

FEBRUARY 2008

O
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FOR
REAL ALE
TIMES

Opening
THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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

Crown is Local Pub of the Year



The Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport, has been voted Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year for 2008.

The Crown has been a multiple award winner in the past but it has really taken off in the past 15 months or so when it was rescued from decline by Steve Alexander and Ian Watts. In that time, Steve and Ian, along with their management team of Sarah Bergin, Lee Watts and Lesley Watts have transformed the Crown into a flagship for choice and quality. Sixteen handpumps dispense an ever changing range of guest beers, there is real cider, exceptional lunchtime food and a pub that gleams and sparkles. Varied live music, quiz nights and real fires in the winter months all add to the award winning mix.

Branch Chairman John Clarke summed up the pub's appeal: "It has been a delight to see the incredible transformation of this pub. The fact that it is invariably busy with customers of all ages is testimony to both the high quality of the operation here and also the hard work, commitment and professionalism of all those involved in the running of the pub."

The award is to be presented on the evening of Saturday 23 February when the pub is likely to be even busier than usual – get there very early if you want a seat.



Friendship is Runner-Up Two Awards for Old Tom

Ably run by Chris and Tricia Batty, the Friendship is situated in the South Manchester student heartland and yet remains a true local, appealing to the whole community, both young and old alike.

The traditional values are underpinned by the range of cask ale available at this Hydes' house. Hydes Original, 1863 and Jekyll's Gold are accompanied by not only the brewery's latest craft ale but also up to two guest beers. The commitment to quality here makes the Friendship a very fine pub indeed.



Old Tom won two medals at last month's National Winter Ales Festival. See our reports on pages 7 and 8.

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COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

Opening Times – Comment

The National Winter Ales Festival turned out to be a huge success, with a record attendance. Congratulations to all involved. Congratulations, too, to family brewer Robinsons for winning a double award with their classic barley wine Old Tom – see page 7 for our special feature on this very special beer. Sadly our local champion was just pipped at the post for the Champion Winter Beer of Britain title (I hear it was a close run thing) but best in class and second overall isn't bad, to say the least.

You will see that one or two regular features are missing from this issue – the National Winter Ales Festival threw our production timetable out of kilter. Normal service will be restored next month – along with the launch of our new campaign to try and get more cask beer sold down one of the area's main arterial roads.

Opening Times - Information

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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	Trafford	0161 9122274
Manchester	0161 234 1555	Derbyshire	08456 058058
Salford	0161 925 1346	Cheshire	0845 1132500
Tameside	0161 342 8355		

Copy Date for the March issue is Saturday 9th February.

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, John Tune, Pete Farrand, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Tom Lord, Frank Wood, Peter Edwardson, Andy Jenkinson, Robin Wignall, Dave Hallows, Jim Flynn, Phil Levison, Jill Hasler, Stuart Ballantyne, Adrian Palmer, Barbara Cauchie

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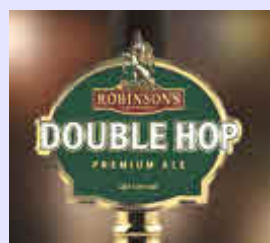
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THE Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for February 2008 has been won by the Queens Arms on Stockport Road in Cheadle.

For many years this pub lacked investment; it appeared to be unloved and unwanted by Robinson's brewery to such an extent that the actual fabric of the pub deteriorated so badly that many regular customers voted with their feet. Something had to be done and finally Robinson's came up with an ambitious plan to inject money into the pub and to virtually rebuild it.

The plans were so extensive that many feared that the pub would not survive the changes and that the community nature of the pub would be destroyed forever. But fear not – enter the



family team of Brian Hall, daughter Tracy Halliwell and nephew Brian Stokes (the licensee). This team set about transforming the pub into the community local that it always deserved to be. The intention was to create a family friendly pub that would appeal to local drinkers of all ages, offer good food at realistic prices and

become the essential drop off point for everyone in the community. The pub has two chefs offering everything from bar snacks to main meals, including of course, vegetarian options. At weekends the pub also offers a vocal artist on Saturday night with a quiz and 'play your cards right' on Sunday night. In the summer months the pub also benefits from an extensive beer garden and a safe children's play area.

I think that Brian, Tracy and Brian have achieved everything that they set out to achieve and a lot more. The pub seems to be busy most of the time; busy at lunchtime with office workers seeking a bite to eat and a break, busy early evening with diners and the after work crowd, and busy in the evenings with locals. Many regulars now visit the pub from some distance away.

Of course every pub that receives the Pub of the Month Award has to sell good beer and the Queens certainly does that. Robinson's Hatters, Unicorn and Double Hop are invariably available and the team always ensure that all of the beers are kept in the very best condition. Selling good beer, good food and appealing to the wider community has ensured that the Queens is a runaway success and so it richly deserves the Pub of the Month Award.

So why not join the local CAMRA branch to celebrate the award which will be presented to Brian, Tracy and Brian on Thursday 21st February when, I am sure, a great night will be enjoyed by all. **SB**



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Almost Ardwick & the City Centre with Jim Flynn

Well, this stagger was supposed to start in Ardwick but in the days leading up to our night out word reached us that the place was denuded of cask beer.

Surely the licensees of Ardwick are all looking for their USP (unique selling point for those without marketing degrees) to improve their trade and here is one being delivered to them on a plate. Yes, it's real ale, you know the stuff everybody in the area used to sell before multinational breweries and huge pub companies came along!

Our first port of call was therefore the **Bulls Head** opposite the new entrance to Piccadilly station. The pub has been opened out

but certainly not ruined as a result, with leaded windows giving the place character. The décor was pleasant with a red ceiling and the now ubiquitous slogans on the walls.



The place was busy but most of our sizeable band found

a seat. There were four cask beers available of which we tried three, the Moorhouses Pendle Witch, Hook Norton Hooky Bitter and Bass with the Moorhouses being the pick of the bunch. We did not try the Marston's Pedigree. Before I left I wrote down a note for myself 'pricy end of the market', little did I know what was to come.

Walking past the previously cask ale **Monroes** we negotiated the tram tracks to arrive at our next port of call the **Waldorf**. Another open plan pub with some raised areas, it has a wooden floor, exposed brick and again red walls and ceiling. That paint salesman did well hereabouts. We tried the London Pride and the Taylor's Landlord which were both in reasonable form. Nobody tried the Boddingtons Cask. As we left the music was replaced with the sound from a very large television.

A short walk away is **Kro Piccadilly**, one of a chain in

Manchester which started a few years ago with a small bar opposite the university (Kro means bar apparently in Danish). This place is anything but small and although it's not my cup of tea this is not a view shared by many others as the place was heaving. It is an L-shaped bar with plenty of glass and chrome which unfortunately reminded me somewhat of an ultra-modern hotel reception area. We tried the three cask beers - Deuchars IPA and Wells Bombardier which were both on good form and the 3 Rivers Manchester IPA which was the beer of the night. Be warned however of a stonking £2.70 a pint for the 3 Rivers, which was cheaper than the other two. You may need to consult your bank manager before arranging a night out in here! Surely, there can be no excuse for these mark ups.



Our next stop could not have been more of a contrast. Hidden away behind Chorlton Street Bus Station on the edge of the Gay Village, **Paddy's Goose** is a pub of the more traditional sort where wood and paint rather than glass and chrome reign



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supreme and seats are there for the taking. It is the sort of pub where you might say all human life is here and while I would not say it is my favourite pub it is still worth calling in. Both the Robinson's Unicorn and the Marston's Pedigree were reasonably well received by our now large group of staggerers.

As usual with large groups of people we began to break up into smaller subgroups, which was lucky as the next two pubs are amongst the smallest in the city centre. Having checked out the still keg Yates (how the mighty has fallen from the days of my youth) we next went to Hydes' **Grey Horse** on Portland Street, the first pub on the stagger to be owned by one of Manchester's family brewers. Despite its size it is very popular, with a mock Tudor interior and pictures between the wooden struts. We tried the Mild, the Original Bitter and a new beer to us all, Atomic (so new they had had to devise their own pump clip). All were in good form with the Atomic, a dark bitter or strong mild, the opinion varied, the best of the bunch.



The smallest pub of all however is almost next door - the **Circus Tavern**. With two small rooms, the walls covered in sports pictures, and a corridor the length of the pub in which sits a tiny bar, the pub is not much bigger than a dining room in Bramhall. It was packed to the rafters with people spilling out on to the street where the Greek Cypriot landlord, one of Manchester's larger than life characters, stood. There is only one beer in this heritage pub, Tetley Bitter and opinion was divided depending on the attitude to Tetley Bitter as a beer in general.



Our final stop was just a few doors down on Portland Street, the **Old Monkey**. This Holt's house has rooms with wood panelling on the walls and bars on two floors. It always has that well lived in feel about it beloved of many a Holt's pub. In the basement are the toilets which unfortunately had a rather over lived in smell about them. The Mild and Bitter were in reasonable form but perhaps we could have picked a pub with better beer to end the night. The 1849 was available but this drinker returned his pint and swapped it for a Mild.

Overall an interesting and very varied crawl which rarely hit the heights as far as beer was concerned but certainly hit the pocket.




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Last Leaf, Massacre, Porter, Snowbound,
Wobbly Bob, White Hurricane, Uncle Fester,
Christmas Kiss, Humbug, Tyke, Thirsty Moon

**MORE CHOICE
BETTER BEER**

International Brewing Awards



1998 2002 2002 2004
Wobbly Bob Navy Wobbly Bob Wobbly Bob



The Empire Crumbles

SOME years ago I expressed the view that the giant pub companies that had taken over from the unlamented “Big Six” brewers did not have a long-term future. Their lack of branding meant they had no identity in the eye of the consumer and they seemed to be focused more on property investment than actually running pubs.

For a long time they seemed to defy this prediction, doing deals to merge and shuffle their portfolios while constantly “churning” the bottom end of their estates. But this was all in an era of economic growth. Now, when the effects of the economic downturn have been compounded by the awful summer and the smoking ban, their chickens are coming home to roost, something reflected by the fact that the share prices of some of the major pubcos have halved since the middle of 2007.

In more and more cases, the high lease payments that could be supported in the good times do not allow licensees to make a living once business has turned down. So we see licensees quitting the trade, or even going bankrupt, and nobody being willing to take on the pub at the same inflated level. Often this leads to a pub being closed for an extended period of time and eventually either being let at a much lower rate or sold off, often to be delicensed and closed forever. I can think of several pubs around this area that don't to my mind seem inherently unviable which have been closed for months. This must damage trade in the long term as regular customers will either go elsewhere or get used to staying at home. In contrast, a local brewery or a small independent pub company would do their best to keep the pub trading, perhaps by putting in a temporary tenant. This approach also leaves the pub companies wide open to being outmanoeuvred by smaller, nimbler operators.

This kind of action clearly shows that the pub companies see themselves as property dealers first and retailers second. It is no good for the pubs themselves, no good for local communities and in the long run no good for their overall business. While there is a future for branded chain pubs I still believe that eventually we will see the sprawling unbranded leased estates disappear, either to be broken up into smaller companies that are closer to local markets, or to retreat purely into property ownership and get out completely from any pretence that they are retailers.

Vanishing Species

I RECENTLY found myself in a pub that ticked a lot of the right boxes. It had a variety of small rooms, real fires burning in the grates, real ale from an independent brewery on the bar, a good mix of locals and visitors from further afield, including people of all ages, a number eating meals but not enough to overwhelm the place, and a friendly, welcoming atmosphere throughout.

But it struck me that, even though this is the image of pubs that most people still have in their mind's eye, all too often the reality is very different. You're far more likely to find a mock-rustic dining establishment that looks down its nose at the casual drinker, a garish chrome and glass theme bar or a pub that can't even be bothered opening most of the time. While there are still thriving real pubs to be found, their numbers are steadily falling, and the popular image of a pub as a cosy, welcoming haven for all comers, which still persists as a media stereotype, bears less and less relation to what you're actually likely to find when venturing through the door.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.org.uk



OLD TOM – LOCAL HERO

LOCAL family brewer Frederic Robinson has a remarkably large portfolio of cask beers to its name – far more than most of its competitors. Milds, Bitter, Strong Bitters, they are all there but it is one very special beer that is gaining an increasingly prominent national profile.

Old Tom, weighing in at an incredible 8.5 per cent alcohol, is today badged as a strong ale but is in fact a classic, arguably *the* classic, barley wine.

The Style

Barley Wine is a style that dates from the 18th and 19th centuries when England was often at war with France and it was the duty of patriots, usually from the upper classes, to drink ale rather than Claret.

Barley Wine had to be strong – often between 10% and 12% - and was stored for prodigious periods of as long as 18 months or two years. When country houses had their own small breweries, it was often the task of the butler to brew ale that was drunk from cut-glass goblets at the dining table. The



biggest-selling Barley Wine for years was Whitbread's 10.9% Gold Label, now available only in cans. Bass's No 1 Barley Wine (10.5%) is occasionally brewed in Burton-on-Trent, stored in cask for 12 months and made available to CAMRA beer festivals. Fuller's Vintage Ale (8.5%) is a bottle-conditioned version of its Golden Pride and is brewed with different varieties of malts and hops every year.

Many micro-brewers now produce their interpretations of the style. They feature massive sweet malt and ripe fruit of the pear drop, orange and lemon type, with darker fruits, chocolate and coffee if darker malts are used. Hop rates are generous and produce bitterness and peppery, grassy and floral notes.

Old Tom is brewed with Halcyon pale malt, crystal malt and a small amount of chocolate malt giving 100 units of colour, making for a dark, inviting brew. The beer is hopped with the classic Goldings variety giving 35 units of bitterness, this avoiding the cloying character that can dog some beers of this style. It has a ripe vine fruit aroma with a delicious hint of chocolate as well as peppery hop resins. Port wine, dark malt chocolate and bitter hops fill the mouth while the long and complex finish offers an increasingly rich vinous fruitiness and a solid underpinning of bitter hops.

The History

With the possible exception of the rarely available Bass No.1, Old Tom has been around for longer than almost all of its rivals.

A prize possession of the brewery is a head brewer's notebook giving details of an Old Tom brew, made on Wednesday 1 November 1899, complete with a sketch of the cat's head at the top of the page.

The beer has been brewed more or less continuously since then (wartime conditions excepted), and more to the point remains almost unchanged. It's not as strong as when it started out, originally being about 11 per cent alcohol!

The Awards

The past 12 months have been very successful ones for Old Tom. The (filtered and pasteurised) bottled version has gained a national listing with four of the major supermarket chains and the cask version has featured nationwide across the Wetherspoon's estate.

There have also been two major awards.

Old Tom was crowned as the World's Best Dark Ale. This award came at the annual World Beer Awards in which an international panel of judges tasted hundreds of beers of different styles from around the world. Style winners then went through to a blind tasting where top UK brewers voted Old Tom as the World's Best Dark Ale. The competition was run by *Beers of the World*, the international consumer beer magazine.

The latest accolade came at the CAMRA-run National Winter Ales Festival held last month in Manchester where a panel of judges named Old Tom as the Gold Medal winner in the Barley Wines category.

This is a real success story for us," says Oliver Robinson, who is the commercial director for Robinson's. "The brand has previously been named as

Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain no less than three times, it has been crowned as World's Best Dark Ale, and a gold medal at the Brewing Industry International Awards confirmed Old Tom as a champion.



"Winning competitions is always good news but it also makes commercial success for the company and everybody who works here. It is obviously a fiercely competitive market and the national recognition has again bolstered our position."

Cooking With Old Tom

Apart from being an excellent drink, Old Tom makes a superb cooking ingredient. Old Tom Cake is a famous recipe idea and we re-print it below.

Ingredients

4 oz butter; 4 oz sugar ; 1 cup dried mixed fruit; 1 bottle of Old Tom; 2 cups plain flour; 1 level tsp. bicarbonate of soda; 1 level tsp. mixed spice

Method

1. Pre-heat oven to gas mark 4, 180C/350F
2. Place the butter, sugar, fruit and ale into a saucepan, mix well and then boil for three minutes.
3. Sieve the flour, bicarbonate of soda and mixed spice into a bowl, add the fruit mixture and mix thoroughly
4. Transfer to a 1lb loaf tin and bake for at least 40 minutes in the centre of the oven.
5. Test occasionally with a skewer – if it comes out clean, the cake is done. Old Tom Cake can be eaten either cold, spread with butter, or warm with cream or custard as a pudding.

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2008 We're in it!

Winter Ales Success

LAST month's National Winter Ales Festival was an enormous success with all records broken. The only disappointment for local drinkers was the failure of Robinson's Old Tom to win the coveted Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain title – the classic barley wine narrowly lost out to Station Porter from the tiny Wickwar Brewery near Bristol. Entire Stout from the respected Hop Back Brewery near Salisbury gained the overall bronze award.

Almost 8,000 customers drank their way through over 200 cask ales, ciders and perries along with a huge range of foreign beers. The biggest ever crowd was just yet another sign of the growing resurgence in the popularity of real ale, both on cask and in bottle. CAMRA membership also received a boost with 120 new members signed up, taking the national membership total close to 90,000.

As ever the highlight of the four day event was the judging for the Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain. As usual the competition was fierce with top quality brews competing in the four categories of Old Ales & Strong Milds, Stouts, Porters and Barley Wines. The top two from each category went forward to the final judging by a panel of brewers, beer writers and CAMRA members.

Here are the category winners. Congratulations to all.

Old Ales & Strong Mild

Gold - Purple Moose, Dark Side of the Moose (Porthmadog)
Silver - West Berkshire, Maggs Magnificent Mild (Berkshire)
Bronze - Highland, Dark Munro (Birsay, Orkney)

Stouts

Gold - Hop Back, Entire Stout (Salisbury, Wiltshire)
Silver - Spitting Feathers Old Wavertonian (Waverton, Chester)
Bronze - Spire, Sgt. Pepper Stout (Chesterfield, Derbyshire)

Porters

Gold - Wickwar, Station Porter (Wickwar, Gloucestershire)
Silver - E&S Elland, 1872 Porter (Elland, West Yorkshire)
Bronze - Acorn, Old Moor Porter (Barnsley, South Yorkshire)

Barley Wines

Gold - Robinson's Old Tom (Stockport, Cheshire)
Silver - Durham, Benedictus (Bowburn, Co Durham)
Bronze - Mighty Oak, Saxon Song (Maldon, Essex)



From: Rhys Jones, Gwynedd, Llanilar, Aberystwyth

We are told (High Peak Featured Pub, OT Jan) that "for cider drinkers" the Beltane in Buxton offers Stowford Press and bottled Green Goblin. No doubt this is true, but in the context of a CAMRA magazine this comes to much the same thing as warning stout drinkers that nothing better than Guinness awaits them - for neither of the ciders mentioned is recognised as a traditional "real" cider.

From the enticing description given, the Beltane sounds like just the sort of enterprising pub that ought to be able to develop sales of real cider, whether draught or bottled. They should be encouraged to do so - not given credit for stocking brands which, while doubtless perfectly saleable (after all, plenty of people drink keg Guinness), do not measure up to CAMRA's standards (**Oops! The Beltane does indeed seem an ideal outlet for real cider. Let's hope they get some in. Ed.)**



General NEWS...

A round-up of pub and brewery news from the local and national scene. First, though, a correction...

LAST month we bade farewell to the Barker family's involvement with the **Belgian Belly** in Chorlton. The good news is that the shop will not now be sold. Jason and his sister Sandra have now decided to keep on running the shop and the coming year should see Jason resuming his quest to bring discerning drinkers elusive Belgian rarities. Good news indeed. Our picture below shows Jason Barker with assistant Gail Lyons.



The **Cheshire Line**, Cheadle, has now reopened with a new manager, Greg, who is a very friendly Londoner. Whilst he has a good knowledge of pub management, his background is in catering, having studied at the same college as Jamie Oliver. His ambitions for the pub are to restart the weekly quiz, a monthly curry night on the second Friday of every month, for which he has a bona fide Indian chef. He is continuing to host the Mini Owners Club meetings, and is hoping to attract like minded groups. The pub still offers a range of regular changing real ales, overseen by the long serving cellarman, Dudley.

A new updated menu is on offer, with interesting home cooked dishes, special offers of two meals for one price OAP special deals, and well behaved children can eat too! The pub is clean and cheerful, having been recently decorated, when OT visited the beer was in excellent condition, the meal portions were generous, and the bar staff were most friendly and helpful.



OT also called into the **Griffin** in Heald Green which is now under the control of Sean Crompton, who took over the helm on the 14th of January. Sean is no new boy on the block; he has had

23 years experience in the licensed trade. His last pub being the popular **Ladybrook** in Bramhall. Sean is gradually settling in and on the evidence of our visit, seems to have quickly established a rapport with the customers, notwithstanding he readily admitted his new nick name of the "Grump at the Griffin". We tried both the beer and the food – all excellent with the Holt's Mild and Bitter being in particularly good nick.

There's also a new face at the **Union** in Reddish where ex-*Manchester Evening News* reporter Tony Robinson is the new licensee. He's a Reddish man himself and before taking over at the Union he gained experience of the trade in other Robinson's pubs. The pub already seems busier than of late and this is clearly good news.

Brewery News

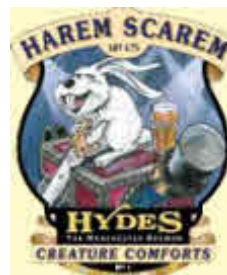
The big news breaking just as this was written was the takeover of **Scottish & Newcastle**, the UK's last remaining international brewer. Many cask ale drinkers may be tempted to dismiss this as being of little relevance to them. After all, the company brews no cask beers of its own, having farmed out the John Smith beers to Camerons and Burtonwood.

However, the picture is rather more complicated than that. S&N brews Theakston's Bitter for the independent T&R Theakston brewery, and it also owns the premises (but not the brands) of the respected Caledonian Brewery in Edinburgh. Not only that but also included in the S&N empire is the Waverley TBS cask ale distribution firm and the 2,000 S&N Pub Enterprises houses, many of which sell some decent guest beers.

All of these, together with four breweries, including Manchester's Royal Brewery in Moss Side, fall under the control of Dutch giant Heineken. Closures and consolidation seem inevitable.

Hydes Seasonals

The Hydes Craft Ale programme for 2008 has now been announced. Entitled "Creature Comforts" the bi-monthly range will have pumpclips featuring caricatures of animals. Out now is Harem Scarem (4.7% ABV) a copper coloured, bitter-sweet beer with a very moreish finish. It was on spectacular form when recently sampled at the Nursery, Heaton Norris. Trojan Horse (4.2%), will be the beer for March and April followed by Eager Beaver (4.4%) for May/June; Bells & Whistles (4.1%) for July/August; Owd Bill (4.5%) for September and October and finishing with the usual dark and powerful beer for November and December – this year this will be Mumbo Jumbo (4.9%) using roast barley and chocolate malt in the brew.



Micro Brewery News

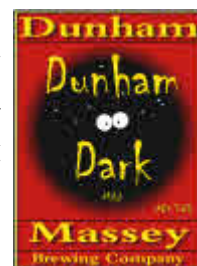
Love is in the ale at **Howard Town Brewery** in Glossop. With Valentine's Day looming, brewery boss Tony Hulme is in the process of producing a romantically themed beer. "It's going to be called Love Nest – based on our winter ale Robin's Nest – and is intended to appeal more to a woman's palate and be slightly sweeter" he told *Opening Times*. After Valentine's Day Tony aims to produce a damson beer using fruit from a large damson tree in his garden.

Jon Costello's **Dunham Massey Brewery** continues to make steady progress. New beers are slowly appearing and following on from the excellent Winter Warmer, Jon has now produced a new dark mild. Dunham Dark (3.8% ABV) is a very dark, rich mild inspired by the famous old Chesters Mild.

There is also a shop at the brewery where the company's bottle conditioned beer can be purchased (and other products are planned). Currently the shop is open from 11-4pm, Mondays to Fridays, with weekend opening planned soon.

There's a new beer in the offing from Mossley's **Millstone Brewery** too. This is the latest in the "Pub Name" series and will be Cat & Fiddle (4% ABV). Unusually for Millstone this is to be a dark copper coloured beer using some pale chocolate malt in the brew and hopped with Marynka and "lashings of Goldings".

This year's new seasonal range this year from Salford's **Bazens' Brewery**, is based on old Salford breweries. We will have more details next time. Bazens' also produced a special beer for the festival at the **New Oxford** pub. Bazens' Irish Stout was an exceptional beer – dark, rich, and full bodied. We are hoping that the brewery can be persuaded to re-brew this.





High Peak PUB NEWS

WITH FRANK WOOD

HIGH Peak's Marple Branch members have been lobbying Wetherspoons to purchase and open up the former Hanburys supermarket in the centre of the town - this has been shut and boarded up for some time. The early reply indicated that "Marple is not an area that we consider of interest to us". However, not to be put off by this response, a second letter has been sent, asking them to reconsider, giving their reasons. Well, one reason that would be in the "for" side of the consideration is that Marple, though having some good Robinsons pubs, has no other choice in real ale of any note for such a population, with many real ale drinkers often drinking out of the town, in Hayfield and Stockport and even Hyde and Glossop.

At the **Butchers Arms**, on Stockport Road in Mossley, Shaws beer has accompanied the John Smiths Cask over and into the New Year period. Up the road at the **Church Inn**, the current licensees are leaving, once replacements have been chosen by Thwaites, as they are re-locating to the **Red Lion** at Denton's Crown Point crossroads. This is a Hydes pub where beers were well received on recent visits by the Branch members.

The **Bull's Head** at Tintwistle and the **Hare & Hounds** at Simmondley are believed to have their leases up for sale as has the **White House** at Stalybridge (Hydes).

At the **Vernon Arms** in Poynton, it is believed from members that Taylor's Landlord is available. While Landlord is also on the bar at the **Cheshire Cheese** at Gee Cross along with John Smiths Cask and Courage Directors.

In Ashton, **Mollie Malones** has been de-licensed by the Council, apparently due to rowdiness and social problems. It's of little interest to this page however, as it sold no real ale.

Descending off Kinder the other week, I called in the **Cheshire Cheese** at Hope, just out of the High Peak Branch area. The Sheffield Branch Pub of the Year for 2007, not to mention the Derbyshire Pub of the year also for 2007, had a choice of Black Sheep Bitter, Black Hole Cosmic, Bradfield Farmers Bitter, Hartington Bitter and Bradfield Farmers Blonde. I had only time for a Cosmic before dashing for the only bus left back to Glossop, but it was in great condition and the gentleman I spoke to at the bar from just up the road told me that all the beers turned over well and were well supported by the locals.

At the far end of the Snake Pass, the **Ladybower Arms** also sells Farmers Blonde and Bitter, with Barnsley Brewery Acorn supplying the other two beers, recently sampled after a Sheffield Wednesday victory in January.

In Glossop, the **Sparrows** on Gladstone Street, shut for two years, is poised to reopen as an Irish theme bar probably by the time these notes are on the bar tops.

At Woolley Bridge, on the road between Hollingworth and Glossop, the **Spring Tavern** has been taking guest ales for some time now. This free house has two handpumps on the bar, though often, as was the case when I called in during mid January, only one was in use as they like the beer to be as fresh as possible. The Copper Dragon Golden Pippin was in tip top condition and the pub, which was busy with Sunday lunch diners, looked cosy and clean.

The latest on the **Market Tavern** in Glossop is that five Cains beers were available during the first two months of opening, Dark Mild, Bitter, IPA, FA and Victoria Ale, the latter at 6.0% being very moreish, though no complaints about any of the others either. At the **Norfolk Arms**, Holts Bitter, Mild and the seasonal have been on sale since it opened the week before Christmas and trade has looked brisk.

Finally, news of the **White Lion** in Disley. After one or two hiccups this pub is set to reopen on February 19 with three regular cask beers (including a mild) plus five changing guests. Great news for Disley real ale drinkers – a full report next time.

RECENT CAMRA AWARDS

The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month Award for September was made to the **Thatched House** on Chestergate in Stockport. Our picture shows local Branch Chairman John Clarke (*centre*) presenting the award to Alex Hammond and Lisa Crouch.



The October award was made to the **Midland** on Wellington Road North, Stockport. Pictured below, Branch Treasurer Jim Flynn presents the award to licensee Janet Howarth.



Finally, the November Pub of the Month was the **Nelson** on Barlow Moor Road in Didsbury. Branch member Stuart Ballantyne (*centre*) is shown presenting the award to Pete and Julie Sweeney.



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Nights**

Pub of the
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Robin Wignall's monthly Peak District News Round-up

THERE are many pubs around which are eating houses, where good food can usually be had and at a mainly reasonably sensible price.

The real measure of a good eating house is seen in how it copes with the really busy times, Mothering Sunday, or large parties at Christmas time for example. The **Beehive** at Combs, just off the Whaley Bridge to Chapel en le Frith road, is one of the pubs that gets it right and does a really good job. In the lead up to Christmas I was there with a large pre-booked rambling club. Service was good, both considerate and efficient. The food was good and freshly cooked, not just kept warm and overcooked, and their system coped with several choices for each course, the selections being pre-ordered. I have previously written positively about the Beehive and this good seasonal experience enhances its good reputation for me. It also scores well on the beer front, with well kept Boddingtons Bitter (Hydes), Draught Bass (Marston's) and Timothy Taylor's Landlord, all on good form on this December visit. The Beehive is well worth a visit at any time of the year.

Last month I wrote about some of the seasonal beers available on draught. Of course many brewers produced Christmas beers in bottle, some widely available in supermarkets. Some more interesting beers are available in specialist off licences such as **Goyt Wines** in Whaley Bridge. Hook Norton 12 Days is described on the bottle as 'deliciously dark and strong,' and this is not really an overstatement. City of Cambridge Mich'aelmas is a pale bottle conditioned brew. A new brew to me was Cwrw Gwledd, Celebration Ale from Bragdy Conwy, the Conwy Brewery. This is also a pale bottle conditioned beer. It is an interesting brew, which might benefit from being kept a few more weeks. As good as ever is this year's Wye Valley Dorothy Goodbody's Christmas Ale, a 6% bottle conditioned brew, as rich and as complex as in previous years. I also tried a couple of Belgian heavyweights. Abbaye des Rocs Spéciale Noël is a fine 9% offering whilst Gouden Christmas is a 10.5% brew. Both of course are rich and complex and quite definitely need treating with caution.

The **Railway** in Whaley Bridge has previously been reported as closed for a six-figure refurbishment. Two re-openings were anticipated as this column was being compiled. On Friday 11 January there was an Invited Guests' occasion, followed the next night by a Gala Opening, and I managed to get along to the Friday event.

A lot of effort and thought has gone into the re-decoration, re-upholstering and refurbishing of the big room, now to be the Lounge and Dining Room. Lighter colours give an impression of increased size. Tables and chairs are of a substantial wooden design. The floor looks to be new. At the windows hang tasteful blinds. Framed pictures and architectural drawings, adorn the walls. All this looks good in a pub where food is to have a higher profile. However, I am not sure where fairly loud music and a television screen fit into this new scenario.

The vault area is retained, now to be known as the Sports Room. There is a new pool table, though I didn't see a dartboard. There is also some un-vault-like comfy seating. Structural alterations are confined to opening up doorways in walls to allow access to the new smoking shelter on its own expansive terrace. There is access from the big room and from the Function/Meeting Room at the rear of the pub. Phil Whittaker's intention to push cask ales will see Robinson's Hatters, Unicorn and Double Hop on the bar. In the event only Unicorn was available on this opening night but this was on very good form. In conclusion this refurbishment looks to be a job well done. Let's hope the investment pays off.



Phil Levison's monthly look back at events past

The front page headline announced that the Navigation was the Local Pub of the Year. It was usually a close run thing in the voting for Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA's Pub of the Year, but this year it was different as the Beartown Brewery pub stormed to victory with an overwhelming majority of the votes cast. This long-time keg only ex-Wilson's pub had been acquired by Congleton's Beartown Brewery in December 2001 and almost overnight transformed itself into one of the foremost cask ale outlets in the town.

There was another front page story, headed "Kro Bar is the Runner-up". Whilst the Navigation was, and is, very much a traditional pub, Kro Bar on Oxford Road is a very different kettle of fish. It is not a traditional type of CAMRA pub, and it proves the point that good pubs come in all shapes and sizes – and Kro Bar is a very good pub. Rather unusually, it was converted from the former premises of the Manchester Temperance Society, and the architects had very successfully incorporated a very modern bar into a listed Georgian building.

There was news of an important initiative from Interbrew. It was their intention to have Draught Bass and Boddington's Bitter assessed for quality by the Cask Marque organisation. In total, some 8,000 pubs would be visited, with the aim of getting 2,000 of them full Cask Marque accreditation.

Credit was due to Interbrew for their obvious commitment to, and investment in, cask ale quality but what would happen to those pubs that were checked and failed? The problem was that even if very poor Bass or Boddingtons was discovered, Interbrew could do little about it. Their contract was to supply the companies that owned the pubs, and they were largely powerless to dictate where their beers were sold.

There was another question to consider – were Interbrew really converts to the real ale cause? They had treated cask Boddingtons Bitter and the smooth keg version as one product. This had created confusion in drinkers' minds, and led to a loss of cask outlets across the *Opening Times* area.

The initiative appeared to die an early death and there was precious little sign of it in practice. Interbrew soon turned their backs on cask beer and now brew none of it themselves at all. Boddingtons has been contracted out to Hydes and the brewery closed and demolished. Bass is now brewed by Marstons.



VILLAGE pubs are having a difficult time in the present climate and the pub in the small village of Langley near Macclesfield had several landlords over a comparatively short period, until Richard Maurice realised his dream, moved back to the village he had grown up in and took over the **St Dunstan Inn**.

That was three years ago and the pub has never looked back since. The regular beer is a well kept Banks's, with a guest beer chosen from a list by the pub's regulars, now grown to two guests at the weekend. The board at the end of the bar lists the beers and names the person who chose it!



Food is not served in the pub, but plates and cutlery (and a washing up service) is made available for customers to eat their own take away, and several local firms are happy to deliver. In fact, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch held a very successful social doing just that!

To add to the attractions, there is a free pool table, a real fire in the cosy bar area and plans to open up the fireplace in the linked front room, while in the summer there is an outside paved drinking area with views to Teggs Nose

From this description it is easy to see why this excellent pub was the winner of the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Pub of the Season for Winter 2007-08. Our picture shows Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch Chairman Jill Hasler presenting the award to a delighted Richard Maurice.



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- Changing lower strength guest ale - e.g. Ruddles Best (3.7% ABV)

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

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

Thursday 14th – Branch Meeting; Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. **Good Beer Guide 2009 selections will be made at this meeting.**

Saturday 16th – Winter Warmer Wobbler presentation night – Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport. From 8.00pm

Thursday 21st – Pub of the Month Presentation to the Queens, Cheadle, From 8.00pm

Saturday 23rd – Pub of the Year Presentation to the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport. From 8.00pm

Friday 29th - Gatley & Cheadle West Stagger: Prince of Wales, Gatley Green 7.30; Horse & Farrier, Gatley Rd 8.30pm

Thursday 13th March: Branch Meeting: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 8.00pm

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

Friday 22nd – Sunday 24th – Branch weekend to Cheltenham & Gloucester.

Monday 10th March – Branch Meeting: White Lion, Disley (provisional). 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**

Saturday 16th – Trip to E&S Brewery, West Yorkshire. Details from Bev Rae.

Thursday 21st – Good Beer Guide 2009 final selection meeting. Volunteer, Cross St, Sale. Starts 8.00pm

Thursday 6th March – Branch Meeting: Orange Tree, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the **Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch** covers a wide area from Knutsford to Congleton. **Branch Contact – Tony Icke 01625 861833**

Monday 25th – Branch Meeting and Good Beer Guide 2009 selection meeting: Crown, Goostrey. Starts 8.00pm

Friday 7th March – Social evening at Congleton Beer Festival.

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 13th – Good Beer Guide 2009 City selection meeting: Kings Arms, Bloom St, Salford. Starts 8.00pm

Wednesday 20th – Branch Meeting: New Oxford, Bexley Sq, Salford. Starts 8.00pm

Wednesday 27th – Good Beer Guide 2009 Out of City and final selection: Crown & Kettle, Oldham Rd, Manchester. Starts 7.30pm.

Wednesday 5th March – Clifton & Pendlebury Crawl. Details from Dave Hallows.

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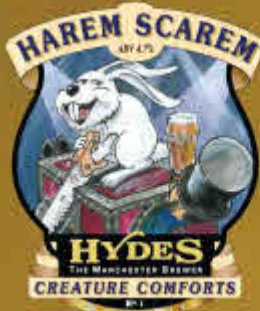


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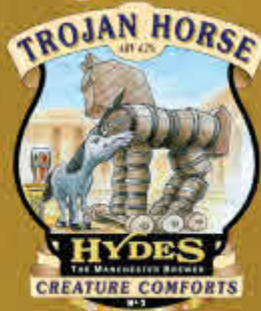
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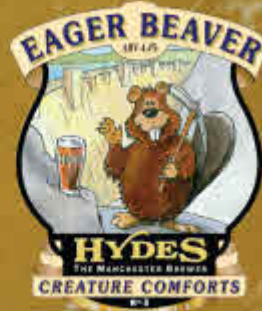
Another Great Range of Craft Ales for 2008



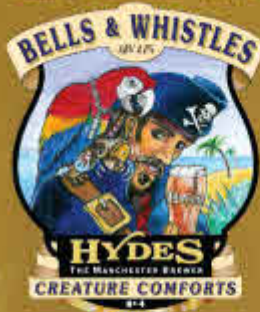
Jan - Feb abv 4.7%



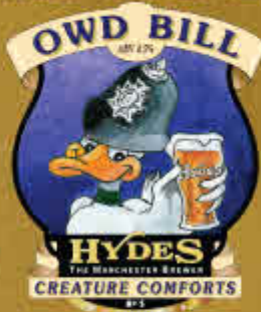
March - April abv 4.2%



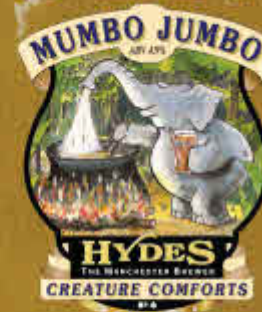
May - June abv 4.4%



July - August abv 4.1%



Sept - Oct abv 4.5%



Nov - Dec abv 4.9%

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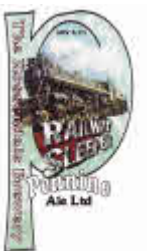
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February and March

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