

January 2013



Opening

TIMES

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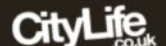


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Pub of the Month

The Waterloo, Stockport



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for January 2013 has been awarded to the Waterloo, Waterloo Road, Stockport, writes Dave Sharpe.

For those who don't know this older part of Stockport, the Waterloo pub is about 50 yards down the hill on Waterloo Road from its junction with Middle Hillgate, situated on the corner of Canal Street and facing Hopes Carr. It lies betwixt two 'historical' sites. Diagonally over to the left was the late Strawberry Studios where many famous groups, bands and singers made their first recordings. Over to the right is the memorial site to the 72 people who lost their lives in the plane crash in June 1967.

Now you know where you are get yourself into this Robinsons house and meet Linda and her staff and experience a warm and friendly atmosphere. There are records of buildings on this site in 1781. The first mention of the Waterloo was in 1878. Bells Brewery took it over in 1891 and in 1949 Robinsons took over Bells. The current pub is a combination of a corner shop, pub and cottage. It now consists of three rooms with a central bar dispensing from hand pulls Robinson's Unicorn and 1892, better known to the older imbibers as Mild. Food is served at lunchtimes. Entering the door on the right takes you into the lounge which runs along the front and was refurbished two years ago following a fire behind the bar. The door facing puts you into the vault. There is a small games room at the rear containing a pool table and dart board. A car park at the rear is accessed from Canal Street.

I hope that as many of you as possible will turn up on Tuesday 22nd January to give Linda and Billy, her husband of six months, her staff and not forgetting the 'regulars', all the support they deserve.

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Comment & What's On

Index, Notes and Local CAMRA Branch Events

Onwards and Upwards?

This time last year we commented that the time could not be long in coming that cask ale returned to actual volume growth rather than just declining at a much slower rate than the beer market in general. So it has proved to be with the latest Cask Report delivering the good news.

We also predicted that by the end of 2012 there would be somewhere in the region of 900 breweries in the UK. Well we got that one wrong as we are now past the 1,000 mark and heading upwards. When the brewery at the Hope Inn opens in a few months' time Stockport will have four operating breweries again – the last time we were in that position was 1959!

Of course it's not all good news. Pubs continue to face many threats (although the rate of closures locally seems to have slowed almost to a halt) and the price of beer goes ever upwards, pricing more people out of more pubs. Luckily there will be plenty of keenly priced good beer at the National Winter Ales Festival so make sure you get down there.

I think we might be in for an interesting 12 months. 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. 7,350 copies a month are printed by Phil Powell Printing of Failsworth. All articles copyright CAMRA unless otherwise stated.

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Subscriptions – available at £11.00 for 12 issues (make cheques payable to Opening Times). Apply to David Sharpe, 1 Chiltern Drive, Woodsmoor, Stockport, SK2 7BE. Tel 0161 483 3708

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Your Local CAMRA Branches

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

North Manchester (NM) www.northmanchestercamra.org.uk
Contact: Phil Booton 0161 957 7148 (daytimes); phbooton@hotmail.com

High Peak & NE Cheshire (HPNC) www.hpneccamra.org.uk
Contact: Geoff Williamson 01663 765634; disleygeoff@gmail.com

Macclesfield & East Cheshire (MEC) www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk
Contact: Tony Icke 01625861833; bicke@madasafish.com

Trafford & Hulme (T&H) www.thcamra.org.uk
Contact: enquiries@thcamra.org.uk

Your Local CAMRA Events

Wednesday 9th – Good Beer Guide 2014 pre-selection meeting: Salford Arms, Chapel Street, Salford. Starts 7.30pm. (NM)

Thursday 10th – Winter Pub of the Season Award: Parlour, Beech Road, Chorlton. From 8pm (T&H) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Thursday 10th – Branch Meeting: Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Includes Pub of the Year selection. Starts 8.15pm (SSM)

Saturday 12th – Visit Cheshire Brewhouse, Congleton. From 12 noon. (MEC)

Saturday 12th – Flixton & Urmston Social: Church Inn 12pm; Flixton Ex-Serv Club 1.30pm; Flixton Con Club 3pm; Tim Bobbin 4pm; Steamhouse 5.30pm. Bus 255 from Stretford. (T&H) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Monday 14th – Branch Meeting: Stalybridge Labour Club. Initial consideration of entries for Good Beer Guide 2014 so all please attend. Starts 8.30pm. (HPNC)

Wednesday 16th – Branch Meeting: Angel, off Rochdale Road, Manchester. Starts 7.30pm. (NM)

Friday 18th – Burnage & Heaton Mersey Stagger: Mauldeth, Kingsway 7.30pm; Albion, Burnage Lane 8.30pm. (SSM) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Saturday 19th – Annual Branch Meal: Nursery, Green lane, Heaton Norris. From 7.30pm. Cost £10 per head. Book with John Clarke on 0161 477 1973 (SSM)

Saturday 19th – Winter Pub of the Season Award: Shepherd's Arms, Whaley Bridge. Starts 2pm and will be followed by visits to other local pubs. (HPNC) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Monday 21st – Winter Pub of the Season: The Macc, Mill Green, Macclesfield. Starts 8pm (MEC) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Tuesday 22nd – Pub of the Month Award: Waterloo, Waterloo Road, Stockport. From 8pm (SSM) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Saturday 26th – Social at National Winter Ales Festival. From 12 noon. (MEC)

Wednesday 30th – Committee Meeting: Dolphin, Windmill Street, Macclesfield. Starts 8pm (MEC)

Wednesday 30th – Swinton Good Beer Guide surveying crawl: White Horse, Worsley Road 7.30pm; White Swan 8.30pm; Park Inn 9.15pm. (NM)

Saturday 2nd February – Mild Magic Presentation to Old Hall, Chinley. Noon onwards. (SSM) [Open to all, welcome along.](#)

Saturday 2nd – Stretford to Hulme Social: Tollgate 12pm; Three Legs of Man 1pm; Junction 2pm; Salutation 3pm; RNCM 4pm (T&H) [All welcome.](#)

Wednesday 6th – Boothstown Good Beer Guide surveying crawl: Boundary Stone 7.30pm; Red Lion 8pm; Woodside 8.30pm; Royal Oak 9.15pm (NM)

Monday 11th – Branch Meeting: Cheshire Ring, Manchester Road, Hyde. Final Good Beer Guide selections will be made. Starts 8.30pm. (HPNC)



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Stagger

Reddish & Heaton Chapel with Steve Smith

On a cool, damp, but thankfully dry September evening our first call was to North Reddish's last remaining pub, the **Fir Tree**.

It is a convenient starting point for public transport, being situated at the junction of Longford Road West and Gorton Road. This is a pub which over the years has had a "now you see it, now you don't" real ale policy. Thankfully, it was in the former guise with a handpump for Copper Dragon Heritage, (£2.40 per pint and at 4.0% ABV), a limited edition cask ale from the Skipton brewery. It scored just above average. This pub is a large roomy affair, with several split levels and plain décor. There is a vault room from which the ale is dispensed, for as we were leaving, it was remarked that the handpump in the lounge was for ornamental use, just to show what beer is available. There is a large car park outside, and curiously, one inaccessible one!

As we trudged onto our next point, pleasantly I may add, we found the **Houldsworth Arms** in Houldsworth Square with two redundant wickets, so it was a short foray to the **Thatched Tavern** on Stanhope Street. This is a two roomed local, and once was a bastion of real ale in the South Reddish area. There was only the one ale available on the night, this being in the form of Wells Bombardier (£2.50 per pint, 4.1%) to be enjoyed here. A further handpump for Morland Old Speckled Hen was not in use. Unfortunately, the entertainment came in the form of a disc jockey vying with a plasma television screen showing golf behind him.

Next up was Robinson's excellent **Union** on Broadstone Road and by now our numbers had swelled somewhat. The pub retains its original window frames and dates from the early 1900s. We all opted for the Dizzy Blonde (3.8%) barring one who went for the Unicorn (4.3%) and both retailed at £2.40 per pint. Free nibbles complemented the beers (put there for the darts match?) in this friendly, well run establishment, with its pillared columns and archways dividing up the rooms.

Virtually next door and separated by only a spare piece of land is the **Grey Horse**, a Joseph Holt retreat. Only the Bitter was offered here, but at £2.08 per pint, 'mustn't grumble'. This 4.0% beer was pleasantly enjoyed by all. The pub is a somewhat large affair dating from 1909 with an opened out lounge and vault room. We thought it wise

not to linger too long, so left just as the karaoke man was starting up.

It was then a short walk along the remainder of Broadstone Road to the **George & Dragon** in Heaton Chapel which sits imposingly by the junction of Manchester Road. Once an old coaching house on the stagecoach routes, it is now Stagecoach of a different kind (the bus company) which plies its trade and passes the door. Despite the showing of six handpumps at this rather large opened out hostelry, there is only one beer on at any one time, the other pumpclips turned about face. I noticed one for Adnams and some others, but the pumpclip that faced us was the by now ubiquitous Wells Bombardier. Nothing wrong with the drink however, which retailed at £2.70 per pint.

Onto the main A6 trunk road next, Wellington Road North, to our penultimate choice, the now renamed **Toby Carvery Heaton Chapel**, formerly the Rudyard Hotel. Styled in the usual bright and airy manner as these places are wont to be, the smell of roast meats greeted us. Alas, they were just clearing most of it away. A friendly and attentive staff dispensed our beers, with Thwaites Original Best Bitter being the staple, and an unused Wainwright wicket about turned. A series of pre-emptive Christmas decorations and advertising for the forthcoming festive season surrounded us (this was in September), as we drank in relative splendour. At £2.40 per pint, this 3.6% beer proved favourable to all.

It was now time to visit the last pub, the final furlong back to Manchester Road and the **Hinds Head**. By far and away the best pub of the night, with also the best beer range. From the Marston's stable comes Pedigree along with Jennings Cocker Hoop, Cumberland Ale and Sneck Lifter. This is a very decent pub, one which does good meals and there is a raised area, conservatory dining space and main bar room. I settled for the Cocker Hoop, but by now my mind had become clouded and so did not take account of the prices or what people were drinking. Ah well, time to catch the bus, so I strolled back down to the A6.

Don't forget that all our Stagers are on Friday night, one of the busiest and loudest nights of the week. Above is only a snapshot of what we found on one night so why not try these pubs yourselves – all are easily accessible by public transport.

Pictured below: Fir Tree, Thatched Tavern, Grey Horse, George & Dragon, Hind's Head.





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Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season

The Parlour, Beech Road, Chorlton

Since opening in 2010 The Parlour has attracted plenty of attention and customers. Sister pub to the much revived Castle in Manchester, real ale is a prominent feature of the bar, and a newly discovered passion for managers Jamie and his wife Goska.

When they got together with business partners Jonny Booth and Rupert Hill, they had planned on working as a team at the Castle, however, once launched it quickly became apparent that they needed another challenge. Chorlton had been a favourite destination, so the Parlour was created to complement both the new-look Castle and the eclectic Beech Road. Although very much real ale focussed, food is also an important element of the bar. With a partly sectioned area on one side, this presents as a more food orientated set up, however, whether eating or drinking, there are no restrictions as to where to sit.

The food is made with locally sourced ingredients, and its popularity was recently rewarded by *Guardian* readers when they voted them winners of the Best Sunday Lunch award, a tremendous achievement.

On this occasion it is the real ale that this branch is celebrating; it was Jonny's desire and enthusiasm for beer that drove the refurbishment of the Castle, and continued with the Parlour. Beers from a number of local breweries frequent the bar, such as Dunham Massey and RedWillow, while those from further afield are also popular, like Moorhouses. With space for 18 firkins in the cellar, the team of three cellarmen try to provide beers that suit the seasons. In the summer they may choose wheat or blonde beers, while winter may see more dark beers appearing. Currently taking part in the Winter Warmer Wander for the first time, this has introduced new customers to the bar.

With the continuously rotating beers and drive for enhanced quality they are even now looking at ways to increase the number of hand pumps on an already crowded bar. Future events to look out for will include more brewery nights and special food tastings.

The presentation will take place from 8:30pm on Thursday 10th January. All welcome to join in the celebration and beat the post-holiday blues.

The Chorlton Challenge 2012

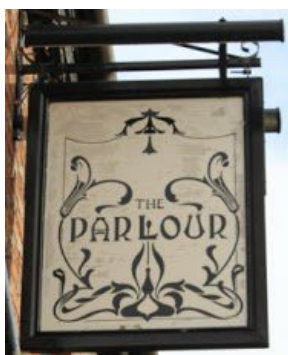
Each year Trafford & Hulme CAMRA surveys all of the real ale outlets in Chorlton. There are now so many that this year it took two days. Heather Airlie was there.

This year's Challenge saw an enthusiastic group of ten starting at **De Nada** and a pint of Boggart's full flavoured Rum Porter. With three hand pumps, there was something to suit everyone's taste, and a fine welcome. Situated opposite Chorlton Baths, it also does tasty food with a South American theme.

A short stroll down the road took us to **Pi** and another classic with Red Willow's Heartless. Although rather busy, we were able to squeeze round a table and display the branch board prominently. **Marble Beer House** had its usual fine selection, with their Chocolate Marble on excellent

form. Again the board provoked discussion with fellow drinkers, both about CAMRA and the Challenge.

Chorlton's Wetherspoons, the **Sedge Lynn** (pictured below), had a good range of beers, including those from Moorhouses and Phoenix. Across the road was the newly opened **Beagle**, sister pub to Port Street Beer House in Manchester. With a number of beers served on the usual hand pumps, there was also a selection on keg dispense at the rear of the bar. These were displayed on a separate blackboard to make a clear distinction. Again, a really busy bar, but still able to accommodate us with table space. This did cause a bit of a split, with some people opting to stay there to try more beers, while others stayed with the Challenge and moved on to the **Spread Eagle**. The landlady and landlord came out to greet us and we were made to feel most welcome. The final bar of the night was the **New Lloyds**, where the Lees seasonal ale could be tasted while being serenaded by the band.



Day Two

Day Two started with ten of us and a Black Bear from Beartown at the **Beech** on Beech Road. Ever hospitable, Chris gave us a tour of the cellar. This is a pretty congested space; the low ceiling and tight corners must make manoeuvring casks around a real challenge. The market stalls gave the pub a lively atmosphere; a fine start to the day. Next was the **Famous Trevor Arms** and the first of the Christmas beers, Santa's Spirit. We hurried on to the **Bowling Green** before kick-off at Old Trafford, meeting another couple of Challengers on the way. With a choice of three beers and a reasonably priced food menu, we were primed for the next stop just across the Green at the **Horse and Jockey** (pictured right).

Home of Bootleg Brewery, The Jockey had eight hand pumps with a mix of their own beer, Holts and guests.

A very busy day with a number of market stalls within the building, it was still possible to view the brewery situated above the dining area.

Moving on to **Parlour**, we found it to be humming. A good range of beers from both local and distant brewers was available. I chose a most enjoyable Black Jack Stout, before moving on to **Escape**, via a brief snack at Beech Road Chippy. A trendy bar opposite the bus station, this deceptive place had a superb dark winter ale from Saltaire.

New on the real ale scene is **Spoon Inn**, a couple of doors down. Although it has been in business for a while, it has only recently started serving real ale — Brightside Best. Very bright and clean looking, it also does a range of teas and coffees served in clear pots!

Moving on down towards the four banks on the crossroads, we dropped in at what was Argyles, now **Morley Cheeks**. With three beers and a cider to complement the re-vamped interior, the bar had a comfortable feel and a warm welcome. We met a couple who were shadowing the Challenge from a different direction who queried the inclusion of the **Royal Oak**. It turns out that since we were last there, the hand pumps have all been removed and real ale is no longer available. Our first and only no show of the day. With the football match completed, we walked back to **Duffy's** which now has Sharp's Doom Bar as a regular. Again the board exerted its magic, attracting some lively discussion on other potential real ale pubs in the area.



Continued on page 18...

ELECTRIK

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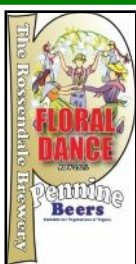
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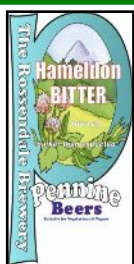
Contacts - Office: 0333 210 4021; Geoff: 07816 912 794; Robin: 07709 874 783

Meet our beers - Beer Tasting Notes



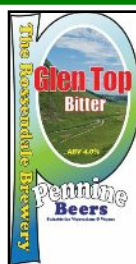
Floral Dance
3.8%

A pale and fruity session beer, with body that is more than a match for many stronger beers!



Hameldon Bitter
3.8%

An unusually dark traditional bitter, with a dry and assertive character that develops in the finish.



Glen Top Bitter
4.0%

A citrusy, full bodied pale beer. Intentionally not over hopped with quite a dry after taste.



Rossendale Ale
4.2%

A malty aroma leads to a complex, malt dominated flavour, supported by a dry, increasingly bitter finish.



Halo Pale
4.5%

A citrusy, pale ale brewed with Cascade aroma hops, finishing with a slightly bitter aftertaste.



Pitch Porter
5%

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



Sunshine
5.3%

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

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High Peak Pub Scene

Frank Wood & Robin Wignall with News and Views

High Peak Pub News

With Frank Wood

Last month I mentioned that I would get back into the recently opened **Number Seventy One** on Mottram Road, Stalybridge. It was formerly the Staly Ward number 1 Conservative Club. The club ceased trading some three years back due to financial problems and falling custom, and the Ashton family bought it in 2010. Admittedly, they planned initially to turn it into offices, and after that, a restaurant. However, eventually they decided to give it a complete refurbishment and open it up as a pub/club and my initial thoughts after visiting in mid December, are that they made a great choice. The club is tastefully furnished and comfortable and testament to this, it has been booked up at weekends for private functions every week in October through to the present time.

On the bar, Marston's Pedigree was the real ale on offer that evening, though beers from Wychwood have also proved popular. There are two handpumps but until trade increases, they will stay with one beer served in good condition and build up trade, with a plan to try other beers when it takes off.

Stalybridge Labour Club is currently only serving two beers at once; on our last visit they were both from Thwaites, being Lancaster Bomber and Wainwrights, both in good condition. In the **Millpond**, Greenfield beers were the weekly choice, the beers varying from week to week. A beer loss over at **Lounge** however, they no longer sell Thwaites Lancaster Bomber and indeed cask has been withdrawn completely.

In Poynton, the **Kingfisher** opened on December 18th. This is the latest Wetherspoons in the High Peak Branch area, and it will be closely followed by the one in Woods Mill Yard at Glossop in January. This will be named the **Smithy Fold**, after the nearby snicket that runs down from High Street East.

In Ashton, the Frost family celebrated 50 years at the **Broadoak Hotel** in the Hurst area of the town. A stylish dinner dance was planned in mid-December, with 100 guests invited. The group Fivopenny Piece launched their career from the pub, playing regular concerts in the function room. More up to date, the late Bill Tarmey (Jack Duckworth to millions) hosted and sang at weekly music nights. The Broadoak is in the Robinsons estate and the brewery have introduced a beer called "Frosty's 50" though I am unsure if it is a re-badged beer or not.

In Hayfield prior to Christmas, on 24th November, the **Pack Horse** had Moberley beers on sale, namely Hedge Hopper and Roadrunner, beers that to my knowledge have

not been seen in our area much if at all. The **George**, also in Hayfield, continues to sell Banks's Bitter, while the other two beers on a recent visit were Wychwood Hobgoblin and Castle Rock Elsie Mo. Finally in Hayfield, at the **Royal** Thwaites is the brewery that is used for usually two or three beers these days, with two or three guests. On our last visit in early December, they were Mayfield First Frost and Newmans Social Butterfly. A cider is also served, Gwynt y Ddraig Farmhouse Scrumpy on the same evening.

Over in Disley, **Frankies Wine Bar** opened on 10th November. Formerly the Mousetrapp, there are four handpumps, two taking Thwaites beers and the others being guests, one of which is from a local micro brewery.

Reports from Hyde are that the **Jolly Carter** is now taking real ale. In Denton, the **Fletchers Arms** re-opened in late November after major refurbishment. It is now rebranded as "Almonds Family Pubs" and will concentrate on a carvery and food. The other pubs in this group are the **Puss in Boots** in Offerton, the **Three Bears** in Hazel Grove and the **Hesketh Tavern** in Cheadle Hulme.

Finally, news of closed pubs, the **Hooley Hill** on Stockport Road, Audenshaw is now a convenience store and the **Stamford Arms** on Denton Road, Audenshaw was shut in the Autumn and put up for sale. Our member who passes regularly saw it being painted up and thought optimistically that it was re-opening – but the next time he passed it was being signed up as a funeral parlour!

Peak Practice

With Robin Wignall

A fairly recent publication about Kettleshulme is *How Things have Changed*, by Alan Boothby, published locally. The cover photo is of the **Bull's Head** in Kettleshulme, currently closed, probably terminally. The main signboard advertises Adsheed's Ales, whilst the dray outside the pub belongs to Lonsdale and Adsheed, Macclesfield, the Macclesfield Brewery. Brewery takeovers are nothing new as Lonsdale and Adsheed bought out rivals North Cheshire Brewery Co. in 1928 and Stancliffe Brothers Sutton Brewery in 1920, before in turn being swallowed by Ind Coope in 1950. Information from *A Century of Brewers 1890 to 1990*, by Norman Barber, published by the Brewery History Society.

The **Duke of York** at Burbage, Buxton, has been closed for some time, but Punch Taverns are now in the process of renovating it for re-opening. A report in the *Buxton Advertiser* during November provided this update. There will be a name change to The Duke, following consultation with Buxton residents.

I understand that one suggestion sent in was for the 'Broome & Brass.' This would have fitted appropriately with local history, as Robert Broome was the local quarry owner who founded the Burbage Brass Band, one of the oldest bands in the country. However the **Duke** it is.

The **Shady Oak** at Fernilee sells at least one of the changing seasonal beers from the various Marston's breweries, as well as Marston's Bitter and Pedigree. Ringwood Lovey Warne made a very welcome return a few weeks ago. The pumclip proclaims 'a smuggler's golden trove', but this was originally brewed as a tribute to Shane Warne, Hampshire and Australian cricketer.

The **Shepherds Arms** in Whaley Bridge regularly sells a wide range from the Marston's empire, but also accesses the beers for the twice yearly Marston's Beer Festival, when for just a few weeks licensees are offered a range of beers from far and wide. This time the ten or a dozen beers included Titanic Night to Remember (a centenary brew?), Fullers Bengal Lancer, a decent IPA, St Austell Trelawney and Everards Equinox. The **Royal Oak**, High Lane, will also have sold this festival list.

Robinson's have had seasonal Tom & Berry since mid-November, and this has been available at the **Cock**, Whaley Bridge, and the **Crossings** at Furness Vale. The **Navigation** at Buxworth continues to ring the changes. Excellent Dark Mild from Bank Top was very popular. Oakwell Senior had a traction engine on the pump clip, whilst Abbeydale beers are often available.

Our local Punch pubs, **White Horse**, **White Hart** and **Goyt** all access beers from the Punch Finest Cask List, with its wider choice. Thwaites Crafty Devil and Lees Top Brass have been recently available as an example of a much longer list.

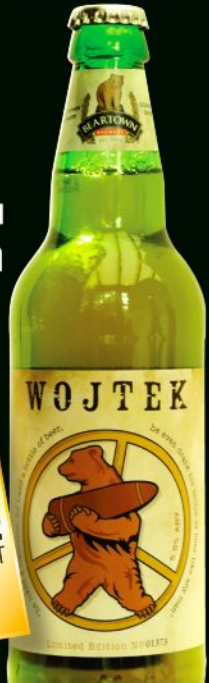
The festive season opened with the Christmas Market at the **Old Hall** and the **Paper Mill** at Whitehough, Chinley. There were stalls on both sites selling a range of Christmas gifts and comestibles. Chapel-en-le-Friith butcher Mac Burnham's pork pies topped with cranberries are very recommendable. Needless to say there was a good array of seasonal ale to be had. Three busy bars, dispensed a range of both dark and light brews, mainly with seasonal names. The beer list had a mainly trans-Pennine note with Abbeydale, Bradfield and Kelham Island well represented. Happy Valley was a more local presence. All the beers tried were in good form, but ales of note included Bradfield Farmers Belgian Blue, Happy Valley Christmas Cracker, Abbeydale Bah Humbug and Kelham Island Fairy Tale of New York. The Old Hall Christmas Market was certainly the one to visit this December.

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For more information or to get involved in our work visit www.afteradoption.org.uk or contact fundraising@afteradoption.org.uk

After Adoption would like to say a huge thank you to everyone involved in helping them raise a fantastic £4,250 from the 2012 Festival!

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Travel to festival from Manchester Piccadilly – £2 return

It is recommended that you use Services 82, 83, 180 or 184. All depart from Stand A on Oldham Street. They operate every few minutes until 19:40pm then operate every 10 minutes. A £2 discounted fare is also available on First services 24, 181 and 182 from Stand F and service 89 from stand B.



Travel from festival towards Manchester Piccadilly – £2 return

Buses depart from Oldham Road on the opposite side of road from the festival site with services 24, 82, 83, 89, 180, 181, 182 and 184 operating every few minutes all day until 23:44pm (although it is recommended to avoid the last bus in case it should be full).



The National Winter Ales Festival returns to Manchester later this month bringing an impressive range of ales for you to sample.

As ever, the festival will feature the National Winter Beer Of Britain Competition with beers in four winter ales categories battling it out to go forward to the finals of the Champion Beer Of Britain Competition held during the Great British Beer Festival at London Olympia in August. The winners of

each of the categories - Stouts, Porters, Old Ales & Strong Milds and Barley Wines & Strong Old Ales then go head to head to be named the Champion Winter Beer Of Britain for 2013. Last year the Champion Winter Beer Of Britain as judged in Manchester was Coniston No. 9 Barley Wine which went on to be named overall Champion Beer Of Britain at the Olympia.



The beers which have been entered in the competition are a closely guarded secret until after the judging is concluded but are then all put on sale to the public. The Championship bar is always a draw for fans of winter ales but the festival features the whole amazing range of beers styles available in this country and beyond. John O'Donnell talked to beer orderer Adrian Saunders about what treats to expect.

The festival will feature around 270 beers from 124 different breweries ranging from the multi-award winning Marble Brewery around half a mile from the festival to Metalman Brewery all the way from Waterford in the Republic Of Ireland.

The number of women who come along to the festival always dispels the myth that women don't like beer, but this year we will also be highlighting that not only do women like beer, they are also very good at making it. We will be featuring beers from 14 brewsters (a female brewer) who form Project Venus, a group of brewsters who get together regularly to share their skills and ideas and most importantly brew beer! As well as beers from the brewsters' own breweries such as Waen and Offbeat, we expect to have three of the Project Venus collaboration brews - Venus Gold, Venus Seren and Venus Ella.



New beers to be launched at the festival include Peerless Pale, a very pale 3.8% beer hopped with all American hops and Robinsons "Frederic's 175", brewed to mark the 175th anniversary of Robinsons brewery. We also have the first casks of "Wanderlust" a 4.2% Best Bitter which has been specially brewed for Beer Junkets, a specialist tour company which organises beer festival trips throughout Europe and the UK.

Dark ale fans can look forward to a few specials. Hawkshead's Brodies Prime has been a favourite of drinkers at the festival for a number of years, but this year as well as the regular 4.9% version, we also have the special edition XXX Brodies Prime. This is matured in whisky casks and weighs in at an impressive 8.5%. Liverpool Organic Brewery, whose Kitty Wilkinson Chocolate & Vanilla Stout is a former winner of the public favourite beer vote, will be bringing their new 4.3% Liverpool Stout as well as their Imperial Russian Stout.



Those looking out for quirky beer names can sample "Baz's Bonce Blower" from Parish Brewery of Melton Mowbray and T'errmmminator, a 5% porter from Cumbria's Strands brewery. Also coming from Cumbria will be "Isle of Dogs" from Watermill brewery of Ings which was the Gold Award Winner at the SIBA North Beer Competition judged in Manchester in October.

Yorkshire's Osset Brewery have been one of the outstanding successes of the microbrewery revolution, so much so that their stable now includes three more breweries - Fernandes of Wakefield, Riverhead of Marsden and the most recent Rat Brewery based at the Rat & Ratchet Pub in Huddersfield. We are pleased to be featuring beers from all four breweries.

New breweries featuring for the first time include Hop Studio who began brewing in York in April 2012, Buckinghamshire's XT Brewing Co, Heavy Industry Brewing (Henllan, Wales) and Cheshire Brewhouse of Congleton.

Of course there is more than just cask ale at the festival. The Bière sans Frontières bar will again be bringing some of the very best beers from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and making their NWAf debut — the USA. One highlight will be Pilsner Urquell Tankovná which will be served direct from oak barrels. This is the unpasteurised, unfiltered and naturally conditioned version of the original Pilsner which makes it closer in character to the way the beer would have been in the 19th century. There will also be the unfiltered version of Budveiser Budvar and all six Munich Oktoberfest beers.

There will also be the usual large selection of traditional ciders and perries from producers across the county. Ranging from extra dry to super sweet, there will be something for all tastes, with your friendly CAMRA experts on hand to help you find something to suit your palette.



The festival opens to the public at 5pm on Wednesday 23rd and from midday Thursday to Saturday. Last orders 10.30pm. The venue is the Sheridan Suite on Oldham Road, a short walk, bus or tram ride from the city centre. Entry is free to CAMRA members on Wednesday and Thursday. For more details visit www.alefestival.org.uk.

Horse & Jockey

the inn on the green

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Curmudgeon

Going to the Dogs

The long-running "Fred Basset" newspaper cartoon strip consists of a series of variations on about four underlying stories, one of which is when Fred's master claims to be taking him out for a walk but – surprise, surprise – ends up calling in to the local pub for a pint. What could be more pleasant and sociable than popping in for a couple and a natter while your faithful hound sits patiently and recovers his breath for the homeward leg?

Yet, unaccountably, many pubs seem to have an objection to dogs, even the best-behaved ones, and put up officious notices saying "No Dogs Except Guide Dogs" – which, of course, they have to admit by law. Maybe you can understand this in a heavily food-oriented pub where diners don't want to have to put up with pooches begging for scraps, but even there surely a dog-friendly drinking area could be set aside.

Some licensees seem to have a narrow-minded attitude reminiscent of the old-fashioned park-keeper, and delight in issuing instructions to their customers as to what they should not do. Yet, in my experience, the vast majority of dogs in pubs are well-behaved and are content just to sit quietly under a table. I recall recently being in a pub where a guy got up to leave and took with him a large black poodle that I hadn't even noticed was there at all.

Indeed, one couple of dog-lovers told me that, even if they don't have their dog with them, they often ask whether a pub welcomes dogs. "Without fail," they said, "all the pubs which say no turn out to be rather soulless, unfriendly places which we wouldn't choose to visit again – no matter how nice they look, or how 'reasonable' their excuses are for not allowing them – whereas the ones which say yes are always warm, friendly and sociable. Although it has surprised a few bar staff when we walk in, having asked if dogs are allowed, without said pooch in tow."

So surely it's time for more pubs to extend a warm welcome to man's best friend – provided he behaves himself – and realise that promoting a friendly, unstuffy, tolerant atmosphere is likely to be good for business.

Oh Yes You Are!

Anti-drink pressure group Alcohol Concern have issued a call for people to abstain totally from alcohol during January. Obviously many people will be forced to cut down simply because of being skint after the festive season, but this is taking things to another level. Spokeswoman Emily Robinson said:

"Many of us think the way we drink isn't a problem, but even having just a few beers after work or a few glasses of wine at home too often can take you over safe limits and store up problems for the future.

"We're challenging people to take part in Dry January and try giving up booze for 31 days, and if it sounds like a big ask you're exactly the person we want to join us and have a go.

"We're not being killjoys or telling people to never drink again. We just think this provides the perfect opportunity for all of us to take a breather and get thinking about our drinking."

Er, isn't killjoys exactly what you are being? And those so-called "safe limits" are a load of nonsense plucked out of thin air by you and your neo-Prohibitionist friends. Of course, if every drinker took them at their word, most of the pubs in the country would be out of business by the end of the month. What a result that would be! Somehow I doubt whether we will see them picketing the National Winter Ales Festival later this month.

A group called "Drinkuary" has been set up as a counterweight to this joyless miserabilism – go along to their website at www.drinkuary.org and take a look.

Curmudgeon Online: curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com

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

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Pub News

Covering Stockport, Manchester and beyond

Chorlton News

For the third time in recent months, we can report yet another bar in Chorlton serving cask ale but unusually we also have news of one which no longer does. The latest addition is the **Spoon Inn** on Barlow Moor Road opposite the bus station. This is a modern cafe bar which originally opened around a year ago, but which has now added two handpumps to the bar as part of a plan moving the emphasis from cafe to bar. The ales are being looked after by manager Dave Cleal-Hill who has worked at a number of bars in the area including Marble Beer House, Jam Street Cafe and Nip & Tipple. There is no fixed range but favoured breweries include Brightside of Bury.

Meanwhile, the handpumps have been removed from Greene King's **Royal Oak**, also on Barlow Moor Road. This returns the bizarre anomaly that in an area dominated by cask ale outlets, the only traditional pub not to sell cask ale is the one owned by one of the country's largest cask ale brewers.

Cask drinkers at **Electrik** bar on Wilbraham Road are being

encouraged by the launch of the Electrik Cask Ale Club. Anybody purchasing a pint of cask ale from the bar Monday to Thursday can get a stamp on a card. Collect five stamps and your sixth pint is free. Electrik now offers three permanent cask ales and one guest. The permanents are their own Bright Spark (3.7%) and Black Out XO Stout (4.4%) plus Thwaites Wainwright.



Rumours in the area suggest that following the recent opening of the Beagle from the Common / Port Street Beer House family, two more of central Manchester's major bar operators are looking to open in the area. One is the Zecol group who are behind the various Trof bars, The Deaf Institute and Whitworth Street's Gorilla. The other is Font who have an award winning bar near Oxford Road station plus one in Fallowfield and one in Liverpool.

The **Bowling Green** on Brookburn Road has completed a refurbishment of the Vault (pictured above right). The room now has a brighter look, although many locals have mourned the loss of the pub's pool table. The

refurbishment wasn't without incident when the ceiling collapsed just as work was commencing, but thanks to hard work by the contractors the room was only out of action a few days more than planned and was able to be used in part finished state for Manchester



Derby day. The pub now regularly has three cask ales available. Regular beers are Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Golden Best while the beer on the third pump will rotate occasionally. At time of writing, Jennings Cumberland was the featured beer.

As reported last month, it seems like business as usual under Joseph Holt's ownership of the **Horse and Jockey**. The pub has now expanded its range of ales to eight with Holt's Bitter and IPA having been added to the range but other than that there are no other signs of the new owners.

West Didsbury

Parallels are often drawn between Chorlton and West Didsbury however while Chorlton is bustling with cafe's and bars selling real ale, with the notable exception of **Mary & Archie's** on Burton Road, somehow this development in the market has passed small operators in West Didsbury by. Recently it seems like tinkering with names is the trend - The Terrace is the new name for Verso, while M20 has become M Tiki (with Hawaiian decor to suit). Neither have real ale on draught.

Another "newcomer" in the area is the **Greenfinch** on the corner of Lapwing Lane and Palatine Road. Regular readers will know it as the Four In Hand, the new name having been adopted on the pub's November reopening following a three month refurbishment by owners Marstons. The emphasis has clearly moved towards food. While the internal layout remains broadly similar, all of the TVs have been removed and the new decor is a mixture of dark wallpapers contrasting light coloured paintwork with the menu displayed on a couple of walls of blackboards. The pub is now part of Marston's "Two for One" dining concept - you have to work out yourself whether this is good value with main courses ranging from around £9.50 to £14. There are six handpumps on the

bar although when OT first visited only three ales were available - Jennings Cumberland, Marstons Pedigree and Wychwood Hobgoblin — all from Marston's stable of breweries. Disappointingly on a second visit on a Friday night just before Christmas only Jennings Cumberland was available.

Salford and N/4

The reopened **Salford Arms** on the corner of Chapel Street and Bloom Street (near Salford Central station) is going from strength to strength. Despite only re-opening in September and the pub not having had cask ale for many years, in early December the pub marked its 50th different ale to go on sale. The pub also now has its own Salford Arms Ale brewed for them by Blackjack Brewery. With the **Kings Arms** just over the road, the **Mark Addy** located just the other side of the station and the **New Oxford** a short walk away, this area of the city has a lot to offer the beer lover.



It seems like the **Lower Turks Head** on Shudehill may finally reopen. The ornately tiled pub has been closed for many years with the building falling into very poor repair. Some of this has been rectified over the last 12 months and now a planning application has been submitted that will see the building come back to life as a pub. The plans submitted will see the existing Lower Turks Head combined with the building to its right. The ground floor will have a central bar serving both sides and a mixture of fixed and free standing seating. A new staircase will link to the first floor which will be used for dining with a beer garden and smoking area to the rear. The second and third floors are to be converted to a small hotel with five rooms. It will be great to see this long neglected pub come back to use, although there have been a number of plans for it over the years which have repeatedly fallen through.

The **Smithfield Hotel and Bar** on Swan Street has also applied to extend into the building next door. It has also requested an extension of its opening hours until midnight Mon - Wed, 12.30 on Thursdays and 2.30am on Friday and Saturday.

More pub news overleaf....

Pub News Continued

Covering Stockport, Manchester and beyond

Scott moves on

The local pub scene is the poorer with the news that manager Scott Davies left de Bechevel group, owner of the The Bar and The Knott, at the end of December. Scott spent many



years as manager of The Knott where his encyclopedic knowledge and enthusiasm for beer helped the pub to two local Pub Of The Year titles and the Regional Pub Of The Year title (which he is pictured receiving above from Trafford & Hulme CAMRA chair Beverley Gobbett) and helped cement its reputation as the beer mecca it has become. For the past couple of years, Scott has been at the group's most recent pub, The Macc in Macclesfield where he has established the former Joseph Holt pub as one of the finest destinations for beer lovers in the area.

While Scott is leaving the pub trade, he'll still be bringing great beer to the public – Scott is teaming up with Jeremy Stull from Port Street Beer House to open a specialist beer shop on Tib Street in Manchester's Northern Quarter. Beermoth is due to open in mid-January – Opening Times will be there when it does – expect a full report in February's edition.

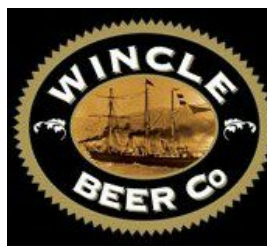
Spoons News

Wetherspoon's latest pub in the area, the **Kingfisher** in Poynton, opened its doors to the public on 18th December and Opening Times was invited to have a look around the day before while the staff were being trained (anything for a couple of free pints!). As usual with Wetherspoons there has been an effort to make the decor sympathetic to the area and in this case, helped by the fact that this was an existing pub rather than a redundant shop, the designers have done a good job with references to Poynton's coal mining past and the nearby Pickford's warehouse of old. For those interested there is a plaque in the entrance explaining all the local connections in the design.

On entering the pub the first thing that strikes you is the clean light feel to the place with a pine effect on the pillars, doors and on some of the walls. Much of the walls however is bare red brick and the furniture is a quirky mixture of different styles, both apparently to give the feel of the Pickford's warehouse. At the rear is very

large wood burning fire. All this does not feel like a traditional Wetherspoons but we were told this fashionable bar type effect is the new Wetherspoons. The most interesting feature however is the large glass wall at the back of the pub behind which is the cellar where you can see the cask beers stillaged and large optics on carousels for the spirits etc. The latter was not in operation on our visit but we were told that each time a customer was served with a spirit at the bar, one of the bottles lit up.

The beers are the usual Ruddles and Abbot from the Greene King stable with half a dozen guest beers and interestingly a house beer produced by Winkle Brewery.



The real departure from the norm however is the plan to always have a mild available as one of the guest beers (other Wetherspoons please note). The beers and the pub are in excellent hands as the new manager is Kirsten Downham from the Good Beer Guide listed Milson Rhodes and on a temporary basis at least Richard Chapman from the Calvert Court is responsible for the beer. Altogether a welcome addition to the pub scene in this north Cheshire village.

The new manager at the **Milson Rhodes** is Leanne Pattison who was Kirsten's deputy when the pub opened before she temporarily went to the Gateway.

Boundary Bounces Back



Continuing the minor trend for pubs to reopen it's welcome back to the **Boundary** at Guide Bridge. This freehouse, once famous for its large annual beer festival, had been closed for some time but reopened in mid-December.

It has been bought by Paul Hobin, a veteran of the local pub scene having previously run pubs such as the Flowery Field, the Hanging Gate in Audenshaw and the Jolly Hatters in Denton. The pub has been thoroughly redecorated and features comfortable seating, bare boarded

floors and a generally smart overall look. A restaurant is due to open this month.

On the beer front there are three cask beers from Hornbeam Brewery available. When OT called just before Christmas these were Champagne Ale, Dark & Divine and the seasonal Old Santa Ale. Paul tells us that while he is free from tie the Hornbeam beers have been very well received and are likely to remain on the bar for the foreseeable future (although the selection may change).

The Boundary is in a good location and deserves to succeed. Well worth a visit (and if you want to call in, it's about a two minute walk from Guide Bridge station)

Pub Shorts

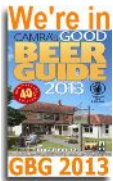
At the end of this month we say goodbye to Dave and Jill Halliwell who are retiring from the trade after 15 years at the **Park** on Newbridge Lane in Stockport. When OT called they had not decided on their future plans but were just looking forward to a well earned rest and more normal hours. OT wished them all the best for the future.

Michael Reynolds was 80 years old on 17 December. Michael, who runs the city centre **Jolly Angler**, must surely rank as one of the city's longest serving licensees. Now unfortunately ill health has put him in the background of things. Not much has changed however, as Michael's wife Sheila, and son, Ray keep this tiny Good Beer Guide-listed Hydes pub in fine fettle. Well-kept Hydes Original and good-hearted banter are the order of the day.

The annual CAMRA "Hillgate Stagger" took place on 21 December last year and proved to be the usual mixed bag. The number of cask ale outlets is now reduced to just eight but most of the pubs seemed to be doing a good trade and they all managed to serve up at least one decent enough beer.

Notable highlights came towards the end. At the **Star & Garter**, always busy and popular this one, draught Old Tom was available for the first time in many a year. Meanwhile the **Fairway** seems to be going from strength to strength. We had time to chat with landlord Stuart Driver who told us that the pub had done really well since it reopened. There are half a dozen cask beers on sale – some from the Marston's stable and some guests. Millstone Vale Mill has become a permanent fixture, so popular is it with the regulars. As usual we finished in the **Blossoms** which, as we reported last month, is in new and enthusiastic hands. Old Tom was again on draught and was deliciously smooth and mellow.

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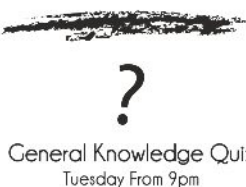


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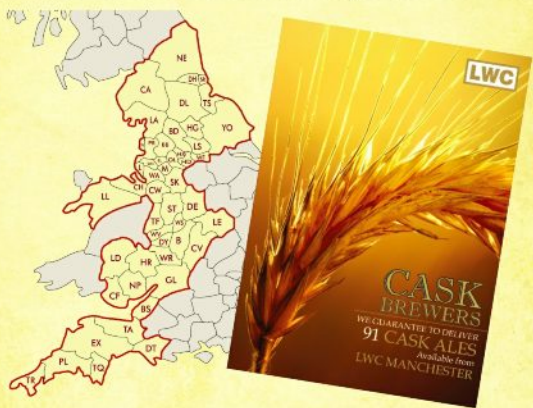
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The Chorlton Challenge

Continued from page 9

A short stroll up the road took us to **Dulcimer**, which had on a selection of Thwaites and guest beers, including a tasty Honey Porter.

A few further on doors was our official food stop, **Elektrik**. We were put in cosy corner and were well fed and watered, with two of their own beers on as well as the usual guests (pictured right – taking refreshment in Elektrik). By now we were slowing down considerably, so the walk up to the **Gallery** for the final leg of our long journey was welcomed. They had a couple of Cross Bay beers on to refresh the palate. I should mention that our cider drinker reported that he was very pleased with the selection throughout the Challenge, and had only resorted to non-cider products twice.



Next door **The Nook** had Dark Ruby Ale from Privateer on and the beginnings of a lively crowd. Again the board attracted interest, as it did next door in the **Bar**. As we sat ourselves on the end of a long table a couple of guys on the end saw the sign and decided to move tables to allow us to sit together, indicating that as they were not drinking ale, they felt they should!

Our last stop was over the bridge to **Oddest**. There the selection included the glorious Off Kilter Porter from Offbeat. A fitting end to the Challenge indeed!

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Letters to the Editor

The “craft keg” debate continues to rage

From Rhys Jones, Aberystwyth:

I believe that Jim Flynn (Letters, Dec 2012) has confused ends with means. As a beer-drinker, my end — my objective — is to enjoy good-quality, flavoursome beer. At CAMRA's inception and for many years afterwards, the only way to do that in Britain (imports aside) was to drink beer that was cask-conditioned or bottle-conditioned according to CAMRA's definition. Still today, the vast majority of good-quality flavoursome beer produced in Britain meets CAMRA's definition, and for all the current excitement (both pro and anti) around “craft keg” and the like, I confidently predict that the same will hold true for the foreseeable future.

However, any but the most blinkered observer of the current beer scene will have noted the emergence of beers, not brewed (or, to be more precise, not **dispensed**) according to CAMRA's definition, but which nonetheless only a churl would dismiss as poor quality or lacking in flavour. Notwithstanding that they use slightly different technological means to attain the same end, an intelligent and open-minded beer consumers' organisation would neither ignore nor castigate such beers as Jim suggests. Neither indeed would it merely tolerate them as some sort of marginal embarrassment, as seems to be the emerging view in some quarters of the Campaign. Rather, it would celebrate them! Time will tell whether CAMRA is capable of evolving to be such an organisation.

From Mike Smith, Manchester:

I really didn't know what to make of Jim Flynn's letter in the December issue of Opening Times. On the one hand he quite rightly says that the term “craft” has quickly become meaningless and is becoming more and more a marketing term. I don't think anyone would argue with that.

However he then somewhat loses the plot with an intemperate rant about so called “craft keg”, describing it as the “latest threat to cask beer”. Sorry Jim, no it's not — these beers are for the most part niche products (think big IPAs and stouts for example) and are priced to match. They are no threat to cask and are not going to replace it in the nation's pubs.

The editor suggests that CAMRA centrally advises against attacking these beers and that must be the common sense approach. To go on the offensive as Jim suggests would make CAMRA look silly and, for many younger (cask and “craft keg”) beer fans completely irrelevant. Time to stop fighting the battles of the 1970s — that war has been won.

This one could run and run. I am starting to think though, given how small and niche the “craft keg” sector currently is, that people on both sides of the argument are perhaps getting a little hung up on this. Ed.

“Much cherished”?

From Paul Thompson, West Didsbury:

As a resident of West Didsbury I'd like to add my comments to the recent Stagger of this area.

I notice that The Woodstock Arms is described as “much cherished”. It also has that description in the CAMRA database of real ale pubs. Why? It's not a bad pub by any means and is very popular in summer when its large beer garden comes into its own. However its beer quality is such that it's never been in the Good Beer Guide (on the night of the Stagger all four beers were described as average which sounds to be about right from my own experience) and the beer is quite expensive. If such a pub is described as “much cherished”, what descriptions should be given to regular Good Beer Guide pubs like The Nursery, The Crown, The Arden Arms and The Magnet? Less hyperbole please!

Although I thought that the description of The Metropolitan was very good I was surprised that there was no mention of the beer prices in this pub. Is this the most expensive real pub in our branch area?

Miracles do happen

From Brian Begg-Robertson:

It seems to be the accepted wisdom that, once a pub throws in the towel and is sold for some other use, it is lost forever. Not so for one pub in Ashton-under-Lyne.

When I first discovered the Halfway House on Whiteacre Road it was in the hands of an enthusiastic couple (their names escape me) who had worked hard to create a pub where decent people could feel welcome. At one point they even flirted with real ale and, for a short time, were offering an exceptional pint of Marston's Old Empire. Then disaster struck.

The building had been for sale for some time and was eventually put up for auction. Once a sale was completed the pub appeared to be safe. The landlord and lady were given assurances from the new owners about their intentions and they were invited to sign a new lease. What game was being played here, I have no idea, but what I do know is that after just a few short weeks the pub suddenly closed and legal notices were posted outside informing people of an intended change of use: the Halfway House was to become a mini-mart. No surprise there then!

Work commenced and glimpses through the door revealed that the interior had been gutted. I think that at one point I even saw shop shelving being installed. But suddenly work seemed to stop and eventually new auction signs appeared outside. The months passed until the workmen returned. New legal notices appeared outside and, to my utter astonishment, they indicated that the Halfway House was to be reopened as a bar!

And so it has come to pass. Some days ago the pub reopened as, well, a pub. True, the fabulous interior has been totally destroyed and there is absolutely nothing here for the discerning real ale drinker, but while beer flows there is always hope. During a brief visit I encountered a wave of optimism that one rarely encounters in a pub these days. Plans are afoot to open a restaurant upstairs and the enthusiasm of the staff was tangible.

One of the bar staff informed me that the original purchasers had fallen foul of building regulations by ripping out the listed interior, but I can find no record of any listing in respect of the Halfway House. Anyway, I don't really care, and I can even forgive them their lack of real ale. All that matters is that a pub has risen from the ashes of, not only closure, but also actual conversion to a mini-mart.

And, on an equally bright and astonishing note, another Tameside pub that featured massively in my misspent youth has reopened after a long period of closure. Despite being advertised as suitable for conversion to retail use (a death sentence for a pub if ever I saw one), the Boundary at Guide Bridge is again pulling pints, though I cannot yet say whether real ale features.

I write this email on December 20th and am minded to suggest that this is evidence that sometimes miracles DO happen around Christmas. What a shame if the world ends tomorrow and few people get to find out!

More good news stories. While more closures are undoubtedly in the pipeline (especially if the current economic climate doesn't improve) the market does seem to be bottoming out. Admittedly there are just a few straws in the wind at the moment and this could be a false dawn but there does seem to be some stability returning to the local pub market. As we report elsewhere — the Boundary (pictured below) does indeed sell cask beer. Ed.



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Whither Craft Beer?

Peter Alexander wonders if there's a crash coming

Most - the huge 90% plus majority of beer is sold by big brewers. That's a fact. When people slag off big brewers, they are, by and large dissing almost everyone that drinks beer. It isn't usually looked at that way, but that's really how it is. I'd say if that isn't snobbery, what is?

But of course, I'm a beer snob too. Not as much as some, but a snob nonetheless.



There was an interesting piece in E-Malt ("the online world of malt") the other day about craft beer, written (or rather his words were reported) by Graham Mackay, who it turns out, is none other than the Chairman of SAB Miller Brewing, who are pretty big in the mass produced big brands game. Noting that In the US, craft beer saw a 13% increase in volume in 2011, while overall beer sales were down by about 1.3% by volume during that same period, he said

"the elimination of harsh and intense flavours has been the central sweet spot of the beer industry for decades, if not generations. If we go back 30 or 40 years and look at the formulations for the big brands that still exist, their bitterness levels in the U.S. are 7 to 9 [measured in International Bitterness Units]. Those brands, 30 or 40 year ago, were up at the 17, 18, 19 kind of level. European lagers are somewhere between 20 and 25." Today, the consumer has gone back to saying, "Let's get a bit of interest, let's have a bit of difference." So, there's been the growth of craft beer."

Now the fact that flavour and character have been eliminated from big brands is hardly a revelation, nor is the fact that a lot of consumers are turning to craft brewing as a way of getting that flavour, not only back, but enhanced. He went on to tell us that SAB Miller is entering the craft market, but admitted that it is.

"difficult for big companies to incubate small brands. That, at its heart, is the dilemma. To start a small brand in a credible, consistent, sticking-to-it kind of way is hard for big companies. That's what small entrepreneurs do best." When they do enter the market, craft brewers feel "we're stealing their authenticity. What we say is, 'Let the consumer decide.' If we're authentic enough for the consumer, that's authentic enough for anyone".

Mackay sees difficult times ahead for craft beer. *"I don't think the craft movement in its current guise will continue to grow indefinitely. I don't think it can. It's not economic. Too many people won't make any money. Too many of them will go out of business. And I think it will become less fashionable. These things are fashion to some extent.*

So how much of that do you agree with? Will the craft bubble burst? Will the big players whittle it away, or will they just whittle away at it? Is it just fashion? Do these observations which are largely aimed at a US audience have much traction here? I'm not sure. I think there are two markets running on parallel lines. I doubt if craft beer will have a crash here, though they ought to watch the warning signs on overpricing, which is endemic and complacency about the big guys, which is institutional, as well as the inevitable dog eats dog situation that will develop if the market continues to grow and recession continues to provide an unhealthy backdrop to spending on beer.

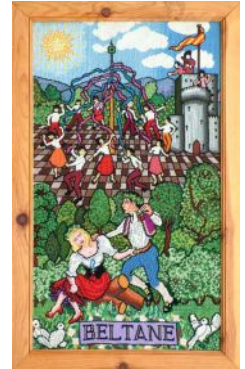
At the end of the day, Mr Mackay is right about one thing. If it is authentic enough for the consumer, that's authentic enough for anyone. That's not just a warning, but a prophecy.

This article is adapted from a piece on Pete's beer blog – check it out at <http://tandlemanbeerblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

Regional Hosts

The High Peak & N E Cheshire Branch of CAMRA hosted an East Midlands Regional meeting in Buxton at the end of November, writes Geoff Williamson. In addition to meeting CAMRA members from other branches outside of Greater Manchester the afternoon provided the opportunity to sample some of the fine beers now on offer in Buxton.

The meeting was held at **Ramsay's Bar** in the Buckingham Hotel, where the usually excellent choice of beers was on offer from micro-breweries including RedWillow, Thornbridge, and Salopian. After the meeting members dispersed into some of the other hostleries in the town - most noteworthy was the recently re-opened **Beltane** (8a Hall Bank) which had two beers from Thornbridge on offer when we visited, with some Worth Brewery beers in the cellar. The licensee, Daniel Hawtin, was keen to describe the range of beers that had already featured on the three hand pumps in the pub since it reopened at the end of October, including beers from most of the local micros; food should have been available from mid-December. We wish Daniel well in this new venture which significantly adds to beer choice in the town and is open from noon every day except Mondays (4pm). Live jazz on Thursday evenings and a jam session on the first Wednesday every month add to the attractions.



A visit also took place to the **Queens Head Hotel** on High Street, which now features two Buxton Brewery beers at all times. On the day Blonde and IPA were available and were on excellent form. The licensee is Ian Howarth and the pub has been managed by the same family for three generations; almost 50 years. It has been a free house since 2009 and opens from noon to 1am all week. Buxton has always been a good place to visit for its excellent pubs and beer choice and these recent additions to the real ale offer provide an even stronger reason to visit.

When in Rome...

.....you don't always have to do what the Romans do i.e. put up with the Moretti and Peroni, writes Barry Pryme.

Although you occasionally come across Dark and Red higher strength versions of the local stuff, there is a mini-revolution going on, with a few designer bars selling what we would call 'craft' beers. This is led by a bar called Open Baladin (www.openbaladin.com) offering up to 40 beers on tap and 100-plus bottles. Situated fairly centrally, close to the island in the river, with good tram and bus connections, it's certainly worth a visit, but not necessarily for a session.



Basic price for the beer on tap is €5 for a 33cl glass, but most are 5/6% and above, with some up to 13%! Having said that, we were stung €10 for a 20cl local beer (less than a half) sitting opposite the Trevi Fountain – you pay for the view – not the beer!



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