

AUGUST 2006



# Opening

TIMES

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

NUMBER 264

COVERING CENTRAL, EAST & SOUTH MANCHESTER, STOCKPORT, TAMESIDE, TRAFFORD N.E. CHESHIRE & MACCLESFIELD

## Back in Business

### Howard Town bounces back after disastrous fire

**A**pril 1 should have been a day of celebration at Glossop's Howard Town Brewery, marking the first anniversary of its occupation of the premises at the town's Howard Town Mill complex. Instead it was a day of disaster struck as a fire tore through the building, threatening the very future of this increasing well-regarded micro-brewery.

Initially prospects seemed bleak. The brewing kit was written off by the insurance company, as the building was considered too dangerous to enter and what should have been first anniversary celebrations could well have turned out to be an epitaph.

However the Howard Town trio of Les and Janet Dove, and Tony Hulme were determined to carry on. So began a two-pronged desperate search – for new premises and also for suitable contract brewers, as the insurance company insisted that the company continue in some form during this enforced break.

Contract brewers were perhaps the easier of the two to source, although the end results were something of a mixed bag. Suitably named beers were produced at Derby's Derwentio Brewery (the 4.2% ABV Hope) and at the considerable more remote Hebridean Brewery, situated on the Isle of Lewis. The



Hebridean beers, Fired Up (4%) and Fire Break (4.3%) sometimes had a tortuous journey to Glossop, on one occasion arriving via an unscheduled journey to Northern Ireland!

The search for new premises took a little longer but very soon a former electrical contractor's premises in Hawkshead Mill in the picturesque Old Glossop were identified.

Despite the name, this is a much more modern, light and airy building, compared to the almost subterranean feel of the old place. Howard Town moved in and after a considerable amount of conversion work the first brew was put through the gleaming kit on 20 June

The beers remain the same with brews of Bleaklow (3.8%), Wren's Nest (4.2%) and Glott's Hop (5%) so far produced – certainly the Wren's Nest that *Opening Times* sampled at the brewery was in superb form.

Sales are now picking up again and Howard Town beers will usually be seen in the town's Beehive and Old Gloveworks pubs along with regular appearances in the Globe and, via the Small Beer Agency, the Star. Beers were also due to go to this month's Great British Beer Festival, with Glott's Hop on public sale and Wren's Nest on the staff bar.

It's good to see this excellent brewery back on track – contact them on 01457 869800 to place an order.

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# Pub OF THE Month AWARD




The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month Award for August 2006 goes to the Victoria on Wilmslow Road, Withington. This is the third time since June 2001 that the Victoria has been named Pub of the Month, yet another award for licensees Janice Oliver and Edgar Ambrose.

What makes the Victoria a deserving winner of Pub of the Month once again? The quality of its Hydes beers, the efficiency of its staff and its traditional local atmosphere. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a real pub. The Victoria is not a trendy chain pub with staff that needs to turn the pump clip around to make sure they know what pint they are pulling. No, at the Victoria you come for a pint and end up staying for a few. And the bus home is just out the door.

When asked what he does to serve the beers in top shape, Edgar replied that he just follows the instructions from the brewery. Well, the brewery must like his straightforward approach because they have named the Victoria Hydes Cellar of the Year 2005, coming tops out of 85 Hydes pubs in the Northwest and UK.

It has been a regular in the Good Beer Guide, which is important as it offers top-quality real ale in an area that is teeming with students from across the UK and indeed the world.

Beerwise, the Victoria dedicates four handpumps to the locally brewed Hydes beers: the Classic Bitter, Jekyll's Gold, Light Mild and one of Hydes' seasonal craft beer. All beers are served in top form: crystal clear at a cool cellar temperature and well-poured by staff who are able to pass a pint without bashing it into a pumpclip.

The pub itself is your basic Manchester local, described by its ever-present landlord Edgar as, 'a traditional pub with traditional hours.' It is frequented by a lively mix of locals, students, pensioners, football fans and bar leaners. All ages from 18 to 85 can expect a well-poured pint and fast service. There is a snug with a pool table and TV, while the main bar features high ceilings, leather seats, plenty of mismatched stools and a big screen that comes down for the football. The Victoria is not a pub for hiding in - expect across the bar conversations and plenty of banter.

This well-deserved award will be presented on Thursday 24 August - a great night is promised. **SL**

The Victoria is well-served by Stagecoach buses from the city centre as well as Stockport. Take the 42 in either direction (42a from Reddish), or the 142, 143 or 157 from the city centre.



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## OT – COMMENT...

It makes a pleasant change to lead with a good news story for once but the reappearance of the Howard Town Brewery is certainly cause for celebration.

While you do have to wonder just when the micro-brewery market will approach saturation point (the UK now has more breweries per head than any other country in the world) it is clear that there will always be room for *quality* cask beers, such as those from Howard Town.

The emphasis has to be on quality, though. There are I think a few too many breweries launching these days where attention to quality is not all that it should be. A recent beer festival at the Cheshire Ring featured a range of new beers from obscure micros, and while all were perfectly kept, one or two of them just weren't very good beers, I'm sorry to say. While the market will soon put out of business any new micro producing reliably bad beer, there does seem to be a ready market for the dull and mediocre. This does no-one any favours but what the long-term solution to this is, I don't really know.

Finally, please note I now have a more user-friendly e-mail address – [stocam@btinternet.com](mailto:stocam@btinternet.com). Long-suffering contributors will be pleased to know that I can now handle all attachments and documents.

## OT – INFORMATION

*Opening Times* is produced by the Stockport & South Manchester Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. Additional material is supplied by the High Peak & NE Cheshire, Trafford & Hulme and Macclesfield & E Cheshire Branches. The views expressed are not necessarily those of CAMRA either locally or nationally. 7,000 copies a month are printed by Phil Powell Printing of Failsworth.

News, articles and letters are welcome to the editorial address – 45, Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport, SK3 9HD. E-mail – [stocam@btinternet.com](mailto:stocam@btinternet.com). Phone 0161 477 1973. Advertising rates on request.

Postal subscriptions are available at £6 for 12 issues (make cheques payable to *Opening Times*). Apply to John Tune, 4 Sandown Rd, Cheadle Heath, Stockport, SK3 0JF.

- **Trading Standards** – problems in pubs should normally be resolved by a quiet word with the licensee. However sometimes it may be necessary to take it further. These are the local contacts:
- Stockport: 0845 644 4301
- **Manchester:** 0161 234 1555
- **Tameside:** 0161 342 8355
- **Trafford:** 0161 912 2274
- **Derbyshire:** 08456 058 058
- **Cheshire:** 0845 11 32 500

**Copy Date for the September issue is Saturday 5 August**

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Tawny Judgement Day: Tuesday 22



### CalderCask Real Ale Guide, CAMRA Halifax & Calderdale Branch, £3.50

**H**ard on the heels of a clutch of CAMRA local guides – all competently done, one or two outstanding – comes this long-awaited guide to the borough of Calderdale, or as most people will know it, the Halifax area, including Hebden Bridge, Sowerby Bridge, Todmorden, and surrounding towns. And in many respects, this highly professional guide is one of the very best.

Inside the glossy front cover with its image of Sowerby Bridge's iconic Wainhouse Tower, the tongue-in-cheek sample pub entry puts a smile on the reader's face, and the good humour continues in the editor's introduction, mercifully lacking in CAMRA cliché. It is perfectly pitched to appeal to a wide audience without dumbing down. We then come straight to the pub entries, and what models of their kind they are! With typically no more than four pubs to a page, the contributors have the space to really get under the skin of the pubs for comprehensive descriptions which allow the potential visitor to make a fully informed choice – though I've never supped a pint there, I now have a clear mental image of the Todmorden pub that hosts both a life drawing class and the Todmorden Agricultural Society

The feature articles – clubs, real ale in a bottle, etc – are clearly the product of original thought rather than recycled CAMRA press releases, and their relative terseness adds to their attraction. Best of all is the double-page spread on Calderdale's six local brewers, in which the hugely well-informed entries condense all the essential information on the firms' history, development, and current beers into a small and crisply edited compass. I couldn't, however, find anything about how to complain about pubs to trading standards. Personally, I have little or no interest in such information – if I don't like a pub, I don't go back – but apparently those in CAMRA who give awards to local guides make this a condition of eligibility, and it would be a shame if an otherwise excellent guide were to be deprived of an award over such a triviality.

I do, however, have two more substantial criticisms. First and less importantly, the front cover promises "all the pubs in Halifax & Calderdale", whereas what we get seems to be all the real ale pubs, with keg-only outlets omitted. Comparison with previous lists suggests that the keg-only outlets are few, apart from the "youth circuit" bars in the centre of Halifax, so their inclusion in hope of future conversion would not have taken too much space. More seriously, the lack of an alphabetical index of pubs is a major misjudgement, albeit mitigated to some extent by the book's clear and easily grasped geographical arrangement (and excellent maps).

Taken as a whole, however, this is one of the best local guides I have seen in a long while. A note inside the back cover tells us the 2007 edition will be available in September 2006. All that will need is a pub index – and, I suppose, some trading standards guff for CAMRA's pedants – and the 2007 edition will set standards that local guide editors everywhere should emulate. I'm looking forward to it already. **RPJ**



### Ten Little Breweries

Over the past eighteen months there has been an alarming trend of established independent breweries being taken over by their bigger and more predatory brethren. Wolverhampton & Dudley have grabbed Jennings, while Fullers have bought Gales and Greene King, seemingly the most rapacious of the lot, have snaffled Belhaven, Ridleys and most recently Hardys & Hansons. In most cases the acquisition of the pub estate was the main objective and the closure of the brewery came not long afterwards. CAMRA has rightly condemned these deals as destructive of competition and diversity in the beer market, but any amount of campaigning is not going to save a brewery that its owners are determined to close.

Fortunately our local family brewers within Greater Manchester seem keen to preserve their independence, but in the current climate no brewery can be regarded as entirely safe. Some may say, of course, that these were poorly-run companies in many cases brewing indifferent beer, and we have hundreds of micros to step into their shoes. But the micro-breweries, despite producing some superb beers, have never really broken through into the mainstream, and still account for less than 2% of the beer drunk in the UK. In reality, the outcome for the pubs involved in these deals would be local beers being replaced by the likes of London Pride, Pedigree and Greene King IPA.

Anyone who wishes to see a vigorous, successful independent brewing sector in the UK has to accept the need to support the businesses actually within that sector. Your local family brewer may not be perfect, but it is still far better than seeing the brewery replaced by a supermarket and the pub estate full of national brands. Micros vs family brewers is a false opposition – we need to see both survive and prosper.

### Extra Uncool

On a recent visit to a pub I spotted no less than five "Extra Cool" keg beers on the bar – not only a couple of lagers, which you might expect, but also smooth bitter, cider and Guinness. It has always been the case that keg beers' lack of flavour was to some extent masked by being served at around 8°, but the latest fad is to go further and chill them down to a ridiculous, teeth-chattering 3

At that kind of temperature, even the last remnant of taste will disappear and you will be left with what is basically a pint of ice-cold liquid. It may have a superficial appeal on a hot summer's day, but it may literally go straight through you on a freezing winter night. The extra energy needed to cool it down to such an absurd degree is also hardly likely to be friendly either to the environment or the pub's profit margin. It is basically just another marketing gimmick for which there is no genuine demand. Has any licensee been besieged by keg drinkers complaining that their beer wasn't cold enough?

Far better to ignore all this nonsense and go for a tasty pint of cask beer served at a natural cool cellar temperature.

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This has been a quiet news month so I paid a long-overdue trip to sample the delights of Romiley. But before we get on to that, I do have one or two snippets for you....

### Round and About

The **Queens Arms** on Stockport road in Cheadle is currently closed. This is due to the refurbishment of the pub and in particular that the progress of the building work is now such that the pub has had to close to allow the building work to continue. Robinson's brewery has not offered a more detailed reopening date other than autumn 2006. I'm looking forward to this, as Robbies do tend to carry out an impressive job of work on their pubs these days.

Last time I mentioned that the **Windsor Castle** in Edgeley was closed and shuttered. That's still the case but now it's for sale as well. My feeling is that this place has had its day as a pub, although I for one won't miss it a great deal.

Nearby the **Tom Thumbs** and the **Comfortable Gill** both remain closed and awaiting tenants. Also available for new tenants, but still very much open, are a clutch of local Robinson's pubs – the **Florist**, Shaw Heath; **Star & Garter**, Hillgate; **Horse Shoe**, High Lane and the perennially available **Nicholsons Arms**. Three other Robbies pubs are also lost to the cause in that they have gone keg! Yes, really! The offending trio are the **Church**, Edgeley; **Cobdens**, Stockport and the **Sportsmans Rest**, Bredbury. A sad sign of the times, I suppose.

In Reddish the **Railway** is again closed and shuttered and while the **Houldsworth** remains open, it is also up for sale.

### Romiley Revisited

And so to Romiley, a place I've not visited for some time. The village boasts an interesting collection of pubs with something for everyone...

The **Stock Dove** (Compstall Road) has been substantially opened out and is comfortably fitted out in a semi-rustic style. Candle lit tables added an intimate feel. Two cask beers were on – Marston's Pedigree, which seemed to be permanent, plus a guest – Holt's Humdinger. The Pedigree was OK but the Holt's was on the turn and went unfinished.

The **Romiley Arms** (Stockport Road), has undergone a very impressive and very open-plan refurbishment courtesy of Greene King. No real ale is sold.

The **Railway** (Stockport Road) is a very football-oriented Robinson's pub in the shadow of the impressive station building. It still has something of a multi-room layout but the star feature must be the impressive beer garden – green fingers have clearly been at work here. An OK pint of Unicorn was the sole cask beer. The nearby **Grey Horse** has a fine old-fashioned exterior hiding a brutally opened-up interior and no real ale (a solitary disused handpump stood lonely guard in the games room).

The **Friendship** is another Robinson's pub with a proper multi-room layout featuring lounge, snug, games room and lobby. There are also extensive grounds including a sunken bowling green in somewhat neglected surroundings. Unicorn and Hatters are on handpump and while the Unicorn was very good indeed, the Hatters was a touch over-mature.

And finally, the **Duke of York**. A great multi-roomed pub with a good atmosphere and a terrific range of beers. Six cask beers featured – Adnams Explorer was on top form.



Most of the front page was taken up by several photographs of pubs and their signs, and the question was posed, what do these pubs have in common? The answer was given inside – they all pretended to sell real ale, but none of them did. Most of them had sold real ale at some time in their history, but at the time not a drop of the stuff could be bought in any of them.

The licensees weren't really to blame – most of the pubs were managed or leased on terms which made the owners, usually non-brewing pub companies, responsible for the exterior signage. It had been decided that the time had come to call a halt to this growing trend, so all of the culprits had been reported to the local trading standards departments, with a request that action be taken to remove all the offending signs.

The four offending pubs were the Brewers, Ladybarn; Church, Levenshulme; Crown, Hillgate and Hardys Well, Rusholme. The Brewers and Hardys Well have now returned to the cask ale fold. The Crown has sold cask beer but might not now and the Church remains resolutely keg only.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was good news from the Railway, West Didsbury, where the problem of the smooth beers on handpump appeared to be approaching resolution. "Smooth cask" mild, bitter and lager had been on handpump, but this had changed, and the "smooth" mild and bitter were dispensed from keg fonts prominently marked "smooth". Similar treatment for the lager was awaited.

\*\*\*\*\*

The previous month's *Opening Times* had reported that Stockport's much rumoured Wetherspoon was really going to happen, and sure enough its actual opening had been reported. The Calverts Court had been described as a modern shop conversion - an oblong room with a bar down one side, although a series of cubicles down the opposite side tended to break up the space a little. Reports had been mixed, with poor service, short measures and indifferent beer, which could perhaps be put down to teething troubles in this brand new operation.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was news of a small brewery being installed in the Lowes Arms at Denton – the equipment was complete, all the ingredients had been delivered, and the first test brew had been planned for 4 August, and was to be Broomstairs Bitter. It was expected to be ready at the pub around mid-August, and in the free trade by early September. Lowes Arms landlord said the interest in the brewery had been phenomenal, and brewer Anthony Firmin commented that the coming weeks would be very busy, particularly with the approach of the Christmas period.

\*\*\*\*\*

Kro Bar, Oxford Road, Manchester, the Danish-style bar in the heart of University lad, had announced its first beer festival. There were to be 11 cask beers on sale, five on handpump, and six on stillage behind the bar. Also up to nine draught beers from Belgium and Germany, and about 30 different bottled beers. The bar's excellent food was to be available, with the possibility of a barbecue.

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**D**ukinfield are holding their very first Dukinfield Music Festival on 7th-9th August. Shaws Brewery have been asked to supply Golden Globe for four participating pubs after consultation with Brian Wilde, the ex-Mayor of Tameside and an organiser of the event. Phil Windsor at Shaws is not sure how this has been arranged but the pubs to be supplied are the Old General (Enterprise Inns), the Newborough (Hydes), the Top Astley Arms (Robinsons) and the W heatsheaf (Marstons/Wolverhampton & Dudley). It is significant that the original Shaws Brewery (they brew now on the same site as originally), is 150 years old this year and a plaque is to be erected at the Brewery to commemorate this fact.

**T**he **Rising Sun** in Mossley, a Good Beer Guide 2006 pub, is to change licensees. Unusually, the new licensee will be the mother of the existing one, Reisa taking over imminently if not already.

**C**heck up on clubs in the Glossopdale Valley: **Charlesworth Conservative Club** has draught Tetleys Bitter and JW Lees Bitter. The **Partington Club** in Glossop has Shaws Golden Globe or Hydes Jekyll's Gold on alternately. Glossop Conservative Club has also either Shaws or Hydes beers on while **Glossop Labour Club** continue to sell Moorhouses Premium with an odd guest firkin at busy events. **Tintwistle Conservative Club** had Hydes Bitter on as did **Tintwistle Liberal Club** (this may however be inaccurate as I have not been in recently). Other clubs in the valley have no cask on at present.

**M**atteos on the Marple Bridge to Glossop road has now reverted to its former name of the **Rock** and has Black Sheep, Landlord, and Theakstons.

**T**he **Woodend Tavern** in Mossley has a keen policy of supporting local micro breweries and regularly has beers from Millstone and Greenfield brewery, and Leatherbritches was also on recently



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Robin Wignall's monthly round-up of doings in the Peak District....

New tenants in the **Shepherds Arms** in Whaley Bridge are John Oliver and Karen Kelly. John hails from 'down under' whilst their previous pub experience has been in the Carlisle area. No changes are planned to this well-regarded local, if for no other reason than the philosophy of 'if it ain't broke don't fix it.' So the Shepherds remains a 'quiet' pub selling good beer. On a recent visit Marston's Bitter and Pedigree were accompanied by Marston's Fever Pitch 4.2% (a World Cup beer of course) and Bateman's Valiant. The Bitter and Valiant were certainly on good form. On a later visit Tom Fool 4% from Jennings (also in the W&D group) was available.

At the **Jodrell Arms**, Theakston's Bitter and Webster's Green Label have continued on the bar. New landlord Damian Fannon was pleased with early sales and decided to keep these beers going. Whilst they are not the most exciting beers around, both are usually worth a try, especially on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday when they sell for £1.80.

Back in March on a visit to Buxton I picked up a copy of *'Real Ales 'R' Down to Us.'* This was billed as 'Your Local Pub Newsletter.' It also served as a sort of mini comprehensive real ale guide to Buxton, and as such was a useful publication, even on photocopied A4. Since then however, the name has changed to *'Pubs 'R' Down to Us'*, and the journal appears to have changed/lost direction, seeming at quick glance to be a hotch potch of adverts for Indian restaurants, keg beers and lagers.

One day in June I called in the **Bulls Head** in High Lane. This is a canal side former Boddington's house. Real ale available was Hydes Boddingtons Bitter, Greene King IPA, and a World Cup beer called, unsurprisingly, World Cup Ale 4%, though with no mention of brewer on the pump clip. This was in good condition, and refreshed palates on a warm day.

The World Cup has of course brought pubs emblazoned with St. George flags, and many are hoping for packed bars during England games at least. The **Shady Oak** at Fernilee is a football free zone with good beer from Jennings and the W&D list and good food being permanent attractions. It is also smoke free zone, Peter McKinnon having decided to go down this route some weeks ago. The **Lamb** at Chinley Head is also a football free zone. Here there is a definite emphasis on food. The lone real ale is Marston's Pedigree, which is well kept, but hardly a bargain at £2.60 a pint.

If you fancy a trip out during the Bank Holiday weekend at the end of August, then the Beer Festival at the **Dog & Partridge**, Bridgemont can be recommended. This can easily be reached by train from Manchester and Stockport to either Furness Vale or Whaley Bridge. The 199 bus runs from Stockport and stops at Bridgemont.

The latest *What's Brewing* (the monthly newspaper free to CAMRA members) headlined the proposed takeover of Hardy & Hanson's Kimberley Brewery by national giant Greene King. One can only fear the worst. This takeover will impact on the Peak District by virtue of the number of Hardy & Hanson houses in the area. Both mild and bitter are beers of character and their continued brewing in Nottingham is important for drinkers' choice.

## May Pub of the Month Award



The one Pub of the Month Awards that escaped a proper mention during our enforced break was the May presentation to Stockport's **Three Shires** on Underbank.

For long a keg-only outlet, the beer at the Three Shires has been transformed thanks to the enthusiasm of owner Sarah Kennedy and bar manager Simon (who was previously responsible for the excellent quality cask beer at the now-keg Cobdens).

Wells' Bombardier is a regular and there are two to three guest beers, often featuring the high quality beers from Skipton's Copper Dragon Brewery. Quality in usually top notch and to add to the overall appeal of this intimate town-centre bar there is an excellent food operation. Our photo shows Sarah and Simon receiving their award from Branch Chairman Mark McConachie on the presentation night, Thursday 25 May.



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Wobbly Bob



2002

Navy



2002

Wobbly Bob



2004

Wobbly Bob

## Cask Marque Award

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The Paramount, Manchester  
Beehive, Moss Side  
Osborne House, Rusholme  
Great Central, Fallowfield  
Friendship Inn, Fallowfield  
The Hillary Step, Whalley Range  
Pineapple, Gorton  
Albion, Burnage  
Sam's Chop House, Manchester  
City Arms, Manchester  
The Waterhouse, Manchester  
All Bar One, Manchester  
Rising Sun, Manchester  
Fletcher Moss, Didsbury  
Victoria Hotel, Withington  
Dog & Partridge, Didsbury  
Gateway, East Didsbury  
Sedge Lynn, Chorlton  
Old Wellington, Manchester  
Moon Under Water, Manchester  
The Bishop Blaze, Stretford  
King's Ransom, Sale  
J P Jolie, Sale  
Old Plough Hotel, Sale  
Bank at Sale, Sale  
Loves Arms, Denton  
Red Lion, Denton  
English Lounge, Manchester  
Lloyds No 1, Manchester  
Tim Bobbin, Urmston  
Ash Tree, Ashton U Lyne  
Calverts Court, Stockport  
Poachers Inn, Bollington  
Hanqing Gate, Macclesfield

Porters Ale House, Macclesfield  
Jar Bar, Macclesfield  
Society Rooms, Macclesfield  
Cotton Bale, Hyde  
Society Rooms, Stalybridge  
Stalybridge Buffet Bar, Stalybridge  
White House, Stalybridge  
Q Bar, Stalybridge  
Angel Inn, Dukinfield  
Wye Bridge Inn, Buxton  
Bamford Arms, Stockport  
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Four Heaton, Heaton Norris  
Nursery Inn, Heaton Norris  
Duke of York, Romiley  
Hare & Hounds, Marple  
Bulls Head Hotel, High Lane  
Crown, Cheadle  
Old Star Inn, Cheadle  
Prince of Wales, Gatley  
High Grove, Gatley  
Kings Hall, Cheadle Hulme  
Cross Keys, Cheadle Hulme  
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John Millington, Cheadle Hulme  
Horse & Farrier, Gatley  
Governor's House, Cheadle H'lme  
Bollin Fee, Wilmslow  
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King George, Hale  
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For once it's been all quiet on the national scene (now that's tempting fate) with no takeovers and closures announced. This month does however see the formal completion of the Green King takeover of Hardys & Hansons (who locally have the Governor's House in Cheadle Hulme and the Old Hall in Timperley). Greene King have formally declined to say what their plans for the brewery are before the deal is finally concluded – expect a closure announcement by the end of September. Turning now to those who have rather more faith in the future of their companies than the Hardys or the Hansons....

### Family Favourites

There's not a lot happening with our local family brewers at the moment, as most of them are into month two of their current batch of seasonal beers...

**Hydes** – the current beer is Cutty Sark (4.1% ABV), a golden ale brewed with Challenger hops. Two 'festival specials' appeared at the recent Chorlton Beer Festival, one light and hoppy, the other stronger and more malt accented. Both went down very well.

**JW Lees** – continue with the summer special, Scorcher (4.3%), golden and refreshing – just right for this time of year.

**Robinson's** – in its second month is Sunny Jim (3.8%), an excellent lower gravity beer which again seem the ideal quencher on a summer's day.

The Robinson's brewed Ward's Best Bitter (4%) tastes nothing like the original but is still a very nice drop of beer. It has been made available to the Robinson's estate and is selling well in those pubs that take it. *Opening Times* has had some very enjoyable pints in the Arden Arms (Stockport) and we hear that sales are also going well in the Sportsman, Strines.

Robbies have also been on the expansion trail, recently purchasing 15 new pubs, 13 of them ex-Jennings and ex-Burtonwood houses from Wolves & Dudley. None are in the *Opening Times* area, the closest possibly being the Leigh Arms at Little Leigh near Northwich. Less positively, seven Robinson's pubs have now switched from cask to keg, smooth beers only. These are *all* in the *Opening Times* area (Sod's Law being what it is) and comprise the Grosvenor and Peacock, both in Stalybridge; Church, Edgeley; Cobdens, Stockport; Junction, Mottram; Sycamore, Ashton; and the Sportsmans Rest, Bredbury.

### Micro Magic

As ever the local micro brewers have plenty of tasty treats in store for you. Our usual apologies to those we weren't able to contact this time around.

**Bazens'** – the latest single hop varietal beer is Styriana (inspired by the George Clooney film *Syriana*) This pale hoppy beer brewed with Styrian hops weighs in at 4% ABV and will be available throughout August. The brewery also reports that sales of their bottled beers are picking up significantly.

**Boggart Hole Clough** – Ginger Boggart (4.5%), pale gold and with a hint of ginger, was out as this was typed. A new 4.3% ABV beer was in the planning stage at mid-July but no other details had been finalised.

**Greenfield** – out for the summer is Dobcross (4.2%) a light and hoppy ale. Due out this month is Longwood Thump (4.5%), a light, golden beer with a slight citrus taste).

**Marble** – this month will see three brand new, beers from Marble, as part of the Marble Arch pub's Celtic Beer Festival. Each of the three Marble brewers will be producing one of the tawny ales – Colin's will be 3.8% ('like an Irish red but with hops'), Dominic's beer will be 4.5% and Head Brewer James is producing a 5.7% beer (the strongest ever Marble beer) with, we hear, a prodigious quantity of hops in it. The most popular of the three beers will join the Marble range as a seasonal – the judging is Tuesday 22 August.

**Millstone** – returning is Square Peg (4.2%), a pale and hoppy beer in the Millstone style, using First Gold hops. Next month will see a brand new beer at 4.6%, to fill a gap in the Millstone portfolio. Apart from the strength, no other details had been finalised when we contacted the brewery.

**Phoenix** – nothing brand new from the regions biggest 'micro'. Look out though, for two excellent summer ales – Midsummer Madness and White Tornado, both are selling very well this year.

**Pictish** – several new beers to report. Willamette (using hops of that name) was 5.2%, pale and hoppy, and has all sold out. Columbus, the trade name for the 4.2% Stockport Festival special has sold well and is being rebrewed. Another new beer is 'Pale N'Oppy' (4.8%), which lives up to its name and uses Bramling Cross hops in the brew plus Chinook for aroma. This month's special is Corn Dolly (5%), a strong pale ale with a dry, bitter finish and a robust hop character.

**Porters** – a couple of recent new beers to report. Pushing the Boundaries, did just that, weighing in at 7.8%. A pale, spicy beer with a peppery hop character, this brew sold out very quickly. Also making a fleeting appearance on the Pub of the Month night at the Railway was Tickers Tease, a 5% chocolate-y, porter-y beer. Very good it was, too.

**Ramsbottom** – although we hear nothing definite, it has been reported that Ramsbottom Brewery has ceased to brew. If true this will be a great shame – the Old Ground Mild in particular will be sorely missed.

**Rosebridge** – the beers from this new Wigan-based micro are now out. There was a launch of them at the Lass O'Gowrie (to which we were not invited, but hey, we don't bear a grudge) where there was a rapid sell out. Rosebridge Bitter (3.8%) was tried in the Marble Arch and is a pleasant bitter beer with a good citric aftertaste but was perhaps a little thin-bodied. The two Lass O'Gowrie beers, LOG35 and LOG42, will feature in the pub and were also at the Chorlton Beer Festival. They are apparently brewed to the original recipes but the 35 was certainly paler than we remember it but both had the malt- accented taste that characterised the old beers. We hope that they succeed – certainly at the increasingly impressive Lass they have a great showcase.

**Shaws** – the local Dukinfield brewery is particularly pleased that its flagship beer, Golden Globe, was to be sold at this year's Great British Beer Festival. Also available this month is the Musicians Special, brewed for the Dukinfield Music Festival (see High Peak Pub News for details of participating pubs).

**Three Rivers** – Stockport's only micro gained extensive press coverage in the *Stockport Express* and *Manchester Evening News* with news of its export deal with a USA importer. The American firm is Shelton Brothers and the initial order is for 20,000 (!) bottles of Old Disreputable and negotiations are underway to also ship out Manchester IPA and the spicy winter beer, Yummy Figgy Pudding. The implausibly named Ron Extract of Shelton Brothers was very enthusiastic about the beer, explaining it would join a small portfolio of British beers among the 150 beers in the company's range. This is great news for Three Rivers, and an interesting spin-off is the reciprocal importing of American micro-brewery beers (possibly on draught) by Three Rivers. The August special, by the way, is Scholar's Prayer, a 4% ABV beer, reddish in colour but with plenty of hops.

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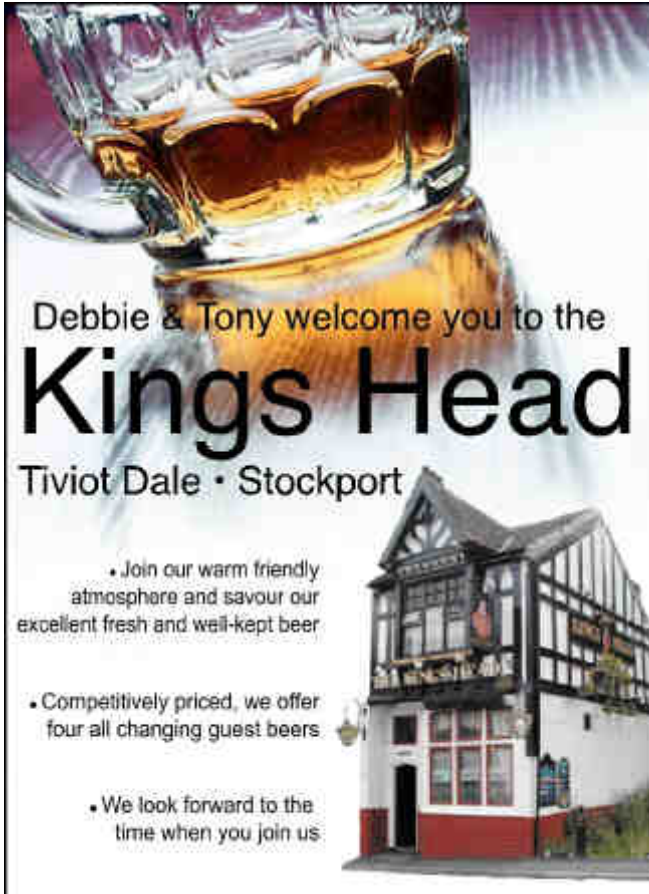
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I have been out and about quite a bit over the past month although as ever, the news is something of a mixed bag. Particularly enjoyable was the event in St Ann's Square, where Marble Brewery had a bar during a North West fine food event. Feedback was very positive it seems and I understand this may be repeated during the Manchester Food & Drink Festival.



The Marble's James Campbell mans the St Ann's Square beer tent

### Chorlton-on-Medlock

I heard a story that there was now real ale to be had in the **Bowling Green** on Grafton Street. This is a pub with a somewhat chequered history on the cask beer front but it does seem to be on the up at the moment.

Dwarfed by nearby University developments, the pub has had a thorough makeover and now presents a very smart appearance in a modern-cum-traditional style. Three cask beers are usually sold – Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Adnams Bitter and Caledonian Deuchars IPA. Only the Spitfire was on when I called but this was in good order (and this was at the end of a very hot week) and selling well.

On leaving I spotted a notice indicating that this is now a sister pub to the excellent **Ducie Arms** on Devas Street, which will explain the impressive transformation.

On my way down to the Bowling Green I popped into the excellent **Mawson** on Kincardine Road (it's just off Brunswick Street) – I believed that it, too, now sold Deuchars but this wasn't on when I called. The Tetley Bitter, though, was in fine form.

I also checked out one or two other pubs and bars in the area. Further along Grafton Street, the **Grafton** (Holt's) just had the bitter visible on handpump. Across the road is the residential Grafton Hotel, now advertising its **Gallery Bar** as open to the public. I didn't expect to find real ale here, and I wasn't disappointed.

Round the corner, the **Oxford** had two handpumps, with only one in use selling Hook Norton Old Hookey. I was pleasantly surprised to find real ale still on sale here. My final stop, though, was a real disappointment.

Earlier this year I had visited the **Whitworth** on Moss Lane East and enjoyed a Christmas beer from Coach House Brewery. Indeed there seemed to be something of a tie up with Coach house as several of their beers featured. Things seem to have deteriorated since then. This time there was not a pumpclip to be seen on any of the handpumps and no real ale was being sold. What a letdown!

**More on East Manchester**

Off I went on the postering circuit for the beer festival, round all the keg outlets I wouldn't normally visit and it turned up a couple changes.

Firstly the **Crossroads Hotel** on Grey Mare Lane has become The Manchester, the **32 Club** at Ardwick Green appeared shut down, of course it just might have been shut that particular evening and the **Star** on Hyde Road has become a members only establishment since I was last in there.

After an extensive journey round I was in need of sustenance so where else could I repair to but the **Legh Arms**, on the way there I received a message that enabled me to notify Dave and Tracy that the Legh Arms was the preferred option along with the Moorhouses Black Cat mild in the 'outside of Stockport' portion of the Mild Challenge. They were needless to say right chuffed, added to the fact that the ladies darts team had come fifth in their league in their first year. Also over the bank holiday weekend they had taken part in a charity pram race in aid of children with polio and the Debdale Park donkey sanctuary where they raised a decent amount of cash so it was congratulations all round..

I had also heard a whisper that there might be some real ale happenings at the **Imperial** on Birch Street in West Gorton. Many years ago this was a real favourite of mine, with long time landlord Wilf and his brilliant Wilsons Bitter. Both have long since departed for the great pub in the sky, I'm sorry to say, and the pub itself was brutalised many years ago. Having said that there seemed a decent crowd of locals in when I called but of real ale, there was none.

I therefore sauntered down Hyde Road to another favourite, the **Vale Cottage** on Kirk Street. I know it's the current local Pub of the Year, but this pub really is a gem. Landlord John Smith showed me the new bar and back fittings he has had installed – all very smart in a warm oak. The three handpumps now take pride of place and feature regular beers Theakston's Black Bull, Taylor's Landlord and Wells' Bombardier. There is a regular guest (often a Northern Brewing beer) which replaces whichever regular beer runs out when it's ready to go on. John told me that the Theakstons is now the most popular of his regular beers, and I have to say it was a very good pint indeed. Quality has been helped by the installation of a python cooling system, ensuring a cool pint every time.

On a less positive note, I see that the **Pomona** on Gorton Lane remains closed and shuttered but there does seem to be some activity in the car park. Surely it's not going to reopen?

**Other News**



The main news from the City Centre is the sudden closure, and re-opening just a week or so later, of the **Bridge** on Bridge Street. One of the city's premier gastro-pubs closed for what were described as personal financial reasons. Galloping to the rescue was the team behind the revitalised **Brunswick** on Piccadilly who swiftly re-opened what has been dubbed the 'B-Lounge at the Bridge'. Cask beers are now Theakston's Bitter and Old Peculier.

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**The Ship, Wincle**



Following its selection as Macclesfield CAMRA's Pub of the Year for 2005, we thought it would be worth paying a visit to the Ship at Wincle. Tucked away near the Staffordshire border amongst hilly, wooded country on the fringe of the Peak District, it's one of the remotest pubs in Cheshire. Although the sign shows a sailing ship on one side, the name apparently derives from the local dialect for sheep and has no nautical connections. It's reached by turning right off the A54 about three miles east of Bosley, in the direction of Buxton.

You follow the road south through the hamlet of Wincle with its little church, and then begin to descend towards the River Dane at Danebridge. The pub is on the left-hand side together with a row of old sandstone cottages. The pub itself, which dates back to the 16th century, is built of the same red local stone, with its unassuming frontage brightened by baskets of flowers and ivy growing around one of the doors.

Inside there's a choice of cosy, low-ceilinged rooms. The heart of the pub is the vault at the centre, with a long bar counter and seating opposite. You can imagine the regulars gathering here for a spot of banter. Beyond this is a more formal lounge with tables set for dining, and on the other side is a rambling, extended area on two levels with bare floorboards and rustic furniture where families and hikers are welcome.

It's a free house that makes an effort to support local micro-breweries, and sensibly goes for quality rather than having a bar groaning with handpumps. There are usually four beers, but on our visit there were only three – Fuller's London Pride, Titanic Mild from Burslem and Storm Twister from Macclesfield. We tried the Titanic and the Storm which were both in excellent condition. The pub also sells Weston's Organic Cider on handpump.

The menu is unashamedly ambitious, as this is clearly a pub that wants to attract people specifically to eat rather than just providing pub grub for those who happen to be passing. This means that the main courses are mostly over £10, although there are also snacks and sandwiches for £5 or less for those with a more modest appetite or budget. Two of us had Steak and Ale Pudding and Thai Red Chicken Curry, while the third went for Staffordshire Oatcakes with a bacon and black pudding filling, from the snacks menu, as he wanted to leave room for a pudding. The food could not be faulted on either quality or portion size. Particularly interesting



The Hilary Step in Whalley Range. This cask ale bar is a completely smoke free pub. No smoking of any kind is permitted on the premises, and there isn't even a kitchen with a chip pan to sully the atmosphere. Perhaps that's the real reason for

the unusual name. The Hilary Step is apparently the last place where a tired climber can get a cup of tea on the climb up Mount Everest, and the atmosphere is notably pure, if a little rarefied. But you won't need bottles of oxygen to keep you going in this remarkable establishment. A financial tie means that Thwaites Thoroughbred and Thwaites Lancaster Bomber are the house beers. There are also two guest beer pumps supporting micro breweries from near and far and there's a German wheat beer on draught too. Prices are what you'd expect for an upmarket bar in South Manchester. There's no TV, no juke box, no background music - although there is live jazz played on a Sunday night. The overall effect is bright and airy - and very "female friendly", to use an awful marketing phrase from the 90s.

**June Pub of the Month Award**



*The Pub of the Month Award for June was presented to Martin Wood of the Railway, Portwood, Stockport..*

were the chips that were more like potato wedges. We managed two puddings – white chocolate cheesecake, and bread and butter pudding with Bailey's and dates – both of which were just as good as the main courses. Everything seemed to be home-made rather than coming out of a freezer or packet. You don't mind paying a little over the norm for food that is this good, but all too often the ambition is not matched by the achievement.

Despite the important role of food, the Ship remains very much a proper pub and is certainly somewhere you would feel happy just popping in for a drink. While somewhat off the beaten track, it is obviously a very well-run establishment that attracts customers from many miles around. It's well worth making the effort to visit.

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### Shaw Heath & Hillgate with Mark McConachie

Our Stagger of Shaw Heath and south Hillgate was held on the night of St Patrick's Day.

We began the crawl at the ever-reliable **Armoury**, sited opposite the TA Centre on Greek Street. This is a Robinson's house that retails their Hatters, Unicorn and Old Tom (the latter on Gravity dispense in the Vault). It was bustling in the Room and two games of darts were on the go - one in the Vault, the other in the back room. This now must be "the" Robbies pub on Edgeley. No one tried Old Tom, the other beers scored very well. I was told by one of our party that St Patrick was a Welshman.

South along Shaw Heath next to the **Florist** (another Robbies house). Two beers are offered - Hatters and Unicorn, and booth were well received. The Florist consists of five rooms around a central bar. It was great to see the names of some of these rooms etched into the glass - Snug and Smoke Room being two examples. It wasn't quite as busy as the Armoury either.

The **Plough** on Shaw Heath has been keg-only for years so it was on to Adswood Lane West for another Robbies house, the **Adswood Hotel** also selling good Hatters and Unicorn. A disco-cum-singalong with a vaguely Irish theme was in progress in the far lounge. A large lobby serves the former No Smoking room, front lounge and a back snug; there is a well-tended beer garden to the rear, and an impressive tree-shaded, cobbled courtyard at the front. The new folk in charge seem to be doing well as the pub was quite busy. It was said that St Patrick was a rabid teetotaler...

A long-time Good Beer Guide entry pub next, the **Blossoms** (Robbies) on Buxton Road. This was to be the only pub in which we were to encounter a pinball game - The Addams Family in this case. Whilst the pinball machine could have benefited from the care and a clean, the same could not be said for the beers - Hatters, Unicorn and Old Tom (the latter stillaged on the back-bar), all were in good form. Also in good form were the immaculate surroundings of lobby, lounge, vault and rear snug. We were to finish somewhere on Middle Hillgate, so as I waited to cross the busy A6, I pondered upon the thought that St Patrick "would mortify his flesh by diving into icy pools..."

At the **Wheatsheaf** there was an icy welcome of sorts, no cask beer. This despite a notice outside proclaiming "Cask Conditioned Ales". A short walk took us to the **Bowling Green** (Charles Street), one of the few non-Robbies pubs of the evening. Whether that had anything to do with it being the busiest pub of the crawl, I cannot say. A fun Karaoke was in full swing; a pleasant mix of locals enjoying the two-room, quite spacious surroundings. The sole cask beer was Boddies bitter which we all enjoyed due its good form. The licensee was enjoying a game of pool in what I must say seems a well-managed, welcoming and friendly pub.

Back onto the street and two more Robbies pubs. First was the **Flying Dutchman** which did not appear too well with a number of boards covering broken windows - passing malcontents perhaps? Nonetheless, the bustling atmosphere within was pleasant, calm and indeed, most welcoming. I believe new licensees were in charge, so I wish them well. Hatters was advertised but none was available, so we all had a very good drop of Unicorn (from electric metered pump).



The second Robbies house was a much older building, the **Star and Garter**. This *did* sell both Hatters and Unicorn (both above average). Fairly lively mood, a couple of good-sized rooms, pool table and yet another Karaoke. This one boasted a good compere/singer though – she belted out "That ole Devil called love", I bet even Simon Cowell would have been impressed.

As time was pressing, we decided to end this Stagger at Holt's **Sun & Castle** (the other interim pubs were either keg or closed). Mild and Bitter were the order of the day with the bitter edging it score-wise over a very reasonable mild. A fair-sized number of folk were in and they seemed well entertained by a very lively female DJ. A good end to an interesting evening. I never did any further pieces of information about St Patrick...

## A Brief Blessing of Beer

The 2nd Chorlton Beer Fest happened on Friday 14th and Saturday 15th of July. *Copland Smith was there with his notebook and camera...*

The weather was spectacularly summery and, for the second year, the people of Chorlton assembled on the lawn and car park of St Clement's Church, going into the nave through a stone arch from time to time to replenish.

### The People

I suppose some people look like CAMRA members – you know what I mean – and, yes, they were there, but as beer festivals go, this was very Chorlton. Lots of sunglasses perched on heads. Men in Chorlton shorts (just below the knee) carrying man-bags. As many females as males. Face-painted children. Picnics under the trees. Idyllic, actually, especially on Friday when it was less crowded.

### The beers

Interesting mix: Quaffable Hyde's Festival beer was good value at 50p per plastic half. Most of the others were £1.10. McGuinness's Summer Tipple, described as gold but more dark butterscotch. I went pagan with Pictish Alchemist, a beautifully hoppy 4.3%, and Millstone's Stone Circle, another pale hoppy at 4.2%. Sarah Hughes's Dark Ruby Mild was less than mild at 6% and like a dark, alcoholic Vimto. Hopstar's Smokey Joes Black Beer was equally dark and tarry. Greenfield's Pennine Rambler (4.4%) suited the weather – it was like bees in summer.

But... By tea time on Saturday, the beer ran out. The cider had gone earlier. And it was scheduled to run until 11pm. I know quite a few who headed there for the evening only to be disappointed. I know they say it's always best to leave them wanting more, but I thought was performers, not beer.

Ah well. I'm still looking forward to next year.



In our New Year issue we reported on the welcome, not to say extraordinary, revival of Belgium's Oud Beersel lambic brewery by Roland De Bus and Gert Christiaens. The aim of the two brewers was to revive the original Oude Geuze and Oude Kriek from Oud Beersel.

On 18 January the brewery became a member of HORAL (the official association of lambic brewers) since when Gert and Roland have received much support from both HORAL and well-know lambic brewers and blenders Armand de Belder (or Drie Fonteinen) and Frank Boon in reviving the brewery and its beers. Invaluable help has also come from Henri Vandervelden, the brewery's original owner.

As a result there are now sufficient stocks of young and old lambic at the brewery to allow limited releases of the first of the 'new' Oud Beersel Oude Gueuze and Oude Kriek. Stocks are very limited at the moment – the first substantial brew of lambic only took place this spring and larger quantities of the beers won't be available for two or three years yet.

*Opening Times* visited the brewery in mid-June and was able to try the latest lambic from the cask (a very promising foundation for future beers, we think) along with the new gueuze and kriek. Both are very young and indeed, the gueuze needs laying down until about Christmas before it is really ready to drink. The kriek is already very drinkable and has the makings of a classic beer. Both beers should be available from Chorlton's **Belgian Belly** as you read this – note, though, that this batch somewhat confusingly uses the old labels, although it is expected that Roland will be designing new ones for later releases.



Our photo shows the 'Three Musketeers' from Oud Beersel (l-r) Roland, Ludo and Gert

Sue & Graham welcome you to

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Here is our monthly round up of what's happening in the local CAMRA branches. Members of all branches are of course very welcome to attend each others' events.

The **Stockport & South Manchester** branch covers Stockport Borough apart from Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley and Marple, plus that part of Manchester from the River Medlock in the north to the M56/Princess Parkway in the south. *Branch Contact – Pete Farrand 07786 283990*

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup>** – Brewery Trip: McGuinness Brewery, Cask & Feathers, Rochdale. Fully Booked. Contact David Platt on 0161 256 1166

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport, SUMMER QUIZ, Starts 8.00pm

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>** – Joint Social with Liverpool Branch Meet: Head of Steam, Lime Street Station 11:30-12:00; Fly in the Loaf, Hardman Street till 12:45. Phone 07981 756720 on the day to find out current location.

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup>** – Hyde Road Stagger: starts 7.30pm Travellers Call nr Pottery Way, 8.30pm The Suburban, off Hyde Rd, nr market

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>** – Pub of the Month: Victoria, Wilmslow Road, Withington. From 8.00pm.

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup>** - Social, Midland, Wellington Road North, Stockport. From 8.00 pm

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September** – Informal Social at the Glossop Beer Festival, Glossop Labour Club, Chapel Street. (More details of fest <http://www.glossop.com/beerfest/>)

The **High Peak & North East Cheshire** Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. *Branch Contact – Tom Lord 0161 427 7099*

**Monday 14<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Crown Inn, Victoria Street Glossop. Starts 8.30pm

The **Trafford & Hulme** Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester west of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. *Branch Contact – John Ison 0161 962 7976*

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Wheatsheaf, Church Street, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>** – Hale Barns social: meet at the Bulls Head, Hale Barns from 8pm

**Note the new T&H website:** [www.thcamra.org.uk](http://www.thcamra.org.uk)

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the **Macclesfield & East Cheshire** Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. *Branch Contact – Trevor Gammage 07802 645898*

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup>** – Macclesfield Pub Crawl - route tba but will include Sun and Peel Arms

**Friday 25<sup>th</sup> – Monday 28<sup>th</sup>** – Beer Festival - Ship Inn, Wincle

**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September** – Summer Pub of the Season Award - Vale, Bollington. From 8.00pm.

# It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale



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Just fill in the form below and send, with a cheque (payable to CAMRA Ltd) or for Three Months free membership (for those renewing or joining by Direct Debit) complete the Direct Debit Form. All forms should be addressed to: Karen & Chris Wainright, CAMRA Membership, 173 Shearwater Road, Offerton, Stockport, SK2 5XA. Alternatively you can join online at [www.camra.org.uk](http://www.camra.org.uk).



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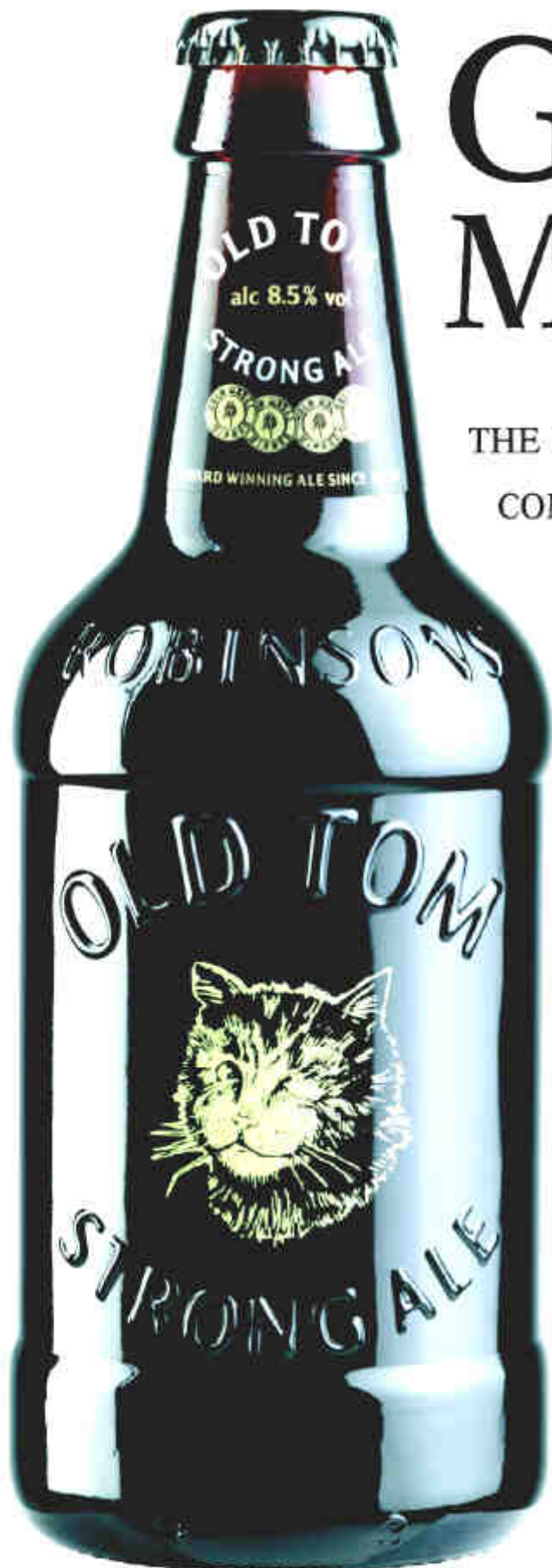
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