

AUGUST 2007



Opening

TIMES

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

NUMBER 276

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

Hornbeam Comes on Stream



The long-awaited Hornbeam Brewery finally brewed its first beer last month and our picture above shows Kevin Rothwell about to cask another batch of beer at the Denton premises. There has been a personnel change and Kevin is now in partnership with his brother-in-law Chris Coates who will work part-time at the brewery.

Three beers have so far been produced on the 7½ barrel plant – Hornbeam Bitter (the renamed and reformulated Hop Hornbeam) at 3.8% ABV, Top Hop (4.2%) and Golden Wraith (5%). The first beers (produced by departed brewer Mike Binks) are being slightly tweaked to produce a rounder finish – the “new” Hornbeam Bitter, brewed using Cascade and Brewers Gold hops promises to be an excellent drink, reminiscent of a Roosters beer. Look out for the forthcoming website at www.hornbeambrewery.com.



As you read this the Great British Beer Festival will be either about to start or be well underway (it runs from 7 – 11 August). If you get the chance, do pay the Festival a visit – London is now just two hours from Manchester by train – but if it's too late then look out for our report next month including the results of the much prized Champion Beer of Britain competition. Will any honours come our way this year? All fingers were crossed as we went to press.

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Traditional Beers for Modern Tastes



Bazens' Birthday Beer 4.3% (The Salford Series - July)
 Pacific Bitter 3.8% (Beer of the Festival, Battersea 2007)
 Flatbac 4.2% (Beer of the Festival, Stockport 2003 & BIA Bronze 2004)
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www.bazensbrewery.co.uk
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* All beers subject to availability



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for August 2007 is the Paramount on Oxford Street in Manchester City Centre.

The Paramount has been open for six years and was so named due to its location in Manchester's old cinema and theatre land. In past however the pub has never really wowed the audience as it's always been thought of as just another Wetherspoon's pub, worthy and usually reliable but nothing special. So what's changed?

Early in 2006 real ale enthusiasts Mark and Natalie Hodgson moved from the Wye Bridge House in Buxton to take over as the new management team at the Paramount and set about improving the cask beer sales. The measure of their success is that they have almost tripled the sales of cask beers in the relatively short time they have been there. Gone are the days when you can't find anybody behind the bar who knows anything about the beers on sale, gone is the awful habit of leaving pumpclips facing the customer even though the beer went off hours previously and oh yes I almost forgot, the quality has improved very significantly. The Paramount now has friendly well trained customer orientated staff and it has an atmosphere so much more relaxed than many other comparable pubs in the City Centre. It regularly has beers from local micros as well as ales from further a field, all in excellent condition and all at Wetherspoon's bargain prices.

As we highlighted in June's OT such is his success that Mark has now been given a wider role to improve the cask beer sold across all the Wetherspoon's pubs in his area, a job he has undertaken with almost missionary zeal. Even though he is a smoker himself Mark firmly believes that while the smoking ban maybe a threat to some pubs it will be an opportunity for those pubs that promote and sell quality cask beer. He points to the experience of other pubs in the group which have implemented the ban for longer to demonstrate his point and is determined to prove the premise over the coming months not only in his own pub but across the local Wetherspoon's estate.

It is not often we have the opportunity to award the accolade to licensees who have not only considerably improved their own pub but have also further the cause of Real Ale on a wider scale. This however is one of those rare occasions and this very well-deserved award will be presented on Thursday 23rd August when the pub is likely to be even more busy than usual. **JF**

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OT – COMMENT...

The smoking ban is now with us. While it is far too early to tell what the effect will be on the trade of local pubs, initial anecdotal evidence seem to be that, by and large, nothing too disastrous has happened. Of course many pubs are suffering an unseasonal dip in trade due to the terrible weather. As I typed this the sun was actually breaking through the clouds so hopefully pubs in the OT area can look forward to some late summer sun to boost takings.

Time for a couple of gripes now. Well three to be precise. First pub signs, adverts and beer lists. I'm not the most pedantic of people but two common errors really get my goat. Wells Bombardier, a popular guest beer locally, has an 'r' in the middle. And beers from Belgium are Belgian beers not 'Belgium beers'. Licensees take note.

Third gripe – the trend for pubs to sell products called 'pear cider'. **There's no such thing.** Cider is made from apples (ideally cider apples). The stuff made from pears is called perry (and should really be made from perry pears but I guess there's fat chance of that with some of the stuff being sold today).

After the brickbats, now for some bouquets. Congratulations to Kevin Rothwell for finally getting his Hornbeam Brewery up and running. Do look out for his beers in the free trade. Also well done Holts for seeing sense and withdrawing their planning application to change the Griffin, Heaton Mersey. I suspect that we've not heard the last of that one though.

Finally, apologies if this issue is a bit thinner than usual – holidays and other events impacted on our production cycle so we've had to put this one together in a bit of a rush.

OT – INFORMATION

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

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

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

Trading Standards – problems in pubs should normally be resolved by a quiet word with the licensee. However sometimes it may be necessary to take it further. These are the local contacts:

Stockport:	0845 644 4301
Manchester:	0161 234 1555
Salford:	0161 925 1346
Tameside:	0161 342 8355
Trafford:	0161 912 2274
Derbyshire:	08456 058 058
Cheshire:	0845 11 32 500

Copy Date for the May issue is Friday 10 August

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The Dysart Arms, Bunbury

Brunning and Price are a small but growing pub company with about fifteen pubs, a couple in the South-East, but mostly in Cheshire, Shropshire and North Wales. They have recently moved much closer to the Stockport & South Manchester area with the acquisition of Sutton Hall near Macclesfield, which they are currently in the process of refurbishing.

Their style is unashamedly upmarket, with prices to match, but at the same time they place great emphasis on locally sourced real ales and food, and produce high-quality renovations that are sympathetic to the original character of their pubs. They obviously know their target market well and in my experience their pubs always enjoy a healthy trade. Much as people (myself included) cherish the unspoilt, no-nonsense rustic boozery it has to be recognised that in the realities of today's market place it is a declining species, and in the future it will increasingly be pubs of the Brunning & Price type that champion real ale and real food. Their website can be found at <http://www.brunningandprice.co.uk>.



One of their longer-established pubs is the Dysart Arms in the idyllic Cheshire village of Bunbury, off the A49 a few miles south of Tarporley. Situated opposite the impressive sandstone church, and surrounded by ancient half-timbered cottages, this must enjoy one of the finest situations of any pub in the county. The pub itself is a four-square building of mellow, variegated red brick that by the looks of it is about two hundred years old. I remember it from the late 1970s as a small, basic pub tied to Bass, but since then it has been completely transformed.

The area at the front still has some of the flavour of the original two-bar interior, especially on the right with its mixture of wooden and quarry tiled flooring. If you've just called in for a drink, this is where to go. Further back the pub has been extended into former outbuildings including a large dining room with the atmosphere of a library and an impressive beamed roof. There are several open fireplaces and the usual mix of mismatched antique furniture, bookshelves and pictures of local scenes on the wall which is very much typical of this style of pub, although obviously done here with thought rather than just bought by the yard. French windows open out into an attractive, sunny beer garden on the south side of the pub.

On our visit there were four real ales available – Thwaites Bitter, a regular fixture in many B&P pubs, at £2.30 a pint, and Elgoods Cambridge Bitter, the local Weetwood Cheshire Cat and Hidden Brewery Hidden Pint from Salisbury at £2.65 or £2.70. Obviously this is not a cheap pub, but £2.30 a pint is commonplace for standard bitters in the smarter pubs around here, and it was good

to see a local micro-brewery being supported, and a range of tasty, appealing beers of modest gravity when all too often the bar is groaning with heavy, headbanging brews that are not ideal for lunchtime. We didn't try the Thwaites, but all the other three beers were in very good condition although the rather malty Hidden Pint perhaps appealed less to our palates than the other two.

The menus are on flimsy sheets of card and obviously change frequently. There is a choice of snacks – often in my experience of B&P pubs quite filling in themselves – at around £5-£7, and then a range of main courses from £8 upwards to £15 or more. We had Bunbury Bangers & Mash (£8.75), Roast Lamb with roast potatoes and vegetables (£11.95) and Whole Seabass and Couscous (a heady £14.75). The food was all enjoyable enough, but being honest it seemed to leave something to be desired, especially considering the prices. For example, the roast lamb gave the impression of having been reheated rather than freshly carved, while the sea bass was undoubtedly very succulent and flavoursome, but it wasn't the largest fish in the world and the bed of couscous was (deliberately) cold where you would have expected it to be hot. For pudding we had Honeycomb Ice Cream (£4.25) and Strawberry Waffle (£4.95), both of which were fine. The beer and general ambience at the Dysart Arms could not be faulted and, particularly given its delightful setting, it is well worth a visit on a trip out into the Cheshire countryside. However, given the ambition of the menu and prices charged, it must be said that the food fell slightly short. At two-thirds the price, you would be well satisfied, but if they are asking such a price premium they need to ensure that both the quality and the presentation are really outstanding.

Glossop Beer Festival

We are in for a treat at the end of this month when the popular Glossop Beer Festival takes place in conjunction with the town's Victorian weekend. The venue is now next to the Star Inn (conveniently close to the railway station, too) and will feature some 30-plus beers including new and rare brews. A further six beers will also be on the bar at the Star itself.

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Note - No Children Are Permitted In The Beer Tent By Law

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Most of the front page was taken up by the news that two new bars had opened in Manchester, and both sold real ale. The long awaited opening of Kro2, the younger and larger sibling of the very successful Kro Bar, finally took place at the end of July. It had been based in a ground floor conversion of the National Computing Centre, next to the BBC on Oxford Road.

The other new opening was the Arch on Stretford Road (just before the Hulme Arch). It was actually a conversion of the former Red Admiral pub which had closed and remained derelict for some years. The old pub was barely recognisable, with its two floors and a bar on each level, and a striking blue tiled extension with a large decked balcony, which was a pleasant place to drink in fine weather. It was still a Robinson's tied house, but with various club DJs playing five nights a week, it was unlikely to be a place for a quiet pint.

The Beer Orders were the laws enacted in 1990 to overcome the "complex monopoly" in brewing and pub retailing. But the Government had announced its intentions to revoke them. CAMRA maintained that whilst the Orders were not entirely relevant to the current market, they had played an important role in preventing mergers and takeovers, maintaining consumer choice and preventing community pub closures. Would it not have been better to leave the Orders intact, and launch an immediate investigation into the industry, in an attempt to overcome the complex monopolies that existed in pub ownership and beer supply?

The previous year, Opening Times had exposed a number of local pubs that displayed signs advertising the presence of real ale when none was sold. The previous batch highlighted all took down their signs and one, the Brewers in Ladybarn, did the decent thing and put in cask beer. Four further pubs had come to light – the Sherwood, Rusholme; the Angel, Gorton; the Gold Cup, Longsight; and the Beech Tree, Heald Green – all advertising real ale but none actually selling it. Another aspect of misleading signage concerned pubs that still advertised Boddingtons, when they had long since ceased to sell the traditional version, and only offered the smooth version.

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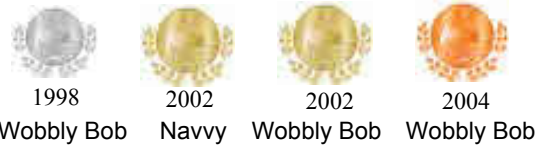
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A Pint of the Usual

I was reading recently how the regular customers of a free house on Tyneside had petitioned the licensee to be a bit less adventurous in his choice of beers. They were fed up of going in and being confronted with a range of obscure beers that they had never tasted before, and if they came across something they liked wanted the chance to be able to enjoy it again a few times.

While there undoubtedly is a market for pubs offering an ever-changing range of new and unfamiliar beers, it is a mistake to assume that is a formula that is ever going to have more than niche appeal. Even though they might like to try something new from time to time, the vast majority of drinkers are looking for familiar beers that they know they can rely on and can drink on a regular basis from month to month. They don't want a visit to the pub to be like a game of lucky dip.

But that doesn't mean that pub goers have to be subjected to a diet of Pedigree, London Pride and Old Speckled Hen. Rather than relying on the unpredictable trade from festivals and beer exhibition pubs, micro-breweries should be aiming to get their beers as regular, permanent fixtures on the bars of local pubs – as indeed some are succeeding in doing. The proliferation of pub companies of all shapes and sizes means there are more opportunities than ever before for independent producers to get their foot in the door. And the far-sighted free house licensee will realise that if he wants his pub to be part of the local community rather than just a Mecca for beer spotters he will offer a couple of permanent beers that regulars can drink

Boozed up Babies?

Until very recently it was generally advised that expectant mothers could safely enjoy a couple of drinks twice a week without posing any risk to the health of their unborn children. However, the government have now changed this to recommend total abstinence from alcohol. While there is a recognised condition known as "foetal alcohol syndrome", this only occurs in the babies of alcoholic mothers and has no connection whatsoever with the kind of light drinking being discussed here.

The government have admitted that no new evidence has come to light, and basically what they are doing is adopting the precautionary principle of avoiding even the faintest potential risk. Far from making any difference to the health of infants, all this advice is likely to do is to make expectant mothers unnecessarily feel guilty about enjoying even a very occasional glass of beer or wine. It is also yet another example of the creeping prohibitionism in our society.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, when Britain was enjoying rapid population growth, it was common for expectant mothers to drink up to a gallon of beer a day as ordinary water wasn't safe. And during the post-war baby boom they were advised to drink bottled Guinness as a tonic. Even women trying for a baby are now being advised to abstain from alcohol entirely. Yet apparently about half of all babies are conceived with the assistance of alcohol, so if would-be mothers took that advice to heart the birth rate would fall off a cliff.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.org.uk



First – good news about the **Griffin**, Heaton Mersey. I reported last month that Holt's were planning major work there and this was causing ructions among the locals.

A real head of steam built up with the planning and license applications attracting some 225 objections. Including one from the local CAMRA branch as we were unable to get any



assurances from Holts that they had no plans to knock out the internal walls in the old part of the pub. In fact all we got was corporate waffle about "retaining

the character and charm of the current operation". A public meeting was arranged at Stockport Town Hall for 25 July but the previous week came news that the applications had been withdrawn. I suspect we've not heard the last of this one, though.

I made an all too infrequent visit to the **Three Shires** on Underbank, and had a good chat with owner Simon Parry. He is keen to emphasise that the Three Shires is now a pub and the old "wine bar" tag is no longer appropriate and certainly the place has been transformed in recent years.

There's an excellent food offering (and I'm told the wine list is good, too, for those who drink that sort of thing) along with up to four cask beers. He showed me the minute "cellar" – broom cupboard would perhaps be a better description – and it's a tribute to the skills of Simon and his staff that he pub sells cask beer at all, let alone 3-4 of consistently high quality. The Three Shires is now branching out into bottled foreign beers (courtesy of Wayne Reece at Dranke Centraal) and these include the excellent Dutch Christoffel Robertus (6%), and two Belgian rarities – Slaapmutske Blonde (6.4% and dangerously drinkable) and Achilles brewery's Serafijm Donker (8%).

There's a treat for cider-lovers at the **Railway** (Portwood) over the August Bank Holiday weekend: Stockport's first pub cider festival. From Friday 24th August to Monday 27th there will be a changing range of about 8 ciders and two perries, as well as additional bottled ciders. Food will be available: chef Nicky is researching cider recipes. Landlady Sue Hitchen says "we'll have old favourites, such as Janet's Jungle Juice, as well as ciders that my customers won't have had before at the Railway." Cider supplier Merrylegs is hoping to source some cider from Welsh makers Ralph and Gwynt y Ddraig, also Herefordshire's Tom Oliver, as well as "some surprises". A weekend to look forward to!

A new licensee called Keith took over the **Bulls Head** (Stockport Market Place) on 9 July. He replaces Sam who now has relinquished running the Bulls Head to concentrate on running the Bakers Vaults. It looks as though the Bulls Head will be firmly aimed at the younger end of the market with guest DJs featuring often. The pub has had new windows fitted and has been thoroughly redecorated throughout with new carpets and furnishings. There is one solitary hand pump offering Robinson's Unicorn at £ 2.10 a pint amongst a forest of keg fonts.

News at the **Crown** (Heaton Mersey) is that an entirely new bar in a traditional style is to be fitted into the vault by the end of August. That room will also be given a re-vamp at the same time. The licensee tells me that the new food menu is going well too. Quality of the Robbies Hatters and Unicorn is also uniformly high.



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High Peak

PUB NEWS

WITH FRANK WOOD

Glossop News

A story on these pages back at the turn of the year has finally moved on. Holt's purchase of the **Norfolk Arms** in Glossop town centre in December last year prompted me to comment that local real ale drinkers may well be voting with their pockets come the Spring in the town centre, with Holts prices being a little cheaper than most.

However, there was nothing to report until last month, when the pub closed for a complete gutting and refurbishment in the Holt's style. It is due to re-open, according to staff, on Thursday December 6th, pretty much a year on from when it was bought.

While on the subject of prices, the **Crown** in Glossop continue to sell Sam Smiths OBB at £1.25 pint, its very doubtful if anyone will match that again. The Branch meeting incidentally in September is back in the Crown.

At **Glossop Labour Club**, rumour has it that they are switching from Moorhouses Premium to a more localised brewery for its single real ale. More on this as I have anything concrete.

Glossop Cricket Club's new pavilion, which includes bars on two levels, opened in late June, with money from the proceeds of the sale of part of their ground two years ago. McCarthy Stone built 48 flats on the land and the Cricket Club got a 21st Century Clubhouse. They are planning to introduce draught ales but at present John Smiths Smooth, Guinness and various cold fizzy lagers are the "attraction".

The **Sparrows**, on Gladstone Street, Glossop was recently up for auction in Birmingham. The pub has been shut for many months and it was thought that it may be bought to convert into a house. I hear it did not reach the reserve at the auction on 25th June.

Hayfield Happenings

A quick run round Hayfield found a wide selection of beers on sale. The **Pack Horse** was selling Greene King IPA and Taylor Landlord, though a third pump is known to have Howard Town on fairly often.

The **Kinder Lodge** had Draught Bass, Taylor Best Bitter and Black Sheep Bitter (one handpump seems to have disappeared). At the **Royal**, six handpumps as usual dispensing a variety of guest beers. The **Lantern Pike** has a permanent beer from Howard Town Brewery alongside Taylors Landlord and Black Sheep, with a fourth handpump often in use too.

At the **George**, Jennings Cumberland, Banks Bitter appear to be the regulars, with a guest...on our visit it was Hook Norton Hooky Gold, a few days earlier it was Hop back Summer lightning. Apparently the **Waltzing Weasel** is selling a guest beer too, though I did not manage to call in. The Marstons beers are now supplemented by a guest from Peak Ales in Bakewell.

More News

Williams Free House in Ashton is now a shell after a fire in May and the **Pointsman** on Whitelands Road in Ashton, that had been out of use for some time, was ablaze soon after on May 31st. The latter was once a highly thought of Boddingtons pub with a good name for an excellent pint of Boddies!

The **White Lion** in Disley, on the A6, going towards New Mills, has re-introduced real ale, with Black Sheep, Old Speckled Hen and Taylors Landlord the beers offered.

In **Hollingworth**, Hydes is on cask, with Bitter at £1.70. Further along Market Street, the **Organ** (Robinsons), has re-opened, with Ed, who previously ran the Gun nearby, at the bottom of Mottram Moor, taking over the licence. Previous to this he had the Cheshire Cheese in Broadbottom when it had a run in the Good Beer Guide



A recent change in the Robinson estate featured in the Buxton Advertiser. Paul Buckle has returned to the **Old Pack Horse** in Chapel en le Frith, the place where he was brought up when his parents held the license. Paul and partner Jayne Boyt take over from Keith and Liz Cox who have run the pub in the intervening years. Whilst my visits to the Old Pack Horse are only occasional as the Cox's operated fairly limited opening hours, a good pint of Dark Hatters was usually guaranteed and a mid June visit did not disappoint, under the new management.

Also in the Robinson estate the **Crossings** at Furness Vale has recently changed hands, whilst I understand that the **Swan** at Newtown has new management, and changes are also afoot at the **North Western** in Newtown.

My call in Chapel en le Frith gave me the opportunity to visit Chapel's new pub, the **Memorial**, where Titanic Iceberg and Thornbridge Hall Blackthorn were in very good form. The Memorial is certainly making an impression in the town, and not just on the beer front where it has the potential to be an oasis of really interesting beer from small breweries, amongst the pubs in the bigger estates. The Memorial won Best Float and Third Best Decorated Pub at Chapel Carnival in early June.

Another event in June was the 150th Anniversary of the opening of the Stockport, Disley and Whaley Bridge Railway, and the station at Whaley Bridge. There were events at stations along the line, whilst the largest celebration, was set up at Whaley Bridge, by the Friends of Station group. Visitors to the town found Black Sheep Bitter, Youngs' Special, Draught Bass and Greene King Abbott at the **Goyt**. The first two are regulars at other Punch houses in the area. The Black Sheep was certainly worth a try when I called during that weekend.

Hook Norton Old Hooky is one of the guests in the various branches of the Marstons' estate, having appeared in the **Shepherds'** in Whaley Bridge, the **Royal Oak** in Chapel (ex Burtonwood) and the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee (Jennings).

St.Austell Tribute sells well when it appears in the **Shepherds'** and is always in good form, despite its long journey from Cornwall. It is a pity that St. Austell don't distribute more widely some of their more characterful beers like Tinnars' Bitter and HSD, though I know this goes against last month's plea to support local micro breweries. Perhaps they aren't brewed to stand the trip.

I understand the Good Beer Guide listed **Monsal Head** is good at supporting local micros with Monsal Bitter (Lloyd's), and beers from Whim, Abbeydale, Thornbridge Hall and Kelham Island usually on sale.

Early in June the **George** in Buxton held a beer festival during a hot weekend, in association with Fiddle Hell, a gathering of international folk violinists. The beers stillaged in the room suffered a bit from the heat, though were still worth trying. There were no problems with the hand pumped beers which were as fine as ever. Breweries represented included Clark's (Wakefield), Leatherbitches, Storm and Bradfield.

At the end of June and 1st July Dove Holes Beer festival provided some good beer and some good jazz. Pale hoppy brews predominated. By Sunday afternoon only 6 out of 10 remained. Beers from Roosters' (Harrogate), York, Rugby, Wolf (Norfolk) and Millstone (Mossley) were enjoyed.

Look out for these festivals another time. Dove Holes is a fixed festival in late June /early July. Festivals at the George in Buxton are rather more moveable feasts. And finally a reminder about the **Dog and Partridge** Festival at Bridgemont during August Bank Holiday weekend. The train to Whaley Bridge or Furness Vale needs a 10 minute walk. The 199 bus from Stockport stops more or less at the door, as does the 61/61A daytime only Glossop-New Mills- Buxton bus. The TP stops at Furness Vale.



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First some news about the **New Oxford** (Bexley Square, Salford). The pub has been refurbished – the café bar seating and tables have been replaced by fixed seating to give the place a more pubby feel. In addition the range of guest beers has been increased to take advantage of the possible eclipse of the Crescent.

Real cider had now been introduced along with an enhanced range of foreign bottled beers including those from then obscure Slaapmutske and Achilles (Serafijn) producers. Draught Slaapmutske Triple and Blonde have proved to be very popular. Dates for your diary are 24 to 26 August when the next beer festival will be held.

Didsbury News

The 'famous' Crown in Didsbury has had a change of ownership. Formerly owned by the Spirit pub company it is now owned by the new Clear pub company. Clear has been formed from a split within Spirit in which some of the Spirit directors received a 'golden handshake' and they have got together to form Clear. At the moment Clear is a small group owning around half a dozen pubs but it may well expand. At present Clear have not announced what their plans are for the pub. The Clock Tower is currently closed and surrounded by builder's wooden hoardings. I understand that the pub has been bought by the owners of the Laughing Buddah, the Thai restaurant and takeaway at 782 Wilmslow road. The planning application on the window of the Clock Tower states that the plan is to turn the pub into the Fugu Bar and Restaurant, with a bar down stairs and a Thai restaurant upstairs. It will be open 10:00 until midnight Sunday to Wednesday and from 10:00 until 1:00am Thursday until Saturday. Alcohol will be served up until

half an hour before closing. It will be open later than this on bank holidays. Also in the plans is the provision to feature live music in the pub. There was no indication on the notice to say whether or not Fugu Bar will serve cask beer but bearing in mind the type of facility Fugu Bar will provide, this seems unlikely

Gorton

A trip down Hyde Road produced mixed results. The former **AStar** in Ardwick has now been converted to other use and is now to let as office accommodation.

The **Travellers Call** still sells a good pint of Hydes Bitter but nearby pubs remain keg only. One keg pub that seems set fair for a return to the real ale fold is the **Lord Nelson**. This pub has been bought Scottish & Newcastle and is undergoing a major refurbishment. When it reopens I am told that there will be a major food operation along with two cask beers, likely to be Caledonian Deuchars IPA and Theakstons Bitter.



Work underway at the Lord Nelson

Nearby the **Vale Cottage** continues to impress. Licensee John Smith tells me that he is expecting little or no adverse effect from the smoking ban and indeed is using this as an opportunity to introduce evening food from Monday to Thursday. The pub also boasts an impressive beer garden too.

On the beer front Theakstons Black Bull and Taylors Landlord continue to be the mainstays although other beers are making their mark – Jennings Cumberland Ale has been a very successful guest beer.

Elsewhere on Hyde Road the **Waggon & Horses** continues to do what you would expect a Holts house to do while the **Friendship** continues to be a shadow of its former self with no real ale.

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Please see details subject to change with our notice.



Brewery NEWS...

On the National scene, the big news last month was the purchase by Marston's of the Ringwood Brewery. This is the first time that one of the new-wave brewers has been bought in this way.

Ringwood was founded in 1978 and in that time had grown from being a tiny micro-brewer to a "new regional" owning seven tied houses and supplying some 700 pubs with its range of beers, including the famous Old Thumper.



The deal was worth £19.2 million and Marston's have issued assurances that the brewery will not close. Instead the plan is to replicate what they have done with Jennings – invest in the plant and expand production. Ringwood beers will also be appearing on the Marston's in-house list of guest and regularly available beers.

Family Favourites

Not a great deal to report from the local family brewers this month. **Robinson's** seasonal remains as Dizzy Blonde while **JW Lees** offer the popular Scorcher. We hear good reports about **Hydes** Summertime Blue (4.1%) while **Holts** slightly ring the changes with the return of Humdinger (4%) a beer brewed with Mexican Honey.

Cains new seasonal this month is also an old favourite back. Finest Lager (5%) is a proper cask lager, matured for three months before going on sale. Should be on sale at the Gothic in Gatley.

Micro Magic

As usual a regular canter round some of the local micros. Space constraints have prevented our usual comprehensive round-up. Apologies to those we miss.

The news from **Porters** is that the Griffin Inn (Haslingden) is for sale along with the brewery and its recipes. The Railway in Stockport continues to trade and hopefully will continue to sell the brewery's beers even if there is a change of ownership. Porter's Porter has been on notably fine form of late.

We've probably not seen the last of Dave Porter on the brewing scene though and OT understands that new premises are being actively sought.

We report on the front page the arrival of the new **Hornbeam Brewery** and hard on its heels comes the new **Green Mill Brewery** at Rochdale. This is based in the town's Queensway Snooker Club as OT went to press the first beer was due to go on sale at the club's bar. This will be Pearly Gates, a 5% IPA. We hope to have a review of this new brewery next month.

The new **Dunham Massy Brewery** is also moving ahead. John Costello was due to sign the lease on his premises at the beginning of the month and then set about installing a 5 barrel plant. Production of "north western style real beers" could start in September with the first beer being Big Tree Bitter. There's a website at www.dunhammasseybrewing.co.uk.

Bazens' have celebrated their fifth anniversary and as well as having bashes at the New Oxford and Kings Arms in Salford, have launched Birthday Beer (4.3%) as the new seasonal. Very good it is too. **Phoenix** are looking to relaunch their lager, Pilsner Irwell (5%) in both cask and keg form and make it available regularly. **Pictish** have rebrewed Pale 'n' Hoppy (4%) and also produced a new mild, Otters Bum (3.7%) which, despite the name really is rather good being dark, smooth and full bodied.



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Stockport Town Centre – with Stuart Ballantyne

This month's stagger begins at **Calverts Court**, the large Wetherspoon's pub on St. Petersgate. It must be one of the biggest pubs in the area but despite this it was still busy at 7:30pm with many of the after work office crowd.

But, why is it that whenever I call into Wetherspoon's pub no matter how busy or how quiet the pub is I have to wait to be served? Another thing that irritates me a great deal is that the pub does not use drip trays on the bar, beer towels or beer mats and so your shirt or blouse can all too easily get soaked in beer. I'm not a fan.

To nobody's surprise all of tonight's staggerers had to wait to be served and by the time we had all been served the first in our group had drunk their beer and were ready to move on. In terms of beer choice the range was York Terrier, Hanby Scorpio Porter, Marston's Pedigree and Greene King Abbot Ale. Nobody tried the Pedigree or the Abbot Ale but both the Terrier and the Scorpio Porter scored well with above average.

Next on to the **Stockport Arms** which had been refurbished since the last stagger and now has a late licence until 1am. The disco was just starting up as we arrived. 'Rush jugs' were on offer at £ 5-99 (vodka, ice and a ripple in a jug). Not surprisingly no one in our stagger group went for the Rush jug. Overall a clean and pleasant, if unexceptional pub staffed by polite bar staff. The only beer on sale tonight was above average Black Sheep Emmerdale Bitter.



Our next port of call was the **Egerton Arms**. This is an opened out twin roomed pub that has a pool table and a jukebox. On my occasional visits the pub always seems

to have a friendly atmosphere and tonight was no exception and all of our party were well received. The choice of cask beer here is limited with only average-scoring Tetley Bitter on sale (the second handpump serving Adnams was not in use).

Next on to the **Bakers Vaults** in Stockport's famous market place. For many years now the Bakers has been at the hub of Stockport's live music scene and tonight the Charlie White Project blues band were playing. This pub



is a Stockport institution, exuding personality and character. It has a great atmosphere with its unique central bar, high ceilings and tall windows; the effect of which is complemented by the mainly black interior and cream walls. Unusual pictures and prints add to the ambience. Robinson's Unicorn and Hatters were available but the Oldham Brewery bitter had just gone off. Both beers scored above average with the bitter achieving the best score of the night.

Across the road is the **Boars Head**. In accordance with Sam Smith's policy no music, be it live or otherwise, is allowed in the pub. When the pub was last refurbished Sam Smiths went to great lengths to replace the internal walls restoring the pub's rooms and adding character to the building. The pub was busy with a good-natured crowd on our visit. The Boars features just one cask beer and that is Sam Smiths Old Brewery bitter which was well thought of. Well worth a visit.

The next two pubs did not take long to cover, as both **Sams Bar** and **Bambooz** serve only keg beers. So it was without further ado that we moved on to the **Bulls Head** adjoining the market place. This pub was owned by the same people who own the Bakers Vaults (see *Stockport Supping for update – Ed*) and so I suppose that it should come as no surprise to learn that it no longer tried to compete with the Bakers by also featuring live music. It is a single large L-shaped pub, which to me lacked intimacy - not helped by the rather bright and stark lighting. The beer on sale tonight was Robinson's Unicorn which received an above average marking.



The **Pack Horse** on Churchgate was our next port of call. This is a very characterful black and white Tudor style building comprising of two unusually shaped rooms plus a tiled-floored lobby and bar area. In comparison with the other pubs we had just visited the Pack Horse was relatively quiet. It's a comfortable pub that serves local people, offering good conversation and background piped music. Two beers were on offer tonight, Copper Dragon Bitter and Tetley Bitter. We all tried the Copper Dragon and this was so good it turned out to be "beer of the night".

A short walk up Churchgate brought us to the **Thatched House**. This is a great bikers and live music pub selling a range of guest beers together with a traditional cider (Westons Old Rosie on our visit). The Thatched now has a ten-year lease so this should offer some continuity and a degree of protection against unwelcome large price increases. I understand that the pub is shortly to undergo a facelift, which should offset its somewhat well lived in feel. What I like about the Thatched is that it is a self-policing pub – few people can be so courageous or so stupid as to cause trouble here. Every town centre should have a pub like the Thatched, with its great atmosphere, great live music, great cask beer and great cider. Tonight the beer range included Kelham Island Easy Rider and Black Sheep Bitter. Westons Old Rosie was thought to be above average with both the other beers receiving a better than good rating.

Backtracking now towards the market place, on the right hand side of Churchgate is the **Old Rectory Hotel**. This is a plush hotel with a bar and an adjoining restaurant that is open to both hotel guests and the public. Although the Old Rectory is pleasant enough it is not, and it does not try to be, a pub. Theakstons Bitter is the only cask beer on sale and this was in good condition.

The **Arden Arms** is one of Robinson's and Stockport's greatest success stories. Not only has the pub been fully restored but it also now offers the full range of Robinson's cask beers plus restaurant quality food at pub prices. Now the Arden Arms is a regular entry into CAMRA's national Good Beer Guide and only recently narrowly missed out on CAMRA's national pub of the year award. With a pedigree like this you would expect the highest standards and tonight we were not disappointed. Although the pub was busy it was operating at its usual slick but highly efficient best with the Unicorn, Hatters, Double Hop and Oldham Bitter all receiving top marks.

And so ends another successful stagger around what is arguably one of the best drinking towns in the north west. As ever why not try the pubs for yourself and see how much you agree or disagree with the author?



The Swan Inn, Kettlethulme



The Swan is one of those idyllic small white-walled stone pubs nestling within a pretty rural village which can build up expectations but then so often disappoint because the beer and/or food is below par – not so with the Swan. The building is old, although probably not the '15thC coaching inn' as claimed. The interior is small, quaint and homely featuring stone fire places, coppers and brasses. Outside there are two patio areas to sit when the sun shines.

Some may recall the pub closing in October 2004 for conversion to a dwelling but a few of the regulars had other ideas - acquiring the premises - and in March 2005 it reopened its doors as a pub. Its style has changed little in recent years with Marston's Bitter on sale at all times; this was initially supplemented by two guest beers – recently increased to three. These are sourced almost entirely from micro breweries, many local but a few from more distant parts of Britain. They are selected by a Beer Committee and this dedicated bunch spend their own time visiting numerous beer festivals sampling ales for future consideration. It's a tough job but don't bother applying as there is a waiting list!

The Swan organised its first mini beer festival last September and a second event is planned from August 31st to September 2nd when 30+ beers will be available. Last year the beers selected reflected the customers' favorites over the previous year and if this year's pick is similarly good it will be well worth a visit.

The food at the Swan has also been held in high regard since the arrival of Rob Cloughley over a year ago. Rob developed a deserved reputation for quality food during the many years he owned the Oddfellows in Mellor. Rob, ably assisted by Janet, has now created an interesting menu of superb freshly cooked food including a variety of fish dishes.

Kettlethulme lies just within Cheshire and is also in the Peak District National Park; it is surrounded by excellent walking country being close to Windgather Rocks, Shining Tor, The Goyt Valley and Lyme Park. The nearest railway station is Whaley Bridge (approx 2 miles) on the Stockport to Buxton line and the Nos. 60 & 64 Whalley Bridge to Macclesfield bus service passes the pub - but beware the buses only run through the day and not in the evening. The pub also has a great website www.the-swan-inn-kettlethulme.co.uk which allows customers to pass comments and give scores on the beers on sale.

The Swan certainly proves that in this case good things do come in small packages. *Geoff Williamson*

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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-west. Branch Contact – Pete Farrand 07786 283990

Thursday 9th – Branch Meeting: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. Will feature Summer Quiz with great prizes. Starts 8.00pm

Friday 17th – West Didsbury & Withington Stagger: 7.30pm Woodstock, Barlow Moor Rd; 8.30 Four in Hand, Palatine Rd

Saturday 18th – Under 30s Central Manchester Pub Crawl. Details from Margaret O'Brien on 07981 756720

Thursday 23rd – Pub of the Month presentation to the Paramount, Oxford St, City Centre. From 8.00pm.

Thursday 30th – Mild Champion presentation to New Oxford, Bexley Square, Salford. From 8.00pm

Wednesday 5th September – trip to Storm Brewing, Macclesfield. £10 per head. Book with Dave Platt – 0161 256 1166

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 13th – Branch Meeting: Queens Hotel, Dove Holes. Starts 8.30pm

Saturday 25th – Branch Walk to Dog & Partridge beer Festival (Bridgmont). Meet Hayfield Bus Station 12.15pm

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. Branch website: www.thcamra.org.uk

Saturday 18th – Chorlton Social: meet Hilary Step, Upper Chorlton Rd, 1.00pm; finish Jackson's Boat, Rifle Rd visiting all pubs in between.

Thursday 30th – Ashley Social: Greyhound, Cow Lane 8.00pm (trains leave Altrincham 18.51 and 19.51 – 5 minute journey – Ashley is request stop). Return 21.48, 23.34.

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

Monday 13th – Social (evening meal optional), Roebuck, Mobberley.

Monday 27th – Beer Festival: Ship, Wincle.

The North Manchester Branch covers The Northern Quarter and North East Manchester plus the City of Salford. Branch Contact – Dave Hallows 07983 944992. davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk

Wednesday 8th – Combined award for 21 years in Good Beer Guide and Long Service: Jolly Angler, Ducie St, Manchester. 8.00pm

Wednesday 15th – Branch Meeting: Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, Manchester. Starts 8.00pm

Wednesday 22nd – Four Crown &... Crawl: Crown & Anchor, Holton St, 7.30; ...& Kettle, Oldham St 8.15; ...& Cushion, Corporation St 9.00pm; ...& Anchor, Cateaton St 9.45pm.

Wednesday 29th – Lower Prestwich Crawl: Ostrich 7.30; Woodthorpe 8.15; Friendship, Scholes Ln, 9.15.

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