

JANUARY 2007



Opening

TIMES

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

NUMBER 269

COVERING THE CITIES OF MANCHESTER & SALFORD, STOCKPORT, TAMESIDE, TRAFFORD, N.E. CHESHIRE & MACCLESFIELD

National Winter Ales Festival

Back in Manchester for 3rd Year Running

The highlight on the local and national beer scene this month is without doubt CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival. As in the last two years the venue will be the New Century Hall on Corporation Street in central Manchester. As last time a second hall has been booked to fit everyone in and once again the beer order is big enough to make sure there is beer for everyone.

Top of the list of attractions that the organisers are laying on is...well, ale. Lakes of it, including some mind-blowingly seasonal beers such as an 11 per center from Big Lamp Brewery in Newcastle. But there will be plenty of session strength beers too – in fact as Festival Organiser Steve Prescott told us, “everything from three-point-something to stupid. And it will be in peak form as CAMRA's cooling equipment will be used to make sure the beers are cellar fresh”.

Cask beers on the three bars, plus the Championship Bar itself are being sourced from all over the UK plus the Irish Republic, where it is hoped to have at least one cask beer from every Irish brewery.

As last year, there will again be a huge range of foreign beers, notably from Germany and Belgium (including draught Belgian beers) plus beers from the USA, Poland, Australia, the Ukraine and the Czech Republic.

Also making a welcome return is the British 'Real Ale in a Bottle' bar featuring many beers from around the country including the three Champion Bottle Conditioned Beers from last year's Great British Beer Festival and the three Champion Bottle Conditioned Beers of Scotland 2006.

There will also be a selection of ciders and perries for lovers of these special drinks.

After the success of third pint glasses at the Great British Beer Festival in August, this year for the first time, drinkers will be able to choose between pint, half pint and third of a pint glasses.

One of the Festival highlights is the Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition, with the results being announced late in the afternoon of Thursday 18 January. Local beers have often featured in the honours with Robinson's Old Tom being a two times overall winner, and last year Bazens' Knoll Street Porter gained a gold medal in its class.

Here are the past years' overall winners – what price a three times champion this year?

- 1997 – Hambleton Nightmare
- 1998 – Nethergate Old Growler
- 1999 – Dent T'Owd Tup
- 2000 – **Robinson's Old Tom**
- 2001 – Orkney Skullsplitter
- 2002 – Wye Valley Dorothy Goodbody's Stout
- 2003 – Nethergate Old Growler
- 2004 – Moor Brewery Old Freddy Walker
- 2005 – **Robinson's Old Tom**
- 2006 – Tongham AOT

Railway Reprieved



Once more displaying the escapologist skills of Houdini and possessing more lives than a cat, the Railway on Portwood has again escaped the threat of imminent closure.

Dave Porter has negotiated an agreement with the site's developers and the pub will remain open on a rolling six month basis for a period of up to three years. No planning permission for the development is yet in place so it seems the pub will be with us for at least two years or more. Good news indeed.

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Traditional Beers for Modern Tastes



Centennial 4% (All-in-one-hop wonder)
 Pacific Bitter 3.8% Blue Bullet 4.5%
 Flatbac 4.2% (Beer of the Festival, Stockport 2003 & BZA Bronze 2004)
 eXSB 5.5% (Beer of the Festival, Great Harwood 2005)
 Black Pig Mild 3.6% (Winner for Mild, Champion Beer of Britain - Club - 2003)
 Zebra Best Bitter 4.3% Knoll St Porter 5.2%

(Gold - Porters & Stouts, C&A 2006, Silver - Porters & Stouts, SIBA North Beer Competition 2006)*

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* All beers subject to availability



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for January is The Grapes in Hazel Grove.

Elaine and George Wood have been here for thirteen years and in that time have maintained a very good house and earned the respect of all who know them. As soon as you walk through the door you sense the "one big family" atmosphere. There is an immediate and warm welcome from both sides of the bar. Although all ages do visit, the pub's appeal is to the more mature clientele, for which they make no excuses.

Situated on one of the borough's busiest thoroughfares, from the outside, there is little to distinguish the Grapes from many other Robinson's pubs in the area. The Grapes is a very old building and has not been excessively knocked about through the years, retaining a classical town pub layout.

A large vault runs from front to back on the left-hand side of the building and is home to the pub's only official team (darts) and their silverware. The central bar separates the vault from the three-roomed lounge. The back room features images of old Hazel Grove, but pictures of local cricket and football teams tend to dominate throughout. The front room is a little more quiet and private if you don't want to get involved with the chat and banter of the main bar. It's the bar area that is the real heart of the pub where most customers gather. To the rear is a small beer garden set with bench tables and plenty of well-kept flower tubs, which are particularly outstanding when in bloom.

On the bar, the beers are Robinsons Unicorn Bitter and Hatters only, and are in consistently excellent condition. This is directly attributable to George's philosophy on beer. He doesn't want to put on a third beer; he knows the pub's throughput can only stand two beers. Any more would mean selling beer beyond its best or suffering excessive waste and having to pass the costs on to the customers. Neither practice he finds acceptable (and quite rightly so). He is proud that wet sales are the mainstay of his trade. No meals are served - they stand or fall on beer quality. The fact they have been standing for thirteen years is testament to them getting it just right!

The presentation will be on Monday 15th January from 8.00pm. **CW**

The Grapes is located in the centre of Hazel Grove on the A6 London Road and well serviced by the 191, 192, and 199

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OT – COMMENT...

I hope all our readers will try and pay a visit to the National Winter Ales Festival this month. Many local CAMRA members have worked tirelessly to get this event, now back in Manchester for the third consecutive year, off the ground. Once again we are promised not only a superb range of beers from around the country but also from overseas, too. Those of you with internet access can visit the festival website at www.winterales.uku.co.uk – this will give you much more information plus lists of both the British and foreign beers to be had.

Many local pubs are also supporting the event with festivals of their own – as far as we know the Marble Arch, Bar Fringe, New Oxford, Crown & Kettle, Smithfield and Crescent should be running complementary events, so try and support these if you can, too.

At this time of year it is customary to both reflect on the year just ended and also to consider what the next 12 months might hold. It is certainly been a year of change for *Opening Times* and I would like to thank the production and distribution team of John Tune, Pete Farrand, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler and Jan Flynn for all their hard work. Many thanks also to our advertisers, distributors, contributors and readers for their continued support.

Next year will see the advent of the smoking ban and we don't know what the fall out from this will be. OT however will continue with its support of local pubs and breweries.

Very best wishes and a happy new year to you all.

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
Cheshire:	0845 11 32 500

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TRAFFORD & HULME

Pub OF THE Season AWARD




The Trafford and Hulme CAMRA Pub of the Season for winter is The Font Bar on New Wakefield Street, Manchester City Centre.

The Font earned its award for two reasons. The first is its provision of cask beers from microbreweries, the other is it being an outlet serving good real ale to young people, particularly students.

Its reputation was built up by Dominic Driscoll and when he left in January 2006 to go to the Marble Arch there were fears for the future of cask ale at the Font. However Dominic has trained manager Johnny Sture who assisted by Matthew Dutton and Tom Beynon have retained a high standard of beer quality and the bar is rightfully in the Good Beer Guide.

This well-deserved award will be presented on Monday 29 January, at 8.00pm.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FIRST CLASS



From Rhys Jones, CAMRA's APPLE Committee:
In the interests of accuracy I must point out that the joint winner of CAMRA's 2006 Pomona Award, alongside John Reek, was not, as stated in OT December 2006, John Lewis (who coincidentally is the cider & perry bar manager at CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival) but Jon Hallam. Based at Chepstow in Monmouthshire, Jon, a small-scale craft cider-maker himself, was the first person in modern times to make a career as a full-time wholesaler of real cider and continues to be active in the business. He is particularly remembered for his early advocacy of traditional perry, which many observers believe to have played a large part in the drink's survival and subsequent revival
(Happy to correct the error – Ed)



More Doom & Gloom in East Manchester

Continuing last month's tour around East Manchester I next visited Clowes Street in West Gorton. All three pubs remain, the **Wellington** and **Timers Restaurant and Bar** (a new manifestation of the former closed Dolphin) still sell keg beer, whilst the **Aces** was shut on my visit. It was shut when I visited some years ago as well, am I just unlucky with timings, or has the place been mothballed? A pub that has been long-closed is the **Grey Mare** in Ardwick, just off Coverdale Crescent. The street address has changed due to rebuilding hereabouts, but little else has.

Better News in Longsight

As I was tired and it was raining, I headed for Belle Vue and the **Longsight** on Kirkmanshulme Lane. I found it to be closed, with the car park and grounds overgrown, and some windows boarded. The name has been changed too, it is now the Belle Vue.

It had all become a bit depressing really and I needed a restorative pint. I got one, in the splendid recently refurbished surroundings of the **Garratt** (Holts) on nearby Pink Bank Lane. Everything was clean and tidy, and the beer, Holt mild and bitter, was in great form. Back to Stockport Road via the **Huntingdon**, no real ale here. Nor was any to be had at the **Bay Horse**.

A final pint in the **New Victoria** was to be my selfless reward. A party was on, but I couldn't have wished for a better drop of ale than the Oakwell Barnsley bitter that passed my lips. Superb. The landlord tells me that the Barnsley Bitter has tripled in sales in the six months since has been there and the Old Tom (mild) is holding its own. He also tells me that the **Union** in Ardwick has, or is about to go real (he thinks it is Marstons).

More News & Views

I finally managed to have a chat with the new people at the **Seven Stars**, Ashton Old Road in Beswick. This Holts pub is now in the hands of Gina and Ian Davies. They hail from Oldham. This is their first pub, but Gina had worked for some time as a barmaid at the Bridgewater (again, Holts) in Hollinwood. They arrived in early October, but have already made an impact as sales are up and new customers are being won over by their friendly approach. Cask beers are mild and bitter. One weekend a month, they promise to introduce entertainment in the form of a karaoke or such. I wish them well.

Holts have acquired the **Newall Green** on Greenbrow Road, Wythenshawe. It is being refurbished, and may open in time for Christmas. This has got to be some of the best news for years for cask drinkers in west Wythenshawe.

I hear from Chorlton that there is a new licensee at the **Famous Trevor Arms** on Beech Road who is keen to install guest beers. More news on this as I get it.

The **Nelson** in Didsbury is now benefiting from Enterprise Inns collaboration with SIBA to supply more interesting beers from small independent breweries to their pubs. On a recent visit the Nelson was selling Moorhouses Black Cat mild and Jennings Cumberland Ale both at a very reasonable (for Didsbury) £ 1-95 a pint. So far both beers are selling well.

Although it's been a distinct lager pub (with clientele to match) for a number of years, the **Barleycorn** on Barlow Moor Road, West Didsbury, has just started stocking cask ale again.



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Flash Flood, Black Bee, White Tornado,
Last Leaf, Massacre, Porter, Snowbound,
Wobbly Bob, White Hurricane, Uncle Fester,
Christmas Kiss, Humbug, Tyke, Thirsty Moon

**MORE CHOICE
BETTER BEER**

International Brewing Awards

			
1998	2002	2002	2004
Wobbly Bob	Navy	Wobbly Bob	Wobbly Bob

Manchester Matters continued

Wells Bombardier & Taylor's Landlord were on when I called. Bombardier would appear to be intended as a regular beer - pub stocked out with posters, drip trays, mats etc. While I certainly appreciate having a choice, I'm not sure whether two ales might not be a bit too adventurous for their customer base at the moment. Didn't bode well that when we popped in at 10.30pm and ordered two pints of Landlord, it was the first time that the barman had used the handpump! That said, the Landlord was in good condition and very pleasant, and cheaper than the local alternatives of The Woodstock or The Met

Cask Marque Award

Wetherspoons, Piccadilly
The Paramount, Manchester
Beehive, Moss Side
Osborne House, Rusholme
Great Central, Fallowfield
Friendship Inn, Fallowfield
The Hillary Step, Whalley Range
Pineapple, Gorton
Albion, Burnage
Sam's Chop House, Manchester
City Arms, Manchester
The Waterhouse, Manchester
All Bar One, Manchester
Rising Sun, Manchester
Fletcher Moss, Didsbury
Victoria Hotel, Withington
Dog & Partridge, Didsbury
Gateway, East Didsbury
Sedge Lynn, Chorlton
Old Wellington, Manchester
Moon Under Water, Manchester
The Bishop Blaze, Stretford
King's Ransom, Sale
J P Joule, Sale
Old Plough Hotel, Sale
Bank at Sale, Sale
Loves Arms, Denton
Red Lion, Denton
English Lounge, Manchester
Lloyds No 1, Manchester
Tim Bobbin, Urmston
Ash Tree, Ashton U Lyne
Calverts Court, Stockport
Poachers Inn, Bollington
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'mle
Bollin Fee, Wilmslow
Coach and Four, Wilmslow
Quarry Bank, Timperley
King George, Hale
Corbens, Hale Barns
Bear's Paw, Knutsford
Cross Keys Hotel, Knutsford



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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2007 We're in it!



Robin Wignall's monthly round-up of news and happenings on the Peak District pub scene

The front page of OT in November last, berating Punch for sitting on boarded up pubs, touches on a malaise, which seems to affect a chunk of the Punch estate. In mid-November the signboards were up in three out of the four Punch pubs in Whaley Bridge. At the **Goyt** and the **White Horse** each is advertised as a "Pub Business Opportunity to let." The White Horse had no real ale on a visit in October. At the **White Hart** the lease is for sale. Each licensee will have his/her own reasons for moving on, but in many cases unrealistic rents, upward only rent reviews and unattainable targets have a large part to play. As one licensee leaves, Punch has another one lined up, hopeful of paying the Punch price. Realistically they have not much more hope of success than previous incumbents. The company does not seem to take the medium to long-term view that allows a good licensee to develop trade, to encourage customers, for sales to grow over a period of time. Such foundations would, in the long run, provide the company with consistent profit growth on a firmer base. Obviously the bean counters don't see it this way. But of course Punch is only a property owning pub company and its pubs, our locals, are but pieces on a Pub Monopoly board.

All is not doom and gloom however. At the **Navigation** in Whaley Bridge Gemma Turner and Peter Ryan are now looking to install a fourth hand pump. Cask mild has been introduced. In late November this was Brain's Dark, which was selling well. All the signs are that a cask mild will become a fixture at the Navigation. As well as getting beers from the normal Punch list, the Navigation is able to access beers from the "Finest Cask Collection" list. So Deuchar's IPA has been on but recent guests have included the unusual Milestone Old Home Wrecker 4.9% and Newman's Wolver's Ale 4.1%.

Christmas came early at the **Shepherds** in Whaley Bridge with Jennings Redbreast being available in mid November. This was closely followed by Snowy Peak (4.2%) and Marston's Strong Pale Ale (6.2%). There is a good steady turnover of guest/seasonal beers at the Shepherds whilst Marston's Bitter and Pedigree remain ever popular.

When the **Shady Oak** in Fernilee closed in early October, the worst was feared, but better news came in mid November when the pub re-opened with a new licensee. Tim Hughes is there initially in the short term, but is hoping for a long-term placement in the Shady. Tim is a CAMRA member and the beers are quickly back to normal with Jennings Bitter and Cumbria available alongside Pedigree and a guest beer, Castle Eden Ale. Hopefully Tim will have the opportunity to build on the foundations left by Peter Mackinnon.

More good news is the return of cask mild to the **Dog & Partridge** at Bridgemont. When Cain's Mild was taken off early in 2006 sales had fallen significantly. However Coach House Gunpowder Mild has pleased the local mild drinkers and sales are going well.

When the **Railway** in Whaley Bridge re-opened in September cask Unicorn was still on sale. The **Dog & Partridge** in High Lane, a keg only budget eating house, was closed for refurbishment during November.



The development in Glossop Town Centre, in the former Ritz factory yard, continues to progress. However, according to the workforce, the bar area that is being developed on the ground floor of the factory is to be opened by the Barracuda Group, a fast developing Pub Group, who do not appear to be interested in serving real ale.

However, across the road on High Street East, better news. the **Howard Arms**, that has not really sold cask ale for the best part of a decade, has appropriately started taking the local Howard Town Ales regularly.

Buxton News

At the **Eagle** on Eagle Parade, Buxton, on the Market Place, Hydes Original and Stormtrooper (5.0%), the seasonal beer from Hydes were on sale when I visited in December. However, the £2.30 pint Stormtrooper was undrinkable and when I asked for it to be changed, the Original was only just drinkable.

On Hallbank, the steep street descending down from the Market Place to the Pavillion Gardens, a new bar opened back in June. The **Beltane Cafe Bar** sells three cask ales which on my visit were Draught Bass, the regular beer, and St Austell HSD and Everards Tiger. At £2.65 per pint the beers are not cheap but the quality is good. I also found out a strange pricing policy as my half pints cost me £1.40 each. However, the bar is really good, trendy and a little Bohemian, with an interesting menu and live music on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. As it is privately owned, it ensures beers are kept interesting. The clientele appears to be mature and the atmosphere is relaxing. Worth a try if you are in Buxton.

Ashton News

The **Station** on Warrington Street seems to be going from strength to strength and is also expanding cask ale availability in other town pubs.

The Station's Pauline Town won many trade awards when she was at the Witchwood and is continuing the trend at the Station. The pub has just won the 'Tenant/Lessee' section of the *Morning Advertiser* Responsible Drinks Retailing 2006 Awards. The judges commented that Pauline was someone "truly dedicated to the cause" of responsible drinking.

The Station is also in the finals of three categories in the annual *Publican* awards. The pub is up for the Customer Service and Marketing awards while Lise Shaw from the pub is one of the Bar Person of the Year finalists.

From mid-January the kitchen will be up and running under Andy Stanworth, who is passionate about selling properly home-made and good value food, sourced from local suppliers. This will be available between 12 and 5, Monday to Friday.

Look out for the 'Old Town Beer Walk', a real ale trail, with prizes, running from the end of this month to the end of February. Those completing cards, obtainable from participating pubs, will win a bottle of beer and go into a draw for a hamper. The **Station Buffet** and **Q Bar** in Stalybridge are taking part and in Ashton Pauline has lent handpumps to some previously keg pubs resulting in three real ale gains – the **Forresters** has Archers and Sam Smiths beers. **Legends** has three cask beers from Archers and Titanic, and reports healthy sales, while **Olivers** (ex-Cavern) has John Smiths and a changing guest. Good news indeed – this pioneering event is well worth support.



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9 Years in the
Good Beer Guide



Miles More Choice?

Greene King's recent closure of the Hardys & Hansons brewery in Nottingham has brought to the fore the issue of "beer miles". With growing concern over global warming resulting from excessive CO₂ emissions, trucking beer from Bury St Edmunds when it could be locally distributed from Kimberley seems rather questionable.

Now I must admit that I am a bit of a sceptic about predictions of imminent climate doom, but long-distance transport of beer (which is mainly water anyway) makes no environmental sense. However, even if most pubs stocked local cask beers, that would be a drop in the ocean compared with the distance kegs and lagers travel. When promoting local beers, the encouragement of local networks and local distinctiveness must be the main advantage.

And this raises some awkward questions for beer drinkers who are keen to do their bit to combat global warming. If you are really serious about cutting CO₂ emissions, should you be drinking Scottish and Cornish beers in a free house rather than the products of a local independent brewer in a tied house a few doors down the road? Should you have a cupboard full of fascinating imported US bottles? And shouldn't you be supporting brewing foreign brands under licence in the UK rather than trucking the authentic product halfway across Europe?

Nobody would claim to be indifferent to the environment, but if you want to take the principle seriously with respect to beer you may need to make some difficult decisions. Maybe in future, to demonstrate its green credentials, CAMRA should recommend that all beer festivals predominantly feature beers from no more than 20 or 30 miles around.

A Tale of Two Pubs

Two pubs in the Greater Cheadle area – the Griffin at Heald Green and the Queens Arms in Cheadle itself – have recently received extensive refurbishments to make them more up-market and food-oriented.

While this may be a matter of regret to the lover of old-fashioned boozers, it is only a reflection of general trends in the pub trade. Outwardly the Queens Arms has a much more traditional appearance while the Griffin is not unlike Southfork Ranch. Yet go through the door and the impression is entirely reversed – the Griffin still feels like a proper pub, while the Queens doesn't.

The reason for this is very simple – the Griffin, unlike the Queens, retains extensive fixed bench-type seating. Fixed seating is comfortable, flexible and encourages interaction with other people in the pub, while loose chairs at separate tables tend to isolate people and groups from each other. They also make the place feel more like a restaurant and less like a pub. Why this basic point continues to elude designers baffles me – but perhaps they don't really want their interiors to have a pubby feel in the first place.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.org.uk

Beer Excursions

with Heather Airlie

WHO knew that a lack of beer would lead to an annual barrel race?

It seems that in 1999 a customer complained to the manager of the Nag's Head in Edale that he had run out of his favourite beer. He pointed out that the Snake Pass Inn, on the other side of Kinder Scout, had plenty. The manager agreed that if a cask could be carried across Kinder from the Snake Pass Inn to Edale he would treat them to the cask.

With the challenge laid down the friends readily accepted it, and to the chagrin of the manager, were successful. Although nothing has been reported on the quality of the beer after being humped the five miles over the hill and through the peat bogs the following year a race was organised to recreate the feat. This time teams of eight carried a nine gallon cask full of water and the race has been held every year since.

The **Edale beer festival** is a celebration of their determination, and includes the awards ceremony. The festival, although promising a range of 15 real ales, was not quite what we CAMRA-types have been led to expect. We were originally asked for a four pound entry fee for a choice of six beers at a time – and to think the Great British Beer Festival is only five pounds! We were then refunded one pound on the basis that the souvenir glasses had not been delivered. Then, after late-comers had not had to pay at all, I was given a full refund.

It appeared that the original organiser had unfortunately passed away earlier in the year and the substitute had been let down on the day, leaving them rather short staffed, so the A-team from Trafford & Hulme branch (Julia and myself) stepped in to give the poor harassed servers a break for half an hour.

It was a great afternoon, but they really would have benefited from the assistance from their CAMRA branch.

Further Afield

By way of a contrast, the 18th **Jersey Beer & Cider Festival** was a much larger affair with over 140 different Ales, Ciders and Perries. Held in a marquee in People's Park, St Helier, it was obviously the primary source of real ale for most islanders, judging by the rate at which they partook. Before close of play on Friday they had finished off most ales above 6%!

The band performing on Saturday were obviously very local, as despite having their own material, the crowd knew all the words, and joined in with gusto.

Of the local bars, in St Helier, the Lamplighter was the favourite, with a selection of half dozen real ales, including four from Ringwood. The Original Wine Bar had recently re-opened, we believe having had a change of ownership and only had Courage Directors, but on form. Outside St Helier the recommendation had to be Le Moulin de Lecq at

Greve du Lecq, complete with working water wheel, which had five ales and a cider available. The building was a conversion of a 12th century water mill and is in a great setting near to Greve beach. Definitely worth a re-visit.



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The **New Oxford** in Bexley Square, Salford put itself well and truly on the map by holding its first beer festival back in November. 15 real ales were always on, with four on handpump and the rest on stillage.

Joining a real cider, was a stall from Dranke Centrale, who used to run La Trapiste in Altrincham, with an interesting selection of foreign beers, wines and champagne. Beers like St. Bernardus Abt 12, Dulle Teve, Westvleteren 8 (!) and Drie Fonteinen Oude Gueuze were some on offer at keen prices and proper glasses. Dranke Centrale is an off-Licence-cum showroom in Altrincham.

First to go was, Salford-based, Bazens' Ashley's Ashes and, hot on their heels, next was Allgates Festival Special from Wigan. Further afield were two from Station House Brewery from Ellesmere Port with Lammastide and Wintafest, Leek brewery had Devils Arse and Splitting Feathers from Chester had two with Special Ale and a very nice dark beer, Old Wavertonian. Among the other beers were festival specials from Moorhouses and Phoenix. The general feeling was the quality and range of beers was good and service friendly. It's good to see, another Salford pub being brought back to life. The next festival is a winter ales festival to coincide with the National Winter Ales Festival weekend.

The New Oxford is now being run by Tim Flynn (who previously ran the cellar) and Paulette Scanlon, both of whom are passionate about beer quality. More on this next time.

Kings Arms

Near-by, is the **King's Arms** on Bloom St and what a revitalised pub it is too! A mid-week visit saw a brisk trade to sample Bazens' Pacific (a regular beer here) Ashley's Ashes, Fullers London Pride and two from Greenfield with Delph Donkey and Black Five - a moreish dark beer. The quality was outstanding on the last visit. The pub has never looked better, tastefully decorated and a refurbished side room, decked out with a collection of mirrors. Quality designer sandwiches (that means posh) are available at lunchtimes on weekdays. The hostelry is the base for Studio Salford and there are often plays, bands (the latest HOT Salford band is named 'Flynn'), comedy and poetry readings upstairs.

Paradise Bar

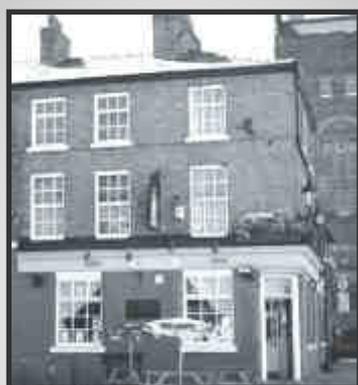
Another visit was made to a recent addition to the city centre real ale scene. None other than a market stall in the Arndale Centre - Paradise Brewery Bar. I found Nantwich Ale and a guest beer - Thornbridge Blackthorn Ale, which was sampled, found in good nick and correct temperature (on previous visit, the beers were somewhat cold). Also, a Cumbrian cider Cockrobin, Rockin Robin at a price of £2 a pint - a snip for a ABV of 7.3!

Not so Good News

Alas, bad news from north of the city. The Good Beer Guide listed, Junction Inn in Harpurhey is no more. Without any warning it closed to become a drinking 'gothic den' called the Hellfire Club. Of course, there's no real ale and a very odd venture, as the new colour scheme is black and silver spray paint to give that 'occult feel', I suppose. On last visit, there was even a mannequin-like skeleton dummy hanging outside front of building to celebrate Halloween! The adage 'It'll never work' comes to mind....

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Phil Levison presents his monthly look back at events from past issues of Opening Times

'Nursery is National Champ!' was the main front page headline, followed by 'Stockport Local Scoops CAMRA's 2001 National Pub of the Year Award'.

There was a surprise but richly deserved New Year's honour for the Nursery in Heaton Norris when the news emerged on January 1st that it had been named the Campaign for Real Ale's nationwide Pub of the Year for 2001.

The Hydes pub beat off strong challenges from contenders in County Durham, Kent and Berkshire to take the prestigious annual award.

It had already won the Stockport & South Manchester and Greater Manchester Pub of the Year titles, before going on to the final round of the competition. It was the first time the award had been won by a brewery-owned managed pub, and also marked a rare victory for a pub in an urban location. The majority of winner had historically been rural freehouses.

Beer lovers in the North West had been rocked by the news that respected Liverpool brewery Robert Cain had been put up for sale by its Danish owners due to poor financial performance.

The sale was expected to fetch more than £20 million but worryingly, a piecemeal sale of the various constituent parts could not be ruled out. The problem seemed to have been a combination of struggling cask ale sales, high-volume but low-margin canned beers, and the cost of running a large and listed brewery.

Hydes had introduced their new Craft Ale selection of seasonal beers for 2002. Excruciating puns had been used in previous years, so 'Pick of the Hops' was quite restrained – each beer would be brewed to a special recipe that allowed the style and character of the hop to shine through, and also produced the name of each beer. Each of the six beers was available for two months – Bramling Cross, Styrian Spring, Red Admiral, Summer Challenger, Autumn Goldings and Winter Fuggle.

As announced in the previous issue, the Navigation on Lancashire Hill, Stockport, had just become Beartown Brewery's third tied house. It had been expected that it would take a little time for the pub to become established, but it had proved to be a roaring success, with the instant popularity leaving both the brewery and the licensee stunned. It had been surprising how cask ale sales had taken off in a pub that had offered nothing but keg beers for years, which went to show that if a pub was well run with quality products, there would always be a demand for real ale.

The Paramount on Oxford Street, the newest of the Wetherspoon's pubs in the City Centre (and probably the best) was to be joined by yet another, the Waterhouse on Princess Street (backing on to the City Arms and the Vine.

Another new development to look out for was the opening of the Kro Bar operation at the National Computing Centre on Oxford Road. This promised to bring further choice and quality to the area.

The Crown

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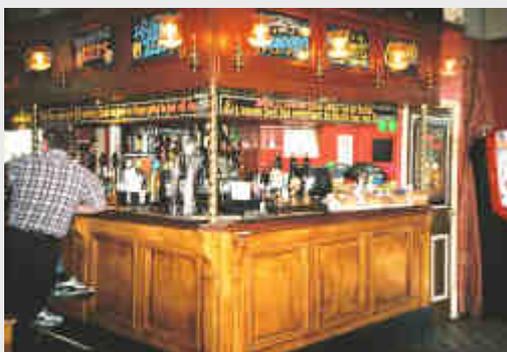
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Family Favourites

As we reported last time, there will be no new seasonal A from Robinson's this month. We weren't able to get details of the JW Lees range before we went to press either.

However Hydes have announced their six new ales for 2007, this time inspired by classic rock and pop tracks. So, look out for the following: January/February – Jumpin' Jack (4.7%), March/April – Vertigo (4.2%), May/June – Golden Brown (4.4%), July/August – Summertime Blue (4.1%), September/October – Thriller (4.5%), November/December – Atomic (4.9%).

Hydes are also running a beer trail until November. All you have to do is collect a stamp from six participating pubs and you can claim a free Hydes Beer Trail t-shirt. The pubs taking part (and from which you can get the trail cards) are: **Friendship**, Fallowfield; **Victoria**, Withington; **Fletcher Moss** and **Gateway**, Didsbury; **Albert** and **Osborne**, Rusholme; **Grey Horse**, City Centre; **Crown** and **Star**, Cheadle; **Prince of Wales**, **Horse & Farrier** and **High Grove**, Gatley.

Micro Magic

Again a rather truncated roundup of some of our local micros. We aim to restore normal service next month – apologies to those breweries not featured recently.

3 Rivers- still selling lots of bottled beers. Two new draught beers available this month. First is "Thank God It's Over" a 5% chocolate orange stout, brewed "for all the bah humbugs". From the 20th of this month look out for the return of Aquarian Ale (4%).

Millstone – nothing new this month as Jon and Nick remain snowed under with demand for the current range, although the long-awaited and eagerly anticipated stout may finally appear early this year. The bottled beers are selling phenomenally well at Love Saves the Day (Deansgate, Manchester) where demand has exceeded all expectations. Hundreds of bottles were sold over the Christmas period.

Marble – Port Stout is back and as good as ever. The three new bottled beers, Lagonda IPA, Chocolate and Ginger, have sold out and more will have to be produced. Again demand has been huge – the Unicorn Co-operative in Chorlton sold 15 cases in one day.

Pictish – there has been a flood of new beers from Pictish as brewer Richard Sutton experiments with new hop varieties. December saw Opal (4.1%) and Saphir (4%) brewed with new German hops of the same names. Bullion (4.6%) has also appeared and at the end of December Herkules (4.9%) (and using another German hop) was in the fermenter. The new German hop varieties are being used as Sooty has started running out of American varieties to experiment with. Northern Dawn (4.3%) is also back this month as the regular January seasonal.

Boggart Hole Clough – last month the seasonal Bogsleigh (5.5%) made a Yuletide return along with a new beer, Noir Noel, a liquorice stout. Brewer Mark Dade was planning a new 4.8% beer for January but had no further details as we went to press.

Phoenix – we didn't make contact but last year nothing new was planned for January but the excellent Porter and Snowbound were due to be available until the end of the month, and this should also be the case this year, we think.



Well we start off with some good news – signs of irrigation in the Reddish Real Ale Desert. For some time now, only two pubs have served the cask ale cause, the **Thatched Tavern** and the **Union**, plus one club, at **3 Rivers Brewery**.

Now, however, the **Fir Tree** in North Reddish has reopened after a refurbishment (Mr Qs has gone) and real ale returns albeit only in the vault, no demand in the lounge the manager tells me (I'm not an expert but surely an extra line to the lounge wouldn't be an issue would it?). The place does look smarter and a lot cleaner, though.

The beers currently on sale when I called were Greene King IPA and Old Speckled Hen on hand pump but the licensee tells me that the beers will change on a regular basis.

There's another gain in the pipeline, too – Holts have bought the **Grey Horse**, and this is due to reopen in April after major work.

Refurbished and Reopened

The **Griffin** (Holts), Finney Lane, Heald Green finally reopened in early December. Now being run by Bryn and Jo Rothwell (of Olde Cock, Didsbury fame some years ago). The refurbishment took many months, so what to make of it? It is visibly very striking, now rendered in white with decked verandahs to two sides with plenty of seating outside in readiness for the summer and the smoking ban. One wag cheekily likened it to looking like Southfork (remember 'Dallas' anyone?).

Internally, the floorplan is much as was and the only room that is really different is the former Snug (the one to the left of the entrance). This is now mostly dining, and seems far larger than the old space. Elsewhere, through the addition of partitions, new doorways and other adornments there appears to be less space. I believe more tables and chairs are to be added as demand grows and space allows.

Decor is stylish, yet muted with a welcome nod to the past by the use of large monochrome photos of old bar scenes and images of 1950s Heald Green. The Vault or 'Tap Room' as they now style it, is now vastly more appealing. Three beers are always on - mild, bitter and seasonal (on this occasion, Touchwood). Prices though are above managed house rates - 179, 186, and 196p respectively. Perhaps Holts have got it right first time with the Griffin, remember it took two attempts to give the Cheadle Hulme the right balance. Do give it a go, it looks promising.

Also reopened in December is the **Queens** in Cheadle. This time the refurbishment has been carried out by Robinson's and the changes are equally striking.

The two rooms at the front of the pub have been kept but the rest of the pub has been considerably changed and expanded. There is a new, second, entrance round the side and the bar is now an L-shape serving the two old rooms and the new extension.

In common with the Griffin, there is a major food operation and the far end of the extension can be partitioned off for events and functions. There is also a no-smoking area-cum-room. The décor is the successful combination of the modern and traditional that characterises many of Robinson's major refurbishment jobs.

Three cask beers are available from the Robinson's portfolio – Hatters, Unicorn and the seasonal, Robin Bitter on my visit. In common with the Griffin, prices are top of the range – I was charged over £2 a pint for all three beers.

Recent CAMRA Awards



CAMRA's Shayne Langlois (right) presents the Stockport & South Manchester October Pub of the Month award to the team at the Lass O'Gowrie, Manchester.



Stockport & South Manchester Chairman Mark McConachie presents the November Pub of the Month award to Sheila Barlow of the Armoury, Shaw Heath.

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

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

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

Monday 15th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Grapes, Hazel Grove. **Note change of date**

Wednesday 24th – Didsbury Stagger: Station, Wilmslow Rd, 7.30pm; Dog & Partridge, Wilmslow Rd, 8.30. **Note change of date.**

Saturday 27th – Branch Anniversary Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. 7.30pm onwards, **Guest Speaker – Roger Protz.** Book with John Clarke on 0161 477 1973.

Thursday 8th February – Branch Meeting: Nursery, Green Ln, Heaton Norris. **Entries for Good Beer Guide 2008 will be chosen at this meeting**

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 15th – Branch Meeting: Cheshire Ring, Manchester Rd, Hyde. Starts 8.00pm

Friday 2nd-Monday 5th February – Branch weekend away to Portsmouth/Southsea

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*

Monday 29th – Winter Pub of the Season Award to Font Bar, New Wakefield St, Manchester. 8.00pm.

Thursday 1st February- 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*

Monday 22nd – AGM & Campaigning Meeting: Brewery Tap, Congleton. Starts 8.00pm

Monday 5th February – Winter Pub of the Season presentation to the Lord Eldon, Knutsford. Starts 8.00pm

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 17th – Social at NWAf. From 8.00pm

Wednesday 24th – Branch Meeting: New Oxford, Bexley Sq, Salford. Starts 8.00pm

Wednesday 31st – Crawl: 7.30 Queens Arms, Honey St, Cheetham; 8.30 Derby Brewery Arms, Cheetham hill

Wednesday 7th February - Irlam on'th Heights; Wagon & Horses 7.30pm, Wellington, 8.00pm.

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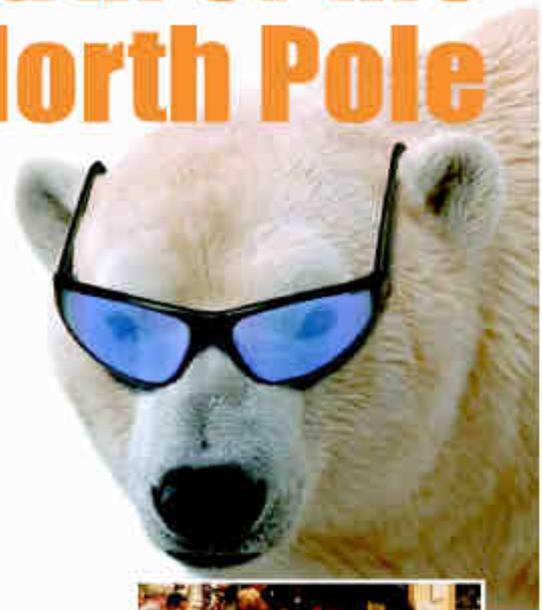
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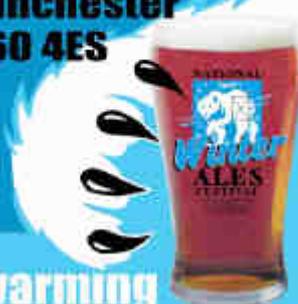
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