

MARCH 2008



Opening

TIMES

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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

A6: The Road to No Beer



In colour – the four real ale outposts: the Midland, Stockport; Horseshoe, Levenshulme; New Victoria, Longsight and Bulls Head, Piccadilly.

There are 23 functioning pubs and bars along, or very near, the A6 between Stockport's Mersey Square and Manchester Piccadilly station. Just four sell cask beer. We don't think that's good enough – for either local drinkers or the pubs themselves. So, this month we launch a campaign to try and improve the sorry situation.

There is clearly a demand for real ale here. Not only do the four local heroes highlighted sell it successfully, but there are pubs in surrounding neighbourhoods that also rise to the challenge. And of course, head south along the A6 from Mersey Square and the situation is reversed. So, what's the problem? Significantly, most of the cask ale pubs along or near the A6 are owned by independent breweries – Robinson's do the honours to the south and Holt's water the cask ale desert to the north. Of the four pubs we highlight, two of those are owned by dedicated cask ale brewers, too – the New Victoria is an Oakwell Brewery house and the Bulls Head is owned by Marstons.

That's not to say that ownership by pub companies should prevent successful cask ale sales. The Horseshoe and the Midland prove that. Furthermore all of these pubs bar one – the Hope – have sold cask beer in recent memory. We hope that by cajoling and encouragement some of these will return to the real ale fold. More on page 10.



Preparations are now well underway for this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival.

The entertainment has been booked and the first meeting has been held to plan the beer order. Indeed one beer has already been ordered as we have two casks of Hornbeam Dark Domination Porter maturing in the brewery! Those important dates – 29 -31 May. Venue – Edgeley Park.



Bullseye!

The honours in this year's Robinson's Bar & Cellar competition went to pubs in the *Opening Times* area. Pictured left are licensee Vicky Almond and her cellarman Dave Cassidy at the Fletchers in Denton. More details on page 11

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COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

Opening Times – Comment

This month a genuine "campaign for real ale" is launched as we both highlight the astonishing absence of cask beer along one of Manchester's main arterial routes, and also try and persuade some of the pubs along the A6 to once again stock a cask beer. There is clearly a demand for the real thing here as evidenced by those pubs that successfully sell it.

As pressures increase on the pub trade, it is important that pubs do all they can to attract business. Selling quality cask ale is an increasingly important part of the offer for many pubs – but the emphasis has to be on quality here. Poor real ale does no-one any favours. Hopefully more of the A6 pubs will see the light and convert to cask. We will let you know what happens.

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

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The Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for March 2008 has been awarded to the New Victoria on Stockport Road in Longsight.

If there ever was a pub that epitomised the expression 'never judge a book by its cover' it is the New Victoria. Outside the architecture and surroundings of this 1970s pub remind you of the set of Shameless but inside it is an altogether different matter. The thing that strikes the casual visitor first is the sheer openness, warmth and friendliness, starting with the greetings from the regulars when you enter to the farewells as you leave. This really is a local community pub in the true sense of the words, in a world when many allegedly more upmarket establishments have lost what it is to be a proper pub.

The real uniqueness of the pub however is there on the bar. The New Victoria is the only pub of Barnsley's Oakwell Brewery in the Manchester area. On handpump is their Barnsley Bitter and Old Tom (dark mild) and superb beer it is too. This is the only cask beer along 6 miles of the A6 from leaving Stockport to arriving in Manchester city centre (the Horseshoe in Levenshulme is just off the A6). As such, it is the archetypal real ale oasis in a keg beer desert. Before other local licensees ask, yes the New Victoria's customers do drink and enjoy the stuff, so there is a market here for cask beers! Selling at only £1.45 a pint for the bitter and £1.40 for the mild, does this make it the cheapest beer along the whole of the A6 from Luton to Carlisle, let alone Stockport to Manchester?

In Andy Eykyn, Oakwell Brewery has a licensee who has made the pub a role model for others in the area. Andy has been in residence for roughly two years but was in the pub trade in the local area for some while before. He certainly deserves this accolade for making the New Victoria the success it is in an environment that has severely tested many other licensees in the area (you only have to see the boarded up Ducie Arms opposite to testify to that).

The presentation is on 27th March at 8pm and a very enjoyable night is promised. **JF/DH**

The New Victoria is a very accessible pub, located as it is on Stockport Road/A6 just on the Manchester side of the Plymouth Grove/Kirkmanshulme Road junction (look out for the pink Longsight Police Station on the opposite side of the road). The 192 bus stops right outside every few minutes up to midnight and also regular 197 and 53 buses drop nearby.

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STARTING off in Rowarth this month and the **Little Mill** was closed and we believe, up for auction, at the time these notes were written. After being in the same ownership for many years, it was sold to the current owners little over two years ago. They had smartened it up, particularly outside where decking and improved benched seating were installed. More news on this as soon as we know more.

Down in Birch Vale, the **Grouse** has introduced live music at the weekends and I believe they have a folky type evening on Mondays. Just turn up and join in with your instruments. This pleasant traditional Robinsons pub takes the seasonal beer as well as the normal Robinsons beers.

In Disley, the eagerly awaited re-opening of the **White Horse** will have happened by the time you read this. Additional handpumps had been promised and locals were looking forward to a variety of beers as a change from the others in the village that are mainly Robinsons.

In Glossop, the **Norfolk Arms** was packed when I called in on a recent Thursday evening. Mild, Bitter and the seasonal beer are available though there was no seasonal on my visit. The pub opens at 11 till 11 Monday - Thursday (12 Fri/Sat) and 12-11 on Sunday. Meals are currently available all day and there is a separate dining area on the left as you go in. There is a covered smoking area at the rear and plasma screen to watch all sporting events in the pub. Also there is a full range of Holts bottled beers. Beware: there is a dress code with no hoodies, baseball caps or track suits allowed. Doubt anyone will argue with that, it will ensure the pub keeps a decent clientele. At the rear, there is a courtyard with furniture and heating that turns itself off periodically to save on power.

Tameside News

IN Hyde, the **Cheshire Ring** has doubled up on its monthly curry nights. The 1st Thursday of the month, when there is also an acoustic night, has now been joined with the third Thursday with no music.

Again in Hyde, further through the town, the **Sportsman** has introduced beers from what was formerly known as Porters. Pennine Ales is the new name and their Sunshine is available as a permanent beer with a second beer available from the Pennine range. At the High Peak Branch meeting held there in February, the second beer was Pennine Sleeper. Unfortunately, one beer has had to disappear from the bar. Hartington Bitter is no longer available. At the parent pub, the Griffin in Haslingden, new owner Geoff Oliver has increased to the full range of beers from those he brews, previously usually only four were available. There is also a further new beer on the bar on a permanent basis, being Pictish Brewers Gold.

In Stalybridge, at the **Pineapple**, the Robinsons beers are no longer cask conditioned. Hydes **White House**, again in Stalybridge, has recently been selling Greene King Abbot Ale and nearby the **Q-Bar**, also Hydes, has had Allgates beers on sale as guests.

It is believed that the **Last Orders** at Crown Point in Denton is to be the next to be converted to a Cains pub following the opening of the Market Tavern in Glossop around Christmas time.

In Mossley, Millstone beers have been selling regularly at the **Rising Sun**. At the Butchers Arms, Dobcross Bitter and Delph Donkey have been seen from Greenfield Brewery, and Shaws have had Golden Globe on the bar. However, at Roaches Lock on Manchester Road, real ale has not been present of late.

In Hollingworth, the **Royal Oak** usually has two guest beers on sale, though I caught them on a Sunday evening when they had reduced to one. The Black Sheep was in perfectly fine condition. Looking at the list "coming soon", they are trying to provide the villagers with a decent option of guest beers.

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Robin Wignall's Monthly Round-Up of the Peak Pub Scene

Beginning with the good news, which is that at the end of January the sale of the **Jodrell Arms** in Whaley Bridge, freehold, was being finalised. The new owner has ambitious plans for a re-opening later in the year after appropriate upgrading and development. This is indeed good news on the face of it. More to come as the story evolves.

Unfortunately the column continues with the not so good news. In early February Tim Hughes left the **Shady Oak** in Fernilee (Jennings/Marston's). Tim leaves with good wishes for a successful future, certainly a more successful future than Marston's were prepared to offer him. The future of the Shady Oak is once again uncertain, though temporary arrangements are to be put in place, however you cannot help feeling that Marston's are making a good job of shutting this one down. Unrealistic rent demands make the pub destined to fail. With more understanding of the pub's location and catchment area, and more reasonable rents, this pub could still make a profit for Marston's, with a good potential for organic growth. A new licensee every twelve months or so, helps neither the pub nor its licensees, nor its customers. Continuity and quality are the keys to success. Both the last two landlords have had the latter. Marston's have prevented the former, to everyone's detriment, including their own.

The bad news continues with closure of both the **Navigation** in Whaley Bridge, and the **Soldier Dick** in Furness Vale. Both licensees have given up the fight with perhaps the biggest bête noire of the pub trade, Punch Taverns. I heard only recently that the closure of the **Goyt Inn** in Whaley Bridge is imminent. Expect confirmation in next month's column. Again the common thread is Punch Taverns. With three out of five Punch pubs in the Whaley Bridge township, it will become increasingly difficult for the beer drinker to become *punch* drunk.

Other pubs in the area are for now getting on with doing the obvious, selling good beer. At the **Dog & Partridge** at Bridgemont, Ruddles County was a recent guest, accompanying Tetley Bitter, Speckled Hen, Deuchar's IPA and Coach House Gunpowder Mild. Real cider is also available with a tub of Weston's Old Rosie behind the bar. My last visit to the **Navigation, Buxworth**, found a good pint of Wyre Piddle Piddle in the Dark as a guest beer.

I got across to the **Pack Horse** on the Mellor road out of New Mills. This Good Beer Guide listed pub has superb views. There is a bar area, a side room and a smart dining room. Phoenix Arizona and Tetley Bitter are fixtures, whilst Slater's Premium and Hop Back Special were guest beers. Food was good. A real fire fuelled by logs adds to the ambience. The Pack Horse is an uphill walk from New Mills. Allow 15 minutes from the bus station or New Mills Central Railway station, and at least 10 minutes more from Newtown. Even though it is a bit out of the way, the Pack Horse is well worth a visit.

At the **Shepherds'** in Whaley Bridge, new licensee Susan Greenwood has re-introduced Mild, Jennings Dark Mild, and good it is. In early February six ales were available. The mild and Brains' St. David's were in good form, whilst there were the usual takers ensuring good turnover of Marston's Bitter and Pedigree.

There are also good things to report from the Robinsons' estate. At the **Cock** in Whaley Bridge, very good pints of the seasonal beer, Tempus Fugit, have been available, along with Hatters and Unicorn, of course. Along in Furness Vale the **Crossings**, Robinsons' Hartleys' XB has been on sale, and selling well. This is an unusual brew for the area, though of course brewed in Stockport.

Despite some of the doom and gloom this month, there obviously still some good things to write about. Hopefully there will be more positive news about some of the concerning issues, in the months to come.



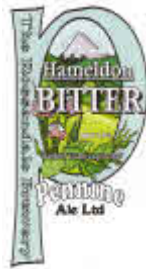
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Burnage & Heaton Mersey with Jim Flynn

On a typical January evening a surprisingly sizable group of us met for the start of the Stagger at the **Victoria** on the corner of Mauldeth Road and Burnage Lane.

This start to the stagger was borne more out of hope rather than experience as in previous years the cask Boddingtons had either been off or less than palatable. We sat in the large wooden panelled lounge which from the ceiling looks as though it was once a number of smaller rooms and found that the Boddies cask that we were consuming was significantly better than we had feared. Unfortunately two of our number had been lumbered with the smooth version because they had not specified cask. It really is about time the practice of reaching for the smooth as a matter of course without at least asking should be stopped – perhaps a little training would help?

We moved further down Burnage Lane to the Hydes' **Farmers Arms** only to find it was keg. If anybody from Hydes reads this let's just say we expected better!

Down Burnage Lane again towards the **Green End** where two of our troop were dispatched to verify that the cavernous Green End was still keg. It was without too much disappointment that we found we would not be visiting this unappealing pub for yet another year. Our next stop was the second Hydes pub of the night the **Albion**, an altogether more promising stop than the first where we were welcomed by the landlord, a previous winner of the pub of the month. This is another large corner house with a vault and a lounge. The lounge is pleasantly furnished and, like most pubs these days, it has been opened out over the years. Although things were relatively quiet there was nevertheless real life in the place. The first thing that strikes you when you go to the bar is the prominence of the Hydes Light handpumps which is indicative of the high levels of sales of the beer in the pub. Here unfortunately comes the second criticism of Hydes, this time in relation to their 'Original' bitter, why did they have to use the same name for their smooth? It not only devalues their cask ale of the same name but it also as it did on our visit causes confusion behind the bar. Perhaps it was the very tendency of the bar staff to reach for the 'Original' smooth that caused the demise of the real thing in the nearby Farmers. The cask ales though were definitely in good form and we



enjoyed both the Original and the Light.

Our next pub in our trek southwards (makes us sound like Antarctic explorers- it was January though) was Sam Smith's **Sun in September**. This was originally built in the 19th century by the local bigwig's daughter as her

marital home after she had come back from her honeymoon in Switzerland and you can definitely see the alpine influences in its chalet like architecture. At one time the pub was perversely given an Indian Raj theme but following a more recent refurbishment much of the original house is now open to be seen. If you go to the pub and get an opportunity to speak to the longstanding landlady she is a mine of information on the history of the place. It is simply a really great pub and the level of custom reflected this, the place was buzzing. Equally good was the one cask, Old Brewery Bitter (OBB) Sam's only cask beer. Standing near one of the open fires and drinking perhaps the best beer of the night it was very tempting not to leave.

On to Heaton Mersey

Being the stalwarts we are though we forced ourselves and crossing the border we made our way to the more leafy suburb of Heaton Mersey and the **Dog & Partridge**. This pub certainly has improved over the last few years following a refurbishment two or three years ago. Although not to everybody's taste the light wood and the open plan modern look give the place a clean airy feel. The pub had been largely taken over by a 21st birthday party with all the balloons, loud music, and food that you would expect at such a bash.



We found the quietest corner to sample our Theakston's Best Bitter and Wells Bombardier which were both found in good form. A worthy effort but if I had to be picky my only real criticism is the prices which are definitely on the high side for the area albeit of course a mile down the road in Didsbury they

would be considered the norm. We all left to travel further towards Stockport but not before some of my less scrupulous colleagues had got in the party spirit by consuming some of the food on offer.

Our next stop was altogether a different type of pub, Holt's **Griffin**. None of your modern clean look here, this is a classic multi roomed traditional pub and in my opinion one of the finest in the region. The piece de resistance of this magnificent place is in the oldest part of the pub (on the right hand side as you look from the road), the mahogany bar with its etched glass. After unsuccessfully trying to knock the place down in the 70s Holts very sensitively and successfully extended the pub in the late 80s/early 90s. They were so successful that I am sure many newer customers don't realise that there is an extension at all; even the new bar looks the part. As usual the pub was extremely busy and it was difficult to believe that the Griffin was under threat again. Not only are current licensees planning to leave but last year Holts put in planning permission to expand the place still further with a view to make it more of an eatery. When challenged by both locals and CAMRA the brewery refused to give any firm assurances about the internal layout of the pub. Such was the resistance that well over 200 objections were received, including one from CAMRA and faced with a protracted planning process Holts withdrew their plans. Vigilance is needed however to ensure that ghosts of the 70s don't return to haunt the Griffin. Contemplating this we tried all three of the beers on offer, Mild, Bitter and the seasonal Touchwood. The Mild was considered on very fine form, almost on a par with the OBB at the Sun in September, while the bitter was also reasonably well received. The Touchwood got mixed reviews, not so much about its condition but about the beer itself.

Back in to the cold night we walked up Didsbury Road to the **Frog and Railway** which was surprise, surprise - keg. It's time Greene King woke up and did something with this dire pub! Ignoring the wine bar, East is East we moved on to our last pub of the night and our first Robinsons one, the **Crown**. Set in a conservation area on a cobbled street, Vale Close with its old world cottages this 400 year old pub has a more modern lounge which is used as restaurant area and a traditional bar to the rear where we sat. Here, as in much of the pub, the ceilings are beamed and the doorway is low but the bar is new. Altogether the pub has a less cluttered more modern feel than it used to and as somebody who has been here off on and on for many years I think the place has lost some of its unique atmosphere but others disagreed so you will have to make your own mind up.



Both the Unicorn and the Hatters were equally well received making this a fitting end to what had been a good night. Ignoring the unfortunate keg pubs overall on that evening's experience this is a Stagger well worth considering as a night out for the variety and quality of both pubs and beer.



The **Hinds Head** reopened last month following 12 days of closure for a complete refit. The pub has a new clean open look which is announced as you enter with a clear glass in the porch. The area around the bar has had all the clutter taken away and replaced with easy chairs and a sofa. The new furniture, carpets and curtains have given the place back its upmarket feel. On the bar are currently three cask beers Taylors Landlord, Marston's Pedigree and Greene King's Ruddles Best. The former is a permanent fixture and the other two beers will be changed periodically with hopefully a fourth, guest beer added in the near future.

The kitchen has had tens of thousands of pound spent on it with a complete refit and the restaurant area has been reopened with food seven days a week 12 until 9. Cooking the food is Steve Craddock the chef from the halcyon days when massively popular Alan Preston ran the pub so successfully. Alan sadly died a few months ago but I am sure he would be pleased at the efforts to return the place to its former glory.

I dropped into the **Royal Oak** on High Street as I had been hearing good things about this pub. It was taken over last April by Gail Yates and she has really turned things round here.

It's a Robinson's house and Hatters and Unicorn are the regular handpumped beers but Gail is also trying the seasonals as they become available, although the extent to which they are sold depends on how much her customers like them. She tells me that sales are almost 50% up on the year despite the smoking ban which, Gail thinks, has had little effect on the pub.

There's always plenty going on, with pool teams playing on Wednesday and Thursday nights and a darts knock-out on Sunday afternoons. Gail is also looking to open the kitchen by April. I was impressed by both the atmosphere and also the beer quality – well worth a visit.

Joseph Holt have now submitted a revised planning application to Stockport MBC for proposed changes to the **Griffin** in Heaton Mersey. This follows on from the outcry against their original application which they submitted last June.



As a result of the opposition, Joseph Holt Managers, together with their Architect, met with a group of regulars at the Griffin Hotel in December in order to discuss the brewery's

revised development plans for the pub. It was an opportunity for the brewery to explain how they see the local pub developing with the addition of the restaurant facilities, whilst still retaining the original pub features, and an opportunity for the locals to seek clarification and allay some of their fears. The regulars were very pleased to be assured that the original rooms and main pub layout will be retained, and to also see that the disabled access has been redesigned. The brewery acknowledged the community aspect of this popular outlet and the facilities it provides to the local people. In particular, they have said that they are aware of the use made of their facilities by the local pensioners and will take their needs in to account when designing and pricing the menus. An innovative suggestion from the locals was that the brewery could consider dual beer pricing once the developments are completed: perhaps "premium" prices in the restaurant area, and "local" prices in the bar.

We look forward to the brewery implementing the proposed suggestion as a trial!



From Mike Johnson, via e-mail:

I was a recent guest of a relative in Heaton Mersey and visited The Griffin Hotel. I was appalled by this pub's approach to televisions: there were four separate TVs and one large screen showing a variety of football matches in various rooms; there were few people watching the football. My party of about fifteen people were the only people in one room holding an impromptu pub quiz when at ten o'clock the landlord came in and started "playing with" the remote control for the TV. One of my party said very politely - "Please can we have the TV off - no-one is watching it"; at which point the landlord became very vocal and let us know in no uncertain terms that he was not interested in what we the customers wanted - he was the landlord and he was having the TV on!!

Needless to say we'll try another venue for our next outing.

From George Drew, Withington:

Reading the City Centre Stagger feature in Opening Times (February) my interest was particularly aroused when I reached the part about the Grey Horse and the Circus Tavern. So similar in size and appearance on the outside - but so very different when we go inside! I wonder how many readers can remember those long gone days when both pubs were so very much alike on the inside.

Up until and into the 1960's indeed they were both virtually identical. On entering there was the same tiny bar just big enough for one, a narrow passage to the right of this with two tiny rooms to the right of that passage. I can well remember my dismay when the Grey Horse closed for alteration to the layout it has retained to this day. I was filled with even more trepidation at the thought of how soon after that the same fate may befall the Circus Tavern! Fortunately my fears were never realised, and the Circus retains its uniqueness to this day.

It is true that time does sometimes heal all wounds, and everyone accepts the Grey Horse for the fine little pub it is and has remained despite those changes so many years ago. It is though equally pleasing that the Circus has been allowed to remain unaltered - making a remarkable contrast to its near neighbour.

Obituary – Ian Kenny

One of CAMRA North Manchester's long standing members, Ian Kenny, sadly departed this world in the early hours of Monday, February 4th.



Ian was one of our branch officers, always ready to lend a hand in any event and for some years now, the Membership Secretary. He was such a likeable and friendly fellow, we will miss him greatly and it won't be the same without him. His insights and vision will be greatly missed by the branch, as well as his energy to try out new ideas. A fall at his home in Swinton finally took his life. He was a keen supporter of the Salford University Real Ale Society some years ago, with a great smile and a winning ready laugh. It was only a few weeks ago when he was sorting out a customer's problem whilst on cloakroom duties at the National Winter Ales Festival, which he carried out with dedicated resolve. Ian, like that, was a credit to the Campaign.

He was also a regular traveller to many of the local and regional beer festivals and also a fanatical football devotee, going some distances to watch his favourite team, combined with drinking real ales. Yes Ian, once again, we will miss you.

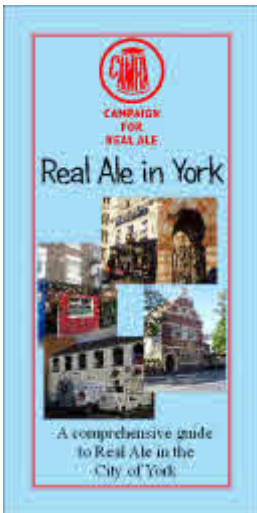
Dave Hallows.



Real Ale in York. CAMRA Books, 92pp, £3.99

Ten years or so after the last guide to the whole of the York CAMRA branch area comes this slim-format guide to the real ale pubs of the City of York, one of Britain's best-loved beer-drinking destinations. After an introduction that explains what real ale is, introduces the major styles, and gives a useful overview of cellar work, the pub entries are split between the city centre and outlying areas; public transport information appears between the two sections of pub listings, while a breweries section at the rear gives comprehensive notes on all North Yorkshire's independent breweries plus many others whose beers can be found in York.

The pub descriptions are well-written and give a good idea of what to expect, and are broken up by small but admirably sharp colour



photographs (though a few more interior shots would not have gone amiss). It is perhaps a pity that brief details are not included of non-real-ale pubs, in the hope of future conversion; real ale clubs where CAMRA members, and perhaps others, are admitted appear alongside the pubs in the listings, though I was puzzled by the absence of the bar at York Brewery, where I recently obtained "out of town" club membership at reasonable rates with a minimum of formality.

The maps deserve special mention. That for the central area in particular is a model of clarity, while that for the outer areas admirably shows area / parish boundaries so that you can instantly tell whether the pub you're looking for is in, say, Wigginton or Haxby. However, if the pubs had been numbered alphabetically rather than in geographical sequence, the maps could also have served as an index of pubs, which is not otherwise provided. Proofreading and copy-editing have been carried out to a high standard, with the exception of the odd intrusive definite article in pub names and a duplicate page in my copy.

This is a guide fully worthy of the splendid city which it describes. It will inform and educate the less experienced pubgoer while never misleading the veteran, and it does so within an attractive, well-presented, and thoroughly professional package. Highly recommended. **RPJ**

Real Ale in York can be obtained from York CAMRA for £3.99 plus £1 postage & packing. Please send a cheque payable to "CAMRA York" to: Karl Smith, 10 Hillcrest Avenue, Nether Poppleton, York, YO26 6LD

Online updates can be obtained here: http://www.yorkcamra.free-online.co.uk/local_guide.html

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- CAMRA Good Pub Food Guide
- CAMRA Regional Pub of the Year 2001
- CAMRA NATIONAL Pub of the Year



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• LARGE BEER GARDEN TO THE REAR •

~ Nice Warm Friendly Atmosphere ~

A6: The Road to No Beer?



SO why the A6? What's so special about this particular road? We think it is the one main artery in the south and east of Manchester where we can improve the availability of real ale. Wilmslow Road is awash with cask ale outlets. Those pubs that remain on and near Hyde Road largely serve cask ale, too. Ashton New Road is mainly a beer and pub desert. Ashton Old Road has lost most of its pubs but quite a few of those that remain open do in fact sell the real thing as well.

But the A6 – 23 pubs between Manchester and Stockport and real ale in just four of them. Why should this be? Apart from the Hope, all have sold cask beer in the past 10 years. Some have sold it much more recently than that – the Magnet, for example, sold real ale for years until the long serving licensee retired a couple of years ago.



Given the pressures on the pub trade, and particularly those in the inner city areas, we want to make sure that all of the pubs that remain thrive and prosper. Too many have already closed – in Levenshulme the Church and the Pack Horse are unlikely to reopen as pubs and the Wheatsheaf seems permanently closed and "to let". More will follow unless they cover all bases and set their stalls out to attract as many customers as they can. In short, this means real ale.

Why Cask?

Cask ale can increase total beer sales and total turnover by as much as 20% when compared with pubs that don't stock it. It says something about a pub's business and stocking cask ale can be a real point of difference. Cask ale drinkers have also been shown to stay longer and spend more.

It is true that the amount of beer sold in the country's pubs is in long term decline. Recent figures from the British Beer & Pub Association paint an alarming picture. However if you look behind the headline figures most of that decline is in keg ales rather than cask. In addition the decline in cask is largely accounted for by the big multinational companies who have turned away from the style.

Local breweries, and there are plenty in Greater Manchester, are doing pretty well with their cask sales. Many are doing extremely well. Many pub companies, who own most of the A6 pubs, recognise this and allow their pubs access to either in-house guest beers or the independent brewers' direct delivery scheme.

Of course there's more to selling cask than installing a handpump. There has to be genuine commitment – and quality beer is paramount. Poor real ale is worse than none at all. But get it right and it should make a real difference.

We want to help. We hope all keg-only pubs along the A6 will see this. If you put in cask ale – let us know and we will celebrate the fact with you. If you want advice or guidance contact us – Jim Flynn (0161 432 1816) or John Clarke (0161 477 1973) will pay you a call and talk things through.

Robinsons Bar & Cellar Awards



FIRST place in Robinson's annual Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition has been awarded to the **Fletchers Arms** at Denton. The annual competition held Robinson's is now in its tenth year and involves a comprehensive, top-to-bottom, inspection of all the company's pubs throughout the North West and North Wales.

Vicky Almond, licensee at the Fletchers Arms, secured a near perfect score of 296.5 points out of a possible 300.

Vicky took on the tenancy in 2002 and in total her family have been tenants with Robinson's for the past 30 years. This year Vicky was distinguished for her efforts which saw the Fletchers Arms rise to the top in a competition where just one point separated the top performers.

"We faced some very stiff competition and winning the first prize is recognition of all the effort that everybody puts in all year round. I would particularly like to thank our cellar man Dave Cassidy for the work that he has done in looking after our beer quality," said Vicky.

As a reward for Vicky and her team they hosted a high profile celebration evening at the Fletchers Arms and were presented with The Unicorn Shield which has been inscribed with their names, and will take pride of place in the pub for the coming year. The prize from Robinson's also included a barrel of Unicorn Bitter.

Last year's winner, the **Coach & Horses** at Timbersbrook came second and in third place was the **Royal Scot** at Marple Bridge. To complete the clean sweep for pubs in the *Opening Times* area, the Most Improved Pub was the **Grapes** in Hazel Grove.

Manchester Matters – Extra

CLEAR Pub Company has been formed by Duncan Ward and Andy Wilkinson (both ex Punch Taverns) and Andrew Lawton Smith (ex Wragge & Co - law firm) who have bought 25 Spirit managed leased pubs. These pubs are situated mainly in the midlands and the north and they have a combined turnover of some £ 14 million. The pubs will be split into two types; the 'cookhouse' branded value food classic urban boozers (some of these will be ex John Barras pubs) and the City Taverns which will be unbranded individual pubs aimed at the local market offering locally sourced food dishes. Clear's plans are to buy another 75 pubs over the next five years.

But how might Clear's plans affect us? Well the 'Famous' Crown in Didsbury is one of their acquisitions and Andrea Chapman, the licensee, has told OT that Clear have earmarked a number of their pubs to provide an extended range of cask conditioned beers. Andrea said that in the Crown "cask beers sell very well" so the Crown has been chosen to be one of the first Clear pubs to sell an extended range of cask beers. Clear seem interested in promoting cask beers; they have one pub in Preston that currently sells twelve cask ales. This is clearly (sorry) an interesting development – more news as we get it.

The Royal Oak

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Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn on handpump

Robinson's Seasonal Beers also available

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Magnificent choice of Cask Beer
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For more information

contact Nick Williams
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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2008 We're in it!



The Revised August 2007/2008 over 75 different real ales and ciders

22nd CAMRA BEER FESTIVAL OLDHAM

4th and 5th April 2008
Queen Elizabeth Hall
Civic Centre
West Street
Oldham

Approved by Oldham Racecourse & J2 J2 (revised) City Museum, Railway Station

Friday evening - The Oddfellows (Traditional folk tunes and songs)
Saturday evening - Blues Positive (Vintage and Contemporary blues)

For a list of Bottled Beers - Traditional Ciders and Perries - Fruit Wines

Opening Times:	Admission:
Friday 12 noon - 4pm	Friday lunch £3.00
Saturday 4pm - 11pm	Friday evening £3.00
Sunday 11 noon - 4pm	Saturday lunch £3.00
Sunday 4pm - 11pm	Saturday evening £3.00

CAMRA members free at all times

Revised August 2008 is supported by: The Brewery's support, The Oldham Green of the Manchester Society, The New Children's Hospital Appeal, The Oldham Racecourse Trust and The Oldham Centre.



The Chorlton Check Out

Heather Airlie & George Elmslie pound the streets

The most recent survey of Chorlton again found a good selection and range of ales in a number of different establishments.

Sedge Lynn - Some interesting guest beers on including Hampshire Penny Black and Beartown Bearskinful served at a good temperature.

The Marble Beer House - A good selection as usual: Lagonda, Janine's One and a Bazens' guest After the Flood were sampled and all in splendid form; the smoking ban has definitely benefited this small intimate bar.

Café-style **Pi**, situated near the Baths, continues to supply a decent pint of Bank Top Flat Cap with the guest being another from Bazens', Flatbac. Their range of bottles beers and lagers is always expanding and the wine list is worth a look.

Dulcimer, near the Banks crossroads, was doing good trade for a damp, January Monday and had its usual choice of four ales on handpump plus a range of continental lagers. On form were RCH Pitchfork and Cairngorm Wildcat. Still expanding on the music upstairs, it is hoped that this may prove a useful venue for the local CAMRA branch meetings.

The Bar, Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season for Spring, is another busy spot, offering a selection of Marble beers, such as Ginger and Manchester, plus Pictish Simcoe as guest. It had a bit of a different atmosphere, as the lighting had gone off over the bar due to incursion from above, so they were serving by candlelight. At least it didn't affect the hand pumps!

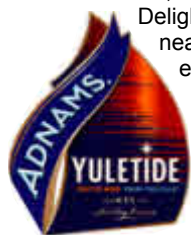
Nearby **Abode** although quieter, had another two real ales, Hyde's Harem Scarem and Bazens' Knoll Street Porter plus bottled beers on offer, both ales on good form. Frequently compared with its neighbour The Bar, it has developed its own style with time and has its own regulars.

Next was a new one for us to try – **Argyles**. Like the previous bars mentioned, it is inserted into an old shop, near Turkish Delight. Same format, long and narrow, with the bar near the door, it extends and widens out at the far end. Alcoves have been created to break it up a bit and Monday night seemed to be quiz night. They did serve a reasonable pint of Taylor's Landlord and Adnam's Yuletide, so maybe worth keeping an eye on.

And so to the old favourite, the **Beech**. How things have changed over the last year.

What was the real ale haven in a sea of obscurity has taken a turn for the worse. Of all our pubs surveyed, this was the only one that not only didn't top up the glasses, but queried our request that they do so. We were informed that we should have stated that we wanted a flat pint before they had started pouring so they could remove the sparkler. Explaining that we did not want a flat pint, merely a full pint with a small head, just confused them and was evidently too hard. The barmaid started to top up the glasses, but from the wrong hand pump – and really didn't want to believe me when I pointed this out! She then tried to give me the glass containing the mixture! Desperately in need of a good scrub and some friendly bar staff, it will be a while before I volunteer to return.

So we retired to the **Trevor**, where we were delighted to see Kevin none the worse for his adventures with robbers. He immediately ensured that we were served with an excellent (full) pint of Caledonian 80 shilling. As Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season for winter it is bright, cheerful and friendly, much more like it!



The Altrincham Ale Trail (Part 1) with John Ison

Alighting from the bus at Navigation Road, our first visit was to the **Old Packet House**. This small cosy black and white building close to the Bridgewater canal - hence the reason for its name - sold on this occasion two real ales. They are Boddington's Bitter and Timothy Taylor's Golden Best, the latter beer not a common sight in this area. The Golden Best was tried and was found to be in good condition. Leaving here we passed by the Navigation was 'passed by' as it sells only keg beers.

Next was Barrington Road and **Barrington's Hotel and Cafe Bar**. This triangle-shaped pub has two bars with the rear bar serving Thwaites beers on handpump. Two beers on offer were Thwaites Original and Lancaster Bomber, the former being in excellent condition.

Leaving Barrington's, we headed towards the centre of Altrincham to the **Bridge Inn** (opposite Tesco's). This building standing on its own and rumoured to be under threat from future redevelopment, sells just one real ale. This is Holt's Bitter and was in good condition.

Passing several 'keg' establishments we ventured into the **Faulkners Arms**. This small (from the outside) one roomed pub, sells again only one real ale - Cain's Bitter - and was eagerly awaited. However our hopes were dashed – the beer was off and vinegary! On returning to the bar, apart from being offered various keg replacements we were given our money back without question. The landlord did not seem bothered which is a shame as on the outside of the building they advertise traditional cask ales. Onward into Altrincham's pedestrianised shopping street and the **Bricklayers Arms**. This pub I believe is in the process of changing landlords and was closed when we visited. A few days earlier it was open serving both Theakston Best Bitter and Old Speckled Hen. I hope the new landlord will be a little more adventurous in his/her beer selection as the Bricklayers is a nice cosy pub to visit and in an excellent position in the main shopping area.

On to Greenwood Street and a few doors down (just before La Trappiste) we came to **Altrincham Conservative Working Mens Club**. Having rung the bell and announced who we were, we were let in and given a warm welcome by the club's steward, John. On the bar were three handpumps - Boddington's and Holt's Bitter plus guest (Thwaites Wainwright). We all went for the Thwaites and were not disappointed as it was served in an excellent condition, in a very relaxed atmosphere.

Next port of call was the **Malt Shovels**, a mere five minutes walk away. This re-entry for the 2008 Good Beer Guide is a Samuel Smith's house serving just their one cask ale - Old Brewery Bitter. For value for money you cannot complain although the beer itself was a 'tad' cold. However it soon 'warmed up' and was good.

The **Orange Tree** was next. This cosy pub with various drinking areas sells between two and three real ales. Caledonian Deuchars IPA was very good whilst the Theakston Best Bitter was untried. The third beer, sometimes from Copper Dragon, was not on when we called.

Our final visit was saved for the best pub on this crawl - the **Old Market Tavern**. Here you are welcomed by up to eleven real ales including regulars from Bank Top and Phoenix, and all in excellent condition. No wonder it is Altrincham's premiere real ale outlet and is always a pleasure to visit. The landlord John and staff must be congratulated for all the hard work they have put in over the past couple of years to keep the OMT such a successful real ale outlet.





Who's Going to Eat all the Pies?

Putting more emphasis on food has been widely recommended as the way for pubs to respond to the smoking ban. Yet food has been touted as "the future of the pub" for thirty years, and we must be fast approaching the point where the market is saturated. You can stay in the pub for one drink or many, but you're never going to eat more than one meal at a sitting. Indeed industry figures show the food trade to have been at best static in the first six months after the ban, despite frantic efforts to tempt diners through the door.

The idea that small urban locals that currently serve no food at all and do four-fifths of their business after 9 pm can suddenly turn themselves into dining establishments is absurd. Indeed, many pubs in less prominent locations that once made an attempt to serve meals and appeal to outsiders have dropped the food, gone evenings-only and essentially cater only for locals and regulars. It is also impossible to switch from a mainly wet trade to a food-led one without a major change in the character of an establishment. It may still be a successful business, but whether it is still in a meaningful sense a pub may be questionable.

So much pub food is dull and predictable – the culinary equivalent of mass-market keg beers. And why do almost all pubs aim to serve slight variations on the same menu? Distinctiveness and individuality are, in general, sadly lacking, and this must ultimately limit the market for pub dining.

The Moderate Option

Recently I went out for a meal with some work colleagues. One of them, a rather fastidious French lady, asked for a small glass of red wine, but when it arrived decided it was far too much and poured half of it away. On the face of it, this may have seemed a rather prissy attitude, but in fact what was presumably a 175 ml glass is considerably larger than the standard glasses served in her native country. Traditionally, wine was served in 125 ml glasses, but in recent years, in the pursuit of profit, many pubs and bars have adopted larger sizes of 175 ml and even 250 ml, and often dropped the smaller size completely. In response to this, MP Greg Mulholland has called for the law to be changed to require wine to be offered in 125 ml glasses, as the widespread adoption of the larger sizes may lead drinkers to underestimate how much alcohol they are consuming and also misjudge their fitness to drive.

This has been criticised in some quarters as a "nanny state" measure, and normally I am no fan of petty-minded restrictions, but in this case he has a point. There is no suggestion that the larger measures will be banned, so it is not a curb but an extension of choice. Pubs would be roundly criticised if they refused to serve beer in half-pints, and a 175 ml glass of pretty much any wine contains as much alcohol as a pint of standard-strength beer. Many customers quite reasonably might not want that much, and so it makes sense to give them the option of a smaller measure. Indeed even a 125 ml glass of 13% ABV wine contains almost as much alcohol as a pint of mild. Providing wine in 125 ml glasses, and describing them as "standard" rather than "small", could be viewed as a mark of responsible drinks retailing. And a lot of customers might buy two 125 ml glasses, but be content with just one of the larger sizes, so revenue need not suffer either.




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Open
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 12 noon - 11pm Sunday

SENGER

Macclesfield PUB NEWS

Mike & Lynn Wawiorok's Monthly Round-Up

After being closed for much of the summer we are pleased to hear that the **Peel Arms** on Peel Street has reopened giving a regular town centre outlet for Thwaites Lancaster Bomber. The landlady, formerly at the Barnfield, would like to recruit darts and crib teams. Bar snacks are available during opening hours. This corner local has new carpets and decoration. The two month delay between visiting, writing and publication of articles unfortunately led to out of date information in the December edition. To help avoid this in future it would help if landlords or landladies let your CAMRA branch know of significant news.

Much change is reported at a couple of the branch's favourite pubs. In the hills at Wincle the **Ship**, that was a free house, is now a JW Lees pub. Chris, who was assistant manager to Giles, has taken over the pub. We haven't yet had chance to visit to find out the new beer range policy. Sadly, the **Railway View** is up for sale by its owner, although I believe the current landlady would like to keep running the pub. We hope it keeps its current range of 6-8 ales from independent breweries that are kept and served well. It will be a sad day if we lose this free house and its summer beer festival. Mark has left the **Plough** on Prestbury Road and decorators were spotted working inside in mid-January. Again, we don't know the new selection of beers.

Christmas and New Year found some excellent beer. The **Vale** in Bollington held a Winter Ales Festival with an excellent choice of around 30 special guests. From our own visit and other reports this was a great success from both sides of the bar. Particular favourites included Acorn 5th Noel and Gorlovka Imperial Stout, Dunham Massey Deer Beer and Brew Dog Rip Tide. With its selection of ales from independent breweries, usually including locals from Storm or Weetwood, the Vale is always worth a visit. It's easy to reach without a car from the Marple/Poynton or Macclesfield directions by walking or cycling a round trip on the canal and Middlewood way. Alternatively, there's an hourly bus from Macclesfield. I suggest you make a point of visiting the summer beer festival and we hope the winter one is repeated.

In Macclesfield, handy for the rail and bus stations, the **Waters Green Tavern** is keeping up its usual high standards. Brian's selection of pale bitters is joined by a cask of dark ale or stout at the weekend. At lunchtime, the home cooked bar snacks and light meals complement the always excellent ales

Dave Gittins' Congleton News

Congleton Leisure Centre has got the go-ahead to run two of its mini-beer festivals this year. The dates are 5-8 March and 8-11 October.

As from mid-January, one of the three beers at **Congleton Leisure Centre** has been from Copper Dragon. It is currently planned to rotate among five different Copper Dragon beers - a new one each week. The success of this initiative will be closely monitored, and any beers that do not sell well will be dropped from the rotation. The remaining two handpumps will continue to offer the ever-changing beers that regular visitors to the Leisure Centre bar have come to expect.

The **Wharf** in Congleton is closed and boarded up. It would seem that the pub has been losing money for some time and the licensee has had enough. According to the Congleton Chronicle, owner Punch Taverns was not aware of these developments.

The **Rose & Crown** at Arclid is still closed and up for sale - I can't understand why nobody seems to be able to make a go of this place, given its location on the junction of two busy A-Roads.

RECENT CAMRA AWARDS



The December Pub of the Month Award was presented to the Cheadle Hulme. Sharon McCann (*right*) and husband Terry (*second left*) and their team are pictured with the framed certificate.



Trafford branch had a great evening at the Bar in Chorlton recently, presenting Jenny Pearson, the manager, with a much deserved Pub of the Season award. On the bar were Ginger Marble, Manchester Bitter and JP Best from the Marble Brewery, Thirsty Moon from Phoenix and from Pictish, Alchemist soon followed by Brewers Gold, all the beers were in excellent condition as you would expect. The

branch would like to thank Jenny and her hardworking staff for keeping the beer flowing and providing a fantastic buffet for everybody in the pub. Pictured are Bev Rae Branch Chairperson (*left*) and Jenny Pearson.

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- ❖ Promotion of your sponsorship on our festival web site and a connection between our web site and yours.

Interested? Ring Jim Flynn on 0161 432 1816 (evenings) or 07917 596751.



PUB Grub

The Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport

A pub's trade can be killed by many things – poor beer, poor and/or ever-changing licensees, irregular opening hours are common causes. But scaffolding? The fate of the Crown, or more particularly its food operation, presents a cautionary tale.

Back in the days when the Crown was an old fashioned Boddington's pub, food was of course non-existent. "This is a public house, not a restaurant" one long-serving landlady told a work colleague when he had the temerity to order a bag of crisps with his last orders pint. He didn't get the crisps.

It was still a Boddies pub when landlord Jim Mulvey built up quite a trade for his lunches. All was going well until the scaffolding arrived.

Tony Favell's sole legacy as MP for Stockport is perhaps his successful campaign to get the famous viaduct sandblasted. Unfortunately the scaffolding for this work blocked a large part of Heaton Lane. As the scaffolding went up, the Crown's trade went down. And that was that for 20 years. Most attempts at anything other than basic "chips with everything" menus died a death.

On the beer side the pub has of course thrived. The short-lived Boddington Pub Company turned the Crown into one of its Ale Houses (the Kings Arms in Salford was another) and since then the pub has traded as a free house. It's had its ups and downs of course but as regular readers of *Opening Times* will know, the past 18 months have been a constant "up". Sixteen changing guest beers and a real cider are enough to satisfy the liquid requirements of the most demanding drinker. Now, though, it's starting to register on the food front, too.



Part of the pub's overhaul since it changed hands in autumn 2006 has been the installation of a proper catering kitchen. This grabbed the attention of local chef Roy Weir (well, I say local – he is of course a Scotsman through and through) and he is now transforming the food operation.

The menu is reassuringly short. There is home-made soup (which can be bought in a "combo" with a sandwich for £5.00), a range of sandwiches, filled jacket potatoes and four winter specials priced from £4.50 to £5.50. These sound exceptionally tempting – beef goulash, roast beetroot, new potatoes; braised chicken in red wine, bacon, mushrooms and baby onions; Flemish beef casserole with mustard bread, and vegetable tagine with spicy couscous.

Unfortunately when we called one Friday in February none of these were available. Roy explained that this had been his busiest week yet and they had all sold out. We chose instead the soup (rich and creamy leek and potato) along with one of the sandwiches – Cajun steak, red onions and cherry tomatoes. This was exceptional – a generous size with superbly tender and spicy steak strips contrasting with the succulent onion and tomato. Top notch.

Food is currently restricted to weekday lunchtimes from 12 to 3pm but if trade continues to build Roy may also expand the operation to weekends, too. I shall certainly be back. **JC**



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Phil Levison Looks Back at Times Past

It had been a year previously that Porter's Railway on Portwood was voted Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year, and despite hopes that lightning might strike twice in the in the same place for the national award, it was not to be. It made runner-up position, though, which was something of a victory in itself, both for Porter Brewing Co., Stockport's pub scene, and landlord Alex Lord. The Railway narrowly missed out on being voted the UK's number one, the top award going to the Swan at Little Totham in Essex.

Interbrew's decision to sponsor the Cask Marque accreditation of 2,000 cask Boddington's and Draught Bass stockists was an interesting hint that the big brewers might be rethinking their strategy. Not before time. In recent years Whitbread and Interbrew had openly and actively set about replacing cask Boddingtons with nitrokeg. Cask Boddingtons now made up just 10 per cent of the 750,000 barrels brewed each year. As for Draught Bass, the way this once great ale had been neglected while the challengers – London Pride, Abbot and Pedigree had been heavily and successfully promoted.

CAMRA had hailed Gordon Brown as the consumers' champion, following the previous year's introduction of duty cuts for micro-brewers. The message this time was "more of the same, please". As part of its budget submission, CAMRA had presented the Chancellor with a dossier listing micro-brewers that had been able to expand and invest since progressive Beer Duty – which halved the excise bill for brewers of less than 18,000 barrels a year – came into force the previous June. What was now needed was a review of the upper qualifying limit with a view to raising it in the not too distant future. The Chancellor was also being asked to apply the sliding scale to cider.

Hydes had announced plans to convert Millington Hall Restaurant in Cheadle Hulme into one of their "Heritage Inns". But the "Cheadle Hulme Residents Against Millington Hall Development" were raising all manner of unfounded allegations to stop it. Riotous behaviour and traffic chaos were imminent, it would seem. Of course no such problems arose and the John Millington is now a local favourite.

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Brewery NEWS...

JW Lees Update

THERE have been quite a few initiatives and new beers from local family brewer JW Lees in recent months. Time to get up to speed.

The Mild has been renamed Brewers Dark, but otherwise the beer remains unchanged, we think. There is also a new premium beer out. This is John Willies (4.5% ABV). This was tried at the National Winter Ales Festival and can perhaps be best described as like their Bitter but with more of everything. The former summer seasonal, Scorcher (4.2% ABV) has been added to the core range and it has to be said this is an excellent ale.



On the seasonal front, Lees will be producing eight different beers this year. Four of the beers will be available for three month periods. These are: Spring Cheer (4.1% ABV) for March-May; Summer Sizzler (3.8%) for June-August; Autumn Glow (4.2%) for September-November and finally for December to February 2009 is Winter Warmer at 4.5%.

Alongside these beers are Dragon's Fire (4%) for March; 180 (marking the company's 180th anniversary) at 4.5% for June; Get A Grip (3.9%) for September and the excellent Plum Pudding (4.8%) is back for December.

More Family Brewers' News

Robinson's still have Tempus Fugit (4.2%) out and about. This is an excellent beer described as a "chestnut brown premium ale with aromas of sweet malt and oats. This smooth, round and full bodied beer has a sweet malt palate complemented by soft bitterness and dry roasted or nutty finish".

Hydes Brewery has launched the second beer in its innovative craft ale portfolio for 2008. This is Trojan Horse (4.2%), featuring an image of the wooden horse as detailed in Greek Mythology. Trojan Horse is "an amber coloured beer with a perfect balance of sweet and bitter and a slightly spicy, malty taste" and will be available throughout February and March.



Liverpool-based **Cains** has launched a limited edition of their bottled Finest Lager to tie in with the city's year as European City of Culture. Teaming up with the godfather of pop art Sir Peter Blake. The 'Best of British' inspired label features the Union Jack and kicks off Cains' support of Liverpool's Capital of Culture 08 activities as official beer sponsor.

Chief executive Sudarghara Dusanj said: "Sir Peter Blake is one of country's best loved artists and, through his work with the Beatles, has built a strong affiliation with Liverpool so we couldn't think of anyone better to create our limited edition 'Best of British' bottle. The final design is truly striking and is the perfect complement to our 'Best of British' activity"

Some national news now. Last month we reported on the takeover on Scottish & Newcastle, speculating that brewery closures were likely. We didn't have to wait long. Even before the ink is dry, S&N have announced the closure of their large brewery in Reading, Berkshire. Not a drop of real ale has ever been brewed here and some of the production will be moving to the Royal Brewery in Moss Side.

Micro Magic

As usual our local micro brewers are hard at work producing new and interesting beers.

Bank Top – Bolton's finest will be reintroducing their Leprechaun Stout (6% ABV), dark and dry, which will be back this month. The excellent Dark Mild is now available in bottle conditioned form – well worth seeking out, we think.

Bazens' – lots happening here. The hop situation means that Blue Bullet cannot be brewed again until September. In its place we welcome back Zebra Best Bitter (4.3% ABV), alongside new beer Salford Pale Ale (4.5% ABV). This is a moreish blond beer with a refreshing but not overpowering hop character.



This year's monthly specials take old Salford breweries as their theme. The first beer came out in January and this was After The Flood (4.4% ABV), noting an event at the long closed Mottram's Brewery when a vessel burst, flooding some nearby houses. Bent Over Backwards (marking an old Bent's Brewery) followed last month and for March the

entrant is the 4% ABV 1868 marking the Bathe & Newbold Brewery. Future beers are in the planning stage but the May beer, Cook Street IPA should be fun – this is described as a "proper IPA" – for which read lots of hops – at 5% ABV.

Pennine Ales – Geoff Oliver is still settling in at the former Porter's Brewery. Certainly the beers have been excellent when sampled at the Railway in Stockport. The pumpclips have been redesigned to show the Pennine name and this goes hand in hand with an increasing appearance of the beers in the free trade. And what of Dave Porter? He continues to install new breweries including, we suspect, one for himself. More on this one in future issues.

Pictish Brewery - Richard Sutton's Rochdale brewery continues to delight local drinkers with his stunning hoppy beers. Brewed towards the end of February was Motueka (4.5% ABV), a single hop beer using a New Zealand variety. A new brew of the superb Blue Moon (6% ABV) is in the pipeline and the current seasonal is Dolmen (4% ABV) described as an "amber coloured ale with a delicate hop aroma, biscuity malt flavours and a lingering bitter finish". Sooty also tells us that he is considering making a brand new mild, too.



Phoenix Brewery – this month sees three beers making a welcome return from the ever-reliable Phoenix Brewery. Shamrock (4.3% ABV) is a pale and hoppy beer using Brewer's Gold hops. Resurrection is also back, this pale copper beer with a good hop finish has had its strength reduced this year – down from 4.7% to 4.5% ABV (which, presumably, will make it a "tick" for those who indulge in that sort of thing). Also out is March Hare (4.4% ABV), this mid-golden beer has moderate bittering and a rounded hop finish.

Greenfield Brewery – new out this month is Jinty (4.1% ABV), a light amber beer that is bitter and fruity with a citrus aftertaste. Two beers returning for Spring are Castleshaw (4.2%), a light golden bitter, and Delph Donkey (4.1%), another light golden beer and with a citrus aftertaste.

Marble Brewery – back this month is Tawny 4 (4.5% ABV), one of the non-organic range, and very good it is too.

Dunham Massey – the shop at the brewery is now open for seven days a week. All beers are available in bottle conditioned form. The Dunham Dark mild went down very well and it to be rebrewed. Beer for the future include "Dunham Light" mild and a bottled-only Chocolate Cherry Mild. This sounds rather interesting, we think.

Millstone – business as usual here with Jon and Nick busy coping with demand, which precludes many new beers being produced including the much anticipated Millstone Stout (memo to brewery – we won't let this one drop lads).



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

Thursday 20th – Heaton Moor & Heaton Norris West Stagger: start 7.30pm George & Dragon, Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel; 8.30pm Plough, Heaton Moor Road.

Thursday 27th – Pub of the Month presentation to the New Victoria, Stockport Road, Longsight. From 8.00pm

Saturday 29th – Brewery Visit: Spitting Feathers, Chester. Depart Crown, Heaton Lane 10.00am. Book with Margaret O'Brien 07981756720. Cost £15 per head.

Saturday 5th April – Afternoon Social at Oldham Beer Festival, Queen Elisabeth Hall. From 12 noon.

Thursday 10th April – **Branch Meeting & AGM:** Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. From 8.00pm. **All please attend this important meeting.**

The **High Peak & North East Cheshire** Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple, Tameside and Derbyshire from Glossop to Buxton. *Branch Contact – Tom Lord 0161 427 7099*

Monday 10th March – Branch Meeting: Crown Inn, Victoria St, Glossop. Start 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 13th – Chorlton Survey: meet Pi 8.00pm, Marble Beer House 8.45 the Dulcimer and Spread Eagle.

Thursday 27th - Sale Moor survey, meet 8pm Carters Arms (Northenden Road), 9.15pm Legh Arms then onto the Temple and finish at The Railway in Sale

Thursday 3rd April – Branch Meeting. Venue tba.

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

Monday 17th – Branch Meeting: Lord Eldon, Knutsford. Starts 8.00pm.

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

Wednesday 12th – Swinton Crawl: 7.30 p.m. White Horse, Worsley Road; then Park Inn; Cricketer's Arms; 10 p.m. Farmers' Arms.

Wednesday 19th – **Branch Meeting and AGM:** New Oxford, Bexley Square, Salford. **All please attend this important meeting.**

Wednesday 26th – City Centre Double Social: 8pm Castle, Oldham Street; 9.00pm Crown & Kettle, Gt Ancoats Street.

Wednesday 2nd April – Chapel Street Crawl: 8pm Crescent (7pm if you want a curry!), 9pm New Oxford, 10pm Kings Arms, Bloom Street.

It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale



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