

TIMES

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THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

NUMBER 268

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

New Hours – One Year On

Last month saw the first anniversary of the Government's licensing reform, the introduction of so-called 'all day drinking'. Despite the hysteria that accompanied these changes, they have proved to be a very modest revolution indeed.

The new licensing laws, allowing pubs to stay open later came into force at 12.01am on 24 November 2005. In the run up to these changes, hysterical press coverage gave the impression the chaos would ensue. Just about everyone with any sort of opinion jumped on the bandwagon – opposition politicians, press commentators, health professionals, the judiciary and the police all came out in opposition. The aim appeared to be to build up such a head of steam that the Government would have to back down.

Luckily it stood its ground in the teeth of all this nonsense and it is now very clear that it was right to do so.

No local pubs are open 24 hours. Most have simply tacked on and hour or two in the evening, particularly at weekends. Nothing has changed for the worse. Manchester police have said they had seen no real change in levels of disorder since the introduction of extended hours

As a result of staying open later, some drinkers just go out later in the evening. Even with the recent hot summer, predictions of riots and brawling drunks in the streets proved unfounded.

We may still be a long way for the European café society culture but the complete absence of the predicted trouble is a tribute to well-run pubs and the people who use them everywhere.

Robbies Revamp Seasonals



Former Oldham brewers Wilf Burgess and John Barron pull the first pint of the relaunched Oldham Bitter

Robinson's have now launched Oldham Bitter into the trade and it is available to all of their pubs. A major revamp of the seasonal range is also planned for 2007. See *Brewery News* on page 5.

The Stout, Porter & Old Ale Trail




See page 9

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NATIONAL

2007



Winter

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Pub OF THE Month AWARD




The Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for December 2006 is the Davenport Arms in Woodford.

Better known to many as the Thief's Neck, the Davenport Arms externally has the aspect of an old fashioned Cheshire farmhouse, built of mellow red brick and surrounded by rambling outbuildings. The exterior features impressive floral displays in Spring and Summer.

Inside the pub has kept its small cosy rooms. On the left is a plain but well-used tap room and on the right a comfortable, no-smoking snug with a welcome open fire in the winter months. To the rear is the busy lounge/bar area, well used by the pub's many regular customers.

The atmosphere is firmly traditional, with no piped music, apart perhaps from the radio being played at low volume, no pool table and blazing real fires in the winter.

At the rear, adjoining the local cricket pitch and well away from the main road, is one of Stockport's best pub gardens, an ideal spot for families. The forecourt offers an alternative outdoor drinking area, and both these facilities are well used in the summer.

Robinson's bought the Davenport Arms in the 1920s and since then it has been run by four generations of the Hallworth family, a record of continuity which is unique in the Stockport area.

The quality of the real ales is such that the pub has now clocked up an admirable 20 consecutive years in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide, as well as winning local and regional Pub of the Year titles in the past.

It is this continuity of excellence, ably maintained by current licensee Yvonne Hallworth that has earned the Davenport Arms this further Pub of the Month award.

The presentation will take place on Thursday 21 December, making the celebrations an ideal run up to Christmas. In fact it will be something of a double celebration as Yvonne will also be presented with a certificate marking those 20 years in the Good Beer Guide.

Join us as we celebrate the continued success of one of the jewels in Stockport's pub crown – and what better way to finish the night off than with a toast to Yvonne and her pub with a glass of Old Tom, always a feature on the Thief's Neck bar at this time of year. **JC**

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OT – COMMENT...

"Hospitals on the Streets" was the memorably hysterical headline in the *Daily Express* in the run up to last year's licensing reform. As is now perfectly clear, it was all so much hoey.

As I predicted in an editorial in the November 2005 issue of *Opening Times*, an awful lot of people have egg on their faces. Their silence compared to the noise they were making 12 months ago says it all.

Having said that, the problems of late night drunkenness in many town and city centres continues. This problem is not helped by media and government obsessions with 'binge drinking' based on a definition that does not connect with the day to day reality of many pub goers. On the government's favoured definition, drink three and half pints of, say, Guinness, in a 24 hour period and you are a binge drinker. We all know what is meant by binge drinking and it's not this.

While all this hand wringing is going on, no-one seems to have addressed other causes of the problem – and ones that really do separate the UK from the rest of Europe. This country is almost unique in the development of the 'high street' – rows of barn-like, difficult to regulate, vertical drinking shops. Add in another development unique here – a drinks industry that has developed and promoted alcopops, ready mixed spirit drinks and shots – and the root causes of the problem become much more apparent. Sadly it seems much easier to stigmatise many innocent pubgoers rather than tackle the vested interests of the drinks industry, which is where the finger of blame should be more correctly pointed.

OT – INFORMATION

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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
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The Blights Arms

Last month's *Opening Times* reported on the blight caused to various localities by closed pubs with steel shutters on the windows. The editor put the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of the pub companies. It is certainly true that pub companies seem less keen than independent brewers to keep pubs ticking over with a temporary licensee, and they have often damaged the trade of their own pubs through half-baked changes of format and lack of consistency.

But the real problem goes far deeper than that. In recent years, the amount of trade enjoyed by pubs in general, and particularly community locals, has substantially declined, so it is hardly surprising that so many have closed or are struggling to find new tenants. If you visit ordinary pubs early in the week you will often find them worryingly quiet, even deserted.

The government and media do not help, of course, with so many messages that deter people from going to pubs, painting them as scenes of rowdiness and violence, and frankly ludicrous health warnings about alcohol. It is easy to say that level-headed folks will ignore all this nonsense, and many do, but nevertheless it has a steady drip-drip effect. Pubs also get into a vicious circle of decline, where people are put off going because they are so often empty, and the lack of trade means a lack of funds for refurbishment, making them ever more dingy. Next year's smoking ban will make matters even worse.

If we are to secure the long-term future of our traditional pubs, we must look at the underlying factors behind their decline and be prepared to do something about it, rather than just blaming the operators. It is pretty obvious that if pubs in general were thriving, there wouldn't be so many boarded up.

Is Beer Bad For You?

In response to concerns about rising levels of alcohol-related violence and health problems, the government are reported to be going to make drinks manufacturers put health warnings on their products in the same way as tobacco.

However, there is a crucial difference from tobacco. Smoking is harmful to some extent at any level of consumption, whereas alcohol is only harmful if taken to excess, and indeed there is plenty of evidence that moderate consumption can be beneficial to health. And does anyone genuinely imagine that heavy drinking won't damage your health in the long term?

These warnings are also likely to include setting ludicrous and unrealistic daily consumption guidelines. Apparently men are only supposed to consume 3 to 4 units of alcohol a day. So is anyone who drinks a couple of pints of Robinson's Unicorn, which together contain a shocking 4.8 units, a problem drinker? And, when there is so much hand-wringing about obesity and related medical conditions, why don't we have health warnings on all food. "Eating to excess is harmful to health!"

Health warnings on alcoholic drinks are a pointless sop to political correctness that will achieve nothing apart from perhaps deterring responsible but gullible people from even the moderate drinking that might benefit their health.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.org.uk



Brewery NEWS...

Family Favourites

Stockport family brewer Robinson's has now launched Oldham Bitter into its estate and the free trade. *Opening Times* was able to attend a pre-launch tasting and we were very impressed with both the beer and the amount of research and effort that has gone into trying to replicate the original OB product. Robinson's are now able to offer their licensees a choice of 10 cask beers – impressive by any standards.

The current seasonal is Robin Bitter (4.5% ABV) one of the most popular of their seasonals. Enjoy it while you can though as it won't be back next year. This is because the seasonal range is being revamped with some very interesting beers indeed. The programme is: January – no seasonal; February-April – Dark Horse (4.3%), a traditional dark malt stout; May – no seasonal; June-August – Dizzy Blonde (3.8%), a summer ale brewed using American Cascade and Amarillo hops; September-November – Flash Harry (4.1%), rich red premium bitter brewed using Liberty and Styrian hops; December – Mr Scrooge (4.4%), a rich dark ale with a full-bodied roast malt character. These sound excellent beers indeed – looks like we are in for a treat next year.

Next month we hope to bring you details of the seasonal ranges from the other family brewers. In the meantime look out for Hydes Stormtrooper (5%) and Yule Be Back (4.6%), Lees Plum Pudding (4.8%) and, if you are very lucky, Holt's Sixex (6%). It also looks as though Hydes will be making their excellent XXXX (6.8%) available for the Stout, Porter & Old Ale Trail.

Micro Magic

Not much room for micro brewery news this month.

3 Rivers - bottled sales are going through the roof with Old Disreputable, Manchester IPA and Yummy Figgy Pudding. The latter is also available on draught and is a fine, rich, dark and spicy beer. Membership of the brewery club is almost at capacity – anyone wanting to join is advised to do so as soon as possible.

Bazens' – the beer to really look out for is Knoll Street Porter (5.2%) - a prize winner at last year's National Winter Ales Festival. Ashley's Ashes (4.2%) is a light beer with a hint of ginger and has been produced for the Ashes series. The latest of the single hop beers is My Beautiful Willamette (4%), using, as you may guess, Willamette hops.

Phoenix – among the Phoenix beers out this month are two festival crackers. Golden Glow (6.5%) is the paler of the two with a notable hoppy taste. Humbug (7%) is dark amber and matured at the brewery for three months before its release. Two excellent beers to look out for.

Shaws – are celebrating their 150th anniversary of brewing (we overlook the gap between 1941 and 2002 of course) and to commemorate this have brought back a famous name. Gradeley Ale (4.4%) was launched last month and is a full-bodied beer with soft malty undertones.

Marble – McKenna's Reprise Porter (4.5%) is out and superb. Port Stout (4.7%) will be back on Christmas Eve and is now an annual treat. *Opening Times* also managed to get an advance tasting of some of the new bottle-conditioned beers from Marble. Stronge Tawny and Ginger were excellent but star of the show had to be bottled Chocolate. This promises to be something of a stunner we think, and multiple awards surely beckon.



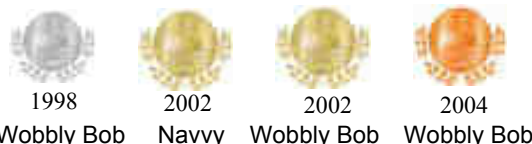
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MORE CHOICE BETTER BEER

International Brewing Awards



Cask Marque Award

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Beehive, Moss Side	Society Rooms, Macclesfield
Osborne House, Rusholme	Cotton Bale, Hyde
Great Central, Fallowfield	Society Rooms, Stalybridge
Friendship Inn, Fallowfield	Stalybridge Buffet Bar, Stalybridge
The Hillary Step, Whalley Range	White House, Stalybridge
Pineapple, Gorton	O Bar, Stalybridge
Albion, Burnage	Angel Inn, Dukinfield
Sam's Chop House, Manchester	Wye Bridge Inn, Buxton
City Arms, Manchester	Bamford Arms, Stockport
The Waterhouse, Manchester	Pack Horse, Hayfield
All Bar One, Manchester	Farmers Arms, Stockport
Rising Sun, Manchester	Four Heaton, Heaton Norris
Fletcher Moss, Didsbury	Nursery Inn, Heaton Norris
Victoria Hotel, Withington	Duke of York, Romiley
Dog & Partridge, Didsbury	Hare & Hounds, Marple
Gateway, East Didsbury	Bulls Head Hotel, High Lane
Sedge Lynn, Chorlton	Crown, Cheadle
Old Wellington, Manchester	Old Star Inn, Cheadle
Moon Under Water, Manchester	Prince of Wales, Gatley
The Bishop Blaze, Stretford	High Grove, Gatley
King's Ransom, Sale	Kings Hall, Cheadle Hulme
J P Joule, Sale	Cross Keys, Cheadle Hulme
Old Plough Hotel, Sale	Ryecroft, Cheadle Hulme
Bank at Sale, Sale	John Millington, Cheadle Hulme
Lowes Arms, Denton	Horse & Farrier, Gatley
Red Lion, Denton	Governor's House, Cheadle H'ime
English Lounge, Manchester	Bollin Fee, Wilmslow
Lloyds No 1, Manchester	Coach and Four, Wilmslow
Tim Bobbin, Urmston	Quarry Bank, Timperley
Ash Tree, Ashton U Lyne	King George, Hale
Calverts Court, Stockport	Corbens, Hale Barns
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Hazel Grove South – with Mark McConachie and Jim Flynn

A couple of centuries ago in more a bucolic era, Hazel Grove was known as Bullock Smithy. The smithy was located at the important fork that divides the roads heading for Macclesfield and Buxton. The smithy was closed long ago and the site is now the popular **Rising Sun** pub, our start point for the crawl. The forge, bellows and anvils have disappeared to be replaced by contented drinkers enjoying four cask ales in good, tastefully decorated surroundings. Low-ceilinged and with a number of areas showing off old photos of the locale, it appeals to many people. We were told that some very good karaoke singers use the pub, and that such is their talent, music-industry scouts monitor their performances. There were no singers tonight, merely chatter and some light music. The beers were J Smiths, Hopback Crop Circle, plus two from Marble - GSB and Road Rider. Our party only sampled the latter two beers, with the Road Rider given the edge. It is commendable to see such a range of beers in the 'Grove', and of good quality.

We noted a new restaurant and bar under construction on the opposite side of Buxton Road as we headed north along London Road to the first of four keg outlets - **Bulls Head**, at one time a fairly lively haunt of the younger drinker, but not really drawing them in tonight. Then came three newer bars that shared a liking for low-lighting, wooden venetian blinds and leather sofas - **The Lounge, Bar One** and **Browns** – with nothing on the bars to tempt in a dedicated cask-ale drinker.

So it was then that we continued on to what would be the first of many Robinson's houses we would encounter tonight, this one, the **White Hart**. A homely charm is exuded by the cream and burgundy decor, the place was pleasingly busy too with a good mix of chatty customers. I must say I found the staff delightful. The Robbies Hatters and Unicorn were not so well received however, both being judged a tad under-par. Unusual dispense too, freeflow electric pumps. Next up was a former Vaux house that used to reward the traveller with a decent pint of Holts. Not tonight though, and indeed, not for a long while. So, it was over the road to another Robbies house, the **Grapes**. Now this was a "horse of a different colour entirely". Selling Hatters and Unicorn, but here in superb form, a real delight - beers of the night, and a pub that may prove itself a contender for a future "Pub of the Month" award, I'd wager. Three rooms here, plus a new looking drinking yard to the rear. Decor is of paintings of cricket grounds, photos of brass bands and of old Hazel Grove, and there is a fish tank set in a wall. Comfortable atmosphere, bright staff, and a likeable clientele. For fans of architectural ironmongery,

I noticed a lovely example of a 50's door-closer by Laidlaw & Thompson, styled "The Mancunian".

Next door was the **Three Tunnes**, Robbies once more, with Hatters and Unicorn on the bar. A lot livelier than the Grapes, there was a darts match in progress in the vault, and quite a number of large groups of people out on their own little pub crawls. Service was speedy and cheerful as we enjoyed our beers in the spartanly furnished rear room. Its main feature was an old cooking range; other rooms are plusher but they all share that cosy, low-ceilinged homeliness. Both beers came out well, with the mild just edging it on popularity.

This being a writing relay, the pen was now passed to Jim as we continued down London Road to the **Cock**. As we enter the pub, yes you've guessed it, it's another Robbies house, we are met with a wall of sound. There is no mistaking it is definitely disco night. I have been in the pub on quieter nights, and I remember it to be a pleasant if unremarkable multi-roomed establishment, but tonight the noise from the disco in the back room dominated. It was clearly popular with the locals and so we had to spread ourselves about with some of us sitting in the least noisy room, the low-beamed room behind the bar and while others went into the front room to have their beer. The Hatters was found to be reasonable while the Unicorn was only found to be average or less.

Across the road now to the **Bird in Hand** which is (how can I put this without boring you all?) another pub selling beers from a Stockport independent brewery. One thing you can't accuse Hazel Grove is a lack of consistency! There was karaoke on and although there is only one L-shaped room it actually was quieter than across the road and my brain was attentive enough to notice all the pictures of old Stockport on the walls and the electric pumps behind the bar. The Hatters was rated to be a similar standard to that in the Cock but the Unicorn was considered by the bitter drinkers in the party to be an improvement. We encountered a John Hickman here who was an OT contributor back in the 90's but has been in Spain much of the time since.

For our final stop we deviated off London Road for the first time, down Commercial Road but there was no change to the Robinsons theme of the night at the **Royal Oak**. This was probably the largest pub of the stagger and perhaps due to its size it seemed empty in comparison to previous stops in the second half of the evening. Maybe because of its very dimensions it is not one of my favourite pubs, but this multi-roomed 1930's building (former Bell's house, I believe) was nevertheless a pleasant place for a pint at the end of the evening. Again we concluded that the Hatters was marginally better than the Unicorn.

This definitely was a stagger for the Robinsons enthusiast, while for others it may have proved the old adage 'familiarity breeds contempt'. It is however easy to forget that drinkers in other towns would cast an envious eye at a quality independent being so prevalent instead of one of the multinationals.

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Robinsons Traditional Draught Beers
At Their Best

CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2007 We're in it!

The Stout, Porter & Old Ale Trail

This month we are introducing a new competition – the first of what we hope will be an annual event.

Like the well-established Mild Challenge and the increasingly popular Cider Circuit, this is the chance for you to visit some new pubs and try some new beers.

Winter is the time for stronger and darker beers and that is what we are focussing on this time. So, a bit about these seasonal beer styles, and what you can expect to encounter...

Porter was a London style that turned the brewing industry upside down early in the 18th century. Restrictions on making roasted malts in Britain during World War One led to the demise of Porter and Stout but in recent years, smaller craft brewers in Britain have rekindled an interest in the style. Look for profound dark and roasted malt character with espresso or cappuccino coffee, liquorice and molasses, all underscored by hefty hop bitterness. Porters are complex in flavour, range from 4% to 6.5% and are typically black or dark brown; the darkness comes from the use of dark malts unlike stouts which use roasted malted barley. **Stouts** can be dry or sweet and range from 4% to 8% ABV.

Old Ale as a style has re-emerged in recent years, due primarily to the fame of Theakston's Old Peculier, Gale's Prize Old Ale and Thomas Hardy's Ale. Old Ales, contrary to expectation, do not have to be especially strong: they can be no more than 4% alcohol, though the Gale's and O'Hanlon's versions are considerably stronger. Neither do they have to be dark: Old Ale can be pale and burst with lush sappy malt,

tart fruit and spicy hop notes. Darker versions will have a more profound malt character with powerful hints of roasted grain. The hallmark of the style remains a lengthy period of maturation, often in bottle rather than bulk vessels. Old Ales typically range from 4% to 6.5%.

Barley Wine has to be strong. The biggest selling Barley Wine for years was Whitbread's 10.9% Gold Label, now available only in cans. Bass's No 1 Barley Wine (10.5%) is occasionally brewed in Burton-on-Trent. Fuller's Vintage Ale (8.5%) is a bottle-conditioned version of its Golden Pride. The local classic, though, is Robinson's Old Tom (8.5%).

Rules

You need to have a least a 1/2 pint of one of cask stout, porter or old ale (4.5% ABV or greater – we have a relaxed definition for our inaugural event) to have a sticker placed on this page. Do 15 different pubs to win a bottle of stout, porter or old ale. Do all 30 pubs to be entered in the big draw for a special hamper of stouts, porters and old ales.

This challenge runs from Sunday the 17th December 2006 to Sunday 28th January 2007 so you have plenty of time. We will only accept signatures if the pub runs out of stickers.

The completed form has to be sent to David Platt before Sunday 4th February. The address is 138 Broom Lane, Levenshulme, Manchester, M19 3LJ.

Name

Address

Rain Bar Great Bridgewater St MANCHESTER M1 5JG Moonraker	Vine Kennedy St. MANCHESTER M2 4BQ Hobgoblin	Crown & Kettle Oldham Road MANCHESTER M4 5FE Guest	Lass O'Gowrie Charles St MANCHESTER M1 7DB Guest	Bar Fringe Swan St MANCHESTER M4 5JN Guest
Marble Arch Rochdale Road MANCHESTER M4 4HY Guest	Ye Olde Vic Chatham St STOCKPORT SK3 9ED Guest	Arden Arms Millgate STOCKPORT SK1 2LX Old Tom	Crown Heaton Lane STOCKPORT SK4 1AR Guest	Spread Eagle Lower Hillgate STOCKPORT SK1 1JQ Old Tom
Nursery Green Lane HEATON NORRIS SK4 2NA Hydes 4X	Navigation Manchester Road HEATON NORRIS SK4 1TY Guest	Victoria Wilmslow Road WITHINGTON M20 3BW Hydes 4X	Crescent The Crescent SALFORD M5 4PF Guest	New Oxford Bexley Square SALFORD M3 6DB Guest
Lloyds Wilbraham Road CHORLTON M21 9AN Moonraker	Marble Beer House Manchester Road CHORLTON M21 9PW Guest	Cheshire Ring Manchester Road HYDE SK14 2BJ Guest	Blossoms Buxton Road HEAVILY SK2 6NU Old Tom	Star Inn Howard Street GLOSSOP SK13 7DD Guest
Prince of Wales Mill Street GLOSSOP SK13 8PT Guest	Hillary Step Upper Chorlton Road WHALLEY RANGE M16 0BH Guest	Horse & Farrier Gatley Road GATLEY SK8 4AB Hydes 4X	Gothic Church Road GATLEY SK8 4NG Guest	Legh Arms Ashton Old Road OPENSHAW M11 2HD Guest
Station Warrington St ASHTON OL6 6XB Guest	Vale Cottage Kirk Street GORTON M18 8UE Guest	Cheshire Line Manchester Road CHEADLE SK8 2NZ Guest	Albion Inn Burnage Lane BURNAGE M19 1NA Hydes 4X	Railway Avenue Street PORTWOOD, SK1 2BZ Stout / Porter

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Stockport
WITH CLIFTON BELL
Supping

Having written off the **Kings Head**, Tiviot Dale, I am very pleased to report that the pub has changed hands again and has reinstated real ale and introduced real cider.

The pub has been taken on by Brian Morris, who took over in early November. After a short, but comprehensive, redecoration, the pub reopened on Friday 17 November and looks set to regain its position as something of a feature on the local real ale scene.

Brian has extensive experience of the pub trade, having been involved with the Pot of Beer and more recently a number of pubs in the Ashton area, including the Tontine. The plan is to offer four changing guest beers. Three excellent beers from Greenfield Brewery were on the bar when I called and the aim is to feature beers from other good micros, such as Phoenix, plus some of the better independents like Marstons and Hydes. Brian is hoping to cement a reputation for quality by gaining Cask Marque status. The pub is being run on a free of tie basis and any micros wanting to supply can contact Brian on 0161 429 6013. Sounds good, especially as the pub is open until midnight Monday to Thursday and 1am Friday to Sunday. One to keep an eye on, I think.

More Freehouse News

The **Crown** on Heaton Lane continues to improve under its new management. The latest development has been the reinstatement of two real fires – in the main room to the rear and the left hand room at the front. Just the thing for those cold winter nights.

Of course a blazing fire has long been one of the attractions at **Ye Olde Vic** on Chatham Street, another of the town's leading freehouses. Landlord Steve Brannan tells me that one of the handpumps is now a dedicated Millstone Brewery pump. So impressed has he been with the quality of the ales, and to show support for local products, he felt this was a good way to demonstrate that commitment. Steve and Johanne (and Molly) have given good service to the people of Stockport for seven years now, and I look forward to many more to come.

Out and About

A foray took me to the Portwood area of town. Shunning the delights of Vernon Park, I popped into the **Park** pub on Newbridge Lane. It still seems to be doing well selling Holts bitter and Boddies (although I think the latter may not always be on). A tidy interior, a pleasant welcome, and what appeared to be a decent lunch menu on offer. Further along Newbridge Lane lies the oft-overlooked **Midway**, quite a food-driven pub these days with its restaurant room to the left, bar to the right. Again, Boddies was on offer, but I just had to reacquaint myself with the other beer, Websters Green Label (£1.40). A rare beer in these parts, but rather unchallenging in taste. Give the Midway and Park a go for yourselves, see what you think.

All Change

I went into see Tom Barlow, the new licensee of the **Florist** on Shaw Heath. New to the pub, but not new to the trade, as he and wife Sheila have been responsible for the success that is the **Armoury**, just a few hundred yards away. Tom

took over in early October, and he will concentrate on the Florist, while Sheila will maintain her high standards at the Armoury. Tom's move has already brought about some benefits, the beer quality has improved as he has implemented some changes in the cellar, Robbies Hatters and Unicorn are the offerings. As word gets around, the pub is attracting more customers with trade improving at a steady rate. It does particularly well on County home games, but strangely the Sharks fans have yet to appreciate what the Florist has to offer. Opening hours are now 4 - 12 Monday to Thursday; 12 - 1 Friday and Saturday; and 12 - 12 on Sunday. I wish continued success to this hard working couple.



The Florist - doing well under new management

News reaches me the **Queens**, Stockport Road, Cheadle is set to re-open on Friday, Dec 8th. It has been closed many months for renovation and refurbishment works. I'm told that the front two rooms will be as they were, with an extension of the bar going left and rearward into new drinking accommodation. Other improvements have been made during the extensive works. Licensees will be Brian Stokes and Brian Hall, the latter Brian having run the Ash Hotel with wife Jane for some time. Although rumours have had it that the pub will be very foody, Brian insists it will be a "pub that does food", not the other way round. I look forward to seeing it.

Real Ale Gains in the Pipeline?

Meanwhile in the south-east of the borough, I hear that several pubs will be installing handpumps to dispense real ale (some for the first time in a long while) as they now come under the Mitchell & Butlers brand. Most are former Brewers Fayre pubs. Known pubs are the **Midland**, Marple Bridge; **Dog & Partridge**, High Lane; **Vernon Arms**, Higher Poynton; and an unknown one in Glossop. The **Rams Head** (ex Hungry Horse, now Greene King) in Disley is advertising itself as a "Bistro pub", what can be going on?

Finally, a long keg outlet, but one-time seller of Holts bitter, the **Otters** on Cross Lane, Marple is having a makeover that will transform it into the Marple Tavern. Re-opens in December, no news of any cask beer though.

More Changes

Another pub that has reopened is the **Comfortable Gill** on King Street West. Despite the Punch Taverns website suggesting that a major refurbishment is planned, little seems to have changed. Boddingtons Bitter remains on handpump.

Further up the hill, the **Tom Thumbs** has seen its last as a pub and is set to reopen as the Lost Monsoon Indian restaurant. You'll probably get a better pint than you ever did when the place was a pub!

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Beer Miles 2006

CAMRA North Manchester's Young Persons Contacts Kim Walton and Tim Jackson held the 3rd 'Beer Miles' event, open to all-comers. The competition commenced at the Marble Arch to take in 6 more pubs across the city centre. The aim is to collect as many 'beer miles' from each UK real ale that was had in each pub, by the shortest road route, from brewery to brewery. The scores were calculated by a cunning piece of software on a laptop in a matter of seconds! The winner was Jon Starkey with an impressive total of 1496.5 miles; without venturing out of the city centre on a Saturday afternoon.



Beer Miles participants relaxing after the event

Pubs Quarter

A little look around the north side of the City Centre, it was noted that the **Castle** on Oldham St, once again had the full card of available Robinsons beers on. No doubt the new Oldham Bitter will be on here, as soon as available, to partake. It is over a year now that the **Crown & Kettle** came back to the Mancunian drinking scene after a break of 16 years. I found four excellent ales on: Nottingham EPA (pale and nicely hoppy), Phoenix Rip-Rap (pale & fruity hopped), Shaw's Golden Globe and Coach House Wizard's Wonder. It seems that former regulars of Boddies Cask and Black Sheep are now a distant memory, with the accent now on guest beers from near and far. Beers from Dark Star Brewery, West Sussex are especially welcomed in this rejuvenated hostelry.

On Swan Street, **Bar Fringe** celebrated its 10th birthday in November. Five real ales were found on: Osset Turning Leaves, Bank Top (a brewery always popular here) Blundell Ale, Owl Sun Daze. Spinning Dog Mutts Nuts and Sadlers Randy Otter, which was golden & mellow. Moreover, Thatchers Cheddar Red Cider is sold in considerable quantities. Oh! and free food to keep the party going. Over the road is the **Smithfield**, a bastion of the real ale scene in this neck of the woods. A good array of interesting guest beers, with the resident Robinson's Dark Hatters Mild (also available at the Castle, too!) Plus one of the best 'house beers' the imbibers could find anywhere, in the inexpensive (plenty of change from a £2 coin) Phoenix Smithfield and an excellent session bitter to boot!



Beers for the Season WINTER

This is the first of a new quarterly series where we try and revive the tradition of focussing on beers for each specific season, starting with winter, perhaps the one time of the year when seasonal specials still hold sway.

As you might expect, beers for the winter months tend to be strong and often dark, sometimes spiced and always warming. They are beers that demand respect, too, often being strong in alcohol. These are beers for sipping and savouring rather than swilling and sessioning.

Thirty or so years ago, most breweries would produce a strong beer for the winter months but sadly, many of these have fallen by the wayside. It is almost as if some of the older brewers have become afraid of strong beers.

Luckily some still carry the flag – locally Robinson's with their revered Old Tom and JW Lees with Moonraker (both now available all year round) are cases in point. Sadly Hydes excellent XXXX, is nowadays rarely found on draught (although it is making an appearance for our Stout, Porter & Old Ale Trail) while Holt's Sixex is confined to bottle.

Luckily the slack has been taken up by many of the micro breweries who produce a vast array of old ales, barley wines and imperial stouts. In Europe, the Belgians, too, produce many fine Christmas beers – those we have chosen here should be obtainable from the **Belgian Belly** in Chorlton.



Robinson's Old Tom (8.5% ABV). The classic barley wine, brewed since 1899 and scarcely changed in that time. Good in bottle but magnificent on draught. Many local Robbies pubs sell this over the festive season.



Marble Port Stout (4.7% ABV). The most festive of beers, launched each year on Christmas Eve. Each cask includes two bottles of organic port. A rich and satisfying beer – available at the Marble Arch & Marble Beer House.

Seven Beers To Try This Winter



3 Rivers Yummy Figgy Pudding (7.5% ABV). A newcomer but none the worse for that. A complex beer with spices and dried fruits that matures extremely well. This year also available in bottle as well as on draught.



Phoenix Humbug (7% ABV). Dark amber in colour, this beer is specially matured at the brewery for three months before its release. Malty flavours are balanced by hops to make for a very drinkable beer. Full bodied and warming.



De Dolle Brouwers Stille Nacht (12% ABV). Brewed in Esen, Flanders, this is one of the most intense Belgian bottled beers. Will last for a decade or more in the cellar. Malty sweetness vies with hops and alcohol. Excellent.



Het Anker Gouden Carolus Christmas (10%). This Flemish treat is available in big and small bottles. A sweetish, dark barley wine with liquorice and spices. If you have the willpower it matures excellently in the cellar.



Brasserie De Silly Enghien Noel (9% ABV). A far from silly beer, this is a lightly spiced blond beer from French-speaking Belgium. The alcohol is balanced with superb hopping which can fade over time. Best drunk now!

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Robin Wignall's monthly round-up of news and happenings on the Peak District pub scene, although this month he starts further afield....

In early September I was fortunate enough to spend a fortnight walking in the Alps. I hadn't expected anything special on the beer front, and certainly there were assorted varieties of cans of Kronenbourg (Scottish-Newcastle) available in some of the mountain huts. However there were some pleasant surprises. One hut kept a Biere Blonde du Mont Blanc, a bottle conditioned 5.9% brew, from a micro brewery in Les Houches, just down the valley from Chamonix. I also saw advertised a Biere Blanche from the same brewery.

The beer highlight of the trip was finding the Micro Brasserie de Chamonix, a brew pub and restaurant just outside the centre of Chamonix. Beers seemed to be served under a light pressure and they were all 5%. They included La Granite Pale Ale, favourite with the group I was with and La Blonde de Chamonix, with certainly more to it than some of the 4.something % supposed blonde beers brewed in the UK at the moment. We also tried La Stout des Drus, which was all right but a bit thin, and a Blanche German style wheat beer which was a good replication of Bavaria's best.

There was a changing Biere du Mois, beer of the month. The owners are French Canadian and it was good to see this successful beer initiative in a country steeped in its wine and not known for its beer brewing prowess. So if you ever happen to be in the Chamonix area, look up the Micro Brewery, and also seek out Les Bieres du Mont Blanc.

In an article in the Business section of the *Daily Telegraph* at the end of September, Paul Inglett, Finance Director of Wolverhampton & Dudley, was quoted as being very positive about real ale and about the brands which W & D produce at their breweries. He was keen to emphasise the contribution which real ale made to the global W & D pot. He also said that W & D were looking to buy more pubs. It is a pity that they can't do more to keep open the pubs they own.

Back in the spring of 2005 Peter Mackinnon took a lease with the then new owners, Jennings of Cockermonth, at the **Shady Oak** in Fernilee, between Whaley Bridge and Buxton. Within weeks Jennings had been taken over by Wolverhampton & Dudley. Eighteen months later, at the end of September, the Shady Oak closed. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Peter felt unable to match the financial demands of the avaricious W & D. This is a pity as the Shady Oak had become a southern outpost for reliable beers from Jennings as well as beers from elsewhere in the W & D empire, and guest beers. This looks like a sad loss to locals and visitors alike.

After missing Glossop Festival and the do at the Swan in Kettleshulme the same week-end (see Alps visit above) I did manage to get to the **Royal** in Hayfield in early October for its 40 beer Hayfield Beer Festival. The menu showed a good range of beers with up to 15 available at a time, ten in the main bar and five in the entertainment room. Local-ish breweries were well represented including Storm, Howard Town, Millstone and from just over the hills, Acorn. Of the pale and hoppy beers available there were more than you could try on a Saturday afternoon! Dinting Arches and Glott's Hop, both from Howard Town were well worth trying whilst the pick of the bunch was probably Millstone Millwright from Mossley. The Hayfield Festival is certainly one to look forward to next year.



High Peak PUB NEWS

WITH FRANK WOOD

Little news from the Branch area this month, and with a temporary setback of a plastercast on my foot for the duration of late October and all of November, little chance of circulating too much.

However, news of the **Bulls Head** at Hayfield. It has recently been closed for quite a serious refurbishment, probably a 'gutting' is nearer the mark with the amount of vans parked up outside for several weeks. Anyway, it has now reopened, though only Theakstons Bitter has been spotted on the bar so far.

The **Bike & Hound** in Hyde (next to the bus station), now has changing guest beers, with Moorhouses Black Cat Mild also seen for a time on the bar.

The **Moon and Sixpence** in Glossop is certainly on the map for live music these days, as an alternative venue to the Globe, down the road, which continues to thrive too, with the music at both venues booked by local promoter Rae Leeson. Atlanta Roots played a tremendous set at the Moon recently, and live music is a regular feature here every Friday & Saturday, as it is at the Globe. The band Dosch who I have booked for the Thursday evening at the Winter Ales Festival play the Moon on 23rd December.

Other thriving gig venues in the town are the monthly Saturday gig at the **Star**, the Folk Train at **Glossop Labour Club** on the 4th Thursday of every month and Sunday afternoons from 4pm at the **Old Gloveworks**. Incidentally, the Moon is now featuring Howard Town beers at weekends.

In Mellor, the **Royal Oak**, a Robinson's pub that has appeared in the Good Beer Guide on several occasions, has new licensees, the previous landlord having moved on to take the **Crown** in Heaton Mersey.

I was sat at the bar in the **Star Inn** in Glossop and the proprietor of the Love Saves the Day delicatessen on Deansgate, Manchester, called in for a pint and he was pretty surprised that the Millstone Brewery, whose bottled beers he stocks in his cafe, had been talked of at length the previous day over in Yorkshire, with leaflets distributed.....and who says that news does not come straight to your seat.

Recent CAMRA Award



Neil Worthington presenting the Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season award for Autumn 2006 to Sue and Charlie at the Church Inn, Flixton, on 17th October

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CAMRA has announced the winner of this year's Cider Pub of the Year, and while it's not in the *Opening Times* area, it's not that far away.

The Old Poet's Corner in Ashover, near Chesterfield, is the lucky winner. It is only the second time the award has been given and the judges were delighted to award the honour to a pub outside of traditional cider making counties such as Somerset or Herefordshire.

The Cider and Perry Pub of the Year judging panel said: "We were very pleasantly surprised to find this little gem of a stone-built pub in the heart of the Derbyshire Peak District selling such a wonderful and interesting selection of traditional ciders and perries all in excellent condition."

Licensee Kim Beresford said "We are totally thrilled to have been awarded this huge accolade after only two years at the Old Poet's Corner

Pomona Award

The prestigious Pomona Award is the highest annual award made by CAMRA's APPLE Committee. The award is named after the Roman goddess of fruit and is made to the person or organisation that has done the most for cider and perry in the previous 12 months.

This year there were two joint winners – cider suppliers John Lewis and local man, John Reek. John, who trades as Merrylegs Cider, supplies many local pubs (and Stockport Beer & Cider Festival) with top quality ciders and perries. He also ferments his own apple and pear juice locally and so is Stockport's (indeed Greater Manchester's) only commercial cider maker.

Needless to say, John is delighted with his award. "I'm very, very pleased" he told *Opening Times* when we caught up with him. "I'd like to thank everyone for their continued support". He also told us that it was through Stockport Beer & Cider Festival that he first gained his interest in cider, having previously been a dedicated beer drinker.

Other News

Congratulations to Ann MacCarthy of Glossop, winner of this year's Cider Circuit. We should have pictures of the presentation next time.

The Knott Bar on Deansgate has reintroduced real cider with Addlestones on handpump.

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2007 We're in it!



Local drinkers got something of an early Christmas present last month with the news that John Henley of the excellent **Bar Fringe** (Swan Street) is to open a second bar on the south side of the City Centre.

The new premises are on Chester Street, off Oxford Road, in a building called The Quad, slap bang in the heart of student territory.

It's all in the planning stage at the moment but the new bar will be considerably bigger than Fringe and feature both ground floor and mezzanine drinking areas. There's obviously a lot to do but the projected opening is April next year. I will be following developments with interest.

Meanwhile Fringe itself has celebrated an incredible 10 years in business. In that time it has become a must visit institution on the city's pub and bar scene, very much leading the way with foreign beers. My congratulations, and thanks, to John, Charlie and their staff for the hard work and commitment over the past decade. And after that good news it's a...

Disaster Zone in East Manchester

Here at OT, we are ever keen to keep you up-to-date with the happenings in the pub world. So with that in mind, I was dispatched to that area with the brief of discovering what was happening at our lesser-visited hosterlies. Beginning my trawl on Clayton Lane in Clayton, the **Blue Moon** (ex Church) was closed and boarded, whilst the **Bridge** was virtually empty and selling just keg beer. The **Victoria** on nearby Croft Street was shut, but there was fresh undercoat on the front door, so maybe I showed up at the wrong hour. With window grilles and opaque glass it is hard to know what's going on.

On Ashton New Road, the former **Sir Humphrey Chetham** is now retail premises downstairs with flats up above. The **Derby Arms** was a surprise to see closed and boarded, but hope remained with a banner proclaiming "Opening soon, under new management". We wait to see.

Then it was over to Beswick. The "big" **Bradford** on Wilson Street is now grandly styled as "**Champagne Charlies Sports Bar**". It looked identical inside to the last time I visited, still no real beer. Over on Grey Mare Lane, the **Crossroads** has become the Manchester, whilst **Mary D's**, and the **Queen Victoria** are much the same. All are on keg beer. Of the three pubs that are on the estate, the **Townley** was busy with a party, whilst the Corner Shop customer's seemed enthralled with TV football, neither sells cask beer. The third pub, whose name I cannot recall, but it was on Wynne Close, has gone. And so too has Wynne Close!

Then it was down to Pottery Lane, or is it Alan Turing Way? This area had already seen the loss of the **Railway** and **Gorton Arms** some years previously, now I was to discover that the **Out of the Blue** (ex Birch Arms) was a pub no longer. It is now a Dental Laboratory. Seemingly, for people banking on income from the promised re-generation of East Manchester and the coming of Eastlands and football, the only outcome has been the devastation of their local pubs. More on this tale of woe next time

Finally – apologies to the **Castle** on Oldham Street. I foolishly got the name of Damien's late mother wrong. She was of course the indomitable Kath Smethurst.

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2007 We're in it!



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 15th – Famous Hillgate Stagger: Queens Head, Underbank 7.30pm; Red Bull, Hillgate 8.30.

Thursday 21st – Pub of the Month presentation to Davenport Arms, Woodford. Minibus may be available (phone for details) otherwise bus 157 from Manchester, Withington and Cheadle/Cheadle Hulme.

Thursday 28th – Social: Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport. From 8.00pm.

Wednesday 3rd January – Joint City Social with North Manchester Branch: Lass O'Gowrie 8.00pm; Sand Bar, Grosvenor St, 9.15.

Thursday 11th – Branch Meeting: Florist, Shaw Heath. **Pub of the Year will be chosen at this meeting.** Starts 8.00am.

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*

Saturday 9th - Branch Christmas Social at Poynton British Legion. Georges Road West, Poynton. Starts 8.00pm

Monday 11th - Branch Meeting: Globe Inn, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm

Friday 29th – City Centre Social: meet Waterhouse, Princess St, 12 noon.

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: Orange Tree, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

Thursday 14th – Branch Christmas Party (members only and fully booked)

Thursday 4th January – Branch Meeting: Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the **Macclesfield & East Cheshire** Branch covers a wide area from Knutsford to Congleton. *Branch Contact – Tony Icke 01625861833*

Thursday 28th – Social: Waters Green Tavern, Macclesfield.

The **North Manchester** Branch covers The Northern Quarter and North East Manchester plus the City of Salford. *Branch Contact – Roger Hall 0161 740 7937*

Wednesday 13th – Worsley Social: Barton Arms, Stablefold, Bridgewater, Barton Rd 9pm.

Wednesday 20th – Branch Meeting: Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, City Centre. Starts 8.00pm

Wednesday 27th – Christmas Social: Marble Arch, Rochdale rd. Starts 8.00pm

Wednesday 3rd January – Joint City Social with Stockport & South Manchester Branch: Lass O'Gowrie, Charles St 8.00pm; Sand Bar, Grosvenor St 9.15pm.

It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale



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Partner	Title Surname	Forename(s)	Date of Birth
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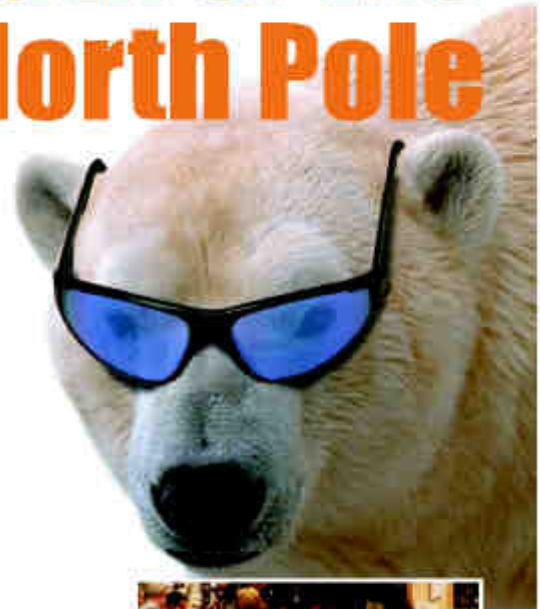
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Discover the best beers south of the North Pole



Wednesday 17th January 17.30 - 22.30
Thursday 18th January 16.30 - 22.30
Friday 19th January 12.00 - 22.30
Saturday 20th January 12.00 - 22.30

- £3 entry for all sessions except £4 Friday night (from 17.00)
- Discounts for CAMRA members
- £1 for Concessions (Students with NUS Card & OAP's) on Wednesday
- Tickets available on the door
- Entertainment: Dosch on Thursday evening and Curragh Sons on Saturday evening
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- 5 minutes from Victoria Station, by CIS Tower

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