

March 2012



Opening

THE FREE LOCAL CAMRA MAGAZINE

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

Reflections on the local pub scene



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Pub OF THE Month AWARD

The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for March is the Railway, Avenue Street, Portwood. Mike Gilroy is a regular and explains why it won.



THIS is a multi award winning family run business; at the helm are Sue and Vince, with a crew of four talented staff: Brian, Frankie, Phil and Sara. The pub has been under threat of demolition for many years but seems to have more lives than your average cat. It has once again had a reprieve for at least another 12 months before it is knocked down to make way for a supermarket (Sainsbury's will have to wait).

Meanwhile it is very much business as usual. The bar sports 14 hand pumps, serving cask ales from Pennine, Outstanding and Moorhouses breweries, with ever changing guest milds. Every Friday up to three guest beers are on sale; there is also a hand pump with Thornbridge "Jaipur" as a permanent feature.

The cider and perry are supplied by John Reek of Merrylegs Cider, so the quality is top notch. The perry is Weston's "Country" 4.5%, and as for cider, a different cider goes on as soon as the last barrel is empty, so you never know what cider is coming next, but you do know it will be good. A wide selection of Belgian, German and other bottled beers complete the range.

The pub has a railway theme, with a large loco mural at the back of the pub, and a model railway at the top of the bar. There is a bar-billiards table which gets used a lot, and card games (crib) are played around the pub. There is a quiz team and a darts team so the place is buzzing with different things going on.

And if all that wasn't enough, the Railway puts on up to three beer festivals a year and the same amount of cider festivals (which are not to be missed). All the local beer festivals get visited from this pub with buses/minibuses organized by Sue & Vince. For the Ramsbottom festival there was a vintage bus and a steam train used to get there.

The presentation is on Thursday 22 March from 8pm. The pub is just a short walk from Stockport Town Centre but buses 330 and 325 will drop you almost outside.

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Comment, Notes & Contents

What's On

Opening Times – Comment

This month in Pub News we relate the sorry fate of the Bricklayers and the Orange Tree in Altrincham. It is a story that has been repeated many times, both throughout the Opening Times area and the country at large.

This is another sad indictment of the failings of the major pub cos, with tenants squeezed until they just can't go on any more. High rents set according to the pub co's own terms, forced to buy beer at prices way over what they could get it on the open market and be limited in the choice of what they can stock and lack of investment in the buildings forcing tenants to put their own money into fixtures and fittings.

Time and time again the model is shown to be failing with pub cos closing faster than others. In this case, it leaves three people homeless, jobless, penniless and very disillusioned and it leaves two of Altrincham's oldest pubs with a very uncertain future. To rub salt into the wounds of the town's drinkers, the Bricklayers closed in the same week that saw the former Bridge Inn demolished within days of the local council purchasing it to make way for the proposed development on the site.

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. 7200 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 April issue is Friday 9th March

Font cover – Manchester's Oast House reflected in the windows if a nearby building. Photo by Andy Jenkinson

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, Andy Jenkinson, Adam Bruderer, John Abrams, Rhys Jones

Distribution Manager – Janet Flynn

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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.

Wednesday 7th – Hydes Brewery Visit. Start 7.30pm. Book with Dave Hallows. (NM)

Thursday 8th – Chorlton Social: 8.00 Pi; 8.45 Marble Beer House; 9.30 Sedge Lynn; 10.15 Charango. Finish Bar, (TRH)

Friday 9th – Mild Magic pre-launch stagger: 7.30pm Bulls Head, London Rd; 8.30 Grey Horse, Portland St. (SSM)

Monday 12th – Two-centre social: Navigation, Manchester Road, Heaton Norris 8pm; Railway, Avenue Street, Portwood 9.30pm. (SSM)

Wednesday 14th – Social: Park Hotel, Monton Rd, Monton. Starts 8pm. (NM)

Wednesday 14th – Allgates “Meet the Brewer”: Moon Under Water, Deansgate. Starts 6.30pm. (TRH)

Thursday 15th – Oxford Road Social: 8pm Odder; 8.45 Font; 9.30 Thursday Scholar; Finish Grand Central and Salisbury. (TRH)

Friday 16th – Chorlton-on-Medlock & University Stagger: 7.30pm Ford Maddox Brown, Wilmslow Road; 8.30pm Grafton, Grafton St. (SSM)

Saturday 17th – RedWillow Brewery Visit. £5pp – limited places. Book at social@thcamra.org.uk (TRH)

Thursday 22nd – Pub of the Month presentation to the Railway, Portwood. From 8pm. (SSM)

Saturday 24th – Visit to Beer Festival at Star, Huddersfield. Meet 1pm at Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar. (HPNC)

Saturday 24th – Nottingham Crawl: Meet 9.54 train from Stockport. (MEC)

Tuesday 27th – Spring Pub of the Season Award: Egerton Arms, Astbury. Starts 8pm. (MEC)

Wednesday 28th – Social: Bulls Head, High St, Walkden. From 8pm. (NM)

Wednesday 28th – Brooklands Social: 8pm Legh Arms; 9pm Moorfield Hotel; 10pm Little B. Finish at The Brook. (TRH)

Friday 30th – Brewery visit and social: Worth Brewery, Poynton RBL Club, Georges Rd, Poynton. Starts 8.15pm. Book with Mark McConachie on 0161 429 9356 (SSM)

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

Thursday 1st March – New Lloyds Hotel, Wilbraham Road, Chorlton. Starts 8pm (TRH)

Thursday 8th March – Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Guest speaker: Paul Jefferies, Production Director Hydes Brewery. Starts 8.15pm. (SSM)

Monday 12th – White Lion, Disley. Starts 8.30pm. (HPNC)

Wednesday 21st – Ducie Bridge, Corporation St, Manchester. 7.30pm. **Includes Branch AGM – all please attend.** (NM)

Monday 2nd April – Duke of York, Romiley. Starts 8.30pm, (HPNC)

Thursday 5th April – Railway, Ashley Road, Hale. Starts 8pm. (TRH)



Tipping Point Approaches

IN 2011, just over 47% of beer drunk in the UK was sold in the off-trade, as opposed to 53% in pubs, bars and clubs. This compares with a mere 32% ten years earlier. The British Beer & Pub Association reckon that 2012 might well see the "tipping point" where off trade sales exceed on-trade for the first time, possibly after the quarter including the European football championships. To the lover of pubs, this may be a cause for regret, but is there really anything that can be done about it?

This shift is often laid at the door at the growing disparity between pub and supermarket prices. But it has to be remembered that pubs are selling an experience, not just beer, and over time, as real incomes increase, the cost of services will tend to rise relative to that of goods because of their greater labour content. I doubt whether many of those complaining about this disparity are advocating a reduction in the minimum wage, and any attempt to rig the market by artificially increasing the price of off-trade alcohol is likely to bring only a short-term respite.

There is also of course the smoking ban, which over the period since its introduction in 2007 is reckoned to have reduced drink sales in pubs by about 15% over and above the long-term trend. But, while this has undoubtedly accelerated the relative decline of pubs, it was still happening well before 2007.

Beyond those two factors, there are a whole range of wider changes in society that have contributed to the rise in at-home drinking. The decline of heavy industry has meant that there are far fewer manual workers for whom going in the pub every night and drinking numerous pints is a way of life. Plus there has been an erosion of traditional gender roles, meaning that it is no longer acceptable for the husband to go out to the pub while the wife stays at home with the kids.

There has been a long-term trend away from beer towards wine. Historically, pubs have done wine very poorly and in any case it is something generally drunk with a meal rather than simply during a drinking session. This has been associated with the rise in eating out, which tends to replace simple drinking sessions and is often not done in pubs. Mass car ownership makes taking loads of cans or bottles home a much more practical proposition than it used to be. At the same time, while more people have cars, they are increasingly reluctant to drive after drinking even within the legal limit, thus reducing the number of potential opportunities to go for a drink in a pub.

There is a much wider and more interesting choice of drinks available in the off-trade than there was thirty years ago, whereas, unless you're a cask beer fan, the range of drinks in most pubs can be somewhat limited. Homes themselves are much more congenial places than they were in the 1970s and offer far more in the way of entertainment, with central heating, multi-channel TV, DVDs, internet and computer games.

Employers are in many cases much less tolerant of even light lunchtime drinking by their staff. In addition, the ever-increasing public demonisation of even moderate drinking means that, when people do drink, they are more likely to do it outside the public eye, to the inevitable detriment of pubs.

The conclusion must be that there are a whole range of factors contributing to the shift from pub to at-home drinking. While a good pub will always offer a better drinking experience than the living room, realistically the days when pubgoing was a routine part of most people's everyday lives are not coming back, and any Canute-like attempt to stem the tide is unlikely to meet with lasting success.

(And yes, I know very well that Canute was making the point that he couldn't stop the tide)

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com
(comments on these articles can be left on the website)



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The Ups and Downs of Hillgate

Peter Edwardson on a Classic Crawl

It is believed that the annual Hillgate Stagger, organised by the Stockport & South Manchester branch of CAMRA and dating back to the mid-Seventies, has been regularly staged for longer than any other CAMRA event anywhere in the country. Hillgate – divided into Lower, Middle and Upper – is a long historic street which stretches about three quarters of a mile south from Stockport town centre until it joins the A6 in Heaviley. It was originally the main road through the town, and would have been traversed by Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 on his ill-fated advance to Derby. However, it was bypassed in the early part of the 19th century by Wellington Road South and North, the current alignment of the A6. This must have been one of the very first road bypasses anywhere in Britain.

Over the years, there have been 19 different pubs included on the crawl, although I don't think there have been more than 17 serving cask beer in any one year. Sadly, due to inner-urban decline and the general contraction of the pub trade, there are now only nine pubs on the route with real ale, plus a couple that are keg-only. Those nine include six Robinson's, two Holt's and one Sam Smith's, a considerable reduction in beer choice compared with what was available twenty years ago. At some point around 1990, the direction of the crawl was reversed to go uphill rather than downhill, as problems had been experienced with some of the pubs near the town centre locking their doors after 10 pm due to the crowds of revellers. That doesn't happen nowadays, but the uphill direction has become well established and does mean ending up at the Blossoms where Robinson's Old Tom is available to round off the evening.

The 19 pubs, starting from the bottom end, are as follows:

Queen's Head (Turner's Vaults) (Samuel Smith's), originally in the early years of the crawl a free house offering no cask beer. Currently open and serving cask beer.

Winter's (Holt's) – converted from a jeweller's shop in the early 1990s. Currently open and serving cask beer.

Spread Eagle (Robinson's) – now closed and used as brewery offices

Royal Oak (Robinson's) – actually just off Hillgate on High Street. Currently open and serving cask beer.

Bishop Blaize (Tetley, then Burtonwood) – previously called the Gladstone, now closed, but still in pub livery

Red Bull (Robinson's) – currently open and serving cask beer

Waterloo (Robinson's) – currently open and serving cask beer. Actually on Waterloo Road, just off Hillgate

Black Lion (Boddington's) – closed for some years

Sun & Castle (Tetley, then Holt's) – currently open and serving cask beer

Pack Horse/Big Lamp (Whitbread) – closed for some years

Golden Lion (Burtonwood) – closed for some years

Crown (Corner Cupboard) (Wilson's, then Vaux, then pub company) – currently open but not serving cask beer, although it has in the past

Star & Garter (Robinson's) – currently open and serving cask beer

Ram's Head (Wilson's) – long closed, and now an Indian restaurant

Flying Dutchman (Robinson's) – currently open and serving cask beer

Royal Mortar (Robinson's) – closed for some years, still derelict and boarded

Bowling Green (Wilson's, then pub company) – very recently closed. Actually on Charles Street, just off Hillgate

Wheatsheaf (Wilson's, then pub company) – currently open but not serving cask beer, although it has in the past

Blossoms (Robinson's) – currently open and serving cask beer

That really is a classic collection of British pub names.

We started as usual at the **Queen's Head**, alternatively known as Turner's Vaults, a Sam Smith's pub nestling in the shadow of the bridge carrying St Petersgate across Little Underbank. This pub has a long, narrow, unspoilt interior of great character comprising bar area at the front, a "horsebox" snug in the middle and a cosy lounge at the rear. We managed to find some seats in the lounge, but the pub was reasonably busy and it was gratifying to note that some of the customers had clearly been having an enjoyable afternoon. As always in Sam's pubs, there was just the one cask beer available – Old Brewery Bitter – which was in pretty good form and at the bargain price of £1.60 a pint. It was interesting to note from the bar mountings that, following the duty reduction for beers of 2.8% and below, Sam's had cut the strength of their keg Dark Mild and Alpine Lager to take advantage of this.

A very short walk under the bridge followed to Holts' **Winter's** on the other side of the street. This pub was converted from a former jeweller's shop in the 1990s and retains an impressive frontage including an ornamental clock. The interior is on two levels with the ground floor being largely open-plan. For some reason this pub never seems to have quite lived up to its potential, but tonight it was noticeably busier than I recall from previous Hillgate Staggers. Only Holt's Bitter was on cask – the Mild being keg – but was found to be in good condition.

We then took a set of pedestrian steps to climb up to High Street and the **Royal Oak**, which is just off Hillgate. This is a modernised Robinson's pub which has a cosy alcove of bench seating on the left-hand side facing the bar. On a Stagger earlier in the year, the beer had been poor in here, but tonight the Unicorn was acceptable enough.



Passing the closed Bishop Blaize, we climbed steeply uphill to the **Red Bull**, which was by some way the busiest pub of the night, and was standing room only. Robinson's again, this old pub was extensively modernised a couple of years ago, resulting in a spacious, rambling interior with a number of characterful spaces around the central bar. Perhaps something was lost from how it was before, but the old layout was cramped and it could be very congested when busy. An array of five cask beers was on sale – Hatters, Unicorn, Dizzy Blonde, the Elbow collaboration Build a Rocket Boys and the seasonal beer Mr Scrooge. I had the Dizzy Blonde which was very enjoyable, and the other beers seemed to be similarly well received.



We crossed the road again to reach the **Waterloo** on Waterloo Road, just off Hillgate, but clearly visible from it. This Robinson's pub always seems to me to have an oddly reversed layout, with the long bar counter in the room designated as the lounge, and the vault being served through a hatch. It also, on these annual visits, always appears to be heated to tropical levels. Nevertheless, it had a reasonable number of customers. Hatters and Unicorn were available – I thought the Unicorn was fairly good, and those who had the Hatters said the same.

We returned to Hillgate and crossed to the **Sun & Castle**, a Holt's pub which is the last non-Robinson's outlet on the route. This is an imposing purpose-built pub from the 1920s which in more recent years has been opened out a little and gained more of a Victorian theme to the decor. It was fairly quiet tonight, with the karaoke not drawing in many customers. Just Holt's Bitter again, which was quite good.



Then followed the longest single walk of the crawl, past the still open but keg-only Crown, to the **Star & Garter**, an impressive three-storey Robinson's pub standing on a bend in the road and commanding a view along it to the north. It has a spacious, modernised interior broken up into a number of distinct areas, and was markedly busier than I remember in previous years. Unfortunately, the beer did not quite live up to this impression, with Hatters no better than OK and Unicorn somewhat lacklustre.

Crossing St Mary's Way by the traffic lights, we came to the **Flying Dutchman**, a compact modern pub which was rebuilt about twenty years ago. It was fairly busy, with a guitarist/vocalist performing and disco-style lighting. A couple of women came up to me and said that they thought I looked like Ronnie Barker, as having just walked in out of the cold my glasses had steamed up – I wasn't quite sure what to make of that! Unicorn was the only cask beer available, which was slightly better than in the Star & Garter.

Passing the closed Bowling Green on Charles Street, and the keg-only Wheatsheaf, we eventually reached the and the **Blossoms**, prominently situated in the apex of the junction with Bramhall Lane. Unlike in previous years, courtesy of temporary licensee Eric there was an impressive array of Robinson's beers on the horseshoe-shaped bar – Hatters, Unicorn, Dizzy Blonde, Mr Scrooge, Black Beauty, and Old Tom in a pin on the counter. I had the Mr Scrooge, which was on good form, and a half of Old Tom was an ideal way to round off the evening. The interior is little changed over the years, with three separate rooms opening off the main bar area, and we managed to find some seats in the cosy snug.



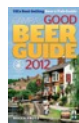
While Hillgate may not have the absolute number of beers or pubs that it once enjoyed, it is still a very interesting crawl with a good variety of characterful pubs and some excellent beer. It was also gratifying to see several of the pubs noticeably busier than they have been in some previous years. Why not try them for yourself and see how your impressions measure up?

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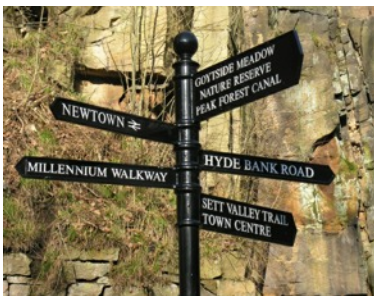


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High Peak Pub Scene

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

THE **Oakwood** in High Street West, Glossop joins the **Star** and the **Globe** in having draught cider on handpump. Cider lovers can now have a mini cider trail in the town, taking in all three town centre pubs. However, it's worth noting that the **Globe** does not open on Monday to Saturdays until 5.00pm (Tuesdays not at all) but is open from 12.00 noon on Sundays and all throughout the day. The **Star** also does not open during the week until 4.00pm. Of course all three pubs do draught beers as well, the **Star** selling an ever changing selection from the **Punch Taverns** list of available beers. The **Globe** sells beers brewed on the premises as well as often having a guest beer (Idle and Ossett are often seen) and the **Oakwood** sells **Robinsons** beers but the staple **Unicorn**, on sale in most of their pubs, is not sold, which gives for a more interesting selection. A recent run down of **Globe** beers that were available in the **Globe** pub were: **Albion** 4.5%, **Toby Porter** 4.2%, **Imperial Stout** 5.8%, **Comet** 4.3%, **Amber** 3.9% and **Blondie** 3.9%. Prices are very reasonable with only the **Imperial Stout** selling at over £2.00.

The **Hare & Hounds** at Mottram Road, Stalybridge (just outside Stalybridge Celtic FC) is selling **Black Sheep Bitter** and **Copper Dragon Golden Pippin** as their regular beers. New licensees **Kath** and **Alan** moved in during January and are hoping to build up trade, and have introduced food back to the pub at a reasonable price. Worth a try before watching a game at **Bower Fold**!

Also in Stalybridge, the **Old Thirteenth Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn** is well known to be the pub with the longest name in the country. Located in a backwater of the town, I decided to check out on the first Friday in February to see if real ale was still sold. It certainly said so - there was a big banner outside stating it sold "Timothy Taylors Beers". However, there were two handpumps with clips facing the other way on entering, and the girl behind the bar told me that they did not sell beer out of them. Still, a few yards down the road, the **Britons Protection** did sell cask, their usual **Banks's Bitter** was accompanied by **Wychwood January Sale**. The **Banks's** was in excellent form, the latter I did not try as it was my personal choice not to drink a 2.8% beer on a Friday evening out! The "Brit" is a friendly corner local that has a lounge and a games/tap room with a pool table, table football and shows football live games and always worth seeking out.

The **White House**, High Peak Branch's Winter Pub of the Season, had **Hydes Old Oak** and **Original** on sale as usual that same night, joined by **Marble Manchester Bitter**, which the landlord told me sells well whenever he puts it on, **Hydes XXXX** (6.8%) and **Okells Aile Smoked Celtic Porter** at 4.8%. This was excellent indeed and my beer of the night. The **White House** also currently sells five ciders from five-gallon containers in the cellar.

In Hyde on a cold Friday night in January, my normal homing device leads me to the **Sportsman**, **Queens**, **Cotton Bale** and **Cheshire Ring** but once in a while, I have a stroll out elsewhere. That night, I walked up **Lunn Road** to the **Gardeners Arms** but there was no real ale at all. Further on, the **Clarks Arms** still had **Wilson's** signage outside and looked quite attractive. However, there were no customers inside - and no real ale either. Round to the **Ring O'Bells**, on the corner of **Stockport Road** and **Market Street** at the **James North** clock. No luck here either, so down the road and the **Bush**, a **Robinsons** pub opposite **Greenfield Street** school...promising? ... No, there was just a big silver font on the bar, and no handpumps once more. Surely the **Shepherds Call**, a nice community pub I used to frequent when it was a **Greenalls** pub many years back, will turn up trumps? Well, despite friendly locals, and a sign outside saying they sold cask ales, there was not a handpump to be seen.

Passing the former **Crown**, **Cheshire Cheese** and **Church Inn** as I passed down **Market Street**, all closed, I came to **Last Orders**, again with no real ale, so it was the **Unity** and the **White Lion** before I had my first drinks of the night, both **Robinsons** beers and both reasonable. So...back to the usual **Hyde** route which left me time to call in the **Cotton Bale** and **Sportsman**, where the beer quality ensured the night was not a wasted one.

Peak Practice With Robin Wignall

ALATE January visit to the **Beehive** at **Combs** found the usual sensibly priced good food, and an interesting choice of beer. Alongside the usual **Beehive Bitter** and **Pedigree** was **Wychwood January Sale**. This is a 2.8% brew which benefits from lower duty on beers with a low ABV. The duty reduction is passed on to licensees, and certainly in this case the customer pays a lower price for a decent beer. Even at only 2.8% this was a beer worth trying, and this is an initiative to be applauded.

Another **Marston's** initiative this year is a monthly single hop variety brew. **Wai-Iti** was

the January beer available in the **Shepherds** in **Whaley Bridge**. This beer is brewed with **New Zealand** hops and has sold well.

Another dining visit where good food was enhanced with good beer was to the **Dog & Partridge** at **Bridgemont**. Hungry runners were well fed after their exertions. All six hand pumps were in use and it was quiz night as well. I tried **Black Sheep Bitter** and **Thwaites Wainwright**, which are regular beers and in good form and a guest from the south of **Derbyshire**, **Derventio Gold**, again a good brew.

At the **Board Inn** at the **Horwich End** end of **Whaley Bridge** **Nick** and **Helen** are getting to grips with turning this smashing little pub into a paying proposition. My visits have found very good **Hatters** and **Unicorn**. I also picked up very good reports on the **Sunday Roast** from a customer who had dined with his family. The **White Hart** in **Whaley Bridge** changed hands in January with a relief manager now in place. **Tetley Bitter** and **Young's Special** were available and a third beer is expected to be added.

At the **Railway** in **Whaley Bridge** **Unicorn** is the usual reliable beer and now seasonal beers are available. **Mr. Scrooge** was very popular, and **Long Kiss Good** night is keenly anticipated. This beer had already reached the **Crossings** in **Furness Vale** in late January.

Also providing customer choice, the **White Horse** at **Horwich End** lights has a **Punch** finest Cask beer to go with **Greene King IPA**. On my last visit this was a good pint of **Black Sheep Ruddy Ram**, described as a 'Porter style beer.' Over the hill in the **Black Brook** valley good beer is to be had aplenty. At the **Navigation** in **Buxworth**, **Windle Waller** enhanced its reputation as a very good well balanced session bitter. **Young's Winter Warmer** was as it should be. There is a beer festival over the Easter week end at the **Navigation**, up to 20 beers and some real ciders.

The **Old Hall** at **Whitehough** keeps a changing range of fine beer and two hand pumped ciders are also usually available. Work across the road at the **Paper Mill** (formerly **Oddfellows**) continues apace. Not always open Monday or Tuesday the **Paper Mill** is busy when open, especially for televised football. The **Winter Beer Festival** at the **Old Hall** will have come and gone at the end of February, by the time you read this, and will have been as ever, one to get to. A report on this and other events next time.

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FOCUS ON QUALITY AND FLAVOUR

Rhys Jones thinks the time has come for CAMRA to refocus



There's a saying that, given time, all organisations end up as if they were run by a conspiracy of their foes. CAMRA is some way from that sorry state, but there are some worrying signs.

Back in the heroic days when CAMRA was founded, it all seemed so simple. "Cask beer good, keg beer bad!", we chanted, in the manner of George Orwell's liberated farm animals. No doubt such simplifications were necessary if our brewing traditions were to be saved from what seemed likely oblivion. What is worrying is that we seem to have learned so little along the way.

Let's be honest – while a handful of our regional brewers seem to have been consistent standard-bearers for quality and integrity, far too much real ale in the 1970s and 1980s was inconsistent or just plain nasty stuff produced by time-serving companies whose complacent owners had more than half an eye to the prospect of personally lucrative takeover by their acquisitive neighbours. All too often, every expense was spared on maintenance and raw materials, the ignorance and indolence of grossly inadequate licensees were condoned without a care, while until the hot summers of the 1990s cellar cooling was dismissed as being for wimps.

All this CAMRA accepted – after all, it was still "real ale". In the existential crisis of the 1970s, this was the only possible tactic – it was that or the death of cask. But as the industry and trade transformed themselves from the old shambolic days to today's higher standards of professionalism (true, there are still exceptions – but nowadays they are few), we

remained stuck in the old certainties: cask was good, keg was bad, count the handpumps.

Surely it is long past time for us as a campaign to temper our obsessive and frankly outmoded dependence on narrow technical criteria and start to focus on the concept of quality across the brewing industry and pub trade. Instead of pettifoggery and unwinnable "campaigns" on such minutiae as short measure, we should be looking to establish standards of quality accreditation across the industry (and if that means driving out of business the minority of clueless microbrewers whose undrinkable cack threatens the reputation of the entire sector, so much the better). Instead of endless debates over the precise methods of making and dispensing beer (and cider) that we condescend to declare acceptable, let's start encouraging – and, in time, insisting on – proper professional qualifications for those who run our pubs, tend their cellars, and serve our beer. And where we must have definitions, let's make them bottom-up rather than top-down – in other words, let's start with the beer and make our criteria encourage excellence, rather than starting with a set of criteria and forcing the beer to fit.

I joined CAMRA because I wanted to drink beer that tasted good – not because I wanted to drink beer made or processed by any particular method. However beguiling the early certainties may have been, we need to acknowledge that our inherited criteria on their own are no longer adequate surrogates for good, interesting, characterful flavour. Humbling though the sheer hardwork and dedication of thousands of CAMRA members undoubtedly is, I fear we risk long-term irrelevance unless we recognise that good beer comes in many guises – and that the certainties of 1971 cannot be our only guide in today's utterly changed conditions.



April 2012 will see CAMRA promote the first national Communities Pub Month, a new national initiative to champion the importance of local pubs.

CAMRA has been campaigning for over 40 years to support pubs in the wake of rising costs, underinvestment, threat of demolition, property developers and more, and with 16

pubs closing on a weekly basis, the future of the great British pub is at stake.

Community Pubs Month is taking place to help increase footfall in local pubs, to increase the awareness of pubs as invaluable community assets, and encourage licensees to organise and promote events to attract further trade. It's all about giving community pubs as much publicity as possible during these tough times. A dedicated website has been set up to promote the great British pub during the month - see communitypubsmoonth.org.uk

A range of promotional materials including campaigning posters, beer mats, leaflets and pump clip crowners are being made available to pubs. Licensees, pub managers and even pub regulars can visit the website to see if your local CAMRA branch has already ordered a promotional pack for you and, if not, can order a pack themselves.

Pubs are also encouraged to organise as many events as possible during April - ideas include sporting competitions, Meet The Brewer sessions, Easter Egg hunts. Publicans can enter their events and get more ideas at communitypubsmoonth.org.uk

Micro Brewery

John Abrams gets online

We seem to be going through a transition period from beer being a minimalist `what's available on a Friday night` sort of affair to something much more expansive – of huge competition between breweries and pubs not on quantity but **quality**

Where there once was a time of `you get what you're given` - the focus is much more on the customer. Who remembers a time when you were lucky to have a `Holt's bitter`? Just one pump – pah, now not good enough!

The evaluation of beer (however subjective) is using the new media to percolate down to the average punter.

Let's look at wine (yes I know!) – apparently the best selling wines used to be Concord, Blue Nun and Black Tower. I remember in the 90s going to a party where every single person had brought an E & J Gallo which was soon superseded by Wolf Blass and now even that is looked down upon. Each to their own yet there's a reason for all this – all objective thought agrees that a Wolf Blass is far superior to a Blue Nun!

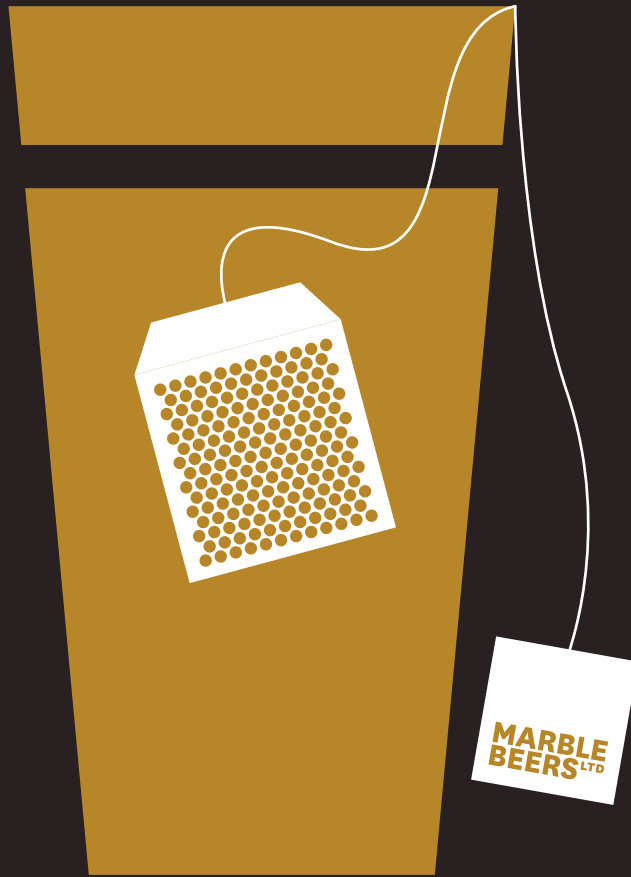
When it comes to `the masses` beer really is a `late developer`. As soon as people realised they had the power of their wallets they started demanding and desiring more wine styles, greater competition and better quality. How did they go on this journey? Through the printed word, broadsheet reviews and cooking programmes.

Beer though has other options based on new technology:

1. Twitter – it's not all about Arab springs – pubs in our area are informing customers using this medium in 140 characters or less listing their beers and giving out messages to their customers. `Followers` on twitter can look at our very own Crown Inn's twitter feed detailing the guest ales on tap – look for it @Thecrowninn154.

2. Next up we have the all important `Youtube`. Budding Jancis Robinson's of the Real Ale world take to their video cameras to critique real ales. The best one is `realaleguide` (stick it into your Google or Youtube search engine) and you'll see Simon reviewing over 450 beers. For a stunning example check out his view of Thornbridge's St Petersburg: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeOhFTOYoCs&context=C3b85b1eADOEgsToP DskKNR4wYj_JhgO4TOencOBFz In a sign of the times his wife also critiques the same beer. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QBHZFSnn5o&feature=related>

Needless to say there's a twitter feed @realalereviews!



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Pub News



Trafford News

Dunham Massey Brewery Tap, **Costello's Bar**, in Altrincham has undergone a



minor refurbishment. While the majority of the work was "behind the scenes" on the building, the brewery has taken the opportunity to redecorate, with the walls now adorned with images of old Altrincham and to renew the toilets. New cellar equipment has been installed which will help with the consistency and temperature of the real ales on offer and the bar is putting in an extra handpump that will be used to serve a non-Dunham Massey guest ale at weekends.

Elsewhere in Altrincham, things are not so good. The **Bricklayers Arms** in the centre of the town's pedestrianised George Street closed suddenly in early February. When OT investigated, we found that landlord Paul Cant had been subsidising the pub's ever increasing bills from his other earnings for many months and had finally decided he had no choice but to hand the keys back to owners Enterprise Inns. Paul also had the lease on the **Orange Tree** on Old Market Place and unfortunately he along with partner Diane and pub manager Stef left the Orange Tree exactly a week after leaving the Bricklayers, heartbroken having put their heart and soul and lots of their own money into the two pubs.



It would seem that pubco failings have also sounded the death knell for yet another community pub in Timperley, with news that the Spirit Group, spun off from the Punch empire last year, has sold the **Sylvan Inn** on Sylvan Lane, Timperley to property developers with plans to build houses on the site. In the hands of Punch/Spirit the pub has not sold real ale for some time and has become in need of some investment. On the positive side, it has now effectively become a free house able to buy beer at market prices and with the current landlord Eric having about a year left on his contract, there is a small opportunity for it to be turned into a viable going concern before the spectre of demolition rises.

Drinkers in south Stretford can look forward to sampling some real ale for the first time in years with the long dormant handpump at the **Robin Hood** having been brought back into use. The first ale to feature was Greene King's Old Speckled Hen. After not having sold real ale for some time, the pub is taking it slowly and will put a firkin (9 gallons) on each Friday for the weekend trade and see how it goes. The choice available to them is limited but the beer each week will change. This is great news for Stretford, which since the demise of The Green Windmill has had Wetherspoon's Bishop's Blaize in the shadow of Old Trafford as it's only cask outlet but now has three - the **Bishop's Blaize**, the **Great Stone Hotel** and the Robin Hood. OT hopes its readers will visit the Robin Hood to sample its ale and help it get the throughput it needs to keep a permanent real ale on.

City Column

Oxford Road's **Kro2** bar closed for refurbishment 23rd December, but as OT went to press it was still closed with no sign of any significant refurbishment work having been done. While it's not everybody's taste in bars and its real ale range may have seemed boring in comparison to nearby bars like **Odder**, **Font** and **Jabez Clegg**, it's not that long ago that it held regular beer festivals and its large outdoor garden is a rarity in that part of Manchester, so it would be a shame if it was a permanent loss.

The **Salutation** on Higher Chatham Street (behind Manchester Metropolitan University and the Royal Northern College of Music) is undergoing a revival under the ownership of the Trof group. Fears that the group known for its venues such as The Deaf Institute



and eponymous bars in Fallowfield and the Northern Quarter would destroy the character of the pub and remove real ale have proved un-necessary. A tasteful and subtle refurb has taken place to update the worn furnishings and the somewhat tired real ale range has been revitalised with offerings from local micro breweries. When Trafford & Hulme branch visited to take part in the weekly quiz, the ales were from Stockport's Quantum and Macclesfield's RedWillow breweries. A new manager has been brought in from the nearby Sandbar, also an excellent bar and there is talk of doubling the range to four handpumps.

JD Wetherspoon will be holding their annual spring real ale and cider festival across all their pubs from 14th March to 1st April. As well as 45 British ales, the festival will again feature real ales specially created by brewers from abroad, with brews from a Norwegian, a Belgian master brewer, an American craft brewer and an Imperial Russian Stout actually brewed by a Russian. This year's festival will be launched in Manchester with a special event at **The Waterhouse** on Princess Street on the 13th, with five of the festival ales on, live music and discounts offered to CAMRA members.

The first day of the festival will be marked with a Meet The Brewer event at the **Moon Under Water** on Deansgate in the City Centre. The visiting brewer will be from Allgates of Wigan who will be giving out free samples. There will be an opportunity to preview the brewery's forthcoming seasonal ales plus there will be a raffle and an opportunity to purchase Allgates merchandise. 14th March, from 6.30pm.

In Levenshulme the **Horseshoe**, a long standing cask ale outlet, has now lost its cask ale this making the centre of Levenshulme a completely cask-free zone. Real ale had also again disappeared from the **Lord Nelson** in Gorton when OT called in early January.

Stockport Supping

Or rather not supping given more pub closures to report. Robinsons are continuing to thin their tied estate and the latest local pub to close was the **Grapes** on Castle Street in Edgeley.



In truth the pub does seem to have struggled in recent times and Robinsons were unable to find a new tenant. The lack of any proper outside smoking area and catering facilities probably didn't help either. We understand that the **Unity** on Wellington Road North is also due for closure and there are rumours that another town pub could also be due for the chop.

On the other side of the coin though, the **Armoury** on the other side of the roundabout to the Grapes continues to thrive and trade is building at the nearby **Florist**, now in the hands of new and enthusiastic licensees. Robinsons have also completed a refurbishment of the **Blossoms** in Heaviley which is now looking very smart after a thorough redecoration.

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5%

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5.3%

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Please do not hesitate to contact us for further info!

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From: Sophie Cunningham, Senior Fundraiser, After Adoption

I would like to say another huge thank you this year to everyone involved in helping After Adoption raise a wonderful £4,250 at the CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival 2012 as the Festival Charity.

We are so grateful to all on the organising committee for selecting our charity for a second year to benefit from this fantastic opportunity, and supporting us in making it such a success for our charity. In particular we would like to thank Jim Flynn for his support and suggestions.

Yet again we received such a warm response from visitors - not only does our participation in the Festival help us raise such a wonderful amount, but it is an opportunity to bring the name and work of After Adoption to the attention of the thousands who flock to the Festival each year - and what a great response we received.

One in four people in the UK today are affected by adoption, whether young adopted people and adopted adults, adoptive families, or birth relatives of those adopted - After Adoption provides support to all. The money raised from the Festival will be a huge boost to this work.

Our success at the Festival this year would not have been possible without the support of our volunteers, who gave up their time to help and put in a huge amount of hard work and enthusiasm, so a big thank you to them and our staff. We also want to thank all the companies who generously donated prizes to our Lucky Straw game on our stall - I'm pleased to say too many to mention individually but we hope you know who you are!

And finally, to everyone who came and visited our stall, took part in any of our games, or made a donation in one of our collection buckets - on behalf of all at After Adoption, and the thousands of children and adults we help every year whose lives are affected by adoption, THANK YOU.

PS We are really pleased to announce we will also be the Festival charity in 2013, for its final year in Manchester - looking forward to seeing you all next year!

(If you would like further information on the charity or to get involved contact Sophie at sophie.cunningham@afteradoption.org.uk Ed)

From Paul Thompson, via email

Some of your readers will have heard the old joke

Q "What's the secret of running a bad restaurant successfully?"

A "Sharp knives & dim lighting"

Am I the only person to notice an increase in the number of very dimly lit pubs? When entering a dimly lit pub which is half full it's noticeable that most of the tables occupied are those that are reasonably lit and those which are in near total darkness are empty. Why should this be?

Well, it's nice to be able to see your companions' faces and to be able to read the print on the bottle of beer you've bought. I find that I enjoy Opening Times the most when I can read it accompanied by a pint of real ale. Sadly in many of the pubs that dispense Opening Times it's too dark to read it.

The British are not a nation of troglodytes although many licensees treat their customers as if they are. Perhaps pubs might get a few more customers if they were slightly better lit? So to any licensees reading this, please lighten up.

From Anne Brown, via email

In your February issue of opening times you mention a knitting circle at the Plough in Heaton Moor as being the only one in Stockport. There is another one at the Arden Arms near Stockport Market.

News Extra

THE revolution at Robinsons continues. All of their pubs (we understand) have been sent a small booklet detailing additional bottled and draught "craft beers" that are now available. They are quite an interesting collection too.

Bottles include St Stephanus and Westmalle Dubbel from Belgium, and from the USA the likes of Goose Island IPA and 312 Wheat Beer, and Anchor Porter and Steam Beer. One pub making full use of these is the **Castle** on Oldham Street in Manchester City Centre which is also pioneering something previously unheard of in the Robinsons estate - guest cask ales.



The guest beers were launched at the Castle on Monday 13th February with four available. Not what could be termed the "usual suspects" either as the range comprised Oakleaf India pale Ale, Bath Ales Barnstormer, Oakham Scarlet Macaw and Titanic Chocolate & Vanilla Stout. Breweries that will be represented over the next few weeks also include Moorhouses, Mauldon, Springhead, 3Bs, Lymestone, Hopback, York, Potbelly and Saltaire. If all goes well the scheme will be rolled out to a further small number of Robinsons pubs that have been dubbed "Ale Shrines". These include the **Blossoms** in Stockport where we know licensee Eric Mills is champing at the bit to get his hands on some of these beers.

At the Castle, there has also been a slight rearrangement of the Robinsons beers with Old Tom being taken off handpump and being served directly from a pin (that's a 4½ gallon cask) behind the bar. One handpump remains devoted to traditional cider.

Manchester Irish Festival

The Manchester Irish Festival is upon us and O'Brien's Bar (the big Irish festival marquee bar) on Albert Square, will be opening at 12 noon each day from the 8th March to 11th March.



Much of the beer is being sourced by Dave Nuttall who tells us that to kick it off on Thursday 8th March, alongside the obligatory Guinness, they'll be celebrating the diversity of local cask ales alongside a selection of Irish cask ales brought over from Ireland especially for the event.

The ale line up hasn't been confirmed yet, but details will be posted on the O'Brien's Bar Facebook page as soon as available. There'll be live Irish music from 6pm Thursday and Friday (12 noon Saturday and Sunday), and Irish Stew from 12 noon each day. They are also televising the Ireland V Scotland 6 Nations Match on a big screen the Saturday afternoon. Entry will be free.

Joshua Brooks

On the corner of Charles Street and Princess Street in Manchester City centre, the Joshua Brooks has not been known as a destination for beer lovers. Not any more.

The manager is Jon Turner who has worked at the pub on and off for eight years and took over as managers about three and a half years ago. He has spent that time building up various aspects of the pub's business and last year turned his attention to the beer line up. What a transformation. From a solitary offering of the likes of Wells Bombardier, there are now five ever changing guest beers, sourced either directly or via Boggart Distribution. To say the range is enterprising is an understatement - when OT called the beers on included Thornbridge Colorado red, Prospect Pioneer, Quantum Bitter and, from Fuzzy Duck Brewery, Dark Drake and Ey Up. One to watch - and well worth a visit.

CAMRA Awards Gallery



The Pub of the Month Award for August was made to the **Friendship** in Fallowfield. Tricia and Chris Batty are shown with their award.



The November Pub of the Month went to the ever-popular **Grapes** in Hazel Grove. This excellent community local is run by George and Elaine for over 18 years. They are seen here being presented with their award by Chris Wainwright.



September's Award was made to the **Fingerpost** in Offerton. Licensee Robert Lester (left) is seen being presented with his award by CAMRA's Chris Wainwright.



In December the Pub of the Month winner was J D Wetherpoon's **Paramount** on Oxford Street in Manchester City Centre. CAMRA's Jim Flynn (left) is seen presenting the award to Natalie and Mark Hodgson.



The Pub of the Month in October was made to the popular **Fletcher Moss** in Didsbury. Managers Ken and Lynn Mallion (right) are seen with their team. Since receiving the award long-serving licensee Ken has decided to retire and Hydes are currently seeking a replacement.



The first Pub of the Month Award for 2012 was made to the **Victoria** on Wilmslow Road in Withington. Manager Mark Burns (left) is pictured with his team.

The Railway

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— SEASONAL

— ALES 2012 —



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SMELL		SWEET MALT, FRUITY HOP	
TASTE		SWEET MALT AND FRUITY FLAVOUR	
BITTER			
SWEET			

Available March/April 2012

