

January 2012



Opening

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Pub OF THE Month AWARD



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for January is the Victoria on Wilmslow Road in Withington. Mark McConachie went along.



THIS is a very busy, community pub in the heart of Withington village. It boasts a fantastic bustling atmosphere visited by a more mature student population along with its regular clientele. It was fully refurbished to a high standard in August 2010. Licensee Mark Burns and his team set about rebuilding the business as a traditional pub – with cask ales as the main focus. So true to cask is its staff, that they are all cask drinkers and are trained in cellar management. With quality as their watchword, it comes as no surprise to see Cask Marque accreditation here. And you know it is genuine as they maintain 10 hand-pulled beers, plus two ciders. If you're mad for cask, get down on a Thursday as all cask is a bargain £2.20 a pint!

Two successful beer festivals have been held - St Georges Day week (22nd to 29th April 2011) and the more recent early October event. Over 86 different cask ales were sold throughout that three-week period, with all beers selling-out, and more importantly for the business no wastage due to their excellent cellar management expertise. The regular beers are sourced nationwide along with local micros such as Phoenix, Hornbeam, Dunham, and Marble. These supplement the full Hydes range.

Hydes have recognised the achievements made here with nominations for Hydes Managed Pub of the Year and Runner-up in Cellar of the Year, whilst Assistant Manager, Laura Bodham won the coveted Hydes Employee of the Year.

Licensee Mark Burns has an interesting background – beginning as a Design Engineer in the aerospace industry in the US, Canada, and Australia, he changed tack in 2007 to become second chef at Hydes Quarrybank in Timperley. Roles as Barman, and Relief Manager quickly followed, then the relief position arose at the Victoria in Nov 2009. Mark says he has never looked back in all that time. So come along for a great night on Tuesday 17.

The Victoria is at 438 Wilmslow Road, Withington M20 3BW, by Withington Library. Buses from Stockport or suburbs are 42,22, X57/157 and 84, also 23/A and 370 (change at Didsbury); buses from Manchester are 41-3,48,142-3 and X57/157.

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Comment, Notes & Contents

What's On

Opening Times – Comment

The last year has seen a growing interest in and awareness of good beer. The annual Cask Report continues to show that cask beer (real ale as we in CAMRA call it) is if not in growth then at least declining much more slowly than the rest of the beer market – and so it continues to gain market share. Predictions are that actual volume growth cannot be far away. So, everything in the garden ought to be roses then.

It's not of course. While the number of breweries continues to expand (OT predicts there will be something like 900 by the year end), too many – luckily not many locally – seem content to produce dull and/or poorly made products that at best fail to excite and at worst offend the palate. Others however continue to produce well made, interesting and enjoyable beers. And say it quietly – not all of those beers meet the dictionary definition of real ale either.

At the same time pubs continue to close although plenty still prosper and thrive – and new openings give the lie to the proposition that the pub is dying. Perhaps some of the new bars do not appeal to the traditionalists but they are often more lively and convivial places to enjoy a beer than some of the decaying “community locals” that continue to cling to life by their fingertips.

In short change is in the air. Pubs are evolving and our better brewers experiment and innovate with passion. Do we embrace this change or do we stay in our comfort zone? That of course is the 64,000 dollar question. Happy New Year everyone.

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. 7,200 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) which also provides advice, fact sheets and model letters on a range of consumer rights. Their telephone no. is 0845 404 05 06.

Copy Date for the February issue is Saturday 14 January

Front cover – National Winter Ales Festival. Make sure you get down there.

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, John Tune, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Robin Wignall, Peter Edwardson, Frank Wood, Phil Booton, Mike Rose, Caroline O'Donnell, John O'Donnell, Mark McConachie, Geoff Johnson, Dave Burston, Stuart Ballantyne, Alan Gent, Pete Farrand, Jim Flynn, Derek Trillo, Mick Slaughter.

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Local CAMRA branches organise regular events in pubs across the region – members of other branches & general public are welcome to attend except some Branch business meetings (contact branch contact if in doubt). Organising branch in brackets.

January

Saturday 14th – Annual Branch Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Buffet, quiz and speaker. From 7.30. Book with John Clarke on 0161 477 1973 (SSM)

Tuesday 17th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Victoria, Wilmslow Road, Withington. From 8pm. (SSM)

Monday 23rd – Social at Leathers Smithy, Clarke Ln. From 8pm. (MEC)

Thursday 26th – Meet the Brewer with Coach House: Bishop Blaize, Chester Road, Stretford. All Coach House ales £1.55 a pint. Starts 7.30pm. (TRH)

Friday 27th – Cheadle East Stagger: 7.30pm Cheshire Line Tavern, off Manchester Road; 8.30pm Royal Oak, Stockport Road. (SSM)

February

Wednesday 1st – Most Improved Pub Award: Wheatsheaf, Oak Street, Manchester City Centre. From 8pm. (NM)

Thursday 2nd – CAMRA evening at Tatton Brewery from 7pm. Details from louise@tattonbrewery.co.uk

Saturday 11th – Knutsford Pub Crawl. Start Legh Arms, cr Brook St, Legh Rd at 12.30pm (MEC)

Monday 13th – Winter Pub of the Season presentation to the White House, Stalybridge – award 8pm followed by meeting at Q from 8.30 (HPNC).

Your Local CAMRA Branches:

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

NM – North Manchester www.northmanchestercamra.org.uk
Contact: Dave Hallows 07983 944992, davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk

HPNC – High Peak & North Cheshire www.hpneccamra.org.uk
Contact: Mike Rose 07986 458517. mikewrose@gmail.com

MEC – Macclesfield & East Cheshire www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk
Contact Tony Icke 01625 861833, contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk

TRH – Trafford & Hulme www.thcamra.org.uk
Branch Contact: John Ison 0161 962 7976, enquiries@thcamra.org.uk

CAMRA Branch Business Meetings

Wednesday 11th – Good Beer Guide Pre-selection meeting: Unicorn, Church Street, Manchester City Centre. Starts 7pm (NM)

Thursday 12th – Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley. **Includes voting for 2012 Pub of the Year.** Starts 8.15pm. (SSM)

Wednesday 25th – Kings Arms, Bloom Street, Salford. Starts 7.30pm (NM)

Tuesday 31st – Committee Meeting including Good Beer Guide pre-selection. All welcome. Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley. Starts 8.15pm (SSM).

Thursday 2nd February – Railway, Chapel Road, Sale. Starts 8pm. (TRH)

Thursday 9th February – Magnet, Wellington Road North, Stockport. **Includes selection for 2013 Good Beer Guide, Start 8.15pm. (SSM)**

National Winter Ales Festival

Where it is and how to get there



ONCE again the National Winter Ales Festival will be held at last year's venue, the Sheridan Suite, also known as "The Venue" on Oldham Road, close to (but just before) its major junction with Queens Road and Hulme Hall Lane. It's about a mile from the Northern Quarter pubs and can be walked from there in about 15-20 minutes. Last year the venue continued to win plaudits from many visitors, who found it remarkably easy to get to.



Buses there and back

Luckily there are many bus services that will take you there and get you home again. For those travelling across Manchester the service 53 will drop you nearby on either Queens Road or Hulme Hall Lane from where it will be a short walk down Oldham Road (heading towards the City Centre).

Most people will be coming from the City Centre. All of the following buses will get you to the festival

* **Services 82, 83, 180, and 184** operate from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Oldham Street stand A. These are the most frequent buses to the festival

* **Service 88** operates from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Oldham Street stand B

* **Services 24, 181 and 182** operate from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Lever Street Stand F as normal.

The most frequent services between Manchester City Centre and the Festival site are services 82, 83, 180 and 184 which between them provide a bus about every 5 minutes until approximately 7.30pm then every 10 minutes. The last bus towards Manchester is about 11.45pm.

Cheap fares

Following our successful partnership last year, we have once again negotiated a travel concession with local operator First Group.



First Group. From Wednesday 18th to Saturday 21st there will be a specially discounted bus fare on all First services from the City Centre to Hulme Hall Lane (except the 82 night bus), with the normal single fare being reduced to £1. This will apply to all services so there will be no need to show a festival ticket or CAMRA membership card etc. Our thanks to **First Group** for arranging this. Now turn to page 6 for a taster of some of the beers...



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National Winter Ales Festival – a Brief Taster

One of the highlights of the National Winter Ales Festival is the judging to arrive at the Champion Winter Beer of Britain. Last time round the winner was Entire Stout from Salisbury's Hop Back Brewery. The 4.5% ABV beer wowed the judges with its rich strong roasted flavour and long, sweet malty aftertaste. Will the gold medal head back north this year – and will it come to our side of the Pennines? The winner will be announced during the Festival's trade session on 18 January and we hope to bring you all the results in next month's issue.

While Hop Back's Steve Wright (pictured right) hopes to do the double he faces stiff competition, not just from established favourites, but also many of the new wave brewers which have been set up in recent years. New kids on the block include Big Bog (the sideline of Hydes Head Brewer Paul Jefferies), Brecon Brewing and Harbour breweries. And two brewers will be making the long journey from the South West with Clearwater Brewery of Devon and Cornwall's Driftwood Brewery both making an appearance.



While fans of stouts, porters, strong milds and old ales will be in seventh heaven, the festival doesn't just concentrate on dark winter beers. Paler beers on offer include the excellent **Bollington Long Hop**, **Lytham IPA**, **RedWillow Wreckless** and the superb but powerful (6% ABV) **Hawkshead New Zealand Pale Ale**. For darker beers in a more modern idiom we have two black IPAs – from Saltaire of West Yorkshire and Windsor & Eton down in the home counties (their **Conqueror Black IPA** is a superb example of this very new style of beer).

But of course it is stouts, porters and all things dark where the National Winter Ales Festival comes into its own. Where to start? The new **Black Cab Stout** from London brewer Fullers will be worth a try (as will their excellent **London Porter**). **Chocolate Marble** will be a must as will Robinson's **Old Tom**. Don't overlook **Anastasia's Imperial Stout** from Ascot Ales and two beauties from Liverpool Organic Brewery – **Imperial Stout** and **Kitty Wilkinson**, an exceptional chocolate and vanilla stout. For more details of the British beer list go online at: <http://nwaf.org.uk/british-beers/british-beer-list/>

Bottled Beers – from Home and Away

There is also a great range of bottled beers – both UK and foreign. From the UK highlights include **Amber Ales Imperial IPA**, a range from the rarely seen **Islay Brewery** and two must-trys will be **Pitfield Brewery's 1793 Imperial Stout** and **1837 IPA**.

Foreign beer lovers will have much to try. There is a range from Norwegian micro **Nogne Ø** (the 10% ABV **500 IPA** will be much sought after). OT is a great fan of Dutch beer so the **De Molen** beers will be a treat with **Vuur & Vlam** and **Hel & Verdoeminis** perhaps being the pick of the bunch. The two draught **Braustelle** beers on the German bar catch the eye as do **St Feuillien Noel Dupont Avec Les Bons Voeux** from Belgium. In bottle the **Viven Troubadour** beers will all be worth trying as will the cult **Struise Pannepot**. For something lighter go for **Taras Bulba** and **Zinnebier** from **Brasserie De La Senne**.

Remember though – many of these beers are very strong. Treat and drink with respect.

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Falling off a Cliff

THE House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee are currently carrying out an inquiry into the official government guidelines on alcohol consumption. Even though these were effectively plucked out of the air with no proper scientific basis, it is perhaps asking a bit much for them to be raised, although a move to restate them as weekly rather than daily limits might better reflect real-world drinking patterns.



However, a major problem with these guidelines is that, all too often, they are presented not as an ideal but as an absolute upper limit, above which the drinker falls off a cliff of risk. In fact, as pointed out by CAMRA in their submission to the inquiry, even taking the figures at face value, you need to exceed them by a considerable margin before there is anything more than a slight increase in the risk level. There is a wide gap between the recommended limit and the point where drinking is likely to have a severe health impact.

The way they are often presented, though, is on a par with suggesting that only eating four portions of fruit and veg a day will inevitably lead to contracting scurvy. It also results in skewed priorities in public policy, with health campaigns often giving the impression of trying to make responsible people drinking 30 or 40 units a week feel guilty, while in effect washing their hands of those drinking at genuinely dangerous levels.

An inconvenient truth of the statistics is that you have to drink around three times the official guidelines before your health risk reaches that experienced by total abstainers. The anti-drink lobby often try to claim that the figures are distorted by the inclusion of people who have had to give up drinking for medical reasons but, even allowing for this, there is still a huge body of evidence that moderate drinking is much better for you than abstinence. It may simply be the case that moderate drinkers are more relaxed and less uptight, but the strong correlation is undeniable. This is a major problem for those wanting to promote the message that there is no such thing as a safe level of alcohol. But no doubt they are working on coming up with more dodgy figures to get round it.

Never Too Late to Stop

AND it gets even worse as you get older. A recent report from the Royal College of Psychiatrists says that the existing alcohol consumption guidelines need to be "drastically reduced" for people over 65. Apparently they should drink no more than one and a half "units" of alcohol a day, so even going to the pub and having a pint of bitter is bad news.

They point out that some older people turn to drink as a way of coping with changes in life like retirement and bereavement, or feelings of boredom, loneliness and depression. No doubt this is true, but the same can happen at any stage of life, and the vast majority of pensioners don't seem to succumb. In my experience, most older people settle down to a regular routine of moderate drinking and rarely if ever overdo it. They have learned the difference between "just enough" and "too much".

And, for many, a regular couple of drinks with friends in the pub is one of the few pleasures in life they're still able to enjoy. Telling them not to drink will just lead to misery and social isolation. It's also not going to cut much ice telling someone in their eighties that having that extra half-pint is going to reduce their life expectancy. Perhaps the doctors should concentrate on people with genuine drink problems rather than trying to cultivate anxiety amongst those engaged in normal behaviour.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com

(comments on these articles can be left on the website)



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Stagger.....

Stockport South

With Dave Burston



Friday night is karaoke night, or so it seems in this part of Stockport. Starting on Wellington Road South (A6), we were going to begin the stagger at the **Nelson Tavern**, which had an A-board outside advertising "Cask ales £2 pint" on one side and "Karaoke Fridays 8.30" on the other. However, once inside we found that no cask ale was available, and were told it would be "on next week".

So we made our way back down the hill, past the Town Hall Tavern, which has been keg-only for a long time



(and still is), to the **Unity**. This being a Robinsons pub, cask ale was definitely available in the form of their Unicorn bitter, but also the seasonal beer Black Beauty, which was the one that most of us tried. Both beers were rated pretty good. The Unity is a typical street-corner Robinsons pub with an L-shaped room and bar. Some large loudspeakers were in evidence but were not in use while we were there. There was a jukebox playing which was free (we were told), but with another six pubs to try, we weren't able to linger.

By-passing Cobdens, another keg-only pub, our next port-of-call was **The Peters Square Tavern** on St. Petersgate. In recent years this pub has flitted between cask and not cask and has had a chequered naming history, including being called the Blarney Stone for a while. It now seems to be firmly back in the cask fold, with enthusiastic new landlords selling two cask ales, both at £1.99 a pint. The pub has



a long, fairly narrow front room (with TV) opening out at the far end into a comfy lounge, and as a karaoke was setting up at the front, we retreated to the lounge to sample our beers, which were Thwaites Wainwright and Wychwood Hobgoblin. Both were fairly good, with the Hobgoblin the better of the two.



Doubling back towards the A6, we next settled for a while in **Little Jack Horners**, our 8.30 meeting point. This has an unusual layout of three rooms in a line, all on different levels, and was the liveliest pub of the night so far. You enter straight into the front room, from which three steps lead up to the bar which has a smaller room attached, and beyond that up another step is a larger room where - yes you've guessed it - a karaoke was in progress. So after getting our beers from the bar, we retreated back down to the cosy front room, which has dark stained wood panelling and very old-looking beams which try to make it look like a much older pub. Four beers were on handpump: Wychwood Hobgoblin, Marston's Pedigree, Wells Bombardier and the unusual Clark's Classic Blonde (3.9%), which all but one of us went for and rated it variously fair to good. The one person who went for the Pedigree found it a bit below average, and none of us tried the other two beers.



So, onward, across the roundabout and past the casino to Lower Hillgate and into the **Royal Oak** on High Street, which had a loud karaoke on in the main room at the back, though there were not many people in there. As the main front room on the right is taken up by a pool table, we all crammed into the small room on the left, where the bar is. Robinsons Unicorn was the only cask beer on offer, and unfortunately this was rated poor by most of us, though some thought it just about OK. To be fair, it was a lot better when we went in

there again on the Hillgate Stagger just before Christmas, but it's a pity that the nearest Robinsons pub to the brewery (now that the tap the Spread Eagle has closed) can't serve a consistently good example of their flagship bitter.



Two more pubs to go, and a stroll downhill into Little Underbank brought us to **Winters**, a former jewellers with a prominent clock outside, converted a few years ago into a Holts pub occupying two floors. No karaoke here tonight (they have it between 3 and 8 on Saturdays, according to a sign on the door!), and the pub was fairly quiet for a Friday night. The beer, Holt's Bitter, was variously rated between OK and good.

Leaving the best till last, we finished the stagger across the road from Winters at the historic **Queens Head**, also known as Turner's Vaults. Dating from at least 1790, this pub won a CAMRA heritage award for sensitive refurbishment in the 1980s. Not only the oldest pub on the stagger, this was also the cheapest as it is a Samuel Smith's house, selling their only cask ale Old Brewery Bitter at £1.52 a pint. This beer was rated fairly good to good by the assembled throng, after we had all pushed our way through the busy but very long and narrow front room (calling at the bar on the way) and past the small snug to the separate lounge (with a skylight) at the far end.



And so ended another stagger. The best beer of the night turned out after all to have been in the first pub we drank in, the Unity, but most of the others were reasonably good too. However, these are only the impressions and opinions of a small group of people on one night of the year, so why not try these pubs and see what you think - but perhaps not on a Friday night, unless you like karaoke!



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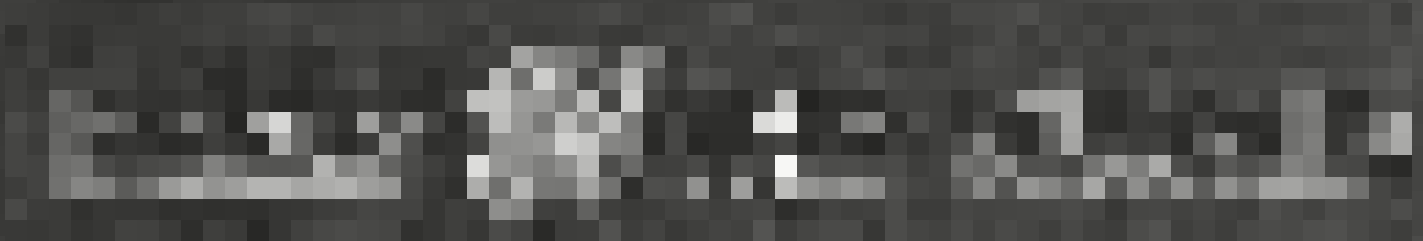
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Pub News



Recently in Macclesfield we have seen the re-opening of the **Castle** after an extended period of closure. This great little pub is both a listed building and also featured in CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub interiors. It continues to be owned by Trust Inns but with a new licensee, Bill Ramage and wife Ewa in charge of the food.



Very much a family affair, with Ewa's brother Sebastian and partner Sylvia also helping out. Food is available from 11am until 9pm with a selection of Polish dishes, which have proved very popular with the locals, complemented by some English items. The cask ales available are Wychwood Hobgoblin, Theakston's Bitter together with a changing guest beer.

The pub comprises four rooms. The tiny tap room on your right as you enter has a fine panelled wooden bar and there is small hatch bar in the corridor with an unusual internal bowed panelled window next to it. Although the Castle is hidden away, it is easy to find, walk up Waters Green (opposite the railway station) to Back Wallgate, the narrow straight cobbled street in front of you, it is located at the first turning off to the right.

City News

Another top city centre pub has committed itself to stocking locally brewed ales and signed up to the Trafford & Hulme CAMRA LocAle Scheme.

Steve Crook, landlord of the **City Arms** on Kennedy Street (just off Princess Street near Albert Square) told Opening Times that he's wanted to stock local products for years but has been constrained by what was available from landlords Enterprise Inns. Now thanks to the Society Of Independent Brewers (SIBA) direct delivery scheme, he can finally order local beers through Enterprise which are then delivered by the local breweries. First beer to get the familiar LocAle pump topper was Black Five from Greenfield Brewery of Saddleworth.



The City Arms will continue to bring their customers the best beers from further afield as well. Although regularly featured breweries such as Stoke's Titanic and Burnley's Moorhouses' are beyond the 20 mile circle that defines the LocAle area, they are only just

outside meaning Steve is still watching his beer miles!

After noticing last month that the Northern Quarter's trendy **Apotheca** bar was advertising real ale - OT called to investigate but was disappointed to find Flowers IPA the only offering. When so many of Apotheca's neighbours in the area are showcasing excellent local brews from the likes of Prospect, Hornbeam and RedWillow, for a bar that advertises itself as "a regular haunt for creative individuals" it's a shame that this creative streak doesn't extend to their beer choice. A beer from the InBev stable, the original Stratford-upon-Avon Flowers Brewery closed in 1962 and after a nomadic half century the 3.6% beer is currently being contract brewed by Brain's of Cardiff but is thin, lacking in flavour and not fitting of such a historic name.

In Whalley Range, the **Hillary Step** has been extended. They pulled all the stops out to complete the work before Christmas but still managed to open all but one day. The extension is into the previously unused yard to the rear of the pub, giving a much larger space to the back of the bar and a new longer bar. Although often overshadowed by neighbouring Chorlton's thriving scene, the Hillary Step has been slowly building an impressive reputation for its real ales including a permanent hand pump serving Thornbridge, Phoenix and Thwaites beers plus two ever changing guests.

Next door, **Nip & Tiddle** has signed up to Trafford & Hulme's LocAle Scheme and will soon be expanding from one hand pump to two. Hornbeam beers are the regular offering here and the new pump is expected to be from the same brewer. Along with two hand pumps at **Jam Street** (from Dunham Massey and Outstanding breweries) this makes it nine hand pumps in three bars approx 30 yards apart, mostly selling LocAle. Well worth a detour from the usual destinations in neighbouring Chorlton - travellers to and from Manchester on the 86 bus route can hop off right outside or it's a five minute walk from Firswood Metrolink stop.

Chorlton's **Marble Beer House** has a new manager. After the sudden departure of longtime Marble cohort Warren McCoubrey in late October, a new team of Dani Pote-Faulkner and Jade Marchington have been appointed. Dani was previously a duty manager with the JD Wetherspoon organisation, most recently at the White Hart in Todmorden so Marble Beer House presents a totally different challenge. No immediate changes to the pub are planned



although we can expect to see the décor updated during 2012.

Down the road in Chorlton, the **South West Manchester Cricket Club** on Ellesmere Road has just completed a major refit of their bar. Along with a modern new décor and a more pub like feel with the addition of copious amounts of fixed seating, they now have the capacity for up to six cask ales, although the normal range consists of Hydes Original and two guest ales from local micro-breweries.

Altrincham's **Brew House** (Greenwood Street) has signed a deal to have a permanent beer from the area's most exciting new brewery, RedWillow. The deal also gives the pub exclusive rights to sell Red Willow's beers in the Altrincham area. When OT called, the RedWillow Wreckless was in excellent form. The Brew House is also offering bar snacks in the form of Pieminister pies served with mash and minted peas. As diners at Chorlton's **Pi** are aware, Pieminister's gourmet offerings are a cut above your usual pub steak and ale pie.

Stockport News

In late November the **Three Bears** on Jacksons Lane in Hazel Grove opened its doors after a £300,000 refurbishment.



The ten-week joint venture between Almond Family Pubs and Robinsons Brewery boasts an airy 30-seat extension with a vaulted ceiling and a full-gable 25ft window that overlooks the beautiful Cheshire fields. The Almond family run a number of Robinsons' pubs including the Fletchers Arms in Denton and the Puss In Boots in Offerton as well as the non-Robbies Hesketh in Cheadle Hulme. All feature impressive carvery food operations alongside a range of generally well kept beers. Should be well worth a visit.

Good news about the **Navigation** at the top of Lancashire Hill. Beartown Brewery has negotiated an extension of its lease with Nelstrops Flour Mill. The lease has been extended for a further five years (with a review at the three year stage). This gives a degree of security for licensee Barry Harvey who has been working hard with the pub which always rewards a visit.

In Cheadle, the owners of the **George & Dragon** have applied for 'further planning permission' and it will open in the middle of 2012 as a coaching house (well, there is a Stagecoach bus stop outside) with 'bedroom and restaurant facilities'. Meanwhile the former **Weavers** is being refurbished and will open this month as a Turkish restaurant.

More Pub News on page 17



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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

High Peak Pub News

With Frank Wood

A real ale gain is the **Guzzling Goose** at 115 Bentinck Street, Ashton. They are reported to be selling a rotating guest beer with a rumour of a deal being tied up with Hornbeam. Across town, the **Lord Napier** near to Albion Mill, a former Tetley pub, is selling Moorhouses Bitter.

Up in Mossley, the **Britannia**, opposite the station - and a pub on the "Rail Ale Trail" - has been fully decorated recently and still sells several beers permanently on draught, including the local Millstone brewery beers at the weekend. Another real ale gain is the **Commercial**, just down and across the road from the Brit. They are also selling a Millstone beer plus another changing guest. Good news this, as they have not sold real ale for many a year.

Stalybridge Circuit

In Stalybridge on Friday 9th December, we called in at the **Sportsman** on Mottram Road to see what was on offer. Unfortunately, the landlord informed us that neither of the handpumps was on that night but the two beers would be ready for the following day. Sounds promising! Round the corner on Acres Lane, the **Organ** had no real ale, so we went on a few yards to the **Old Hunters Tavern** (Good Beer Guide 2012) which had Robinsons Elbow, which we tried and it was fine, the other beers being the staple Hatters and Unicorn.

Further on down Acres Lane and **Stalybridge Labour Club** was firmly closed, following a fire at the premises back in October, when there was a serious incident and robbery. The future is uncertain here at present and any update would be welcomed on what is also a Good Beer Guide 2012 entry.

The **Society Rooms** (Wetherspoons) was quiet for an early Friday evening, but the beer range was good. We tried the Frodsham 800 at 4.7% which was a good choice and in very good condition. Across at **Lounge** the usual Thwaites Lancaster Bomber was good value and good quality at £1.90 pint; a good example of a pub that caters for the real ale drinker without being too greedy or too ambitious with numbers of beer on sale. One beer on good form is better than several that aren't moving.

We went on to the **Old Fleece** where I had heard that Millstone had a permanent beer on the bar. We were not disappointed and chose the Tiger Rut before the other beer on cask, John Smiths. The Old Fleece is a traditional pub with two separate rooms round the central bar, some original features and a pleasant place for a quiet beer. However, onwards to the **Stalybridge Buffet Bar**, Good Beer Guide 2012, where I was re-acquainted with an old

school friend after 38 years.....and plenty of time for two pints. We chose Titanic Cappucino Stout at 4.5% and Greenfield Rudolph's Tipple at 5.0%, both being in excellent form. The Buffet Bar was very busy that night and clientele came and went as ever, as trains pulled into the station.

The final pub of the night was the **Q**, which had a selection of Hydres beers on, a guest beer that I did not record and a band that was adding to a pleasant atmosphere. I hear that the nearby **White House** is going from strength to strength with six handpumps dispensing guest beers and also at least one real cider under the stewardship of the very enthusiastic manager - however, the bus was imminent so we departed and ended up in the **Palatine** in Hadfield where a very nice pint of Mr Scrooge was an excellent night cap.

Geoff Johnson adds - As reported in October's OT, the former Stop and Rest in Stalybridge has reopened as the **Lord Stamford**. A good refurbishment and about double in size, but selling no real ale. However the price of smooth at around £1.60 a pint appears to have taken trade away from the nearby Wetherspoons and meanwhile the **Pineapple** (ex-Robinsons), across the road, has been closed and de-badged and unlikely to open as a pub again.

The **Stamford Arms** (ex-Good Beer Guide) at Heyheads (Carrbrook) has Thwaites Wainwright on as a permanent beer, whilst taking at least one other guest.

Peak Practice

With Robin Wignall

Robinson's seasonal beer Black Beauty was a big hit for those pubs in the Whaley Bridge area that sold it. Customers at the **Crossings** in Furness Vale and the **Cock** in Whaley Bridge certainly took to the dry, stout flavours. Your correspondent also found a decent pint in the Lake Road Inn in Keswick, albeit at Lake District prices. Black Beauty is a most un-Robinson's brew, but certainly deserves a longer run than two months as a seasonal beer. Hopefully overall sales might encourage the company to consider this.

The Crossings tends to be one of the first with seasonal beers. By early December Mr. Scrooge had arrived, also available at the **Railway** in Whaley Bridge, and then draught Old Tom was to follow soon after.

The last week or so of the Marston's autumn festival saw further delights reach the **Shepherds'** in Whaley Bridge. Titanic White Star and Fuller's Bengal Lancer, a good IPA, were well worth trying, whilst Hook Norton Flagship was certainly a flagship brew. Christmas beers from the Marston's brewing empire reached the Shepherds' in early December with Wychwood Bah Humbug,

Jennings Redbreast, Ringwood Ring o' Bells and Marston's Ugly Sisters.

A November visit to the **Dog & Partridge** at Bridgemont found a more limited choice than usual after a busy weekend. Bank Top Flat Cap was in good form and Ringwood Boondoggle seems to be a fixture. Recent Cottage beers with locomotives on their pump clips had been Lord Nelson and Puffing Billy.



The recently re-opened **Soldier Dick** (pictured above), Furness Vale had a trio of interesting guest beers recently, all from the Cross Bay Brewery at Morecambe. Sunset, Dusk and Nightfall have been available, the latter well worth trying was oddly a pale bitter brew. Food is now available at the Soldier Dick and on a recent call I found a large family group very contented with Katie's cuisine.

The **Navigation** at Buxworth is run as a free house and often sources beers from Sheffield breweries. Abbeydale and its subsidiary brand Beer Works have recently been sold. But of course beers from elsewhere are not neglected. The most recent new Cheshire brewery must, I think, be Mobberley Fine Ales. The Navigation was quick to acquire these beers. Hedgehopper was rapidly consumed and Whirlybird was in the cellar when I called.

Just along the Peak Forest Tramway at Whitehough, the **Old Hall** held its Christmas Market in early December. This is a busy event with opportunities to stock upon presents at art and craft stalls and on Christmas comestibles from local produce stalls. There is importantly an enhanced range of beers, with seasonal beers from local-ish micros. The list included Howard Town Rudolph the Red, Phoenix Snowbound, Amber Chocolate Orange, Thornbridge Black Harry and from Pontypridd, Otley O1.

This is the time of year for dining in large groups with clubs and societies. A visit to the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee enjoyed good, well presented fare, promptly served. This could be washed down with Marston's Bitter, Hobboblin and Jennings World's Biggest Liar.

To end on a sadder note, the **Board Inn** in Whaley Bridge appears to have changed hands at the beginning of December, whilst the **White Hart** in Whaley Bridge is expected to change hands in early January. Hopefully more next time.

Otherwise enjoy drinking good beer in good pubs in 2012. Happy New Year.

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From Paul Thompson (via e-mail):

In November's Opening Times I read "The Hogs Head on Wilmslow Road is being turned into a Tesco Metro. It has always been a fairly anonymous outlet but it's a shame to see it go all the same".

People with long memories will disagree with this statement. When the Hogs Head first opened it had 10 handpumps dispensing nine real ales (two handpumps were reserved for Boddingtons), and friendly, knowledgeable licensee and staff. This quickly became my favourite pub in Didsbury. Many other people evidently felt the same way as it was pretty busy during the week & packed on Fridays & Saturdays with the Didsbury circuit crowd.

All was well until a regional manager decided that no Hogs Head should sell more than two real ales (as there was too much danger of beer going off). The removal of the handpumps coincided with the friendly and knowledgeable licensee leaving (I don't know if she had her arm twisted) and the pub having lost its USP (unique selling point) quickly became deserted outside Friday and Saturday evenings.

This is a classic case of someone thinking that they knew more than they did and trying to improve something that was pretty well unimprovable. This decision cost their business a lot of money. Personally I'm surprised the Didsbury Hogs Head lasted as long as it did.

From Mark Boardman, Edgeley (via e-mail):

I hope you give a right to reply re your correspondent and CAMRA member Fraser Brisbane's rather strange review of 'Ye Olde Vic' on Chatham street.

As my local watering hole and home from home I feel certain comments need redressing. Foremost, for one whom on his own admission has never stepped into said location, yet appears to have preconceived ideas and set limitations to his rhetoric concerning its qualities; *'I have personally never set foot inside the premises before and as I did so, was in two minds whether to continue'* .. Why? Contradiction after contradiction.

'In a constant state of renovation', yet said gentleman had never been in before so how does he come to a 'constant renovation' theory. It's a 'Grotto, it's going for the Homely and it's quirky too'. Make up your mind Fraser. Oh I forgot you seem to have done before you entered and gave us your font of knowledge, acquaintance and wisdom. Its *'lived in look'* didn't hit the mark for, yet, and I repeat 'Yet' it appears to merit another visit.

The thing about the 'Vic' is that any initial visit isn't the sum total of the essence and vitality of the place. A philosophy that isn't its decor but a vision that supplants its interior with a warmth and love few 'watering holes' could ever come close to. Steve and Jo do a fine job; its uniqueness is the central core of what makes recurring visits a must and not a reason for negative comments on one *reluctant* visit.

The ongoing work at the Olde Vic is almost the stuff of local legend – let's not forget that for some considerable time there was a chart of "Steve's unfinished jobs" on the wall. I think it is also fair to say that the article also included the words "...the bar at the Olde Vic actually proved the most welcoming of the trip" and concluded "in any event the beer was all well kept and the pub worth a repeat visit". Ed.

From Mike Davies, Shaw Heath (via e-mail):

It is a pity that your November edition reported a Shaw Heath Stagger that dated back to August, as it resulted in an incomplete picture of the current state of affairs at The Florist. John and Debbie had taken over only a matter of weeks before your visit. They have since been making great progress in transforming a pub that was on its last legs into a bright, welcoming local serving very good beer.

In fairness we did comment positively about the Florist in the September issue – a revisit is in order I think. Ed

From Rhys Jones, Aberystwyth:

If "there is no such thing as a safe level of alcohol consumption" (the aptly-named Prof Nutt, quoted by Curmudgeon, September), presumably that includes zero.



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Pub News Extra

ANOTHER historic Stockport pub has gained legal protection with a Grade II listing, although it is fair to say that the **Nursery** in Heaton Norris is in very safe hands. Intact inter-wars pubs are rare indeed and this is recognised in the listing description which cites:



©Michael Slaughter LRPS

* **Interior:** for its remarkably complete and little altered interior featuring a wide range of high quality features such as panelling, fitted seating, stained glass, signage and light fittings, along with the more unusual screen printed silk decoration above the bar counters

* **Layout:** for the survival of a little altered layout of rooms complete with the relatively rare survival of an off-sales counter

* **Social History:** as a very good example of an inter-war "reformed" public house, having an architecturally restrained exterior but providing a range of facilities such as the sundeck overlooking the bowling green, all designed to form a respectable venue for responsible drinkers.

The Nursery joins Stockport's other superb inter-wars survivor, the **Swan With Two Necks** (Princes Street), as one of very few listed pubs of this era anywhere in the country. *Photo above courtesy Mick Slaughter LRPS*

Competition to get into the Good Beer Guide is always fierce, with many pubs selling good enough beer jostling for the limited number of entries. It says something about the beer quality for a pub to clock up 25 consecutive entries but that is the achievement of the **Davenport Arms** in Woodford. This Robinsons house has been run by the Hallworth family for almost 80 years with Yvonne Hallworth being the fourth generation at the helm. CAMRA presented Yvonne with a certificate to mark this remarkable Good Beer Guide run and is seen here receiving her award from Stockport & South Manchester Chairman John Clarke.



Bits & Pieces

Matt Comerford has left the **Fletcher Moss**, Didsbury where he worked bar and cellar, to take on his first Hydes pub. He and wife Amy, have taken over the more rurally-set **Hare & Hounds**, a successful dining and drinking house on Dooley Lane in Marple. Matt's remit is to increase the sales of cask ales from the current three, to four in the near future. Matt has done a fantastic job at the Fletcher Moss, helping it maintain its Good Beer Guide status there, so surely this bodes well for this new venture.

In Rusholme, the long-closed **Huntsman**, which has always sold keg beer, has been sold to investors to become another shisha bar. Rusholme now has more shisha bars than it does pubs. Meanwhile in Portwood, the forlorn and long-closed **Old King** has been sold for conversion into two food outlets. One outlet is rumoured to become a Nando's restaurant. Elsewhere in Stockport the **Bulls Head** on the Market Place has been closed by Robinsons. Up for sale but still trading are the **Greyhound** in Edgeley and the **Hope** on Wellington Road North.

Good news from Gorton where the **Vale Cottage** has now reopened. Taylor's Landlord and Moorhouses Pride of Pendle have been spotted on handpump and beer quality is reported as good. Not so far away Robinsons **Plough** has cask ale back on sale – Unicorn when OT called with Mr Scrooge waiting in the cellar. Finally a real ale gain in the City Centre where **Grand Central** Oxford Road has installed Wychwood Hobgoblin on handpump with more beers to follow.



The Trafford & Hulme Branch Pub of the Season for Winter 2011/2012 is the **Beech Inn** on Beech Road, Chorlton.

The award was presented on 27th December when the pubs' many regulars joined local CAMRA members to congratulate landlord Chris Clish and his team on turning round this former Good Beer Guide pub. Pictured is local CAMRA member Heather Airlie presenting the award to Chris.



Just two years ago, the pub was closed having gone through a number of temporary managers under owners Enterprise Inns and many locally feared it would join the ever growing list of pubs that never re-open. Since Chris and his wife Julia took on the pub in 2009, they have slowly and steadily rebuilt its reputation as both a pub and the heart of its community and where good beer is assured.

Troublemakers have been barred, regular folk and jamming nights have returned, the cask ale range has grown from three regular ales to up to as many as eight and the pub recently held its first ever beer festival. While Chorlton's plethora of excellent modern bars is very welcome, it is also heartening to see many of the area's younger drinkers are discovering in the Beech Inn just how great a real traditional pub can be. More improvements are planned for 2012, with Enterprise having promised an internal refurbishment and Chris also in negotiations to add a further four handpumps.

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For Young Member and concessionary rates please visit www.camra.org.uk or call 01727 867201.

I wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association

I enclose a cheque for _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Applications will be processed within 21 days

12/10

Campaigning for Pub Goers & Beer Drinkers

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Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the whole form using a ball point pen and send to: Campaign for Real Ale Ltd, 230 Hatfield Road, St. Albans, Herts AL1 4LW



Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society Service User Number

To the Manager _____ Bank or Building Society
 Address _____

 _____ Postcode _____

9 2 6 1 2 9

FOR CAMRA OFFICIAL USE ONLY

This is not part of the instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Membership Number _____
 Name _____
 Postcode _____

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Campaign for Real Ale Limited Direct Debits from the account detailed on this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Campaign for Real Ale Limited and, if so will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society,

Signature(s) _____
 Date _____

This Guarantee should be detached and retained by the payer.

The Direct Debit Guarantee

- This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay by Direct Debits.
- If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request
- If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit by The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society
 - If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when The Campaign for Real Ale Ltd asks you to
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.

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for more information... or maybe just for a little chat about our new beer

contact **Claire Middleton**

07896 198240 or 0161 4806571

www.frederic-robinson.co.uk claire.middleton@frederic-robinson.co.uk