

JANUARY 2009

Opening

TIMES THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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



DEEP in the midst of Winter, what better way to avoid the dark days and misty chill than a visit to the CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival in January? Held at the New Century Hall, Manchester from 21 to 24 January, the Festival promises to showcase some winter-warming recommendations for the season, combined with a formidable array of over 200 cask ales, bottled ales, ciders and perries.

Graham Donning, CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival Organiser tells us that this year more beer than ever before has been ordered, in part to accommodate the increasing consumer demand for cask ale. Graham adds "Through the success of the Festival it is also hoped that beer styles under threat such as 'porters' and 'milds' are given a try during the week by consumers new to real ale, as the Festival plays an important reminder to people unaware of the nation's extensive and diverse brewing history." **More details on page 11.**

Attention at the Festival will also be centred on the newly crowned Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2009. At the 2008 Festival, Wickwar Station Porter from Gloucestershire scooped the accolade for its 6.1% ABV Porter described by the Good Beer Guide 2009 as a 'rich, smooth, dark ruby-brown ale.' The Supreme Champion for 2009 will be announced on January 22 at the beginning of the Thursday session.



A6 Campaign bears fruit with two more real ale gains - see page 13 for details...

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HYDES
THE MANCHESTER BREWERY

BEER FESTIVAL STARTS THURSDAY 29TH JANUARY



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for January 2009 is the Ladybrook on Fir Road in Bramhall.

Originally a purpose built hotel dating from the 1930s, the Ladybrook (named after the nearby river) is surely the most impressive pub in the leafy suburb of Bramhall. It was once owned by Clarke's Brewery of Reddish and passed to Boddington's ownership in 1963. It is now part of Spirit, the managed house arm of Punch Group.

The interior has a spacious, multi-roomed feel, having benefited from some expensive and well judged refurbishments over the years. The two full-sized snooker tables are long gone but nevertheless the Ladybrook retains many of its impressive original features.

While food features prominently, available from 12 noon to 9.00pm every day, this is a well-used community local with a loyal crowd of regulars. Activities include a hockey club along with football and darts teams.

In this day and age it might be expected that a pub such as this might offer one, or perhaps two, averagely kept cask ales. That however is far from the case, and it is the impressive cask ale offering that really makes the Ladybrook stand out from the crowd.

The manager is Sarah Ridgway and, while she doesn't drink the stuff herself, she is a huge cask ale fan. Together with cellarman James Darcey, she has driven this side of the pub's operation forward in no uncertain manner. In particular she has been keen to ensure that the guest beers include more than the standard pubco "usual suspects". Sarah is full of praise for James, whose enthusiasm has played a major role in driving forward the cask ale offering here.

As a result of this enthusiasm the permanent range comprises Boddingtons Bitter, Wells Bombardier and a changing beer from Titanic Brewery, this latter being an exclusive arrangement for this pub. These beers are joined by three changing guests that often come and go in 24 hours.

Unsurprisingly, then, some 23 nine or 11 gallon casks of real ale are sold here every week, with cask accounting for 60-70% of the wet sales (and this in a pub that also offer no less than five lagers for those who prefer that sort of thing). Quality is invariably high and Sarah is aiming for Cask Marque accreditation.

All in all, the Ladybrook has been something of an unsung hero on the local cask ale scene. We hope to start putting this right with our Pub of the Month award which will be presented on Thursday 29 January. Come along for a great night out. **JC**

The Ladybrook is served by bus 378 from Stockport Bus Station – get off at the roundabout at Bramhall Park.



COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

Opening Times – Comment

Doom and gloom seem to be the order of the day at the moment. There are however some things to look forward to in 2009. First up will be the National Winter Ales Festival – get down to the New Century Hall between 21 and 24 January for some great beers and ciders. Later in the year the 23rd Stockport Beer & Cider Festival will be held from 28 to 30 May, this year with more beer, cider and perry than ever before.

Of course, 2009 is Opening Times' 25th Birthday year. We were launched in June 1984 and we plan to mark the event in various ways – not least with a series of commemorative beers. Details of the first are on page 11.

A Happy New Year to you all.

Opening Times - Information

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

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

Stockport	0845 644 4301	Trafford	0161 9122274
Manchester	0161 234 1555	Derbyshire	08456 058058
Salford	0161 925 1346	Cheshire	0845 1132500
Tameside	0161 342 8355		

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Navy



2002
Wobbly Bob



2004
Wobbly Bob



Stagger

Offerton Offerings. A Stagger with Karen Wainwright

THE usual starting point for this stagger, the Wrights Arms on Marple Road, has recently gone keg, which is a real shame. On the nearby estate, the Harvester on Turnstone Road rarely has cask ales these days and looks likely to be lost to keg in the near future. We also traditionally miss out the Golden Hind due to its persistent lack of cask ales. Hardly the best start to any night out!

So therefore, one October evening, the Offerton stagger began on Offerton Lane at the **Strawberry Gardens**.

Its name derives from the mid 19th century when there was a large strawberry field behind the pub. The gentlemen would quaff ale while their ladies and children were picking fruit. At this



time the alehouse was also frequented by soldiers from the nearby Hall Street barracks who used to hold regular dances here. Original features include the small snug to the left of the front door with wood panelling and old pictures, and a small games room to the right. The rest of the pub underwent an expensive and well carried out refurbishment a few years ago, which extended considerably to the rear. The "Strawbs" is a recent gain for real ale in Offerton, helping to balance the loss of the Wrights by selling Theakstons Bitter. Disappointingly the cask ale scored rather low this evening. Whilst we welcome the fact the new licensees are making a

committed effort by re-introducing real ale again at this popular local pub after a break of decades, we would encourage them to keep a close eye on it to ensure consistently good



quality.

Next stop was the **Finger Post** on Hemphaw Lane. A multi roomed pub that has changed little in a very long time. A city-centre standard pub located in the suburbs, it is very busy, full of friendly locals and almost a shrine to Stockport County FC with much memorabilia on display. The Murphy family are long standing licensees with different family members running the pub over the years. The beers are Robinsons Unicorn (bitter) and Hatters (mild), both up to the standards we are accustomed to here.

A five-minute walk brought us to the **Gardeners Arms** on Little Street where Dave Baxter has been the licensee for twelve and a half years. This is an attractive pub, dominating the junction at the top of Hall Street. Inside it is well lit with a good friendly atmosphere that makes it popular with drinkers of all ages. A central bar divides the building into two distinctly differing areas, front lounge and rear vault/games room. The beer here is Tetley's Bitter, which was on good form. Part of

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the Orchid Group, the Gardeners has Cask Marque accreditation and Dave is looking to introduce a guest beer, hopefully from November.

We then went down Hall Street to the **Emigration**. According to local tradition, it is supposed to be named after a racehorse (though you would not think so by looking at the pub sign). The bar is to the right of the building. There are three separate drinking areas: - two snugs to the left and right of the



entrance and a longer room at the back. Being a Robinsons house, Unicorn and Hatters were the offerings. Again, both in good condition.

A very short stroll brought us to the **Victoria** (also on Hall Street), which is presently up for sale by its pub-co owners. The lounge and vault have been freshly redecorated and pictures and trophies were starting to go back up to repopulate the apparently bare walls. We had a choice of three beers, Greene King IPA, Tetley's Mild and Morland Speckled Hen. The Mild received very high scores, as did the Speckled Hen.

We ended the evening at the **Thatched House** on Churchgate. This place can be described as either a music venue with a real ale bar or a real ale pub with a great mix of live heavy rock music. Whichever, here in was found a good choice of real ales and ciders on the bar. Declared as best beer of the stagger, the Wychwood Hobgoblin was on bewitching form. Also available were Black Sheep Bitter and Old Rosie Cider. Sadly, the Pendle Witches from Moorhouses had just finished. We took our drinks into the beer garden where the potted herbs and customers alike are sheltered from the elements by the tall walls of surrounding buildings. Here the beer and music was complemented perfectly by some excellent cheeseburgers from the BBQ.



One of our number ventured across the road to the **Old Rectory** which was selling Theakstons Bitter and Okells Autumn Dawn in their relaxed and comfy lounges, both reported to be in fine fettle.

Rounding up, all the Offerton pubs are on the whole busy, friendly places serving a mainly local trade. Although very disappointing at the Eastern end with the group of keg outlets the beer got progressively better and more varied the closer to Stockport we travelled. But, as with all staggers this is only the impression of one small group of a dozen or so CAMRA members. Most of these pubs are either on or close to the 314, 358, 384, and 383 bus routes. So your best bet is to try them for yourselves and see if you agree with us.

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Join CAMRA
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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 2009 We're in it!



*thank you
for your patience
while we build
a better
beer house!*

MARBLE
BEERS

THE MARBLE
BEER HOUSE

~ CAMRA Awards Gallery ~



The Pub of the Month Award for August was presented to the **Kings Hall** in Cheadle Hulme. Rick Parris and Jo Fish are shown here with their certificate



The **Crown** on Heaton Lane in Stockport won CAMRA's Regional Pub of the Year Award and has since gone on to reach the final four in the national competition. Here Sarah and Lee from the Crown receive their Regional Award from local CAMRA Chairman John Clarke (*left*) who appears to have swallowed a wasp.



The September Pub of the Month Award went to the **Red Lion** in Cheadle. Chris and Vicky Lane are pictured with their award.



The year ended with a very well attended Pub of the Month presentation to **Ye Olde Woolpack**, Brinksway, Stockport. Local CAMRA Chairman John Clarke is seen here presenting Sarah and Andrew from the pub with their December award.



October's Pub of the Month was the **Pack Horse** on Stockport Market Place. The team at the pub display the certificate.



Macclesfield & east Cheshire CAMRA's Winter Pub of the Season Award was made to the ever-popular **Waters Green Tavern** in the town centre. Tracey and Brian from the Waters Green are seen here with local CAMRA Chair Jill Hasler (*right*)



Old Hall Bounces Back



The hamlet of Whitehough lies just south of Chinley and is perhaps a ten minute walk from Chinley Station, writes *Robin Wignall*. Whitehough boasts two licensed premises. The Oddfellows is a Marston's house which has recently changed hands.

This article is about the **Old Hall Inn**. After a varied history as restaurant and dining pub the Old Hall is in Capper family ownership and is thriving with Dan Capper at the helm. Their card proclaims Fine Food- Cask Ales- B&B, and success in all three areas has been the achievement of Dan with support of family and staff. There has been a steady growth in the last four years and now even mid week dining is busy.

There is an emphasis on food. As far as possible this is sourced locally and Derbyshire produce features wherever possible, with meat from local butchers and farmers and vegetables seasonal and locally grown whenever available.

But the Old Hall is not just about food. The 'local' commitment extends to beer. Whilst Marston's and Adnams Bitters are regulars, guest beers are usually from Derbyshire microbreweries. To improve wine quality and to develop sales, wines are now obtained from **Goyt Wines** in Whaley Bridge, a supplier who is also a regular in the Good Bottled Beer Guide.

The Old Hall holds regular Wine & Dine Evenings, and I was able to go along to the recent High Peak Porky Dinner, where every seat was taken. The menu included soup with Hartington Blue cheese, and High Peak Porky Sausage. The sausages were made to the chef's recipe using the 'sausage kit' from **designasausage**, a successful Whaley Bridge enterprise aimed at raising the quality of the contents both in restaurants and at home, and enabling customers to produce their own 'exceptional sausages.'

The food was washed down by English wines, sadly no vineyards in Derbyshire, and bottled ciders and perries from Dunkerton's and Frome Valley. Again no Derbyshire cider orchards. All these were supplied by Goyt Wines. Local beers available on the evening make an impressive list, and those tried were in impressive form. Thornbridge Ashford and Jaipur, Howard Town Wren's Nest and Bleaklow and Whim Hartington Bitter made a good local beer list. Some customers do call in just for a drink or two or more. A recent firkin of Wren's Nest sold out in two and a half hours.

Plans are well in hand to expand the pub and restaurant back into a room with a minstrel gallery, whilst the other exciting development will be the opening of a microbrewery. Again plans are well in hand and there is a serious commitment to this project. The Old Hall has several outbuildings and one of these is earmarked as a brew house. More news as this project develops.

The Old Hall at Whitehough makes a really good visit. Dan Capper's 'sourced locally' agenda is admirable, and this is enhanced by food well prepared and beer well kept by the team at the Old Hall.

The Old Hall is open 12.00 till 14.00 and 17.00 till 23.00 Mon.-Thurs., till midnight on Fri. and Sat. and from 12.00 through the day on Sunday. Food is available 12.00 till 14.00 and 17.00 till 21.00 Mon.- Thurs., till 21.30 Fri. and Sat. and from 12.00 till 19.30 on Sunday.

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The Cheshire Ring

Manchester Road, Hyde



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Saturday - Sunday 12pm - late

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Robin Wignall's monthly Peak District Round-Up

EARLY in November the *Buxton Advertiser* carried an article announcing that Jeremy Middleton's plans for the **Jodrell Arms** in Whaley Bridge, had been approved by High Peak Borough Council. Work can now go ahead to move this Grade 2 Listed building into the 21st Century, whilst conserving the best of that which is historic. The *Advertiser* article notes, 'It is to be repaired and refurbished into a 'gastrohotel,' (whatever that is) with an emphasis on high quality, affordable food and accommodation.' More on this as the project develops.

I called in the **Fallow Deer** in late November. This is the new Marston's house at the southern end of the Chapel en le Frith by-pass. With cars in the car park and lights on I assumed that it was open, but I had walked into a staff training session. That in itself is a good sign. With three hand pumps, which could go to four if sales justify it, real ale will feature. The pump clips a week before opening showed three beers from the Marston's stable, Jennings Cumberland, Marston's Pedigree and from the Marston's Classic Ale Series, Winter Ale brewed at the Banks Brewery. Updates to follow.

The recently closed **Memorial** in Chapel en le Frith (licence revoked) is expected to have re-opened by the time you read this. An application for re-opening has been submitted to High Peak Borough Council. It will be given a new name and will become a 'bar and grill.' This implies a change in the nature of the pub, but should not preclude real ale being served. After all just up the road at the **Chapel Bistro** one or two real ales from the Punch list are a permanent feature. More on this developing story.

For seemingly ages Mark Parsons had been relief manager up at the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee. Mark had hoped that Marston's might have come up with a reasonable and sensible deal to take on the tenancy. No arrangement was forthcoming and in November Mark took over the tenancy of the **Board** at the Horwich End end of Whaley Bridge. This pub has been a Mild Challenge regular in recent years. It has a potential and Mark is looking to bring back some of the trade which has drifted away in recent months. Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn are both in good form. Meanwhile up at the Shady Oak a new tenant was expected during December.

A new tenant has moved into the **Railway** in Whaley Bridge in November. No more information on this one yet, other than that a decent pint of Unicorn is available.

Interesting guest beers and choices of beer continue to turn up in the area. In November the **Crossings** in Furness Vale had Hatters Dark Mild. Although more widely available these days than formerly, this can still be hard to find. It was of course in good form.

The **Old Hall** at Whitehough near Chinley has had Whim Arbor Light, as good as I can recall drinking it. My pint of this pale, hoppy Derbyshire gem was followed by a stroll along the Peak Forest Tramway to Buxworth where the **Navigation** had another pale, superbly hoppy, bitter brew. This was Hornbeam Evil Monkey 4.5%. Nothing unusual in this as it typifies Hornbeam's quality brews, and it is also typical of the often unusual beers sourced by the Navigation.

Seasonal beers appeared before the end of November at the **Shepherds** in Whaley Bridge. The Banks Classic Winter Ale went untried whilst Ringwood Old Thumper 5.6% was indeed a welcome winter warmer.

Which leads into a final note of really good news. The **Soldier Dick** at Furness Vale had re-opened by early December, with no obvious fanfares or announcements. No details yet. My New Year Resolution must be to get round to see more of these 'more news next time' pubs!

The Crescent

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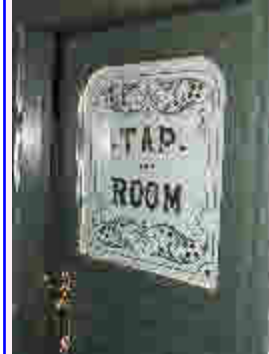
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The Railway at Broadheath, on the A56 just north of the Bridgewater Canal, is the Trafford & Hulme Branch's Pub of the Season this winter, writes Neil Worthington. It's won the award before, just a couple of years ago. The fact that it's won again shows the high regard that branch members have for this great survivor and the battle it's waging against the many problems that beset traditional community locals these days.



The Railway has been in the news a few times recently, as a result of the "Lease For Sale" signs going up. Fortunately the signs have come down again, but the landlady, Pam Turton, is still struggling against continuing rises in running costs and a general decline in patronage, thanks in part to the smoking ban and not least to the remorseless rises in beer duty. In an attempt to diversify, Pam now offers lunchtime meals and also bed and breakfast accommodation. But with a tiny kitchen and only two spare rooms, these will only ever be sidelines in a pub where "wet sales" have always dominated.

This is a classic multi-roomed pub, thankfully listed (Grade II) as "a building of Special Architectural or Historic Interest". It was listed in the 1990s when it seemed destined to fall victim to the redevelopment of the area. A fierce campaign by local groups and CAMRA ensured that this former Boddington's house survived.

The real merits of the pub are on the inside and have earned it a place on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors. From the street you enter a hallway that opens into a classic drinking lobby with the bar facing the front door. On either side are separate rooms that have retained their doors and etched glass announcing their names, the "Tap Room" on the left and the "Bar Parlour" on the right. Beyond the bar are another two rooms, one originally a domestic kitchen but now dignified with its etched glass as the "Vault", the other a more modern extension for darts players.



The glories of the pub are in the fine detail, some of it woefully dilapidated. Floors vary from mosaic to carpet to tiles to slate. Walls include elements of ornate plasterwork. The Parlour features a splendid original tiled Victorian fireplace that can still be used for real fires. And both front rooms have classic banquette seating with bell pushes to summon service. You've got to fetch your own ales from the bar these days, and the Holt's Mild and Bitter are well worth the extra effort.

Should the pub become a museum piece, just opening on weekends and Bank Holidays? No. It needs live people and live ale to make it feel right, and there has to be a constant turnover of beer to keep cask ale in good nick. That's why Trafford & Hulme branch is promoting the Railway now, not just to keep this one pub going but to give heart to all the other traditional pubs, discarded from the trendy drinking circuits but still at the core of their communities.

Come and join us at 8 p.m. on Wednesday 28th January when we present Pam and the Railway with another well-earned Pub of the Season certificate.



OT Birthday Beer January

To mark the 25th Birthday Year of Opening Times we are commissioning a series of commemorative beers from local breweries, one per month (although one or two "extras" are also likely). Each month we will be featuring the brewery producing the beer and also tell you a bit about the beer itself. The celebrations are kicked off by Denton's Hornbeam Brewery. Check the brewery website at www.hornbeambrewery.com.

About the Brewery

AFTER test brewing at Stockport's 3 Rivers Brewery, Kevin Rothwell's search for premises took him to Denton and a unit in the shadow of the old Moore's Hat Factory. After the installation of an eight-barrel plant, brewing started there in July 2007.

It has to be said that the first couple of brews were not a success – and in the competitive world of micro-brewing where free trade accounts have to be earned and retained on quality, this could have been a disaster. Kevin however is a determined man and a reorganisation saw the departure of his former business partner and the arrival of brother-in-law Chris Coates, who looks after sales and admin.



It is fair to say that since that shaky start Hornbeam Brewery has scarcely looked back and has gained an enviable reputation for the range and quality of its beers.

Left – Kevin Rothwell and Chris Coates at Hornbeam Brewery

The current core range comprises four beers:

Lemon Blossom (3.7%) – an excellent light ale with a distinct citrus lemon note. There is some sweetness on the palate with a delicate bitter finish.

Hornbeam Bitter (3.8%) – the flagship beer with a medium body and good hop character. Easy drinking and refreshing.

Top Hop Best Bitter (4.2%) – a full bodied ale with both malt appeal and ample bitterness. An excellent premium bitter.

Black Coral Stout (4.5%) – a smooth dry stout with a generous use of roast malt. Dark and full bodied with a subtle bitterness.

There is also a range of seasonal and special beers. Notable amongst these is the superb Dark Domination Porter (6%), a superb, complex, chocolatey beer that is a classic of the style. Also exceptional is Malt Mountain Mild (3.6%), a dark, rich, almost stout like beer, a beer that has picked up prizes.

About the Beer

IN a departure from his usual repertoire, Kevin has decided to kick off the Opening Times birthday beer range with something different – a blackcurrant wheat beer at 5.4% alcohol.

The recipe includes malted wheat, pale malt, munich malt and chocolate malt. Hops are Hallertau tradition in the boil, Ahtanum for flavour and Styrian Goldings for aroma. Bavarian wheat beer yeast has been used and blackcurrant concentrate added to the secondary fermentation stage. Enjoy!



National Winter Ales Festival – Preview

January is of course that month that CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival rolls into town. As usual there is an enormous range of beers on sale. While those that will be judged to decide the Supreme Champion Winter Ale of Britain are being kept closely under wraps, here we can bring you a taster of some of the other goodies that will be on sale.

As this is a national event the beer order has to cover the entire country, which does unfortunately mean that some local favourites have to be missed out. However there are plenty of other tasty brews for your attention.

Among the beers that grabbed our attention are **Adnams Tally Ho (7%)** a superb, smooth barley wine style beer from the east coast. Rarely seen on this side of the country, this is a beer that demands to be treated with respect.

At the other end of the spectrum is **Black Isle Yellowhammer (4%)** a gloriously hoppy session beer from the far north of Scotland near Inverness. An excellent refresher, this one.

The **Dark Star** brewery from East Sussex has an enviable reputation for its beers – we have two on order including the spicy yet hoppy **Winter Meltdown** at 5%.

Back up the gravity scale now and **Fullers**, the last remaining old established family brewer in London. As well as sending us the ruby red seasonal ale **Jack Frost (4.5%)** they are also supplying the potent **Golden Pride (8%)**. This is a pale, rich barley wine with some good hops to balance the warming alcohol. Another one for sipping at the end of the night.

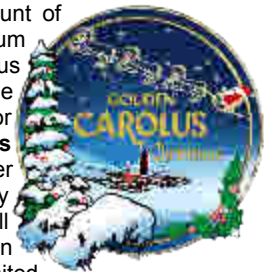
Sheffield's **Kelham Island Brewery** is sending a couple of beers, notably the excellent **Brooklyn Smoked Porter (6.5%)**, a beer brewed in conjunction with New York's award winning Brooklyn Brewery and simply doing "everything it says on the tin". Lovely stuff.

Staying with the dark beers, two more to spot are **Northern Brewery's Deep Dark Secret (5.2%)** a superb fruity and slightly smoky brew that is currently the Champion Beer of Cheshire and from Pontypridd in South Wales. **Otley Brewery's Porter (6.2%)**. Otley Brewery have an enviable reputation for their beers so this one should be a real treat.

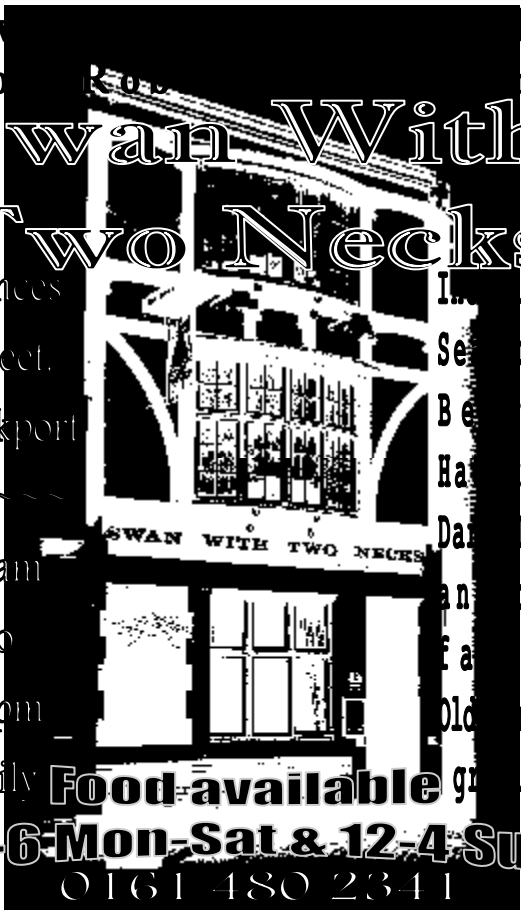
Finally, let's not overlook Stockport's very own **Cellar Rat**. These beers are brewed by Sarah Bergin to her own recipes at 3 Rivers (who will also have their beers at the Festival, by the way). **Bit O'City Life (4.2%)** is brewed for one of the Festival sponsors and is a crisp, amber bitter with a good smack of hops. **Victoria Porter (5%)** is another festival special with a variety of spices used in this rich dark beer.

We will also be selling a huge amount of foreign beers from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Space prohibits us from delving too deeply into the excellent beers on offer but look out for the wonderful **Gouden Carolus Christmas (10.5%!)**, a dark rich beer with liquorice notes and one of the very best Belgian Christmas ales. This will be available both in bottle and on draught. There will also be very limited quantities of **Westvleteren** trappist beers, considered by some to be amongst the best beers in the world.

Also available will be beers from **Struise** regarded as one of the more cutting edge new Belgian beer firms. We have **Pannepot (10%)**, a smooth, rich abbey-style beer and the enormous, in every sense of the word, **Black Albert** a "royal Belgian stout" weighing in at an incredible 13%. If these are all too much look out for two hoppy Dutch wonders – **SNAB Maelstrom (9%)** and **De Molen Storm & Averij (9.2%)**, the latter only on draught. There are also some excellent sharp lambics to refresh the palate – check out the gueuze and kriel from **Oud Beersel**, **Drie Fonteinen** and **Cantillon**. The festival website is at www.alefestival.org.uk/winterales/



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• **Giving with One Hand**

**W**HEN leaked reports suggested that Alastair Darling was going to make a temporary cut in VAT to stimulate economic activity, many people will have held out hope of a short-term boost for the beleaguered pub trade. It was disappointing, although not remotely surprising, that this proved to be a short-lived illusion, and he decided to raise alcohol duty by 8% to offset the cut in VAT. While this was supposedly only meant to maintain the existing retail price, in an embarrassing U-turn, the Chancellor recognised that the measures would actually increase the price of spirits, and halved the planned increase for that category within a day or two, a clear indication of the half-baked thinking behind the move. Also, given the way pub licensees often arrive at a retail price by applying a mark-up to the wholesale price, it could easily end up putting prices up in pubs too.

And what's the betting that, when the VAT rate reverts to 17.5% at the end of this year, the duty rates won't be reduced back to where they started? Combined with a 9% rise in duty in the last Budget and a likely rise of at least 4% in the next one, that will mean a hike in beer duty of over 20% in a year, something that inevitably is going to do severe damage to the pub trade.

Given the current depressed state of the economy, it would have been welcome if people had been given a bit of Christmas cheer from a temporary reduction in the price of drink, but that did not fit in with the miserabilist agenda of the current government. There seems to be a total failure to recognise that well-run traditional pubs make a positive contribution to local communities and increase general social well-being, and indeed ministers give a growing impression of not understanding why people go to pubs in the first place, let alone why they might on occasions drink more than four units of alcohol at a sitting. While they claim to wish to support small businesses, it would be foolish to expect any respite for pubs in the coming year.

**A Silver Lining?**

**T**here can be no doubt that the current recession is likely to lead to the closure of substantial numbers of pubs. But, ironically, it might end up being the saviour of a few. Especially in the south-east, but increasingly in other parts of the country, the past few years have seen pubs that were viable enough in themselves being closed because the site was more valuable for residential development. Now, though, with the demand for property having fallen through the floor, that is often no longer the case. One such is the Rycroft Arms in Cheadle Hulme, the former Conway, that had been slated by Hydes for closure and redevelopment as sheltered accommodation. However, the local planning committee threw out the application, and now, with the rapid decline in the economic outlook, it is unlikely to be revived any day soon, thus giving the pub a new lease of life. Hopefully Hydes will now be in a position to enhance the appeal of the pub so it has more chance of a long-term future. But it has to be said that many post-war estate pubs of this kind have never enjoyed the appeal of their older counterparts, despite having plenty of potential customers living nearby, and in the coming years they are likely to continue to interest developers.

Curmudgeon Online: [www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk](http://www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk)

Curmudgeon Blog: [pubcurmudgeon.blogspot.com](http://pubcurmudgeon.blogspot.com)



## A6 Campaign Gathers Strength

Christmas came early this year with news that a further two A6 pubs had returned to the real ale fold, joining the **George** in Mersey Square in offering the real thing. First at the **Railway**, Wellington Road North, where Pam and Ray arrived in November from pubs in the heart of Cheshire, the Wirral, and North Yorks. They've been in the trade since 1992 and recently they did a stint at the Bells of Peover.



Ray's plan is to concentrate on building the trade with the aid of two cask beers. Currently he is selling Jennings Cumberland (Ray's favourite), and Brakspear Bitter. Both were on great form when OT called. The pub is bright and clean, with two smart rooms to

the front, and a large games room to the rear. Ray hopes to build up entertainment over the coming months with quiz and karaoke nights, jazz, and the odd live bands playing. Food will also be offered soon in the form of light lunches served noon till 2.30 Monday to Saturday. All in all, a good start, and encouraging to see cask back at the Railway after such a lengthy fallow period.

Meanwhile, across the road, the **Magnet** too has cask ale on. They are trying Greene King IPA. This is another welcome return to the cask ale fold. Note that the handpump is in the vault – so make sure you ask for cask if you are in the other room.



I had also heard a report that there had been a further real ale gain at the **Hope**, just up the road. However, despite an impressive refurbishment resulting in a very smart, and obviously well-run, pub real ale remains notable by its absence. This seems a glaring omission – surely it's now time for the Hope to finally try out cask ale, one of the few on-trade growth areas?

## News, Brews and Moves

Sheila Barlow at the **Armoury**, Shaw Heath has extended her beer range to include the Robinson's seasonal beer. When OT called this was a fine drop of Mr Scrooge. This is an experiment at this stage to trial the success with customers. This makes the range now Hatters, Unicorn, seasonal, and Old Tom (winter).

Across the road, Val and Noel at the **Grapes** on Castle Street seem to have made the pub very much their own since the enforced move from the now closed Spread Eagle on Hillgate. When I called just after Christmas I was struck by how warm and comfortable the pub seemed. Handpumped Old Tom has now joined Hatters and Unicorn on the bar, and very good it was too.

Ange and Trevor (formerly of the Swan with Two Necks) shall be taking over at Holt's **Winters** on Underbank this month. Expect to see a few changes as Ange usually likes to put her personal touch on a pub.

Meanwhile it's sad to say goodbye to Caela and Lee at the **Adswood Hotel** in Cale Green. They have been at this large Robinson's house for something like three years and during that time introduced many improvements, especially in the picturesque garden to the rear. We wish them well.

Trigger and Pam Dean continue to make their mark on the resurgent **Swan With Two Necks**, Princes Street, Stockport.



The cask ale range was up to seven before Christmas – on hand pump were Hatters, Dark Hatters, Unicorn, Chocolate Tom, Double Hop and Mr Scrooge and in a small cask at the back of the bar was the redoubtable Old Tom. I have to say that I did wonder if this was too many beers for the pub but a couple of random "pick'n'mix" visits showed quality to be good. There's an increasingly impressive food offering too, available from 12 to 6pm Monday to Saturday and 12 - 4pm on Sundays.

I hear tales of variable cask ale availability at the **Bamford Arms**, Buxton Road, Heaviley. My source tells me that the cask only tends to be available mid-week, apparently because it is so popular that it regularly sells out. You would think that this would prompt the pub-restaurant to order more wouldn't you? I wonder why they don't?

## Club News

INTRIGUED by an advert that popped through my door, I visited the Legion on Turves Road, Cheadle Hulme. Formerly the Royal British Legion, this is one of the first in the country to roll-out a new image for their clubs. Refurbished at some expense months earlier, it is an impressive setup. It's larger than it looks from the road, it has a large function room, smart lounge, games room, and snooker room (three tables). It even does hot food (£6.50 Sunday lunches are popular) daily from noon till 8pm.

At present they sell Courage Directors at £2.05, but they have also tried Pedigree. Although still a members club, people are welcome to visit to give the place a "test-run" so to speak. Annual membership is a paltry £13, whilst casual users pay 50p per visit. The first Friday of every month they host a brass band night.

## Orchid – an Open & Shut Case

NOW here's a funny thing. I have mentioned the Orchid Pub Company before. They are a group that bought about 290 pubs from Spirit Group, the managed house arm of Punch Taverns. The attitude to cask beers was refreshing to say the least, allowing many of their managers to source micro brewery guest beers – pubs such as the **Plough** in Heaton Moor and the **Bulls Head** in Hazel Grove have been particularly keen in this respect.

However in mid-December Orchid went into administration. It came straight out of it, though, following a financial restructuring that saw 250 mainly freehold pubs sold back to the existing management. The remainder of the pubs, all leasehold, are reverting to their former owner, Spirit Group.

This had some unfortunate effects locally. Four of the Orchid pubs, the **Plough** and, in Manchester, the **Sawyers Arms**, **Bandstand** (Gorton) and **Bell Tower** (East Didsbury) remain open and continue to trade as normal. These pubs have all moved over to the "new" Orchid.

However, three others in Stockport, the **Bulls Head**, **Carousel** (Reddish) and **Gardeners Arms** (Offerton) all closed more or less straight away and were not scheduled to re-open until mid-January. They should all be trading again when you read this. As far as I can see the closure was due to a variety of legal niceties, such as the managers effectively being made redundant by Orchid and then having to re-apply to Spirit. I hope they will continue as normal under their former managers. I also hope that the enlightened approach to cask beer will continue. The Carousel and Bulls Head were both recent cask ale gains and were offering interesting beers beyond the "usual suspects". More next time, hopefully.

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# Brewery NEWS...

## Family Brewers

**S**TOCKPORT'S family brewer **Frederic Robinson** has announced their seasonal range for 2009. As usual there will be no seasonal for January. In February and March the beer is **Trouble & Strife** (4.1%), described as a "premium copper red ale with distinctive deep fruity wild American hop aroma. This rich, full bodied, bitter beer has a predominately hop dominated palate but also exhibits an interesting balance of biscuit and burnt toffee flavours".

There is another pause in April followed by **Nosey Parker** (3.8%) for May and June. The brewery tasting notes tell us that this is a "traditional Harvest gold bitter with aromas of spicy hop and honey. An interesting and complex beer with a malt and honey sweet palate matched by fruity overtones and complemented by a dry roasted or nutty finish."

**Tit for Tat** (3.7%) is the beer for July and August. This is to be a "pale straw coloured Summer Ale with a distinctive peachy fruit hop aroma. This light, smooth and refreshing beer has a sweet malt palate perfectly balanced by a soft bitterness and crisp dry finish".

After a September break, the final new beer for 2009 is to be **Wags to Witches** (4%) for October and November. Again we have brewery tasting notes describing this beer as "an outstanding dark, rich and full bodied autumn bitter with a distinctive roasted malt character complemented by a vague hint of liquorice culminating in a deeply satisfying finish"

The year finished with the return of the popular **Mr Scrooge** (4.4%) in December. The new beers have some very amusing pumpclips, too – these should really stand out on the bar, we think.

We don't yet have details of the 2009 seasonals and craft ales from **JW Lees**, **Holts** and **Hydes** but hope to have more information about at least some of these next time.

## Micro Brewery News

**Q**UITE a few of the breweries we tried to contact this month appeared to be on their Christmas or New Year break.

**Hornbeam Brewery** – are of course producing the first of the *Opening Times* birthday beers and this is reported elsewhere. Also out this month is **Winterlong Dark Bitter** (4.7%), the first ever Hornbeam beer which is tweaked each year, becoming increasingly bitter.

**Bank Top Brewery** – have been brewing flat out over December, with over twice as much beer as usual leaving the brewery. You might still catch **Santa's Claws** (5%) the Christmas seasonal. Bank Top will be brewing the second *Opening Times* birthday beer – more about that one next time.

**Millstone Brewery** – another local micro running to keep up with demand. The final beer in the "pub names" series will be "Ye Olde Vic" and this will be out next month. Details of the beer had not been decided upon when we contacted the brewery in late December.

**Greenfield Brewery** – were also very busy in the run-up to Christmas, "pushed to the limits" as they put it to us. Retail sales direct to the public have been the big success story here with some 30 hand pumps out on loan over the festive season.

**Leyden Brewery** – have been making some interesting strong ales this past year. The potent **Chateau Leyden** (7%) almost sank the OT editor on his birthday last summer. This is back at the end of January. Out now is **VSOP** (Very Special Old Pale) Bitter, a pale and hoppy brew weighing in at 6%.



**Phoenix Brewery** – another brewery reporting a very busy December. No new beers out this month but look for **Snowbound** and the superb **Phoenix Porter** (5%) which remain available throughout the month.

**Pictish Brewery** – the January special is **Northern Dawn** (4.3%) "a full bodied deep amber coloured ale with caramel notes and a lingering malty but bitter finish". Also back will be one of the single hop beers that now appear regularly. This is **Liberty** (4.6%).

**Howard Town** – while well-known for its range of pale and hoppy beers, Howard Town does from time to time produce a beer of a darker hue. This time they have really gone for it with **Dark Peak** (6.4%), a strong porter with the added taste of rum. Howard Town's **Tony Hulme** has always wanted to make a porter and is confident that this will be a success. "Rum works really well with the porter," he told us, "and tastes just right for this time of year. I'd recommend it with the Christmas pud instead of a dessert wine." Peak also has hints of liquorice and chocolate and gets its name from the north Derbyshire Pennine landscape that includes **Kinder Scout** and **Bleaklow** and is characterized by peat bogs and millstone grit.

**Marble Brewery** – **Port Stout** (4.7%) was successfully launched on Christmas Eve (as is now traditional) and this year's version seemed richer and fuller-bodied than ever. An excellent festive tippie. However the beer that got everyone talking was 1425. The rather anonymous name (it's the brew number) hid something pretty spectacular.

This was a 5.9% alcohol hop feast brewed using mainly **Nelson Sauvin** and **Green Bullet** hops with support from the **Mortueka** variety. These are all aromatic and citrusy hops from New Zealand and so there is an immediate and immensely appealing floral hop aroma leading to a deep citrus-hoppy taste which lasts right through to the lingering finish where one or two warming alcohol notes come through to remind you that this is a pretty strong beer. There's a good malt grist too, ensuring that this is a beer with good body and mouthfeel instead of being a one-dimensional hop solution. As you may gather we rather like this one. A cask has been held back for the **National Winter Ales Festival** week and the pressure must now be on to make this potentially award winning beer at least a semi-permanent addition to the Marble portfolio.



**Bollington Brewery** - It's not every day you get to see a publican-brewer without their clothes on. But for **Lee Wainwright**, owner of **The Vale Inn**, in **Bollington** and brewer of **Bollington Beers** it was business as usual when he agreed to bare all for a 2009 calendar being sold to raise funds for the popular **Bollington Festival**, which is held every four years and attracts thousands of visitors to the area. "It was all rather surreal", said Lee who is pictured here with just a beer cask covering his modesty (*all photos were taken by Kate McLean*). There was an excellent beer festival held at the Vale after Christmas when several new **Bollington** beers were tried. These included **Rum Night** (4.1%), a "rum laced" version of **Ruby Nights**, and **Winter Reserve** (4.6%) a dark oak, full bodied beer with just a hint of sweetness.

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# Macclesfield PUB NEWS

IN Macclesfield we've lots of good news, writes Mike Wawioroko. After some months being closed, the **Bate Hall** in the heart of the shopping area on Chestergate is being painted and is on the point of reopening. It was formerly a Marstons house, so we'd expect two or three of their cask ales to reappear. On Park Lane, close to town, the former Ivy House has reopened as the **Last Orders** with a couple of ever changing real ales. On my visit the Locale, Storm, was in cracking form.

In the outskirts, two former deserts have been offering cask for the first time in a good while. At Broken Cross, the **Packhorse** is serving one ale from the Punch Finest list. Landlord Paul explained he has installed new lines and we found Shepherd Neame Canterbury Jack in good condition. A promotional offer during December had your second pint of cask at half price. It will be interesting to find if this continues into January. On the Moss, the **Golden Lion** has been



putting a toe in the market with Bombardier.

During the festive season a traditional local the **Dolphin** up Windmill Street is a must. Robinsons Old Tom has been in perfect condition on two visits. There's also Unicorn, Hatters and the

seasonal Robinsons brew. The Dolphin is a stalwart in the Macclesfield bar skittles league.

Another Robinsons house, the **Flower Pot** at Congleton Road crossroads near the Learning Zone, has added a seasonal brew to the always excellent Unicorn. This is a popular pub with all ages, from students through to mature diners, and children welcome to eat early evening. Main meals cost £8-9 and the children's menu has real food, not just the usual junk. As well as the lounge area, there's a games room with darts and pool and a large garden.



The **Crown** on Bond St. has been under new management for about three months and is offering three casks ales, with cracking good Bass, regular Tetley Mild and a guest. The landlord is very enthusiastic about his ales and the Crown is well worth a visit.

A traditional back street local, the **Crompton Road Tavern**, has completed its internal renovation and is thriving with a couple of real ales, on our visit Bombardier and an enjoyable Everards Tiger. The tavern has been thoroughly redecorated and reupholstered, but keeps its traditional feel with four separate inside areas.

Further afield there is less good news. Following the financial woes at the Orchid Pub Co, both the **Unicorn**, on the road between Wilmslow and Woodford, plus the **Butley Ash** were closed over the Christmas period. It seems that the restructured Orchid has surrendered the leases on these pubs back to Spirit Group, the managed arm of Punch Group. What cask ale will be available when they reopen remains to be seen.





**Didsbury Beer Festival**

THE First Didsbury Beer Festival held at St Catherine's Social Club showcased over 70 cask ales along with a fine selection of ciders and perries. The Local and Lakeland theme proved to be a winning formula.

Festival organiser, Phil Saunders told me that the popular Lakeland beers like Hawkshead and Coniston Bluebird were the first to sell out...by about 8:30 on the opening night. The Heskett Newmarket beers also sold well.

The event was a triumph for cask ales with a good range of ABVs up to the 8.5% of Robinson's Old Tom. Also well received were the seasonal beers including Three Rivers' Yummy Figgy Pudding and Hornbeam's Dark Domination, as were the 13 different ciders and 3 perries. Beer of the Festival was Heskett Newmarket Helvellyn Gold.



Phil added "For a first festival we were unsure what to expect but feedback has been generally very positive and we hope to improve for the second event in Autumn 2009. Thanks

to all CAMRA members who supported the event which has raised £7,000 for our two charities, Francis House and Friends of Ghyll Head.... Here's to the next one!"

**Didsbury Real Ale Gains & News**

FIRST an oversight from last time. I meant to report that the **Parrswood**, the nearest pub to the Didsbury Beer Festival venue, has started selling real ale again. Full marks to the licensees for listening to their regulars and putting the real stuff back in. The range currently comprises Courage Directors plus a changing guest beer.

There are also some real ale gains on the local café bar scene. The former West One café bar on Burton Road has reopened as "**Silver Apples on Orchard Street**", a gallery-cum-café bar. There were two ales on when I called, both from Thwaites (they also had Warsteiner as the lager so I'm seeing a bit of a "supplied by Thwaites" vibe going on). Both the Good Elf and the Wainwright were rated as good, and the two pints came to £5, relatively cheap by local standards. They also had a reasonable selection of bottled foreign beers (plus a couple of Hobgoblin bottles). While there is food on, it's a small selection dominated by a range of Pieminster "Gourmet" Pies, so it's definitely more drink dominated than most of West Didsbury's "Café Bars". And is a welcome addition to the local scene.

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I have also had an unconfirmed report that the **Art of Tea**, Barlow Moor Road, Didsbury, is also selling cask beer. I aim to check this one out for the next issue.

Further up the road in Withington Village, the **Solomon Grundy** cafe-bar now has a handpump. When I went in this was dispensing Bateman's Rosey Nosey which was OK. From what I was told by the bar staff, they seem to want to have cask ales with a 'seasonal' theme - e.g. they had Hobgoblin on for Halloween, apparently - so it may be an occasional thing rather than a regular one.

The **Barleycorn**, Barlow Moor Road, is under new management. Previous management had installed Taylor's Landlord and Wells Bombardier as regulars, so I called to check out if new management had maintained the ale. I was pleasantly surprised to find that while only one of three pumps was occupied, it was with a micro ale - Hawkshead Brodies Prime. It was lovely and went down a treat. There was also a Copper Dragon poster on the wall adjacent to the pumps so fingers crossed that this is a gain for more varied ale choice.

**Down Deansgate**

DECIDED to take a post-Christmas stroll along Deansgate to check out the pubs on and around this main City Centre thoroughfare. It was a mixed bag.

Starting at the northern end the first pub is the **Moon Under Water**, a cavernous Wetherspoons outlet offering the usual "Spoons" range but little atmosphere in my opinion.

**Mulligans** on Southgate, near Kendals, offers no cask beer but back to the main drag the **Sawyers Arms**, on the corner of Bridge Street, is an Orchid Pub Co outlet with Boddingtons Bitter and Theakston's Old Peculier on hand pump. I noticed that the pub also has Cask Marque accreditation. Almost next door the **Hog's Head** does what Hog's Heads do - it should serve cask but on my visit the pump clips were reversed and none was available.

Across the road, the **Rising Sun** on Queen Street is a clean, well-run looking place with Wells Bombardier and a very tasty pint of Young's Bitter on hand pump. Again there is Cask Marque accreditation. It's possible to leave the Rising Sun by the back entrance, cross the road and enter the **Nag's Head** by its back door. A very homely and traditional feel here with quite a food operation, I was expecting to see cask on sale but again the pump clips were all turned round.



There was worse to come. The **Old Grapes** in Sunlight House (famously owned by Liz Dawn, Corrie's. Vera Duckworth) has no cask ale either. From there it's a long walk to the closed **Negresco** (formerly the closed Pig & Porcupine).

Relief is at hand, though. Turn into Liverpool Road and the excellent **Cask** usually has a couple of micro beers on



handpump along with a good foreign bottled range. Back on to Deansgate and the **Deansgate**, in the shadow of Bethams Tower, has the feel of a country house or gentlemen's club. The cask range often features Robinson's,

Hydes, Coach House or Moorhouses beers, and these are invariably in good condition. It's one of those pubs it can be difficult to leave but further on the **Knott** beckons. Slotted into a railway arch this characterful bar offers great food, a great range of micro brewed beers, with Marble beers as regulars, and again a small foreign range. **Atlas** is keg and so has nothing to offer the cask ale drinker - a shame as it used to sell lots of well kept real ale.



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*

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup>** – Hazel Grove South Stagger: meet 7.30pm Rising Sun, Buxton Road; 8.30 Grapes, London Road.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>** – Annual Branch Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. 7.30pm onwards. **Guest Speaker – Chris Hopkins, Hydes Chief Executive.**

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup>** – Pub of the Month presentation to the Ladybrook, Bramhall. From 8pm.

**Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February** – joint Stockport Social with Macclesfield CAMRA. Meet Railway, Portwood at 8pm.

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. **NB Selections for Good Beer Guide 2010 will be made at this meeting.**

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](mailto:mikewrose@btinternet.com)*

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February** – Branch Meeting: Hatters Arms, Marple. Starts 8.30pm

The **Trafford & Hulme** Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester West of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. *Branch Contact – John Ison 0161 962 7976. Branch website: [www.thcamra.org.uk](http://www.thcamra.org.uk)*

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup>** – Winter Pub of the Season presentation to the Railway, Manchester Road, Broadheath. From 8pm.

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February** – Branch Meeting: The Nook, Wilbraham Road, Chorlton. Starts 8pm.

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February** – Ashton-on-Mersey Social: Meet 8pm Old Plough, 9.30 Buck – both on Green Lane

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

**Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January** – Campaigning Meeting: Roebuck, Moberley. Starts 8pm

**Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February** – joint Stockport Social with Stockport & South Mcr Branch. Meet Railway, Portwood 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](mailto:davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk)*


**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>** – Good Beer Guide 2010 short listing meeting: Kings Arms, Bloom Street, Salford. Starts 8pm.

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Unicorn, Church St, Manchester. Starts 8pm.

**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> February** – Irlams o'th Height crawl: Waggon & Horses, Bolton Rd, 8pm; Wellington 9pm; Red Lion 9.30

**Happy new Year**

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