

SEPTEMBER 2006



Opening

TIMES

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

NUMBER 265

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

Vale Cottage is Greater Manchester Pub of the Year



Popular Gorton Local wins top award from CAMRA

LANDORD John Smith was stunned when his back street local won the Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year Award for 2006. He knew that this meant his pub, the Vale Cottage on Kirk Street, would go forward to the regional competition but happy with his local award, he never considered winning anything else. Amazed delight therefore greeted the news that he had indeed won the Greater Manchester Pub of the Year title.

So, what makes a pub both local and regional Pub of the Year? Hidden away off Hyde Road, behind a wooded conservation area, the Vale Cottage has always been one of the better pubs in the locality, with the almost rural aspect outside matched by the warm country-pub atmosphere within. In recent years, though, the pub seemed to drift. Certainly for the cask beer drinker, the solitary hand pump dispensing John Smith's Cask was little enticement to either call in or stay awhile.

However the pub's fortunes took a turn for the better early in 2005 when John and his wife arrived and took the pub by the scruff of the neck. As we have reported before, one of John's first actions was to ditch the beer that bore his name. So, out went John Smith's and in came Well's Bombardier, which found great favour with the pub's more mature clientele. With one cask beer always on top form, sales and demand grew.

Taylor's Landlord was the next cask beer to join the line-up and this year a third handpump has been added, to dispense Theakston's Black Bull, which has rapidly become a best seller.

If that wasn't enough, John is fortunate that his pub is owned by Enterprise Inns thus enabling him to participate in a direct delivery scheme promoted by the Society of Independent Brewers. As a result of this, one of the

handpumps often features a guest beer from Northern Brewing of Runcorn.

There are no pool tables and music is usually confined to the taped background variety, often reflecting John's interest in Northern Soul. There are popular quizzes in Tuesdays and Thursdays and the pub also has a reputation for good home-cooked food, available every lunchtime apart from Saturdays.

John also continues to invest in the business. This years a new bar and servery have been installed and he is also talking about redecorating and renewing the upholstery. It is against the background of continual improvement to what is already a great pub that this award has been won. The presentation will be on the evening of Saturday 7 October when John plans to push the boat out for a memorable night.

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OT – COMMENT...

Hearty congratulations to the Vale Cottage in Gorton for scooping up the Great Manchester Pub of the Year. I know that John Smith has worked tremendously hard to get the pub where it is now and this award certainly recognises all that effort.

The pub will now go forward to the next round of the National Pub of the Year competition. This is the 'Super Regional' round where the Vale Cottage will be up against the regional winners from three other of CAMRA's 16 regions across the country. The four 'Super Regional' winners then form the finalists of the national contest. Given the qualities of the Vale Cottage, and having an inkling of what the judges look for, there is every chance that we could have another finalist on our hands here. I'll keep you posted.

It remains fashionable in some circles to still maintain that there is no demand for real ale, and that the style itself is dying out. The doomsayers would have done well to attend last month's Great British Beer Festival. The move to the new venue at Earl's Court certainly paid off with just about every record being broken. In particular the numbers through the doors shot up from 47,000 in 2005 to an incredible 66,000 this year. No demand for real ale any more? Pull the other one.

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. 7,200 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. 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
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Copy Date for the October issue is Friday 8 September

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, John Tune, Pete Farrand, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Tom Lord, Frank Wood, John Ison, Peter Edwardson, Phil Levison, , Robin Wignall, Neil Worthington, Adrian Palmer, Mark McConachie, Shayne Langlois, Robin Pendragon, Ken Birch, Heather Airlie, Roy Parkes, George Elmslie.



THE STOCKPORT & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for September is the Legh Arms on Ashton Old Road, Openshaw.

This is the third major CAMRA award for the Legh Arms since it was taken over by Dave and Tracey Britnell in summer 2001. The pub picked up the local Pub of the Month Award in July 2004 and then went on to win our 2005 Pub of the Year Award. The continuing excellence of this fine local has now gained it Pub of the Month for the second time.

What's so special about the Legh Arms? Well, with Dave's commitment to cask beer this would be a good pub anywhere but in the cask ale and pub desert that is much of Openshaw it is something of a minor miracle that the pub has prospered and thrived in this way.


The pub not only offers a range of cask beers, including the celebrated Moorhouse Black Cat (of which more later) but there is also real cider (usually Westons Old Rosie) and the pub also acts as a real community local with darts and cribbage teams (the darts played on the traditional Manchester log end board) and other sporting events are covered on the big screen TV.

When the Legh Arms was last Pub of the Month it was in the enlightened hands (as far as real ale went) of the Unique Pub Co. It's now owned by Punch Taverns but they have let Dave continue to offer a range of cask beers, particularly from Moorhouses Brewery in Blackburn. And this neatly brings us on to why this Pub of the Month will in fact be a double celebration.

This year's highly successful Mild Challenge asked participants to name their favourite pint of mild and the pub they drank it in. With 93 participating pubs, two awards were made, one for pubs in Stockport Borough and one for those outside. Such is the quality of Moorhouses Black Cat in the Legh Arms that it romped home with the 'out of Stockport' award. Dave was over the moon when I told him - so much so that he let his tea go cold and insisted on bringing his partner, Tracey down to celebrate! September the 28th is the date set for both presentations so put it in your diary as it promises to be a night to remember, on a par with the Pub of the Year celebrations. The evening starts from 8.00pm.


AP

The Legh Arms is well served by public transport. Buses down Ashton Old Road (219 and 220) will drop you close by and it is a short walk from Ashburys Station



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A Stagger Around the City with Jerry Wicken

Thank heavens for CAMRA! Without it I doubt whether we could have visited 10 pubs and bars offering 30 different beers from more than 20 breweries. So without further ado let's get started.

A fairly warm April evening saw eight of us sitting outside **Kro 2** on Oxford Road. It is a modern, airy establishment with plenty of chrome, refectory style tables inside, a large glass frontage and a good size drinking area outside. Clientele is mainly student, it being so close to the University, although it will remain a mystery how they afford the prices. The beers, though, were well received, particularly the Timothy Taylor Landlord which was rated highly by our six tasters: the Deuchars IPA less so, but still above average. Nobody tried the Theakston Cool Cask which stood alongside various Continental lagers on draft such as Budvar and Paulaner plus any number of continental bottled beers.

Across the Oxford Road and down New Wakefield Street we found the **Font Bar**, which probably comes to life a bit later than our 8 o'clock visit. Again, the bar is possibly aimed at the younger customer (Playstation on a big screen and cooler beer temperatures). This is a shame given the licensees have taken the trouble to keep two real ales, Greenfield Mild and Phoenix Resurrection which both scored well, despite the coolness masking their true flavour.

Next was our mid-evening meeting point, the **Lass O' Gowrie** (Charles Street). With its tiled exterior, stone floors and an almost country pub atmosphere, this is a firm favourite. It also has an excellent range of beers. The Greene King IPA and Harviestoun Schiehallion Lager were ignored in favour of the Beartown Bear Ass, Black Sheep and Elgoods Cambridge Ale all scoring above average, and the in-house Lass Ale and Coach House Cromwell which were particularly well received.

Our numbers swelled, we moved up the road to **Joshua Brookes**. It had only one draught beer, Robinson's Old Stockport which divided our merry band like no other. Its above average score disguised the range of marks from poor to good. It just shows what an individual thing taste is. The pub was not overly busy for a Friday night and rather soulless. The music divided us almost as much as the beer and could be escaped only by venturing to the outdoor terrace overlooking the fragrant River Medlock. It was time to move on and passing the keg only Old Garratt, O'Sheas and Overdraught we reached the **Fab Café** on Portland Street.

Anybody who hasn't been there is missing a warehouse size bar filled with sci-fi memorabilia including a dalek and an ice warrior by the door (or it may have been a Cyberman!) and TV screens silently showing old sci-fi movies. Business was steady but the place was not overcrowded, the bar was well staffed and friendly and there was a good atmosphere. The only draught ale on offer was Wychwood Hobgoblin and was enjoyed by all, now 14 strong; so much so that some of our group stayed. The rest of us, bounden to do our duty and with an unquenchable thirst moved on to the **Paramount**. Modern and uninteresting, the Paramount (Wetherspoons) appeared to offer a large range of beers. However, some of our group were told the Three Rivers Harry Jacks was off; the rest of us who sampled the beer just wished it had been. George Wright's Hoppy Easter fared slightly better but both were described as rather tired. None of us had the Pedigree, Abbot or Old Speckled Hen.

Tameside Roundup

Roy Parkes with generally bad news...

The **Gardener's Arms** on Taunton Road, Ashton-u-Lyne has been demolished and houses are being built on the site. Robinsons have put in an outline planning application to demolish the boarded-up **White Hart Inn** at 47 Old Road, Flowery Field, Hyde. This is an attractive stone-built pub in an interesting area of old housing. The application is for a nine-unit apartment block.

The **Old Ball** at the junction of Henrietta St, Cranbourne Rd, Broadoak Rd, Ladbrooke Rd and Smallshaw Lane, Ashton-u-Lyne has had a makeover and now boasts modern wooden flooring and new furniture. The Marstons cask has disappeared. The old ball was a bundle of rags created once a year and then ripped apart in an ancient orgy of letting off steam, probably in frustration at the spread of keg.

The **Hop Pole** on Oldham Road (at the junction with Cranbrook St) is an imposing brick pub from the outside, its stone facings and window frames clothed in darker-than-olive green in an effort to attract the youth market. Now it's been painted an attractive deep cream, with flashy gold 'Edwardian' lamps over the 2 doors. Food is promised, but no indication from the signs what ales within. A glance through the windows shows no change to the keg fonts in either of the 2 bars (there are only 2 rooms). This pub served draught Bass years ago.

(Roy promises that he has better news to come – Ed)

Stagger continued...

Next stop was the recently reopened and classily refurbished **The Bank** on Mosley Street. Chandeliers, marble columns and a much more civilised atmosphere, the remaining ten of us thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The pub (more like a Gentleman's Club) occupies the ground floor of the Portico Library. Built in the neo-classical style the building is now 200 years old and would be well worth a visit even without the fine spread of beers at very reasonable prices for the City Centre. The ubiquitous Boddingtons Bitter and Landlord were joined at the bar by Wychwood Shires which was good, Brakspears Bee Sting also rated highly and Moorhouse Pride of Pendle which was narrowly voted the beer of the evening.

Somewhat reluctantly we left The Bank and headed for the **Seven Oaks** (Charlotte Street), which served Well's Bombardier as the only beer on draft although it usually offers Boddington's and Tetley's Bitters. This is a City Centre one room 'local' and the only pub in Chinatown. Everybody was satisfied with the beer quality. They also have an upstairs function room which may open when the pub is very busy.

With research time running out we returned to Portland Street and the **Grey Horse**. It was its usual busy self and sold three Hydes beers, bitter, the seasonal Heavenly Draft and mild. All scored highly but the mild took the honours.

As the last bell sounded and half the team headed off to final buses and trains, the last five walked fifty yards to the later closing **Old Monkey** and repaired upstairs to the quieter lounge. The Holt's bitter and the mild were tried and both were well received and were, of course, the cheapest beer of the night.

And so ended a mammoth stagger and it is no exaggeration to claim that each Pub and each beer had something to offer. That was our conclusion but why not try them yourselves



Nursery is Regional Champion – Stockport local is Greater Manchester Pub of the Year. This was the main front page story, and for the sixth consecutive year. The Regional Pub of the Year title for CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, in Greater Manchester had gone to a pub in the *Opening Times* area. The Nursery on Green Lane, Heaton Norris, had scooped the award, despite a strong challenge from pubs in Wigan, Glossop and Salford.

Pubmaster's bid for Wolverhampton & Dudley had failed, but only just. A successful bid would have meant the break-up of the company and the breweries would have been put up for sale. As a buyer would have been difficult to find, it would almost inevitably meant the closure of four real ale breweries. Banks's and Marston's were safe, and although Cameron's would also continue, it would be under new ownership as it was to be sold to Castle Eden. The downside of that deal was that the current Castle Eden brewery would shut. Mansfield Brewery was still doomed to closure.

Wetherspoon's King's Hall in Cheadle Hulme had been badly damaged in an arson attack in late August. The fire had been started with the aid of a petrol can at the back of the pub. The conservatory was badly damaged, and there was serious smoke damage to all of the premises. Those responsible were clearly visible on CCTV, and it was believed that they had been apprehended.

There was a further report on the new micro-brewery that had been installed at the Lowes Arms in Denton. The test brew had been successfully produced, and the first pint of St Annes Ale was pulled on 17 August. Details of further ales to follow had been made available, and the decision had been made early on to name the beers after the area, to maintain a sense of community. Frog Bog Bitter, Wild Wood, Broomstairs Bitter – they all had tales to tell. The opening of the brewery was to be celebrated by an official launch night on Saturday 29 September.

Kro Bar on Oxford Road had announced its first beer festival the previous month, and in the pipeline was Kro 2, which would be in part of the recently extended ground floor of the National Computing Centre (also on Oxford Road, but further in towards the City Centre). This new bar was to have something run on very similar lines to Kro. With cask beers, a good foreign bottled range, and good food. There was also to be a Kro-run bar in the newly revamped Manchester Museum. Whilst there would be no cask beers, there was to be Krombacher and Budvar on draught, complemented by a range of German bottles.

Fag End Facts

Robin Pendragon lights up....

One thing to emerge in the present debate on smoking in pubs is how pathetically out of date some CAMRA members seem to be on the subject.

One writer recently went rambling on about "Player's Weights", "Woodbines" and "Park Drive" as though people still smoke these brands. Not round here they do not, and have not done for years. Weights are obsolete whilst Woodbine and Park Drive are uncommon high tar brands. The more common brands these days are Benson & Hedges "Gold", Silk Cut and Marlboro (*sic*) whilst meerschaum pipes and cigarillos are seldom seen except at a few of the more homespun folk festivals.

There are cheapo brands still coming and going, being modern evolutions of the old "Dominos" and "Cadets" brands. Whilst it was once madly trendy to smoke Gauloise or Disque Bleu French cigarettes, modern wannabees rather tend to go for du Maurier "Cocktail" and Dunhill from posher town centre tobacconists. A few of the old council estate favourites such as Embassy and Sovereign are still around from, shall we say, selected suppliers. All the posh brands of yesteryear such as Passing Clouds, Players No.1, Blue Book, Pasha and 'sand' Sobraine have now either ceased production or are rare even in the posh tobacconists shops.

Because of the health risks associated with the practice it is hard to remember now that cigarette smoking was once something of a gourmet activity with its armies of well-informed fans. "Tobacconists" were the chaps who held tutorials, gave lessons and made up the cigarettes from selected papers and leaf, and who only later started opening shops to sell their products. This is where the major manufacturers such as Wills, Players, Carreras and Kensitas came on the scene, mechanising what had previously been a cottage industry. Later still they started adding cork tips, filters and blending permitted amounts of NSM (new smoking material) in with the tobacco.

This cause a switch to loose leaf brands, some smokers being able to detect the variable amounts of NSM as well as sometimes needing something to let down and blend with their cannabis. Last I heard, the field leader in loose tobaccos was "Clan" and it was held to outsell the made-up cigarettes at some of the smugglers' suppliers in Calais. Not that the old tobacconistas actually needed illegal herb in their cigarettes as some of the old brands would blow the heads off modern smokers.

The most commonly available was "Capstan Full Strength" and only hardened older smokers could actually inhale the smoke from them. Other brands had really dense flavours reminiscent of walnut, chocolate, coffee or prunes and which, intriguingly, sometimes feature in beer tasters' notes today. One brand, "Gold Flake", had only a feeble flavour and was popular with ladies whilst another called "Three Castles" had a unique flavour of its own which some called "Ale-like"(!)

The chances are that smoking will become a popular addiction again in the future, when the manufacturers have discovered how to remove the carcinogens from the tar, have developed a filter which will remove the dangerous sizes of carbon particulates from the smoke at the same time boosting the nicotine levels to give an optimal 'hit' with each draw. It is a tall order but give them another century and see if I am not right!

(Readers might be interested in this link - www.mcgahey.co.uk - Ed.)



The mid-Cheshire hamlet of Warmingham is tucked away amidst lush dairy country in a maze of lanes between Middlewich, Sandbach and Crewe. There's a narrow bridge over the River Wheelock, with an old sandstone church on one side and a pub on the opposite bank. But it isn't the timbered alehouse you might expect, but an impressive high-gabled redbrick inn built in the 19th century by the Earl of Crewe to match other buildings on his estate.

The Bear's Paw is now an independently-run small hotel, with twelve bedrooms, a restaurant and an extensive bar open to the general public. It has sold real ale for many years, but recently has been gaining a growing reputation for beer and was South Cheshire CAMRA's Rural Pub of the Year for 2005. Warmingham is only two miles from either the A534 or A530 south of Middlewich, and is signposted from both, but to avoid getting lost it's probably best to get hold of the relevant OS Landranger map or search for the postcode, CW11 3QN, on the Internet. Bear in mind that it's only open at lunchtimes at weekends.

Outside, there's an impressive floral display and an attractive timbered porch. Going inside, the restaurant area is on the right, and the spacious bar area on the left, arranged in an L-shape around the serving counter. There's a variety of different areas, one with bench-type seating, another with relaxing sofas, and a more spartan section at the rear with a pool table, showing that locals are welcome and it isn't just a haunt of hotel guests and diners. While obviously much altered over the years, it's all very pleasant and comfortable, with an abundance of wood and leaded lights in the windows.

The Bear's Paw is in the current Good Beer Guide, and obviously makes a major effort on the beer front, with an impressive display of pump clips from independent breweries on the wall. The regular house beer is Tetley's Cask Bitter, and there are normally two ever-changing guests alongside, although on our visit one pumpclip was turned around. Nonetheless, the Springhead Surrender 1646, from Newark, was in excellent condition, and good value for the smart surroundings at £2.10 a pint.

While food is served in the bar as well as the restaurant, they don't put menus or place-settings on the bar tables, which helps avoid the feeling of being dominated by dining, but is perhaps a little confusing for the casual caller. There's an extensive menu of snacks, traditional favourites and more ambitious specials, but from our experience everything seemed to be made from fresh ingredients.



Up in the far north-eastern corner of our Branch area, spreading out in the Tame valley lies Mossley, writes Tom Lord, and it is here where you will find our featured pub.

Over the past two years or so the pubs in Mossley have been quietly increasing the range of cask-conditioned beers available in the area. Add to this the existence of two micro breweries, Millstone and Greenfield, and Mossley now has one of the best choice bases in Tameside for cask-conditioned beers.

Playing its part in this resurgence is the **Woodend Tavern**, to be found on the 'bottom' Manchester Road, heading out towards Greenfield but still close to the centre of Mossley.

Geoff and Dorice Byram took over this former working men's club back in December 2005 and have worked hard putting it back on the real ale and food map.

The pub is open plan, consisting of a comfortable lounge and eating area complete with extremely comfortable leather sofas. Outside a large beer garden is ideal for drinking in, particularly in recent weather conditions.

Geoff is dedicated to serving local micro brewery beers, and currently has brews from the 'locals' Millstone and Greenfield, and Shaws in nearby Dukinfield. Leatherbritches from Fenny Bentley in Derbyshire also features from time to time. This is a tremendous line-up and would be hard to beat in any pub.

A good range of value for money meals and bar snacks is available to complement the beer and are served from 12.00 to 8.00 (Mon to Thurs) to 9.00 (Fri & Sat) and to 8.00 (Sun), and the pub opens at 12.00 noon each day.

Mossley railway station is only 5 to 10 minutes walk away and buses go right past the door.

For those walkers or boaters amongst you the pub is only a few minutes away from the Huddersfield Narrow canal.

Coming as I do from a local village dominated by one brewer how I wish the Woodend was up the road from my house. I would make very good use of it. So come on you discerning drinkers, here is a range of beers second to none and a welcoming comfortable pub to drink them in. Go to it !!

Cheshire Inns continued.....

Prices range from snacks below £5 to main meals at around £10 and some of the specials at up to £14.

I'm a lover of that traditional pub staple, the Ploughman's Lunch, and was not disappointed here, getting an enormous helping of three different kinds of cheese together with hot rolls and an ample supply of pickles and salad. Indeed there was so much cheese that some ended up being taken home in a doggy bag. My companion went for roast stuffed peppers with a wild mushroom risotto, accompanied by Lyonnaise potatoes, which was very well-presented, but the combination of cream in the risotto and potatoes perhaps made it a little too rich for its own good. We both rounded off our meal with a generous helping of ice cream, something that many pubs fail to offer in straightforward form.

The Bear's Paw is distinctly different from the typical village pub, but it's somewhere that's making a real effort on the beer front when you might expect nothing more than a solitary Pedigree handpump, and also serves, on the evidence of our visit, some excellent food, and is well worth a visit if in the area or even a special trip out.

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Two Nations

Over the past year or so, we have had an unprecedented amount of wailing and gnashing of teeth about the risks of so-called binge-drinking and the danger posed to the health of the nation by the excessive consumption of alcohol. Now it can't be denied that drinking a bit less would be good for many people in Britain today. But those who are most likely to benefit from all this advice are the least likely to heed it. What we are seeing is those who drink heavily continuing to do so in cheerful defiance of official warnings, while those whose drinking is already at very modest levels are panicked by all the scare stories into cutting down even further, or giving up entirely, and at the same time feeling guilty even about the occasional pint or glass of wine.

In a column last year I alluded to how official propaganda about the dangers of alcohol leads supposedly intelligent and streetwise people into frankly ludicrous over-caution about drinking. If you don't want a glass of wine, fair enough, nobody is forced to have a drink, but don't pretend this is because it will lead you inexorably to an early grave.

It is striking nowadays how at some social gatherings people look askance at a level of alcohol consumption that at others would seem untypically modest. We are becoming two nations marked by our tolerance (or lack of it) for alcohol, and it is less and less common to see the old-fashioned moderate social drinking actually taking place. People either drink nothing (or virtually nothing), or loads.

Enough is Enough

A further issue is that the official advice given by the authorities, that men should normally drink no more than 4 units of alcohol a day, is completely out of line with the everyday experience of large numbers of people. For many beers this is no more than a pint and a half, yet the bloke who just has a couple of pints is widely seen as the epitome of moderation, and to cast him as some kind of problem drinker will seem ridiculous to many. You have to wonder whether the people who put these guidelines together ever manage to descend from their ivory towers long enough to actually visit a pub on a Friday or Saturday night.

Surely it would be marginally more credible if the official advice for men were to say something like:

- 1 You should not normally consume more than 28 units of alcohol in any one week
- 2 You should not normally consume more than 8 units of alcohol in one session
- 3 It is advisable to have at least one alcohol free day each week

This might be slightly more generous than a scientific optimum, but, as can be seen in many other areas of life, strict rules that are perceived as unrealistic are far less effective in moderating behaviour than more lenient ones that are viewed as reasonable and attainable.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.org.uk



Shayne Langlois visits the Lass O'Gowrie...

The Lass O'Gowrie on Charles Street has made big strides to match the quality of their food with their reputation as a great real ale pub. With a concerted effort to boost the menu and attract diners, the Lass has become an option for those looking for interesting food in a traditional pub in addition to being a well-established beer destination.

The Lass website states that their sausages and meats are sourced from local butchers such as Brendan Anderton of Longridge, Edwards of Conwy and Axon's of Didsbury, perhaps warranting the £5.95 price tag for many of the main meals.

On my first visit for a lunchtime meal on a recent weekday, I had a look at the menu and thought the food was quite eclectic and the prices hopefully bringing a large portion.

I chose the the Lass Handmade Big Burger and Chips (£5.95), and was happy to welcome a nicely seared burger resting on a soft bun. The thousand islands-type burger sauce blended well without being sloppy and the salad on the burger included some red and green peppers. The chips were crispy if a little shiny with cooking oil, though happily not soggy.

I also pinched some samples from my dining colleague and was impressed with the French Onion Soup with Wholemeal Bread. Though not topped with Gruyere cheese, the soup was tasty without leaving an overpowering afternoon aftertaste. The thickly sliced bread came with a smart dish of whipped butter and went well with the dark soup.

With hindsight, the soup of the day (a regular feature for £1.95 and listed on a blackboard next to the quiche of the week for £5.25) would have been enough for lunch for my workmate, but she thought she'd top up the meal with an order of garlic bread. For £1.75, the garlic bread, consisting of 5 lovely slices of toasted ciabatta, is a not only a great bargain, but filling solution to not drinking on an empty stomach.

I was also tempted by traditional pub dishes such as Sausage and Mash in rich Red Onion gravy and the 100% Homemade Traditional Steak Pie. For those looking for something a little different, the Huntsman Chicken, at £6.25, is described as 'stuffed with mature Cheddar and topped with barbeque sauce' while the Handmade Beef Lasagne, which comes with salad and garlic bread for £5.95, will satisfy those with an Italian leaning. Also note that the Lasagne has a vegetarian version available, as the pub also makes several dishes for people who prefer a meal without meat.

Their new dishes mark a move to appeal to a more upmarket diner (the nearby BBC perhaps?) while still maintaining the traditional base of hungry pub goers who enjoy a pint with their Fish & Chips, served in a Black Sheep Ale Batter by the way (£6.50).

The lunchtime trade can be busy with BBC workers or university staff looking for a pub lunch. Recent visits have seen plenty of seats available, even on a Friday, while the non-smoking snug offers the option of being able to enjoy your meal and pint away from the smoke when the pub gets crowded whatever time of the day. Table service is available (they even brought my pint over to me!) and the waiter was friendly and knowledgeable.

To Hale and back

Or more precisely to Hale Barns and back. Personally, this evening's social with the Trafford and Hulme branch started at the Victoria in Altrincham, writes *George Elmslie*, an establishment that has recently re-opened in an altogether different guise. In the past real ale may have been served here but in recent times it was a keg only place and had been boarded up for some time. But no more, it has been reborn as a restaurant cum pub.

The new look incorporates a small intimate restaurant but with three real ales on and the staff on the lookout for more, preferably from local independents. Don't let the foodie aspect put you off, this is still a pub where you can drop in and have some sustenance of the liquid variety, speaking of which Jennings Cumberland, Flowers IPA and Old Speckled Hen were all in good condition.

A short bus ride to the edge of our branch area took us to the **Bull's Head** in Hale Barns to join the rest of our gang and the social proper. And what a good turnout it was, with no less than three new, or new to us anyway, members attending. This is a large Robinson's establishment with usually a large selection of their beers on offer, two regulars are Double Hop and Unicorn bitter and also a seasonal, on this occasion Sunny Jim. All scored well although I found the latter a bit sharp for my taste.

After a pleasant couple of hours we went the short distance to **Corbens**, a lively Hydes pub/restaurant. Unfortunately there was no real ale on offer at this particular time so our merry band broke up to catch last orders at places nearer to their homes. A hotel in the Brooklands area had recently been given a makeover and was selling a couple of real ales, so time to investigate.

The term 'real ale desert' is often used in these columns and this could be used to describe the long stretch of Brooklands Road. Until now. A few hundred metres from the ever-excellent **Brook** (at the Brooklands metro stop), going towards Baguley, the large **Belmore Hotel** now sells Lees beers. At last orders on this particular Thursday night the bitter was all that was on offer but was in excellent form, we were assured that Scorcher had been on earlier. The Belmore sits in large grounds and has a spacious car park and plenty of room for alfresco dining and drinking. Inside the bar area has a high ceiling and makes for a pleasant airy atmosphere, a very welcome addition to the Sale area indeed.

Pub Grub continued...

Disappointing, though, has been a lack of real ales on tap at times. With 10 handpumps usually welcoming such breweries such as Beartown, Titanic and Bank Top, I was surprised to find only Charles Wells Bombardier guesting on a Tuesday lunchtime visit. Normally regular beers include Black Sheep Best Bitter, Greene King IPA and Old Speckled Hen. Also note the Lass has a new line of beers called LOG Ales brewed exclusively by Wigan's Rosebridge Brewery. At around six pounds for a meal, the Lass would be more of a weekly treat rather than part of a daily routine. Other options in the area include the Font and Kro2, but the handmade food and traditional pub atmosphere make the Lass O'Gowrie top choice for a filling meal in a Good Beer Guide listed pub.

The Lass O'Gowrie is located at 36 Charles St, 200 meters east of Oxford Road, across from the BBC. Food is served daily, 12:00 - 7:30pm. There is a no smoking room. Vegetarian options are also available. For more details go to www.thelass.co.uk

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 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 Joule, Sale
 Old Plough Hotel, Sale
 Bank at Sale, Sale
 Lowes 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
 Hanging 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
 Pack Horse, Hayfield
 Farmers Arms, Stockport
 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
 Ryecroft, Cheadle Hulme
 John Millington, Cheadle Hulme
 Horse & Farrier, Gatley
 Governor's House, Cheadle H'ime
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This has been a very quiet month locally with not much to report at all. The **Olde Woolpack** (Brinksway) and the **Windsor Castle** (Edgeley) remain up for sale, the latter blighting Castle Street with its shuttered frontage.

Well Done, There!

Some Congratulations are in order to two local publicans, though. First is Joanne Mills of the excellent **Cheshire Line** in Cheadle. Joanne has recently done a sky dive for charity – rather her than me. Anyway it looks as though loads of money will be raised for charity by this brave event.

The **Hesketh Tavern** in Cheadle Hulme has won the Scottish & Newcastle 'North West Best Kept Cellar Award 2006'. The pub has been run since June last year by James Almond, whose family are no strangers to the licensed trade with his father previously running the 'Red Lion' in High Lane for many years and his sister Vicky* running the 'Fletchers Arms' in Denton. The Hesketh was impressively refurbished last August and is now a food oriented pub with up to three cask beers on.

Congratulations to both pubs.

A Tale of Two Pubs

Recent press reports about one former and one future pub neatly sums up a fundamental problem with the local pub scene. As a town, Stockport is probably not 'over-pubbed' (some might disagree) but a problem we do have is that quite a lot of the pubs are, for historic reasons, in the wrong place.

Like many industrial towns, Stockport's pubs opened where the Victorian population lived and worked. Some of these areas were cleared in the 50s and 60s, but in others the pub stock survived almost intact – Edgeley and Hillgate being notable examples. With changing social trends the shakeout had to come. Edgeley has seen the closure of its two biggest pubs (**Blue Bell** and **Windsor Castle**) while Hillgate has seen the closure of the **Black Lion**, **Big Lamp**, **Golden Lion**, **Rams Head** and **Royal Mortar**. The latest to formally pass to non-pub use is the Golden Lion, being converted into flats, and the subject of the aforementioned press report.



Work underway at the former Golden Lion

Meanwhile, café bars spring up apace in the suburbs, notably in Hazel Grove (not notably under-pubbed in any event) and Heaton Moor. The latest proposal is likely to cause controversy – the proposed conversion of the Savoy Cinema into a bar, by the Barracuda Group. Just watch those sparks fly!



FOR what is normally a quieter month, I have quite a bit of news from round and about. I also managed to pay a visit to some of my favourite pubs on the Manchester/Salford cusp. News first....

Openings and Closures

The biggest news, I suppose is the eclipse of one, and possibly two, former Northern Quarter stalwarts. The biggest casualty has been the **Beer House** on Angel Street, which closed shortly after the last issue of *Opening Times* went to press. Paul, who I understand now has a tattoo shop in Kirby, and Sue have left the trade and the pub is closed and, rumour has it, awaiting the redevelopment of the site into flats. For many years the pub was something of a real ale icon with monthly beer festivals attracting enthusiasts and 'tickers' from around the country. It has struggled for some time really, with several false dawns but never fulfilling its promise. Nevertheless it will be sorely missed.



Closed and forlorn – the Beer House

Also apparently going off the boil is the **Queens Arms** on Honey Street, Red Bank. We reported in the July issue that improvements were in the pipeline here but no sooner had those words appeared than licensee Michelle Nicholson left and the pub seems to have taken a different direction with at times little or no availability of real ale, I am told. I plan to visit before my next column to find out just what the position is – it would be a great shame to lose this one as well.

Also closed, but this time purely temporarily, is **Galvins** on Deansgate. This is undergoing a major refurbishment, which may involve the creation of dining facilities. I'm confident real ale will feature when it reopens and will let you know when it does. Across the road the **Pig & Porcupine** is also closed and awaiting both a tenant and a refurbishment by Punch Taverns.

But as one door closes another one opens, so they say. News reaches me of a brand new bar – in the unlikely surroundings of the Arndale Centre Food Market (via the new entrance off High Street). This is to be run by John Wood, the owner of the Paradise Brewery (currently brewing at 3 Rivers). His original plan was to run a stall selling bottled beers from both Paradise and other micro brewers, much along the lines of the stalls he runs at local farmers markets. However he discovered that his stall, and indeed the entire food hall, has a full on license – and so the **Paradise Brewery Bar** was born. The premises are minute (John thinks he may win the much fought over title for the

smallest licensed premises in the country, currently held by a former signal box in Cleethorpes, but I digress). However there is other seating available in the food hall itself. Not only will the bar sell bottled beers from Paradise and other micro brewers (including 3 Rivers, of course) but there will also be three handpumps selling cask beers, one of which will be a lager.

There's no room for chiller cabinets and the beer will have to be drunk out of plastic glasses, so I'm not altogether sure how it will all work. I hope it does, though and I'm certainly looking forward to dropping by on or after the opening day, which is Thursday 7 September. The opening hours will be 11-6, with 'late night opening' to 8.00pm on Thursdays.

The Salford Fringe

I know it's not really part of the City, but I've always regarded the Chapel Street corridor in Salford as part of the Manchester drinking scene (*Oh God, the letters! Ed*) and although it includes some of my favourite pubs, I've hardly been out there at all recently. Time to put that right I thought.

First off, and furthest out, is the ever-reliable **Crescent** on the Crescent. Idy and Sal have been running the place for years now and it's too easy to take the place for granted and forget what a terrific pub it is. Roosters Special and Bazens' Black Pig Mild are the regulars along with ever changing guest beers, real cider, foreign beer and good food as well.

Across the road is the **Adelphi**, signed as Burtonwood, owned by Banks's and former home to Bridgewater Brewery. It's up for let and the sign says 'business as usual' – sadly this does not extend to the provision of real ale.

Further in there's a new real ale outlet that really does deserve support. This is the **New Oxford** on Bexley Square. Andrew Shepherd is the man at the helm and while he has been there for 18 months, it's only since the spring that the pub, done out in café bar style, has developed a beery interest. Turning a former, and long-standing, keg-only bar into a multi-beer free house (and the pub is totally free from tie, all you potential suppliers out there) was never going to be easy and Andrew tells me that while the beer is selling well, there is a problem getting people in.



The New Oxford – well worth a visit

There are four handpumps, one for customer requests, and the others often feature beers from one brewery at a time – the first two weeks in September will be Northern Brewing and 3 Rivers. The beer is all matured for two weeks before going on, too. The New Oxford is open all day everyday so get there soon. It makes a useful half-way house between the Crescent and that other stalwart, the **Kings Arms** on Bloom Street. Here you will find a warm welcome and great beer, from micros and regionals – the pub is a regular Bazens' outlet. One of my long-time favourites

And Finally...

Busby's Real Ale Bar at the airport now appears not to sell real ale. The number of handpumps has been reduced to one which has not been working on my last three visits. How can they call themselves a real ale bar?

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**From: Mrs Madeleine Hennessy, Director of Finance,
Independent Options:**

Thank you and the Stockport Beer & Cider CAMRA Festival committee for nominating Independent Options to be the Festival Charity for 2006.

All the volunteers enjoyed taking part in the event and meeting lots of people which enabled us to raise our profile in the area too. Some of our service users also came to the Festival for the first time and enjoyed this new experience.

Our stall raised just over £2,500 for Independent Options and the funds raised will be used to buy additional items to improve the service we offer to people and also to continue to run our Right Start Children and Family Centre, which is free to access.

We are delighted with this and thank you for your support.

(This letter was sent to Festival Organiser Jim Flynn and we are happy to reproduce it here – Ed)

From Michael Ginley, Woodheys, Sale:

Curmudgeon somewhat understates the situation in Eire after their smoking ban of 2004. There have probably been rather more than the 400 pub closures he mentions whilst of those that remain, many are now part-time operations opening only for limited periods in the evening and, in rural areas, into the early hours of the morning. Some bars which are still listed as such are really just off-licenses these days whilst there has been an explosion in the number of shebeens – illegal drinking dens.

Those pubs which were already operating a food service have drifted a lot closer to being licensed restaurants over the last two years. In some areas these places swarm with unruly kids, especially at lunch times.

What remains a bit unclear is the extent to which the smoking ban is being ignored. It certainly is in all the shebeens and especially in rural areas, the ashtrays come out at the start of every lock-in. Village pubs also have informal arrangements for smokers which are not strictly in accordance with the ban on smoking in "enclosed spaces". Sometimes, part-covered areas out the back are referred to as "the beer garden" when the only plant to be seen might be one shrivelled succulent, sharing its soil with dozens of fag ends.

There has been an impact on the tourist trade, officially described as "slight" the last I heard but admitted in some areas to have been "catastrophic". Killarney, rural Galway and east Donegal licensees are said to be struggling most.

Amusingly in a way, the moment the Irish smoking ban went in, word started turning up in the technical press of the positive benefits of smoking, notwithstanding the now proven dangers. Amongst others, a very light smoking habit is now known to be enough to keep one serious respiratory complaint at bay whilst work is going on to try to establish the extent to which smoking counteracts alcohol-induced liver disease.

All this is known to our MPs and the process whereby the UK might be saddled with an Eire-style smoking ban is not yet complete. That is, we might yet get a workable compromise here.

Hesket Newmarket Brewery and pub visit

Heather Airle heads for the hills...

I FIRST heard about Hesket Newmarket Brewery when I sampled a pint of Doris's 90th Birthday Ale some years ago. I was having a lunch break after an arduous site visit to a habitat improvement scheme. Obviously, I chose my venue from the Good Beer Guide, so knew I would have something reasonable to drink, but Doris's was something special. So special, I vowed to visit the source some day.

We set off in a leisurely fashion on Friday morning, knowing the journey would not be easy, but savouring the anticipation of joys to come. A slow trawl up the M6 took us as far as the Bay Horse at Dolphinholme for lunch. This Good Beer Guide entry presents as a restaurant in a pub setting. A welcoming atmosphere, a choice of three real ales plus an impressive specials menu led to a very pleasant interlude.



Smiling smugly as we passed queues for the South Lakes turn off, we arrived in Hesket at 40/c, immediately locating The Old Crown. A couple of false turns later, we had located the campsite, erected the tents and were well on our way to our first pint. A quick check of the facilities revealed a treasure – we stared open-mouthed at the visitors centre-cum-washroom, complete with children's games and sun-loungers!

The Crown closes during the afternoon, so we elected to walk the scenic route by the river to Caldbeck, where the OS plan marked a public house. Sure enough, a pretty if muddy walk took us to The Oddfellow, a Jennings house.



Although not listed in the Good Beer Guide, it was friendly and served up a good pint of Golden Glow, a seasonal ale of a refreshing nature. Then a shorter walk returned us to the Crown along the road. Imagine our surprise, having left a deserted campsite, to find the pub packed! So busy, it seemed we would have to have a liquid dinner. Luckily the landlord took pity on us poor campers and squeezed us in when a pre-booked party rang to say they would be late. This

gave us the confidence to try out the whole range, from Great Cockup Porter at 3% to Old Carrock Strong Ale at 6%. Luckily 4 out of the 8 available were below 4%, so we were still able to find our way back to the tent! The following day turned out lovely, after a slow start the sun shone brightly and off we headed up High Pike. Mostly a well defined footpath, it winds its way round Carrock Crag up to an OS trig. point, complete with slate bench for the weary to enjoy the views over Skiddaw with their lunch. An easy descent took us straight to the Oddfellows once more, for a well timed rest from the rain that had started to chase us. A couple of pints later the sun came out again and we set off back to Hesket via the back road for some more pleasant views across the valley.



This time we were prepared, having booked our table in advance, so had a leisurely pint of Helvellyn before eating. Having been in the new extension the previous night, we were promoted to the old dining area, and much more atmospheric it was, although some of the art work was rather loud! The food, however, was superb, although we were glad to be in early as a lot of the standards were selling out. The kitchen hadn't really caught up with the increased capacity the extension provided and were struggling with the numbers. Still, nothing wrong with the quality, my Lamb Henry was falling off the bone, and the sauce for the chicken was pronounced excellent.

As for the beer, nothing wrong with the quality, just a shame that three were drunk dry and the anticipated replacements hadn't settled in time. Our host, Lou Hogg, was the perfect landlord on discovering our interest, and took us to visit the cellar. It is tiny, and it is to his credit that it was not only spotless, but that he managed to keep such a good selection on as long as he had.

Definitely to be recommended, there is even a B&B next door for the less hardy amongst you!

July Pub of the Month Award



The Pub of the Month Award for July and the "Mild Challenge, Mild Award for a Stockport Pub" were presented to Carol at the Gothic, Gatley by Mark McConachie

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High Peak

PUB NEWS

WITH FRANK WOOD

The Globe in Glossop are building up sales of their own beers at the pub with three handpumps recently now dedicated to their own beers. Both the Globe, Shaws and Howard Town are producing a special festival beer for the Glossop Beer Festival which is being held on 1st - 3rd September at Glossop Labour Club, coinciding with the town's Victorian Weekend. So far, the only one named is Shaws, whose beer will be called Devils Elbow, after the acute bend on the B6105 road out of Glossop towards the Woodhead Pass.

Hydes beers continue to appear at the bar at Glossop Conservative Club, usually the seasonal ale or Jekyll's Gold, though Shaws beers are still in evidence a couple of nights a week.

The Star in Glossop has managed to get Howard Town beers on regularly now that Punch Taverns have extended to a further wholesaler.

Hyde seems to be something of a beer festival Mecca at the moment. The Sportsman will be holding a mini beer festival from Friday 29 September through to Sunday 1 October. The opening hours are 6pm to close on the Friday, 11am to close on the Saturday and noon until stocks run out (!) on the Sunday. There will be A 10% discount for card carrying CAMRA members; a "Be A Beer Buff" Festival Quiz; a raffle with beer prizes and a 'massive hop pot supper' each evening.

Of course beer festivals and the like now seem well-established at the Cheshire Ring. The next date for your diaries is the Halloween weekend as this will see the next major in-house beer festival held at the pub. These events are always well worth a visit or two, and the combination of brand new beers from obscure micros plus more familiar favourites sees 'tickers' and regular drinkers rubbing shoulders and enjoying the atmosphere.

On Sunday 13 August, the pub staged a charity fun day for Christies Hospital with special food, music, fancy dress (the League of Gentlemen's Papa Lazarou being particularly scary) and a great range of beers. Stand-out brews included Old Growler and Umbel Magna from Nethergate and the new XXX Ginger Bear from pub owner's Beartown. This is an 'extra ginger' ginger beer and is exclusive to the pub (tickers note) and makes for a very tasty drop - very much along the lines of the award-winning ginger Marble. Some photos of the festivities follow...





A few weeks ago I called in the **Cock** in Whaley Bridge (well kept Robinson's Unicorn and Hatters), one of the village's Mild Challenge participants, to find a game of table tennis in progress. The second pool table is out of use and table tennis is up and running and proving popular. But then the Cock is a games orientated pub with teams for darts, dominoes and pool, and there is also the rarely found bar/table skittles.

Gemma Turner and Peter Ryan have taken the **Navigation** in Whaley Bridge on a lease from Punch. The pub has been closed for a clean up, a lick of paint and new furniture, but more significantly, a new floor and a kitchen refurbishment. The latter highlights the aim to give food a high profile. There was still some kitchen work to be done at the end of July, but by the time you read this the food operation will be in place. On the counter was Black Sheep Bitter which will be a regular, whilst there will be a changing guest. Wadworth's 6X has been available and will be followed by Old Speckled Hen. The Black Sheep Bitter has been on good form.

After taking over the **Shepherds** in Whaley Bridge, John Oliver has maintained the beer policy of his predecessor. Marston's Bitter and Pedigree are accompanied by two beers from the W&D. list. These are often beers breweries in from the W&D. group, but can be beers from elsewhere. In early July a firkin of Hop Back Summer Lightning sold out in a session, as did Jennings Fish King. Later in the month during the heat wave a re-run of Summer Lightning was much appreciated one hot afternoon.

Out at Fernilee the **Shady Oak** continues with up to five beers on the bar. A visit in early July found very good pint of Jennings Bitter, just as when you get it at its best in Cockermouth or Keswick. At the **Jodrell Arms** there are still two real ales to be had, but Webster's Green Label has been replaced by Theakston's Mild. This might itself change, but in the meantime this can count as a real mild gain.

Across at the **Ladybower Inn** on the A57 close to the Ladybower Reservoir, a lunchtime call found the pub busy with several folk dining. The beer range was certainly attractive, with an emphasis on more or less local microbreweries. Acorn Barnsley Bitter 3.8% was tried, a malty bitter brew, and certainly enjoyable. With miles yet to walk Bradfield Farmers' Blonde 4% and Abbeydale Brimstone went untried. It is good to see a free house supporting local breweries and presenting visitors with local produce.

Whilst there are honourable exceptions, many pubs in tourist areas seem happy to charge visitors high prices for beer. In some areas there is no close season these days, as tourism has become a year round business. In a recent visit to the Lake District I called in the Good Beer Guide listed Manor Arms in Broughton in Furness. Broughton lies outside the tourist heart of the Lake District. At the Manor Hawkshead Bitter (3.7%) cost £1.80. Less than an hour later a few miles up the road in the tourist honey pot of Coniston, I paid £2.40 for the same beer in the Sun, also Good Beer Guide listed. I know where my first port of call will be when I am next in south Cumbria.



Stuffed Mushrooms with Girardin

This is tasty snack that can be eaten chilled as a summer snack, or it can also be warmed up to make an appetising starter.



Girardin Oude Gueze – said to be the best of its kind

Ingredients (for four people)

4 field mushrooms
2 beef tomatoes
½ lb feta cheese
1 large red onion
1 small bunch of spinach or rocket leaves
2 cloves of garlic
½ tsp oregano (dried)
Black pepper and salt to taste
¼ - ½ pint Girardin or other Oude gueuze

Method

Place the mushrooms in a large baking tray or casserole dish and soak with a teaspoon of gueuze per mushroom.

Dice the tomatoes, or preferably make a concasse. Peel and finely chop the onion, crumble the feta and add it to the mixing bowl. Crush the garlic and together with the chopped spinach or rocket (some sprigs can be saved for decoration) and mix in with the seasoning.

Drain the mushrooms of the excess beer and fill the upturned base with the feta mixture. Cook in a medium oven, 220F, or medium grill for 10-20 minutes. Serve immediately, or chill if preferred.

Tomato Concasse

In a large pan boil enough water to cover the tomatoes; simmer for 5-10 minutes, then drain and run under cold water. Peel off the skin and de-core, finely chop, retaining as much juice as possible.

This dish can be served with the remaining gueuze.

Where to get your Gueuze

Gueuze is a beer style unique to Belgium, and comes in traditional and not so traditional forms. 'Oude Gueuze' are the words to look for on the label. Some local freehouses, notably Bar Fringe and the Railway (Stockport) sell it. Carringtons in Chorlton and Didsbury stock some but your best bet by far is the Belgian Belly in Chorlton.

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No sooner do we report that one local micro has risen from the ashes, than another burns down. The unlucky brewery is the Thomas McGuinness brewery in Rochdale. This is a company whose activities are seldom reported in these pages – an omission that was to be put right with a visit on Friday 4 August.

Sadly, late in the day came news that there has been a serious fire affecting both the brewery and the pub at which it is based, the Cask & Feather on Drake Street. Hopefully repair work is now well underway. Once the brewery is up and running again OT plans to visit and bring you a review.



Closed and boarded – the Cask & Feather

“I’m 2 sweet 4 bitter”

Taking lessons from the wine industry, CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, and 14 real ale breweries, including local family brewer Robinson's, launched a new initiative called 'Cyclops' at the Great British Beer Festival. Cyclops aims to demystify real ale after research showed that one in three people would try more real ale if its characteristics were made easier to understand in pubs.

Declining beer sales in the UK have brought beer consumers and brewers together to revitalise the market for real ale, Britain's national pub drink. Following the success of the wine industry to make wine more accessible to all consumers through simple tasting notes, Cyclops will use common language to explain what different real ales should look, smell and taste like. Sweetness and bitterness are the two dominant taste qualities of real ale and Cyclops uses a scale of 1 to 5 for each to enable drinkers to work out how sweet and bitter they like their beers.

The new scheme was the brainchild of David Bremner, Head of Marketing at Everards Brewery in Leicester. Everards pilot scheme aimed to promote its beers to new consumers who may never have tried real ale before or who had only tried a few pints in the past.

By using attractive imagery and simplified language, real ales are described on promotional material such as beer mats, posters, tasting cards and pump-clip crowners to inform consumers of what they are buying. The information will also be placed on the back of beer handpulls to keep pub staff informed of what the real ale is like.

Tony Jerome, CAMRA's Senior Marketing Manager said, "Real ale is an incredibly complex drink with an enormous range of styles and tastes. Cyclops will demystify real ale so drinkers will know what a beer will look, smell and taste like before they part with their cash at the bar."

Facer's In Flint

Regular readers will remember Dave Facer and his eponymous brewery that shared premises and plant with Bazens' in Salford. Dave upped sticks and moved to Wales last year but his beers still continue to appear in the local free trade. We thought it was about time we caught up with him.

All is going very well with Facer's Flintshire Brewery (Bragdy Sir y Fflint in Welsh), established in a unit on an industrial estate in Flint. The equipment was built by Johnson Brewing and Engineering, who also built much of the Salford Brewery Syndicate kit. The first brew in Flint was on Friday February – a special called AB bitter by way of thanks to Alan Banks, Treasurer of the local (Vale of Clwyd) CAMRA branch – Alan spent an enormous amount of time helping Dave to install the equipment at the new brewery.

Apart from a couple of one-offs - the AB and one recent brew of Blue Lagoon (the 3.9% 'cask-conditioned lager' that he also brewed last year), Dave has stopped producing specials; the demand for his regular products means that he just can't fit them in!

The regular beers now include two new brews (Clwyd Gold and Sunny Bitter) specially for the Welsh market, where there is a preference for more ruby-coloured beers with malty/biscuity palates, rather than the straw-coloured hoppy fare generally preferred in NW England. The full range is now:

Clwyd Gold (3.5%) – Brewed to a recipe specially developed with the Welsh drinker in mind, Clwyd Gold is a bitter with an 'old-fashioned' ruby/bronze colour and a smooth full malt/biscuity palate balanced nicely by the mid-range bitterness.

Northern County (3.8%) is a light, easy to drink session beer with subtle maltyness, a hint of sweetness and a very satisfying citrus/fruit hop aroma and palate.

Sunny Bitter (4.2%) is an amber-coloured mid-range abv beer with a delightful blend of satisfying malt and hop characteristics.

Splendid Ale (previously Crabtree) (4.3%) Splendid Ale is golden yellow, with a rich and smooth full fruity palate including tangy orange zest, cherry and elderflower notes, good mouthfeel, and a mellow dry aftertaste. The nose is delightfully hoppy and tempting.

DHB (Dave's Hoppy Beer) (4.3%) is a dry hopped version of Splendid. The 'Splendid' palate is subsumed beneath the dry hop aroma and palate from the Styrian Goldings added to the cask. Ideal for those who like their beers really hoppy!

Landslide is a 4.9% beer, golden in colour with a gentle malt introduction, the bitterness coming through later enhanced by additional notes including resinous esters, full lemon and orange fruitiness with a hint of cherry and strong mouth-feel.

About two thirds of production now stays in Wales with the other third going over to Greater Manchester, Cheshire etc. Only a small amount now goes out via wholesalers. The Crown Inn, Stockport has a hand pump serving one of Facer's beers all the time and The Smithfield, Kings Arms, Marble Beer House, Marble Arch, are frequent stockists.

Other News

Only room for a very quick canter round some of the local micros this month. Hopefully a bumper round-up next time. Look out for Hopalong Cascadey (4%), the latest film-themed beer from **Bazens'** featuring Cascade hops this time. Cascade and Pacific Hallertau also feature in the new 4.6% Millwright from **Millstone**. Make a trip to Hyde's Cheshire Ring to catch the XXX Ginger Bear from **Beartown**, a heavily gingered brew in the Ginger Marble mould. Also out is Willamette PA from Shaws, another pale and hoppy brew.



Pomona Awards by Gillian Williams

Each year CAMRA invites nominations from members or branches for the Pomona Award – for the person, place or thing which has done the most for cider & perry in the last twelve months or for their ongoing work in the field. The nominations are considered and a decision taken as to whether any of them merit the prize. This year saw such a bumper crop of aspiring notables that I thought I'd share them with you as it might inspire you to put someone or something forward for consideration next year.

We received seven nominations for the Award this year. They were made by individual CAMRA members and by Branches – thanks to everyone who submitted them. Without you there would be no competition.

CAMRA's Newcastle Beer Festival was nominated for 25 years of supporting real cider & perry in one of Britain's 'cider wildernesses'. In the last few years the range has been steadily expanded and bears favourable comparison with that available at virtually any CAMRA Festival in the country.

Another nominee was the National Cider & Perry Collection at the English Farm Cider Centre, Middle Farm, Firle. Rod Marsh and his wife offer the widest selection of British ciders & perries available to the public. Their wonderful establishment allows you to browse and sample what is on offer before choosing anything from a pint to a 5 gallon polycask.

J D Wetherspoons was nominated for their commitment to cider and perry since it was introduced in the summer of 2005. They have brought cider & perry to a new audience by offering a range of varying range of products.

Jon Hallam & Merrylegs are two small distributors who supply real ciders & perries nationwide and both offer a range which would not otherwise be available to pubs, beer festivals and the like. They were nominated jointly for their sterling work. The cider and perry sold via Merrylegs and Jon Hallam plays a large part in encouraging producers to continue making it.

Dave Matthews the outgoing Chairman of the Welsh Perry & Cider Society and a previous editor of CAMRA's Good Cider Guide (2000). The Welsh Perry & Cider Society won the Pomona award in 2003 but this time round Dave was nominated in his own right. His perry is the current National Perry champion and he recently established the Welsh Perry & Cider Championships at The Clytha Arms CAMRA's Reading Beer and Cider Festival 2006 was presented for consideration for their tremendous range of well presented ciders and perries which was sourced from all over the country. This year's Reading festival sold almost twice as much cider and perry as it did in 2005 - which kept the knowledgeable staff very busy indeed!

Full consideration was given to each entry and the winners will be announced by CAMRA in October 2006. Check out <http://www.camra.org.uk> for more details and to see if you agree with the decision.

(The 7th nomination was Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA & Opening Times for our Cider Circuit but we were too modest to mention it! – full details of this year's Cider Circuit next time- Ed)



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*

Thursday 14th – Branch Meeting: Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heavily. Starts 8.00pm.

Wednesday 20th - Presentation of Beer of the Festival Award to Marble Brewery. Meet Marble Arch, Rochdale Rd from 7.30pm.

Friday 22nd – Hazel Grove South Stagger: meet 7.30pm Rising Sun; 8.30 Grapes.

Thursday 28th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Legh Arms, Ashton Old Rd, Openshaw (catch bus 219 or 220 from Piccadilly. Short walk from Ashburys station)

Monday 2nd October – First meeting to organise 2007 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. Armoury, Greek St, Stockport. Starts 8.15pm

Tuesday 3rd – Young members social and beer tasting: Lass O'Gowrie, Charles St, Manchester. Booking essential with Shayne Langlois 0781245 9360

The **High Peak & North East Cheshire** Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple, Tameside and Derbyshire from Glossop to Buxton. *Branch Contact – Tom Lord 0161 427 7099*

Monday 4th - Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Mottram Road Hyde. Starts 8.30pm

Saturday 30th – Branch Social in Mossley. Meet at the Britannia 3.30pm.

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 7th – Branch Meeting: Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

Thursday 21st – Stockport Social: meet Railway, Avenue St, Portwood 8.00pm

Advance Notice: Thursday 5th October Branch AGM

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

Monday 18th – Campaigning Meeting: Davenport, Marton.starts 8.00pm

It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale



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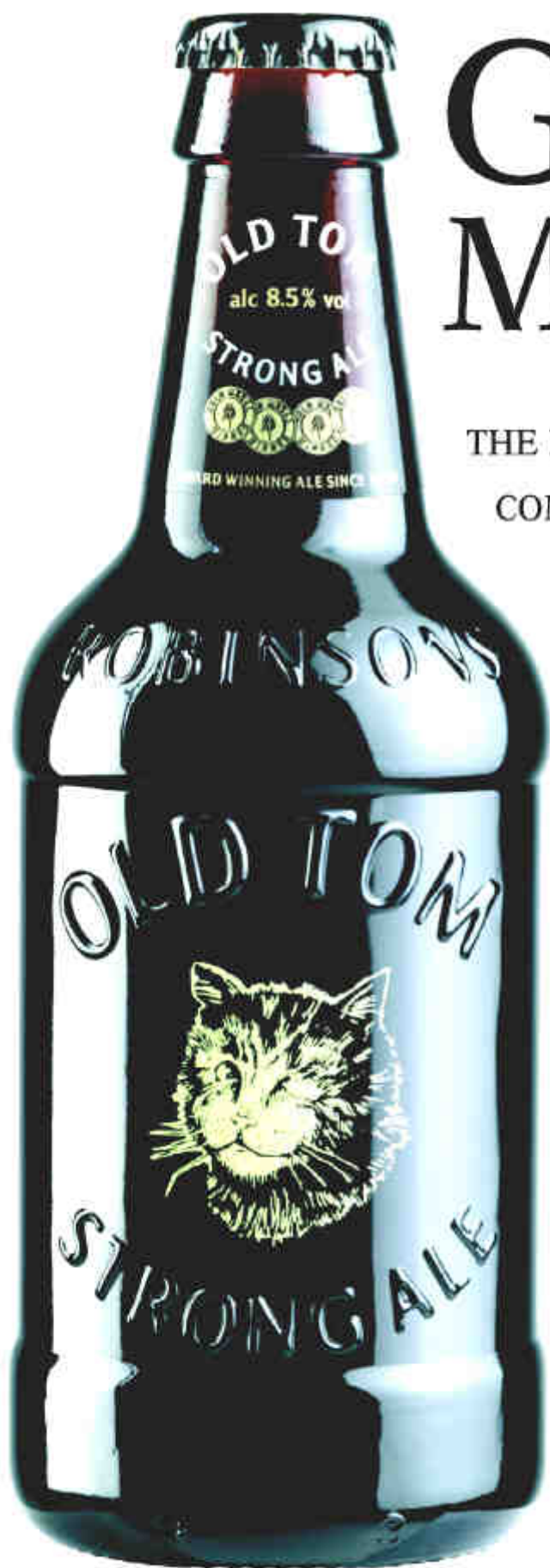
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Mild Challenge Winners



Our photo shows those lucky winners of this year's Mild Challenge enjoying their trip to Robinsons and Robbies' Head Brewer Chris Hellin. A very enjoyable and informative tour was followed by informal questions and answers plus a small buffet. Our thanks to Chris, Lea and her team and all at Robinson's for a very enjoyable night.



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