



SEPTEMBER 2008

# Opening

TIMES THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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



## CROWN IS COUNTY CHAMP

**T**he Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport, has been voted **Greater Manchester Pub of the Year** by local branches of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. The one-time Boddingtons pub is well-known for its prominent position under Stockport's railway viaduct and has for many years been known for its range and quality of real ales and cider.

The pub beat off other strong challengers from the New Oxford (the winner of the same award in 2007), the Anvil in Wigan, the Old Market Tavern in Altrincham and the Tandle Hill Tavern in Middleton (winner of Manchester Food & Drink Pub of The Year in 2007)

Ralph Warrington, Regional Director from CAMRA said, "The Crown is an outstanding example of how to get a pub running right with a great selection of well-crafted beers in a welcoming environment. Trade at the pub is flourishing despite the recent challenges put before the industry. Congratulations to the licensees for their hard work in securing this award. Well done!"

It was only two years ago when there were fears that this pub, one of Stockport's premier houses, could be in decline – but then Steve Alexander and Ian Watts took over with their management team of Sarah Bergin, Lee & Lesley Watts. Now the pub has been transformed into a flagship of choice and quality. 16 handpumps serve an ever-changing range of real ales, real cider, and exceptional lunchtime food in a pub that gleams and sparkles. The presentation will be made on the evening of Saturday 13 September.



The 2009 edition of CAMRA's flagship publication, the Good Beer Guide, is launched this month. This is the 36th edition of what has become the country's premier guide to good pubs and good beer. We will be running a special feature next month. The cover price is £14.99 but CAMRA members can pick up a copy for just £10 at branch meetings in September.



The George, Mersey Square, Stockport, is the first of our "A6 Campaign" pubs to convert back to cask beer. This is a very welcome real ale gain at one of Stockport town centre's more prominent pubs. More details in Stockport Supping on page 11.



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# Pub OF THE Month AWARD



**The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for September is the Red Lion, Stockport Road, Cheadle.**

This is a pub with an interesting history in CAMRA terms and many years ago was the subject of an unsuccessful campaign to prevent its major refurbishment and extension into what it the pub you see today.

The bone of contention was that the Red Lion at the time was a traditional community pub selling the then rare Robinson's "ordinary" bitter (better known today as Old Stockport). It was felt that what was planned would destroy what made the pub special and replace it with a more impersonal operation catering mainly for the youth market.

For a while that prediction came true – the pub was loud and noisy with bouncers on the door and indifferent cask beer.

Luckily time moves on, and pubs can also change and improve. So it has proved to be with the Red Lion. For the last nine years it has been run by Chris and Vicky Lane who have made sure it is a cosy and friendly pub with a mixed clientele of all ages.

The open plan layout remains but there are plenty of cosy areas with traditional fittings and Victorian fireplaces. The long bar is also faced with dark wood and behind is decorated with Toby jugs and bottles. The low beamed ceiling also adds to the cosy traditional feel. Outside there is a large drinking and eating area – good home cooked food is also available. Other activities include a weekly quiz night.

Of course the beer is also important. This is a Robinson's house and you will find top quality Unicorn, Hatters and a seasonal beer, currently the excellent Olympic Gold. Old Tom joins the line up for the winter months.

This award, recognising Chris and Vicky's hard work will be presented on Thursday 25 September when a good night is promised – miss it if you dare. **DP**

*The Red Lion is easily accessible by public transport. From Stockport buses 309, 310, 312, 371 will drop you close by.*



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# COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

## Opening Times – Comment

Well, they did it! This year's contest for regional Pub of the Year was a tough one, with five excellent pubs in contention including last year's winner The New Oxford. Having said that, the Crown is a pub that really does seem to get everything right from the top notch food, the varied entertainment and the ever changing range of cask beers. The pub also seems permanently busy thus providing proof, if it was needed, that quality really does count in today's pub environment. I have said it before and I have said it again – the good pubs have nothing to fear from the credit crunch, recession or the effects of the smoking ban.

"Welcome back to the George, Mersey Square, Stockport, at last returned to the real ale fold." This appeared in last month's editorial when the position was not in fact clear. Now it is – and it really is a cask ale gain. This is a brave move and I hope our readers will give it the support it deserves.

## Opening Times - Information

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

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

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

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

<b>Stockport</b>	0845 644 4301	<b>Trafford</b>	0161 9122274
<b>Manchester</b>	0161 234 1555	<b>Derbyshire</b>	08456 058058
<b>Salford</b>	0161 925 1346	<b>Cheshire</b>	0845 1132500
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**Copy Date for the October issue is Friday 12<sup>th</sup> September.**

**Contributors to this issue:** John Clarke, John Tune, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Frank Wood, Robin Wignall, Peter Edwardson, Mark McConachie, Andy Jenkinson, Jim Flynn, Dave Platt, Steve Mason, Mike & Lyn Wawiorok

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# Vale Cottage Inn

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**City Centre West with Mark McConachie**

**O**UR City Centre West Stagger began at **Kro2** on Oxford Road. As it was a warm night and the place was very full, most of our party chose to sit outside.

Kro2 is a conversion of the ground floor of a former office building. Just imagine the foyer of a 60's building with a bar sited in the middle of it. Full-height glazing lets the natural light flood in to this innovative space. Outside tables front Oxford Road, whilst covered and heated seating is to the side of this in the shadow of the snaking, concrete viaduct that is the Mancunian Way.



The bar was dispensing four beers tonight - Taylor Landlord, Deuchars IPA, Jennings Cumberland, and Pedigree. The Landlord was rated very well, whilst the others scored highly. The Pedigree went un-tried. Kro2 is

deservedly popular with a mix of customers; part of the draw of the place is an interesting food menu that includes Danish dishes.

When we have carried out this Stagger on previous occasions, we have at times strayed in to either the Salisbury or Font Bar, both near to Oxford Road rail station. Tonight we were to venture into new territory. **Odder**, a newish bar that has established a good reputation in its two year existence. Opposite the BBC, this is a two-storey affair with a quirky, almost zany approach to decor, witness an array of Bison heads on the ground floor, whilst upstairs displays a moodier, Middle Eastern look. All great fun though. This is the sister pub of Northern Quarter establishment, Odd. I believe a third outlet for the city is being planned. Three beers were available (both floors have bars, by the way), Copper Dragon Golden Pippin, Leeds Yorker, and Marble JP Best

The **Lass O'Gowrie** on Charles Street was our next call, this had Nethergate Vixen, Allgates Mild at Heart, and Skinners Spriggan Ale. That is

only three of the 10 possible beers that could have been on. A missed delivery was the source of the reduced range I was informed. Vixen scored well, with the other two beers dividing opinion. The Lass was very busy, perhaps due to



live televised football. I noted it now features art exhibitions courtesy of local artists. Some were photo exhibits, others not. Despite the curtailed range of beers, still an interesting place to sample good beers in an "ale-house" atmosphere.

A few doors down is **Joshua Brooks** at the junction of Princess Street. Outside a terrace allows one a rare glimpse of the city's most hidden river, the Medlock. Looking fresh following a recent re-decoration, the pub seemed bright and welcoming. A far cry from the gloominess that it used to exude. We occupied one of the Waltzer-style booths near to an oversize telly (showing footie again). Two Wychwood beers were on - the powerful Hobgoblin which rated well, and the seasonal, cricket-themed beer, Owzat. This really bowled us over with its flavour. Two cask beers being on here meant a 100 per cent increase in cask availability. Well done to Joshua Brooks for being adventurous and giving people a choice.

The pubs on Princess Street were omitted as they only sell keg beer. They were the Old Garratt, Overdraught, O'Shea's, and the New Union. That short walk brought us to the city's first (and only) Sci-Fi and cult TV bar (their words), **Fab Cafe**. This is reached via some basement steps from Portland Street. The two beers on the bar, Black Sheep bitter and Hornbeam Golden Wraith scored well with our group. Dimly lit, and still as funky as ever, I did get the impression that there was not as much of the Sci-Fi clutter, sorry, older exhibits around as there had been on previous visits. Perhaps it has been replaced with more of the TV stuff? Still, a good bar, and one that is always a talking point.



Wetherspoon's **Paramount** was next on our list. Sited on busy Oxford Street, it was bustling inside. Looking at how many people there were waiting at the bar, I thought it would take some time to get served. I was wrong though. All credit to

efficient staff, we got our beers pretty speedily. Although Pedigree, Abbot and two other beers tempted us, we plumped for Thwaites Wainwright and Moorhouses Pendle Witch which both scored highly, and Spitting Feathers which was just a touch under those. The Paramount is a large affair with a smallish mezzanine floor for private parties and functions. It was full of all types of people tonight, ranging from hen-party goers to quiet, conservative folk enjoying a pint and a meal. The next-door Varsity is all keg, so we moved on.

Our penultimate pub was the **Seven Oaks** on Nicholas Street, on the edge of Chinatown. The building is noteworthy in being constructed from white, glazed blocks. A wrought-iron "tree shape" is inlaid in the facade to reinforce the oak imagery. Inside, it is actually quite compact, although when open, the first floor offers a far larger drinking area for folk to relax in. Of the three beers on, Pedigree went un-tried, Black Sheep bitter was good, whilst the Boddies was merely fair. An interesting space with a chatty, town-pub feel to it.



We made the **Bank** on Mosley Street our final call of the crawl. This is a neo-classical building set atop the historic Portico Library. Some years ago the pub spent some time as a brewpub, the Forgery & Firkin, now however it sets itself as a far more upmarket drinking and dining establishment. In respects it is redolent of a gentlemen's club, with a quiet, solid and purposeful air. It is a large space which is broken up well into a large open area in front of the bar, then plenty of seating towards the large windows. There appeared to be a promotion on as a "Summer Six beers" was advertised. With one having already gone we tried Youngs Special, Robins Ransom (a house beer), and Highgate Beezone. All were enjoyed. We did not have time to try the Jennings Cumberland nor the Old Mill Summer Sunshine. A good end to a pleasant night. Try them out for yourself and see what you think.

**JOIN CAMRA NOW  
SEE PAGE 18**



### The Macc LAGs

The Macclesfield CAMRA Local Action Group (or LAG) is meeting regularly on different nights from the full branch meetings or socials to try and tempt out members we don't see often enough. We're aiming to sample ales at pubs in the running for Good Beer Guide selection to make sure we select the correct ones. We're also visiting bits of town that we don't get to very often, in case there are any hostilities that ought to be on our radar for good beer quality or might be at risk and need support.

Our first wander in June was around the local pubs to the west of the town centre, starting at the **Oxford**. It's a smart pub that largely keeps a traditional layout with one semi-opened out room with bar, lounge and pool table areas, but also a small quiet room at the front. There are usually a couple of Jennings ales and one or two guests. Hopback Spring Zing was excellent and Deuchars IPA very drinkable. Around the corner, the **Crompton Road Tavern** offered an enjoyable Bombardier.

The **Chester Road Tavern** is keeping up its standards with a choice of five ales. This is a thriving multi-roomed traditional local with lots of games teams and regular trips to the races. Regulars John Smiths, Tetley and Cains bitters were joined by guests Thwaites Wainwright (very good) and Daleside Blonde.

Up on the truncated bit of Prestbury Road near town, the **Plough** is back on form under its new landlords. Regular ales are Tetley bitter, Black Sheep Bitter and Flowers IPA with a guest that was Courage Directors at our visit. We found the Black Sheep and Directors well up to the mark. Trade is building up with a quiz on first Sunday of the month, Karaoke on Saturday and bar snacks at lunchtime Monday to Friday.



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It was strange to find the **Barnfield** closed at 10 o'clock on a Tuesday evening. I wonder what's going on there. The **Crown** had good quality Bass and a real cider is promised soon. At the **Prince Albert**, near Granelli's ice cream factory on Newton Street, we found Old Speckled Hen and quaffable Theakston's Black Bull. On Park Lane, the **Park Tavern** offers Unicorn and round the corner on Crompton Road the **Bruce** has Tetley bitter. Finally, a big surprise at the **Flower Pot** on Congleton Road – alongside the always excellent quality Unicorn there's now the Robinson's seasonal ale. That's the first time I've known a choice of ale there, so let's hope it's a success and continues.

Our July LAG roughly followed the canal starting at the **Puss in Boots**, where there was a choice of Tetley Bitter or Bombardier, with Boddingtons awaiting. Along Black Road, the **Navigation** was new to us and we found regulars Black Sheep Bitter and Bombardier joined by a well-kept guest Batemans Valiant. The **Hollins** had very good PGA from Macclesfield's Storm brewery. At the **Dolphin** we found Robinson's Olympic seasonal brew, alongside the usual Robinson's range. We found chess players and folk music and the **Railway View** with three beers to choose from including a wonderful dark beer from the Derby brewery. There's very good news at the **Old Ship** on Beech Lane, where the landlord Jed is back on his feet after illness. We wish him well at his pub that offers several cask ales, always including one or two from Storm.

### Gold Amongst the Dross

I recently saw a sobering statistic that, in the thirty years from 1977 to 2007, the amount of beer sold in the on-trade in Britain had more than halved from 37 million barrels to a mere 17 million. It was forecast to fall yet further to 10 million barrels over the next ten years. Against this background it is easy to understand why so many pubs have closed and so many of those that remain are often very quiet.

There are many reasons for this, most of which have been discussed in this column over the years, but it has to be accepted that it is the result of deep-seated social changes that cannot be reversed by one or two simplistic policy measures. In particular, the routine session drinking that used to be a feature of many urban pubs has, as far as it survives at all, largely moved from the pub to the home, and isn't ever going to come back.

On the face of it, that may seem a pessimistic analysis, but there will always be a demand for pubs or something approximating to pubs, and there is another statistic that looks rather more positive. In the past year, total draught beer sales in pubs fell by 9%, but cask beer sales only fell by 1.3%. That's a large rise in market share and, if you strip out the impact of pub closures and pubs where cask beer has been taken out, probably an actual increase on a like-for-like basis.

People need a positive incentive to visit the pub rather than just seeing it as a default option, and offering cask beer, the one drink that can only be experienced in the pub and can't be replicated at home, is the most effective way of providing that. In the future, it is more and more likely that those pubs which succeed in a difficult market will be those putting cask beer at the heart of their drinks offering.

### A Better Class of Dead Horse

IT has been reported that InBev, the makers of Stella Artois, are launching a 4% ABV version of it in the UK. Obviously this is an indication that Peeterman, the existing 4% beer intended to be a little brother to Stella, has proved a failure. On the face of it, this seems like diluting the brand, although given full-strength Stella's unfortunate nickname of "wife-beater" it may be doubtful how much reputation there is left to dilute.

There can be no doubt, though, that the "standard lager" category is one of the dullest and most jaded in the entire drinks market. Brands such as Carling and Fosters are looking very tired indeed nowadays, so you can understand the brewers' desire to stimulate interest in it and introduce products with more of a "premium" cachet. However, you have to wonder whether they might be flogging a dead horse.

A few years ago I was in a pub in the Midlands and saw five working-class, middle-aged blokes in succession come in and order a pint of Carling each. This really underlined how standard lager has usurped the position of "ordinary" bitter as the default choice for the undiscerning drinker. In contrast, more and more, those choosing lower gravity cask beers will be offered an ever changing variety of products and will take an active interest in what they're drinking. Throwing the marketing budget at them is not the way to increase consumers' interest in beer.

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**Godley Hall. Godley Hill, Hyde**

**T**HIS is a gem of a pub, hidden away within the Kerry Foods factory (Walls factory to locals) in the Godley district of Hyde. It is conveniently local to Godley railway station and several bus routes. Whilst this may not be the oldest pub in Hyde, it is probably the oldest building which is now a pub. It was built in the 18th Century and still retains many of its oldest features, including the low beam at the entrance. Anybody above 5'6" should duck on entry. This is a quiet pub, with low level background music only and there is no pool table and no dart board.

There are two real ales available, Theakston's Best Bitter at all times and the other is a guest from a range of beers, which recently have included Old Speckled Hen, Adnams Broadside, Wells Bombardier and Theakston's Old Peculier.

Food is available every day other than Wednesday, but in addition to the normal menu, Monday has a curry night and Thursday sees fish, chips and mushy peas. There is a quiet quiz on Tuesday, free to enter. August Bank Holiday sees a fun day to raise funds for Willow Wood Hospice and includes bouncy castle, brass band and pony or tractor rides.

On the whole a warm friendly pub, just ten minutes walk from the centre of Hyde.

Opening hours are Monday to Thursday, 4.00pm till late, Friday to Sunday, noon till late.

Food is available Monday, Tuesday & Thursday 5.00pm to 7.30pm and Friday, Saturday and Sunday Noon to 7.30pm.

**Digging In At The Swan**

**N**ew licensee Carol Dougal has lost no time in putting her plans into action at the **Swan**, New Mills. With the help of some willing friends and a digger she has transformed land behind the popular Robinson's house into a secure beer garden complete with lambs and chickens.

"We see ourselves very much as a family pub and wanted to create an area where people could relax," she said. "The lambs are very popular with the children - especially when they get to bottle-feed them!"



Peter Robinson presents Carol with her Innkeeping certificate.

Taking over at the Swan was a big step for Carol, 36, whose previous jobs have included working in a bank and as a riding instructor.

She explained, though, that she had no doubts about taking up the new challenge along with partner Nigel and children

Andrew, 15, and 13 year-old Emma.

"Running a pub is very different from my previous careers but I jumped at the chance when it came along," she said.

"I've lived in the area all my life and the Swan has always been my local. I also worked here when I was younger and so it's a special place for me."

In addition to creating the beer garden, meanwhile, Carol has also been carrying out a full redecoration of the pub's interior to further enhance its welcoming appeal.

Her future plans include a bar snacks menu, live music and an exhibition darts match featuring top professional Darryl Fitton while she is also keen to hear from anyone interested in joining the pub's darts, pool and quiz teams.

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**CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2008 We're in it!**



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Wobbly Bob, White Hurricane, Uncle Fester,  
Christmas Kiss, Humbug, Tyke, Thirsty Moon

**MORE CHOICE  
BETTER BEER**

**International Brewing Awards**



1998

Wobbly Bob



2002

Navy



2002

Wobbly Bob



2004

Wobbly Bob



**A**LATE spring meeting at one of our nearby Local History Societies had a talk about Bugsworth Basin. Amongst the excellent local history the speakers threw in a bit of pub history, which, as can be expected, showed that the phenomenon of 'lost locals' has a long history, and is not just recent. At one time Buxworth was blessed with four pubs of which only one remains.

The Rose & Crown was demolished in 1983 to make way for Whaley Bridge and Chapel en le Frith By-pass. At the time of closure The Rose & Crown apparently had no running water and no electricity, though gas was in place. The Yellow Cat was on Silk Hill, the narrow lane which is the back way to Whaley Bridge. Could this have been the Golden Lion back in the mists of time? The Bull's Head is now a private house on the road to Chinley from Buxworth. In days gone by workers in local industries would have sustained these three locals. Which leads into the remaining pub, the **Navigation**, beside the historic canal basin, a pub often mentioned in this column for its interesting guest beers and for the general quality of the four or five real ales available. The Navigation is both a community local as well as being well placed to benefit from visitors to Bugsworth Basin



and other attractions in the area.

These days the **Navigation** in Whaley Bridge usually has Tetley Bitter, Wells Bombardier and a consistently well kept pint of Black Sheep Bitter available. The Navigation won the Best Dressed Pub in

the Whaley Bridge Carnival with a Flintstone theme, the interior being the Bedrock Bar. Well done to all concerned.

It was pleasing to find Jennings Bitter as a guest beer at the **White Horse** in Whaley Bridge. It is good to see this on the Punch list of beers available to their licensees.

Marston's are obviously promoting beers from their recently acquired breweries. The **Shepherds** in Whaley Bridge has had Ringwood Boondoggle Summer Ale and Wychwood Bee Wyched in recent weeks. The Shepherds has a willing clientele for such treats, as well as a steady turnover of Jennings Mild and Snecklifter, Marston's Bitter and Pedigree. Marston's seasonal beers also sell well, Long Hop a summer beer with a cricket theme being an August offering.

The **Cock** in Whaley Bridge is a reliable source of Robinson's seasonal beers. Olympic Gold has been in good form. The quality of Robinson's Hatters Mild is also a feature at the Cock where it is often very good indeed.

I managed a call in early August at the **Cross Keys** in Chapel Milton. This lies on the A.624 between Chapel en le Frith and Chinley, and almost beneath a huge railway viaduct. I called here a few years ago when for some reason there was no real ale available. Eventually getting round to calling again I found the pub busy with Quiz Night customers on a Wednesday evening, and a decent pint of Black Sheep available. Situated where it is the Cross Keys can serve an obvious community role, as well as attracting visitors with food and good beer.

Attracting customers to pubs has become difficult in the current climate. At the **Prince of Wales** on Fairfield Road in Buxton, the licensee has gone for longer opening hours. Instead of closing part of the day in midweek, the pub is now open noon till midnight every day. The new licensee at the **Swan** at New Mills Newtown managed to get an article in the Stockport Express after taking over. Let us hope these strategies work. Many pubs certainly need all the custom they can get. You the reader can help.



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**George Backs Cask**

**T**HE campaign to try and get some of the pubs along the A6 back to cask has scored its first win with the **George** in Mersey Square, Stockport.

This is down to the initiative of pub manager Laura Robinson who took over eight months ago and set about restoring the pub's fortunes. The pub was pretty grim when she arrived – certainly it's somewhere I gave a wide berth and so did many other people, leaving the place to a rowdy sub-25 clientele.

That's all changed now. A refurbishment has left the pub looking clean and modern with the new look chiming well with the few remnants of its old 1930s interior. The pool table went as well, and with it many of the unwanted customers. The customer base is now more 25-plus with all age groups once again using the pub.



Left, George barmaid Lisa mans the handpump

Laura, who came to the George from the cask-driven White Horse in Swinton realised that cask ale would be an essential part of the mix although the powers that be at Punch (the pub is part of their Spirit Group subsidiary) took a little persuading. Even when Laura was given the green light there were hiccups with the beer lines and point of sale material. This resulted in beer being wasted but determined to persevere she tried again. Just one of the four hand pumps is currently in use and this dispenses a well kept pint of Bombardier. It's taking off, too with each nine-gallon cask selling out in two days. Suitably encouraged Laura is now planning to add a changing guest beer from the quite extensive Punch list with the ultimate aim of having all four hand pumps in use.

This really is great news, and I shall certainly be calling in again to support Laura in her efforts to turn the pub round. I hope all of my readers do so, too.

**Crown, Hawk Green**

For many people running their favourite pub would be the perfect job, and for Danny Massey his long held ambition has just come true. Danny has in fact had his eye on the Crown at Hawk Green since the age of sixteen, when as a school leaver he worked for a local butcher and the Crown was on his regular delivery round.



Dennis Robinson ( l ) presents Danny ( r ) with his Innkeeping certificate.

He explained: "I just couldn't help admiring the pub and everything it offered to its customers. It was well run, the location was ideal and with my inside knowledge I knew the food was first class."

Drawing on his early background in the catering business his focus is very clearly on running a comfortable, inviting pub where the food is of restaurant standard. "The customers have been very clear about asking for fresh, local produce rather than the cheapest option. So I have taken on two well respected chefs who know that the quality of the food is more important than the size of the menu. I have also appointed Annie Downes who many customers will recognise from her years in the pub trade, and is now working front of house to help deliver a first class service."

**ROBBIES NEWS**

**Fight Back for Family Brewers**

**R**obinson's in Stockport is a member of the Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB), an organisation that was set up in 1993 by a group of 28 family-owned breweries to promote British beers and protect the unique heritage of the family brewers in Britain.

There are however a number of issues that now face the industry as William and Oliver Robinson (*pictured l-r, below*), explain: "Poor weather last summer hit the industry hard; the introduction of the smoking ban; the biting credit crunch and a



steep rise in the cost of living all add up to some pretty tough conditions. Added to that a further 4p a pint increase in beer duty by the Chancellor ignores the challenges already faced by the industry."

"Additionally, there is not enough positive press about the roles that pubs play at the centre of

our communities as a place to meet in a responsible environment. Instead the image of pubs and alcohol has been tarnished by the stream of media coverage around the issue of licensing legislation and being linked to binge drinking," added William.

One of the big challenges that now lie before the brewers is putting across the positive image of the pub trade as a career choice. With the IFBB Robinson's are working to convey the very positive aspects of the pub trade and attract more licensees to run their own high-quality pubs.

Typical of the new breed of tenants are Julie Martindale and Jason Mills (*below*) of the Printers Arms in Thornsett.

It was a lucky chance that Julie and Jason met when they



were working in Tenerife three years ago, and they have been together since then.

Julie explained: "We both had catering jobs in the hospitality industry and when we came back to the UK together we worked at the Grove Hotel in Buxton where we built up our experience.

With experience and training under their belts, the couple then moved to the Printers Arms on a temporary basis, but having settled in Thornsett they are now going to stay.

"We have been overwhelmed by the community spirit that has developed since we changed what the pub has to offer. The customers were asking for activities like karaoke and quizzes as well as darts and dominoes teams. It just goes to show what a close knit community we live in and how the pub is still the social focus," she said.

## HYDES NEWS

**H**YDES has recently acquired Bamford Hall, a Victorian mansion located at Gee Cross (previously trading as the Bluebell Centre) and which is due to open as a pub-restaurant this month. The Hydes website has some tantalising details...



*"The development of the hall will include the construction of a large orangery of 1000 sq ft which helps to deliver 135 restaurant covers alongside substantial bar areas. A host of superb period features will be retained and the development work will*

*be of the highest standard incorporating many reclaimed materials. There will be extensive gardens.*

*The food offering will be at the top-end of pub-restaurant standards with a high proportion being fresh-cooked. We are currently developing the menu for the site and can promise you won't be disappointed by the choice and quality on offer".*

Look for a full review in either the October or November edition of Opening Times.

### New Craft Ale

Look out for the Hydes craft ale for September and October, out by the time you read this. The beer continues the "Creature Comforts" theme and is Owd Bill, a 4.5 per cent ABV chestnut coloured autumn ale.

Good old fashioned Fuggles and Goldings hops have been used to create a highly quaffable ale, with a full taste coming from the combination of Perle Pale Ale and also Crystal malts, leading to a smooth finish.



### Pub Beer Festivals

Many Hydes houses have been running in-house beer festivals this year. Each typically features 10-15 additional cask beers – these have included festival special beers from Hydes themselves along with an enhanced range of guest ales. Those forthcoming in the *Opening Times* area include:

**Eagle Hotel, Buxton** (5-8 September); **Friendship, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield** (19-21 September); **Old Plough, Green Lane, Sale** (3-5 October).

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## Belgian Beer Festival

**A**S we reported last month, one of the UK's biggest Belgian beer festivals will be taking place at the New Oxford pub (Bexley Square, Salford) from 26 to 28 September. This promises to be a major event with 50 beers on draught (of which 30 should be available at any one time).

The draught beers are likely to include the entire Slaapmutske range and from Achilles the Donker, Grand Cru and the bew Palieter, a beefy 8% tripel. Look out also for Troubadour Blond and the delicious Obscura, a selection from Het Anker, makers of the Gouden Carolus range. There will also be draught beer from Van Eecke, makers of the excellent Het Kapittel range of abbey beers, Dupont, Sint Bernardus and of course La Chouffe.



There should be some draught lambic beers, too, and these will also feature prominently in the additional bottled beer range along with anything else unusual that becomes available.

In addition there might be the extra treat of some Dutch beers. As we reported last time, Dranke Centrale are importing some mixed pallets of beer from a variety of Dutch micro brewers including De Molen and De Schans (arguably two of the best breweries in the Netherlands) – (beers to look out for: any), alongside Klein Duimpje (beers to look out for: Hazelnoot Porter and the powerful (9.5%) Eric de Noorman); 't Ij (beers to look out for: Natte, Zatte and Columbus at 6.5, 8 and 9 per cent respectively); Drie Horne (beer to look for: Trippelaar at 8.5%); De Hemel (beer to look for: Nieuw Licht at 10%); and Mommeriete (beers to look out for: Scheerse Tripel (9.5%) and Vrouwe van Gramsbergh at 10%). Our recommendations are of course just that – don't ignore any other of the Dutch beers you may see, all are worth trying.

We will have a review of this potentially landmark festival in the November issue.

## Great British Beer Festival

**L**AST month saw CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival held at Earl's Court in London. Some 59,000 visitors poured through the doors to try the vast array of British cask ales, bottled UK beers, bottled and draught foreign beers, and real ciders and perries on offer.



One of the festival highlights is the contest for the Champion Beer of Britain and this year there were few gongs for the North West. Indeed the only local winner was family brewer JW Lees who won a silver in the bitter class for their standard bitter. Thornbridge Brewery in Derbyshire won the Strong Bitter class with their Jaipur IPA, so congratulations to them, too.

The overall Champion Beer of Britain was Alton's Pride from Hampshire's Triple fff Brewer with Beckstones Black Dog Freddy runner-up and Wickwar Station Porter (the current Champion Winter Beer of Britain) in bronze position.

## RNCM Beer Festival

We dropped a clanger last time. The dates for this first festival at the Royal Northern College of Music (Oxford Road, Manchester) are 19 and 20 September. The Festival will be open from 6-11 on Friday 19th and 4pm to midnight the following day. The venue is the RNCM main bar and café area and tickets will be £3. Given the location there will also be musical entertainment on the Saturday night. This pioneering event is well worth supporting with a great range of cask ales promised.



**Out East**

**A**wander round the eastern part of Gorton and into Abbey Hey brought to light some changes. John and Alison at the award-winning **Vale Cottage** reckon they have got through the worst of the economic downturn. Trade is steady, and two good ales are always on - Taylor Landlord and Theakston Black Bull. In order to maintain quality throughout, the third beer, Copper Dragon, has been dropped by John.

Tony Lindsay at the **Plough** (Robinsons) continues on with Unicorn and Hatters, whilst round the corner on Cross Lane, the **Royal Oak** was doing a nice pint of Everards Tiger.

Elsewhere, the news of cask beer is not so good. On Gorton Lane, the **Vulcan** (Monkey), **Gardeners**, and **Angel** are all keg. So too is the **Cotton Tree**. Also all keg are the Abbey Hey quartet of **Hare & Hounds**, **Hamlet**, **Garribaldi**, and **Prince of Wales**. The latter pub has new tenants, the Hamlet has recently changed hands but was empty of custom when I called. The Abbey Hey Hotel has served its last as a pub as it is now being renovated for some other purpose. The Vulcan was looking very smart and it sports an amusing pub sign that alludes to its nickname of the "Monkey". It depicts an ape swinging from the letter U. I was told that the licensee here was soon to switch over to the Garribaldi.

**City Centre**

**T**HE latest addition to the Northern Quarter, the reopened **Angel** (formerly the Beer House) on Angel Street seems to be going from strength to strength. Every time I have called there has been a good crowd in both enjoying the beer and also the excellent food.

While I have not eaten there yet, I can testify to the beer quality. Of particular note have been the Dunham Massey beers which really do seem to be on a high at the moment. Turnover is such that a fourth hand pump for cask beer has now been installed. Not only this but real cider is also available from a small cask behind the bar.



Elsewhere it's a mixed bag. The former **Pig & Porcupine**, latterly trading as Negresco, on Deansgate has closed again. Given the prominent site I can't help wondering why no-one can make it work. Too much competition I think – certainly if I want a traditional pub, the excellent **Deansgate** across the road must be the local choice.

On Oldham Street the **Castle** remains closed. Robinson's have confirmed that they aim to get the pub open again as quickly as possible after what is described as a major clearing up operation.



Finally, the **Lass O'Gowrie** on Charles Street has now opened its long promised balcony-cum-smoking area overlooking the River Medlock next to the pub. There were plans to have an official naming ceremony last month when "Vegas on Medlock" was to be unveiled by Johnny Vegas, a good friend of the pub. There is always a good range of beers on at the Lass – and the food is pretty damn good, too – and this only adds to the pub's attractions.

There is always a good range of beers on at the Lass – and the food is pretty damn good, too – and this only adds to the pub's attractions.

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PINT

MANCHESTER MARBLE BREWERY



# PUB Grub

## Marble Fish Supper

THERE is a growing interest in matching beer and food. Last year the Marble Arch hosted a memorable night when a five course meal was matched with a variety of Marble beers. This year they have gone one better and are hosting two. The "Marble Fish Supper" took place on 12 August and the second "Something Meaty" was scheduled for Tuesday 26th, after the deadline for this article. Naturally *Opening Times* booked a place on both.

The evening opened at 7.30 where a complimentary half of "Pint" (the renamed Janine's One) made for a crisp, citrusy palate freshener. After this we were ushered into the back room where one long table was set out for the party of 12.

The meal opened with a small glass of brown shrimps topped by a warm seafood foam, perfectly complemented by the remains of the "Pint" – amusingly served in half pint glasses labelled "Half".

After that *amuse bouche* it was on to the meal proper and first up was a plate of four perfectly cooked scallops. These were paired with glasses of Krombacher pils, the sweet grassy lager matching the sweetness of the scallops very well. Also on the table were large baskets of crusty home-made bread, some containing smoked salmon, some capers and some plain. Very more-ish and my ultimate downfall, of which more later.

The next course was avocado, spiced crab and gazpacho all layered in a large cocktail glass. The three components blended extremely well, with the coolness of the gazpacho offsetting the richness of the crab. Accompanying was Harpoon IPA, an American import. This was less aggressively hopped than some American IPAs and also had a good malt underpinning to offset the still generous hopping. It was probably rated one of the best beers, and matches, of the night.

Three courses left and next was a squid ink risotto with pan fried squid. Both very well cooked, with the squid avoiding the toughness that can come with the slightest overcooking. Two beers were presented with this – Marble's Stouter Stout and a south German wheat beer, Schneider Weisse. Personally speaking I'm not sure that either really worked here. The stout worked the best, with the dryness contrasting quite well with the richness of the risotto. The Schneider Weisse, well I don't know. This isn't my favourite beer style in any event and for me it just didn't seem to work at all.

We finally reached the main course. Large dishes of buttery new potatoes and braised lettuce with peas arrived first. Then came plates of halibut, cooked in goose fat, with red and yellow peppers. With this was a Belgian wheat beer, Witterkerke from the Bavik Brewery. This beer is unusual in that it is named after and licensed by a Flemish TV soap opera. Despite that it is a surprisingly good beer, spiced in the usual Low Countries fashion. A good match.

A small glass of lemon posset cleansed the palates in readiness for the pudding. Another large cocktail glass containing honey and mint yoghurt, topped by summer berries and a honey and mint syrup. The matching beer was Boon Kriek a richly fruity and one of the less aggressive Belgian lambic beers. A great combination and one that I would normally have devoured in no time at all. However pigging out on that excellent bread took its toll and I could only manage a couple of mouthfuls. After that all I could do was waddle off into the night looking forward to the return match two weeks later. If it's half as good as this one was, I'll be in for a treat. **JC**



## RECENT CAMRA AWARDS

The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month Award for June was presented to the Bulls Head, London Road, Manchester. Pictured below is Keith Wylam with the award and business partner Mui Heng Koh in the background.



The award for July went to the Florist on Shaw Heath, Stockport. Licensee Tom Barlow is seen here with his certificate.



This year's Wild for Mild was a huge success and one of the prizes was a trip to Robinson's brewery. Our thanks to Robbies for their hospitality and pictured below are the winners and their guests on the night of the trip:





# Brewery NEWS...

## Cains Flounders

**T**HE big news this month is the eclipse of Merseyside family brewer, Cains, which last month went into administration. The company is now up for sale with no less than a reported 50 expressions of interest in all or part of the business.



So, what went wrong? Cains problems and probable demise can be summed up in just two words, and they are neither "credit crunch" nor "smoking ban", although both of these had a part to play in this local tragedy. No, the source of all this woe is "Honeycombe Leisure".

Honeycombe, some readers may recall, is the stock market listed company that Cains took

over last year with the aid of £40 million in finance from the Bank of Scotland. At a stroke the Cains estate increased in size from 10 pubs to over 100, but unfortunately the Honeycombe pubs were, by and large, a pile of old junk.

Honeycombe Leisure was already a failing company and had been up for sale for some time. The pubs had received little or no investment for years and, for the most part, were keg and lager driven with a high proportion of smokers among what passed for their customer base. Not only that but about three quarters of them were leasehold, so Cains weren't even buying the bricks and mortar.

The takeover finance package included £5 million to refurbish the pubs but even those few with a major investment seemed to struggle – that certainly been the case at Glossop's Market Tavern now on its third licensee in less than a year. However most of the ex-Honeycombe pubs remain much as they were before and are just those pubs being hit by the smoking ban and the effects of higher on-trade beer prices.

The result of all this shouldn't have been difficult to predict – huge losses, the inability to pay a tax bill and the Bank declining to bail them out. So what happens next? Those 50 expressions of interest may include many time wasters, and the leasehold pubs must be effectively worthless. However the 25-ish freehold pubs and the brewery must be viable businesses and worth saving. Word is that Marston's are a name to watch in this connection. This story still has a way to run yet.

## Family Brewers

We report on Hydes elsewhere. Meanwhile there are developments with our other family brewers.

**Robinsons** – there is no seasonal this month but in October look out for Spellbound (4.1% ABV), a premium autumn ale with a good dry taste. Chocolate Tom may also be available during the Wetherspoons beer festival.

**JW Lees** – Autumn Glow (4.2% ABV) is the seasonal beer for September to November. This is a ruby coloured ale brewed with a high percentage of crystal malt to give a sweet fruity finish, but balanced by the use of Target and Styrian Goldings hops. In addition there is also Get A Grip out this month. This beer, inspired by the distinctive pint glasses used in many Lees houses, is a 3.9% pale ale "brewed with the finest malt and blend of hops to give a taste explosion".

**Holts** – a new seasonal here as well. This month sees the return of Pioneer (5% ABV). This is a refreshing IPA style beer, light and golden in colour with a slight citrus flavour.



## Micro Breweries

Again the local micros are brewing up a variety of treats. As ever, apologies to those we could not contact this time. Local breweries can however send their news to Opening Times at: stocam@btinternet.com.

**Bollington Brewery** – the area's newest brewery based at the Vale Inn. The success of First Brew (4.2% ABV) has now been followed with a darker beer, Bollington Nights (4.4% ABV) described as a "dark mysterious beer with lots of body and a creamy head". Brewer Lee Wainwright tells us that it was inspired by the long since departed Youngers No.3.

**Shedded** – arguably the region's smallest brewery with a tiny 9-gallon brew length, Shedded is not short of ideas for new beers. Look out next for a 3.8% ABV liquorice stout called Takes All Sorts, a name suggested by Lou Wright, one of the bar staff at the New Oxford. Shedded beers are currently brewed using malt extract but the brewer tells us that he is considering changing to "full mash" brews.

**Marble** – the popular Janine's One has been renamed "Pint". Hmm. There are several new beers to report, though. The special for September is a welcome return of Tawny 4 (4.5% ABV), a full bodied brown beer with a good bitter finish. There are also rumours of a brown ale appearing before Christmas. The end of August also saw three additional new beers from the brewing team of Dominic Driscoll, Colin Stronge and Head Brewer James Campbell. All were single hop beers named after their respective brew numbers.

No. 1332 (3.8% ABV) was brewed by Dominic using Mount Hood hops. This was a pale, aromatic beer with a slightly sweet finish. Colin brewed No.1334 (4.4% ABV) and this was one of his almost trademark brown beers brewed using Brewers Gold hops. This was an excellently balanced beer with a crisp bitter finish. Finally came James' entrant, No.1335 (4.8%) brewed using Sorachi Ace, a Japanese/American hybrid hop. This was perhaps the least successful of the three for *Opening Times*' tastes – nothing wrong with the beer as such but perhaps this hop is not so well suited for single hop beers.

**Bazens'** – two new beers this month. The latest in the Salford Series is Cuckoo's News (4.3% ABV), marking the Whitbread takeover of Threlfall's Cook Street Brewery in 1967. The other beer, not finally formulated as we went to press, is to be an autumnal ale marking our Olympic success and will, appropriately, be called Cycling Gold.

**Pictish** – the monthly special for September is Staddlestone (4.5% ABV) described as "a premium tawny coloured ale with a ruby red hue. A robust hop aroma precedes a full bodied malty taste with caramel notes and a dry bitter finish". Also new this month is Vanguard (4.7% ABV) brewed with American hops of the same name. A further batch of Bobek (4.2%) will also be made. There are also plans for another new beer using an ingredient never before used in a beer – apart from that brewer Richard Sutton's lips are sealed. Very mysterious.

**Hornbeam** – the Summer Champagne Ale may not now appear. This was to have used New Zealand Nelson Sauvignon hops and the new year's crop is late in arriving in the UK. There will be a new beer this month. Details had only been sketched out when we contacted the brewery but it is likely to be brewed using Target and Styrian Goldings hops and be quite a bitter beer.

**Millstone** – still very busy. The 4.3% ABV Crown & Anchor is still out and the next in the "pub series" is to be "The Wellington" but this might be delayed due to the late availability of New Zealand hops. This shortage has also, temporarily, prevented the reappearance of Grainstorm.

**Phoenix** – congratulations are due to Tony Allen for picking up another award. The excellent Spotland Gold won Beer of the Festival at last month's Worcester Beer Festival.







Phil Levison's look back over past issues of *Opening Times*

"Cask Beer Week" was the front page headline, and this was a major event for Manchester's four local family brewers – Holts, Hydes', JW Lees and Robinson's – who were joining forces in two major promotions for cask beer.

The springboard for these major events was the Independent Family Brewers of Britain-organised Cask Beer Week, which was running from 19-28 September, followed by another promotion during the Manchester Food & Drink Festival the following week. The four local brewers were joining together to visit the breweries on the "World's Largest Bike", with the cyclists stopping for a "pint" in each. Then during the Manchester Food & Drink Festival, the brewers would be offering free quarter-pint samples of their beers.

Besides these major activities, many of the local pubs would be running events in support, with in-house promotions to encourage giving out samples of cask beer.

\*\*\*\*\*

Interbrew had unveiled radical changes to Boddingtons in a determined attempt to halt and reverse the decline in sales of the cask version of "Manchester's finest". The changes included a new name, higher alcohol strength, and a smart new handpump. The new "Boddingtons Cask" would rise in strength from 3.8% to 4.1% with a slight recipe tweak to include extra malt in the brew. There would not be a price change, though, as the company would absorb the extra duty costs that the higher ABV would incur.

Interbrew admitted that Boddingtons had lost drinkers over the years, and the relaunch was intended to retain existing Boddies drinkers, as well as reclaiming lost drinkers and gaining new converts. These changes were only being made to the cask version of Boddingtons – all the other versions would remain unchanged.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next seasonal beer from Holts was to be Paterson, with the name reflecting the connection between the Holt family, the Christie Hospital, and the Paterson Research Institute in Withington. For every pint of Paterson sold, 20 pence would go to the Christie Hospital charity. The new beer had been tested and the recipe finalised, but there had been some delay due to problems with the design of the pump clips. The 4 per cent beer would be reddish in colour, brewed with Challenger hops and a touch of honey.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was news of a new micro brewery coming to Stockport. The Three Rivers Brewery would be based in Offerton, and it was hoped its beers would be available in the Crown on Heaton Lane later in October. The plant had already been purchased, and initial plans were for two beers, both pale and hoppy, at session and premium strength, with a strong 'un for Christmas. Of course, the brewery eventually launched in Reddish from where it still trades very successfully.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Conway in Cheadle Hulme was due to close for eight weeks whilst it received a £400,000-plus refurbishment from Hydes. Plans on display at the pub indicated a very impressive end result. Sure enough, the Conway had apparently been transformed into a much improved Ryecroft Arms. But current news is not encouraging. Although still trading, Hydes have struggled to find a role for the pub. Plans are now in place for redevelopment with an application to convert the pub into a rest home.

## NEW OXFORD

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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 11<sup>th</sup> September** – Branch Meeting: Blossoms, Buxton Rd, Heavily. Starts 8.00pm. **NB – selection for new Stockport Pub Guide to be made at this meeting**

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup>** – Beer of the Festival presentation at Marble Brewery, Marble Arch, Rochdale Road, Manchester. From 8pm

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup>** – Heaton Norris East Stagger: start 7.30pm, Pineapple, Heaton Lane, 8.30pm Silver Jubilee, Hamilton Square, off Belmont Way.

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>** – Pub of the Month presentation to the Red Lion, Cheadle. From 8pm.

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October** – Branch Meeting: Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8pm.

The **High Peak & North East Cheshire** Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple, Tameside and Derbyshire from Glossop to Buxton. *Branch Contact – Mike Rose 07986 458517. mikewrose@btinternet.com*

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Cheshire Ring, Manchester Road Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>** – Foreign trip: Vilnius & NE Lithuania

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](http://www.thcamra.org.uk)*

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup>** – Hale Survey. Meet Railway 8pm; Cheshire Midland 9pm and then on to Tatton Arms, Tipping St, Altrincham and finish Wetherspoons Unicorn, Lloyd St, Altrincham

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>** – Manchester Castlefield Survey – meet 8pm Cask; 8.45 White Lion (both Liverpool Road), 9.30 Castlefield Hotel and finish at the Knott

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October** – Branch AGM at **Timperley Taverners Social Club, Park Road, Timperley (adjacent Metrolink Station). Starts 8pm.**

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

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup>** – Macclesfield Crawl (including the Castle)

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup>** – Day out – Stockport to Huddersfield by train

**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> October** – Campaigning Meeting (including beer scores update): Poacher's Inn, Bollington. Starts 8pm.

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 10<sup>th</sup>** – Greenfield visit: 7.30 Railway, Shaw Hall Bank Rd, then King William IV, Chew Valley Rd.

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: New Oxford, Bexley Square, Salford. Starts 8pm.

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup>** – Castlefield Crawl: Commercial 7.30, Ox 8.00, Castlefield Hotel 8.30, White Lion 9.00, Cask 9.30. Finish Knott.

# It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale



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