers that make the Navigation worth a visit.

The newish Thornbridge hall Brewery at Ashford in the Water gets a good write up in the January issue of the CAMRA newspaper *What's Brewing*, and certainly deserves it for its Brock Stout, well flavoured for a 4 per cent brew of stout when appearing at Buxworth. The Ring O'Bells Brewery (Cornwall) has 'One and All' (4.4%) on the bar, whilst another newish brewery, George Wright from Rainford, St Helens, was represented by 'Partridge in a Pear Tree'. This 4.7% brew is paler than some Christmas beers and makes a good drink. Guest beers in the Navigation can certainly be unusual, and are also supportive of some of the smaller and newer breweries Christmas at the *Shepherds'* in Whaley Bridge saw Bateman's Rosey Nosey (4.9%) behind the bar. This seasonal beer, a sort of stronger XXXB, has now been around for three Christmases, I think, and is recognisable by its flashing pumpclip, when licensees remember to connect the batteries. Into the New Year and Jennings Snecklifter (5.1%) followed on the bar in the *Shepherds*, and soon sold out.

It is a while since I had been to the Swan at Kettleshulme, the pub rescued from closure by a consortium of local supporters, and featuring in the 2006 *Good Beer Guide* in an article entitled "The Swan returns to its nest". Passing near by during a recent hill walk was too much temptation. Whim Black Christmas (6.4%) was available as a seasonal beer, superb as one would expect from Whim, but was preceded by lighter offerings, Vale of Belvoir Hophead (3.8%) and Millstone Three Shires (4%). The Swan really is a rural gem and is well worth a visit.

To inform Clifton Bell's search for Robinson's Old Tom in January's *Stockport Supping* column, Old Tom has been available at the Cock in Whaley Bridge, a pin thereof being stillaged behind the bar with gravity dispense. It is good to see this addition to the well kept Hatters and Unicorn on sale at the Cock.

A recent visit to the Goyt in Whaley Bridge, fine Tetley Dark Mild a speciality, found a petition on the wall. This is the *Morning Advertiser* "Lay of my Local" petition, to counter the worst doom and gloom fears from potentially longer opening hours. The *Morning Advertiser* is the publicans' newspaper and it is good to see it supporting its customers. I am sure this worthy journal also supports its readers in other threats to our locals, such as upward-only rent reviews, site redevelopments and sale of pubs for residential use. In the meantime if you see the petition in your local, get your pen out and sign up as a way of supporting your local.



## Stockport Beer and Cider Festival 2006

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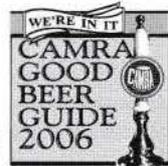
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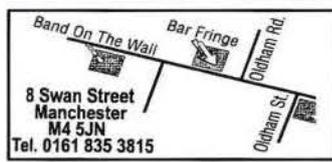
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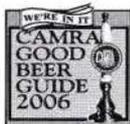


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**O**PENING TIMES 

**From David Newton, Clifton:**

*Is it not a little incongruous that whilst your national headquarters is striving to adopt a new, fresher image - which is usually a cue for the picture of a young lady clad in a CAMRA t-shirt to appear - your local publication insists on clinging to the archaic ?*

*I refer of course not to the recent election of Mr McConachie but to his Campaign for the Re-introduction of Archaic Parlance. Contributors to your magazine regularly "wend" their way between pubs; they "espy" other pub goers; landlords "bed in" to their new jobs. Alliteration runs amok ("we wended our way", "wend my weary way" "a very varied stagger"). And all of the above in just the last edition.*

*However, do I also detect a new upstart movement ? Perhaps a party of neologists ("scaffolded up", "a ring-round") spear-headed by American enthusiasts ("he majored on", "will major on") ? I think we should be told.*

*Having said this, I did guffaw at the wonderful "... and a new departure has seen the introduction of ..."*

*On a minor point of interest, your staggerers failed to detect any alterations to the Bulls Head, London Rd. These are in fact new disabled toilets on the ground floor (with the consequent removal of the gents upstairs) and the creation of a small snug named after the longest serving regular (of which there are not that many). I can only surmise that your staggerers were too consumed in savouring their consistently fine ale amongst nefarious locals after being served by wonderful wenches. No doubt fresh from making hay in verdant Ardwick Green!*

*(A veritable superfluity of suggestions from the indefatigable Mr Newton who clearly appreciates our continuing celebration of the rich pageant of the English language. Mr McConachie has certainly been the subject of some correspondence this month - I also received a letter from six locals of the Victoria in Withington bemoaning the absence of his photograph from recent issues (He's back, in glorious colour on page 19! - ed(2)). On a more serious note, a problem with the Bulls Head has actually been finding it open - both myself and numerous other potential contributors have found the place unexpectedly closed on more than one occasion. Ed(1))*

**From Peter Etchells, Hayfield area:**

*Having been a regular reader of Opening Times, I've notice that my local pub, the Lantern Pike, has been, too often in my opinion, omitted from your magazine. Therefore I feel I must write to you to rectify this matter.*

*I have in recent months spoken to Mr F Wood hoping someone will visit and give this excellent pub a mention. At present there are four hand pumped beers on - Tetley's, Deuchars IPA, Black Sheep and Boddingtons (occasionally the superb Old Peculier). Food served 12-9m and a real log fire to boot! Your hosts are Chris and Katherine, Buses 358-368 from Stockport will drop you outside the pub. I hope you will drop in in the near future as it 'without doubt' deserves a mention. I may even see you there.*

*PS - Frank Wood doesn't know what he as been missing - you may inform him of that!*

**(Thanks for that - consider Frank duly informed. Ed(1))**

**From Dave Arnold, Durban, South Africa:**

*On a recent visit to the UK, I also visited Mother Macs at the back of Piccadilly, Manchester, as did your contributor Robin Pendragon. Funnily enough I was also given some lame excuse for the unavailability of the Tetley Bitter (it had spilled on the floor!). However I was told that "lots of our customers ask for it", so what seems to be the problem? Someone (who better than CAMRA) will have to keep an eye on them - eh? On another day I was lucky enough to find real ale more readily available at the Crown Inn, Glossop Sam Smith's OBB at £1.20 a pint! Truly the bargain of my trip and it has always been one of my favourite bitters, too - a double bonus. I couldn't understand why this splendid old pub wasn't packed*

*(continued bottom of following page....)*

# ROBINSON'S BAR & CELLAR COMPETITION



**TOP PERFORMANCE WINS BREWERY ACCOLADE**  
**THE PLOUGH AT WHITEGATE** has secured the top spot in a comprehensive search of the north west and north Wales for the pub with the Best Kept Bar and Cellar. Licensee David Hughes, and his wife Sarah, were thrilled when **The Plough** was singled out in the strongly contested annual competition, which is now in its eighth year.

The significant achievement by The Plough was honoured in an award ceremony at the pub. Customers packed the premises to see David, along with his cellar manager, Gordon Leigh acknowledged for having earned an almost perfect score of 297.5 out of a potential 300 points to vie for.

"Along with my staff and customers we were over the moon when we heard that The Plough had been singled out as the best. We have been in the top three positions before but never actually won the competition. This year's achievement is a real credit to all our staff, and especially to Gordon whose takes an enormous pride in looking after our cask conditioned beer, as well as being one of our longstanding customers," said David.

To win the coveted top spot in the competition that takes in all of Robinson's 350 houses throughout the north west and north Wales, every aspect of the bar and cellar at the Whitegate pub was put under close scrutiny. In the final round of the contest there were just three and a half points separating the top three pubs, but with The Plough putting in a perfect performance for both the quality of its beer and presentation of its bar, the pub's close knit and dedicated team pipped the opposition to the post.

"We all work on the principal that the more we put in the more we get out. This award is a real acknowledgement of what can be achieved when we all pull together and I would like to thank everybody for the enormous effort that they put in all year round," said David.



In recognition of the significant achievement by The Plough, director Oliver Robinson of Frederic Robinson Limited presented David with the Unicorn Shield which has been specially inscribed to mark the occasion. His prize also included a Barrel of Robinson's Unicorn Bitter and there were also presentations from the competition's sponsors Chemisphere and Coores Brewers.

## OTHER WINNERS

There were some local names amongst the runners up in the competition, which has done much to improve the overall quality of beer in Robinson's pubs.

Runners-up were Mike and Tracey Ashworth of the Royal oak in Mellor (the Devonshire Arms in Mellor was last year's winner, and the award has also been won by two Marple pubs - competition is clearly fierce in that area). Robert Frost of the Broadoak in Ashton was in third place - this pub is often in the top ten - while the prize for Most Improved pub went to one of Robinson's more far-flung outposts, the Elleston Arms in Pilling, Lancashire.

(...continued from previous page)

*- only me on a Friday lunchtime. But still a warm welcome, where the landlord made sure I didn't leave without a copy of your magazine. OK, I know it's free, but nice of him I thought. He was even obliging enough to direct me on to the Old Gloveworks where I enjoyed a pint of Howard Town at his suggestion, so helping to make my brief visit to your neck of the woods all the more rewarding and interesting.*

*Kindly pass on my thanks and support the Crown on my behalf. Keep up the good work.*



## THE BOOK OF THE FLETCH - PART 'N'

**In the beginning of the Winter Ales Festival was the Word. And the Word was Fletch.**

And the Fletch looked upon what was to be and said: "Let there be cooling, or I walk". And to the Monster he said: "and if I walk, you walk". And the Monster saw that Fletch was truth. And Lo!, there was cooling. Despite the gripes of the philistines and the moans of those scheduled to unload and upload the 40-ton artic on which said cooling would be transported.

So Fletch looked upon his plan, and it was good. And then King Log (for it was his domain) kept making changes unto the Fletch's plan. And the Fletch was truly wroth. And again he said to the Monster: "I'm going to walk", but then a revelation came unto the Fletch. A total handpump situation, and he was appeased and said "Glory is to the handpump". And there were handpumps. Exactly 100 on the bars of the Fletch and the Monster. Until the evil Whirling Dervish came upon the site and insinuated his evil 101st pump for the devilish saspirella (sic), and attempted to beguile the Monster with the sight of his beautiful daughter, Karen.

So Lo! There were in one place 100 vessels of Crom, the God of Handpumps. Stouts, Porters, Bitters, Winter Ales and even Mild Beers (though mainly strong) they dispensed, cooled as the fair waters of Burton. Yet still mischief lurked in the realm of good king Log. For Mik of the Iron Horse with his mechanical ordinauteur presumed to price the nectar of the gods and unlike 2005, he chose to cheapen the ales, so that e'en the Holts was cheaper than in their pubs, and the Porters too. And lo! the Fullers London Porter was exactly half the price the Monster had found it in the Capital of Blairdom in October. And this was (frankly) absurd. Still, the worshippers complained not at all.

And in the palace of the nectar there were many bars. Upstairs in the hall of the handpulls was the 'Rose' Bar with only Fullers Vintage and Gales Prize Old Ale not on Handpull; the Irish Bar which sadly passed away with only two gallons of nectar left on Saturday morning, the North West Bar, ruled over with disdain by the 'Youngman' (Andrew Last, the youngest CAMRA National Bar Manager, at 22, of whom more will be heard) with the second highest sales, 31 handpulls, and all beers available on Friday; RAIB (Real Ale in a Bottle) presided over by trusty Nolux the Bottle Magnate (and part-time long-suffering and under-appreciated chauffeur to the Monster) whose measured complaints were that the cask prices were so low that no-one could compete. He too controlled the Belgic offerings, which were good and popular, though with little improvement on the previous year - because - WOE! On Saturday the range of cask beers was good. The temperature was good! The condition was, well, excellent! So no-one drank anything but really cheap cask beer. Woe was the Elder Foal and his minion Black Locley with their barbarian Germanic brews. For despite the largest range of draught German beers under a single roof, ever, the cheap cask offerings from Blairland proved invincible and again sales, though good were largely the same as 2005.

Only in the dungeons, new this year, were changes afoot as Applejack and his nibelungs sold the fermented juices of Apple and Pear to a truly extraordinary extent, more than doubling their haul of 2005. Yet there also were Mik of the Iron Horse with his 'champion' beers and young Chris, confused, bemused but ultimately triumphant with his throsty 'Thistle' bar. Cool and grave. And so to those former customers, made wroth by the warm beer on the Saturday of 2005, and the running-out-by-6-situation, who cameth not. Woe unto you! Those of you who made it far as the festivals at the Crescent, Smithfield, Fringe, Beer House, Marble, Buffet Bar etc. Thrice Woe! Enjoyed yourselves, perhaps you did. Missed a great deal also. Sixty beers still on offer at 10pm. Well Yoda'd you are, yes. For the beer was great, the cooling superb, the workforce magnificent, the organisation as shambolic as ever, and the customers (sorry, worshippers) sadly lacking in numbers on Wednesday and Thursday. but solid the rest of the time. A success? Yes.

*With absolutely no apologies to Rupert. The BeerMonster is in recovery with Charles Kennedy and will return in March.*

# POPEYES – ALES FOR STRONG MEN?

CHRIS WALKDEN SEEKS OUR BEER IN TOKYO...

free evening in Tokyo whilst on a ~~tour of the area with a paid visit to the local microbrewery~~ in Tokyo? A bit of research on t'interweb suggested there was an excellent bar called Popeyes in the suburb of Ryogoku where the largest variety of Japanese microbrewery cask beer could be sampled. Always up for a challenge and with notebooks in hand, we set off on Tokyo's complicated railway system. Most station signs are in English as well as Japanese which makes life a little easier - however after you have had a couple of beers it all starts to look foreign when you are on your way 'ome....

Our journey took about 20 minutes including a snappy connection Armed with an English map of Popeyes' location - only a two-minute walk from the station - we were immediately thrown off course by the sight of a large bar called Beer Station at the station exit. This had also come up on an internet search and was reputedly a micro, so it warranted investigation first, especially as there was a warning that the local brew was sometimes rationed and ran out late in the evening.

Beer Station is built in what appears to be old railway buildings and the interior of the beer hall resembles some of the Weatherspoon conversions of old bank buildings. Conditioning tanks were visible at the rear of the room alongside huge statues of sumo wrestlers - four or five times lifesize so we are talking big - as Ryogoku is the sumo capital of Tokyo. The locally produced beer was available at this early hour and Paul and I between us shared the Dunkel and the Weizen. The Dunkel was very malty but I felt was a bit thin whilst the Weizen was nothing special. The pilsner was not tried. Food was available in the main hall as well as in an adjoining Japanese restaurant.

Time to move on, by-passing the not very inspiring looking London Arms Pub to our ultimate goal, the Popeye Beer Club. We were greeted on the doorstep in traditional Japanese style and shown to a table. The pub is a small single room with several tables and the bar is found at one end. As this was early evening there were only half or dozen people in; however the Japanese work long hours and as time wore on the pub filled up nicely. A glance in the direction of the bar had already confirmed the presence of three handpulls, but before we could investigate we were presented with the day's beer list. (in English thank goodness). It was ominously titled "Today's Keg Beer" but reassuringly featured a section lower down indicating "Hand Pump Real Ale".

Draught beer is served in US pint and half pint measures, but the prices were around 700 yen for a half and 1000 for a pint (that's £3.50 a half / £5 a pint). We decided to order pints and swap over halfway through to enable each of us to sample a larger number of beers. "Happy Hour" - or Happy Three Hours in Popeye's case - reduced the outgoings further and some free snacks appeared when certain beers were ordered.

The handpulled stuff had to be tried first. Yona Yona is a brewery from Nagano and their pale ale was on offer. This was a great pale ale, bursting with hops and citrus flavours, but at the same time subtle. Next came Baird's Rising Sun Pale Ale which was even more in your face in terms of flavour with a lovely citrus aroma and a very crisp finish. Both these beers were around 5%, as were most others.

The other handpump was not on so it was time to sample some of the other stuff. Many of the Japanese micros are heavily influenced by US brewing styles - after all Japan is as close to the West Coast as it is to Europe. The Baird Brewery mentioned above has a reputation for being one of the best and is run by husband and wife - he an American and she a Japanese. They brew a fearsome beer for Popeyes as their house Beer - an IBA (for India Black Ale) going by the name of Divine Vamp 3. Don't ask why - I don't know, but this was a truly outstanding drink. It had all the distinctive bitterness of an American brewed IPA but was jet black and there was a hint of chocolate and roasted malts. Very definitely the highlight of the visit. Also sampled were the Siga koken Porter, very dark but slightly thin, Echigo EM Stout, an excellent chocolate and malty brew, Swan Lake IPA, and Ikiiki Taiko Ale both great US style IPAs, Iwate Kura IPA, an even better IPA with a very strong hop taste, yet "subtle and dangerous" say my notes, and finally Fujizakura Heights Rauch with a very smooth smoky taste.

Whilst all this sampling was going on the pub was filling up. The waiters whose English was not bad had learnt of our interest in Japanese Beer and asked me to come over to the bar to speak to "Mr Bento". Bento is a great web-site for researching Tokyo beer venues and it turned out that "Mr Bento" was Bryan Harrell who compiles most of their beer notes. Bryan is American and is a leading light in promoting Japanese micros and good beer via, amongst other things, the Good Beer Club that is a much smaller version of CAMRA. He introduced me to the owner of the bar, Aoki-san who is pas-

sionate about beer as you can tell from the quality and the enthusiasm of everything that happens there.

There were still a range of Japanese micro beers that we had not tried including a Pilsner, Amber Ale, and several Porter and Wheat Beers. Left out of the sampling too were the Rogue Beers from the US although I did try a mouthful of Hair of the Dog from Portland, an 11% Barley Wine, very reminiscent of Old Tom. The UK was represented by draught Greene King Abbott and Harviestoun Old Engine Oil which I had sampled at the brewery in Scotland earlier in the year. A large variety of European bottled beers were also available including some from Jever, Erdinger, Hoegarden and Belle Vue and the usual Belgian suspects.

By now the third handpump had come on featuring Isekadoya English Dark Ale. This was a very creditable malty bitter and an appropriate way to finish the evening. A fantastic evening with good company and excellent beer. If you ever have a spare night in Tokyo you couldn't do better than to go here. There are several other interesting beer venues, but this one has to be the tops for sampling the largest range of Japanese micro-brewed beers in great condition..



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*Local CAMRA Pub of the Month, Feb 2004*

# NATIONAL PUBS WEEK

National Pubs Week 2006 will take place between Saturday 18th to Saturday 25th February. This pubs campaign has been running for four years and is now firmly established in the CAMRA calendar.



National Pubs Week supports all British pubs by encouraging more people to visit pubs at a quiet time of the year for the industry. This national campaign also gives pubs the opportunity to organise some events and promote themselves whilst taking part in an established, generic consumer campaign.

Tony Jerome, CAMRA's Marketing Manager said, "Thousands of pubs have participated in National Pubs Week over the last few years. It has been good to see a number of them experiencing increased pub-going figures following the promotion and organisation of a few simple events. Due to this success these pubs have continued to organise a variety of functions through the year for events such as Valentines Day, Mother's Day and Halloween which has really benefited to their trade."

Approximately 10,000 pubs participate every year in National Pubs Week. Events that have been organised in the past have included pub quizzes, fancy dress nights, themed beer and food evenings and local entertainers. CAMRA have now produced free promotional packs to support pubs and are asking all members and pubs to sign up to the biggest generic pubs campaign ever!

Jerome said, "There are two different ways that pubs can sign up to National Pubs Week. Licensees can either order direct by post, phone or National Pubs Week website or CAMRA members can order promotional packs and deliver them direct to their local pub and encourage their licensee to come on board. This 'adopt a pub' scheme was successful last year and hopefully more of our members will be ordering packs this year and help to get more of their favourite pubs involved."

The National Pubs Week promotional packs are distributed to the first 10,000 CAMRA members and pubs that sign up to this year's campaign. These packs include branded beer mats, empty belly posters which have space for licensees to promote what events they will be organising throughout the week, advice sheets on how to get the most out of National Pubs Week and press release templates that will help pubs attract some free publicity from their local media. The National Pubs Week website [www.pubsweek.org](http://www.pubsweek.org) will also promote pub events for free.

## LOCAL EVENTS

Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA have organised two high profile events to coincide with National Pubs Week. On **Thursday 23rd** the Pub of the Month Award for February will be presented to the multi-award winning Nursery on Green lane, Heaton Norris, from 8.00pm. Last time the Nursery gained a Pub of the Month Award, it went on to win Branch, Regional and National Pub of the Year titles - so this could be the start of something big.

On **Saturday 25th**, the latest Branch Pub of the Year Award will be presented to the Vale Cottage, Kirk Street, Gorton, again from 8.00pm. Licensee John Smith is promising to 'push the boat out' for this major award, which could of course see the Vale Cottage follow in the steps of the Nursery. A grand night out is promised - get there early.

## JOIN CAMRA - HELP PRESERVE REAL ALE

Use the form on the right to join CAMRA - send it and a cheque made payable to CAMRA to: Karen & Chris Wainwright, CAMRA Membership, 173 Shearwater Road, Offerton, Stockport, SK2 5XA - or better still, and more conveniently, just fill in the Direct Debit application and send it along with your form - remember to keep your Direct Debit guarantee.

This Guarantee should be retained for your reference.

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You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by writing to your Bank or Building Society. Please also send a copy of your letter to us at Campaign for Real Ale Ltd, 230 Hatfield Road, St. Albans, Herts. AL1 4LW



## DOING THE CIDER CIRCUIT

Last October's *Cider Circuit*, run by *Opening Times* was very successful for a first event. Even though only four people actually visited all participating pubs, we hear that a good number of others started but didn't finish. There will be another *Circuit* this October to coincide with CAMRA's Cider & Perry Month, and this time we plan to make a few changes to ensure more people can take part.



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# MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

Last month was to some extent overshadowed by the National Winter Ales Festival, but I do have one or two snippets for you ... First some bad news – beer enthusiast Dominic Driscoll left Font Bar on New Wakefield Street at the end of last month. After the best part of five years at the bar he is looking for fresh challenges (which may involve some brewing). Hopefully we will see more of him as Northern Quarter pubs are one of his passions. Talking of the N4, long-standing Good Beer Guide entry Bar Fringe on Swan Street is due to add a fifth handpump. Owner John Henley told OT that steady increase in cask beer sales now justified five beers and all five should be on unless one line is being cleaned. Although like other pubs in the N4 he enjoyed a bumper weekend during the Winter Ales Fest, he was somewhat disgruntled by the number of visitors trying to steal branded Belgian glasses and ripping breweriana off the walls. Given how many halves were being drunk suspicion centres on visiting beer buffs. Close by on Angel Street (off Rochdale Road) the revival of the Beer House continues apace. A successful in-pub festival was held to coincide with the National Winter Ales Festival (along with much of the N4, The Crescent and Buffet Bar, Stalybridge), and as well as increasing numbers of live gigs, food has been reintroduced, though presently limited to Friday & Saturday lunchtimes.

Meanwhile at the Circus Tavern on Portland Street, I was disappointed to learn that a Tetley Smoothflow font has appeared on the bar, displacing one of the handpumps. Let's hope that this isn't the thin end of the wedge.

Elsewhere in the City Centre, the Piccadilly Tavern (ex-Goose on Piccadilly), a fairly down market keg-only bar (once bizarrely described in *What's Doing*, the North Manchester CAMRA magazine, as the best thing to happen to the Manchester pub scene in many a long year) was closed and undergoing a major refurbishment as this was written. It will be interesting to see what emerges.

Up in Gorton, I am told that Brodies (ex-Coach & Horses) on Belle Vue Street is closed and boarded. I seem to remember a report just before Christmas about a landlord escaping a fire in the Gorton area and there are scorch marks on the outside wall (which I do not put down to over-enthusiastic New Year fireworks!). I had some of the worst beer I have ever been served in Brodies last year so this is a closure that I have been expecting.

## TROUBLE BREWING DOWN DIDSBURY WAY?

You might have thought that the government's new extended licensing laws would bring to an end to trouble in the suburbs caused by the pubs all chucking out at the same time. This may be true in most places, but not in Didsbury where the building regulations in some pubs may prevent them from taking full advantage of the new laws.

When all the new pubs were built in north Didsbury, that is the Slug & Lettuce, the Café Uno, the Pear Tree, the Hog's Head, the Café Rouge and the Pitcher & Piano, the agreement made with local residents was that these pubs and bars should close no later than 11:30pm. This is not a police requirement or a Manchester City Council requirement but a building regulation designed to protect the local community from the excesses caused by late night revellers. With extended licenses now in use it seems likely that these bars may choose to ignore the building regulations and elect to open beyond 11:30pm to take full advantage of the extra trade now available due to deregulation. The fines likely to be incurred for breaking the building regulations have been described by one local as 'derisory' and 'unlikely to be a deterrent'. This situation can only lead to conflict between local residents and the big pub owning companies who put profit above everything else. It will also make life more difficult for the more established pubs in Didsbury who will have to police their doors and some have said that will not welcome drunks turfed out from the pubs of north Didsbury after 11.00pm.

Quite how this situation will be resolved remains to be seen. However it will be a great pity if the established pubs of Didsbury are forced to close their doors early due to young late night revellers and the greed of the big pub owning companies.

## DOWN IN NORTHENDEN

Having finally cleared the fumes of Xmas and New Year from my brain I felt it was time to wander down to an area not often visited on our Staggers, mainly due to the lack of pubs stocking real ale, Northenden, for a lunchtime stroll.

First stop was the **Tatton Arms** on Mill Lane by the newly erected flood defences of the River Mersey. The pub was shut and a sign from S&N Enterprises was advertising the place was up for lease. Not a good start. A short walk round to the **Crown** on Ford Lane got me a pretty decent drop of Boddies, though.

Next stop, the **Church** on Church Road, was all boarded up and apparently plans are in for conversion into flats. Onto Royal Green Road and the **Spread Eagle**. Keg only served here. I thought I might fare a bit better at the **Jolly Carter**, no such luck - the place has been flattened and a small housing estate built on it!

So it was down to the **Farmers Arms** on Longley Lane to back up the Crown's defence of real ale. The Greene King IPA was passable but the other three handpumps were off and to top it all Jenette and Andy, the licensees, had left to take over a pub up on the Fylde coast. Mind you I can't say I blame them given the sort of welcome they had to Manchester with an armed robbery shortly after they had moved in. At the moment the pub is being looked after by a relief until a new manager is appointed.

Shortly after that rather dismal afternoon a strange whim made me revisit Northenden and I'm glad I did because the **Tatton** now has a new licensee! Billy McCran a man with a wide knowledge of the trade who previously has turned the Piper in Sale round to profit. He told me that he has great plans for the Tatton starting with a bar and kitchen refit, he also aims to have five-a-side and pool teams as well as disco and karaoke evenings. Eventually he also hopes to offer bed and breakfast facilities along with weddings, pensioners' bingo sessions and other events in the rather splendid function room. I sincerely wish him well with the ventures especially the one to reinstate the cask ale provision which had been dropped by the previous licensee. I moved on to the **Crown** where the Boddies was even better than the last time, full of hope I entered the **Farmers** to be let down with a bump - all the handpumps are off until the new licensee is appointed so at this low point in a good evening *bogged off home*.



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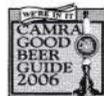
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**RECENT CAMRA AWARDS**



Stockport & South Manchester Branch Chairman Mark McConachie (yes, he's back!) presents a long service award to barmaid Linda Oliver of the Red Bull, Hillgate marking 41 years at the pub. Below Alan and Carole Taylor being presented with the November Pub of the Month Award by branch stalwart David Platt (right).



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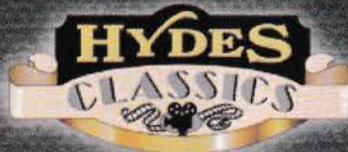
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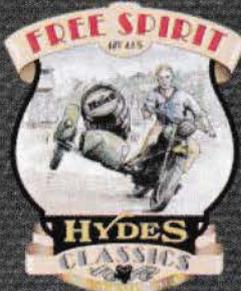
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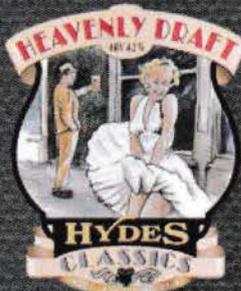
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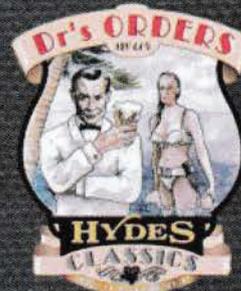
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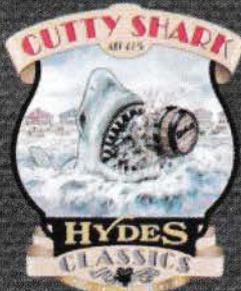
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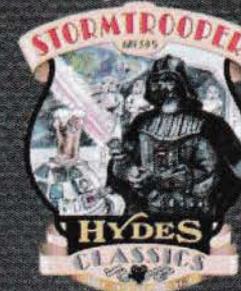
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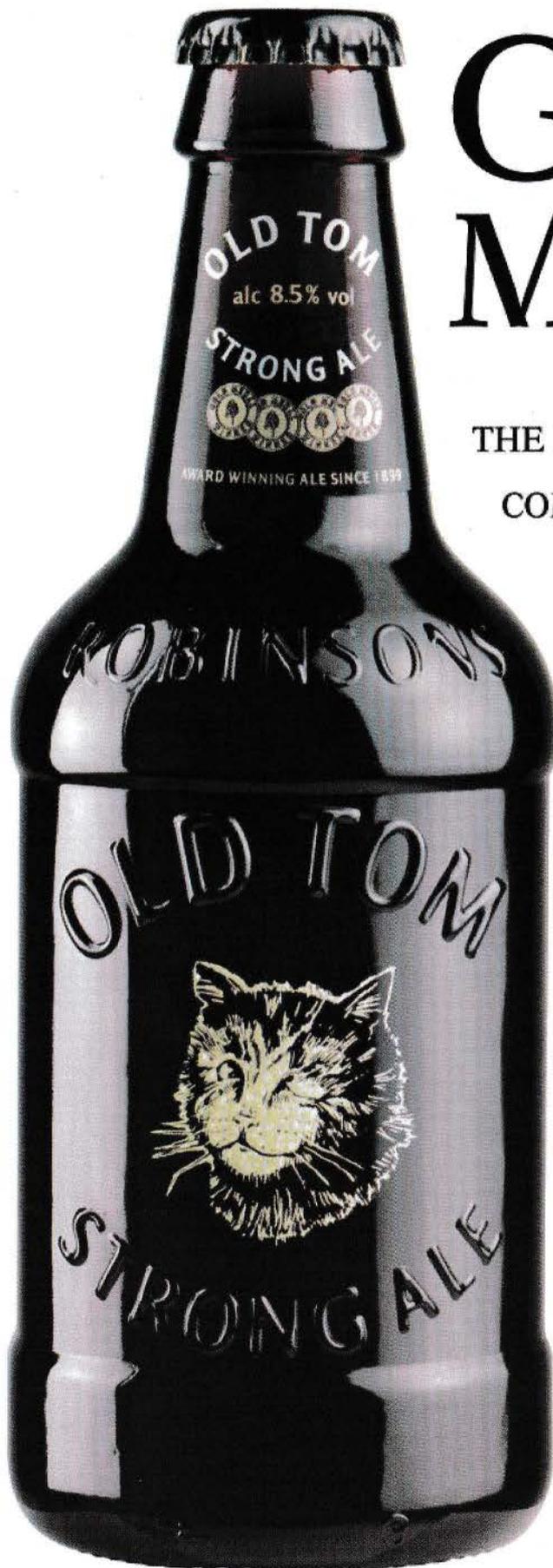


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