

November 2009



# Opening

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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

## Cask is Back

2009 Cask Ale Report – see page 11



Marble Brewery triumphs at Manchester Food & Drink Festival – see page 11



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CAMPAIN FOR REAL ALE



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for November has been won by the Lord Nelson on Hyde Road in Gorton. Margaret O'Brien tells you why.



**D**ESPITE being one of the oldest pubs in the area, for many years the Lord Nelson held few attractions for the cask ale drinker, or even for the lover of traditional pubs. A former Wilsons house it had been badly modernised in the late 1960s or thereabouts and hadn't sold a drop of real ale for many a long year, apart from the occasional attempt to sell some lacklustre Tetley Bitter.

However a couple of years ago major changes took place. A refurbishment-cum-rebuild in 2007 saw the pub undergo a major transformation. A modern extension was demolished and the rest of the pub given a thorough makeover to combine the best of modern décor and styling with the remaining traditional features of the building.

This is a real locals pub which has a welcome for all. There is a food area, where excellent and value for money home cooked food is available from 12 until 2pm, but food isn't allowed to dominate. The cask beer offering comprises Theakston's Bitter and a changing guest beer. Quality is good and prices are keen. There's a good selection of malt whiskies, too.

Responsible for all these improvements are the team of Lynne Crossthwaite, who is the pub's owner, and Les Park, who runs the cellar, together with their excellent staff. Together they have built a real community pub, where there's always something going on and lots of local groups meeting up. As you may expect a lot of charity fundraising goes on as well.

This well deserved award will be presented on Thursday 26 November when we hope for a good turnout.

The pub is easily accessible on public transport – buses 203 (from Stockport and Manchester) 201 and 204 from Manchester, 168 from Chorlton and 169 from Levenshulme will take you there and back.



The Pub of the Month award is sponsored by Stephenson's, a local family firm that has been supplying the local pub and catering trade for over 140 years. Check out their advert on this page.

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## Keeping Drinkers in the Dark

**T**HE British Medical Association has recently called for drastic restrictions on the sale and promotion of alcohol, one of which is a total ban on advertising. It's highly questionable, though, whether this would have any effect on consumption levels, as there is plenty of evidence that while advertising may affect brand choice, it doesn't change people's minds as to whether or not to have a drink. You don't need an advert to prompt you to go to the pub or to pick up a few bottles from the off-licence. Tobacco advertising has been banned for a number of years now, yet smoking rates have hardly fallen off a cliff.

You wouldn't be reading this if it wasn't for alcohol advertising, as that's what pays for this magazine. And how could you run a beer festival if you couldn't tell people that you were actually going to be selling beer? Would a pub be able to say outside that it belonged to Robinsons or Holts, or even that alcoholic drinks were available at all within? Subject to a basic requirement of honesty, surely the ability of manufacturers of products to provide consumers with information about them is a central aspect of free speech.

Some people naïvely assume that banning advertising would help small-scale producers by preventing the big boys from mounting expensive promotions. However, in reality it is likely that the effect would be exactly the opposite, tending to prop up established players and well-known brands. If you can't advertise products, it makes it extremely difficult to introduce new ones, so a market without advertising ends up stagnating and becoming ossified.

In the absence of any other information, people inevitably would end up asking for familiar products they had had before, or which their friends were drinking. Those brands that had been well-known before the ban came in would benefit from continued recall and recognition that no new entrants would be able to challenge. There could also be a return to simply ordering generic products such as bitter, white wine or whisky, which again would militate against anything new or different.

## Chopping Down the Grapevine

**T**HERE are, of course, other ways of promoting alcoholic drinks apart from paid advertising. An important feature of the alcohol market, and one in which it differs markedly from tobacco, is the enormous amount of information disseminated about drinks that is not paid for directly by producers. There are societies devoted to the appreciation of beer, wine and spirits, magazines, guide books, newspaper columns and a growing number of internet listings and blogs.

Most people with a serious interest in alcoholic drinks will probably get much more information from these informal sources than from conventional advertising. Obviously, though, there is plenty of scope for behind-the-scenes manipulation by drinks producers, which would assume more significance if advertising was outlawed. But do the doctors really want a situation where the "Good Beer Guide" became a banned publication and you would be committing an offence if you wrote in a newspaper article or on a blog that you had a good pint of Robinson's in the Arden Arms? Given the immense possibilities of spreading information through the grapevine, it's hard to believe they would be happy to leave it alone.

Curmudgeon Online:

[www.curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com](http://www.curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com)



## Opening Times – Comment

Good news all round on the cask ale front this month. As we report on page 11, cask ale is now back in growth. After many years of being written off as a basket case by industry commentators, who really should have known better, cask is back. In 2008 cask declined along with the rest of the beer market, but at a much lower rate than any other category. The first six months of 2009 shown cask to be the only category in actual growth

The growing interest in cask across the board was amply demonstrated by the crowds at the Manchester Food & Drink Festival's beer festival in Albert Square last month. The tent was packed with male and female beer drinkers of all ages who displayed a real enthusiasm for the product.

The message to those publicans who still remain wedded to keg is clear. Quality (and that is the crucial element here) cask is now an essential "must stock" for those pubs that want to grow and thrive.

## 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.

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**Trading Standards** – for complaints about short measure pints etc contact Consumer Direct (North West). Consumer Direct works with all the Trading Standards services in the North West and is supported by the Office of Fair Trading. You can email Consumer Direct using a secure email system on their website ([www.consumerdirect.gov.uk](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk)) which also provides advice, fact sheets and model letters on a range of consumer rights. Their telephone no. is 0845 404 05 06

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The last time this Stagger took place, there was a chance encounter with the television chef Keith Floyd. This time it took place in the week his death was announced. Jim Flynn was along on what is now the Keith Floyd Memorial Stagger. This is what he found on the night....

On the early autumn day that the death of the TV chef Keith Floyd was announced we met up at Hyde's **Four Heatons** on Didsbury Road for the Edgeley Stagger (yes I know the pub is not in Edgeley!). The pub was largely deserted (the vault was completely in the dark), although there were a few people in the beer garden. Perhaps it was for this reason that the current tenants were moving on and the pub was to let. This is all very sad when you think of the money Hydes spent a few years ago. Previously called the Moss Rose it used to describe itself as the 'ugliest pub in Stockport' but now while not an architectural gem it's much improved. We all tried the one cask beer, Original and found it to be reasonable. Clearly the pub needs a boost; let's hope the next tenants provide it.

Navigating all the obstacles the planners put in our way we crossed the M60 and the Mersey to **Ye Olde Woolpack** at the bottom of Brinksway. In the shadow of the Co-op's giant blue pyramid this free house was saved a few years ago by Andy



Sinclair who has refurbished the pub. Normally he has three or four cask beers often from local micros but we were met with only two on our arrival, Greene King IPA and Hornbeam Top Hop Bitter, as two other beers had just sold out. The pub was relatively quiet, although busier than the Four Heatons and we had plenty of choice of seats when we sat down in the well lit lounge to try the Hornbeam. I have always found the beer here spot on but surprisingly on that night while it tasted OK it was a little hazy. Sod's law, just as we were leaving Hornbeam Bitter was put on.

We trekked up Brinksway and turned left at the closed and largely unattended **Bow Garrett** on to Northgate Road. I was dispatched inside the **Gardeners Arms** to verify that it was still a cask beer free zone only to eye a handpump with a Lee's Bitter pumpclip. In we went only to find that the beer was on the turn (along with my stomach). The licensee was called and immediately changed the barrel. Although we could see there were a few more customers in the well lit vault we sat down amongst the semi darkened décor of the lounge in largely splendid isolation. From what I could see the walls were panelled and at the back of a deserted stage was a large screen showing moving bubbles. Lee's Bitter is still a relatively rare beer in Stockport and here we found it to be in a respectable condition from the new cask.

Up the hill further along Northgate Road is Robinson's impressive **Alexandra**. Here we were met by new additions to our party and as many customers as had been in the first three pubs put together. What an excellent multi roomed pub this is with etched glass, superb tiling and old style bench seating. No wonder it's on CAMRA's National Inventory of pub interiors to be preserved. Not only is the pub more than worth a visit for its aesthetic appeal it is also definitely worth calling in for a pint. We found both the Unicorn and the Dizzy Blonde in good form and it was with some reluctance that we set off for Castle Street.

Our first stop on Edgeley's main drag was the **Royal Oak**.

This ex Wilson's house (note the superb tiles in the loos) now serves Holts Bitter. The pub was very crowded and the Karaoke was quite noisy so rather than stay in the well appointed black and white plastered lounge we all trooped outside into the pleasant walled garden.



Sitting amongst the hanging baskets and discussing our beers we soon twigged that those of us who had been served from the handpump close to the front door had got a more than drinkable pint while those served from a presumably little used pump to the rear had received somewhat lukewarm beer. Nevertheless the Royal Oak is to be valued as a good solid pub with plenty of atmosphere.

By the time we left the Royal Oak Sale Sharks' fans were spilling out of nearby Edgeley Park having seen their side beaten by Bath. As we wandered past the **Prince Albert**, **Sir Robert Peel**, **Pineapple** and **Jolly Crofter** we wondered why so few fans were in these pubs. Could it be because their team had lost? More likely I suspected it was because these are keg only pubs. Evidence for this theory came at our next port of call, the **Grapes** at the far end of Castle Street and therefore further

from the ground yet full of supporters. This warm and welcoming pub still retains the atmosphere of Edgeley of old. The current licensees are leaving at the end of January but on our visit they were still keeping good pints of Unicorn and Hatters. All the best Noel and Val!



A stone's throw from the Grapes on Shaw Heath is the **Armoury**. On our visit the place was rammed with customers, many of whom were Sharks fans again voting with their feet. What a pub this is!



Anybody with a liking for traditional pubs will love this Robinson's house. It has something for everybody from the comfortable lounge to the vaults with its adjacent darts room to the garden to the rear. We managed to find a seat in the darts room and found the Unicorn, Hatters and Dizzy Blonde were all in such great form that some of us (e.g. me) went back for a second.

We finally walked down to the **Olde Vic** on the corner of Chatham Street. This small free house has been one of the hidden gems of Stockport's beer scene for many years, its brilliance concealed from the casual passer by, a rather careworn exterior (*now undergoing extensive renovation – Ed*). If you haven't been then pay a visit if not for the excellent choice and quality of the beer (on our visit Salopian Oracle, Facers Beer Nouveau, Little Ale Cart Kestrel, York Yorkshire Terrier and Hopback Crop Circle) and cider (Old Rosie) then for the opportunity to meet one of Stockport's most idiosyncratic and distinctive licensees, Steve Brannan. The pub interior is full of character reflecting its owner but as it was also full of rugby supporters we gravitated to the garden. Here we toasted the memory of Keith Floyd who we had met in this pub in a heavy state of inebriation on this very Stagger 2½ years ago.

Overall after a slow start it was a good night with a variety of generally good beer including uniquely for Stockport staggers from all four of the area's family brewers and characterful pubs, all very accessible from the town centre.



**T**HE **Wheatsheaf** in Old Glossop seems to be the nearest to a brewery tap for Old Glossop-based Howard Town Brewery, just a few hundred yards up the road. On my last visit in mid-September, Longdendale Lights and Wrens Nest were on offer from that brewery, with Hop Back Summer Lighting on the third handpull. Howard Town has introduced a monthly Brewery Tour, on a Monday evening, with food served afterwards down in the Wheatsheaf. Phone the Brewery for details on 01457 869800.

**Poynton Round-up**

**I**n Poynton, the **Vernon Arms** had Young & Wells Bombardier, Greene King Speckled Hen and Taylor's Landlord when a branch member did a quick recce of the village prior to a recent Branch Meeting at the **Bulls Head**. The Bulls Head has three rooms – main bar, snug and vault, the latter popular for darts, cards or watching TV, as well as a patio area at the back for smokers. There is always a selection of four or five hand pulled cask ales available, which varies on a weekly basis. Recent brews on tap have included : Black Sheep; Thwaites Lancaster Bomber and Wainwrights; Wadworth 6X; Youngs; Charles Wells' Bombardier; Jennings' Cumberland; Skipton's Brewery Copper Dragon Golden Pippin; and Tribute from Cornwall.

The Pub is ably run by mine Hosts Ken and Barbara Bromley, and their daughter Sally Anne. A warm welcome awaits all CAMRA members and their friends and families

At the **Farmers Arms**, Robinsons Unicorn, Hatters, Double Hop and Dizzy Blonde were all on offer. The **Cask Tavern** (ex.Poynton Wine Bar) had Brains Rev James, Everards Tiger, Copper Dragon Golden Pippin, Bollington Best and two real ciders, being Old Rosie and Westons Traditional - not a bad choice for a Monday evening! The **Kings Head** had Black Sheep Bitter, amid a sea of fons.

**Round and About**

**R**oaches **Lock** in Mossley had a change of licensee in early September and a recent choice there was Deuchars IPA, Bombardier and Millstone True Grit.

In Romiley reports are that the **Stock Dove** has reopened after several months shut.

The bad news from Buxton is that the **Beltane Bar** shut towards the end of September as had been rumoured for a while.

At the **Old Hall Hotel** at Chinley (Whitehough to be precise), a successful recent beer festival all but sold out, and I hear it was so successful that the next one is a certainty. Apparently a good deal at the Old Hall is a "buy six, get one free" policy with both the cask ale and the food. Buxton SPA, Taylor's Landlord and Peak Ales Best Bitter have been seen recently.

In Hadfield, the **Palatine** sells Hatters, Unicorn and the guest beer (recently Dizzy Blonde) while down the road, the **Masons Arms** has re-opened after a redecoration, though no reports here of any cask ale since the re-opening. Also in Hadfield the **Chieftain** has been awarded Cask Marque accreditation, the first in the Hadfield area to get it.

In Glossop, the **Globe** has a new display of fresh hops over the bar, after landlord Ron Brookes and his wife Diane tripped down to the hop fields in the Hereford area. His new beer at the pub is Globe Harvest Ale, brewed with the fresh hops he returned with. Interestingly, he has had a Globe Light (3.4%) on the bar for some weeks now at only £1.40.

Finally, High Peak CAMRA have chosen their Autumn Pub of the Season; the **Cotton Bale** in Hyde was presented with their plaque on Monday 12 October prior to a local Branch meeting. A fuller report and photograph next month.

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**PEAK Practice**

**Robin Wignall visits pub beer festivals and also celebrates good publicity for local pubs...and shire horses, too.**

**T**HE Beer and Cider Festival in mid September at the **Old Hall** at Whitehough, near Chinley, was an unqualified success. All the ciders and perries sold out and Dan Capper now intends to add an extra cider pump to the bar on a permanent basis. This will be a changing guest to augment Weston's Original. Of the many beers I tried over two days, all were in good condition. There was a good atmosphere on Friday and Saturday afternoons, and doubtless the other sessions, with locals and visitors enjoying the superb choice of beers on offer. The fine weather over the week end helped to swell the crowds, as the outside drinking area was able to absorb a few hundred alfresco imbibers. Dan promises that this year's festival is only the first, so look out for next year's event, presumably in mid September. Well worth the effort of getting there.

The **Swan** at Kettlethulme held its beer festival later in September, but with minimal publicity. This was one I missed. I did however get to the **Royal** at Hayfield at the beginning of October for the 17th Annual Hayfield Beer Festival. Over 50 beers were on the menu, and those that I tried were in good form. Despite losing its bus services on Saturday because of a road closure in Birch Vale those who did get through to Hayfield could enjoy a good session. There was a good selection of beers from Cheshire, Derbyshire and nearby Greater Manchester microbreweries, augmented by a list from West Yorkshire and Northumberland. Not all the beers were on at the same time, but the beers from Allendale were well worth a try, Beartown had a new one to me, Ursa Minor, and Ashover Rainbow's End would be my pick of the Saturday afternoon beers.

Disappointing news from the **Beehive** at Combs, near Chapel en le Frith, is that Taylor's Landlord is no longer served, because the landlord feels unable to meet a big rise in price from the brewery. He was unwilling to pass this on to his customers. Not too long ago the Beehive was good for a decent pint of Hydes Boddington's Bitter, Draught Bass and Landlord. All these washed down the good food served at the pub. Now only Draught Bass and Ruddles Bitter are available, I understand.

The Bakewell Show has a section for heavy horses, and an entry in this year's competition was a dray from Bradfield Brewery, the micro on the Peak District fringe of Sheffield. It is good to see one of the small concerns picking up one of the old brewery traditions.

Pubs getting into the news for good reasons, and therefore getting good publicity, include the **Old Pack Horse** at Chapel en le Frith. They held a 24 hour darts marathon which raised useful funds for Blythe House Hospice in Chapel and Kinder Mountain Rescue Team. When I last called in the Old Pack Horse, Robinson's Unicorn and Dark Hatters were available. In days gone by when Robinson's Dark Mild was a rarely available commodity, this was one of the very few pubs where it was sold.

The Buxton Advertiser in a recent edition had a Menus and Venues page which featured the **Duke of York** at Pomeroy, on the Ashbourne road to the south of Buxton, and the **Red Lion** at Litton, near Tideswell. Both articles concentrated on food so obviously this is where they see a bright future. Let's hope they haven't forgotten about some decent real ale. Back in August the Daily Telegraph Weekend featured the **Lantern Pike** at Little Hayfield in its Pint to Pint column. This was a good article with a bit of history, a plug for food and praise for the two real ales, Taylor's Landlord and Howard Town Longdendale Lights. This latter is of course more evidence of licensees supporting local microbreweries. Good news indeed.



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## Report and Round-up

**T**HIS year's Manchester Food & Drink Festival had many beery attractions, chief among which was the now well-established beer festival which hosted the Best Beer Brewed in Greater Manchester competition.

CAMRA helped host and run this in conjunction with the MFDF and this year 16 local breweries took part for the coveted award. Preliminary judging whittled the beers down to a final six – Bazens' Flatbac, Green Mill Special Mild, Holts Thunderholt, Marble Dobber, Millstone Tiger Rut and Prospect Silver Tally.

The final panel was chaired by CAMRA stalwart and chair of many judging panels, Graham Chin and included Phil Jones, executive director of the MFDF, beer writer Pete Brown, Black Lion and New Oxford licensee Tim Flynn and Neil Sowerby, former food and drink writer for Manchester Evening News.

After much deliberation the top three emerged. Third place went to Green Mill Special Mild, a pitch black 5% brew with a deep flavour. Silver went to Prospect Brewer's Silver Tally, a deep gold hoppy session beer at 3.7%. Winner by a considerable margin was Marble Brewery's Dobber, a

stunningly good 5.9% IPA with big hops balanced/complemented by a firm but not overpowering malt base.

The Marble team (pictured left are Dominic, Colin and Head Brewer James Campbell) were ecstatic about the win. Dominic Driscoll and Colin Stronge from the brewing team were present as the result was announced – Colin's presence was particularly apt as it was he who has brewed this particular batch of the winning beer. "I'm so proud of our boys" read the text message *Opening Times*



received from Marble's owner Jan Rogers. James told us that he was "very, very pleased" with the award. This has been a great year for Dobber – it only appeared in its final form in the spring and has since become something of a cult beer.

## The People's Pint

**A**part from the Best Beer judging, the two day festival also hosted another beer award. The public, who attended in their droves and drank it dry by 7pm on Saturday, were asked to vote for their favourite beer and this People's Pint Award was won by the exceptional Stout brewed by Bury's Outstanding Brewery.

When *Opening Times* broke the news, Outstanding's Alex Lord was stunned. When he recovered his composure he told us "We are extremely proud of all of our ales and lagers and endeavour to produce the very best beers possible. In particular, we regard

our Stout to be one of the finest representations of the beer style available. It is a great honour to receive the public recognition of having one of our beers voted The People's Pint Award at this year's Manchester Food and Drink Festival. We wish to thank the organisers and staff at the festival who did a fine job in promoting some excellent local produce and businesses and we also wish to thank all the people who attended the festival (especially those who voted for us!)."



- \*400,000 new drinkers in 2008
- \*Volume growth in a declining overall beer market
- \*Distribution in 3,000 new pubs last year
- \*More breweries than at any time in the past 60 years

**T**HAT these statistics can be used to describe cask ale will come as a surprise to anyone who witnessed the category's near-demise around five years ago and confirm its journey from 'zero to hero', as published in *The Cask Report - Britain's National Drink*.

Pete Brown, the report's author, said, "Turnaround stories don't get much better than cask beer's. In a shrinking on-trade beer market, cask is the only category to show growth, albeit modest, of 1% in the first half of 2009. Its share of the on-trade beer market now stands at 13.5%, up from 11% in 2007. But what's most important for Britain's licensees is that there's compelling evidence to show that cask beer can offer them a 'lifeline' out of the recession."



Cask ale's growth is good news for pubs. Many pubs are fighting to stay open and cask ale has turned out to be one of their most powerful weapons. Pubs with Cask Marque accreditation - a reliable indicator of well-kept, well-served cask beer - are shutting at around half the industry closure rate.

No wonder, then, that 42% of licensees name cask as the drink that's outperforming everything else on the bar. Or that 3,000 new pubs put cask ale on tap in the 12 months to June this year.

Cask ale is viewed by many drinkers as an indicator of a pub's overall standards. Keeping cask in good condition requires care and attention, the thinking goes, so the licensee must also know what he's doing with other drinks, food and service in the pub. And when a group of friends are choosing a pub to visit, it's usually the cask beer drinker among them who makes the decision.

Typically, cask ale drinkers are more affluent and therefore less affected by the 'credit crunch' than other beer drinkers. They have reached a lifestage where they can afford to visit the pub more often - 40% of them visit at least once a week, compared to just 23% of non-cask drinkers. And they spend more when there - 70% of cask drinkers dine out in the pub at least once a month, compared to 60% of non-cask drinkers.

Happily for pubs who are courting cask ale drinkers, there are now more of them - and more of them are women. Over the last year, the number of women who drink cask has more than doubled - a staggering result for something that's generally held up as a 'man's drink'. Around 400,000 people have tried cask beer for the first time in the last 12 months and the total number of cask drinkers stands at 8.5 million - all advances made at a time when fewer people are drinking beer, or any alcohol, at all.

Brown comments, "Higher-spending customers who drink more beer, go to pubs more often and spend more while they're there, make cask beer a vital asset for struggling pubs. Sure, it's not right for every single pub, but for those that can keep and serve it well, and attract the right customers, cask beer can help to lift them out of the trading downturn."

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## Railway on Track

Last month I briefly mentioned the **Railway** on Wellington Road North. This time I managed to call in and have a word with owner Ray Ford.

I say owner because, as I mentioned last time, in July Ray bought the pub from Punch having first moved into the pub with wife Pam in November last year. As a result of removing the pub company restrictions, the Railway is now completely free of tie and has begun experimenting with some interesting guest beers.

When I called there were three beers on handpump - Greene King's Ruddles Bitter, Harviestoun Late Harvest and Anglo Dutch Kletswater. I was impressed by the quality and Ray tells me that his regulars are starting to try the guest beers. He is certainly selling enough to add a fourth beer so by the time you read this the three changing guests will have been joined by Holt's Bitter as a house beer.



One feature of the Railway is the live jazz every Sunday evening. I always think that jazz is great pub music and on Sunday nights what a great way to round off the weekend. I shall certainly be dropping by. The music usually starts at about 9pm and there is also supper and a raffle for just three quid.

Next year Ray is planning a "Beer and Brass" event which will see a small beer festival held accompanied by a brass band. Sounds fun. Do call in the Railway and give it your support.

## Magnet set to attract

I VISITED the **Magnet** on Wellington Road North and spoke to Ian and Lesley Watts about their plans for the pub. I asked them when he thought that the pub would reopen and Ian said 'we were planning to reopen on the 13th of November - that was until we realized that that was a Friday and we thought that that might be a bad omen. So instead the plans are to reopen on Thursday 12th November at 4pm. Opening times will be 4pm until midnight Monday to Wednesday and 12 noon until midnight Thursday to Sunday.

However there is still a lot of work to be done before the pub can reopen. The pub has had little money spent on it in recent years and was in quite a bad state. The pub has suffered from damp so floorings have had to be replaced, the central heating is having to be replaced and new upvc windows have been installed throughout. Some of the plaster was rotten so a plasterer was due to arrive to replaster some walls. There seemed to be a whole team of people (many being familiar faces on the Stockport pub scene) working away so hopefully the planned opening date will be hit. More news next time.

**Ian has asked me to say that any breweries wishing to supply the pub should contact him on 078 366 82031.**

## Olde Vic gets facelift

On more than one occasion I have been asked if Ye Olde Vic in Edgeley was open as it looked closed and, well, a bit derelict. While "derelict" may have been a little over the top, the pub did look a little careworn. Not for much longer though. Licensee Steve Brannan is currently revamping the exterior and very smart it will look, too, when the work is complete.

Inside it remains business as usual with up to five ever changing guest beers and real cider as well. Quality is everything you would expect for a Good Beer Guide regular.



**Openings, and a pub bought by its customers hog the headlines this month.**

### Black Lion finally opens

**T**HE much anticipated reopening of the Black Lion in Salford finally came to pass last month. This of course is the second pub project by Tim Flynn and Paulette Scanlon from the New Oxford so great things have been expected. First impressions are that it was well worth the wait.

The dreary, tired interior has been transformed. Pale yellow walls make for a bright and cheery feel and also set off the traditional bar fittings that have undergone a major restoration. Traditional pub furnishings add to the traditional feel.

Although the pub is leased from Enterprise Inns, it is nothing like almost any other Enterprise pub you are likely to encounter (not for nothing to some wags dub the company "Unenterprise"). On the beer front there are eight changing guest beers. These are sourced via the Direct Delivery Scheme run by the Society of Independent Brewers, and so will not feature quite so many exotic rarities as you will find on the bar of the New Oxford. That's not to say this doesn't mean there won't be plenty of interesting and unusual beers. Real cider is also in the pipeline, too.



The Black Lion is however free from tie for bottled beers and the plan is to have a range of 120 different bottles – mainly Belgian but with a few German beers, too. The evolving range already includes all the Trappist beers (except Westvleteren, of course), De Ranke, Cazeau, Senne, St Feullien and Dupont to name just a few of the breweries represented.

Food is served Monday to Saturday (Sunday lunches are to follow) and in something of a coup, Tim has recruited Megan van Dyke from renowned City Centre eatery Ithaca on John Dalton Street.

To date it's been a huge success with beer running out and food sale really taking off. It's attracted a new crowd, too, not just refugees from the New Oxford, where trade had also increased since the Black Lion opened. Well worth a visit – but you'd guessed that hadn't you?

### Angel spreads its wings

**I** MENTIONED last month that the Angel on Angel Street had suddenly closed and just as quickly reopened. I also picked up stories that it was to have a more beery focus than it had done.

Now this is a pub that has a place in the heart of many local beer enthusiasts due to its previous incarnation as the Beer House. The final days of the Beer House were rather sad and the pub's closure some years ago seemed to be the end of the line. Surprise and delight followed its reopening as the Angel, particularly as a small but changing range of guest beers featured in what was essentially a gastro pub run by local chef Robert Owen Brown.

The pub did seem to become increasingly foody and then came news that Owen Brown was upping sticks and decamping to the Mark Addy in Salford. Thus was followed by the sudden closure of the pub.

It rapidly reopened and is now being run by Kevin and Gerard (Ged) Keaney, two brothers who are in fact the owners of the building (and who leased to Robert Owen Brown). They reopened in late September and there has been a change of emphasis since then, with six handpumps dispensing a changing range of guest beers,



usually sourced from micro brewers. When I called these included beers from Allgates, Dunham Massey, Pennine and Facers (who will continue to supply the house beer, Angel). Real cider has also returned and while this is currently "bag in a box" on the bar, the plan is to have this in the cellar, too.

There's no food at the moment pending a kitchen refit after which food will be served upstairs, with the downstairs bar reserved for drinkers. The Angel is currently open from 12 to 12 on Mondays to Saturdays. It's closed on Sundays until the kitchen reopens.

This is Kevin and Ged's first venture into the pub trade but they certainly seem to be settling in well. I'm sure everyone will want this to succeed and I for one wish them well.

### The Thirsty Star Customer Buy Out

**T**HE Star on Back Hope Street in Salford is a community pub that dates back to the 1860s and in the historic the Cliff conservation area of Salford has been bought by a group of 30 customers from owner's Robinsons brewery of Stockport at a starting price of just £80,000. At a packed out meeting on Thursday 1 October

(pictured right), local residents and regulars launched their appeal to get a consortium together to make a bid for this much-loved pub – the last surviving on the Cliff and one of the few back street hostelrys left in Salford.



A full set of local and North West regional media and TV cameras were there to record the moment when the auctioneer's gavel went down at Manchester United's ground on 15 Oct. A body from the Action Group stood up and punched the air in triumph on their first and only bid that was successful. The pub itself is within striking distance from Man U's The Cliff training ground and their winning bid was like netting that last minute of time added-on from a 25 yard free kick! The Action Group had just over two weeks to get their bid and business plan together – plus everything else.

Back in January the pub won the local branch – North Manchester- award for a fine example of a traditional unspoilt pub: the Neil Richardson Trophy. So named after the late editor of the now defunct branch magazine –'What's Doing.' Neil also loved this pub.

There is also an appeal for people to come forward to give of their time, while the pub is being renovated and when it re-opens (hopefully in early December-TBC) with duties such as book-keeping and voluntary bar work etc.

This must be one of the best examples of 'Dunkirk' British spirit, winning through, when the odds were stacked against the customers of the pub, but won they did. The Star Inn will stay as a local pub - a local service and a place to meet your friends and chat over a drink.

I had lots more for you this time but again have been defeated by space. A big catch-up next month.

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Pitch Porter  
5%

A full bodied, rich beer with a slightly sweet, malty start, counter-balanced with sharp bitterness and an obvious roast



Sunshine  
5.3%

A hoppy and bitter golden beer with a citrus character. The lingering finish is dry and spicy.

***Our ales can all be sampled at The Griffin, Haslingden;  
The Railway, Portwood Stockport or The Sportsman, Hyde.***



## OT Birthday Beer November

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 eleventh in the series comes from Millstone Brewery in Mossley. Check out their website at [www.millstonebrewery.co.uk](http://www.millstonebrewery.co.uk) (from where a chunk of this article originates)

### About the Brewery

**N**ESTLING in the Pennine foothills at Mossley you might be forgiven for expecting a broad northern accent to greet you when you telephone Millstone Brewery. Instead you will hear a friendly West Midlands twang.

Nick Boughton and Jon Hunt are the owners/brewers of Mossley's first real-ale brewery since 1914. Although both from the West Midlands, Nick and Jon decided to establish their business in the North-West. Nick had moved to Grasscroft Saddleworth in 1997 to take up a lecturing post at the University of Liverpool. Jon, formerly an engineering quality manager in Oldbury, moved North when the dream of a brewery became a reality in 2003.

In January 2003, David Porter of the Porter Brewing Company was commissioned to supply and install their brewing equipment. That summer, Nick and Jon left their respective employment to concentrate fully on the brewery. Late September to early October saw the installation of the brewing equipment. A brewery of eight-barrel capacity, along with two fermenters, provides a potential capacity of up to 15 barrels per week and plenty of scope to accommodate future expansion. The release of Millstone's first beer, Three Shires Bitter, in late October was favourably received and set the standards for future beers.

In the intervening years the brewery has gone from strength to strength, winning many awards for its wide portfolio of pale and hoppy beers (although Opening Times still hasn't abandoned its campaign for Millstone Stout...).

Beers to look out for include:

**Vale Mill (3.9%)** – a pale gold session bitter with a floral and spicy aroma building upon a crisp and refreshing taste

**Tiger Rut (4%)** – a pale and hoppy beer with a distinctive citrus / grapefruit aroma.

**True Grit (5%)** – a well-hopped strong ale with a mellow bitterness and prominent citrus notes. Has won many awards.

### About the Beer

**Twenty Five** is a pale and hoppy beer in the classic Millstone style. Just one brew has been made of this 3.8% beer. It is a pale and hoppy session beer brewed using Optic pale ale malt and three English hop varieties. First Gold, Goidings and Pilot hops have been used in this pale straw coloured ale, with crisp hoppy aromas and a seriously bitter finish. Enjoy!



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## Buxton Bottle & Cask Festival

**F**OLLOWING the success of the Altrincham Bottle & Cask Festival, held over August Bank Holiday weekend, a similar event is to be held in Buxton.

Martin Matthews of Altrincham's Le Trappiste Belgian Cafe Bar is now planning to stage the Buxton Bottle & Cask Beer Festival which will be held over two days in the town's historic Old Hall Hotel. The hotel was once host to Mary Queen of Scots and the festival will be in the Hotel's Orchestra Pit function room. The festival takes place on Friday and Saturday 20th & 21st November.

Martin Matthews of Le Trappiste says that visitors will be able to enjoy beers from micro-breweries from around the Peak District and beyond, along with Cider and Perry and an extensive range of quality offerings from Belgium, including Geuze and Trappist Ales. Martin assures us that there will be some specialist Belgian winter beers too.

Some of the beers already confirmed are the winter offerings from Dunham Massey, Winter Warmer, Bollington's Winter Reserve and Storm's Looks like Rain Dear, as well as many others, although they will not all be winter beers so there should be something for everyone

Martin and Mike Rose from the High Peak and North East Cheshire Branch of CAMRA who are assisting with the Festival are keen to source as many different beers from as many micros as possible from the around region.

There will be entertainment on both evenings of the Festival and CAMRA members can enjoy a discount on admission. Le Trappiste has set up a separate web site for the festival where the guest list will be updated on a regular basis. Please see [www.letrappiste.com/bbcfestival](http://www.letrappiste.com/bbcfestival).

## Gorton News

**A** TRADITION that had fallen by the wayside for a number of years has been successfully revived in Gorton. The Gorton Rushcart procession was brought to life once more by local man Ash "the Squire" Latham.

He and a band of helpers put together the cart behind the **Vale Cottage**; this was then paraded through the streets of Gorton starting from the **Lord Nelson**. The event was greeted with great glee and acclaim by local people who enjoyed the celebrations in the streets and all of the pubs taking part.

To mark the event in mid-September, John and Ali at the Vale Cottage put on 14 different beers across the week. All of the beers were different from their usual range of Taylor Landlord plus two other beers. John told me that two beers that went really well were a stout, and Rudgate Ruby Mild (bucking the light, hoppy bitter trend somewhat). He has been so encouraged by take-up of the beers that a similar event may well take place in December.

All of the other pubs were busy too, and cask ale was definitely a star of the show in a lot of the pubs. With enthusiasm and community spirit raised, this event will certainly be a fixture on next year's calendar. And given what Ali told me about the food at the Vale Cottage, I think OT's Pub Grub team ought to pay it a visit?

Other Gorton news is that Tony Lindsay of Robinson's **Plough** is to retire soon. He's put a lot of time into the pub over the years, so we wish him well.

## The Picturehouse

As part of a trundle round Manchester OT visited the Picturehouse. This is a new bar attached to the Band on the Wall music venue nearly opposite Bar Fringe. It has cask - Ruddles County and Old Speckled Hen were on and in good nick. Hydes Bitter was on inside the concert venue - only available for concert-goers but the Picturehouse is open to anyone. Nice to see them looking at cask and it is going very well by all accounts.





# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FIRST CLASS

From Frank Mullen, Senior Manager, The Knott:

Following Curmudgeon's thinly veiled attack on the Knott Bar's seating arrangements in Septembers Opening Times, I feel totally aggrieved at this person's constant carping about the people CAMRA are supposed to be championing. You are talking about Trafford and Hulme's PUB OF THE YEAR, for goodness sake.

Curmudgeon bemoans the lack of decent seating, and drivels on about poser's tables. As for the comment about sacrificing capacity in the interest of appearing trendy, I have news for you, Curmudgeon, we are trendy and we cater for our customer base in style. Our emphasis is on Quality Beer, Quality Food and Quality Customer Service, and from the comments we receive, we don't seem to be doing a bad job. For your information we have 22 tables and seating for over a 100 people. Appearances can somewhat deceive, can they not!

Be aware Curmudgeon, if you are not careful, you will alienate the very people who promote the causes which led to CAMRA being formed all those years ago.

*(Curmudgeon did not specify to which pub or bar he was referring, of course. Ed)*

From Peter Edwardson, Heaton Norris:

Following last month's "Curmudgeon" column criticising Tory plans to impose punitive duty on "super-strength" beers, I wrote to Chris Grayling to say this would unfairly penalise traditional products such as Robinson's Old Tom.

To his credit, he replied very promptly, saying: "Can I reassure you of one thing, though - our plans for a tighter regime for "super-strength" beers and ciders specifically exclude exemptions for traditional craft products - so small producers should not have to worry that we will inadvertently make their lives more difficult in future."

That is a welcome concession, but he didn't specifically say that Old Tom - which is made by a fairly substantial brewer - would be exempted.

*(The present Conservative policy seems to be a little imprecise as far as I can see - they want to clamp down on "super strength" beer but are making soothing noises about protecting the products of traditional brewers and cider makers. If they come to power after the next election it will be interesting to see how this all pans out. Ed)*

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# Brewery NEWS

## Bollington Takes Cheshire Double

THE Bollington Brewing Company has scooped not only the top brewing award in Cheshire but also the second prize as well.

Bollington Best, named after the brewery and the village in which it is based, has been named 2009 Champion Beer of Cheshire by CAMRA - followed closely by Oat Mill Stout from the same brewery.

The accolade puts this new, family brewing business firmly on the real ale map - just fourteen months after the first cask of First Brew - now renamed as Bollington Best - went on sale.

That first cask sold out in three hours and since then Bollington Brewery has never looked back.

The growing range of ales also includes Happy Valley (the local nickname for Bollington), Ginger Brew, Long Hop, White Nancy (named after the distinctive hilltop folly that marks Bollington's location from miles around) and new addition to the range, Damson Nights.

This year's Champion Beer award was judged at a blind tasting as part of the Nantwich beer festival and judges included eminent beer writer Pete Brown, local MP Edward Timpson, and Marc Holmes organiser of the Great British Beer Festival.



## Another Award for Dunham Massey

YET another CAMRA Beer Festival Award for John Costello of the Dunham Massey Brewery, this time at the recent Northwich Festival. Chocolate Cherry Mild was voted Beer of the Festival by the attendees from 70 different beers. This brings the total to 14 awards (seven for Beer of the Festival) since the brewery opened two years ago.

## New Brewery for Marble

AFTER a long wait, Marble Brewery has now commissioned its new, and considerably larger, brewery. Situated in a converted railway arch a short walk from the pub, the new 12-barrel plant will be used to make the higher volume Marble beers. Initially Manchester Bitter, Pint, Stout and Dobber will be brewed there while the shorter run beers will continue to be produced in the original brewery at the Marble Arch pub.

The stainless steel kit was installed by Vincent Johnson Engineering and the main elements comprise a direct fired copper, two fermenting vessels and two conditioning tanks (with room for one more of each). *Opening Times* paid an early visit and as our photo of the kit alongside Head Brewer James Campbell shows, it all looks very state of the art.



The brewing team are still getting used to all of this - the first brew was meant to be Pint but they found the new kit gave a higher extraction rate - basically the beer came out stronger than it should have done. Faced with this, the brewers used a different hop than is usual for Pint (Ruwaka rather than Pacific Gem) and the 4.4% ABV has gone on sale as 1st Brew (and rather good it is too).

We mentioned last month that the Imperial Stout, Decadence, was to reappear this year and there were rumours of some very limited edition variants. These have now been confirmed as Decadence Kriek and Decadence Frambozen, whereby the beer will be matured over whole cherries and raspberries respectively. Only available in bottle, these will be released to coincide with the National Winter Ales Festival.

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Your membership will make a difference. For just £20 a year you can help our work to promote real ale, protect consumer rights and support pubs. Benefits include a monthly newspaper, quarterly magazine, free entrance to beer festivals and discounts on books and the Good Beer Guide. Just fill in the form below and send, with a cheque (payable to CAMRA Ltd) or for Three Months free membership (for those renewing or joining by Direct Debit) complete the Direct Debit Form. All forms should be addressed to Membership Secretary, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, AL1 3LW. Alternately you can join online at [www.camra.org.uk](http://www.camra.org.uk). CAMRA newsletter *Opening Times*

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## CAMRA Calling - What's On In The Local CAMRA Branches

### Stockport & South Manchester

Branch Contact: *Pete Farrand 01625 425734*  
[pete.farrand@googlemail.com](mailto:pete.farrand@googlemail.com)  
Branch website: [www.ssmcamra.org.uk](http://www.ssmcamra.org.uk)

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Crown, Buxton Road, Great Moor. Starts 8pm

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup>** - Heald Green & Cheadle Hulme Stagger: Meet 7.30pm Griffin, Wilmslow Rd; 8.30pm Ryecroft Arms, Turves Rd.

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup>** - Visit to Robinsons Brewery to present Beer of Festival Runner-up award. Meet brewery 7pm. Book with John Clarke on 0161 477 1973

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>** - Pub of the Month presentation to Lord Nelson, Gorton. From 8pm.

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December** - Branch Meeting - Arden Arms, Millgate Stockport - includes Christmas Quiz and free mince pies. Starts 8pm.

### High Peak & NE Cheshire

Branch Contact: *Mike Rose 07986 458517*  
[mikewrose@gmail.com](mailto:mikewrose@gmail.com)

**Monday 9<sup>th</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Hare & Hounds, Otterspool. Starts 8.30pm

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>** - Buxton Social Ramsays Bar, Buckingham, Hotel. From 8.30pm

### Trafford & Hulme

Branch Contact: *John Ison 0161 962 7976*  
Branch website: [www.thcamra.org.uk](http://www.thcamra.org.uk)

**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>** - Branch meeting at the Old Market Tavern, Old Market Square, Altrincham plus Celebrate 500+ membership. Starts 7.30pm

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>** - Sale Moor survey. Meet 8pm Legh Arms, 9pm The Temple, 9.45 Wetherspoons J.P Joule.

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup>** - Altrincham survey. Meet 8pm Hare and Hounds, Shaftesbury Avenue, 8.45pm The Old Hall, 9.30pm Barringtons, finish Malt Shovels.

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup>** - Chorlton Challenge. Meet 1pm Hillary Step plus 16 other outlets.

**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December** - Branch meeting at The Orange Tree, Old Market Square, Altrincham. Starts 8pm.

### North Manchester

Branch Contact: *Dave Hallows 07983 944992*  
[davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk)

**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup>** - Atherton visit. Old Isaacs, Market St, 8pm, Pendle Witch, Warbuton Place, 9pm.

**2-15 Nov. Local Pubs Week** -12 Nov. 11 consecutive years in Good Beer Guide award presentation, Jolly Angler, Ducie St, M'cr City Centre, 8pm. -14 Nov. Beer Miles Tankard Competition Mystery Crawl. Register at Piccadilly pub, Piccadilly, M'cr City Centre, 1pm, £1 per head, teams 1-5.

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Unicorn, Church St, M'cr City Centre. Starts 8pm.

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup>** - Worsley Village Social: Barton Arms, Stablefold, 8pm.

**Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December** - Dec. Social: Black Lion, Blackfriars St/Chapel St, Salford. From 8pm

### Macclesfield & East Cheshire

Branch Contact: *Tony Icke 01625 861833*  
[contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk](mailto:contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk)

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup>** - Macclesfield Survey Part 2; Baths at 7.30pm and then onwards.

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December** - Branch AGM at Coach & Four, Wilmslow (upstairs room). Starts 8pm. All attend please

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