

November 2010

O
TIMES



Opening
THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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Foreign Beer Special

– pages 12 & 13





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November's Pub of the Month is the Hind's Head in Heaton Chapel, Stockport. Jim Flynn is a long-time fan of this popular pub and explains why it won.



Although the Hinds Head is an upmarket pub with excellent food unlike many such pubs it is still unashamedly very much a proper pub and a community local to boot - it recently sponsored the carnival in the Manchester Road Park opposite.

Although built only 20 years ago it gives you the impression of having been around longer. Set its own grounds the whole feel of the Hinds Head as you approach is of a country pub. Inside the décor and furnishings give a modern yet warm and welcoming feel. Although relatively open plan there are enough distinct areas with nooks and crannies to allow those who want to feel secluded to do so if they wish.

Much of the credit for all this is down to the current owners and staff and in particular Stuart Kirkham the licensee who has pulled the pub up by its boot straps since taking over in 2007. In the 1990s the pub was taken to the heights by the late great Alan Preston but after he retired the place dropped into the doldrums. However since taking over Stuart and his team have completely refurbished from top to bottom, brought the quality of the meals back to their former glory and focused once again on cask beer.

The beer range is excellent with the house beer being Jennings Cumberland Ale and normally three guest beers, one of which is normally Taylors Landlord, all on handpump. They run a voting system to enable regulars to vote for the cask ale they would like to see on the bar.

So why not join the local CAMRA branch to celebrate the award which will be presented to Stuart and his staff on Thursday, 25th November when, I am sure, a great night will be enjoyed by all.

The pub is on the 328 bus route from Edgeley and the centre of Stockport or only 2 minutes walk from the A6 down Denby Lane or five minutes down Manchester Road from the 42A bus route from Reddish, Heaton Moor, Heaton Mersey, Didsbury etc. Heaton Chapel station is less than 10 minutes walk away.



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COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

Opening Times - Comment

This month we are turning our attention to foreign beer, primarily from Europe and notably from Belgium and the Netherlands. More and more pubs and bars are stocking European beers and indeed Altrincham has turned into "Belgian beer central" with no less than three Belgian beer bars in about 100 metres of each other. Imports are one of the big growth areas on the British beer scene so clearly these beers are here to stay. For those of us who appreciate good beer in its widest sense this is good news indeed.

One or two siren voices have questioned last month's focus on cider and perry. "We're the Campaign for Real Ale" they cry. "Why are we talking about cider?" Such criticism misses the point. Long ago CAMRA voted to put campaigning for real cider and perry, and campaigning for pubs, on an equal standing with campaigning for real ale. So in actual fact we are really the Campaign for Real Ale, Cider, Perry and Pubs. It just doesn't trip off the tongue very well, so it's CAMRA for short. *Opening Times* will continue to focus on all of CAMRA's activities and makes no apologies for that.

Opening Times - Information

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Stagger...

Burnage & Heaton Mersey with Mark McConachie

INTREPID as ever, our Stagger this month followed the fortunes of England in their World Cup First Round encounter versus Algeria. It was the Friday where the whole country must have been watching football on telly. Well, not us, we headed to Burnage to begin our trawl of the pubs of that district and adjoining Heaton Mersey.

We started at the **Victoria** on the corner of Burnage Lane and Mauldeth Road just as the match had kicked-off. It was not as busy as I had feared; I thought everywhere would be rammed, but instead it was just quite busy. Plenty of handpulls advertised Boddies Bitter, but there was none to be had tonight, only smooth beer. It may just be me, but this seems to happen to me every time I visit the Victoria.

Disappointed, we left for the nearby **Farmers Arms** also on Burnage Lane. This former Hydes house is now under the control of the Hennigan empire (branching out from their Levenshulme base). It's a smart two room place with Vault to the right, and Lounge to the left. The Vault was full of excited folk engrossed in the game, whilst the Lounge was a little quieter. A feature of one corner is a series of images and articles about Burnage rock band, Oasis. Good, attentive service brought us pints of Holts seasonal beer, Golden Boot. An enjoyable light-coloured beer which we all thought was good. Overall, a very nice pub, well turned out and an improvement on its latter days with Hydes.

A ten minute walk, passing the keg-only **Green End**, brought us to Hydes' **Albion**. A large house set on a street corner. I expected it to be

thronged with people, yet it was just ticking over. The main room was in semi-darkness to



assist the football viewers, the other rooms were devoid of people. The pub has a comfy, lived-in appearance complemented by friendly and chatty service and jocular locals all adding to its charm. Beers were Hydes Light and Original. We seemed to prefer the Original over the Light although both were on reasonable form. The football remained resolutely scoreless.

A few streets down is the **Sun** in **September**, a Sam Smith's house. The pub is a former mansion converted to pub use some years ago. I believe the story goes that builders discovered old plans from a century before of the building when it had a faux-Indian Raj decor to it, so they decided to theme the pub structure with that loose theme in mind. They gave it a fitting name as well,

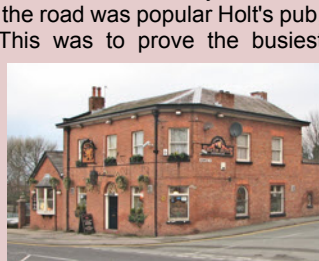
With the mansion came impressive grounds to the front. Mature trees and well-tended lawns lead you to the entrance. The Sun proved to be a welcome World Cup-free zone. Pleasant surroundings, convivial atmosphere and most welcoming service. The Raj theme is quite muted, with really only the doors and etched windows echoing a setting sun. The three rooms are not as large as the exterior would suggest, but there's plenty of room nonetheless. The cheapest beer of the night too! It scored well with our party. Which is more than the footballers could manage it seems.



A fair ten-minute walk took us into Stockport Borough next, and to the **Dog & Partridge** on Didsbury Road. The first of our Heaton Mersey pubs. This was the busiest of the pubs we entered. With minutes to go in the game, excitement was high amongst the pub-goers. The D&P has quite a modern look to its decor, with low sofas and other relaxing furniture giving a lounge feel to the two large rooms that make it up. The handpumps for cask are badly sited though, hidden somewhat towards the rear of the pub; not easily seen if you enter from the front door and its pergola extension. As we were served our glasses of Hancocks HB (nobody tried the other beer - Flowers IPA), the final whistle sounded to end the game that was a nothing-nothing farce. Saddened and disconsolate people began to drift out of the building leaving us to enjoy the pub. The Hancocks could have been better, but there you have it.



Next along the road was popular Holt's pub, the **Griffin**. This was to prove the busiest post-match venue of the evening. Obviously many fickle TV-followers leave once full-time is called, not here however. Every one of the five rooms was alive with folk and chatter; I suspect the pretty garden area would also have been busy too had I looked. Our group clustered itself round a vacant table in the front snug to enjoy Holt's north Manchester brews - Mild and Bitter; both scored well with our party. The Golden Boot seasonal ale was on as well,



although none of the party had it. The Griffin is a pub of much character and many original features - etched glass and an ornate mahogany bar being just two. The many rooms allow for drinkers with differing tastes and requirements to be accommodated. The rear room is decorated with football photos from teams national and local.

On we trod then to the seldom-visited **Frog & Railway**. I say seldom, because until very, very recently the pub did no cask beer at all, indeed it had not sold any for many a year. This appears to have followed a change of management and a refurbishment that took place in May. Good to see three cask beers on the bar now though - Greene King IPA, Abbot Ale, and Old Speckled Hen. Whilst the Abbot went untried, we enjoyed the Old Speckled Hen, but the IPA was very poor (I'm sure this was a blip on the night). The Railway is a good deal deeper than it appears from the outside. A plush, low-ceilinged interior with good mood-lighting sets it off very well as a pleasant place to stay awhile. Various comfortable areas have been created to provide intimacy too. Going to the rear of the pub, where many people dining seemed to be (although you may eat at any table, it seems) is an outside drinking area that abuts the car park. The Railway impressed me, and could be one to watch cask-wise.

Our final call was to the nearby **Crown** (entrance located just off Didsbury Road, on Vale Close). This small area is one of Heaton Mersey's oldest settlements, with the low cottages that lead down to the valley and the Crown reflecting that history. Some steps lead you to a small,



shaded patio drinking area, whilst beside that is the entrance to this Robinson's house. Low-ceilinged, cottagey, comfy, and possibly the only pub that has a village feel about it. In the past I have often been given the impression that new people or visitors here were unwelcome, well this does not appear to be the case under the current stewardship. All now is pleasant, friendly and most hospitable. Two rooms are served from a central bar, the left, lower room is mostly for diners, whilst the right side is the bar with a tiny alcove-like annex off that. The whole is decorated in a warm and relaxing manner. A most comfortable way to end the evening. The Robbies beers were Hatters, Unicorn, and the seasonal ale, 4-4-2 (how appropriate). All were sampled, and all scored very well. To sum things up, I think we had better entertainment than those watching the England first-eleven? Perhaps there's a moral there?

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Pub News

Shaw Heath Cask Gain

One pub that hadn't sold cask beer for years and years was the **Plough** on Shaw Heath, Stockport. It is therefore particularly pleasing to report the pub's return to the real ale fold.



This is down to new licensee Gill Deane who has taken on the Enterprise Inns house having previously run the Queen's Head on Underbank. The Plough had been closed for a short while before Gill arrived, and before then had seemed to struggle for some time. The pub is therefore having a spruce up and part of this work has seen the installation of two new handpumps and beer lines. Gill's gamble in reinstating cask beer seems to have paid off with the Copper Dragon Best Bitter selling well; when *Opening Times* called it was on absolute top form. Well worth a visit.

New at Four Heaton



We welcome Mike Flanagan and his sister Amanda who have recently taken over the lease of Hydes' **Four Heaton** on Didsbury Road, Norris Bank. Mike has started opening from 12 noon every day and has introduced a number of initiatives to encourage trade. Food is now available seven days a week from 12-5, including a £5 offer for burger, chips and a pint.

Wednesday nights feature bingo and a quiz, with supper provided, while there is karaoke on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons from 4pm, and Saturday nights see singers in the Northern Soul and Motown style.

The only cask beer currently available is Hydes Original, but when "OT" called it was in good nick. Although the exterior of the pub still smacks of 1970s modernism, it is surprisingly pleasant and comfortable once you get inside.

Mike says that trade is steadily building up and the old regulars are returning.

Northenden Gain

Lounge About bar on the main drag through Northenden has two cask beers in the form of rotating guest beers on handpump and Westons Cider also on a handpump. We think this is the first cask beer outlet on the main high street for quite a while (if ever before) and joins the **Farmers Arms** as cask beer outlets. Let's hope that the other bars that have sprung up along the high street take note. The **Crown** in the old village near the police station however is now looking a little sad and bereft of cask

Village News

A new bar, the **Eagle**, opened in Manchester's Gay Village recently. Nothing unusual there, you may say. Well, this place is different. For a start it's selling cask beer. Yes, Hydes Original at a mere £1.95. The Eagle only opens in the evenings; it's a cellar bar situated behind Central Coach Station on Bloom Street (a few doors away from Paddy's Goose). An interesting place with a comfy-cum-rustic decor that makes for a nice place to visit. The lighting level is **very** low however. It will take you some minutes before you are able to see the whole room



More Changes

The **Shady Oak** on Redford Drive in Bramhall was closed in mid-October with a notice outside that it is to reopen soon under new management.

There's an interesting development at the **Royal Oak** on Commercial Road in Hazel Grove. After a period of the pub being a 'Business Opportunity' it has been taken over by Craig Torevell, son of a former long standing licensee Bill, who ran the pub for about 25 years until 2002. Bill is helping out with the running of the pub

In Stockport Town Centre the **Stockport Arms** on St Petersgate looks to have finally closed for good as a pub. It has struggled for years and is now being converted to "David's Coffee House & Eatery". Cask beer had not

featured at the pub in any serious way for years although the disused handpumps remained on the bar to the end.

Staying in Stockport Town Centre, the **Thatched House** on Churchgate has reopened after a short period of closure. The opening hours are currently Monday-Thursday 5pm - 11pm, Friday 4pm - 1.30am, Saturday 2pm - 1.30am and Sunday 4pm - 11.30pm.



There were no real ales when *Opening Times* called (a notice outside has been promising "cask ales back soon" for several weeks) - a notice on the handpumps said there were "no beers on as the brewery are changing the lines on all the beers" (we assume this is actually the pubco, still Punch Taverns as far as we are aware). There's no indication of how long this will take but if and when cask is back here we'll let you know.

In Offerton there is good news about the **Puss In Boots** on Nangreave Road. The Robinson's tenancy was taken on by the Almond family in September and after a major refurbishment it is scheduled to reopen this month. You can get more information here: <http://www.almond-pubs.co.uk/puss-in-boots/about>.

The Almond family already run three very successful pubs - the **Three Bears** in Hazel Grove; the **Hesketh** in Cheadle Hulme and the **Fletchers Arms** in Denton. The latter is a former winner of the Robinson's Bar & Cellar competition which is an indication of the quality the Almonds bring to their operations. More on this after the reopening.

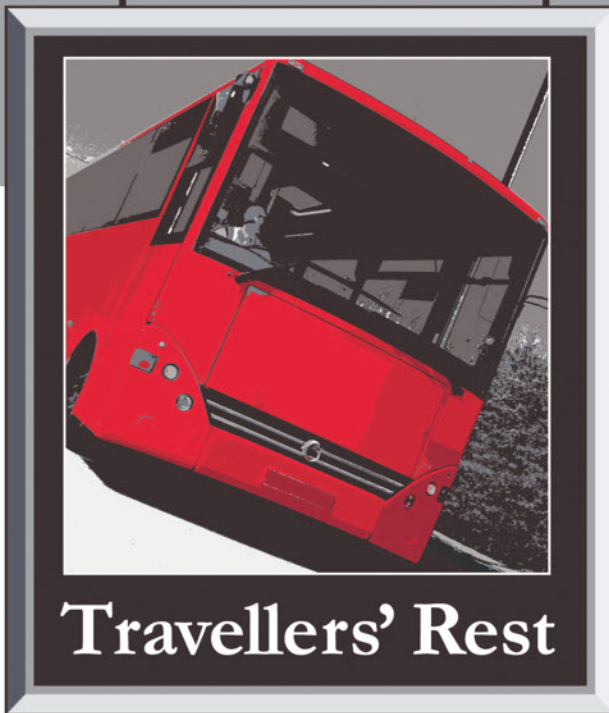
Rumours Scotched

A perennial feature of the pub scene is the rumours that fly around from time to time. Two recent ones can be put to bed.

Firstly the **Angel** off Rochdale Road in Manchester, this excellent free house, currently North Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year, is very close to the huge redevelopment site that will be the new Co-op headquarters. Inevitably reports followed that it was for the chop. Total cobblers - the pub is entirely unaffected by the scheme.

In Cheadle the **George & Dragon** is a large closed and boarded pub. Holts were reported to have bought it. Not so. It seems they did have a look at the place but decided it wasn't for them.

More Pub News on Page 11...



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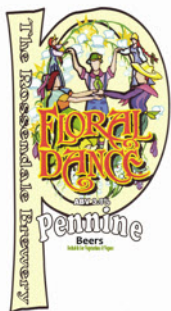
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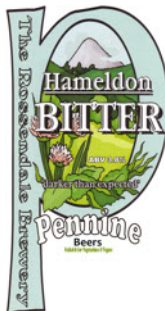


*The Griffin Inn, 84-86, Hud Rake,
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Contact Geoff or Shane on: 01706 21 40 21*



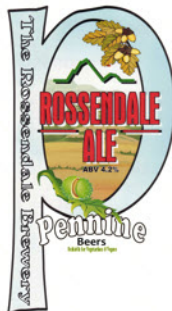
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Railway Sleeper
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Pitch Porter
5%

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



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.***

Pub News and the Chorlton Challenge

The Chorlton Challenge

November sees the return of Trafford & Hulme CAMRA's "Chorlton Challenge" writes *John O'Donnell* - the annual sampling of all of the pubs in one of our most vibrant areas in one weekend. When the first Challenge was organised a few years ago, there were around 14 real ale pubs in Chorlton - this year there are 23. Therefore, in the interests of responsible drinking (and a more realistic pace), this year the challenge will start on the evening of Friday 26 and continue through to Saturday 27.



Friday night will commence with dinner at **The Sedge Lynn** @ 6pm, before heading across the precinct car park to the **Spread Eagle** and **Lloyds Hotel**. A short walk to Chorlton Green will take us to our new brew-pub the **Horse & Jockey** at 8.15pm, before heading on to the **Bowling Green**, the **Parlour**, the **Famous Trevor** and finally the **Beech**.

Saturday begins at Noon at Chorlton's oft forgotten real ale pub, the **Christie Fields** on Barlow Moor Road opposite Southern Cemetery. We'll then jump on a bus to Chorlton Bus station, checking out **Escape** bar opposite before heading to **Duffy's Bar** for 1.30pm. Then it is **Argyles**, our newest outlet **My Place**, **Charango** and the legendary **Marble Beer House**. As we reach **Pi** around 4pm, the pace will slow for those who wish to eat. **Iguana** is the most northerly point on our tour before we make our way across the tram tracks to Wilbraham Road for another chance to eat at **Oddest** (5.45pm) and **The Bar**. Then it's homeward bound down the "Chorlton Strip" calling at the **Nook**, the **Gallery** (formerly Abode), **Elektrik** and finally **Dulcimer**.

Not everybody has the time or constitution to take up the full challenge, even those joining for an hour or two will be most welcome. If you can't make one of the timed points listed, call or text 07879 880972 for whereabouts in between points.

Magnet Celebrates

This month the **Magnet** Wellington Road North, Stockport, celebrates its first anniversary as a multi-beer free house. To mark this milestone the pub will be having a

celebration night on Saturday 13th. The upstairs function room will be opened up for the event. Sarah Bergin is to brew four Cellar Rat beers to mark the occasion and there will be a complimentary hotpot supper. A date for the diary we think.

White Hart, Hazel Grove

Last month we suggested that the White Hart no longer sold cask ale on the basis that no handpumps had been seen on the bar. Fortunately we qualified our comments with the proviso that this might not mean no cask ales as in the past the White Hart had used electric pumps. So it has proved to be – real ale continues to be sold here and we are pleased to put the record straight.

Chorlton Latest

Just when you think Chorlton must be saturated with real ale outlets, by the time you are reading this, yet another one will have opened. The former **Lounge Bar** on Wilbraham Road has been rebranded "**My Place Bar & Grill**". As OT went to press, a single handpump had been installed on the bar and was awaiting connection. The beer to be served hasn't been finalised yet, but something from the Moorhouse's range is mooted.

Further along Wilbraham Road, three more handpumps are in use. The **Nook's** second pump is now being used for ale, having relegated the real cider & perry to barrels on the back bar. **Oddest's** growing reputation as a quality ale house will be further enhanced by the recent installation of two new handpumps making a total of six. This can only be good news for local brewers - **Oddest** have one of the strongest commitments to local micro-breweries of any free house in the area; it is not unusual to see "LocAle" headers on all of their handpumps



New Face at the Crescent

There was quite a sudden change of management at the **Crescent** in Salford last month. Will Brown left and his replacement is experienced beer man Steve Wise.

Steve has had a good grounding in the pub trade and is in fact the step-son of Ken Mallion, long-time licensee of the Fletcher Moss in Didsbury, a Good Beer Guide regular. Steve learned his craft here and elsewhere, and when he was approached to take over at

the Crescent he leapt at the chance to make his mark on this famous cask ale outlet.

Few changes are planned. The beer range may settle down to a combination of fixed pumps featuring the beers of just one brewery and guest pumps ringing the changes. The range of changing guest ciders and perries will also continue to feature. The quarterly beer festivals will also be continuing with the first planned to feature champion beers from Lancashire.

Food will be available again from this month, and the curry nights and the chip barm nights will continue as before. Live music will also be back on Fridays and Saturdays.

All in all it sounds as though the Crescent is in safe and capable hands.

MFDF Winners

Good to see three *Opening Times* outlets picking up major gongs in this year's Manchester Food & Drink Festival Awards.

Best Bar was the increasingly impressive **Common** on Edge Street, a modern bar marrying cask beers with a growing range of foreign craft ales with style and confidence.



We asked manager Will France for a comment and he told us "I can't say it's not been hard work since we re-opened as an extended version of Common, but the award is the icing on the cake for what has been a great year so far. Thanks to the staff as they help maintain the great atmosphere, quality beverages, delicious food and good times that we believe is so important in making a bar great".

Pub of the Year was the **Marble Arch** on Rochdale Road, for which we can only say – about bloody time! Architecturally stunning with award-winning Marble beers and superb food from an expert kitchen team the Marble Arch just about ticks every box when you're looking for a great pub.

Last of the trio is the **Mark Addy** winning the Newcomer of the Year award. Yes, we know the Mark Addy has been around for years but John Mooney and Robert Owen Brown have turned it into a rather different animal – a first rank gastro-pub with great beer to boot. Local micros such as Marble and Boggart often feature and real cider or perry is now also available. The food is nothing short of spectacular. John Mooney is "absolutely thrilled" with the award telling *Opening Times* "you have contributed and your readers have contributed to our success. Onwards and Upwards".

Foreign Beer Special:



Altrincham – Belgian Beer Pubs Capital of Britain?

That seems an unlikely claim to make but now with three serious Belgian beer outlets within 100 metres of each other Altrincham can lay a serious claim to be the top Belgian beer town in the country. All offer table service, nibbles with your beer and a serious commitment to the beers from one of Europe's top brewing nations.

The claim has been made possible by the welcome return of **Le Trappiste**, the town's original Belgian beer bar, in new and expanded premises at 18 Shaw's Road.



The new Le Trappiste opened its doors in mid-September and bears a striking similarity to its former incarnation nearby on Greenwood Street – the warm red decor, the first floor drinking area and the walls decorated with all manner of Belgian memorabilia, beery and otherwise, will be a familiar and welcome sight to Le Trappiste's former regulars.

For owner Martin Matthews this has been a labour of love, and despite the similarities with his old bar, there are notable differences, too. It's considerably bigger for one thing, and even has a sheltered beer garden at the back.



appearance of the bar.

On the beer front there are no fewer than 156 Belgian beers on sale and these cover all the major beer styles. Trappist and abbey beers are there in depth – ultimately the full trappist range will be sold (no Westvleteren at the moment), and the abbey beers are top of the range; St Bernardus (full range), Het Kappittel, Val Dieu and St Feuillien are all present and correct. There are good lambics, too, with Oud Beersel, Cantillon, Girardin (Black Label Gueuze) and Boon Mariage Parfait all available. You will also find beers from top producers such as De Ranke (almost the full range), Alvinne, Slaapmutske, Verhaeghe, the list goes on.

If Belgian beer isn't your thing then cask and bottled beers from Bollington and Dunham Massey breweries are available and there is

even bottled cider from Gwatkins, Thatchers and Dunkertons.

This is a welcome return for Le Trappiste and is a must visit for anyone with an interest in Belgian beers.

About 100 metres away, half way down Greenwood Street is **Mort Subite**, a cellar bar beneath the Fat Cat café bar. The words "cellar bar" scarcely do justice to the elegant, fin-de-siecle décor and atmosphere that prevails here. It's owned and run by Wyn Reece, the original owner of Le Trappiste, and another dedicated Belgian beer man, although Mort Subite styles itself as a European beer bar.



The 290 strong beer list includes about 150 Belgian beers in a range similar, but not identical, to that at Le Trappiste. The draught range is often interesting here – when OT last dropped by De Ranke Saison de Dottingies was on tap.

Alongside the Belgian list are about 140 other beers. These include specialities from the UK (lots of stuff from Brew Dog including the bonkersly strong Sink the Bismarck and Tactical Nuclear Penguin), the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and a small but interesting range of Italian micro-brewed beers.

Halfway between Le Trappiste and Mort is the prosaically named **Belgian Bar**. With its upstairs drinking area, warm orange walls and memorabilia, this bears a striking resemblance to Le Trappiste, which is unsurprising as this is the latter's former premises.



There are between 130 and 150 Belgian beers on sale here, again with strength across the whole gamut of Belgian styles. The menu boasts that by Christmas they hope to have available every beer featured in the book "100 Belgian Beers to Try Before You Die". A bold aim, and if it comes to pass some real rarities will be making an appearance. A word about pricing here – this seems to vary between the give away (Drie Fonteinen Vintage Gueuze shown at £3.75) and top whack (De Ranke Guldenberg at £5.45 compared to £3.90 for the same beer at Mort Subite). Nevertheless this is still well worth a visit



More Bars, Pubs and Shops

Belgian and other foreign beer is quite easy to track down these days as many free houses sell one or two. Many of these are what could be termed the "usual suspects" from multinational brewers. However some pubs and bars do that little bit extra.

In Stockport the **Crown** and the **Magnet** both have small but well put together ranges, with the Magnet



having some good American beers. Perhaps the best pub in Stockport for foreign beer, though, is the **Railway** on Portwood, which has sold a good range of Belgian and German beers for some years now.

Many of the Chorlton bars sell some decent European beers with perhaps **Pi** being the pick of the bunch. In the City Centre the **Knott** on Deansgate, the **Marble Arch** on Rochdale Road, and the **Crescent** on Salford Crescent all have decent offerings. **Sand Bar** on Grosvenor Street at All Saints has long sold a variety of European beers with particular strength in German beers. In the Northern Quarter, **Common** on Edge Street, which is developing quite a beery interest, and recently held an American afternoon which included a tasting co-hosted by the editor of this publication, is "one to watch".

However two places stand out. In Salford the **New Oxford** has something like 120 Belgian (and a few



Dutch) beers in the fridges behind the bar with strength in depth across the whole gamut of the Belgian beer spectrum. There's usually a decent range on tap, too.

In the Northern Quarter, the Marble Brewery owned **57 Thomas Street** features 46 Belgian and 22 German beers in a well chosen range. The Belgians include good beers from the likes of De Ranke, De la Senne, St Bernardus and St Feuillien.

For taking home there are one or two shops that sell a decent range of foreign beers, although none has yet stepped up to the mark to fill the gap left following the closure of the Belgian Belly in Chorlton. However **Carringtons** in Chorlton and Didsbury always have a good range which can include some real bargains. In Bramhall the **Bottle Stop** on Acre Lane also has a well thought out range of bottled beers from Belgium, Germany and the UK.



Festivals, Bars & News

Beer Festival Focus

Brussels and Amsterdam are both about one hour's flight from Manchester so a trip to one of the many beer festivals held in Belgium or the Netherlands is easy to arrange.

Usually run by Zythos and Pint, respectively the Belgian and Dutch equivalents of CAMRA, regular visitors to UK beer festivals will find much that is familiar at the Belgian and Dutch equivalents. The major differences are the glass sizes (usually either 15 or 20cl, although the line is often a comfortable distance from the top of the glass!) and the staffing – at Belgian festivals in particular the bars are often staffed by brewers and other brewery staff (like *Slaapmutske's Dany de Smet*, seen below at the *Bruges beer festival*)



Perhaps the highest profile beer festival held in either country is the annual **Zythos Beer Festival**, held in late February / early March in St Niklaas, near Antwerp. Arguably the Belgian equivalent of the Great British Beer Festival, it gets very crowded and here at *Opening Times* we prefer one or two others.

Bruges & Bruxellensis

Having just marked its fourth outing, the **Bruges Beer Festival** now almost rivals the Zythos event in the number of breweries and beers available. This year 68 breweries and beer firms exhibited no fewer than 282 beers.



What however clinches it for this festival is the spectacular location. Bruges itself is a famously attractive town and the festival takes place in perhaps its most famous landmark, the Halletoren in the Markt (*pictured above*). Entering on the right you enter a courtyard, often filled with tables and brewery umbrellas during the festival, and ascending to the first floor the festival itself takes place in a medieval beamed gallery (*pictured below*).

The range of beers was truly exceptional this year with many brewers premiering new beers and the Zythos group running their own lambic and trappist beer stalls – the former sold a huge range including the new, and rare, Timmermans Oud Gueuze and Oud Kriek, while the trappist bar is one of the few in Belgium that has a special dispensation to sell the superb Wesvleteren beers. Another feature of note is that an increasing number of the brewers sell their bottled beers to take away, and this can lead to some exceptional bargains.



This year Bruges Beer Festival was held in mid-September, next year it may be moving to a November date. This is due to be announced on the website (<http://www.brugsbierfestival.be/>) next month.

Bruxellensis is admittedly something of an unknown quantity at the moment as we have not yet been able to visit. The reason for this is that it's not taken place for two years, and the reason for that is the people who organise it have been busy setting up their own brewery, the well-regarded Brasserie De La Senne. **Bruxellensis** is very highly regarded as a festival that features some of the very best craft ale makers from around Europe. They have promised it will take place in 2011. We will let you know if and when it does.

Borefts & Bokbier

The Netherlands hosts numerous attractive beer festivals – the sometimes elusive Meibockfestival, a celebration of Spring beers, is worth seeking out, but two of the best are very contrasting affairs.



The annual **Bokbier Festival**, the main event run by Dutch beer organisation Pint, is now in its 33rd year and takes place on the last weekend in October in Amsterdam. The venue is the famous Beurs van Berlage, the old stock exchange whose red brick bulk



dominates the Damrak in the city centre. It's a spectacular example of the Amsterdam school of architecture and the colonnaded main hall makes the perfect setting for this flagship festival.

Here the bars are staffed by Pint members and almost every Dutch brewery is represented with their Bokbier. Traditional Dutch bokbiers are at least 6.5% ABV, dark and malt accented. However with the growth of the Dutch micro brewing scene, the newcomers do what newcomers inevitably do and play around with the style, and so the beers present tend to fly off the style guidelines in all directions – and are none the worse for that.

By contrast with the venerable Bokbier Festival, the **Borefts Bier Festival**, hosted by the De Molen micro brewery, out in the sticks (and under a windmill!) at Bodegraven (about 40 minutes by train from Amsterdam) has only been going for two years.



However in that short space of time the Borefts Bier Festival has become one of the major destinations for European beer lovers. The De Molen brewery has already made a formidable reputation for itself, primarily for a range of stunning imperial stouts, but for their beer festival other top European micros were invited along, including Manchester's very own Marble Brewery (*Colin Stronge and James Campbell are pictured right on the Marble bar*)



Among the other brewers present was up and coming Dutch micro Emelisse whose beers impress more and more – of note was a hoppy Double IPA (9%) and an Imperial Russian Stout aged in a Bowmore whisky barrel (11.5%). Amongst the others were Haandbryggeriet from Norway and Midtfyns Bryghus from Denmark – both of which also have a Manchester connection as their kits were installed by Dave Porter, owner of Bury's Outstanding Brewery.

The next Borefts Bier Festival is likely to take place in late September next year. Marble have been invited back, along with another major British micro. Look for updates on the brewery website at <http://www.brouwerijdemolen.nl/index.php>.

ELECTRIK

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- Fuzzy Duck
- Hawkshead
- Hornbeam
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- Ludlow
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- Osetts
- Phoenix
- Prospect
- Riverhead
- Rosendale
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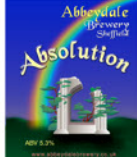
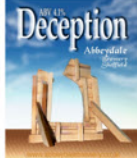

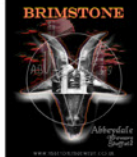

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Specials for November 2010

Illumination ABV 4.8%
Strong pale beer, lots of aroma and flavour from the Marynka hops and a lasting bitter finish.

Dr Morton's Eurocrat ABV 4.1%
Pale, medium bodied beer. Hints of lime and elderflower, and a bitter finish.

... and an extra Dr Morton's seasonal special

Horrible Skellington Stout ABV 4.9%
Strong, dark stout, full of rich dark flavours with a hint of liquorice.

High Peak Pub Scene

Frank Wood with Pubs News from High Peak & North East Cheshire CAMRA plus Robin Wignall's monthly round-up of the Peak District Pub scene

Pub News with Frank Wood

I made a long overdue visit to the **Royal Oak**, Glossop in the last week of September and was pleasantly surprised at finding Jackie Madden back in charge. She formerly had the pub before going to Glossop Cricket Club as stewardess but has now returned. The frontage looks very smart with newly erected, raised decking which gives a better view over the hills, and its partly covered too. Inside, it is much the same, though there is an imminent re-decoration due by the time you read this. Now the beers. Black Sheep Bitter, Wells Bombardier and Taylor's Landlord were the three beers on sale and the latter two were tried and very good.

Meals are served Wednesday-Sunday 12-8pm, with a special pensioners special deal at £4.95. Another attraction is a monthly live band on a Saturday. Most Stagecoach 236 and 237 buses turn round outside the pub though beware - the last back down into Glossop is at 9.02pm.

Further down into Glossop, the **Manor Inn** on High Street East has closed its doors. The word is that it is being used as an overspill to the nearby Manor Surgery round the corner. A former Boddingtons pub, popular until recent years, it's another example of a small community pub that will be no more.

Better news at Gamesley however, with the re-opening on Friday 1st October of the **Melandra** on Winsters Mews (Enterprise). No sign of cask ale when I peered through the windows that morning, though the landlord had intimated he may put on cask John Smiths, that previously sold under the last management. It brings Gamesley's pub total back up to three, after the **Old Tup** recently re-opened as the **Bluebell**. The other pub on the estate of course is Hydes' **Centurion**.

Glossop Perimeter Walk

On a Sunday walk of the perimeter of Glossop in late September, I called into the **Cheshire Cheese** at Broadbottom where the Thwaites Dark Mild was on good form. Thwaites bitter was also on sale in the pub, under a recent management change.

Up the road, the **Wagon** had Robinsons Dizzy Blonde and Unicorn on sale, the former being on good form. At Mottram, the **Pack Horse** was shut (it has been shut for several months) as was the **Junction** at Mottram lights (it has planning permission granted for conversion to flats and houses, including some on the car park). The **White Hart**, once a free house, very highly respected, and a regular in the Good Beer Guide for a few years, only now has Lees Bitter (smooth) on sale.

Reaching the **Roe Cross** at Mottram cutting, the beer that immediately took my eye was called Terry Robinsons Shanghai Nights. The bar staff could not tell me anything about the beer and there is nothing I have been able to find out about it. The pump clip did look a

little "self made", so I can only presume it's a new micro-brewery. The beer was very nice anyway, so much so, that I forgot to note which the other beers were on sale!

Taking the back paths down into Hollingworth, I noted that the **Royal Oak** has been and still is, firmly shut and looking quite unkept. Maybe it's another shut for good? At the **Organ**, the Robinsons beers were on smooth flow, so I passed on through the old John Waltons factory yard and up to Hadfield. The **Lamp** was also firmly shut; it has been for some months now. The future is looking none too certain here either.

The **Victoria** at the top of Brosscroft had no real ale on sale, so I carried on up to Padfield and the **Peels Arms**. The Peels usually has a choice of beers on offer and today was no different. Theakstons Bitter was accompanied by two guest beers.

At this stage, the other 50 or so walkers on this charity walk for "Help for Hero's", that I had led and routed so far, walked back over to Glossop to the **Corner Cupboard** on the Glossop High Street. The Corner always has a Thwaites seasonal beer on offer and as there is normally only one cask beer available, it moves fairly fast. It is always worth calling in to support, as previous to last year the pub had been caskless for a number of years.

Hayfield Octoberfest

Finally this month, I visited the **Royal Hotel** Beer

Festival in Hayfield on 3rd October. As always the beers were on form in this regular



Good Beer

Guide pub, with extra beers on the bar and another rack of handpumps in the function room at the side. Beers from Hornbeam and Holdens were among my highlights of the session. The highlight of the Sunday afternoon was the local band, Gene Therapy and the Chromazones who were popular enough to pack out the function room all afternoon.

Robin Wignall's Peak Practice

Early October will have seen the Marston's Ale Festival come and go. As well as an enhanced range of beers from the various breweries in the Marston's empire ales from other breweries were made available to licensees for a short period. This time the list included Hook Norton Hooky Dark, Bateman's Salem Porter, York Terrier, Titanic Engine Room, Castle Rock Harvest Pale and more. At the **Shepherds'** in Whaley Bridge, Sue Greenwood was all set to go with these once they were ready.

North East Excursion

Peak Practice spent a few days walking along the Northumberland coast in September and discovered some good pubs and excellent locally brewed beer. The Red Lion at Alnmouth had Wylam Bitter and Red Lion Festival Beer from local microbrewery High House Farm. This latter was ahead of the pub's first beer festival in early October. At Embleton Grey's Inn also had beers from Wylam and High House Farm. Perhaps the best of the Good Beer Guide pubs was the **Old Ship** at Seahouses, very busy early evening in the middle of the week, and no wonder with excellent beers from High House Farm and Hadrian & Border. Equally impressive was a quick visit to the Ship Inn at Low Newton. This seemingly fairly isolated village on the cliff top sports a pub with a thriving microbrewery. Trade was already beginning to build up at just after eleven in the morning. Ship Hop and White Horses were tried, pale, hoppy and refreshing. We also popped our heads into the adjoining building that houses the tiny brewery.

Even the hotels that we stopped at served real ale, the Schooner at Alnmouth, Sportsman at Embleton, beers from Mordue, and the Bamburgh Castle at Seahouses. The last of these had a range of beers at sensible prices for a tourist hotel.

In the not too distant past this area would have been in Scottish-Newcastle hands and awash with keg beer. But no longer. The Northumberland coastal villages are now a real ale paradise.

Back Home

Back in Derbyshire the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee has been successfully selling beers with a slightly lower ABV. Marston's EPA 3.6%, Wychwood Wychcraft 3.8% and Ringwood Showman's 3.8%, all sold well in September. These beers make sense in a pub very much dependent on road trade. Of course Marston's Bitter and Wychwood Hobgoblin remain standard fare.

Finally a few notes on the beer festival at the **Old Hall** in Whitehough, Chinley held in mid September. There were lots of pale hoppy beers from around the country, all the ones I tried being in good condition of course. Amongst the darker beers RCH Old Slug Porter was my beer of the festival. Yet again there was no Thornbridge St. Petersburg Imperial Russian Stout, as supplies have gone to make Sainsbury's Christmas pudding. Yet again this was a highly successful beer festival, enjoyed by many hundreds of ale and cider drinkers.

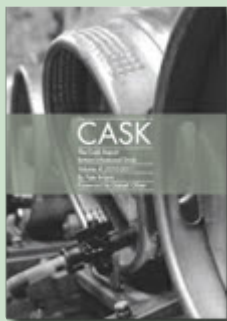




The Premium Pint

Is the future for cask beer to be as an expensive, premium drink? Peter Edwardson poses the question

The recently-published 2011 Cask Report (downloadable from www.caskreport.co.uk) was good news for cask drinkers, showing it maintaining volumes in the face of an overall decline in beer sales, and thus increasing market share. It is a product that is likely to bring more affluent and discerning customers into pubs. But this leads on to a controversial point made by author Pete Brown that, in his view, cask beer should be able to command a price premium over kegs and lagers (or at least not sell at a discount to them) as it is a higher quality product. On the face of it, that seems a reasonable enough proposition, and something that applies in many other consumer markets. However, it is likely to run into a number of practical difficulties.



The first problem, of course, is that "cask" is merely a method of storage, maturation and dispense, which says nothing about the inherent qualities of a beer. The idea that cask beer is lovingly crafted from traditional, natural ingredients, while keg is made from chemicals in somewhere resembling an oil refinery, has always been largely a myth, and is no less so in 2010 than it was when CAMRA was founded, despite the Cask Report describing it as an "artisanal" product. Many individual cask beers are of much higher quality than most kegs, but cask as a generic category isn't. There are plenty of cask beers such as Pedigree and Old Speckled Hen that are also available in keg form. While serving them as cask is likely to result in more depth and complexity of flavour, at least when well-kept, they're still basically the same stuff.

We also shouldn't forget the long tail of newly established micro-breweries who still have much to learn about the art of brewing and produce inconsistent and often lacklustre beer. If you went in a pub and saw a pumpclip for Old Scrotum from some brewery you had never heard of, would you really be happy to pay a price premium for it? In contrast, if you saw a Thornbridge beer on keg, you might.

When keg beers and lagers were first introduced in the 1960s, they sold at a higher price than cask beers as they were something new and different, required an investment in refrigeration equipment and CO2 cylinders, and held out the prospect of more consistent quality. That pretty much remains the same today, even though the marketplace has changed beyond recognition. Even bog-standard cooking lager like Carling is 20 or 30p a pint more than cask bitter. There is a lot of history to overturn.

It is also still the case that, where keg ales are sold alongside cask of a comparable strength, the keg generally sells for more. Clearly the keg drinkers see it as worth paying a price premium for over cask, not the other way round. We have also seen in recent years the growth of "smooth" as a distinct category, whereas in the past there would just be "bitter", which could be either cask or keg. I've seen groups come into Holts, Hydes and Robinsons pubs and ask "have they got any smooth?" You have to wonder whether making cask a premium product would ultimately lead to it becoming an entirely separate, and more expensive, beer category from keg – and thus inevitably one perceived as a middle-class drink?

Traditionally, price premiums in the on-trade have been associated with specific pubs and areas, not specific beers. If you are in a prosperous area, offer a smart atmosphere and want to keep out the riff-raff, then you may feel justified in charging more for your beer. But in the individual pub the pricing structure across the draught beer range remains much the same, typically with Draught Guinness at the top of the tree in terms of pence per unit, and cask down at the bottom. There is still little evidence of particular beers being able to command a price premium within their own category, although maybe Beck's Vier and Stella 4% do to some degree over Carling and Fosters. The culture of seasonal ales and rotating guest beers also tends to militate against any cask beers gaining the long-term reputation that may justify paying more in the customer's mind.

And, of course, when ordering a pint of cask, there is always something of a "quality lottery". By definition, it is a product that will vary somewhat from pint to pint due to the stage of secondary fermentation it has reached, and various factors in cellarmanship. Even in the very best outlets, you will occasionally get a pint that is no better than indifferent; if you drink it in random pubs at least one in ten is likely to be disappointing. That factor alone makes it harder to justify charging more for it, and probably always will – in a sense its part of its appeal.

Some pubs will continue to seek to charge a premium over others for draught beer that reflects their location, ambiance and aspirations. But there is a very long way to go in terms of both public perception and consistent quality before cask beer as such can command a premium over kegs, and that of course begs the question as to whether that's a desirable aim in the first place. The concept could be seen as reflecting a somewhat half-baked and perhaps rather London-centric view of the draught beer market.

Securing a price premium depends on long-term reputation – the challenge is how to build that up, and that falls more to brewers than retailers. If you are a brewer of cask beer, you need to gain more control over the distribution chain by determining where it is sold and how it is presented. Not to mention having a high-quality product in the first place. The history of business is littered with companies who have tried to go for a premium image and pricing but haven't had the quality or consistency to back it up.



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Brewery News

Bootleg Brewery



Over the past few years, Chorlton has become a bit of a real ale Mecca with 22 pubs and bars selling real ale. Now it can boast its own brewery as well. Located at the base of the historic brew tower at the Horse & Jockey on Chorlton Green, the region's latest micro-brewery was revealed on Friday 25th September to coincide with the start of the pub's second Ale & Cider Festival. A full height window in the pub's first floor dining room allows customers to see brewing in action in what was the bottling plant of the original 1907 brewery.

A return to brewing at The Horse & Jockey has been part of the dream of pub owner Peter Dalton since he bought the pub in December 2008 and a micro-brewery has been in the planning ever since. Work to prepare the brew house started in early September with Dave Porter of PBC Brewery Installations commissioned to supply & install the brewery. The 4 barrel brewery and two fermenting vessels were a tight squeeze in the available space. With a ceiling height of around six feet, the equipment has had to be made to measure. In fact, just three inches lost to install drainage in the floor meant the original hot liquor (that's hot water to me and you) tank didn't fit and had to go back to be shortened!

A competition amongst pub regulars was held to name the new brewery, with the name Bootleg Brewing Company winning out over numerous equine based suggestions.

While the more obvious horse and Chorlton references are likely to feature in beer names, something a bit punchier was chosen for the brewery itself.



Brewer Erin Guy wasted no time getting the brewery to work, with the first test brew taking place the day after completion of the brewery. Erin joins an exclusive club of local female brewers, joining Prospect's Patsy Slevin and Sarah Bergin of Cellar Rat. Being invited to be brewer at the new brewery is a dream job for first-time brewer Erin, the pinnacle of a love affair with real ale that started when she worked at the Railway, Portwood at the age of

just 18. The enthusiasm for ales of then landlord Alex Lord rubbed off on Erin, and his willingness to share his experience gave the young brewer's career the strongest of foundations.

After spending four years at the Railway, Erin moved from one Good Beer Guide listed pub to another in The Bar in Chorlton and then a third as assistant manager at The Knott on Deansgate. Erin told OT that it was the training and encouragement of manager Scott Davies that gave her the confidence to move to The Horse & Jockey where she has been Cellar Manager since its re-opening in June 2009.

The pub's resident ale is to be a very pale light hoppy ale, but will only be found on the bar when Erin is happy with the product. Beer "tickers" might have to camp out in the pub while she tries out recipes - "Test Brew No. 1" went on sale in mid-October (a dry beer which drew favourable comparisons with Phoenix Arizona) and will be followed by more test brews until the house ale is perfected when it will go under the name of Saddle Rash. Erin will then be moving on to trials of other styles. Once fully up and running, the regular portfolio will consist of the house ale and a range of four seasonal brews. The first seasonal to be brewed will be the Winter ale and can be expected to be on the bar in January. The regular beers will be complemented by a range of specials - Erin is very much looking forward to the chance to experiment with different tastes and is already planning ginger beers, porters, fruit flavours. Initially all the beers will be available exclusively at The Horse & Jockey.



The final stage of work on the brew house will see the remains of the original brewery restored and revealed as a backdrop to the new modern plant. Alongside the building work to create the brewery, the pub has also opened up previously unused space at the top of the pub as an extension of their restaurant dining room.

Happy Valley Brewery

Bollington now boasts a second brewery. The eponymous Bollington Brewery has now been joined by the Happy Valley Brewery.

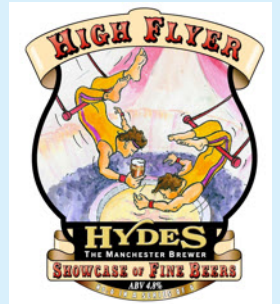
The man behind Happy Valley is optician Dave Hughes who is brewing from a 2.5 barrel plant installed by Dave Porter. The first beer is called Sworn Secret (3.8%), named because Dave has been so secretive about the brewery set up, and is described by him as "extremely hoppy using Hersbrucker Hops as a late Aroma hop. By using our own unique Lancashire mill town yeast the ale has

a distinctive crisp, citrus finish". Future beers will include a 4.2% Olde English Ale and Black Magic, a stout at 4.6% ABV.

The first beer was due to be launched at the Poachers in Bollington on 29 October, and future brews will also be premiered at the pub.

Family Brewers

Hydes have two new beers out for November. The November / December craft ale is often the most entertaining of the series and this year's beer sounds exceptionally good. High Flyer (4.8%) is described as "dark and delicious, a divine warming full flavoured ale". A dark, almost black beer, it is made using chocolate and black malt plus roast barley. Hops are Challenger and Fuggles.



Alongside this is a fruit beer, Plum Treat (4%). This beer, and its branding, seems to be something of a departure for Hydes but promises to be a tasty tippie, so look out for it.

Robinsons still have Battering Ram (4%) out and next month will see the return of December regular Mr Scrooge. Robbies also had a bar in Manchester's Albert Square as part of the Food & Drink Festival, and this featured no fewer than 12 cask beers. Among these was Chocolate Tom and a new version of Ginger Tom at 4.3%. The pump clip bore the word "Spring" and we understand that this will indeed be one of the seasonals from Robinsons next year. An incredibly refreshing beer, it tasted like old fashioned ginger pop, and sold like hot cakes. We think Robbies could be on to a winner with this one.

Two other casks of Chocolate Dubbel were produced and they lurk in the cellar of the Marble Arch - look for them on sale in the winter months.

Marble Brewery

Following on from the Festival we understand that De Molen brewer Menno Olivier will be coming to Manchester for a collaboration brew at Marble with head brewer James Campbell. Exciting news.

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Gimme Shelter

THE smoking ban has now been in force for over three years, but in its early days few pubs seemed to make much effort to provide covered shelters for smokers. Perhaps they imagined all the smokers would just give up, or that they would be replaced by crowds of antismokers who had previously shunned pubs. But, now that things have settled down, the more enterprising pubs have begun to realise that they need to cater for all their customers, and I've noticed quite a lot of investment going on in provision for smokers.

While obviously they are only two examples out of a growing number in the local area, the Railway at Rose Hill now has a very smart elevated, covered area of wooden decking at the rear, while the beer garden at the Armoury in Edgeley, once little more than a patch of grass, now has two substantial separate shelters and bears a distinct resemblance to a grotto. More and more pubs now have a sign outside advertising, amongst other facilities, "Covered, heated smoking patio," while another proclaims "Plasma Screen TV for smokers" – so it's becoming an important point of differentiation.

Although undoubtedly the smoking ban has put many smokers off visiting pubs, and made others visit less often, surveys have shown that smokers are still more likely to visit pubs than non-smokers, so it stands to reason that pubs should do what they can within the law to accommodate them. If you are a smoker, it is very clear which pubs extend a welcome to you, and which can't be bothered, and that is obviously likely to influence where you take your custom, and indeed that of your non-smoking friends as well.

Marketers are always looking for that key factor which will determine which pub a group will go to, because one or two members will insist they won't go anywhere that doesn't have it. In the past, this has often been said of cask beer, but now it's equally likely you will also hear someone say "I'm not going there, there's nowhere to have a smoke".

Problem, What Problem?

IF you believed the media, you could be forgiven for thinking that Britain was in the grip of an unprecedented wave of alcohol-related health problems and disorder, and that consumption was shooting through the roof. Indeed, it's not uncommon to hear representatives of the anti-drink lobby claiming precisely that. However, once you look at the facts, the reality is entirely different. Average alcohol consumption has been falling steadily year-on-year since 2004, and in 2009 dropped by the sharpest rate since 1948, falling by 6% in a year. We are now drinking 13% less than in 2004, and our alcohol consumption is below the EU average.

It seems that people are really taking all the anti-drink messages to heart and curbing their intake. However, it doesn't apply evenly across the board – those who wish to be responsible and health-conscious are reducing what is already often a very modest level of consumption, while problem drinkers of all kinds carry on regardless. In the process, drinking becomes increasingly denormalised and seen as something socially unacceptable, which is obviously bad news for the pub trade. Britain's drink problem – if it has one at all – is not that we consume too much as a society, but that it is distributed too unevenly. What we need are more responsible, regular, moderate drinkers, but sadly the tide of anti-drink hysteria is driving us in the opposite direction.



Pub Grub

Pork and Cider Night at the Marble Arch

OCTOBER is the month that CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, celebrates cider and perry. Locally *Opening Times* organises the Cider Circuit and for the last two years has helped arrange a cider and perry themed meal at the Marble Arch on Rochdale Road.

This year's event was themed as "Pork & Cider" with most courses featuring various bits of pig supplied by Maynards one of Rick Stein's "Food Heroes". The matching ciders and perries came from Merrylegs Cider wholesaler.

So it was that 18 sat down at 7.30pm on Tuesday 12 for what turned out to be a memorable meal.

The standard and theme was set by an entertaining amuse bouche comprising slices of fried pig's ear presented in individual silk pouches thus proving that a silk purse can indeed be made out of a (very tasty) sow's ear!

The meal proper opened with pig's cheeks served on puy lentils, with quince jelly and cinnamon foam. The cheek was meltingly tender and was perfectly set-off by the earthy lentils and spicy sweetness of the foam. Accompanying this was Denings medium cider. This was in fact more of a medium-sweet cider, albeit with a tannin background note which complemented perfectly.

Next up was a excellently seasoned piece of black pudding served with a tender scallop, cauliflower puree and "edible sand" made from pulverised pork crackling. The whole thing hung together beautifully and was again well matched with the accompanying Countryman medium-dry cider which again had a tannin presence which offset the richness of the dish.



This was followed by an intermediate course which was the kitchen's take on a BLT – a glass layered with tomato jelly, cos lettuce soup and bacon foam. Unusual and delicious. Accompanying this was the superb Swallowfields Moorcroft perry, an elegant medium-dry "single varietal" perry with a smooth texture.

Seafood featured in the next course of slow cooked pig's tails with langoustines and celeriac foam. An unexpected but hugely successful combination with the slightly gelatinous nature of the pig's tail perfectly countered by the citrusy Biddenden Bushels cider matched with this course.

We now reached the main course, a generously proportioned slice of smoked pork loin with roasted pumpkin, morels and apple. The slight smokiness of the pork and the roasted squash made for a superb combination. The matching cider, Rich's Legbender (great cider, daft name) was slightly sweet with distinct spicy notes and accented the food perfectly.



And so to pudding. A pear poached in perry was accompanied by a very moist almond cake and chantilly crème, which had been enlivened with a shot of amaretto. This managed to be light and rich at the same time and was contrasted with some very bright and shiny Broadoak Premium perry.

We weren't done yet as we were then able to relax over glasses of 10 year old cider brandy and some homemade cookies.

It should also be noted that the two vegetarians present were equally well catered for, with one of them declaring it the best veggie meal he had ever eaten.

Our thanks to the Marble Arch and Ken Calder and his excellent kitchen team who really rose to the occasion. The challenge is now on to surpass this next year.



Rail Ale

Travels with Alan Gent

Alan Gent gets out and about on the local public transport network sampling beers along the way. The first of an occasional series.

IT was, of course, a sunny day, the sunlight beaming though the roof of Piccadilly, cutting raw swathes of acid light across the platforms and burning the unsuspecting populace with unasked for injections of vitamin D.

Suitably armoured against this onslaught (dark glasses and tweed suits) we equally armoured ourselves with the ticket of the day - the Over 55 Club zone ticket, which allowed us unhindered travel between Here and Leeds. This was a direct train, if we wanted it to be and I had previously taxed Paul with the prospect of getting off at Dewsbury for the semi customary stop (We were lunching in Leeds). No he quoth, let's press on to Leeds.

As we approached Huddersfield, I again asked, if we were getting off here or not? "MMMM, well we don't want to arrive in Leeds too early do we?" And with that we disembarked and headed down Platform 1 to the Head of Steam. Much has been made of the fact that the HoS is not now as good as the Kings Head at the other end of the platform. The Kings Head has been smartened up, better beer, all that sort of thing. That may be but the HoS has one over riding plus at 11:05 on a Friday morning. It's open.

Given the plethora of ales available, you would of course, choose mild. Well you might? And as it happens so did we. Thwaites's Dark Mild as it happens. The sun streamed through the windows. Mine Host chatted to us. It was the perfect start to a day. We were almost tempted to stop for another but Leeds and Whitelocks Bar beckoned. There's a warm feeling about certain pubs; you walk in and feel immediately at home. Copper bar top, hand pumps, standing proud, slightly above your head, the quiet murmur of good conversation. We felt right at home. Did we want to eat in the bar? No, it was the restaurant for us and that delightful 84 year old waitress that treated us with the utter contempt that only 60 years of Doing It can muster. Nursing a pint of Kelham Island Easy Rider, this was Mr Thomas's with a Yorkshire slant and nothing wrong with that. We feasted on Yorkshire puddings with gravy and then tucked into various meaty options before spurning the option of a dessert.

The train was at 14.15 so we had time for two pints in the nearby Scarborough Hotel. A fine array of some eight hand pumps greeted us as we entered. What I did not approve of were the six or so half pulled pints sitting on the pumps waiting for top ups to speed service no doubt, but I'll wait for my fresh pint, thanks. Of course we opened up with Landlord and excellent it was but then I switched to Lancaster's Red and very toothsome it was too. Less toothsome - more toothless, was our table companion. Paul once again in that unerring way he has, managed to light on the Local Colour. To be fair, the aforementioned wasn't there when we arrived, but he soon let Paul know on his return that that was his pint that Paul moved and proceeded to sit in the corner muttering. If only it had stayed at that. He looked out of the window, laughed out loud (to himself) muttered again. Got out his cigarette lighter and seemed to be trying to read his newspaper through his hand - by the light of the cigarette lighter.. Got out his wallet, unfortunately to buy himself another pint, with the result that we cracked first and left. The moral of this story - don't drink Carling (he was).

And so to the train and Sowerby Bridge. A new one this; the refreshment rooms having only been open some 10 months but we had a choice of 3 ales to choose from and just under an hour to sample them. Again, it must have been that sort of day, we had a pint of Yorkshire Brewing Dark Mild, followed by Acorn's White Oak.

As we sauntered out onto the platform (20 strides, no more) there was the train to Victoria. More beer on the way across town enlivened the walk back to Piccadilly then it was a train and home. What a pleasant day, perhaps even a Grand Day Out?

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CAMRA Calling - What's On In The Local CAMRA

Stockport & South Manchester
Branch Contact: Mark McConachie 0161 429 9356 mark.mcconachie@o2.co.uk
Branch website: www.ssmcamra.org.uk

Thursday 11th – Branch Meeting: The Magnet, Wellington Road North, Stockport. Start 8.15pm.
Friday 19th – Withington Stagger: 7.30pm Old House at Home, Burton Road; 8.30 Victoria, Wilmslow Road.
Thursday 25th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Hinds Head, Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel.
Sunday 5th December – Cider Circuit winners presentation and social. Cheshire Ring, Manchester Road, Hyde. From 2pm
Thursday 9th – Branch Meeting: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. Will include Christmas Quiz and mince pies. Starts 8.15pm.

High Peak & NE Cheshire
Branch Contact: Mike Rose 07986 458517. mikewrose@gmail.com
Branch website: www.hpneccamra.org.uk/

Monday 8th – Branch Meeting: Crown, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm
Thursday 25th – Buxton Social: Ramsays Bar, Buckingham Hotel. From 8.30pm

North Manchester
Branch Contact: Dave Hallows 07983 944992. davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk

Thursday 11th – POPPY crawl - Peveril Of the Peak, Grt. Bridgewater St, 7.30pm. Paramount, Oxford St, Yates, Portland St, M'cr City Centre.
Wednesday 17th – Branch Meeting: King's Arms, Bloom St, Salford. Starts 7.30pm.
Saturday 20th – Riverhead Brewery Visit, Riverhead Brewery Tap, 2 Peel St, Marsden, W.Yorks. 2pm. £7.50 a head (approx. inc. beer & tour). Book ASAP.
Wednesday 24th – Dark Beers Crawl 2 - Piccadilly, London Rd, 7.30pm, then Grey Horse, Old Monkey, Portland St, Waterhouse, Princess St, M'cr City Centre.
Wednesday 1st December – Social, Bridgewater, Barton La, Worsley, 8pm.

Macclesfield & East Cheshire
Branch Contact: Tony Icke 01625 861833 contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk
Branch website: www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk/

Monday 8th – Open Committee Meeting: Baths, Macclesfield. Starts 8pm.
Tuesday 16th – Macclesfield Crawl: start Society Rooms 7.30pm

Trafford & Hulme
Branch Contact: John Ison 0161 962 7976.
Branch website: www.thcamra.org.uk

Tuesday 9th – Altrincham Belgian Beer social. 8pm Belgian Bar, 8.30 Mort Subite, 9.30 Le Trappiste.
Thursday 11th – 8pm Regional Pub of the Year presentation to the Knott Bar, Deansgate, Manchester.
Saturday 13th – Beer of the Festival presentation to Liverpool Organic Brewery. Limited places booking essential.
Thursday 18th – Broadheath survey. 8pm Railway, 9pm Packet House finish LMRCA Club at Navigation Road station.
Friday 26th – Chorlton challenge Part 1. 6pm Wetherspoons Sedge Lynn plus 8 others.

Saturday 27th – Chorlton Challenge Part 2. Noon at Christie Fields plus at least 8 others.

Wednesday 24th – Social / Games Night: Union Club, Alderley Edge. From 8pm
Monday 6th December – Branch AGM; Congleton Leisure Centre. Starts 8pm

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- Thursday 20th January 12.00 - 22.30
- Friday 21st January 12.00 - 22.30
- Saturday 22nd January 12.00 - 22.30
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- Tickets available on the door
- Souvenir Programme £1

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Come in from the cold and grab some winter warming

Battering Ram

October and November 2010

ABV 4.0%

Full flavoured dark oak coloured bitter with aromas of roasted malt and spicy hop. This rich deeply satisfying beer has a palate reminiscent of burnt coffee with a hint of blackcurrant and a robust after bitterness perfectly balanced by priming sweetness.

