

NOVEMBER 2007



Opening

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

NUMBER 279

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

Manchester's No.1



THE MARBLE brewing team (l-r Head Brewer James Campbell, Warren McCoubray, Colin Stronge and Dominic Driscoll) with their CAMRA-sponsored Manchester Food & Drink Festival award for the "Best Beer Brewed in Greater Manchester".

The award, for Marble's JP Best, was announced at the end of the hugely successful "Ale Day" staged in Manchester's Albert Square on Friday 12 October. Full story, including the surprising Mild Challenge connection with the winning brew, is on page 6.



Coming soon...the countdown has now started for 2008 National Winter Ales Festival, run by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. Once again being held at the New Century Hall in City Centre Manchester, the festival will bring you an unrivalled selection of stouts, porters, old ales and winter warmers – along with plenty of other beers too. Get those important dates in your diaries now – 16-19 January 2008.

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* All beers subject to availability



THE Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for November has been won by the Nelson Inn, on Barlow Moor road in Didsbury.

Licenseses Pete and Julie Sweeney have now been in the Nelson for two and a half years and in that time they have turned around the pub. It has been thoroughly redecorated both inside and out, and it now offers a traditional pub atmosphere to a mainly more mature clientele. Sport features heavily in the pub with live sport on TV and the pub's enthusiastic crib and darts teams. The Nelson is now a key team in the Chorlton & District Darts and Crib League.

Over the years the pub has experimented with different cask ales providing a choice of quality ales at very keen prices. Jennings Cumberland Ale is the house beer and this is complemented by a guest beer. On a recent visit this was Moorhouses Pride of Pendle. Both beers are always on good form and so it should come as no surprise to learn that the pub is featured in the new 'hot off the press' 2008 national Good Beer Guide.

Pete and Julie's pub policy is that it's 'nice to be nice' to customers. In most cases this positive attitude is returned by the regulars making the pub a great place to just call in for a pint (or two) or to meet up with friends. This policy ensures that the pub always has a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Live music features every Thursday night, Quare Craig (a great lively Irish folk duo) features every fortnight and other artists appear every other week. A piano has recently been introduced in the pub for Sunday afternoon sing-a-longs. For those that prefer more traditional entertainment, a DJ with karaoke is featured on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Although the Nelson is a single roomed pub serving mainly the working men of the village, the pub is certainly none the worse because of this. A good relaxed atmosphere is always guaranteed.

So why not join the CAMRA group for the presentation night on Thursday 22nd November when a great night will be guaranteed? **SB**

The Nelson is at the centre of Didsbury Village. Buses 23, 23A, 42 and 371 from Stockport will take you there. Similarly buses 42, 142 and 157 will take you there from Manchester.

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Hydes Pub Festivals

Just as we were going to press news broke of two in-house beer festivals at the Nursery, Heaton Norris and the Horse & Farrier, Gatley.

Running throughout November the pubs will feature extra Hydes beers plus guests such as Tom Woods Bomber, Jennings Snecklifter, Brains Rev James and others.

OT – COMMENT...

Congratulations to Marble Brewery for winning the first Cever "Best Beer Brewed in Greater Manchester" award, sponsored by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. Staging this competition was something of a leap in the dark for the Manchester Food & Drink Festival and a rather nerve-racking event for yours truly who invested a fair amount of time, effort and credibility in the success of the event.

Luckily it seems to have been something of a roaring success with a huge amount of positive feedback. It looks as though there will be something similar next year, too. Of course there is always room for improvement so if anyone has any comments, either good or bad, please contact me at the editorial addresses below.

It may be the case that the Ale Day event in Albert Square was the first beer festival that some people had visited. If you are one of those "festival virgins" you might want to visit the Bury Beer Festival on 16 and 17 November. The venue is the Met on Market Street (just a short walk from the Metrolink station) and it will be open from 12-4 and 6-11 on the 16th and from 12-11 on the 17th. Well worth a visit.

Of course the essential visit for every local beer lover is the "big one" – the National Winter Ales Festival, just two months later at the New Century Hall in Manchester City Centre. This is one of CAMRA's two national flagship events (the other the Great British Beer Festival held at Earl's Court, London, every August) – more next month.

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
Salford:	0161 925 1346
Tameside:	0161 342 8355
Trafford:	0161 912 2274
Derbyshire:	08456 058 058
Cheshire:	0845 11 32 500

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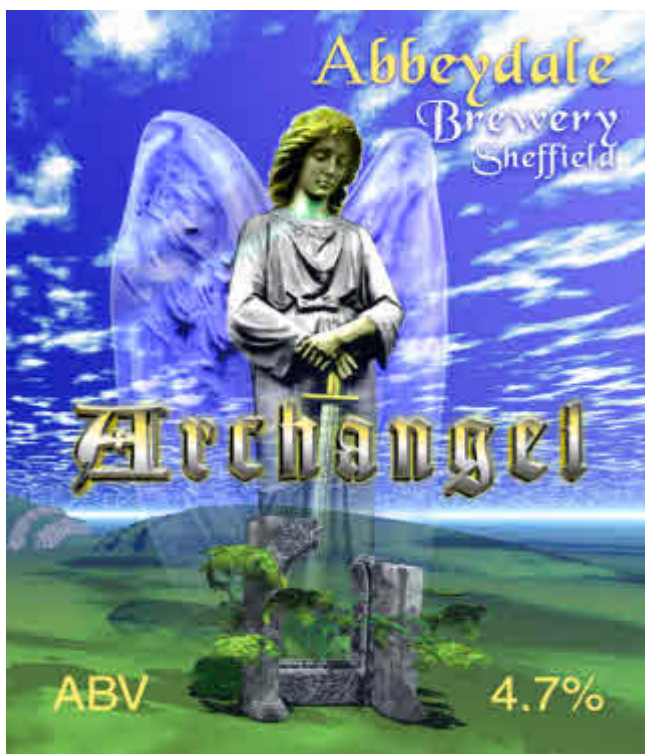
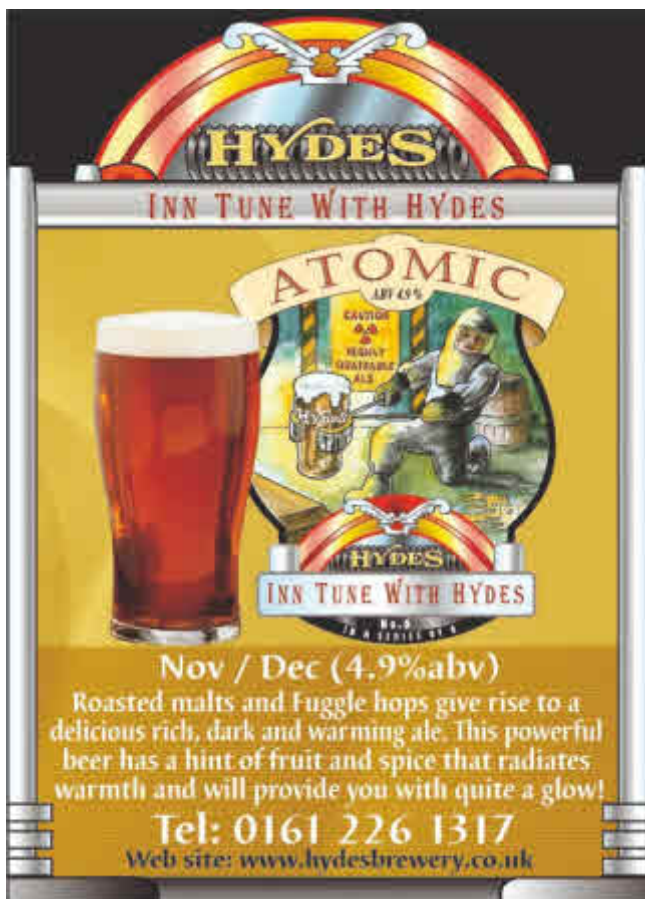
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School of Drinking

GIVEN all the talk recently about the problems caused by underage drinking, it was not surprising that Tim Martin of Wetherspoon's raised a few eyebrows when he suggested we were being too strict in enforcing the 18 age limit. Yet, when you look at it more closely, he does have a point. There are plenty of politicians and police officers urging clampdowns on underage drinking, but the vast majority of them will have had a drink in a pub before the age of eighteen and will say it did them no harm. Surely this is a distinctly hypocritical attitude.

In the past, before we had ID cards and sting operations, it was commonplace for sixteen and seventeen year-olds to drink in pubs. They knew they had to behave responsibly to avoid attracting too much attention to themselves and therefore this represented a controlled introduction to drinking. Is drinking cheap cider from the off-licence in the park and then going in the pub on your eighteenth birthday and getting blitzed a better alternative?

In reality, the line between responsible and irresponsible behaviour is often far from black and white, and it makes sense for the enforcement of the law to recognise this. Paradoxically, returning to the situation of twenty or so years ago where underage drinking in pubs was widely tolerated could well reduce society's alcohol-related problems. Indeed, there could be an argument for changing the law to allow sixteen and seventeen year-olds to drink sub-4% ABV draught beer and similar drinks in pubs at 16, while continuing to clamp down on sales from off-licences.

Room for All

THERE'S one pub I sometimes go in hoping for a quiet drink, but more often than I like my enjoyment is spoiled by howling babies and hyperactive toddlers. So I was heartened when, in another pub, a couple came in to the main bar area with a child of about three, and were politely asked by the bar staff to move to another (perfectly pleasant) room where children were welcome, which they did without demur. It's also noticeable how a couple of local pubs that do not offer food have now put up signs by their door saying that over-18s only are admitted, suggesting they recognise their customers want an adults-only environment.

It's one thing to take children out for a meal from time to time, but surely anyone with their interests at heart will accept that parents routinely dragging them into the pub while enjoying a few drinks isn't the best way to bring them up. The most anti-children attitude of all is to argue that children should be indiscriminately allowed into all areas of all pubs at all times.

As with many other things, the best way for the pub trade to approach children is to have a diversity of provision – some pubs that are family-friendly, others than are adult-oriented, and where appropriate to have the same choice within an individual pub. The latter will often be the best way to please as many customers as possible and thus maximise overall trade.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.org.uk



THE main front page story dealt with the possibility of time running out for licensing reform, unless Tony Blair's government could be held to its promises to act soon. There were fears that the bill might not be included in the Queen's Speech due on 13th of the month, in which case the whole package of reform, including the abolition of permitted hours, would be in real danger of being swept away by the next General Election. So now CAMRA was urging its members to support a move by Liberal Democrat MP Lembit Opik, who was tabling an early day motion to make sure that licensing reform didn't fall off the Government's agenda.

AS *Opening Times* went to press, news broke of a last minute deal to keep all brewing of Boddington's Bitter at Manchester's Strangeways Brewery. Interbrew, the owner of the brewery and the beer brand, had planned to retain only the cask version in Manchester, with the keg and "smooth" versions being brewed in Magor, South Wales. This would have resulted in the Manchester brewery only running at an uneconomic 20 per cent capacity, which had led to fears over the brewery's long term future. After five hours of talks between the company and the union (TGWU), vociferous local protests and petitions, which had been sent to Interbrew's Belgian headquarters, union officer Franny Joyce said "We campaigned to keep production of Boddington's in Manchester and that is what we have done."

IT was reported that brewing had finally ceased at Brakspear's historic Henley-on-Thames brewery. The Brakspear beers were being brewed in the north west at the Thomas Hardy Burtonwood brewery near Warrington, and initially they were actually a blend of Burtonwood and Henley beers. There was no news of how the Burtonwood versions compared with the classic Brakspears of old.

FOR sometime the Hogshead chain had been typical; of a multi-beer freehouse style operation. But owners Laurel Pub Company had unveiled their new look for the entire 111 outlets. They were to be re-named Hog's Head, and the old Hogshead barrel would be disappearing from the pub frontages, to be replaced by "Harry Hog", described as "a figure which symbolises the new emphasis on personality-led service". This was to be supplied by Hoggers, front bar staff offering table service. They would also be encouraged to interact with "guests" by, for example, playing table football and Connect Four.

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Ale Day Success

FOR the first time in its history, the Manchester Food & Drink Festival this year turned some serious attention to the region's great brewing scene.

With now no fewer than 23 independent breweries, Greater Manchester can stake a serious claim to being the UK's centre of independent brewing. The classic brewing towns such as Burton-on-Trent may produce more beer in pure volume terms but for the number of operating breweries and the choice, variety and quality of beers produced Greater Manchester takes some beating.

The central event was "Ale Day" held in a marquee in Manchester's Albert Square on Friday 12 October. The aim of this was twofold. Members of the public would get the chance to sample some of the finest of the county's cask ales, some from breweries they may not have encountered before, and judging would take place to arrive at the "Best Beer Brewed in Greater Manchester", a new award for the Food & Drink Festival, and sponsored by CAMRA.



Left – the final judging panel at work

16 out of the 19 breweries who were invited to do so took part (the other four being too new), including the four family concerns of Holts, Hydes, JW Lees and Robinsons. All supplied one regularly brewed cask beer to be judged. Two preliminary rounds whittled these beers down to six finalists – Hydes Jekyll's Gold, Marble JP Best, Pictish Brewers Gold, Greenfield Dobbross Bitter, Millstone True Grit and Bazens' Flatbac. These went before a "celebrity" judging panel chaired by Graham Chinn, chair of CAMRA's regional tasting panel, and including Bev Rae, Chair of Trafford & Hulme CAMRA; Dave Hallows, Secretary North Manchester CAMRA; Neil Sowerby, Manchester Evening News Food & Drink Editor; David Gale, Head Chef at the City Inn; Tim Flynn, licensee of Regional Pub of the Year, The New Oxford; Paul van der Walle Chief Brewmaster at Interbrew in Leuven; and Phil Jones, Manchester Food & Drink Festival executive director.

After much deliberation the winners were announced by Phil Jones (right). Third place was taken by Pictish Brewer's Gold, runner-up was Millstone True Grit and the winner Marble Brewery JP Best.



The Marble brewing team, there in force, were over the moon. The winning beer, described in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide as "hoppy with a good malt balance, assertively bitter", is named after John Palmer, the long-time morning manager at the Marble Arch pub on Rochdale Road who is recovering from a serious illness. Marble Head Brewer James Campbell told *Opening Times* "We are delighted to have won this award; it's a real honour for us." Paul van der Walle was also full of praise for the local brews. "The ales were excellent. This is the only country where you can find such dry, hoppy beers. When I am over here, I always go for such styles."

The Mild Challenge Connection

IN an extraordinary turn of events, the winning entry in this year's "Best Beer Brewed in Greater Manchester" contest has a connection with our very own Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge.

One of the prizes on offer was to visit Marble Brewery and help with a day's brewing. The lucky winner was Heald Green CAMRA member Alan Beeley. Our pictures below show Alan being greeted by Marble brewer Dominic Driscoll and stirring the mash. The beer brewed on that day was J P Best – and not only that but this was the very brew from which the winning cask was taken! Alan was delighted when he found out. "This is terrific news", he told us. "I really enjoyed my day helping at the brewery and this is just the icing on the cake!"



More Food & Drink Festival Events

OTHER beery events also took place during the Food & Drink Festival. A special mention should be made of **Hydes** who had a large presence in one of the Albert Square marquees and produced a special Festival Ale (4.3% ABV), an excellent well-balanced beer.

There were also two major beer and food matching nights. The first was at the **Malmaison Hotel** on 5 October. Two local brewers were featured – 3 Rivers and Bank Top and each course was made with one of their beers, with the same beer being served as an accompanying drink. *Opening Times* editor John Clarke introduced the night and as each course was served one of the brewers (Mike Hitchen from **3 Rivers**, Dave Sweeney from **Bank Top**) gave a short talk about the matching beer. Highlights included hotpot with 3 Rivers' Old Disreputable, the same brewer's Yummy Figgy Pudding in both a fruit pudding and the ice cream that went with it, and the cheeseboard accompanied with Bank Top Port O'Call, the superb port stout. Following the meal bottles of Port O'Call and 3 Rivers' Manchester IPA will be available in the Malmaison.

Pictured right is the groaning table at the Marble Arch's food and beer evening held on 11 October. Each course was matched with a Marble beer and highlights here included organic rack of lamb matched with Tawny 3, Ginger 6 as a sorbet and the first public outing of Decadence, the new imperial stout (8.2% ABV), to accompany the Lancashire cheeseboard. The Decadence was a real treat and will be on public sale in December solely as a bottled beer.



More Manchester Matters

THE **Ladybarn**, on Mauldeth Road in ... er ... Ladybarn (near Withington) is open again, and it's a real ale gain! Under the previous tenants it only had cask on very occasionally, but now it's been taken over by Patrick Smith from the Lass O'Gowrie, who says he intends to stock two real ales on a regular basis. I spoke to him when I went in mid-September. He said he still owns 50% of the Lass tenancy but intends to concentrate on the Ladybarn. *Continued on page 10.*



Mixed Fortunes in Heaton Moor

HAD a saunter around Heaton Moor one Monday evening in late July (yes, I know it's taken me ages to get round to writing this up). Starting at the **Moor Top**, they had two cask beers from Bass - Brew XI, and Draught Bass. The latter was a hefty £2.44, but was in good condition. Opposite this is a new bar, **Room Three Eleven**, at 113 Heaton Moor Road. Owned by the folk who run the Orangery, this is a good looking setup, but serves no cask beers.



The **Crown** stays with tradition however; it is now stocking four real ales - Boddies, Theakston Mild, Hancocks HB, and Skinner's Cornish Knocker, the latter guest beers. A few doors down at the **Plough**, the beer range has also been expanded from just

Tetley Bitter, to have Cains Bitter selling alongside it. I was expecting to see two or three beers on the bar of the **Elizabethan**, but although there were handpumps on the bar, none were in use. Either I called in on an off day (perhaps after a weekend of good sales?), or this is an appalling turn-around?

Opposite, the keg beer bar twins of **Orangery** and **Town** were nigh-on empty. Saddened, I made my way to Heaton Chapel for a pint of Boddies in the **George & Dragon**. Boddies was in good nick, and considerably cheaper here than the beers in its Heaton's siblings.

More News and Views

THE refurbishment is almost complete and real ale is back on at the **Thatched Tavern** in Reddish (John Smiths and Tetley Dark Mild). Guest beers are rumoured to be on their way in due course.

Staying in Reddish, work finally seems to be underway at the **Grey Horse**, taken over by Holt's months ago. Now fencing is up around the car park, portacabins in place and scaffolding erected. I asked one of the workmen how long all this was likely to take and he replied "about four months". So we shall have to wait and see what the New Year brings.

Our piece last month concerning the **Hinds Head**, Heaton Chapel, was slightly inaccurate. The new owners are Dave Woolf, Keith Ellis and Stuart Kirkham, with Rob Denny as the bar manager. Apologies. Rob tells me that the planned refurbishment will now take place in the New Year and plans of what is proposed are up in the pub.

I received a phone call from Philip Davidson, the owner of the **Oddfellows** in Mellor. He was responding to Frank Wood's call for more information (*High Peak Pub News*, last month). He tells me that the pub was closed for a short period while it underwent a refurbishment but it's now fully open for business again. There's a brand new menu and cask beer remains. The favourite Adnams is joined by two guests at weekends.

Finally, one that almost got away. Work has been going on at the former post sorting office on Warren Road, Cheadle Hulme for a few months now. We had heard that it was going to be a restaurant called "Barracuda". It has now gained the signage **The Penny Black** - a Smith & Jones pub. I asked some workmen what they knew and was told that Barracuda are the owners and that the pub is due to open on or around the 28 October. I caught a glimpse of the inside and it looks rather smart and not only could I see some gleaming fonts but three handpumps as well! More next time.



High Peak PUB NEWS WITH FRANK WOOD

Down Denton

HIGH Peak Branch had a pleasant visit round Hornbeam Brewery in Denton recently and we took the opportunity to survey many of the town centre pubs whilst in the area. Leaving the brewery and heading for Crown Point, the centre of the town, we passed the **Bowling Green** (ex-Wilsons) which sadly has no real ale available. Turning left at Crown Point, we went to the **Silver Springs** and were again disappointed to see that there was no real ale.

However, at the **Red Lion**, actually at Crown Point, Hydes' Bitter and Hydes' 1863 were in good form. Moving on to the **Chapel House** on Stockport Road, Holts Bitter and Mild were joined by the current seasonal ale, Joey's. All three were tried by our party and all three beers were adjudged as being in fine form.

At the **Jolly Hatters**, another Hydes' pub, Hydes Bitter was the beer available, and was fine. At the **Gardeners**, another Robinsons house, Unicorn and Hatters were on sale, though only the Unicorn was tried, again perfectly fine.

Turning towards Hyde, again passing Crown Point, **Broomstairs** had no real ale but the **Coach & Horses** had Marston's Best Bitter that was again fine. At the **Angel**, the oldest pub in the town, we walked on, due to there being no real ale and the same at the **Cottage**.

Leaving Denton, we walked to Hyde via the **Lowes Arms**, finding Hornbeam and Dane Town beers available from the re-opening of the Lowes Arms Brewery, re-named Danetown Brewery. Danetown's current beer range is Elixir of Life at 3.8%, Valkyrie Bitter at 4.2% and Odins Revenge at 5.2%. The new brewer is Ken Adamson (see *Brewery News*)

My beer of the day, however, was in the **Cheshire Ring**, in Hyde, where I sampled the Hopstar Bitter.. the Hartington Bitter in the **Sportsman** being not far behind it.

Dane Bank

A COUPLE in Denton have set their sights high as they take on their first pub together with the aim of putting the **Dane Bank** on the map as the premier venue in the area.

For Richard Keary, who also runs a development company in the area, and his partner Claire Hassall who has worked at the Dane Bank for 16 years, it is a perfect opportunity for their combination of skills and investment.

For both Richard and Claire their first few weeks have been extremely busy as they have kept the pub open while making some significant changes. "We have been here by six thirty each morning as work on a new bar, decoration, soft furnishings and kitchen has been underway. Our customers have been great and commented on how much things have changed each time they come through the door," said Claire.

However it is not all change at the Dane Bank as both Claire and her customers are adamant that the seat where her grandfather sat when he was a regular will be staying put but with new upholstery to bring the old seat up to date!

Around and About

AT Glossop, bad news for real ale fans is that the **Gloveworks** has closed for what will be several months after a fire in the adjoining unit, leaving the pub severely smoke damaged.

Better news though from the **White Lion** in Disley, an Enterprise house. They have up to four rotating guest beers, and are allowed to take beers from the SIBA list. A major refit on the bar is planned imminently, with eight new handpumps being installed. A great addition to an area that has been pretty ordinary for choice of beer in recent years.

The Old General



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Wobbly Bob



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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2008 We're in it!



Robin Wignall's monthly round-up of the High Peak pub scene

LAST month's High Peak Pub News introduced Peter Rothwell and David Ridgers as the new management team at the **Crossings** in Furness Vale. A September visit found Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn accompanied by Dizzy Blonde. Apparently Peter cornered the last few firkins available before the change in seasonal beer to Flash Harry. In addition to a decent pint, food is available at the Crossings at teatime with a £4.95 menu, whilst Sunday Breakfast is an attraction for late risers.

Another anticipated change has seen Chris Byatte (left, with brewery director Denis Robinson, far left) and Andrea Williams take over the running of the **Board Inn** in Whaley Bridge. Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn are again accompanied by the current seasonal beer. Dizzy Blonde went well and Flash Harry is on the Bar at the moment. Nearer Christmas Scrooge is to follow. By early October Chris was pleased with progress in their new venture.

It is good to see both the Crossings and the Board taking the Robinson's seasonal beers. For a good while now the **Cock** in Whaley Bridge has had good sales of Ward's Bitter, and this is now being alternated with the seasonal. Dizzy Blonde went very well and more could have been sold. Again in September/October, Flash Harry was available.

An early September visit to the **Ram's Head** in Disley left me with similar conclusions to those reported in this column in OT March 2007. There was decent food, decent service and a decent pint of Timothy Taylor's Landlord. However the Taylor's Landlord came at an eye-watering price of £2.85 a pint. Last December the price was £2.60, and that was bad enough.

The latest price gives an increase of effectively 10% in about eight months. I almost hesitate to mention all this in case more moderate licensees get the wrong idea about prices, but this is clearly over the top for a 4.3% beer.

Despite some optimism of a re-opening in September, the **Jodrell Arms** in Whaley Bridge remains closed, with a *to let* sign again in place. It is understood that some tentative plans had been made but these did not come to fruition. The Jodrell is a listed building in the Whaley Bridge Conservation Area. As a building of some architectural merit it deserves better than months of vacancy, with only a security guard in residence. The premises cover a fairly large area, with accommodation for visitors available and a good food potential, as well of course as being an outlet for good beer. Given the right management this could be a good pub. It is difficult to understand why Scottish & Newcastle Pubs allows this uncertainty to continue. It is easy to surmise that an over-priced lease is a deterrent to possible new management. S & N needs to get somebody in on a financially manageable lease, and to look for long term financial rewards from hopefully successful organic growth. The present situation is unacceptable, and it is not difficult to see it as being typical of the big pub companies.

Just before this article went to the editor, came the news that a *lease for sale* board has gone up at the **Shepherds** in Whaley Bridge. This is not good news from a pub where John Oliver has worked hard to make the pub a beacon for good real ale, and has been rewarded with the Shepherds going back into the Good Beer Guide for 2008. More next time.

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Continued from page 7

When I went in they had Black Sheep (which was OK) and 'Ladybarn' which apparently is a local badging of Lass Ale, which was good. Patrick tells me he put on the Black Sheep because it's the best seller at the Lass, but he hopes to get some beers from local micros. He deserves your support if you're in the area.

Staying local, the **Brewers Arms** round the corner is also 'under new management', but still has no real ale.

Meanwhile the **Lass O'Gowrie** continues to be a 'must visit' pub with comedy and live music nights adding to the attractions - Gareth's new management team of Lisa Davies and Mick Warr are certainly making their mark on this local institution. Regular beers include Shepherd Neame Spitfire, Deuchars IPA, Taylors Landlord, Bombardier, Black Sheep Bitter, the house Lass Ale plus three independently sourced guest ales - quality is high and the pub is a Good Beer Guide regular.

Check out the new menu - there are two new chefs and from my brief perusal of the menu they seem to be really ringing the changes.

Greens

IT WAS about a year ago that I was chatting with John Henley, owner of **Bar Fringe** on Swan Street and he mentioned that he would be opening a second bar on a site just off Oxford Road. The result is **Greens** (The Quadrangle, Chester Street), which opened on 29 September. Those expecting a sort of "Fringe 2" are in for a surprise. Fringe has the cosy, eccentric feel of a bar you could easily find on a side street in Antwerp. Greens, however, is very much in the modern Manchester idiom.



Outside the brushed steel pillar with its neon sign gives a clue that this is something different. Within a bare concrete shell John has created an eating and drinking space that

contrives to be both intimate and dramatic. A sweeping curved wall, dramatic artwork and a front lit bar all add to the sense of theatre.

Greens opens at 7am and functions as a coffee shop until 11 and then is essentially a bar/restaurant (kitchen closes at 10pm). The food is modern British and initial samplings get a high recommendation. The one similarity with Fringe is the beer offering. Three cask beers are on handpump (to date a Phoenix beer, an Allgates beer and Boddies) along with a traditional cider. There's an excellent bottled beer range, too, including some American craft brews - the Great Divide Titan IPA (6.8%) and the Flying Dog Doggie Style Pale Ale (4.7%) were particularly noteworthy and flavoursome. Well worth a visit.

Didsbury

WELL, *the Didsbury* to be precise. I popped in and chatted with new deputy manager Adam Shaw, who has been there since February. He arrived from the Two Brewers in Watford and his remit is to push the cask ale offering in the pub. He's certainly getting stuck in - check out the pub's beer festival throughout November. The aim is to get through between 60 and 100 beers in the month. I was impressed also by the pub's organic beers from the North Yorkshire Brewery including the house beer "The Didsbury Ale" (3.7% - ish). With a new menu in the offing the Didsbury is certainly worth a special visit I think. I'll certainly be popping down during the festival.



West Didsbury & Withington with Mark McConachie

OUR West Didsbury and Withington Stagger began on Barlow Moor Road just beyond Palatine Road at Ember Inns' **Woodstock**.

Formerly the home of the British Council, it was converted to pub use some years ago and is now a much cherished facility in an area with few pubs. A Victorian house with many original features preserved and well-tended gardens too. Beers were Hydes Summertime Blue, Black Sheep and Ruddles Best. The latter beer scored highly with our party.

Across the road is the much rejuvenated **Barleycorn**. Formerly in the Tetley stable, this pub had a history as something of a "greasers" pub. Well, no longer. All is neat and tidy now, they even do food. It had not sold cask ale for some time either, but has of late been selling the odd different beer each week, on our call this was Wells' Bombardier. I found it pleasant, but we generally found the temperature of it was far too cold, and this masks the flavour. Keep trying though please.

A ten minute walk along Palatine Road will get you to the **Four in Hand** (Banks's) at the junction of Lapwing Lane (I decked on a 43 bus to save time). This is another of these Victorian mansion conversions that occurred some years ago. Also set in extensive grounds and doing much food, this is quite a plush affair with many folk taking advantage of a mild evening to use the gardens. The beer quality was disappointingly average for the two offerings – Banks's Bitter and Marston's Pedigree.

A short walk along Lapwing Lane arguably gets you to the centre of West Didsbury. The small Holts pub, the **Railway** was our first call. Busy as usual, and the two beers on offer scored very well - Holt Bitter and seasonal five percenter Pioneer. Neither next door **One Lounge Bar**, nor **M20** were visited as neither sells cask beer.

Thus we ventured across the road to the bustling vastness of the **Metropolitan**, possibly the area's premier venue, certainly the one with the most folk in it tonight! I seem to recall this being the dearest outlet too, £2.80 a pint. Three beers on, we didn't try the Deuchars IPA, but the Taylor Landlord and Kodiak Gold from Beartown were very good.

Second part of Stagger now, so a move into Withington was taken by a short stroll along Burton Road (bus 111 from Manchester) to the **Old House at Home**. I recall this former Whitbread house attaining a Pub of the Month award back in September of 2001. It now appears to be under Greene King ownership; would the Suffolk brewer provide us with something

special? Well, yes and no. The pub is quite foody now, and is in good repair, plus it offers four beers - three from the Greene King stable IPA, Old Speckled Hen, and Ruddles County, plus a guest in the form of Smiles Maiden Legover. We only tried the latter two beers, the County was average, whilst Legover was better but hardly orgasmic.

Would next pub, Holt's **Orion**, prove a revelation? Hardly, but the air quality there is one of the most improved I've encountered since the smoke-ban. Holt Mild went untried while the bitter was pretty good. Still a down-to-earth, sometimes lively haunt.

On to Wilmslow Road next. The **White Lion** remains closed, whilst the **Albert**, **Solomon Grundy**, and **Turnpike** sold no cask ale. Thus, it was into the **Victoria** (Hydes – pictured below) we strode. Run by long-time licensees and long-time Good Beer Guide entrants Edgar and Janice, this is always a well-run house with beers that showcase the Hydes range. Tonight was no different, four beers on, all of them tried, all in top-notch nick. The range was Hydes Mild, Bitter, Jekylls Gold, and Summertime Blue. I would have loved to have stayed longer. Thanks to a



proud Edgar for showing me his new beer garden.

Marston's **Red Lion** was our terminus tonight. This sprawling, low-ceilinged pub with fine bowling green can usually be relied upon to deliver the goods. I'd say it was merely passable on our call. Of the three beers, the Bass went untried, whilst Marston's Bitter was average, and the Pedigree good. A fair number of people were enjoying the convivial atmosphere and the late opening hours too.

Another interesting crawl with some very mixed findings beer-wise and pub-wise.

If you would like to follow in our footsteps, use buses 23, 23A, or 370 (from Stockport BS) to get you to the Barlow Moor Road start point or buses 41, 43, 48, 143 from Withington Library to get to Lapwing Lane, West Didsbury. Full details of all our Stagers are published on our website. Enjoy.

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Dave Sheldon reports on two summer outings

Consecutive Saturdays in July saw us visit two top class pub festivals. First up was the Bhurtpore in Aston. This village is 5 miles south of Nantwich and the best way to get there is by taking a train to Wrenbury and then walking for 15 minutes. Out of the way it may be but it attracts drinkers from across the country many of whom camp on an adjacent field.

Over the 6 days of the festival around 110 beers were available, a dozen at the bar with the rest being on stillage in a recently refurbished part of the pub.

We hit lucky on the day of our visit as yet another wet week gave way to one day of blue skies and sunshine. Arriving at the pub shortly before it opened at midday meant that we were able to lay claim to a table under the marquee in the garden.

CHAPS at the Bhurtpore



As well as the cask ales the Bhurtpore has a great range of foreign, mostly Belgian and German, draught and bottle beers. To accompany the beers is a range of quality food from hot rolls through to excellent main

courses.

Well behaved children and dogs enjoyed the beer garden, and impromptu musicians added to the relaxed summer atmosphere. Can there be any better way of spending a Saturday afternoon? The following Saturday we visited the Star Inn, Lockwood, just outside of Huddersfield town centre This is another pub that knows how to put on a good festival. This pub also has a dozen cask ales on the bar and a large marquee covering the outside yard. In this marquee is one long bar with around 50 handpumps in a row, what a sight! Once again drinkers come from far and wide but this time it is more about the beer, consequently the ratio of males to females is much greater than at the Bhurtpore.

Right - the impressive bar at the Star Beer Festival



At both of these festivals it was about drinking the best of British cask ales. What

better way is there of spending a Saturday afternoon than getting together with friends to taste and chat about some of the finest beers that our brewers can produce. And in the view of many of us a new brewery called Brew Dog produced the very best of them all, Rip Tide at a staggering 8%ABV which tasted of chocolate, coffee and liquorice - wonderful!

After the visit to the Star Inn many of the drinkers, including a good number from the Stockport and South Manchester area, were to be found in some of the better Huddersfield hostleries including the Rat & Ratchet, Grove and Railway Tavern.



Brewery NEWS...

Dunham Massey Comes on Stream

AS WE trailed last month, the county's latest brewer has now launched into the free trade.

John Costello is an engineer by profession and spent 10 years at the Tetley Brewery in Warrington. While there he had major roles in the cask and fermenting departments and finally assumed the role of decommissioning engineer when the place was closed down. A career at Astra Zeneca followed but now he has taken early redundancy to expand his hobby up to a commercial scale – and if early feedback is anything to go by, it will prove a wise move.



The brewery is in a National Trust-owned barn (pictured, left) that had been disused for seven years before being taken over by John, who is full of praise for his supportive landlords.

The 5-barrel brewery (formerly at the Battersea Brewery in London)

produced its initial beers during the first week in October. These were Dunham Massey Bitter (3.6% ABV) and Tawny Ale (3.8%) – accidentally weaker versions of what will be the core range of Big Tree Bitter (3.9%) and Deer Beer (4.5%). These sold out very quickly and have now been replaced by the core beers. Feedback has been very positive to date with rapid sales in some outlets.

The beers themselves are described by John as traditional north-western beers – copper coloured with a good malt balance underpinning a firm hoppy bitterness. Hop varieties are all British with a combination of Target, Northdown, Fuggles and Goldings hops along with Halcyon malt. The yeast comes from a 'northern brewery'. Don't expect huge numbers of new beers, either. John's policy is to exhaustively test new recipes and then stick to a relatively small tried and trusted range. That's not to say there will be nothing new – John has ideas about a winter warmer, a paler summer beer and he even has a recipe for a bonfire beer incorporating treacle in the brew. Bottle-conditioned (or "real ale in a bottle") beers are also being tried.

Pubs wanting to try the beers can contact the brewery on 0161 929 0663.



Dane Town & Hornbeam Joint Launch

LAST month saw the formal launch of the Hornbeam Brewery at the Lowes Arms in Denton. An added bonus was that the former LAB Brewery, based in the Lowes Arms' cellar was relaunched as the Dane Town Brewery on the same night.

The **Hornbeam** beers seem to get better and better, with Top Hop turning into a superbly quaffable, aromatically hoppy beer. The launch night saw the debut of Black Coral Stout (4.5%) – again not too heavily bodied but a drinkable and satisfying beer with an abundance of chocolate and coffee notes coming through as you drink it. This month should see the appearance of the potent Dark Domination Porter at 6%.

The re-launch of the LAB as Dane Town Brewery caught everyone on the hop, so to speak. Peter Wood still owns the Lowes Arms and his new Head Brewer is Swinton-based Ken Adamson, a man with 18 years experience at Greenalls, and even more as a keen home brewer, behind him.

His beers are based on his home brews and were very drinkable on the launch night. Denton was originally "Dane Town" and so the beers have names with Viking connotations.

Launch night saw the appearance of Valkyrie Bitter (4.2%), a premium beer with an enjoyable hop character from the generous use of the American Amarillo variety. Arguably it needed a little more malt underpinning to lift the body but a quaffable brew none the less. Also available was Odin's Revenge (5.2%), a more malt accented beer. Subsequently Elixir of Life (3.8%), a light, pale blond beer has been on sale and Ken tells us that next up is Warrior's Might, a dark beer with much more hop character. Ones to watch, we think.

Aside, Ken Adamson (l) and Peter Wood (r) in the cellar brewery at the Lowes Arms



Porters Sold

AS we went to press, Porter Brewing Company, along with the Griffin Inn was about to change hands. The new owner is Geoff Oliver, owner of the Sportsman pub in Hyde. He has also taken on the lease of the Railway in Stockport. More on this one next time.

More Brews News

Robinsons new seasonal Flash Harry, an excellent beer with a peachy hop aroma, is selling very well, we hear. Indeed all of this year's new beers have been a success – Dizzy Blonde at least will be back next year.

Hydes' – the seasonal for November / December is usually something dark and delicious. The one to look out for this year is Atomic (4.9%).

Bazens' – new in the Salford Series this month is Picture Perfect (4.3%), brewed with Mount Hood and Cascade hops. Top of the Pubs (4%), brewed for the New Oxford's Regional Pub of the Year Award remains on sale at the pub and is selling well. Check out the brewery website for the new Knoll Street Porter t-shirts.

Phoenix – Spotland Gold (4.1%) pale gold and crisply hoppy, is the latest addition to the permanent range. Very nice it is, too. This month look out for Flash Flood (4.1%), Last Leaf (4.5%), Rip Rap (the Editor's favourite Phoenix beer) at 4.1% and Firecracker (4.5%). Phoenix Pilsner (4.8%), unpasteurised and rough filtered can be found at Sand Bar, All Saints.

Pictish – still experimenting with single hop beers. The latest is Riwaka, using a New Zealand hop, (4.2%) and Amarillo (5.5%) has also been re-brewed. The superb Samhain Stout (5%) will be out for Hallowe'en and the monthly seasonal is Z-Rod (4.8%)

Marble – we are of course all waiting for the launch of the bottled imperial stout, Decadence (8.2%), but some consolation is available for November with the reappearance of the rich McKenna's Revenge Porter (4.5%).

Greenfield – one new beer is Crown & Kettle Ale (4%), a new house beer for Manchester's Crown & Kettle. This was launched at the pub's second birthday party on 11 October and is a good crisp hoppy beer. The Rugby World Cup prompted the appearance of Block & Tackle (4.4%), a chestnut coloured bitter with a hoppy aftertaste.

3 Rivers – a new beer is Murphy's Law (4.5%). This amber, very bitter beer has been brewed exclusively for this month's Wetherspoon beer festival. Future plans include a new stout and a smoked malt beer ("Old Smokie") which may appear on or around Bonfire Night.

Bank Top – new out are Beever's Droop (3.9%), pale and floral plus Beetlejuice, a darker Hallowe'en seasonal at 4.2%.





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-west. *Branch Contact – Pete Farrand 07786 283990*

Thursday 8th November – Branch Meeting: Blossoms, Buxton Rd, Heaviley. From 8.00pm

Saturday 10th – Trip to Hornbeam Brewery. Depart on 11.28 Stalybridge train from Stockport (alight Denton), bus back. £5 per head – book with John Clarke 0161 477 1973

Friday 16th – Cheadle Hulme Stagger: Hesketh, Hulme Hall Rd 7.30pm; Governor's House, Ravenoak Road 8.30.

Saturday 17th – Informal social at Bury Beer Festival. From 12.00 noon.

Thursday 22nd – Pub of the Month presentation to the Nelson, Didsbury. From 8.00pm

Saturday 24th – Under-30s crawl of Stockport. Start Railway, Portwood 8pm.

Thursday 13th December – Branch Social and Xmas Quiz: Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8pm.

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 12th – Branch Meeting: Star Inn, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm
The **Trafford & Hulme Branch** covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester West of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. *Branch Contact – John Ison 0161 962 7976. Branch website: www.thcamra.org.uk*

Thursday 8th – Branch Social: Church Inn, Church Rd, Flixton. 8.00pm

Thursday 22nd – City Centre Crawl: Ape & Apple 8pm; Waterhouse 9.15 then on to Vine and City Arms.

Thursday 6th December – Branch Meeting: Volunteer, Cross St, Sale. 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 19th – Campaigning Meeting: Bull's Head, Mobberley. Starts 8.00pm

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 14th – 10 Successive Years In Good Beer Guide Presentation: Smithfield, Swan St, Manchester. From 8.00pm

Wednesday 21st – **Branch Meeting & AGM:** New Oxford, Bexley Square, Salford. **All members please try and attend this important meeting**

Wednesday 28th – Rochdale Crawl: 7.30pm Cask & Feather, Oldham Rd; 9.00pm Regal Moon, The Butts.

Wednesday 5th Dec. Eccles Alemanac Crawl. Eccles Cross, Regent St, 7.30pm, Dog & Partridge, 8.15, Albert Edward, Church St, 9pm. Finish Lamb Hotel, 10pm.

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Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season Presentation



Kevin with Bev (Chair, left), Heather (nominator, right) and unknown visitor.

IT WAS a rather nervous landlord that greeted us at the Trevor for the presentation of the Trafford and Hulme Pub of the Season Award, writes Heather Airlie, but he was clearly delighted. Kevin's first words were to thank his staff, particularly long-term Trevor favourite, Mary, for their hard work and support.

T&H's new Chair Beverley Rae commended Kevin for not only bringing in guest beers, being good enough to be nominated for the POTS, but also keeping said beers well enough to be awarded the Cask Marque, all in less than a year.

The regulars expressed their pleasure in seeing their local recognised and particularly enjoyed the buffet!

Kevin's next target is the 2009 Good Beer Guide, as he had not been in post long enough to be eligible for the latest 2008 edition. With stiff competition in Chorlton developing, he still should have a good chance, if present form continues.

Well done, keep up the good work!

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