

February 2014

Opening



Times

The free local CAMRA magazine

Covering the cities of Manchester & Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield



**The Hope is Stockport & South
Manchester Pub of the Year 2014
Full details on page 11**

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Pub of the Month

The Armoury, Shaw Heath



The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month award for February 2014 is to be awarded to the Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport, writes John Clarke.

This is a survivor. In recent years most of its neighbouring pubs have closed but the Armoury soldiers on. In fact it is a thriving community local with a substantial band of loyal regulars.

"It feels like a homely village pub" landlady Sheila Barlow tells me. "I love the pub, the customers, everything". She's not wrong. The pub seems to glow with warmth, all helped by a very impressive refurbishment carried out by Robinsons about three years ago. The traditional vault is particularly impressive and work is ongoing with more etched windows planned along with a refit of the lounge which has new seat coverings and blinds.

Some historic features were retained not least the etched glass panels on the interior doors which testify to the pub's previous ownership by the old Bell's Brewery. You can spot these on the doors to the downstairs rooms and also the upstairs darts-cum-meeting room. The Armoury is something of a local hub for darts lovers and hosts no less than 11 teams who play in all local leagues including the Super League. The well stocked trophy cabinet in the vault testifies to their success here. There's also a quiz team and a number of clubs and societies meet at the pub and at the back is the sun trap of a beer garden.

Beers are from Robinsons with 1892, Dizzy Blonde, Unicorn, Trooper and the current seasonal all impeccably kept. Not for nothing has the pub featured in recent editions of the nations Good Beer Guide. Join us as we celebrate the enduring appeal of this classic community local when the Pub of the Month award is presented on the evening of Thursday 27th February. The pub is close to Stockport Station and a short walk from the A6 which is well served with buses. Edgeley buses will drop you close by.



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

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What's On



Information, Notes and Local CAMRA Branch Events

Opening Times - Information

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www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/getadvice/consumer_service.htm

Their telephone no. is 0845 404 05 06. To report a matter to Trading Standards go to:

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- * Transport for Greater Manchester: www.tfgm.com. 0161 228 7811
- * East Cheshire: www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/transport_and_travel.aspx. 0845 140 2666
- * Derbyshire: <http://www.derbybus.info/>

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Front Cover – The Hope, Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year

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Local CAMRA Events

Thursday 6th – Branch Meeting: Melville, Barton Rd, Stretford. Starts 8pm. (T&H)

Monday 10th – Branch Meeting: Royal Hotel, Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm. Second and final Good Beer Guide 2015 selection meeting. (HPNC)

Tuesday 11th – Social: RedWillow Bar, Macclesfield. From 8pm. (MEC)

Wednesday 12th – Two Pub Social: Bradford Inn, Bradford Rd 7.30pm; Jolly Angler, Ducie St, 9pm. (NM)

Thursday 13th – Branch Meeting: Magnet, Wellington Road Nth, Stockport. 2015 Good Beer Guide entries will be chosen at this meeting. Starts 8pm. (SSM)

Thursday 13th – EGM followed by Good Beer Guide 2015 selection: Timperley Taverners Club. Starts 8pm. (T&H)

Tuesday 18th – Good Beer Guide final selection meeting: Beartown Tap, Congleton. Starts 8.00pm. **Note change of date.** (MEC)

Wednesday 19th – Branch Meeting: Royal Oak, Barton Lane, Eccles. Starts 7.30pm. (NM)

Thursday 20th – 2013 LocAle Pub presentation to City Arms. Kennedy St, Manchester. From 7.30pm (T&H)

Friday 21st – Hazel Grove South Stagger: 7.30pm Rising Sun, Buxton Rd; 8.30 Wilfred Wood, London rd. (SSM)

Friday 21st – Social at Old Hall Beer Festival, Chinley. From 6.00pm. (MEC)

Saturday 22nd – Visit to Green Mill Brewery, Broadbottom. Cost £14 (includes food and beers). Book with Margaret O'Brien on 07981 756720 (eves only). (SSM)

Saturday 22nd – Trip to Liverpool Beer Festival (advance tickets only). Afternoon session 12-4pm (T&H)

Wednesday 26th: Final Good Beer Guide 2015 selection meeting: Derby Brewery Arms, Cheetham Hill Rd (upstairs room). Starts 7pm. (NM)

Thursday 27th – Deansgate Social: Oast House 8pm; Gas Lamp 8.45; 9.30 Bridge; 10.00 Sawyers Arms; 10.30 Lost Dene. (T&H)

Thursday 27th – Pub of the Month presentation: Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. From 8pm. (SSM)

Thursday 6th March – Branch Meeting: Old Hall, Timperley. Starts 8.00pm. (T&H)

Favourite comments from the 2013 round ups...

THE WINNER

“ Food and Beer Pairing of the Year.

In order to sound like a sophisticated man of culture, I'll say goats cheese with Fyne and Wild's Cool as a Cucumber. But really, the answer's a pack of Cheesy Moments with a pint of Marble Manchester Bitter ”

Connor Murphy, Beer Battered, 18th Dec 2013

RUNNERS UP

“ I advise sloping off to this pub for its terrific brews... the pub still retains its status as the brewery's flagship carrier... Try as many beers at The Marble Arch as you can.”

Gary Collier, Manchester Evening News, 5th Dec 2013

“ Marble Beers, Quantum and Tickety Brew were all singled out for their beer making skills in Manchester.”

**Jamie Faulkner, The Skinny Food & Drink Survey,
10th Jan 2014**

(and thanks for all the other nice things you've said during the year!)



Stagger

Heaton Norris with Stuart Ballantyne



entered the pub to buy one of these ales. Only we couldn't because none were on sale. Since writing this article I have been back to the Grapes to see if when we visited we were just unlucky but there was still no cask beer being sold (*nor was there in mid-January when OT called to photograph the pub- Ed*). This seems to be a clear case of a misleading sign – let's hope the Grapes either takes it down or, better still, puts real ale back on sale.

On now to the **Silver Jubilee**, a modern Robinsons estate pub which has Unicorn as its sole cask beer. Built in 1977 the pub was renamed after the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations that year. When we called the rear lounge was featuring karaoke; not something that I can tolerate for too long and so we quickly drank our beers and moved on. However the Unicorn was perfectly drinkable receiving an average rating by our group.

backing tracks and guest singers. The beers on sale tonight included Holt's Bitter, Bosun's Unforgotten, Bosun's Old Laxey (both from the Isle of Man) and Naylor's October Ale. All were of the usual high standard making this pub well worth calling in at next time you are passing.



Across the road from the Railway, is the **Midland**. This is a much improved pub and still keeps its old multi-roomed feel, despite some opening out. One feature is a great display of British bottled beers on high shelves around the perimeter of each room; many of which I have tried over the years. The Midland now sells up to five different beers and on our visit these included Jersey Liberation Ale, Jarrow Brewery Jarrow Bitter, Wooden Hand Pearl and Marston's Pedigree. Again all the beers that we tried were good or better with prices starting at an incredibly low £1.90 a pint. Something to look out for at the Midland is when the Midlanders play the pub. They are a lively folk band who have a great following and play to an appreciative audience. This is a great newcomer to Stockport's northern quarter offering good beer at really keen prices and so it deserves to do well.

Our stagger started at the **Carousel** on Reddish Road in Reddish, a modern Farmhouse Grill Pub Co. outlet. The large single room bar is open plan with at least thirty five dining tables plus fruit machines and children's treat vending machines. I think that the pub's appeal for families might have something to do with its varied children's menu which is inexpensive and obviously very popular. In terms of beer choice the pub had three hand pumps but only two were in use when we visited. These were dispensing Black Sheep Bitter and Robinsons Trooper selling at £3-14 and £3-64 a pint respectively; prices which later we might judge to be high in comparison with other beers we were to encounter on this stagger. Both beers were reasonable enough though.



A short walk from the Silver Jubilee brought us to the **Hope** on Wellington Road North. Once a dismal pubco outlet, the Hope has been in the news recently following its reopening as a brew pub and multi-beer free house and most recently, Pub of the Year. The pub's new owners set about transforming its fortunes by selling not only their own range of Fool Hardy beers but also a wide range of ever changing guests. Beer lovers tend to decamp into the right hand room but tonight the pub was so busy that we only found seats in the left hand side vault. Beers tried tonight included Growler Brewery Lemon Head, Leeds Gathering Storm, Fool Hardy Roo Shoe and Fool Hardy Rain Dance. All the beers we tried scored highly, ranging from good to very good. The Hope is one to try if you have not visited it yet.



Our final port of call was the **Magnet** serving fourteen hand pumped beers together with a traditional cider and a range of European and American bottled beers. This can be a very busy pub as we found it to be tonight but the service is always good and the staff are efficient. Fourteen beers are too many to list here but they include milds, bitters, stouts, porters, IPAs and strong beers. Watch out for the in-house brewery that will be opening later this year. The beers that our group tried tonight were all on excellent form – as we expected they would be. This was a real high point to finish on.



On now to the **Navigation** at the top of Lancashire Hill. The Navigation is run by Congleton's Beartown Brewery and tonight's beers were Bear Ass, Best Bitter, Bearskinful, Kodiak Gold, Bruin's Ruin and a guest beer, Holts Bitter. I like the Navigation because it is a pub with great atmosphere, with a group of friendly, if sometimes sarcastic, regulars. Very much a 'Blue' pub, if you are a Red then you can expect to receive some lively but friendly banter. Our group tried all the beers with the exception of the Kodiak Gold and all performed well. With prices between 54p and £1.34 a pint cheaper than the last pub, the Navigation represented a considerable saving.

Bypassing the long closed Grey Horse (converted to offices and "to let") we headed for the **Grapes Hotel** on Old Road. As you approach the pub there are two large signs on its walls proclaiming that real ales are sold. So with confidence we

Walking downhill brought us to the **Railway**, a previous local CAMRA Pub of the Year winner which regularly sells up to five real ales comprising Holts Bitter and four guests. This pub seems to be very popular with older drinkers and has its group of regulars which are often supplemented by people visiting Stockport's "northern quarter". Ray and Pam are really putting this pub on the map and it is becoming known for its excellent live music. Tonight it was open mic night with a keyboard player, recorded

Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season

the Wharf, Castlefield

The Trafford & Hulme Branch Pub of the Season for Winter 2013-14 is The Wharf situated in the Castlefield area of Manchester, writes Steve Sharp.

The City Centre is fortunate in being able to boast a number of top quality real ale outlets with some notable ones located around the perimeter of Castlefield. However, for a long time a foray down into the actual Castlefield Basin was a rather unrewarding experience for the cask ale drinker. Thankfully, that situation changed in July 2012 with the arrival of The Wharf. Huge credit should be given to owners the Brunning & Price Group, for taking on a derelict and somewhat uninspiring building and turning it into a real feature of the area (the building was purpose built in 1998 to house the Jackson's Wharf pub which closed in 2005).

The Wharf consists of two floors; the top level is set up to provide a more formal dining experience whilst the ground floor, with its various little alcoves and cosy corners, offers the customer that "proper pub" feeling. B&P is a company that takes cask ale seriously, preferring to use smaller independent breweries as well as encouraging those local to their pubs and it's a philosophy that can be clearly seen in operation at The Wharf. Entering the pub from the large outside terrace you are immediately welcomed by the sight of a long bar boasting a total of 12 handpumps, double the quantity from when it first opened. The beers on offer are always varied and interesting and include their very own house beer "Brunning & Price Original Bitter" brewed locally by Heywood's Phoenix Brewery.

The friendly and knowledgeable staff led by manager Siobhan Youngs included, until recently, deputy manager and cask ale enthusiast Dave Green leading the cellar team. With Dave now installed as Manager of B&P's newest pub, Worsley Old Hall, the task of ensuring that his excellent work continues has fallen to his successor Chris Beswick. Chris assures us that he will be looking to build upon The Wharf's growing reputation for providing quality real ale.



CAMRA Petition

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has launched an online petition calling on the Government to introduce a Pubs Watchdog immediately to protect pubs from closure due to unfair practices in the tied pub sector. In the first 24 hours after the petition launched, CAMRA secured over 15,000 signatures.

The eight-week consultation into reform of the large pub companies launched last year promised to introduce a Statutory Code and Adjudicator. But despite 96.2% of people responding to the consultation supporting the need for regulation, the Government are still delaying their plans.

CAMRA is now sending out a clear message to the Government that enough is enough. With 26 pubs pulling their last pint every week, a Pubs Watchdog is urgently needed to ensure our pubs are protected. **Sign the petition here:** <http://www.pubscandal.org.uk/>

Congleton News

Congleton Leisure Centre will again be hosting its annual March Beer Festival between Wednesday 5th and Saturday 8th March 2014. 20 real ales and three real ciders will be on offer. The orders are being placed at the time of writing, but it is likely that local breweries such as Beartown and Merlin will feature, with beers not previously seen at the Leisure Centre, as well as some offerings from further-flung breweries. Opening hours will be 1900 - 2300, Wednesday - Friday and 1700 - 2300 Saturday.

Also in Congleton, the former Marston's-run Antelope at the end of Lawton Street has been reopened by Chester-based AtWill pubs as the **Beartown Cock**. This is the company behind the Coked Hat in Stockport and also the Cock In Treacle in Macclesfield. The opening took place the week before Christmas and saw a selection of seasonal offerings from Coach House on the bar. The pub promises a policy of predominantly Cheshire beers, adding to the increasing number of outlets in the town selling local beers, as the likes of Marston's retreat from all but their food-led operations.

Graham Axon

Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA, not to mention the Stockport pub scene, lost a great friend and supporter when Graham "Digger" Axon died on 4 January having been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer just a few months previously.

Very much a local character, Graham was a keen associate of Stockport Harriers (albeit in a drinking rather than a running capacity in recent years). Also a keen crib player, he managed to make a couple of visits to the Railway, Portwood over the Christmas period to play a few final games.

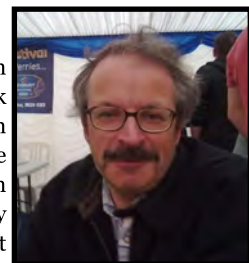
Along with the Blossoms, the Railway was Graham's local. It was therefore fitting that after the funeral on 15 January Sue and Vince arranged a music night in his memory – like the chapel at the funeral, the pub was packed. Known for his firm and lengthy handshakes and impromptu bursts of song, Graham was always affable and always good company. He was simply irreplaceable and will be much missed by all who knew him.



Dave Pate

Local CAMRA members were shocked when Dave Pate collapsed and died from a heart attack last October. This genial and warm hearted man was regular on the local pub scene, often to be found in Salford's New Oxford and an enthusiastic participant in many local beery events. He was a regular face behind the bar at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival.

There was an enormous turn out at his funeral where the generous tributes paid testimony to the high regard in which Dave was held by everyone who knew him. He was that rare character, a genuinely nice man who will be and is sorely missed.





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Pub of the Year 2014



Stockport & South Manchester Winner first off the blocks

Over the next few months the various CAMRA branches in Greater Manchester will be selecting their pubs of the year. Stockport & South Manchester Branch is usually the first to declare and there was no change this year.



The Stockport & South Manchester winner is selected from the previous twelve Pubs of the Month and this time around there was a strong field of contenders. However there can only be one winner and this year the award goes to the **Hope** on Wellington Road North in Heaton Norris.

For many years the Hope offered little of interest to local beer drinkers. The Hardy's Crown Ales boldly advertised along the top of the pub have long since ceased to be brewed. Despite a brief flirtation with draught Bass on handpump the pub was a cask ale free zone: The "no hope" really.

However in February last year, the pub was been re-born as the town's (then) latest free house and Hardy's beers are also back in a way. This transformation is down to Martin Wood and Samantha Halfyard (pictured) who bought the pub in December 2012. They promptly closed it down and started a complete overhaul.



The pub is now a comfortably appointed two-roomer with a "vault room" to the left, with leather fixed seating and a bare board floor, and to the right a comfortable lounge. The emphasis now is on good beer with 10 handpumps on the bar dispensing a range of cask ales and a traditional cider. These are complemented by draught foreign beers and a large range of

bottled beers from Europe and the USA.



Of particular interest though is the in-house brewery producing its own range of Fool Hardy Ales (Martin couldn't find out who owned the rights to the Hardy's Crown name). The brewery produces four regular beers and a range of monthly specials. The beers have been produced to a uniformly high standard and are very much in the modern style (Martin considers it something of a matter of honour that the brewery houses no UK hops – perhaps a slightly controversial view but there's no arguing with the quality of the beer). The beers are now available in bottle conditioned form and have also been appearing in a small number of free trade outlets and beer festivals. A forthcoming outlet will be the appearance of Fool Hardy beers in the Strangers' Bar at the House of Commons.



With such a transformation, it is perhaps unsurprising that the pub romped home in the voting. When Martin was told the news he was pretty much over the moon telling OT: "It's hard to put into words how pleased we are on winning CAMRA Pub of the Year 2014. Shocked, surprised and overwhelmed spring to mind! I'd set my sights on winning it within the first three years of trading, so to win it in our first year is awesome! After winning Pub of the Year three times previously for other people, it's very satisfying to finally win it for ourselves. We'd like to thank everyone who's supported us on our journey so far, especially our customers and staff, this is just the beginning!"

The award should be presented in March or April – check future "What's On" pages for the date.

Fairway is Runner-Up



Our runner up is another new free house – the **Fairway** on Hillgate in Stockport. In its Robinsons days this was the Flying Dutchman, a pub of varied fortunes (and was in fact rebuilt by Robinsons in the 1980s). It closed in 2012 but reopened in October the same year after a complete refit. While the layout is similar almost everything else is new – toilets, kitchen, seating, décor, windows. There is also a new smoking area and secluded beer garden at the rear of the pub.



The Fairway is run by Stuart and Emma Driver (pictured above) who have years of experience in the trade, notably at the Copperfields Bar in Adswood and more recently at the Dog and Partridge in Great Moor. They are perhaps the ultimate safe pair of hands and the success of the Fairway is testimony to that. They have set out their stall to run a community local, with men's and women's darts teams based at the pub. Friday night is dedicated to games of Don and on Saturdays there is live entertainment.

There's an increasingly good food operation too. Emma told me they focussed on "traditional pub grub" with curry, chilli and pies featuring on the menu. Sunday lunches are also very popular.

And the beer? There are six ever changing guest beers from mainly, but not all, from local brewers. Quality is second to none which accounts for the healthy sales.

Pub News



Covering Stockport, Manchester and Beyond

Closures & Losses

Following the closure of Stockport's Woolpack on New Year's Eve, there have been several more losses recent weeks, some of quite high profile pubs.



One closure that was trailed in advance was that of the **Lass O'Gowrie** on Charles Street in the City Centre. This made headlines as not only is the Lass something of an iconic pub but in 2012 it was declared the Best Pub in Britain in the Great British Pub Awards. So what went wrong?

Departing licensee Gareth Kavanagh laid the blame squarely at the door of the pub's owners Greene King. Citing a drop in trade caused by the closure of the BBC's Oxford Road premises he fought an ultimately successful two-year battle for a rent reduction. However Greene King subsequently undertook a thorough review of the pub and demanded £40,000 of improvements, saying that the Lass was a "below average pub". Cue departure of Gareth Kavanagh and the pub's temporary closure.

Another example of bully boy tactics driving out a successful licensee? Opinions are clearly divided. There was a very trenchant letter to the *Manchester Evening News* laying the blame for the pub's demise firmly at Gareth Kavanagh's door and OT can certainly testify that when local CAMRA people called comments about the range and quality of the beer, not to mention the cleanliness of the pub, were decidedly mixed to say the least. And of course, **Joshua Brooks** next door goes from strength to strength.

The good news is that the Lass O'Gowrie is set to reopen. The new licensee will be John Rowlinson who runs the nearby, (and also very successful) **Salisbury**. In a statement, Greene King said: "We are investing in the Lass O'Gowrie with a major redevelopment to improve this popular ale-house. The pub will remain independently-run and the new

tenant, a successful local pub operator, will take over shortly.

"The pub will re-open in a few weeks once it has been refurbished, with an even stronger focus on real ale and a wider selection of locally-brewed cask ales alongside our own ales."

John Rowlinson added: "The Lass O'Gowrie is an iconic pub and I am very proud to be taking it forward. I am certain that the refurbishment we are planning will firmly cement the Lass's place in Manchester as a first rate real ale pub."

OT thinks the pub is certainly in the right hands to make this happen and looks forward to the Lass regaining its place on the City pub scene. More on this story after the pub re-opens.

Mark Addy Shuts Its Doors

More of a shock was the closure of the **Mark Addy**. The pub was due to reopen on 6 January after a Christmas and New Year break (which when you think about it is an odd thing for a pub to have). However there was an announcement that the doors would remain shut.



Not only had the pub developed an increasing reputation for its beer range (at one stage having a house beer brewed by Macclesfield's RedWillow Brewery) but it was something of a renowned food destination. This latter was due to the reputation and skill of chef Robert Owen Brown.

So, why the sudden closure? Well, costs associated with maintaining and upgrading the pub have been cited – and indeed in recent months parts of the pub had seemed to become increasingly shabby. However in a letter sent to OT by director Margaret Hope the closure is said to be due to a number of factors "not least one large and several small burglaries" which means "it has become clear the business is not viable". All of which must cast doubt on rumours that the pub will reopen purely as a

bar selling a range of cask ales and other drinks. If and when this happens we'll let you know. We can't imagine the owners of this high profile site letting it remain closed for too long.

Bakers Vaults Closes



A sudden and unexpected pre-Christmas closure was that of the **Bakers Vaults** in Stockport Market Place. Well known for its music, the pub had apparently sold tickets for New Year's Eve (on which refunds were offered).

Departing tenants Yvonne and Tony Martin took to Facebook to announce their departure blaming both Robinsons and Stockport Council. The pub is likely to reopen though and this is what Robinsons had to say about it: "We were very sorry to find out via Facebook that our licensees had decided to close the Bakers Vaults. We have been working hard to support them with their business and having completed the refurbishment of the toilets just last month, were looking forwards to commencing the refurbishment of the bar area in 2014.

"Clearly the difficulties they have encountered with the lack of customers particularly in the evenings in Stockport town centre have been a major factor in their decision to close.

"At Robinsons we work to support our community and traditional pubs. When the former licensee decided to leave the Bakers Vaults at Christmas it was a big disappointment for everyone. Yet from this disappointment it has been great to see the community come together in support of their local. Those customers can rest assured that we are committed to the Bakers Vaults and to the town of Stockport. So, watch this space...!"

We certainly hope the pub reopens sooner rather than later as this is a venue Stockport Market place can ill afford to lose, especially as with the rejuvenation of the Cocked Hat and rumours of a specialist beer bar opening the area seems to be on the up. And after they've reopened the Bakers let's hope Robinsons turn their attentions to the mothballed Bulls Head. *More on page 23*

The Deansgate



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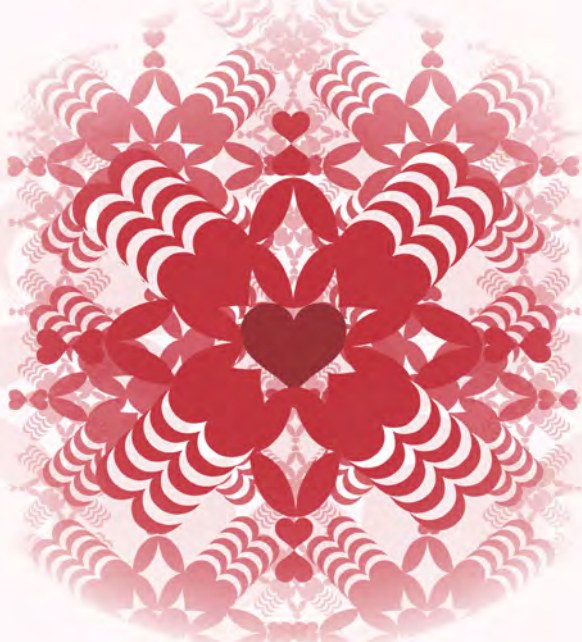
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High Peak Pub Scene



Tom Lord & Robin Wignall with News and Views

Peak Practice With Robin Wignall

Christmas usually gives a chance to call in some less visited pubs, to sample their food and beers. The last few weeks have been no exception. The *Shady Oak* at Fernilee, on the road from Whaley Bridge to Buxton, made a good venue for a group meal. Sensibly priced, well cooked food features at the Shady Oak, and service was good for a fair sized group. Two or three well-kept beers from the Marston's stable make a good accompaniment to a meal.

Similar comments in terms of food price and quality also apply at the *Beehive* at Combs. The Beehive makes a good place to dine especially at lunchtime when the bargain menu operates. Again three beers from the Marston's breweries are available, with Beehive Bitter being Brakspear Bitter from the Wychwood/Brakspear brewing operation at Wilton, Oxfordshire.

Whilst more expensive, the *Swan* at Kettlethulme is well recommended. This GBG listed pub serves two guest beers, Thornbridge Brother Rabbit and Cheshire Brewhouse Squire's XB, available when I called, which are invariably in good form. Again good food is served.



Early in January I managed at last to get to the *Duke* at Burbage, Buxton (pictured above – taken from pub website at www.thedukebuxton.com – check it out). This was formerly the Duke of York, and was closed whilst Punch refurbished it. A redesigned layout, redecoration and refurnishing have made a comfortable pub with different drinking and dining areas. Good food is available. On this occasion, by coincidence all the beers were from Marston's breweries, and were obviously well tended. Tetley Bitter from Banks's, Wolverhampton, Jennings Cumberland, and Marston's Pedigree were available. There is a rolling programme of guest beers, with Tetley

Bitter being the regular brew. It is fifty years since I last called at the Duke, but on this new form I am sure shall be back before too long.

Other Punch pubs have also had beers from the Marston's empire available recently. Those with a house badged beer, such as White Hart Bitter at the *White Hart* in Whaley Bridge, are selling Marston's EPA. Just before Christmas the White Hart also had Wychwood Hobgoblin and Bah Humbug. Presumably a contract with Punch must be quite lucrative for Marston's. Of course if drinkers want to sample a good range of Marston's beers, from Burton and elsewhere, they need do no more than pay a visit to the Good Beer Guide listed *Shepherds* in Whaley Bridge (pictured below) where as many as eight beers can be available at the start of the weekend. A Punch pub not drawn into selling Marston's is the *Goyt* in Whaley Bridge. A December gem was Starry Night from the Black Hole Brewery at Burton.



Just before Christmas the *Drum & Monkey* at Horwich End held a mini beer festival, with beers from Whaley Bridge brewery, Storm, Happy Valley, Wincle, Marble and Abbeydale, and everything tried was in good form. There was also live music from teatime on the Sunday.

At the *Old Hall* in Whitehough, near Chinley the main event to look forward to is the Winter Beer Festival during the weekend Friday 21st - Sunday 23rd February. With a big range of beer in the Old Hall and across the road in the *Paper Mill*, this is one not to miss.

And finally, the *Wanted Inn* at Sparrowpit has re-opened as a free house. The *Dog* at Chapel-en-le-Frith may be a real ale gain. Our clubs do a good job promoting real ale, with *Furness Vale Club* recently selling Golden Hinde from the Coastal Brewery in Cornwall. On the down side *Beltane* in Buxton was closed – a police raid before Christmas saw numerous drug related arrests and the bar's license suspended for 28 days.

High Peak Pub News With Tom Lord



News on some beer discounts - the *Harewood Arms* (pictured above) in Broadbottom gives a 20p discount to CAMRA members from Sundays to Thursdays and the *Station* on Warrington Street, Ashton under Lyne has real ale at £2.00 a pint on Sundays.

The *Fleece Inn* in Mossley has increased the number of handpumps from four to six and we understand that there are plans afoot to begin brewing at the pub. More news on this as we receive it.

New licensees have arrived at the *Bulls Head* in Old Glossop and over in Mossley, Amy and Gavin Green the licensees at the *Dysarts Arms* are leaving the pub to take over another Robinson's outlet, the newly refurbished *Dandy Cock* in Disley. Currently the *George Inn* in Compstall is closed.

The Christmas markets held in Ashton-under-Lyne had a purpose-built pub serving cask conditioned beers from Greenfield Brewery. Let's hope this becomes a trend for these local seasonal events.

Congratulations to all at *Stalybridge Labour Club* for picking up a brace of CAMRA awards. Not only did the club win High Peak CAMRA's Club of the Year Award for 2013 but it also achieved third place in the regional contest. Pictured below is High Peak CAMRA's Stewart Taylor (right) presenting the certificates to club steward Tina and son-in-law Simon (Cellarman).



MBCF on Track



Velodrome Event a Sell Out Success

Despite one or two teething problems, last month's Manchester Beer & Cider Festival, held at the iconic Velodrome of the National Cycling Centre, proved to be a huge success.

Over 10,000 visitors flocked through the doors and, despite an emergency repeat beer order, the doors closed three hours sooner than planned on the Saturday evening. All beer was gone by 4.30pm – rather short of the planned 7.00pm official closing time.

Obviously there were some problems to sort out for next time – not least seating provision in the central area and flagging up access for the less able. And with the best will in the world, it will still be a trek to the toilets. However having said that, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and all things being equal *Opening Times* looks forward to a repeat event in 2015.

Champion Beers



One of the festival highlights was the judging for the first ever Champion Beer of the North West, featuring beers from Cumbria to Cheshire. The winner was the superb **Cumbrian Five Hop** from the Hawkshead Brewery. Pictured below is Festival Organiser Graham Donning (centre) congratulating Anne Jones and Alex Brodie of Hawkshead Brewery.



"It is a thoroughly modern beer and we're pleased to see that the judges appreciate it" said Anne "It is made, as is our way, with a blend of traditional English and modern American hops, five varieties in all."

Runner-up was the superb **Dark Mild** from Bolton's Bank Top Brewery. An excellent result for Dave Sweeney. This rich, dark beer really is a classic of the style.

Third place was taken by **Way Out Wheat** from the Offbeat Brewery in Crewe. This fine beer has something of a track record with bronze awards having gained similar placings in 2011 at both Stockport Beer & Cider Festival and in the Champion Beer of Cheshire contest.



More Results

The festival also saw judging for the North West round of next year's Champion Winter Beer of Britain contest. Here beers produced in the *Opening Times* area took three out of the four top spots.

Champion Barley Wine was the excellent JW Lees Moonraker (6.5%) a classic rich, strong ale. In the Old Ales & Strong Milds category the winner was Fra Diavolo (4.3%) from the Ulverston Brewery. The stout and porter categories were both won by the now serial award-winning RedWillow Brewery from Macclesfield. The winning porter was Smokeless (5.7%), a classic smoked beer with added chipotles for a little bit of heat while the champion stout was Heartless (4.9%), an alluring chocolate stout.



Iconic Venue

Of course another champion was the venue itself (despite the difficulties we mentioned earlier). It was only by being there was it possible to get some idea of the massive size of the place and seeing Team GB and other cyclists practising was the icing on the cake – the speed at which they went round was truly awesome at times (and that's not a word you'll see in these pages very often).

In the next column a few images of the venue, the bars, and some of the stalls which sold everything from designer chocolates to Viking drinking horns (as well as the more usual books and beer guides).





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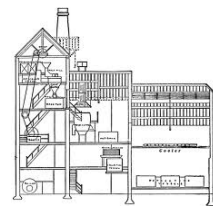
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Brewery & Pub News

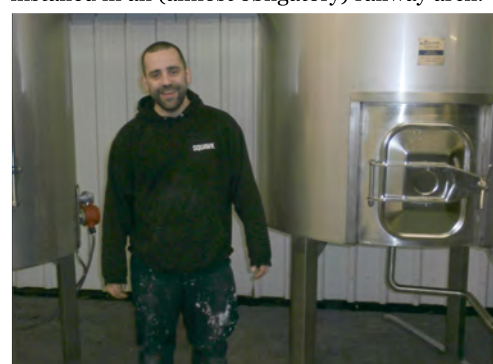


Covering Stockport, Manchester and beyond

Squawk Brewing

Last month we mentioned this new venture which was set to become the region's newest brewer. The first brew in fact went through on 18 January. So, who and what is Squawk?

The man behind the brewery is affable Yorkshireman Oliver Turton (pictured below) who plans to relocate to this side of the Pennines in due course. For the moment there's a commute from rural Holmfirth to less than rural Ardwick where the brewery has been installed in an (almost obligatory) railway arch.



Oliver is a former chef but also a keen home brewer. "I always wanted to make something and sell it" he told OT. Being keen on brewing he took the chance when an opening came along to lend a hand at the Hand Drawn Monkey Brewery in Huddersfield. There he helped out at everything from cask washing to brewing. In fact some draught and bottled Squawk beers have already appeared and these were made on the Hand Drawn Monkey plant. Oliver thinks this experience was vital in helping him get started.



And so late last year a shiny stainless steel eight to nine barrel brewing kit (it's officially eight but looks like it will produce nine) was delivered to Ardwick where it was assembled and installed by Oliver personally. Which brings us back to that first beer.

It's an IPA at 6.3% ABV. Made with Maris Otter and lager malt it's a pale beer and is generously hopped with Cascade, Chinook, Amarillo and Magnum varieties. Sounds good to us. Next up

may be a stout. Initially the beers will be available in cask and as a bottle conditioned beer, although Oliver may also put some in key kegs. If you are a pub or beer shop and fancy giving these beers a go then Squawk can be contacted on 07590 387559.

We've not mentioned the name which is certainly distinctive. Oliver told OT that he wanted a short one syllable name and was inspired by an outfit worn by his partner. Simple, as they say. Joking apart Squawk shows great promise – look for updates here.

Fool Hardy Ales

The very popular Rou Shou (4.1%) is now back as part of the core range. This very pale beer is hopped with Cascade and Galena which makes for an extremely refreshing and drinkable beer. The February special is Reverse & Rewind (3.9%), a modern take on the traditional brown bitter hopped with Bobek, Chinook, Columbus and Green Bullet varieties. The renowned Ginger (4.4%) was also due to reappear for the Hope's first anniversary beer festival at the beginning of the month.



Fool Hardy is also very pleased to have won an award for "best new brewery design" from the Pump Clip Museum website – the Fool Hardy clips certainly are stylish and distinctive so this is well deserved.

Phoenix Brewery

The always reliable Phoenix Brewery in Heywood launched a brand new beer on 23 January. This has been produced in conjunction with Salford Red Devils and is called appropriately enough Red Devils, a 3.9% light brown beer described as a "traditional old style bitter made with well-rounded malt and hops". It is said to be a step away from "the overkill of blonde beers ideally suited to new and old Red Devils' supporters".

New Cider Maker

Greater Manchester has a brand new cider producer called **Dunham Press Cider**. As they are based in Dunham Massey, it is fitting that they have done a deal with Dunham Massey Brewery for their ciders to be available in the brewery's three pubs, including Costello's in Altrincham. The range consists of three ciders - sweet, medium & dry which are currently available in bottles but will be on draught

shortly.

Geipel Brewing

Another new brewery in the area is Geipel Brewing. Well, yes and no. While Geipel is based in Didsbury the brewery is basically in the "middle of nowhere" in North Wales. A look at the website (www.geipel.co.uk) shows how remote it is.

While the Geipel people "reserve the right to brew whatever style we please" they are at the moment concentrating on lager-style beers. The emphasis is on quality and the beers are unfiltered, unfiltered and unpasteurised, and brewed with traditional ingredients and processes. They are also naturally carbonated in the fermentation and conditioning process rather than being force-carbonated.

Three beers have been produced to date – Pilsner (4.6%), Zoigl (a sort of farmhouse beer) at 5.4% and Hefeweizen at 5.6%. The beers are available in bottle and keg and are starting to appear in local shops and bars.



New Face at Nursery

2013 was a bumpy year for the **Nursery** (Green Lane, Heaton Norris) with two managers departing. However welcome stability looks to have returned with the appointment of Brendan Adderley (pictured above) as manager at the end of November. Brendan is an experienced hand – he was at the Harvester in Offerton for eight years and has spent the past 13 at Hydes' High Grove in Gatley. In total he's had 25 years in the trade. So far it's looking good – he told OT that Christmas trade as very good and trade in general has increased nicely since he arrived with many former regulars returning to the pub.



The Nursery's reputation for good food has been maintained with everything home cooked and sold at fair prices. Meal times are 12 noon to 2.30pm Tuesday to Friday and 12 noon to 4pm Saturday and Sunday. There's an open quiz night each Monday and live entertainment features on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The beer range includes Hydes' Owd Oak, 1863, Original and Manchester's Finest along with others from Hydes' Beer Studio and "guest" brewers.

Something About Gee Cross

Andy Sullivan takes a tour

Is Gee Cross (Hyde) a forgotten backwater when it comes to pubs and real ale? I would have to say it is and I shall in some small way try to redress the balance a little, starting with the **Buxton Inn**. This place has had a makeover fairly recently; quite tasteful, retaining real fires and most importantly the bar separated from a restaurant area by a lovely slate double fireplace. The pub has hard flooring and a real fire, dogs are welcome. The restaurant area has an unsurprising but decent enough menu, which is served lunchtimes and early evenings. There are darts teams and a log end board; a pool table lurks in a corner.

It's bright and clean everywhere, including the toilets, and a lovely warm welcome it is a joy to be here and on my visit the Bank's Mild was stonking. A nice, but oft-neglected, touch is that not only is the bar facing as you enter, but both handpulls are prominent.



The Buxton is on Mottram Old Road and can't be missed as the makeover also extends to the outside, presenting a nice modern face to the road, which is a long way from the shabby state so many of our pubs have ended up due to a lack of investment. The thing that puts it high on my list is that welcome; first impressions are everything.

Something that was equally apparent at the **Cheshire Cheese**, down the hill on Stockport Road. The Cheese has a more traditional feel. Its makeover was some time ago and looks like it opened the pub out while retaining a back room. An earlier fitting-out seems to date from the 1930's. That said the pub set back slightly from the road and is smaller than it looks from outside; it's comfortable and clean; the toilets nice and fresh too. I like the worn-in look, but do not take that to mean dowdy and tired: the pub is well looked after. Dark wood contrasts with the light wood of the Buxton; there are two lobby entries.

The Cheese, which is Cask Marqued, has a regularly changing list of less common beers, Purple Moose and Otley among them, but a real rarity these days is the John Smith's Cask Bitter. Although a beer with a somewhat jaded reputation under the badge of "smooth" the cask

version is still well worth a go and the example I tried was indeed excellent, tempered with "for what it is". I must also restate how welcome we were made to feel as soon as we entered the pub. "Only two beers on today but look what I have coming", etc etc etc. Great stuff.



In fairness I have visited the Cheese rarely and this was the first for some time and I have not been to the Buxton before, so this is a snapshot review of how things are on a given visit. I have no reason to suppose that in either case the standard will not remain high. Together with the immense **Grapes** half way between the two they make for very different experiences.

The Grapes has also had its makeover, a year or five ago and is worn in nicely. I popped in to take a look at a place I have never really got on with; no special reason, but not really for me. One beer, Unicorn, on the bar, and "I'll be with you in a moment" from the bar staff. (Politeness and welcoming manners are endemic in Gee Cross it seems). I visited on a Friday at four and a nice crowd was building up.

A really lovely convivial vibe in what I sense as a rather old fashioned atmosphere; lots of chatter, mixed crowd age-wise, if predominately male, in a building that looks old fashioned, but with a comfortably modern interior and once again clean in the bar areas.

Another pub in Gee Cross, again on Stockport Road and visible to the right, across the road, coming out of the Grapes is the **Queen Adelaide**. No real ale I'm afraid, but it looks to have some of the same local characteristics in looking well run and well presented, if dark by modern standards.

Not quite Gee Cross I know, but at the end of Market Street, Hyde, just before Dowson Road, there is the **Shepherd's Call**, previously given a brief mention in OT by Tom Lord. I have never before set foot in this lovely, lively little boozery which does old fashioned in as authentic a way as the Grapes, but totally differently. Unusual tiling outside and Seventies ravaged inside, it is quirky. At five on a Friday the impassible vault area is packed with an after-work crowd, the

small remaining area facing the lounge is three deep and still the bar staff have an idea who to serve next. The landlord pipes up that he has only got the Speckled Hen on. Now I really am not a fan, but credit is due as this example was very good.

The beers change regularly and there are usually two on sale. Whereas there was the ability to get to the bar and sit down almost anonymously in the Grapes, here there is no alternative but to talk to your neighbour at the bar and that gives plenty of opportunity to engage straight away. The TV was on but with no-one watching.



Two other pubs up at Gee Cross need mentioning. The **Werneth** on Stockport Road which has no real ale, but appears well run and clean from a very cursory inspection.

The **Hare and Hounds** (above) on Werneth Low, is a major food operation with stunning views across Manchester. There is a huge car park and the place gets packed, with summer Sundays particularly popular. Three real ales are on the bar so there is something for everyone - except for those who want a pub. Just my view, I know and this has all the signs of a successful business, so good luck to them and don't let me put you off.

The 330 and 206 buses will get most of you close enough to all the pubs mentioned. Anyone with walking difficulties should cab it from Hyde.

Denton Update

A brief return to Denton reminds me that I failed to mention the **Chapel House** on Stockport Road, a large Holts place, last time. Not everyone's cup of tea: loud and brash at times, redolent of the 1980's. It has traditional vault and lounge areas with a recent paint job and general brightening up. Good value here and great ale of which there were five varieties on offer recently. TVs sadly now everywhere! Added to this and a short step from the Big Chap is the **Carter's Arms**, which has recently returned to the real ale fold and seems pretty decent to me.

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Pub News

Covering Stockport, Manchester and beyond



More Losses

Sadly there have been two pub losses on the outskirts of the Opening Times area with both **Ye Olde No. 3** in Little Bollington and the **Wheatsheaf** at Agden Brow (a former Hyde's house) both being closed at the moment. In Gorton the **Pineapple** was closed and boarded in mid-January.

The seemingly never-ending growth in the number of pubs and bars in Chorlton finally came to a halt just after New Year with the sudden closure of **The Gallery** on Wilbraham Road. However, reports indicate that the premises are unlikely to be empty for long - there is apparently already interest in taking it on.

Meanwhile, the refurbished **Lloyds Hotel** at the other end of Wilbraham Road is due to reopen on 7th February, having been clad in scaffolding for most of January; we look forward to paying a visit.

Altrincham Ambles

There was good news for the pub scene in Altrincham before Christmas with the re-opening of the **Wheatsheaf Hotel**. The former coaching inn on Church Street just outside the town centre has been closed since the autumn but rose from the ashes just in time for Christmas. The interior has been tastefully decorated to give it a more homely feel. The kitchen re-opened in mid-January serving a range of home cooked meals from 12 noon until late. You can follow all the latest from the pub on twitter at @wheatsheafaly.



Meanwhile just up the road, the ups and downs of the **Orange Tree** saw new management take over just in time for New Year's Eve. After the very short lived former management removed cask ale from the pub, the new team immediately re-instated it with Black Sheep Ale available for the festivities and Old Speckled Hen being the guest in early January - all at a

very reasonable £2.60 a pint. The Saturday karaoke sessions which were very popular at the pub previously have returned. Follow on Twitter @TheOrangeTree3.

If you take a short walk from Altrincham to next door Hale, you will find another new bar offering an excellent selection of beers. The **Moose** is at 119 Ashley Road and offers two cask ales alongside a good selection of bottled beers leaning heavily on the American craft scene. The brainchild of Chris Cunliffe and David Sorrigan, the team behind Hale's independent Little Deli Company, the two-floor bar has been converted from a former bookshop with the basement being a snug. Keen on local produce at both the deli and the bar, they have immediately joined the CAMRA LocAle scheme with one handpump being a rotating RedWillow beer and the other offering guests which have most often been from Dunham Massey Brewing Co. There is also traditional cider on tap. The bar is yet another one on which you can get all the latest news including updates on the guest beers via Twitter - @TheMooseHale



City Centre News

The **Vine Inn** on Kennedy Street (near to the Town Hall) has had a bit of makeover which has seen a brand new bar installed downstairs. The Vine has long been an excellent inner city local with landlady Rachelle and her team offering a warm welcome to regulars, occasional visitors and tourists. With no room for expansion of the range upstairs, the pub has transformed its underutilised cellar bar into **Malt & Cask**.

With eight handpumps on the bar it is certainly an ambitious venture, but when Opening Times called on a Friday evening it seemed to be working, with the bar busy with groups of friends enjoying their ales. We sampled beers at both ends of the spectrum in Theakston's Old Peculiar and Lancaster Blonde, both of which were in good form. The décor is a mixture of plain brick and wood panelling and the pub's collection of old tin advertising signs from the old cellar bar have been retained to decorate the walls. The panelling of the roof is broken up with wooden packing crates is a particularly interesting feature. Just over the road from the Vine, what was the

Crown on Fountain Street is to be turned into a "gastropub" by the New Moon Pub Company, which already has four similar restaurant-cum-pubs across Cheshire. The new venue is to be known as "**Beef & Pudding**" and is due to open in March.

Across town in the Northern Quarter, Hydes have obtained planning approval for a new hotel, restaurant and bar at a site on Turner Street.

Hinds Head



Keith Ellis and Stuart Kirkham have relinquished the lease of the **Hinds Head** in Heaton Chapel, Stockport, with Stuart moving to take over as manager of the **Blind Pig** in Monton on behalf of Enterprise Inns. The two of them leave an excellent legacy to the new licensees Colin and Janine Edwards.

Stuart spearheaded the setting up of two innovative work experience programmes at the Hinds Head to help children with learning difficulties and to introduce students from the local school to elements of business. It was through this work that he won the Community Hero Award 2012 from the Publican magazine.. Janine was brought up in the trade but this is her and her husband's first pub. They promise that the emphasis on cask beer will continue but say that in the New Year they will be looking to make a few changes to build on Stuart's excellent work.

In Brief

The **Suburban** in Gorton now has no cask beer. Nearby, Geoff McCabe will be leaving the **Vale Cottage** in March. A sad loss, this. In Cheadle the **Malt Shovel** is another closed and boarded pub.

The **Cock** in Hazel Grove has not exactly been a flagship for Robinsons in recent years. However the brewery has announced that this pub will be the site of their first major refurbishment scheme for 2014. More on this after the pub reopens.



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